



Payton Lee

Five Star Affair

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*I dedicate this book to you, the reader. It is
for you I write. My only hope is you enjoy
sharing the movies of my mind.*

Five Star Affair

*There was something left unfinished a long time ago.
"If things had been different"*

Spring 1942

Chapter 1 ★

David Hall moved his glasses to his forehead and rubbed the bridge of his nose in thought. “My brother is demanding a lot. All the qualifications he requires are next to impossible.”

“Do you expect me to tell General Hall that?” Lieutenant Colonel Davidson grunted. “I don’t think the general knows about the old Roman law of not killing the messenger.”

“Fortunately for the both of us, I do have such a qualified person in this volunteer squad.” David motioned John Davidson to follow him to his solid oak file cabinet. He opened the second drawer from the top. Deftly his fingers filed through several files. “Here it is. The dossier of Kiley Burke.”

John took the manila file folder and paged slowly through the contents reading every record in it carefully. “This Burke appears to have all requirements. Superior grades, linguistic and fluent in Russian, German, Polish, French, and Italian, and Burke has had field experience as an ambulance driver during the Blitz. This Burke is a top student, has the highest clearance, administration training and can even manage portable typography.” John closed the folder and handed it back to David Hall. “Perfect! Send Burke to 30 Governor’s Square next week for orders. I’ll see to the induction myself.”

“John, in case you missed it in the dossier, Kiley Burke is a civilian in my volunteer corps.”

“Didn’t miss it. That fact is trivial and doesn’t matter. This Burke has just been inducted into service for His Majesty and Country. Duty is duty,” John countered. “Just see to it that Burke reports to me next week Tuesday.”

David Hall poured a glass of port, a luxury during the war, but it was offered to his important visitor from the high command. He poured himself a glass and asked quietly. “Is it classified to find out why my brother sent you to me for this super qualified person?”

The colonel sipped the port inhaling its essence with relish. “The general knows you have the best intellects gathered here for your own service to the war effort.”

“How would my Tom know of my war effort?” David asked cocking a brow. His linguistics groups translated messages after they were Enigma decoded. It was as top secret as Enigma itself. David Hall’s particular linguistics group also translated intercepted Russian, French, and Italian messages, notes, and letters. Some letters were important but most were not. David had left his position as professor to give his expertise to the war effort.

“Only a few know of this place. As a need to know basis, General Hall was informed to find this person. Naturally he was thrilled to know it was operated by his own brother.”

“Can you tell me just who this person is and why this person requires one of mine?” David queried. “Or is that a need to know basis?”

“It is a need to know basis, but you do need to know,” John whispered. He functioned automatically to the soft voice whenever exchanging important information. This habit would protect him from anyone else overhearing a conversation. With this war and its secrets, everyone was a bit paranoid. This paranoia was with good reason and probable cause. “As you well know, when Japan attacked the Colonies and Germany and Italy declared war on them, they became part of this war.”

“They were a part of this war a long time ago. Most of our supplies are from the Americas.”

“Yes, but now they are fully involved. I believe we are going to win this bloody war with Yank money, personnel, and equipment behind us,” John quipped sipping more of the wonderful port.

“That doesn’t explain the need to take one of my people to Governor Square.”

“David, this came from the top. I do mean the top. Winston Churchill sent out this request himself,” John said seriously.

David suddenly felt a little weak kneed. He sat on the nearest chair and gulped his port. “Why?”

“The Prime Minister has informed his staff that the Colonies are sending one of their aides to study the European theatre. This aide is supposed to be given all assistance

necessary,” John explained. “Now you know. Let’s enjoy our port and send Kiley Burke to me next week.”

“I hate to lose Kiley, but anything for the war effort,” David conceded calmly. He felt halfway between proud and concerned. The fact the Colonies were sending one of the highest-ranking aides to England was disconcerting. The American’s were fighting on two oceans. They had lost most of their fleet in Pearl Harbor and could send the largest portion of their forces to the Pacific. Of course Churchill would want only the best for this emissary.

“Where is Kiley Burke?” Lieutenant Colonel demanded peering around the woman standing in front of him.

“Sir, I am Kiley Burke reporting as ordered.” She straightened her tie. It felt as if it were choking her. Today for her interview she had dressed in the proper uniform with skirt and stockings. Kiley’s head was aching because she had pulled her auburn hair so tightly into a straight bun. Her green eyes were hidden behind her reading glasses. Although she could see clearly without the spectacles, she used them for reading. Kiley read a great deal. History was her passion.

Standing uncomfortably, Kiley was well aware of Lieutenant Colonel Davidson’s scrutiny. Slowly she licked her lips. Kiley did not put on any makeup or lipstick that day. It was her intent to look as bookish and simple as possible. London was filled with RAF, Army, and Yank soldiers. Kiley didn’t hope or care for a quick lay in the hay or short lived affair. She loved her books. As far as she was concerned, Kiley didn’t want or need to encourage any male admiration. She had tried marriage once. It didn’t work for her and she had no intention of every trying it again. What Kiley needed in a relationship she was certain she would never find in any man alive today.

“Bloody Hell, I had no idea you were a woman,” Davidson’s voice boomed shattering the silence. “There is no time to find someone else. I just hope this is acceptable to the general.”

“General, sir?”

“Haven’t you been briefed on your assignment here at Governor’s Square?” Colonel Davidson barked.

Kiley was used to Army brass being short and gruff. His demeanor didn’t rattle her in the least. She was a civilian in a

wartime nightmare. Service and duty had taken over her life. Kiley used all her education and knowledge in the wartime effort. “Sir, I was told to report to you for assignment as an administrative aide. Lord Hall explained that my expertise in linguistics, administration, and driving ability were needed here. That is what I was told.”

“You’ll just have to do,” Davidson grumbled.

Just have to do? Kiley ground her teeth. Whatever this duty was, as a linguistic, administrator, and historian, she was the best for the job. *Bloody men! They all thought they were superior. Who was this general any way?* Kiley continued to stand at attention.

“Have a seat Miss Burke,” Davidson pointed to the simple wooden chair in front of his desk. “I’ll have to brief you quickly. There is little time. General Hauser is arriving in three hours and you are to be the American staff’s aide while he’s here in London. You know London so well due to your duties as an ambulance driver during the Blitz.” He handed Kiley the schedule.

“You will adhere strictly to the generals schedule.”

“Generals?” Kiley noted the plural form.

“There will be two American generals. General Mark Hauser, and General Linden Matthew. Both are emissaries from the Colonies under direction of General George Marshall and the President Franklin Roosevelt. They are here to observe and report to the American President.” Colonel Davidson remained silent for several moments as Kiley read the schedule. “It is very important that everything goes well for his inspection. The very future of Britain is dependent upon this.”

“The schedule is quite busy and tight, but I can handle it,” Kiley bragged. She felt wonderful to be given an opportunity of service that would make a difference in this war. As much as she disliked the American presence in England Kiley knew they were needed to fight the Nazi. Kiley let herself daydream often of walking into Berlin and blowing Hitler to kingdom come with gun. Silence surrounded her in the Colonel’s office as she studied the schedule and dossiers of the Americans. “Isn’t Hauser a German name?” Kiley asked skeptically.

“Yes, those Yanks have mixed bloodlines from every country, but don’t you worry. This Hauser is hand picked and the

highest clearance,” Colonel Davidson remarked. “If I were you though, I wouldn’t bring up his pedigree.”

Kiley simply nodded and rose from the chair clutching the dossier in her hand.

“Your office will be on the third floor just outside the space we’ve made for the Americans,” Colonel Davidson stated. “I’ll show you. He rose from behind his ornate mahogany desk and plush heavily stuffed leather chair. His hands motioned her to the door, but his eyes were suddenly drawn to the calves of her legs. Those legs were long and shapely. The seams of her silk stockings followed shapely curves around small ankles moving up to her calves to hide beneath her woolen dark brown skirt. *Too bad the rest of her doesn’t match those legs.* He moved quickly in front of her. “Follow me.”

Kiley managed to keep up with the Colonel’s brisk pace. Soon they were in a barren room. There was a small desk with two large drawers on each side and small drawer in the center. Behind the desk was a simple straight back chair. A typewriter took center stage on the top of the desk. She noticed a steno pad, pencils, pens, and a stack of white paper beside the large typewriter.

“This is your office,” Colonel Davidson announced. “That door is the office General Hauser will be using. If he needs you for letters, memos, or translation he can call for you.” Davidson walked toward the connecting door and with his hand on the polished brass knob he opened the door.

Kiley inhaled in awe. The windows held heavy brocade draperies of deep crimson. There were two potted fern plants on either side of a large ornately carved cherry wood desk. In the front of the desk were two matched cherry wood captain chairs. Their seats were made of heavy crimson brocade with gold silken threads in leaf patterns. Under the desk was a gold, green, and red woven Turkish rug. This was a stark contrast to her simple office. Must be pretty important this American General Hauser.

“I’ll be leaving for luncheon at Connemara House,” Davidson informed.

“You won’t be here when the general arrives?” Kiley asked with surprise.

“No, I’m not that important,” Colonel Davidson chuckled. “General Hall will meet them.”

“Well I haven’t much time to acquaint myself with the generals, I’d better get down to it,” Kiley sighed heavily and turned on her heels to return to the tiny barren little office. She sat down to read the necessary information on the Americans visit when she spotted a wooden file cabinet hidden behind the door. Rising quickly Kiley opened the top drawer. She was horrified to see files thrown in without order of any sort. This needed to be organized first. She threw herself into it and just before noon the file cabinet was organized. Her stomach was growling and decided to visit the nearest café for a dab of lunch. Grabbing her brown leather purse, Kiley walked down the steps to the front door.

A few moments before an American Packard stopped in front of Governor’s Square and a private opened the door for two generals to emerge and walk up the stairs to the entrance.

Kiley had made it to the bottom of the staircase when the generals entered. All the soldiers of the British Army in the room stood to attention and saluted stiffly. A corporal glared at Kiley and gestured for her to salute. “Oh very well,” she whispered to herself. She was a civilian but it seems the salute was like a command.

The two generals returned the salute and spoke to a major who had approached them. One of the generals nodded and walked briskly to the staircase where Kiley was standing.

Kiley was amazed at the swiftness of the tall generals gait. She stood stiff with her salute as the two men walked by her without a notice. As they mounted the stairs the generals managed to ignore Kiley completely. When they were out of sight Kiley released the breath she had been holding. Those Americans were rather handsome. It must be those lovely uniforms made of that fine cloth. One step toward the door found her thrust back against the wall as several Americans followed the generals and several of the lower ranking officers of the British Army followed them. Should she follow? *Absolutely not!* Those Americans had enough manpower surrounding them to last the rest of the day. Logic compelled her to soothe those hunger pangs and then find her way to that little cubbyhole upstairs.

Kiley ate a bite quickly and returned to her assigned hole in the wall. She was about to open the folder and read when her name

was bellowed in the next room. To Kiley it sounded like an Indian Water Buffalo ready to attack.

“Burke!” Mark Hauser shouted. “Goddammit, where the hell is that assistant? I need translations for this map.” Mark was not known for patience and bulldogged toward the door opening it as Kiley had reached for the knob. He thrust the door open with such force Kiley was knocked backwards. “Where the hell is that Burke?” he snarled at Kiley.

Kiley had just managed to balance and not fall down flat on her rump when the bull bellowed once more. Snapping to a quick salute she replied, “I’m Kiley Burke, sir.”

“You?” The raging bull snapped. He eyed the plain uniformed young woman. “Get in here. I need translations on this map,” Mark demanded in a lower tone. He turned and stomped back into the elaborate office and stopped in front of a map on the wall. His arms were quickly folded over his chest and he glared at the woman entering the room. When Kiley stood next to the map he pointed at various markings.

It was obvious to Kiley this map was taken from either Germany or a German spy. She quickly translated all the handwriting in the sections the general was interested in. She was suddenly left standing at the wall map wondering what she should do next.

A major spoke to Kiley and told her, “That will be all.”

“Thank you very much,” Kiley snapped testily. “Dismissed and all that!” She stomped back to her little room and drummed her fingers angrily on the desktop. “Bloody Americans. Pompous lot they are!”

“Burke?” A lieutenant asked popping his head into the room. “The general needs your service as a driver.”

“Where the Bloody Hell does his majesty wish to be driven?” Kiley asked sarcastically.

“Here, here!” the major interjected reprovingly.

“Oh very well,” Kiley growled. She grabbed her purse and went down the back stairs to the car. The two generals were waiting next to the car. Both looked a bit irritated that they were kept waiting. She sprang to open the door.

“You again?” Mark snarled. “London only has female drivers doubling as secretaries?” He bent and entered the car.

The other general smiled at Kiley and greeted, "I'm General Matthew. Thank you."

Kiley liked the middle-aged man immediately. How polite he was. She returned his smile closing the door. Jumping into the front seat and finding the keys in the ignition she started the car. "Where to sir?"

"Connemara Hotel," Mark Hauser barked.

Kiley was dumbfounded. The Connemara Hotel was less than a block away. They could have walked. Didn't they know petrol was rationed? Bloody Americans were too rich for her taste, and wasteful. With a surge, Kiley pulled the Packard forward sending her two generals flat against the seat. Lurching forward into traffic Kiley pulled in front of the hotel. Stopped the car and bolted to open the door for the generals. "Connemara Hotel," she announced.

Mark and Linden looked at each other. They had no idea the hotel was so near. Mark was irritated at his own ignorance and decided to take it out on the woman driver. As he emerged he snarled, "Where did you learn to drive Miss Burke?"

Before she could reply he turned to General Matthew. "We need to get a male driver."

General Matthew grinned and winked at Kiley as he answered, "Sorry Mark, all drivers are assigned. This is it."

Mark ignored his friend and stormed into the hotel. He announced himself to the concierge and was given the key to his rooms. The concierge told him his valet and aide were waiting in his room.

General Matthew addressed Kiley, "Good stiff upper lip and all that. You're dismissed. Keep the car in front of Governor's Square. We'll walk there in the morning."

"Thank you General Matthew," Kiley smiled sweetly. She certainly liked this sweet man.

He smiled and followed General Hauser into the hotel.

Kiley drove the car around the block and returned it to its place in front of Governor's Square. Once the car was parked she decided this had been a long enough day. Taking her purse she walked back to the flat she shared with two of her friends.

“He was back again,” Cindy teased when she opened the door. “No matter how dull you try to make yourself, he keeps coming back.”

“So sad for him,” Kiley sighed.

“He’s handsome. I’d go for him myself if he was interested.”

“Have at it,” Kiley grouched. “If there is one thing I don’t need right now is another Bloody American!”

Chapter 2 ★

Kiley untied her uncomfortable military heels. “These are abominations to a woman’s foot.” She was wiggling her toes when there was a knock at the door.

Cindy ran to answer it. Cindy was always such a bubbling optimist. Kiley looked at herself as a pragmatist. At twenty-six she had toured the continent and studied cultures. She graduated from college with top grades. Kiley had been through a horrible marriage, motored burnt bodies to a morgue, and lived through bombings and suffering that no one should have to bare. She smiled as a funny thought raced through her head. Which had been worse? Was it the bombing or was it her marriage?

Cindy giggling in her ear disrupted her thoughts, “I do hope you’ll share these.” Cindy thrust a box of treasured chocolates in Kiley’s face. “These are from Bob. He’s waiting downstairs to see you. Oh, I’m so envious. A handsome American Major just gah gah for you and you don’t even try to look lovely.”

“Men are bastards,” Kiley snarled. “Especially Americans as I am coming to learn.”

“He’s waiting to take you to dinner!” Cindy declared testily. “Don’t you Bloody tell me you’re too tired! You had an early day and he has Captain Turwald with him. You aren’t going to muck up my chances!” Cindy pulled her roommate up from the chair. “Get up, make your self presentable and don’t wear that Bloody ugly uniform! I’m going downstairs to keep the men occupied. I’m giving you twenty minutes.”

“But,” Kiley interjected.

“Don’t but me. This is my chance and by Gawd it’s a free meal. A real meal! These Americans are rich you know.”

Kiley pursed her lips angrily. “Very Well!”

Twenty minutes later Major Deacon caught his breath in his throat. Kiley Burke had her hair tied in a blue ribbon and the

auburn locks cascaded down her back. She was wearing a form fitting blue silk gown that revealed a luscious long neck. Matching Blue shoes finished her ensemble and he viewed those gorgeous legs he had first admired. This change was incredible and suddenly he felt jealous. Captain Turwald was staring as well.

Cindy followed the men staring and swore, "Damn!" Breaking away from Captain Turwald's hand she stomped to Kiley. "You did this on purpose didn't you? Dressing to your full beauty. I'll be lucky to keep Dan with me tonight."

Kiley smiled and whispered, "Yes I did. This will teach you to force me out when I don't want to go. I've had my fill of Americans today with one bloody general."

Major Deacon gently moved Cindy aside offering his arm to Kiley. "Dan is waiting for you Miss Stratford." When Kiley had placed her hand on the major's forearm he placed his hand on hers. "My God, why have you been hiding your spectacular beauty? I believe I will have to bring my sidearm next visit and use it to keep all the men away."

"Thank you for the compliment," Kiley replied. "The bookish Kiley is to prevent men from taking me as a female fluff and ignoring my knowledge and capabilities."

"In that case I'm proud I was impressed by your capabilities and not your ankles alone."

"Really?" Kiley asked in surprise. "You have been pursuing me for my mind?"

"Of course," Bob grinned. "Your disguise has worked well enough to keep other interlopers away from my claim."

Kiley rolled her eyes. "I'm hardly a claim. I am a woman."

"Indeed you are!" Bob quipped. "A beautiful intelligent woman."

Kiley's solid protective emotional wall started to crumble.

All heads turned when Major Deacon entered the Hunter's Red Restaurant. It was of the more elite restaurants of London and a favorite haunt of the American military brass.

One of the guests that evening were Mark Hauser and Linden Matthew. Both looked to the couple as they entered. The restaurant had suddenly become silent when Major Deacon entered

with Kiley. Their military instincts had kicked in and followed the eyes to their focus.

“That dear friend is a typical problem in this country with our troops discipline. These British skirts parading around disrupting our officers thinking,” Mark grouched. The beauty of the woman on the major’s arm took even his breath away. “Women, they are nothing but heartache and trouble.”

“You’re talking about your wife not all women,” Linden countered.

“We’re separated remember?” Mark reminded his friend. He was glad about it. Why he married her he asked himself over and over again. He came from a poor Arkansas farming family and she came from a wealthy California family. Yes, she had become a perfect military wife. She was too good of a military wife. With her father’s money, connections, and friends Martie had bullied him throughout his career. She made the choices for him. She wined, dined, and bullied everyone. He wanted a military career. Martie wanted wealth and power and made his life hell to get it. “The divorce isn’t going to happen too soon for me.”

“That’s if she divorces you,” Linden quipped. “I’m sure she’s heard about your promotion to Assistant Chief of Staff. That will impress Martie. She of all people will realize the implications of importance with that tag.”

“This is no time to depress me,” Mark growled. “Goddammit quit staring. Don’t fall into the female traps. I need you and your clear mind, Linden.”

“That little miss looks awfully familiar,” Linden stated thoughtfully stroking his chin.

“They all look alike,” Mark growled.

Linden arched his eyebrow. “I beg to differ with the Assistant Chief of Staff. I daresay they do not all look alike, thank God!”

“Eat!” Mark ordered in authority. “We have a lot discussed this evening.” He found even he couldn’t stop glancing at the auburn beauty eating dinner with the major. They appeared to be having a wonderful evening. Even Mark wasn’t certain what was eating him, but he wanted this fraternization stopped and damned if Linden wasn’t right. She looked familiar. He couldn’t place it. It didn’t matter. Women were trouble. He was acutely aware of that.

Early the next morning Kiley once again donned her bookish spinster look. The difference today was she chose slacks and comfortable boots over the constrictions of a girdle and tied shoes that pinched her toes.

Walking up the stairs at Governor's Square the door opened suddenly. She didn't have time to move as a solid body slammed into her. As she fell she heard.

"Goddammit, where the hell is that driver?"

Mark turned to the body he had slammed into. It was trying to rise. "Are you hurt, soldier?" he asked offering his hand.

Reaching for the help she grasped his offered hand to rise.

"You!" General Hauser stormed. "Where the hell have you been? Do you always sleep in? It won't do as my driver. I want you here at 7:00 sharp since you are the only driver option I appear to have." Wasn't that typical of a woman? His wife was just like that. Martie barely rose before noon.

Shocked at the general's change in demeanor she was quite angry herself. He cared for a soldier, but treated her rudely because she was a woman. "Yes sir!" Kiley snapped angrily rising to a stiff salute. She bounded to the general's car and opened the door. Standing stiffly and saluting once more as General Hauser approached her she bit into her lip with temper.

"Do quit saluting Miss Burke," Mark growled. "You do it quite badly."

"I'm a civilian sir," Kiley hissed. "My education did not include salute 101." She didn't think the general heard her. She hadn't realized the window had been rolled down.

Mark's scowl deepened and pushed back into the car's seat cushion. When Kiley entered the car he barked impatiently. "What are you waiting for Burke?"

Beneath the calm of her voice lie surging storms. "You haven't told me where to drive, SIR," Kiley replied enunciating the word sir.

Linden interceded immediately recognizing the sarcastic retort from Kiley. "Montgomery's headquarters, please."

"Yes sir," Kiley replied softly. This General Matthew is a true gentleman. Putting the car into gear she took shortcuts to the headquarters and delivered the generals in record time. Kiley

bolted from the car and opened the door for the generals. She did not salute.

Several hours later they returned to the car. Kiley jumped out and opened the car doors. Although she thought it would be impossible, General Hauser returned in with a worse mood. As she motored toward London his wrath seethed from his mouth.

“Well? What are you waiting for?” Mark barked to Kiley.

“A destination, sir?” Kiley replied sarcastically. This general was next to impossible.

“Connemara!” Mark snarled. He had no patience at the moment, especially to be corrected.

“Would that be Connemara in Erin, or Connemara the hotel in London,” Kiley responded. “There are of course...”

Mark cut her off. “Hotel, Burke!” He was red faced with fury. These British were an insufferable lot.

“Yes sir,” Kiley replied far too sweetly.

Linden clamped his teeth shut to prevent a belly laugh from escaping.

Incognizant of Kiley’s sarcasm Mark started a tirade. “Goddammit, do you believe that man? Did you believe that savage remark?” Marks spewed out angrily. “I should have told the bastard we won that war.” He slammed his back against the seat so hard the big car jolted a bit.

“He is a bit self centered,” Linden agreed.

“A bit? That man is so ego centered Freud would take a century to examine his mind,” Mark snarled. “That idiot doesn’t understand the importance of allied front. We need every man available working together as allies to defeat the axis.”

“And every woman,” Kiley whispered. She hadn’t realized she had even said it loud enough for the generals to hear.

“What was that, Burke?” Mark snapped.

It was too late to retract her thoughts. “Every woman, sir. We need every man and woman’s efforts to defeat the Nazi and Axis powers.”

Mark snorted, “What do women have to do with war, Burke?”

“Everything! In every war women have played important roles. In our history we can name Queen Phillipa who gathered an army and defeated Scotland. She also captured Scotland’s king

for her husband King Edward. There is Joan of Arc. She gave her life for her country. In your own country there have been many, An Apache named Lozen baffled your soldiers.”

Mark and Linden looked at each other. They had never heard of Lozen. Linden mouthed Lozen’s name with question. Mark shrugged his shoulders.

“During the Civil War you had your Clara Barton. We’ve spied for our countries, carried arms and battled on the fields with men. We’ve carried banners, nursed, and cared for soldiers on the battlefield under fire. Yes General, women! When I drove ambulances during the Blitz I carried the charred burned remains of hundreds of women. Some were clutching their children in a vain attempt to spare their lives. Our women carry the incendiary bombs away when possible. Our women captained many of the crafts that carried our troops from Dunkirk. These are only a few examples.”

Mark sat back further into the seat. For the rest of the short trip back to London he remained silent. He had thought he was an expert in History. He realized even he had much to learn and it was fascinating to contemplate a different point of view.

Linden remained silent back to London as well. He bit his lips so his chuckles wouldn’t escape. Mark Hauser was an arrogant man and Linden appreciated his come up pence from this Kiley Burke. He smiled as they approached Connemara Hotel. He really liked this woman and as for the General? Mark needed a taste of the humble pie she dished out to him. If Mark Hauser were to be successful in his mission to unite the allies, he would need to learn to listen as well as order. Linden knew many minds help make a good decision, but it takes one solid mind to filter through the parts to make a sum. Hauser was that man, but he needed to learn to listen to other council. He could report to Oscar Newhall that Hauser was the man for the command of the European Theater. Yes, he liked this Kiley Burke.

Stopping in front of the Connemara Hotel, Kiley bolted from the car as soon as she turned off the engine and set the emergency brake. She opened the door, but did not salute.

Linden stood to the side and waited a moment after General Hauser left the car and walked up the stairs. He leaned over to Kiley and spoke quietly. “Excellent history lesson. I believe we both learned a great deal. Thank you, Kiley.” Linden whispered

into Kiley's ear, "We breakfast at 6:00 in the morning and leave for the office promptly at 6:45. We'll have several meetings with the RAF, British Army Brass, Navy, and more. We'll be driving to those meetings. Make certain you eat and be here no later than 6:45 in the morning."

Kiley felt the general's warm breath as he gave her those instructions. She responded in spite of herself, "I thought you wanted a new male driver."

"No my dear, he wants a male driver. We need you and he needs you more than he realizes," General Matthew quipped. "By the way Burke, keep the pants. They're more practical." With those words he left her and entered the hotel.

Kiley smiled after General Matthew. "Such a nice man," she said to herself. It was getting dark and she wanted to get back to the flat. She was tired.

Chapter 3

Kiley was actually happy to see Bob Deacon waiting for her by the flat. Her nerves were taut and she would appreciate a nice hot meal at a nice restaurant.

Deacon waited while Riley changed. This time she didn't dress as flamboyantly, but still projected an attractive figure.

The next few weeks were easier for Kiley. General Hauser no longer barked for her when he needed linguistics or translation. Instead he sent his aide into the next office for her. General Matthew ordered Hauser's aide to give Kiley a daily schedule of their planned meetings and tours. On occasion she would scribe conversations on General Matthews request giving Hauser's stenographer a reprieve.

General Hauser never mentioned obtaining a male driver again. The humility he tasted was bitter, but it made him start to think of his own frailty that he needed to conquer. He was able to listen to other's voices. Contemplating and analyzing the information offered, he was capable of offering Oscar Newhall a plan of operation in the European Theater. This eye opener was all due to a bright and bookish British subject that drove his car. Mark actually felt a bit guilty for his initial treatment of her. Of course this was a lesson she would never know she gave.

Major Bob Deacon was waiting for Kiley every night. She found she enjoyed being with him. He was kind and considerate of her every wish and comfort. He didn't seem overwhelmed by her intelligence. Instead they engaged in many intellectual conversations over dinner and wine. Before his commission in the Army he had been a Professor of Sociology at a small college in Nebraska.

Kiley enjoyed these evenings. It was a blessing from the strain of the war. She was relieved when the schedule for the day included transport of the generals to a military plane that would take them back to Washington. Perhaps now she could return to her favorite world of books and linguistics with Lord David Hall.

Armed with briefcases the two generals entered the military transport and returned to Washington.

When Mark Hauser deplaned from Bolling Field there was an unexpected and unwelcome visitor waiting for him. He had no sooner set one foot on the ground when Martie bolted from behind the fence and ran into her husband's arms. Camera flashes nearly blinded him. The military airport always had new reporters nearby to catch military personnel or brass in photographs. With his current position, there was simply nothing he could do.

Martie watched the ramp rolled to the open plane door. Several men descended as she watched carefully. She saw Linden and behind him stood Mark with briefcase in hand. His uniform was still crisp. "If you think you're going to get away from now that you've finally made it. You are very wrong Mark Hauser," Martie mumbled quietly to herself. With a shout she ran toward her estranged husband, "Mark! Mark my darling!" She quickly ensconced herself in his arms.

Before Mark knew what actually hit him, his estranged wife was kissing his cheeks and lips like a starved woman at a feast.

"My darling, I've missed you so much," Martie resounded for everyone within twenty feet to hear.

Mark bent his head and whispered in her ear, "What the *Hell* do you think you're doing?"

In a voice barely above a whisper so she could be heard above the airport's noise Martie replied, "Image is everything darling. Your image is critical at this time. General Newhall and I had a long conversation about this."

Mark was furious. He knew very well that Newhall liked Martie. She was a perfect army wife in his eyes and Newhall was his superior. He also knew that Newhall often scathed the commander of the Pacific front for his divorce and remarriage to a younger woman. Mark felt trapped. He had been hoping Martie would have used her father's money and pushed the divorce

through. What was she up to now? Mark took Martie's arm none to gently and ushered her into the military car waiting for him.

Linden knew of the marital discord, but both men knew better than to say anything that the young driver might overhear. Linden also believed this was a private matter that Mark would prefer to handle in private. The driver was told to drive immediately to General Newhall. Mrs. Hauser should be dropped off at the hotel of her choice.

It was early into the morning that Mark Hauser returned to his small apartment in Washington. He considered himself lucky to have this little private haven. Here he could curl up with his books. He loved history and kept his favorite books there leaving everything else in the house he walked away from six months ago. Mark tossed his hat on the small sofa in the tiny living room. Quickly he removed his jacket and tie. He removed his shoes and socks placing them neatly under the coffee table next to the sofa. His jacket and tie were placed neatly on the sidearm of the sofa. Unbuttoning his shirt he entered the small bathroom. It was in that bathroom he removed his shirt, undid his brass buckled belt, and unzipped his pants. Comfortable at last when he was down to his tee shirt and boxers, Mark walked to his bedroom. He was exhausted and needed sleep. "Goddammit!" Mark shouted as he reached for the covers in the dark and found a body under it.

"Mark, you simply must stop that foul language," Martie murmured sleepily.

"Goddammit, what are you doing here?" Mark demanded.

"Darling, I thought you would be pleased that I've changed my mind about the divorce. Your public image is sooo important now," Martie cooed.

"Martie, I'm too damned tired to deal with this now, but I want this divorce. I want this hell we call a marriage ended," Mark stated angrily. He took the top quilt from the bed and stormed into the living room to sleep on the sofa.

Mark rose early. Martie rarely rose before ten. He wrote a letter instructing her to find an apartment of her own or return to California and her parents.

Mark took no chances for several days. He billeted himself at the Washington headquarters and was available at any hour. It was a wise decision because Martie had taken over his tiny little

apartment and refused to move out for propriety and public image. She consistently reminded him of how important it was for the Commander of European Operations to project a proper American mom's apple pie squeaky-clean image. Mark continued to press the divorce until General Newhall intervened and told him to wait. Mark was exasperated by his superior's insistence that all marriages get rocky but survive.

Mark maintained his sanity by concentrating on his work. His report on the state of readiness for European theater was presented to General Newhall. Options and alternatives were debated endlessly. Meetings happened morning, noon, and night. One day Mark was called for a meeting with the President and Newhall.

To Mark's surprise his plans for invasion were discussed by Franklin Roosevelt and Newhall, and Winston Churchill.

"We've agreed upon your plan for one man to be in Charge of American forces, Mark," The President stated. "We've also decided on the person you recommended to be the sole commander of the American Forces in Europe." The President let silence hang in the air. "General Newhall and I agree on the choice."

Mark looked from the President to his superior. He had recommended a member of the staff, General Patrick O'Riley.

A familiar voice suddenly boomed from behind him. "We are all agreed on General Mark Hauser."

Mark choked. It was Winston Churchill. Suddenly the responsibility of the future of the free world rested on his shoulders and his shoulders alone.

"Do you want the job, Mark?" the President asked.

Mark found himself nodding and with a shaky voice he answered, "Yes sir. Yes sir, I do." If nothing else he was confident of his plan.

"Good," General Newhall said. "You'll leave in a week for London and assume command of the European Theater. Congratulations, Mark. You've just received your third star."

Mark was stunned, but he threw himself into his new rank and responsibility. There would be many changes in the command overseas. The first to go would be General Lane. He was ineffective and certainly held no respect from an undisciplined troop. In only a few days Mark had convinced General Newhall to remove Lane and place General Randall Jones as his adjutant.

Mark was determined to bring discipline back to the American troops in the British Aisles and he knew exactly where to begin. Fraternalization with the British civilian population would come to a screeching halt. He would present a image as Martie put it. It would be an image of strength, capability, and proper military manner. *Duty, Honor, and Country!*

The next week he was surprised at his military billet by his daughter, Debbie.

“Dad, I’m so proud!” she bubbled and kissed her father. “Radcliffe gave me a special holiday so I could see you before you left for England. Imagine, my dad is the commander of the armed forces in Europe. I’ll be ever so popular at school.”

If anything wonderful came out of his marriage to Martie, it was Deborah. She was smart, beautiful, and the joy of his life.

“Mum met me at the train station. She’s waiting for us at your apartment. Is that swell with you?” Deborah was aware of the problems in her parent’s marriage. Even though her mother had assured her in the car that her parents were reconciling, Deborah was doubtful. Her father’s pained look confirmed her suspicion. “It’s alright Dad. We’ll just project this perfect family like we’ve always done and you can come back here. I just want to spend as much time as I can with you.”

“Sweet pea, for you I will enter the jaws of hell. We’ll put on the pretense. Just so I can spend time with you,” Mark promised. He hugged his daughter. Strong emotions engulfed him and he squelched the tears that shimmered on his eyes.

Deborah took his hand and led him out to the car. For his last few days he and Martie put on an exhibition worthy of an academy award.

Deborah and Martie saw him board the flight to England. He hugged and kissed his daughter farewell. He allowed Martie to embrace him. On that embrace Mark growled quietly, “Get that divorce Martie, and get it done with now. I’ve attorneys ready to handle it in my absence.”

Martie kissed her fingers and touched them to Mark’s lips. It was strictly a gesture for the photographers. When Mark turned to board the plane he heard Martie reply, “Not on your life soldier!” She knew he couldn’t do or say anything. “Write to me everyday like you promised my love,” Martie shouted for benefit

of reporters and photographers. Tears suddenly flowed from her eyes and she sought the shelter of General Newhall's arms.

"That Martie is a real actress," Mark's new adjutant, General Randall Jones quipped.

"She belongs on the Hollywood Cinema for certain," Mark agreed.

"She doesn't project the image of a woman obtaining a divorce from a neglectful husband," Jones teased lightheartedly.

"Daddy is going to benefit from my new star," Mark sighed. "Once Daddy doesn't benefit anymore I'm sure my divorce will go smoothly. But Randy, my personal life ends here. We've got a job to do!"

"Yes Mark, that we do!"

Chapter 4

Unfortunately for Kiley she was retained by Colonel Hall's staff and worked every day for the next two months transcribing, translating, and driving for Colonel Hall. While driving a visiting American Colonel to a private party, Kiley heard the news of Hauser's promotion. He was given command of all American Forces in the European Theater and promoted to a three star general. "We're in for it now," she said silently.

Returning to work after a three-day holiday she was met at the door by Major Bob Deacon. He embraced her and pulled her to the side. "I've something important to say and I have to say it now. I haven't much time."

Kiley swallowed hard. She had a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach what was coming next. How could she explain to Bob she liked him, but wanted absolutely no romantic or marriage ties to muck up her life.

"Don't answer me yet. Think on it for a day or two," Bob spewed out quickly. "Kiley, I love you. Marry me."

Kiley opened her mouth to give an answer. Bob quickly put his finger on her lips. "Don't answer me yet! I can't be seen with you in public anymore. Hauser as issued the order," he hesitated. "No Fraternization! No Fraternization with the female gender."

"Good God!" Kiley exclaimed not for herself but her friends, especially Cindy who was quite happy with Captain Dan Turwald. Those two had been discussing marriage. "Who gave this order?"

"The Commander of the European Theater," Bob laughed. "You know, the one you admire so much."

"Hauser?" Kiley asked in shock. "He's back?"

“Yes, and leading the whole shebang,” Bob replied. “Got to run now. I have a meeting upstairs with the staff.”

“Good Lord you’d better leave before the general arrives,” Kiley chuckled with humor. “He’d lop off your head for fraternizing with this humble British servant.”

Bob Deacon had no sooner left than Kiley spotted Hauser and two men walking toward her. She ran up the stairs to hide in her office.

Kiley sat on the straight back chair and went through her inbox looking for the day’s schedule. Colonel Hall always had his aide put it there the night before. She found nothing. Shuffling through the papers once more, she still found nothing. Kiley heard the general and his staff walk up the stairs to his office. “Bloody Yanks. They sound like a herd of Elephants walking up here.” When the door opened to the general’s office she heard the voices. Kiley decided to find Colonel Hall and obtain her scheduled duties personally.

“Has anyone found Burke?” Mark Hauser queried his staff.

“Yes sir,” Captain Hawker responded. “Burke had taken a three day holiday to visit her mother and will report for duty this morning.”

“Get her,” Mark barked.

“Sir, we don’t know if she’s arrived yet?”

“Have you checked her office?” Mark queried the captain. His voice was dripping with irritation and sarcasm. “I won’t be late for another conference. Do you understand me?”

“Yes sir.” The captain saluted and walked briskly to the door of the adjoining office. Walking into the little room he looked around. Kiley had already left and was downstairs trying to locate Colonel Hall.

The captain came back and reported, “She’s not there, General sir.”

Packing his briefcase Mark was seething with anger. This was getting irritating. He had an American male driver that was lost all the time both inside and outside London. Mark had been late everyday for every meeting since his return three days ago. His temper was at its explosive level. As much as he hated to admit it, that wisp of a woman was the best damn driver in England. “Then find her, Goddammit! She has to be around her

somewhere.” If Mark had to have that same corporal as his driver one more day he would bust him lower than a private and the rest of his duty overseas would be cleaning latrines. “If she isn’t here, go to her billet and get her.”

The captain ran from the room.

“Burke is a civilian, Mark,” Randall reminded the General. “It may not be a good idea to drag her screaming from her bed.”

“She’s still in service and I have need of her services,” Mark snapped. “Burke may be a woman, but the chit knows her way around England. I need that, England needs that, and the ally war effort needs that!”

“Speaking of Allies,” Randall chuckled. “Burke is lend lease and it might behoove you to begin your politics as making her your ally.”

Mark raised his brow and shot General Jones a look that would slice a normal man in two. “Randy, shut up!”

Sean Ryan followed the captain down the stairs. He knew what Burke looked like and he knew Mark Hauser’s mood. He had been Hauser’s personal aide for over ten years. Sean guessed correctly that Hauser would not tolerate another delay or being late for a meeting. Hauser was meticulous and prompt. He spotted Kiley in the hall behind the main office. She appeared to be asking for someone. Sean ignored the captain and sprinted across the room. He called for Kiley by name. “Kiley Burke?”

Kiley heard her name and spun around to the voice. “Yes?” She responded automatically and knew it was not the General.

“General Hauser has sent for you,” Sean stated reaching her side.

“Tell the General I haven’t yet found my schedule. I may be needed elsewhere.”

“Colonel Hall has transferred you to our staff, ma’am,” Sean informed politely doffing his hat. “You’ll find your schedule upstairs. General Hauser needs you to drive for him.”

“What?” Kiley stated with surprise more than question. “General Hauser hates women drivers. He did nothing but complain the entire time I was assigned to him.”

“He may have had a change of heart,” Sean excused.

“Heart? You mean he actually has one?” Kiley sneered. “I thought his body ran on ice.”

“Please ma’am,” Sean gave into pleading.

“It looks like you know what my assignment is,” Kiley capitulated. “For King and Country you know.”

Clutching her purse tightly against her shoulder she entered General Hauser’s office to face the hot-tempered Commander of Allied Forces. She spotted Bob talking to a Naval Officer. She would come to know that man as Harry Durham. Kiley remembered the new fraternization rule and didn’t try to catch Bob’s attention. Instead she noticed a tall major approach her.

“Morning Burke, here is the general’s schedule,” he said handing her a sheet of paper. “I’m Major Dallas Stern. I’ll be preparing the general’s schedule for you ever day.”

Kiley’s Irish temper exploded. “Bloody Unlikely!”

Mark Hauser and everyone in the room turned to look at her.

“I beg your pardon?” Dallas gulped.

“You heard me! Bloody Unlikely! I’m a civilian. I am not in any British military service, much less a Bloody Colonist Army!”

Hauser’s orders, command, or aides had never been questioned before. As a commander he needed to support his aides and let this mere woman know just who was in charge. “Miss Burke, although you are a woman you seem to be the only available driver with knowledge of London and England. It is imperative for the war effort that I arrive safely and on time for meetings, reviews, and inspections.”

Kiley didn’t hear anything except the woman blurb. “As a mere woman I should be flattered to be so underhandedly complimented, but I am not a female to be trifled with or debased. My driving expertise is a service that should not be equated with a gender. You Colonists seem to have a problem appreciating any of your women’s talents.

“Miss Burke, there is no need to get into a gender war here,” Mark stated attempting a more placid tone.

“Don’t placate me General Hauser,” Kiley bit back. “It’s no wonder you Bloody Colonists didn’t give your women equal rights and the vote until well after the British Crown.” Kiley snapped the paper from Stern’s hand and looked at it and then her watch. “We have plenty of time General. I’ll be at the car waiting for you. It should take me only ten minutes to take you to your meeting with the Prime Minister at Downing Street.” With those

words leaving her mouth she spun around on her heels and marched out of the office and down the stairs.

Bob was dumbfounded. He couldn't believe what Kiley had just done. She had dressed down the military commander of American Forces. He allowed a smile of pride to slide across his face. He could never pull off what she just had.

Mark watched Kiley march away from his office. He couldn't help but admire the guts of a woman who had just told him off. That also took courage to retaliate against an American General that was in supreme command under orders of the President of the United States. He also admired the woman for her knowledge of history, his favorite subject. It might be interesting to compare notes with her at some quiet time.

Mark finished filling his briefcase and buckled it. He started toward the door. Randall Jones followed him on his heels and whispered, "For God's sake Mark, we don't need anymore war fronts. Try to be a little more political with our driver. She isn't one of ours you know."

"Maybe I should make her one of ours. A little discipline would do her some good," Mark chortled.

Randall rolled his eyes and followed the general to the car.

Kiley was waiting at the car and had the door open for the generals when they stepped out of the building. She did not salute and her face was stoic not revealing her feelings.

Several hours later the general emerged from his meeting. His mood was better since this meeting went well. Seeing Kiley he felt a twinge of guilt for his rude treatment of her. "Would you care to join General Jones and I for dinner Miss Burke?"

Without twitching or moving a muscle Kiley replied, "Thank you ever so much for your warm and kind invitation *Mon General*, but I already have plans for the evening."

"Break them," Hauser ordered not thinking of how callous this order sounded.

"I am your driver, not a slave," Kiley related dryly.

"Look, Miss Burke," Mark explained nearly choking. "I would like to make a truce with you. We've started off on the wrong foot. You are an excellent driver. I'm sorry I indicated anything else. I apologize."

This apology was too good to be true and Kiley didn't want to make light of it or take it too seriously. She drew back her acerbic tongue and merely said, "Thank you for your apology."

"You're welcome. I thought to have dinner at the Hunter's Red Restaurant. Have you ever eaten there before?"

"Oh yes, several times. A certain major takes me there on occasion."

"One of yours?" Mark asked for no reason other than conversation. At least that's what he told himself.

"Actually one of yours," Kiley retorted. "A sweet kind American Major that doesn't bark, yell, or criticize me at any time. We actually have quiet conversations."

Mark reached deep inside himself and found an impish boy. "Now who on God's Green Earth would bark, yell, or criticize you Miss Burke?" After the words escaped his lips he actually felt like a little boy once more. It felt wonderful.

"An American General for one," Kiley blurted out and continued her diatribe in the humor at the moment. "My mother, father, brother, aunts, uncles, teachers..."

"Thank you for putting the general in such good company," Mark laughed.

Randall stared at his superior officer and friend. He never remembered Mark ever laughing and he had known him for over ten years.

"I really do have plans for this evening with a friend," Kiley reminded the general. "I must inform him of the change of plans."

"Him?" Mark asked not understanding why that upset him.

"Major Deacon asked me out to dinner this evening," Kiley replied nonchalantly. She bit her lip when she remembered the no fraternization rule General Hauser had just imposed.

"I'll have Sergeant Ryan send word to the Major for you," Mark replied coldly. He would also see to it that the major understood the no fraternization rule. His offer of dinner was different. Kiley was his staff and he often shared dinners with his staff.

Chapter 5

“You may drop me off at the Connemara and take the car to your flat. Perhaps you might want to change for dinner,” Mark said to Kiley’s back while she was driving. “I know I would like to change.”

Kiley was surprised to say the least. This gruff general was actually almost human at the moment. He was actually understanding of the fact it had been a long dusty day. Kiley’s uniform was wilted and she felt grimy. It was Susan’s night for a bath, but a cloth wash would feel wonderful. “Yes General, I would like that very much. Where and at what time should I meet you?”

“We’ll grab a ride to the restaurant with someone else and you can meet us at the Red Hunter about 8:00. Would that be acceptable?”

“Wonderful! It would be wonderful!” Kiley replied enthusiastically.

The long drive back to London seemed shorter and Kiley let the generals off at the Connemara. She hurried back to her flat.

As soon as Kiley entered the flat she removed her boots, socks, undid her tie, shirt, and started removing her slacks. Quickly she ran to the bathroom and dipped a cloth into the hot sudsy water Susan was enjoying. “Thanks love. I need to freshen up a bit.”

Kiley washed her self and started applying fresh makeup. She brushed her teeth, redid her hair, applied rouge and lipstick, and then darted to her room for fresh clothing.

Cindy watched the whirlwind and followed Kiley into her room. “What the devil is going on with you? Don’t tell me it is a hot date with your major? Dan tells me he’s wild over you.”

Rummaging through her closet Kiley selected a green silk evening dress and pulled out a pair of matching shoes. “Actually I did have a dinner date with Bob, but General Hauser is treating his staff to dinner tonight and I’m ordered to attend. He suggested I change for dinner. I took that as an order as well.”

“General Hauser?” Cindy gasped. “What did you say? Taking his staff to dinner and you’re part of the staff?”

“I was transferred to the General’s staff this morning,” Kiley responded while dressing. “It was a genuine surprise for me. I wasn’t given any warning. Apparently he returned the day I left for my holiday with Mum and Dad.”

“Doesn’t he despise you?” Cindy asked remembering their conversations of only a few weeks ago. “As I recall you could barely tolerate him.” She shadowed her friend and help Kiley zip up the back of her dress. “That Hauser won’t recognize you dressed up like this. I barely know who you are.” Cindy twirled her around. “You look smashing. This should melt a bit of that General Hauser’s brass.”

“Oh Cindy, I’m not out to melt any brass,” Kiley countered. “I just like feeling a bit feminine every now and then.”

“Well, it doesn’t hurt to make the men look a bit though, does it?”

“You keep thinking that way Cindy,” Kiley laughed. “I’m going to have a smashing dinner and someone else will pay for it. Got to run.”

Kiley drove to the Hunter’s Red. Entering the restaurant she looked about and found the General at the bar. He was a man who stood out in a crowd even without his general’s uniform. Mark Hauser was a tall man. He had to be over six foot, Kiley estimated. He had a roman profile with a strong square jaw. He had thick curly dark brown hair and the most vivid blue eyes.

Mark was enjoying a discussion on football with his friend and adjutant Randall Jones. In his hand was a scotch and soda.

“General,” Kiley stated coming from behind him.

Mark turned around acknowledging her presence. “Burke.” When he turned to see her he couldn’t believe his eyes. She was beautiful. That plain bookish spinster spectacled face had been transformed into a painting of treasure. Her hair was down her back held with a green ribbon. Her eyes sparkled blue with an

unexpected beauty. Her lips, oh those lips, were the most luscious kissable lips he had ever seen. They parted slightly in a most sensuous manner. What on earth was he thinking! “Would you care for a drink, Burke?”

“Why thank you General, I would love one.”

“Port? Claret? Gin?”

“Heavens no General. I prefer Scotch on rocks.”

“General Hauser, your table is prepared,” the maitre de informed. “Right this way.”

When the group was seated General Hauser ordered the waiter to bring a Scotch on the rocks for Kiley. He turned to look at Kiley. “Rather unusual drink for a lady.”

“I’ve never claimed to be a lady, General Hauser,” Kiley chuckled. “I perhaps have aspired to be one, but never attained it.”

This optimistic pragmatic young woman puzzled him. Kiley reminded him of his daughter. Perhaps this would explain the interest he had developed in her. Perhaps his sudden feelings for her were paternal. She was just a few years older than his daughter. He suddenly felt very old.

Kiley had been seated inside next to the general. The seat gave her a clear view to the entrance of the restaurant. She glanced up after taking a sip of Scotch and saw Major Bob Deacon enter. “Excuse me,” Kiley remarked rising from her seat and walking briskly toward Bob.

Hauser watched her leave and noticed the object of her pursuit. His mood suddenly went sour. Were those the protective paternal instincts once more?

“Bob!” Kiley called to gain his attention.

“Kiley? The general’s aide told me our dinner engagement was cancelled, but didn’t tell me why. Are you having dinner here tonight?” Bob queried a bit confused. Jealousy or suspicion was never a part of Bob’s character. He was simply happy to see her and possibly have dinner with her.

“The general’s aide didn’t tell you his staff was ordered to have dinner with him?” Kiley asked somewhat surprised herself at the lack of information given to Bob. It was true that she only liked the man, but such treatment was boorish. Her temper was fired up.

“No, but that doesn’t matter. I’m happy to see you and we can have dinner another time,” Bob excused gallantly.

“I will hear of no such thing. You will join us for dinner,” Kiley replied firmly.

“Ah Kiley, a major simply does not invite himself to sit down and dine with a commanding general,” Bob stuttered.

Ignoring his plea, Kiley locked her arm in Bob’s and literally pulled him to the table. “General Hauser, look who walked in unexpectedly. We haven’t ordered our dinner and I told Bob you wouldn’t mind one bit if he joined us.” Kiley’s eyes reflected a bit of the imp within her when she sweetly added, “I told Bob you weren’t at all a kind of snobbish general that wouldn’t allow a non staff member to join him. You did know our dinner was cancelled because of your ordered staff dinner.” To make matters worse, Kiley fluttered those long lashes over her green eyes innocently.

General Randall Jones began shaking with mirth. Linden had told him about Kiley Burke and how she put the general in his place. Linden had told him he felt this female driver was good for Mark. If anyone would be able to shake this general, it would be a personality like Kiley Burke. *General Hauser could learn to adjust to the British ally with a taste of humble pie from Kiley Burke.* Randall recalled.

Dallas, Harry, and Sean were choking on their drinks. They were waiting for General Hauser to explode and send the two flying across the room with one hot breath of reproof.

General Hauser couldn’t get his mind and mouth to coordinate. On one hand the audacity of this woman was incredible. On the other hand, he truly didn’t worry much about protocol. It seemed to be his underlings and definitely his wife that worried about the proper etiquette. “Of course, do join us. I should have thought of that myself.” The slipping into his real being was short lived. Something clicked back into anger when he watched Bob pull Kiley’s chair and seat her. He pushed that back into his psyche. Anger was something to be controlled. Thanks to his marriage, he had developed an excellent poker face.

Randall stopped laughing. He was in shock.

The other men found the menus quickly and were studying them with scrutiny.

“I am surprised to learn of your involvement with Miss Burke,” General Hauser said breaking the silence. A vein appeared on his forehead when he watched Deacon place a hand possessively over Kiley’s hand. “You are aware of the no English fraternization order?”

Kiley’s brows rose with anger. How dare he bring this up now when half the occupying top military brass were already involved heavily with English women. Hah! Now she had him. Before Bob had a chance to respond, Kiley piped up, “Glad to know that excludes me, I’m Irish.”

Bob’s mouth dropped. He was dumbfounded that she would be so impertinent with the commander of American Forces.

Mark Hauser was left speechless as well. No one had ever in his military career given him so much disrespect.

Randall didn’t try to hide his enjoyment of the situation. “Guess you’ll have to include the Irish, Scottish, and every other country our troops will occupy, Mark.”

Mark sipped his drink in silence. Being one up on this hot-tempered red haired woman was now a challenge. He ignored Randall’s question. He turned the conversation toward his expertise and discussed the military maneuvers of history’s great leaders.

Kiley realized she had gone a bit far and didn’t add any of her history knowledge to the military legends.

When dessert was served Mark was feeling more confident again once more and wanted to meet the challenge of the saucy red head. “I take it you are interested in marriage to an American.”

Bob interrupted, “I’m hoping for that General Hauser.” He placed his hand on Kiley’s hand.

Kiley slipped her hand out from under Bob’s. She thought this might be a good opportunity to let Bob truly understand her feelings about his proposal. “Actually I’ve tried marriage once. I found out it didn’t suit me. Since my divorce I’ve discovered a lot about myself. The first reason being I’m not good wife material.”

Mark nearly choked on his torte. The audacity of this woman was incredible. “Not good material?” Mark choked out.

“Why yes, some people should be married. They can devote themselves to the future and career of a spouse. They abandon all their own desires. Worshipping the spouse whether deserving it or not. Sacrificing every hope, dream, and want for

the sake of a mate. No, I am not suited to that lifestyle. I'm far too autonomous, individual, stubborn, ..."

"Contrary," Mark added.

"Converse."

"Obstinate."

"Independent."

"Inflexible."

"Unmovable."

"Impertinent."

"Cheeky."

"Impudent."

"Sassy."

"Insolent."

"Does any one have a scrabble board?" Randall interceded.

"And a dictionary?" Randall couldn't believe the sparks that flew between the driver and the general. Fraternization would be an issue the general himself would soon be facing if his gut instincts were right.

"What a clever idea," Kiley responded. "I would simply love to play a good board game. It is so much fun and relaxing."

Mark found himself feeling wonderful, relaxed, and like a little kid again. "We'll find one. Get on it Dallas. My rooms at the Connemara have a nice parlor."

Dallas left in a hurry and returned to the group at the Connemara two hours later with a scrabble board in hand.

General Hauser had a dictionary brought to his room by the concierge. The game and laughing went on until nearly midnight. Since it was very late for Kiley to drive back to the flat, General Hauser made arrangements for her to have a room at the hotel. Major Deacon bid his good nights and returned to his hotel just down the street.

This game had been so relaxing Mark Hauser fell asleep and had the first comfortable and sound sleep he had since the war began and he left for Washington.

Chapter 6

“Good Morning General Hauser,” Kiley smiled opening the car door for him.

“Good Morning Burke,” Mark returned. “I see you are back to your alter ego once again.” He allowed his eyes to scan her from top to bottom. Her hair was pulled back tightly and covered with a hat. She wore no make up. Her clothes were a brown uniform shirt, tie, jacket, and slacks. She wore military boots. “Does the insubordinate tongue accompany that disguise?”

“Possibly General Hauser,” Kiley retorted closing the door.

On the drive to Reading Hauser could not squelch his curiosity any more. “Why do you wear that spinster disguise? Last night you were incredibly attractive. I would think a woman as yourself would be most comfortable bringing men to their knees.”

“That’s a thought,” Kiley laughed. “A lovely thought.”

Before he knew it, Mark was laughing with her. “I can see you holding a saber and in your hand the head of the knave that dare ask for your attention.”

“And lopping off the blighter’s head,” Kiley agreed.

Both were laughing so hard they were in tears.

Catching his breath he pursued his question, “So Burke, why do you choose this camouflage?”

“I made a commitment to this war effort when ...”

The loud wailing of an air raid siren interrupted Kiley. “Bloody Hell! An air raid!” She exclaimed. “There’s a shelter just around the corner.”

“Ignore it,” Mark ordered. “Just continue driving.”

“Are you mad? Or are you just really stupid and ignorant?” Kiley growled turning the car violently at corner and slamming the

brakes on the car. “Don’t bloody expect me to hold the door for you. During an air raid it’s every man for himself.” With those words of warning Kiley ran from the car leaving the door open. She ran into the shelter and once inside its secure walls she looked behind her. The general wasn’t there. Pushing her way back through the people who were coming into the shelter, she found the general calmly closing the car doors and looking up into the sky. “You bloody lunatic!” Kiley snarled. She grabbed the general’s hand and pulled him into the shelter just as the first bomb hit the streets. It hit very close to the shelter. Dust flew into the unsecured opening of the shelter. Children cried, babies wailed, and women screamed. The bombs continued to fall. The dust filling the shelter, human sweat mingled with the scent of fear.

“I’ve never been in an air raid,” Mark said softly.

“Quite obvious,” Kiley agreed angrily. “You could have bloody well been killed out there. How are we going to win a war when our ally generals haven’t even lived the hell of it all? And worst of all, the ally generals don’t have enough sense to come in out of the inferno?”

“Burke,” Mark whispered. She was so right it hurt. He was put in charge of thousands of lives and he never experienced a battlefield.

“You are a Bloody Fool!” Kiley reprimanded.

“You’re right Burke,” Mark agreed. “It is my responsibility to set example and I’ve just set a lousy one.”

“You’ve never really experienced any of this horror, have you?” Kiley asked sympathetically.

“No Burke, this is the very first air raid and shelter I’ve been in. I’m a military strategist. I use historical reference, personality study, and maps.”

“Then look around you general. You need to see what this war really looks like. Its crumbled buildings throwing dry dust into you mouth until your teeth feel like the only thing it eats is sand. It is dead bodies of men, women, children, and babies. Those bodies are all burned and most charred beyond recognition. Dogs, cats, birds, and small mammals are not spared this horrible death either. The only things that seem unmoved are fleas, cockroaches, and lice. The smell of human waste and death intermingle. The wounded walk wrapping any cloth they find for binding those wounds. The smell and sight of blood surround you.

This is what your soldiers see. They look at the dead staring bodies of their friends and they kill young men and boys so much like themselves. Look at this horror General Hauser. Look and never forget it. Because people like you are here to end it! Until you understand what this war really is, you will never be able to end it.”

“You have been through all of it,” Mark realized sadly. “You’ve been through this hell and back.”

“That I have General Hauser,” Kiley acknowledged. “It’s made me hate war. It’s why I made a commitment to devote myself in every way fighting the Nazis. I will fight them in any opportunity I am given. Being a flighty pretty girl pushes me into a corner of protectiveness by the male gender. I don’t want to be a fluff. I want to use my intelligence and capability in this fight. Be certain of my words. I will fight!”

“The Nazis don’t have a chance,” Mark said firmly. “Not a damn chance in hell with an enemy like you.”

“Why thank you,” Kiley replied cheekily.

“I’m glad you’re on our side,” Mark teased. “And on my staff. I promise you that I will give you the opportunity to give your all to fight the Nazis. I need people like you.”

“You do?” Kiley asked. She couldn’t believe this was the same man she met and disliked completely. Suddenly he was no longer an arrogant self-fulfilled American jerk. She looked into his eyes and saw a bit of fear, a bit of awe, and a bit of humility.

“I do,” Mark answered. “I’m new at this and I know have a lot to learn. I’m about to get black and blue with errors, but by God I believe in this war. Everything I’ve got will go into ending this horror. I’ve been put in charge of thousands of young men’s lives. It’s a gigantic burden, but like you, I will give my all. I take this responsibility seriously. I ask you for your help.”

“You’ve just earned it General,” Kiley smiled.

Mark put his arm around her for no recognized reason. It just felt right at that moment. “We’ll do it together Burke.”

The moment was emotional. Both of them felt it. At that moment they had made a commitment to each other. They thought it was for a common goal. They didn’t realize they had touched each other’s heart in that shelter.

For the first time in a long time, Kiley allowed herself to feel comfort and security in someone’s arms. As she leaned into

his body she felt the rock hardness of his muscles. Lord she felt like she belonged there. She felt so safe. Of course it was just the moment.

“You really are a beautiful woman, Burke,” Mark praised.

“With or without my lipstick?” Burke laughed.

Contrary to her flippant remark, Mark remained quite serious. “Your beauty transcends even your physical attractiveness. You are a beautiful person with your deep sensitivity.”

Burke couldn't believe her ears. She leaned back in his arm and looked up into his eyes. She could tell he was quite serious and telling the truth. All she could think of saying was, “Thank you.”

“I may need you to listen to me once and awhile. I won't expect you to say anything, just listen. I'm surrounded by people who won't voice their opinions or try to inflict their opinions to reach a self need of glory,” Mark shared. “I know you don't like me very much, but I need someone to listen to me when I'm feeling lost or weak. I can't show this side of me to anyone else. I need someone to trust.”

“I don't like you when you are a pompous arrogant ass,” Kiley chuckled. “Which is most of the time, but I do like you when you are a genuine and real person. Just like you are now. You understand my disguise and I'll understand yours.”

Mark smiled with warmth he hadn't felt in a long time. A thought to kiss this woman was currently on his mind when the all-clear siren sounded. It was time to put on the war and forget the person once more.

“I hope the car is in one piece. It's a long walk back to Governor's Square,” Kiley remarked reluctantly leaving that secure shelter of his arms. Still she broke from the security and trudged ahead of the General to open the car door. “Sorry, this time you will be a little late for the meeting at Reading.”

“An air raid is a plausible excuse,” Mark replied entering the car. “Just see that it doesn't happen again.”

“Of course General, next time I'll jump in this car and aim its artillery fire at the bloody Nazi plane. You have my word!” Kiley bit out. This general was a real trial.

When Kiley had seated herself behind the steering wheel Mark answered, “I knew I could count on you.”

She looked into the rear view mirror and saw the mischievous smile on his face.

“I’ve been invited to Lord Mountbattan’s country home this weekend,” Mark casually said during the drive to Reading.

“Broadlands?” Kiley asked in surprise. She wondered if she would drive him there.

“The very same. Do you know where it is?”

“I could drive to it blindfolded. It’s heavenly. How lucky you are to receive such an invitation.”

“I’ll see to it that provisions will be made for you to drive me there.”

Kiley couldn’t believe it. Fate had taken her into the service of a major player in this war and would be near by, as history would be made. She actually felt a little humbled.

Upon their arrival at Reading, officers of the camp surrounded General Hauser. He greeted each officer cordially and slowly moved his way over to the growing group of soldiers that were thronging to catch a look at their American commander.

The next day Kiley watched as the press corps had their first conference with the new American commander. Hauser eased press restrictions after listening to all their complaints. He was aware he needed the press corps to be friendly if he were ever to need them. Hauser was also aware the press would stop at nothing to gain confidential information if he were the enemy and not a friend. She admired him for that.

The next day with her luggage packed, Kiley drove the general and his staff to Broadlands. Lord Mountbattan greeted them on the steps. Kiley remained by the car and house staff removed the general’s luggage giving her instructions for her housing. A lady’s maid was sent to take her to her rooms near the servant quarters.

Kiley gasped when she saw her accommodations. She had expected a simple billet type room near the servants quarters. Instead she was surprised to find a sunny room with yellow chintz curtains and matching bedspread under a canopied bed. Adjacent to her room was a small but more than adequate toilette room with a porcelain bathtub. “I must have died and gone to heaven.” Kiley stripped her clothes off and nearly leaped into the hot tub the maid

had drawn for her. The maid had even added bath salts. Kiley soaked in that tub until her skin wrinkled and the water turned cold. The best part of the visit was that she had three days of this luxury without being on call.

Mark Hauser was kept occupied by Lord Mountbattan. They spent hours in discussion about the war and Britain. They played cards, rode horses, and played golf on the lawns. There were also social luncheons and working dinners. He found he missed Kiley's irritating but enjoyable challenging barbs. The last day they would spend at Broadlands he sought her out. He found her where he was told she had spent a lot of time. Kiley was in the garden reading a book.

Mark took the book from her hand. "Attila the Hun?"

"I'm seeking first hand knowledge of dealing with generals and leaders."

"Glad to see this country living hasn't sweetened your caustic personality," Mark chuckled.

"I've a reputation to keep," Kiley returned in good humor.

"This is a lovely garden," Mark noted. "Care to take a walk?"

"Won't you be missed? I'm sure you're needed somewhere," Kiley answered sincerely. She knew she was relatively unimportant in the greater scheme of things.

"I've been reprieved for an hour," Mark laughed. "I'd like to take a walk before the luncheon. Come with me." He held out his hand offering to take hers. "Leave the book. I don't want a sneak attack." He was relieved to see that this weekend Kiley wasn't in her spinster disguise.

Kiley's hair was sparkling in the sun like golden threads lying in the midst of auburn hair. She had not bound it at all, but had let her hair fall down her back. She was wearing a light green satin blouse with a waisted black satin skirt. She was wearing black flats and no hosiery.

Mark Hauser couldn't help but admire her beauty and femininity. When he had bent down to take her hand he smelled lilacs.

Kiley took his offered hand and allowed him to help her to her feet. She felt the strength of his body as he lifted her with little strain. He looked so handsome in his knit sweater, white shirt, and

crisply pressed woolen slacks. In a uniform or civilian, he was a handsome man.

“Are you enjoying your weekend?” Mark asked releasing her hand and walking down the path between the flowers.

“It is smashing! I’ve forgotten there is still peace and beauty in this world of war and horror. Thank you so much for allowing me to stay here,” Kiley replied gratefully.

“I’m glad you’re able to enjoy it,” Mark said wistfully.

“Of course you can’t take this as a holiday can you?” Kiley asked. She knew the general’s time was completely utilized even here at Broadlands.

“No, I can’t. I’m responsible for planning battles and defeating a major axis power. The worst battles I’ve had so far are the battles of politics with our own allies.”

Kiley knew immediately he had taken her to listen to his weaker side. If he released his worries and frustrations, he could be strong for the politicians and public.

“I’m a soldier. I’m not a politician. I hate politics!”

“But you will learn politics because you have too!” Kiley added.

“Yes, I will.”

“And you’ll be bloody good at them,” Kiley praised. “Lord knows you’ve got me convinced you are a rock hard bloody cold hearted general when you wear that uniform.”

“I’m that convincing?” Mark chuckled.

“Absolutely!” Kiley smiled.

The smile the general returned warmed Kiley’s heart.

Mark took her hand once again and put it in the crook of his arm. “Look! Isn’t that a falcon?”

“Wouldn’t it be wonderful to soar freely like a falcon?” Kiley asked. “Oohhh, so free and without a care except your next meal.”

“Wouldn’t that be lovely,” Mark agreed.

They continued the walk in silence, but it was a comfortable silence. Retracing their steps they were met by Harry Durham. It was time for the man to become a general once more. Without a word he removed her hand from his arm and followed Durham into the main house.

“You really are a strange duck General Hauser,” Kiley said to herself and picked up her book. She would enjoy this small place of heaven for every bloody moment she could.

Kiley woke early the next morning and put on her uniform and her disguise as ugly spinster. Securing the tight topknot on her head Kiley chuckled, “You and that general have a lot in common, Kiley Burke. You both put on one visage for the public, and another secret self you keep hidden revealing it to only a few people. So Kiley Burke, why do you trust this general? Because he hides like you do.” She straightened her tie, pulled down her jacket, and left to wait at the car for the generals.

Chapter 7

The next few weeks were frustrating. Every day there were meetings with top brass. The General received no less than ten invitations a day for teas, luncheons, even bar mitzvahs. It seemed every one in London was vying to grab General Hauser's attentions and good graces.

Kiley whacked a photographer and journalist with her large leather purse just yesterday. She simply lost her temper when they continued to harass her regarding information on the General and what it was like to drive for the American General.

When General Hauser was told about the incident he quipped that perhaps Miss Burke should receive a medal for bravery under fire. Fortunately this was kept within his inner circle and not for the press.

Kiley appreciated General Hauser's praise and his support of her action. There was a limit to everything and those reporters and photographers had pushed her beyond her limits.

This weekend the General was to spend at Winston Churchill's Chequers. It was going to be a very important meeting and Kiley was once again given accommodations for the weekend.

"All I have to do is go to the gardens and I'm certain to find you there reading a book," Mark told Kiley finding her in Chequers gardens.

"I'm just a creature of habit," Kiley smiled. She looked at the General and saw frown lines deepening on his mouth. "Something is not quite right."

"Perceptive," Mark agreed. "Come walk with me."

Kiley rose and took his offered arm. She knew this was the time he needed to vent his frustrations in private. It was her time

to listen. If this would be her role in winning this war against the Nazis, she was happy to do it.

“I’ve been blockaded,” Mark spit out. “They call my plan foolhardy. Without allied support it is, but we can’t let the Russian front fall. If we do, we can all practice the goose step. Goddammit!”

“What will happen now that they have rejected your plan?”

“I believe in it and I’m going to fight for it. This is a damn political move by Churchill.”

Kiley walked for several minutes with General Hauser. He vented his anger and frustration. When they turned and retraced their steps he took her back to the bench where he found her. “What book are you reading today?”

“This time I’m reading 20,000 leagues under the sea.”

“Great book. I prefer these.” He pulled out a small book. It was a western pulp novel.

Kiley examined it. “Lovely history, your Wild West.” She returned it to him. “Reading takes you away to a place in your mind. It is a place that you control. I’m happy in that make believe place.”

“So am I,” Mark agreed. They sat together on the stone bench. They both opened their books and were lost for several hours until Dallas came to retrieve the General.

As he rose from the bench he whispered, “Again I thank you.”

“At your service general,” Kiley smiled warmly.

After their return to London, Bob continued his pursuit of Kiley. Although she told him she liked him, this was simply not the time for her to even consider marriage.

“I vow to change your mind,” Bob promised and showed up at her flat to take her out to dinner whenever he could.

Two weeks later Kiley was instructed to drive General Hauser and his staff to the airport. A military transport taxied down the runway and Kiley got her first taste of General Oscar Newhall, FDR’s Chief of Staff and Mark’s boss. There was also a Navy Admiral on the plane. He was a quiet man. Kiley wondered about him. Sometimes still waters ran deep.

“I’ve a letter from Martie for you,” Oscar announced once entering Mark’s car. “She’s told me that you haven’t been writing

to her, but you've been sending letters to Debbie. You must understand how important your image is as a husband and father are. How can you possibly lead your men if you give an example of failure in your private life?"

Mark remained silent. He feared if he uttered one word it would be suicidal. Newhall always had liked Martie for some strange reason.

"We're deadlocked about Sledgehammer," Mark offered as topic and hoped that would change the direction of the conversation. It worked.

"I'll do my best, but in reality we have to deal with policy here, and the President needs an solid agreement. Our policy with our English Ally will be solid," Newhall answered. "Have you set up the meeting?"

"Tomorrow morning," Mark answered. "I would also like to talk to you about James Hayes. He needs to be called back to the States."

"Why is that?"

"He follows the British Army, not ours."

"What the Hell are you talking about?"

"He starts work late, eats a leisurely lunch, and stays up until midnight. He never works on Sunday," Mark Complained. "He's a great brigadier, but too British for the theatre and our invasion."

"Our invasion when it occurs," Newhall reminded. "We face major policy issues here, Mark."

"Goddammit, Churchill promised Roosevelt and Stalin we'd invade to give Hitler hell on two fronts. We need to squeeze him."

"Policy first Mark," Newhall reprimanded.

"Policy at the risk of lives of innocents?" Mark queried.

"What the devil are you talking about? Innocents?" Newhall returned.

Kiley wanted to turn around and shout at the imbecilic general. Instead she merely commented. "Perhaps the General is referring to British old men, women, and children that are dying from the bombings. Or perhaps the innocent Jews that we've heard stories about mass executions."

“Does your driver often intrude in private conversations?” Newhall snarled. “You may give more quarter because of her gender, but I suggest you change drivers immediately.”

Kiley’s temper soared once more. *The nerve of that man!* There was immediate and intense dislike of this American. Mark may have been arrogant, but at least he confronted her directly. Just who did General Newhall think he was? The King? Kiley steamed in silence. How utterly uncaring this general was. He appeared more concerned about policy than human lives. It was obvious this American truly didn’t understand the horrors of war either. She began wishing an air raid would happen right this minute and this general wouldn’t be allowed in the shelter.

Arriving at the Connemara the men left the car and entered the hotel. General Hauser returned to the car and spoke to Kiley. “This war is stressful on all of us. You should also know how tiring a long plane flight could be. We have a small battle tomorrow with our own ally. Thank you for holding back that Irish temper of yours.”

Kiley let her temper out on the general. “Politics! Bah! Bloody Generals, Bloody Egos, and Bloody War. Just give me a gun and I’ll go over to Germany and shoot Hitler myself.”

“Depending upon this meeting I may hop a flight and go over there with you,” Mark snorted.

Kiley returned the general’s laugh with a smile. “Trust me to keep my mouth shut. I wouldn’t want to be responsible for mucking up Allied policy.”

“Good!” Mark exclaimed. “Tomorrow we go to Downing. I suggest you be here at 6:00. You’re dismissed for the rest of the day.”

“Thank you general.” Kiley parked the car and walked to her flat. It was good to be home. Bob was waiting and took her out for dinner and drinks. She drank a little too much, but she felt a wonderful numb. Bob was a wonderful friend. He never asked any questions. They enjoyed evenings discussing history. She learned a great deal of history of the United States.

Crisp and clipped were the words for Kiley while she drove the men to their meeting at Downing Street. Before they arrived Kiley found herself wishing she could stop the car and slam that damned General Newhall with her handbag.

“Glad to see you have your girl under control,” Newhall said referring to Kiley. “We can be guaranteed our intelligent conversations won’t be interrupted by a feather headed female.”

After those words they arrived at their destination and Kiley slammed on her brakes giving everyone a solid jolt. She hoped General Newhall would crack his head.

“The policies are weak. The British were slapped in face when the Nazis took Tobruk,” Hauser complained as he departed from the car. “This is a war, not a game of king of the mountain.”

“That is what war is, Mark,” Newhall replied gruffly following Hauser into 10 Downing. “Everything is about being king of the mountain.”

If ever Kiley wanted to practice gunnery, it was today. She believed that if she put Newhall’s picture a thousand yards away, she would still hit the target right between his eyes. He would be the icon for callousness. Oh yes, she was quite certain this man had never commanded young men to watch them die or live under fire. He never would.

The naval admiral Tom Prince leaned down to whisper in her ear, “General Newhall would be a dead man by now if your looks could kill.”

“Sorry sir,” Kiley quickly apologized. “I didn’t mean to be impudent.”

“Don’t be sorry. I couldn’t agree with you more. That man has more arrogant pompousness than Carter has liver pills,” Prince whispered again. “I dare say the man has never lived under fire.”

“You have,” Kiley replied as a statement.

“Indeed I have. I’ve seen my friends and my men blown to pieces,” Prince stated. “War is hell, not a game.”

“Thank you sir,” Kiley smiled. A small tear ran unheeded down her cheek.

“You have,” Prince repeated knowingly. He rubbed his palm up and down her uniformed sleeve. “You have.” He disappeared into the house.

Kiley pulled out her book and sat down in the car to read. It was hours before the men emerged. Newhall ordered her to return them to the Connemara. She drove them back to Downing after they changed into their dinner clothes. Fortunately for her, she was dismissed. Limousines were waiting to take the Prime Minister, the British staff, General Newhall and the American staff

to dinner. She was relieved because she often heard Hauser complain these dinners lasted until two in the morning. Kiley noted that Hauser and his staff were looking very tired lately.

These meetings continued for a week. Everyone was showing fatigue and finally a plan was agreed upon. The Americans would invade Algeria. Mark was given an additional star and given supreme command of the invasion Churchill called Torch.

Kiley was thrilled that Newhall had returned to the United States. She thought Mark Hauser wouldn't look so tired and worried anymore. She was half right. He didn't look as tired, but he looked more worried.

There were two headquarters now. Hauser had his staff two blocks down at the AFHQ, American Forces Headquarters. He maintained the ETO, European Theatre Operations. Both he and his close staff split time between the two.

Kiley was privy to all private conversations and plans. Nearly half were made and discussed in the back seat of the car. Mark's decision to keep her as driver served him well because both the American and British never for a moment thought anything would be discussed of importance with a woman driving. "Bloody smart of you General Hauser. They all think that if you discussed anything with a woman driver it would be the next night's news."

"It was the British and their censorship and secrecy like Enigma that taught me many things. This includes the sanctity of the privacy of my car. My mother also taught me that the best way to keep a secret would be to keep it in the open," Mark laughed. It felt good to laugh. "And you Burke are my best kept open secret."

"It's good you listened to your wise mother and not hold her female gender against her," Kiley quipped.

They approached General Hauser's next best-kept secret. His aide had found him a small cottage to escape. His escape was not needed from the pressure of planning Torch or even the Axis powers. Mark Hauser needed to escape from social and society pressures. Too many people were trying to impose upon his position to gain political and monetary favors. The haven was called Cable Cottage.

"We're here General," Kiley announced when she stopped the car to lift the bar crossing the road.

“It’s a long way back to London,” General Hauser said when she sat back in the car. “Spend the night at the cottage tonight and I’ll see to it that you be billeted nearby when I’m here.”

“Thank you general,” Kiley appreciated. “That is very considerate. I am exhausted when I drive back to London and get up early to be here.”

“Then its settled,” Mark said authoritatively.

“One small problem General Hauser. Although I maintain minimal toiletries in my handbag, I’m afraid I didn’t bring any nightwear as I usually do when we spend evenings at Broadlands or Chequers.”

“I’m sure I have extra pairs of pajamas. You’ll wear a set of mine,” Mark offered.

“People might talk.”

“What people?” Mark laughed. “My staff?”

Kiley laughed at the absurdity of it herself. The general had been a perfect gentleman since their last run in. The more she learned about him and understood him, the more she liked and admired him.

Later that evening and after a game of bridge, Dallas handed a pair of silk pajamas to Kiley. She was walking upstairs to her room when she heard General Hauser swearing. She stopped to listen.

“Goddammit Dallas, what the hell are you doing?” Mark roared. “The last thing I need is to let Martie think she was getting her way. I need this divorce to go through and my lawyers certainly do not want her lawyers to get hold of this.”

“But sir, General Marshall ordered you to send letters. I felt that I needed to protect you,” Dallas stuttered fearly.

“How many of these goddamn letters have you sent to her?”

“About a dozen or so.”

“Goddammit. I’ll have to let my lawyers know just where these letters have been coming from,” Mark stormed. He went into the small study of the cottage. If things weren’t pressurized enough, he had to tell his attorneys just what his orderly had been doing and what to face. He put the letter Dallas had written in the envelope.

Dallas was unrepentant. "General sir, you cannot act in an insubordinate manner against the Chief of Staff. You are so important in this war theatre you must be concerned for your image. What type of man are you projecting to the thousands of men that will go to war for you?"

"Are you saying my divorce would affect these boys?" Mark snarled. "Half of these boys are dating English women and their women are dating men other than their husbands. What they need is a leader to depend on to make decisions and win this war."

"Your image..." Dallas started to comment.

"Damn my image," Mark shouted. "You will cease writing these letters." Those words left no quarter.

It was the first Kiley had really heard about the general's private marital problems. She had been through a bad marriage herself. A sense of camaraderie filled her. She walked into the tiny room and changed into the pajamas. They were voluminous so she decided to wear only the top. As comfortable as she was, she couldn't seem to sleep. Kiley stood by the window and stared at the quiet countryside. It was lovely and soothing to touch a bit of beauty in the ugliness of the war. The doorknob rattling startled her.

General Hauser stood silhouetted against the light of the hallway.

He saw Kiley bathed in bright moonlight. His eyes roamed from the top of her moonlight kissed hair down her throat to the perfectly formed breasts underneath his pajama tops. He couldn't help as his eyes went downward to the thighs that were exposed. Her legs were shapely and her ankles small and feminine. His body began to betray him. It had been so long since he had a woman beneath him. His mouth dry and his body hot Mark found himself saying, "I wanted to make sure you were comfortable."

"Yes General Hauser, I'm quite comfortable," Kiley replied nervously. She felt his eyes scrutinizing her as a lion scrutinizes its next meal.

"You can't sleep?" Mark asked with concern. He knew he shouldn't be there. He shouldn't be talking to her. His body was firing up like a rocket. He was starved for female companionship.

"No," Kiley answered. "I don't even know why."

Mark wanted to throw her on the bed and make her so tired she would sigh and fall asleep in his arms. The thought reminded

him of his vulnerability and how Martie had snared him in the first place. “Well do try to sleep. We will be up early tomorrow. I’m sending Randy to Gibraltar tomorrow.”

Chapter 8

Major Bob Deacon was waiting for Kiley when she returned from the weekend at Cable Cottage.

“Bob, how long have you been waiting here?” Kiley asked when she walked up the steps to her flat.

I have been here every evening since Friday night,” Bob replied.

“Do you want to go out to eat?” Kiley asked stopping in front of her door.

“Can we have dinner in? I’ve only got two hours.”

“Two hours?” Kiley questioned inserting her key in the door lock. “Two hours and then what?”

“I have to go to the depot and catch my train to Scotland.”

“Scotland?” Kiley nearly shouted. “Oh dear God, not Scotland.”

“What do you know Kiley?” Bob pressed.

“I know everything. I work in the bloody headquarters of this war, remember?” Kiley grated. “Why did you volunteer for active duty? You are so unsuited for battle. You are kind, soft spoken, intelligent, gentle, and definitely not aggressive.”

“Thank you, I think,” Bob teased kissing her nose. “I haven’t pressed you for an answer to my marriage proposal.”

“This isn’t the right time to ask either. Not as you are about to go off and get yourself blown into pieces somewhere.”

“You’re always right Kiley, but consider this. Where ever I go I will have our picture and I will tell everyone I’m going to marry this beautiful wonderful woman.”

“Bob...”

“Not another word. I love you Kiley and I will wait for you as long as I live.”

“Try to live a long time,” Kiley whispered.

“For you my love, anything.” Bob kissed Kiley with a passion. “Remember that one.” He started to walk away.

“Wait, I have the general’s car this evening. I’ll drive you to the depot,” Kiley volunteered. “That will give us some more time together and talk about things, like we always have.”

The last two hours before the train pulled away became a special time for Kiley and Bob. They liked each other. They were friends even though Bob had hoped to be lovers. They shared love for learning. That is what they shared together for the last hours they had together before his shipped off.

Kiley watched the train filled with British and American soldiers disappearing into the night. “Live Bob. For God’s sake live.”

The meeting in Gibraltar did not go well. Hauser was furious that he could not get the French cooperation he so desperately needed for operation Torch. Weeks later after several dozen meetings Mark Hauser decided to go to Gibraltar himself.

Kiley was summoned up to his office in the middle of the day.

“Go home and pack a bag, Burke. We’re going to Gibraltar,” Mark ordered stuffing papers in a briefcase.

“Am I to drive there?” Kiley asked in surprise. She had never been asked to go with him on his flights to other parts of the realm. She was only asked to drive around England and Wales.”

“You’re my secret weapon. Remember?” Mark chuckled. “I’m going to be meeting with Girard and I need you to tell me if his translator is completely honest. I want nothing said that I wouldn’t know what it is. Now hurry. We’ll be leaving shortly.”

Three hours later they were on the military transport plane flying to Gibraltar.

“It’s incredibly beautiful,” Kiley remarked before they entered the waiting car.

“To think we are only a few rolls of barbed wire away from the Axis powers,” Mark added shrugging his shoulders.

The staff was taken to the temporary AFHQ headquarters deep beneath the Rock of Gibraltar’s surface.

After settling in her quarters, Kiley was ordered to remain close to Mark Hauser’s side. Only his executive staff knew of Kiley’s multi lingual talents and nothing had ever been said about it to anyone outside of their group.

There was French, British, Canadian, and American military brass everywhere. The Army, RAF, and Navy were also present. Even before Hauser had left London, Operation Torch had been set in motion. Hauser's purpose for setting temporary operations in Gibraltar had been for the explicit purpose of coming to agreement with General Giraud. He also needed Admiral Darlan of the Vichy French to order his navy not to fire upon British, American, and Canadian ships in the Mediterranean.

General Giraud finally arrived late in the evening. It was only hours away from the entry of the task force into the Mediterranean.

"Now there is haughtiness walking," Kiley whispered to Mark as the general walked into the room.

"He looks like a bad cartoon character," Mark chortled in reply. Keeping his poker face, Mark offered his hand to the general.

"I understand the allied forces are going to attack my country men in Oran and Algiers," Giraud said directly. "And you wish me to speak to my country men. You wish me to tell them to lay down their arms."

"And how was your trip?" Mark asked. "We were happy to bring you safely from Vichy France. We were pleased to know that you had escaped from the Nazi prison."

"Mon General, let us discuss the present situation at hand," Giraud chided.

Beneath his calm exterior, Mark wanted to slam his fist into the supercilious general.

Kiley took in every word of translation from the French interpreter. She understood every word. She understood even more the egotistical bearing and body language of General Giraud. Kiley was ever grateful she didn't have to negotiate with this Frenchman. She had always been aware of the quirks of the brass surrounding Mark Hauser, but this one was an absolute prize of irritation.

"The situation at hand is the deaths of American and French boys in a field of battle. Deaths that can be avoided by your speaking to your country men," Mark in a restrained growl.

"Who is the commander of this invasion?" Giraud demanded to know in question.

"I am," Mark answered honestly.

“If I am to speak to my country men, It is I who must lead this invasion,” Giraud stated crossing his arms over his chest. “I am France. I will subject myself to no one.”

Mark knew that as a three star general he was considered a junior officer to General Giraud. The general would be considered a five star general in France.

Kiley was furious. How many deaths would be the direct result of this general’s refusal to address his country? Damn it, unnecessary deaths on both sides.

The discussion continued on getting louder and turned into a shouting match. After several hours Kiley knew that this was only a ploy on Giraud’s part. She left the room and came back with a folded paper in her hand.

“A special bulletin from Washington,” Kiley lied to pull him away from the useless argument.

Mark opened the paper and found it was blank. As difficult as it was, he did not laugh. He maintained his straight face. “Excuse me General Giraud. This matter needs my attention.” Mark followed Kiley outside of the room. “What are you up to, Kiley?”

“Nothing more than giving you a breather from that useless conversation,” Kiley quipped. “He has no intention of talking to the French. He’s only biding time.”

“That I figured out,” Mark chuckled. “If our invasion fails he wants to distance himself from it. If it is successful he..”

“Wants to make sure he gets the credit,” Kiley finished.

“Exactly!” Mark emphasized.

“That is why you needed to get away from it,” Kiley explained. “It is a waste of your precious time and energy.”

“There are times I marvel at your understanding and comprehension, Kiley Burke.”

“Thank you, Mon General!” Kiley answered with smiles. “Care for some coffee?”

“I’d prefer a walk and a cigarette,” Hauser suggested pulling a cigarette from his pocket and lighting it. He handed it to Kiley and lit another one for himself. He led the way down a path that led to a rock garden. There they found a stone bench and sat upon it.

“This is incredibly beautiful and peaceful here,” Kiley murmured. “When did you find it?”

“Did I find it or is it the company I keep that makes it,” Mark said profoundly. He put his arm around Kiley and before he allowed another thought, his lips were upon hers.

The kiss sent an electric shock through the two of them. The jolt of electricity jolted them apart.

“I’m sorry,” Mark apologized. “I shouldn’t have done that.”

Kiley licked her lips. That kiss was something she had never experienced before. “Why?” she squeaked wondering why he had kissed her.

Mark misunderstood her question. “I had no right. My God, I’m old enough to be your father.”

Kiley’s eyes rounded in surprise. She opened her mouth to contradict him, but he spoke once more.

“Forgive me, you are engaged.”

“What?” Kiley shouted. “I am not! Who told you otherwise?”

“Harry. He told me that before Bob left he stated he intended to marry you when this war was over,” Mark answered quickly. He was completely surprised by Kiley’s response.

“Bob told me the same thing when he left,” Kiley sighed. “I should have told him, no. I couldn’t bring myself to tell him. God, I should have. I like him. I really do. It’s just..”

“Just?”

“My first marriage soured me completely. I don’t know if I could ever love again,” Kiley shared. Her eyes were filling with tears. She couldn’t bear for the general to see her so weak. She was strong. Kiley stood and ran back to the bunker.

Mark stood. For the first time in his life he felt helpless. Worse than helpless, he felt confused. He felt happy. Kiley wasn’t engaged to Bob Deacon. Why did he feel so happy and relieved? Why did he kiss her? Mark went back to the bunker. Arguing with General Giraud was something he did understand.

Early in the morning, long before dawn, Mark found he couldn’t sleep. He walked down the path once more and looked across the sea. On the Atlantic side he watched the ships heading toward the Mediterranean Sea. It was a beautiful sight to behold. The invasion was about to begin. Giraud and Darlan would not participate. An intense sense of pride filled Mark. “We’ll do it

ourselves,” he said quietly. It was then he noticed a small figure sitting on the bench. Mark nearly ran to her. He needed to share this with her.

“Kiley,” Mark addressed.

“General,” Kiley answered trying to choke away her sob.

“What is it? What’s wrong? Are you ill?” Mark asked worriedly hearing the sob in her throat. He sat next to her on the bench and placed his arm around her protectively.

Kiley couldn’t stop her tears or sobs. With a quivering voice Kiley answered, “This time forgive me. I’m sorry. I feel so weak and vulnerable right now. There are times I can be strong and brave. Most of the time I can be strong and brave. Right now I feel weak. God, I hate it that you found me like this.”

“I never imagined that such a stubborn willful women like you was capable of being weak,” Mark soothed. “It’s alright to be weak. We all are weak now and then.”

“You never are,” Kiley strangled another sob. “You are always so strong. You are invincible, unmovable, unflappable, stoic, powerful..”

“That’s enough!” Mark laughed. “Another word and you would declare me a god.”

“Then I would have to add omnipotent,” Kiley chuckled. “That you are not.”

“I wish I were. Of all the above traits, I wish I had that one,” Mark desired. “This war would be a lot easier.” He quickly held up his hand. “Yes I know. If war would easy we would have it too often.”

Kiley’s red swollen tear stained eyes looked into Mark’s soft blue eyes.

“What is hurting you so badly?” Mark asked gently.

“Please don’t ask me,” Kiley begged. How could she explain to the general that his brief kiss stirred something inside of her that scared her to death? It was a wanting something that she had convinced herself she could never have. She wanted to be loved. Her ex husband had cured her of that notion. She couldn’t be loved. She wasn’t worthy of love. Damn that wanting! Those tears were her reminder that she was never worthy of being loved. She was never good enough for anyone. Perhaps she wasn’t worthy of life. Everyone from a child on had told her she was an

awful child. "I couldn't explain it to you or anyone. Can you just hold me? It feels so good."

Mark didn't answer. He pulled her closer into his body with his arms. "Look over there," Mark said pointing to the small ships making their way through the straits. "I was hoping to share this with you. There go our ships, our equipment, and our men. It has begun."

Kiley melted into his embrace. She allowed her weakness to take over just this once. His arms were warm and welcoming. For the first time in a long time, Kiley felt safe and secure. Kiley allowed herself to feel she belonged.

The two-silhouetted figures sat in the moonlight watching the ships sail into the Mediterranean. They sat together long after the ships had disappeared. It was dawn when they separated and walked hand in hand to the bunker for breakfast.

Harry Durham met them at the door. "I was just about to search for you. Breakfast is ready."

"Any news on our friend Giraud? Or Admiral Darlan?" Mark questioned testily.

"Darlan cannot be reached at all. As for Giraud? He is hiding in his room," Harry answered flippantly. "Come in. I'm hungry. Let's eat."

"I'm not hungry," Mark growled.

"Neither am I," Kiley agreed.

Both their minds were on the soldiers and sailors heading right into the jaws of the enemy. Who was that enemy? The French? The Nazis? It was both. Without intervention of the Vichy French, the Nazis and French military would fire on the ships killing sailors and soldiers as they landed. Neither could think of food with their stomachs churning in anxiety for future of those men.

Harry ignored them and went straight to the mess for breakfast.

Mark and Kiley went to the war room. There they found Dallas. He was keeping track of all radio calls from the armada.

Dallas looked up and nodded to Mark, "The battle is on."

Mark sat between Dallas listening to the radio and the Teletype ticker.

Kiley chose to stand by the war table where WACs were moving ships as reports came in.

Hours went by. The next days arrived.

“Goddammit,” Mark shouted. His eyes were swollen and red from lack of sleep, too much coffee, and too much nicotine. “The Goddamn Frogs are sinking their own ships.”

“To prevent the Nazis from taking them,” Kiley reminded.

“And to prevent the British and our troops from using them,” Mark roared back. “Goddamn Vichy Frogs.” Anger was his consolation.

The news was good. The troops had taken hold of North African soil. Oran was theirs. With this news, Mark Hauser took food and rest.

The next day General Giraud returned to the war room and offered to speak to the French.

“A little late aren’t you?” Mark snarled.

“Too many lives are lost,” Giraud excused.

Mark bit his tongue.

Kiley whispered quietly to Mark, “and we are winning. We know what side we need to be on.”

That was the first smile anyone had seen on Mark’s face in days. “Indeed,” Mark agreed.

As it turned out, the French paid no attention to Giraud and little attention to Darlan.

The invasion was successful and Mark was left to deal with Darlan. He sent his friend Linden to meet with the French Admiral with instructions to name Darlan governor of North Africa. The decision had been his alone to give him a better chance to obtain the sea ports of Bizerte and Tunis. In those two cities there were airfields only a few hundred miles from Sicily.

Chapter 9

The Darlan agreement infuriated public opinion. It was a choice Hauser felt he had to make regardless of public opinion. He flew to Algiers for a meeting with Darlan to settle the agreement.

Kiley was sent back to London. It was an order Mark quickly regretted. He trusted her perceptions and translations. He wished Algiers had been safe enough for her to be there with him as he made the agreements with Darlan.

In the meantime the American public was incensed at the establishing of a former Nazi as governor of French North Africa. Mark's brother Vincent was sent to repair public relations. The war department had set up an agency for propaganda and Vincent was one of the highest-ranking officials.

For two weeks, Mark enjoyed his brother's company as Vincent repaired the backlash from the appointment.

"I've seen a lot of Martie at the Capitol," Vincent shared with his brother one quiet evening.

"Isn't that a bit far from New York? I thought that's where she was staying with Durham's wife."

"She's doing her public bit for the war effort," Vincent offered. "Martie visits veteran hospitals and the war wounded. She is great lending the image of the wife of the Commander of the ETO to war bond sales. Your wife is the epitome of a public relations angel. She says and does all the right things at all the right times."

"My soon to be ex-wife."

"I believe you should re think this. Martie is the perfect wife for you. You belong to history and this could lead to a

political future for you. You will need a political wife like Martie.”

“Martie is the perfect political wife for a politician. I’m military,” Mark countered.

“Bunk!” Vincent grouched. “The military is more political than politics and you know it.”

“Martie knows it all too well. I was bullied into everything. Martie did everything right all too well. I had to take assignments I didn’t want. When I had assignments I loved, Martie deserted me to stay with her parents. When she stayed with me all we did were those perfect parties with perfect people. I’ve had that up to my neck,” Mark complained. “You should know Vincent I’ve filed for divorce. My lawyers tell me that it will be final in a month or two. This pretense of hers is ludicrous.”

“Are you crazy?” Vincent shouted. “This is not the time for a divorce. You’re apple pie and hot dogs. Is it that woman driver of yours? Is she the reason you’ve decided this? The rumors I’ve heard back home are true?”

“Kiley is engaged to someone. She is a brilliant linguist with a knack of perceptions I count on. She is also one hell of a good driver. There has never been anything like that between us. Hell, she’s almost as old as my daughter.”

“Okay! Okay! I’m convinced,” Vincent replied holding up his hands in defense. “We’ll drop the subject. If you are that unhappily married, you should get a divorce.

“Thank you,” Mark appreciated grumpily. “You have to know the kind of hell my marriage has been to understand why I have to get this divorce. I don’t give a damn what image she projects. I know the hell I live as her husband.”

“Anything else about this you want to share with me?”

“I’m not certain she is all that faithful.”

“Mom always did comment on Martie’s flirtatiousness.”

“Mom could always read through the lines,” Mark agreed. “I should have listened to her before I jumped into marriage.”

Vincent placed his hand on Mark’s shoulder. “I’ll support you in this divorce all the way. I’ll also make certain it is downplayed by the press.”

“I appreciate that Vince. I have to put all my concentration on this war, its battles, its men, and its politics.”

A few days later Mark decided to send for Kiley. In French Africa he wanted her nearby to listen and translate to him in private exactly what was being said. With Darlan as governor, that was even more important now.

“Oscar,” Martie whispered into his ear. “It’s time to wake up. You have to get home before the sun rises.”

A shallow grunt announced that Oscar was waking up. His hand rubbed the silk covered nub of Martie’s breast. “Lord I hate to leave this,” Oscar grumbled. “You are magnificent.”

“We can’t take any chances. Mark is destined to be great and I’ll be right next to him.”

“It could have been me if I hadn’t made the wrong choice,” Oscar complained rising from the bed and reaching for his scattered clothes.

“We both should have met each other before we made our mistakes. Unfortunately we have to live with them,” Martie stated angrily. “I don’t enjoy be married to that country boob. I have to make the best of it. Which reminds me. His lawyers are pushing through the divorce. We have to stop it. Somehow. I think you’d better place some pressure on him.”

“I’ll think of something. Remember I talked FDR into making your husband commander of the ETO. It makes our time together so much easier,” Oscar bragged.

“You also made him a real hero.”

“Isn’t that what you wanted my dear?” Oscar chortled pulling on his pants.

“It is, but I need him to heel and face his responsibility,” Martie snorted. “Especially his responsibility to me.”

Oscar laughed and gave Martie a kiss on her nose.

Kiley found herself on the Dart Moor heading for Hauser’s Algiers headquarters. It was sailing in the Mediterranean. Nazi wolf packs had been sighted and were concentrated in the sea. The captain had been warned. Every night Kiley and the WACs were told to keep alert and a duffle bag packed for such a submarine attack. One night away from port the worst happened. The Dart moor was torpedoed. Kiley and the WACs found themselves adrift in lifeboats. The survivors didn’t know how they would be rescued. The rescuers could be friend or foe.

Dallas was the most perceptive of Mark's staff. He had watched his commander check on the progress of the Dart Moor. Dallas realized several months ago that Kiley had become special to Mark Hauser. Although his commander tried to hide and deny his feelings, Dallas knew Kiley and Mark were destined to be a couple. He just hoped it could be possible for them. When Dallas received news of the Dart Moor sinking, he knew he was the only one to tell Mark. He didn't trust Harry and it wasn't because Harry was having one hell of an affair with a WAC he made certain accompanied him everywhere. Sean was a loyal valet and aide, but he was loyal to Martie also. That scenario included Jacob Sterns, Mark's personal valet.

"Sir," Dallas cleared his throat.

Mark was studying papers from his frontline generals. "What is it Dallas?"

"I just got word the Dart Moor was torpedoed."

Mark went pale. His silence and mood were exactly what Dallas had expected.

"Any word on Burke?" Mark choked out. He couldn't hide his emotions no matter how hard he tried.

"No sir," Dallas answered. "There has been no word on survivors."

"Find out for me, Dallas."

"Yes sir," Dallas replied. He walked backward out the door and closed it. He realized Mark needed time to get his emotions under control. A commander in his position wasn't allowed personal emotions.

Kiley and her friends had been picked up by a British ship and taken to Oran. She had heard that Bob Deacon was stationed at Oran. With only her duffle bag of two uniforms and two pair of stockings, she was deposited on the docks. Her first idea was to contact Hauser's staff and to do that she hoped she could find Bob. During wartime, it would be weeks before a listing of survivors would be made. She was hungry, tired, and stranded. Without proper papers and money she would be lucky to get shelter and food at than a red cross hostile. Those places were already over crowded. Yet, she knew she had to let Hauser's staff know she had survived. Kiley believed in first things first, even over her

own comfort. She found out where the headquarters in Oran was located. Finding a ride, Kiley was taken there hoping to find Bob. Without thinking, she ran into the headquarters. A military police tried to stop her, but she managed to elude him. Once in the office Kiley announced, "I need to speak to Major Deacon."

A sergeant laughed at the female spectacle. She was barefoot, wrapped in an oversized naval lieutenant's coat, and her hair was in a wind blown disarray. "There ain't no major here by that name." He looked at her bare feet.

"Look, I've just been torpedoed."

That set the sergeant and the rest of the enlisted men in the headquarters in an uproar of laughter.

Kiley was furious. She was tired, hungry, and now the laughing stock of lecherous undisciplined American soldiers. What was she thinking coming here? "Damn it, find me Major Bob Deacon."

"There is no Major Deacon here," the soldier chortled sarcastically. "Will I do? I'd love to torpedo you."

An officer walked into the area between her and the mocking soldiers. "What's going on here?" the officer said haughtily.

Kiley was into pure rage at the moment. "Look, I was on the Dart moor. My ship was torpedoed and sunk. I am tired, hungry, and in no mood to deal with the impudent species before me. I am a member of General Mark Hauser's personal staff. I need to speak to him. You have a radio here, don't you? Headquarters generally do."

"Okay lady. I'll play along. Why don't we just contact General Hauser?" the officer snickered looking at the radio operator. "Contact Hauser, but ask for one of his aides. I don't think the general would be to happy to be interrupted for a gal."

"Yes sir," the corporal sniggered.

Kiley was exasperated by their attitude, but didn't let it bother her. They thought she was playing a game. She knew this was one way she could contact the Hauser staff and let them know she survived and was ready to be on the next ship to Algiers. Kiley was becoming more agitated as the soldiers and officers eyed her contemptuously. One more remark about having a man torpedo her and she would blow higher than one of those Nazi bombs.

The lieutenant made such an error. “You sure the guy that torpedoed you said his name was Hauser? Some men would have been less creative. Perhaps Napoleon?”

“Listen to me you insolent, ignorant, small minded, little excuse for a soldier. I was on the ship, Dart Moor. If your little mind can handle such news, I shall inform you that press reports are accurate. A Nazi torpedo sank the ship. I was one of the survivors picked up in a lifeboat by HMS Prince of Wales. Because I am a member of General Hauser’s staff I must notify him of my survival and location. I am tired, hungry, and quite irritable. When I do speak to General Hauser’s staff, and I will! You will be responsible for my report. I may just eat one of you for my lunch and throw your bones to some Nazi that are in prison camps.” Kiley crossed her arms in a defiant stance daring anyone to say a word.

The lieutenant was about to brave deadly waters and come back with a retort when their attention was drawn to the corporal on the radiophone.

“Yeah, some ditzy broad here says she was on the Dart Moor and is one of General Hauser’s staff.” The corporal listened to the voice at the other end. “What’s her name? I don’t know. Just a minute.” The corporal looked at Kiley. “What’s your name?”

“Kiley Burke!”

The corporal returned to the radiophone. “She says her name is Kiley Burke.” Again there was silence as he listened. “We’re calling from Oran, sir.”

Dallas was in the general office listening for any reports of survivors from the Dart Moor. When he heard the sergeant talking to some corporal, he quickly picked up on the conversation. He grabbed the radiophone and asked the corporal on the other end what the woman’s name was. He motioned to Sean and holding his hand over the receiver of the radiophone ordered him to get General Hauser immediately.

“Is Burke there with you?” Dallas asked the corporal. “Good! Hold on a moment.” He turned to see General Hauser entering the room led by Sergeant Sean Ryan. Dallas held up his hand and beckoned the general. When Hauser was near he placed

his hand over the receiver once more. "It's Burke. She's calling from Oran."

The look of relief washing over Mark's face was pictorial. He took the radiophone from Dallas' hand.

"Hello? Hello, Burke?"

"Who is this?" the corporal in Oran questioned.

"This is General Mark Hauser. Put Kiley Burke on the line immediately."

The corporal turned ashen white. He swallowed and handed the phone to Kiley. He looked to his lieutenant and whimpered, "It's General Hauser. He wants to talk to her."

Kiley couldn't hold back the look of triumph she felt. These imbeciles had nearly called her a liar. It was wonderful seeing their arrogant faces turn white in humiliation. "Hello General Hauser?" she cooed.

The lieutenant ordered a chair for Kiley and ran to get her a cup of coffee. He offered it to her sheepishly as she continued her conversation with General Hauser.

"I'm fine physically other than being very tired and hungry. Oh, they just offered me some coffee. How sweet!" Kiley smiled at the lieutenant fluttering her eyelashes. What a difference in her treatment now that they knew she was on the General's staff. Isn't that always the case? It doesn't matter who you were, only who you knew. If she had been lying there was a good chance she could have ended up being raped. "I was picked up by the British ship, Prince of Wales. As soon as I arrived here I thought it best to call you. What could I use? A good hot bath and some fresh clothes, but more importantly a hot meal! After all that I would love a soft bed. What? Yes, there is an officer here. Of course," Kiley ended the conversation. "General Hauser would like to speak to you. Perhaps he wants to explain about the torpedoing of the Dart Moor. Do you think?" She handed the phone to the lieutenant.

The lieutenant swallowed hard and adjusted his collar. If suddenly felt like it was choking him. He stood straight as if in attention when he took the phone."

"This is General Hauser and these are my orders. Kiley Burke is one of my staff members. I want her treated with the utmost respect. She is to be given quarters, a hot bath, hot food,

and a soft bed. I will be sending my private plane to pick her up in the morning.”

“Yes sir!” the lieutenant exclaimed saluting the radiophone.

Kiley thought she might burst out laughing. The lieutenant looked so ridiculous. It was then she heard Bob’s voice.

“Kiley? Kiley that is you! My God I can’t believe it!” He pulled Kiley into his arms. “How on earth did you get here?” He looked down her body and saw the bare feet, naval coat, and knotted hair. “Kiley what happened to you? Or is this a new disguise?”

“Bob, it’s so good to see you,” Kiley sighed. At last she was with a friendly face. “Your last letter said you were in Oran. I’m so glad you’re here.”

“What the devil happened to you? How did you get here?” Bob questioned. He couldn’t believe she was here with him. He thought she was safe in London.

“I was on my way to AFHQ in Algiers on a perfectly lovely boat. The Nazis decided to decorate it with a lovely hole in the bottom. I ended up on a lifeboat with twenty-five others and picked up by a British ship. Completely stranded, hungry, tired, and about at the end of my tether.”

“We’re trying to find a room for her, Colonel Deacon,” the lieutenant interjected.

“I’ll let her use my quarters. I’ll billet with Major Johnson. Come along Kiley. Let’s get you some food. I know how testy you get when you’re hungry.”

“Dressed like this?”

“A lovely choice of ensemble,” Bob teased. “The barefoot look is fabulous. Don’t worry about that nonsense right now. I’ll take you to my quarters and order some food.”

Arriving at the simple flat Bob showed her the bathroom. “Take a hot bath and I’ll get some food for you.”

Kiley took a long hot luxurious bath. It was absolutely heavenly soaking in hot suds. She stayed and soaked long after the hot water had turned tepid.

“Kiley, I’ve got the food,” Bob announced through the doors across the bedroom and bathroom from the living room.

Reluctantly Kiley toweled herself and walked into the bedroom. She found a pair of Bob’s pajamas on the bed. Lying

next to the pajamas was a toothbrush, paste, and hairbrush with pins.

“Oh you sweet thoughtful man,” Kiley grinned. The pajamas were silk and soft against her skin. She brushed her hair thoroughly, but decided not to pin it. She let it hang long and loose. The aroma of hot spicy food permeated through the bedroom door. Kiley’s stomach began to grumble loudly.

Bob looked up as she entered the living room. He had prepared a small area on the top of the coffee table between the sofa and loveseat. “You look absolutely smashing! That is what they say in London isn’t it?”

“Yes,” Kiley replied. She glanced hungrily over the fare Bob had prepared for her. “I am absolutely famished!”

The food may have been normal fare, but to Kiley the food was a feast. She ate with a flourish.

Bob chuckled as he watched Kiley’s eyes start to close after the meal. He realized how exhausted she must be. When her head nodded to the side, Bob gently picked her up and tucked her into his bed. “Just you wait little love. I’ll make you mine yet.” He kissed her forehead and retrieved her saltwater drenched uniforms.

The next morning Kiley was surprised by the delivery of freshly washed and ironed uniforms. Breakfast was served shortly after the delivery. With the breakfast Kiley found a note.

Good Morning Love. You can’t imagine how happy you have made me to be with you these few hours. I am more convinced than ever that we were meant to be. When this war is over, I intend to pursue you to the ends of the earth. Never thought I’d have to thank the Nazis for a thing, but I thank them for sending you to me this day. I’ll see you tonight.

*Love,
Bob*

“I appreciate you going to collect Kiley,” Mark told Dallas. “She’ll be in your capable hands. God, she must have been through so much.”

“Still her stiff upper lip stuff,” Dallas commented. “Don’t worry General. I’ll take good care of her.”

“I only wish I could bring her myself.”

“If you did you would bring the press and gossip. You are far too important and busy to deal with that,” Dallas said wisely.

“It would be unfair to Kiley,” Mark muttered. “Gossip about her and an old man.”

“What was that?” Dallas asked buttoning his jacket and straightening his tie.

“Nothing,” Mark replied. “My plane is ready. Sean will drive you to the tarmac.”

“Well I’m off,” Dallas smiled.

Chapter 10

The knock at the door startled Kiley. She thought it might be Bob taking her to late lunch. She was surprised to open the door to Dallas Stern.

“Dallas? What the Bloody Hell are you doing here?”

“I’ve come to collect you and safely fly you to Algiers headquarters,” Dallas answered with a large grin. “I’ve the general’s private plane waiting for us.”

“I’m not packed,” Kiley managed to say through her surprise.

“Get cracking,” Dallas ordered cheerily. “I’ve a schedule to keep.”

Kiley quickly packed her other uniform, the gifts Bob had purchased for her including his silk pajamas. “Sweet man.” She penned a quick note for him.

Bob,

Thank you for the sweet man you are. I do believe you will pursue me to the ends of the earth after this war. You’ve softened me to the point I may consider your proposal. Until then, stay well.

Yours sincerely,

Kiley

“Oscar,” Martie trilled. “Mark brought that woman with him to Gibraltar.”

“I’ve heard,” Oscar replied. He was going through some of his papers on his desk. “What brings you to the office?”

Martie closed the door. “Mark’s lawyers are proceeding with the divorce. I’m expected to sign the final papers in a month or two.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” Oscar sympathized.

“I need you to leak to the press about this Burke woman,” Martie snarled. “I will give the public image of the long suffering

wife and Mark will look like a idiot pursuing a relationship with a woman nearly half his age.”

“Not a bad plan at all,” Oscar agreed. “You do play the long suffering wife so well.”

“Exactly! Mark’s position has opened many social doors previously closed to me. I have no intention of giving all that up.”

“I’ll see to it the press will get hold of it,” Oscar commented. “First I have to see if we can use that against him.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” Martie barked angrily.

“I’ve received news she was on a ship that was torpedoed. She may not have survived.”

“That won’t do. I need the gossip for sympathy.”

“All you need is me,” Oscar implied suggestively. “Tonight?”

Martie leaned over his desk. “Definitely!”

“I’ll find out about the broad. I’ll pull some markers to get those lawyers to ease off for awhile.”

“When will you find out about that woman? How long will it take?”

“Sometimes it takes weeks to find out names of survivors,” Newhall explained. “I’ll pull some rank to find out quickly.”

Arriving in Algiers, Dallas and Kiley quickly disembarked from the general’s private plane. A military car was waiting and drove them to headquarters.

Dallas took Kiley’s arm as she emerged from the car. He took her directly to Hauser.

“Your package as ordered, sir!” Dallas exclaimed. “Excuse me while I retrieve the lady’s luggage.” He quickly departed the room.

Kiley felt awkward standing in the general’s office. It was like she was being presented.

Mark removed his glasses and placed them on the pile of papers on his desk. He rose from his chair and walked to Kiley. “You gave us quite a scare.”

“Sorry about that. Of course being sunk wasn’t on my itinerary either,” Kiley snipped.

“Always the temper,” Mark chuckled. “I’ve missed that.” He took Kiley by her hands and pulled her into his embrace. “I couldn’t believe my feelings when they told me the Dart Moor had

been sunk. You're safe." Mark pulled her tighter into his frame and kissed her lightly on the forehead.

Kiley found herself relaxing in Mark's embrace. It felt safe. The most wonderful memories of her life were when she felt safe, as rare as those moments were. "What were your feelings?"

"I thought about not seeing you again. I would miss your acerbic tongue. More importantly I would miss your perceptions. You've been so helpful to me. I'm a selfish man. I didn't want to lose you. You are a great help to me."

"I guess I'm glad to be back. At least I know I'm needed and helping in the war effort," Kiley responded wistfully.

"You are needed," Mark reassured. He couldn't stop holding her. How could even he understand his feelings? When he was told her boat was sunk, his heart sank with it. A deep sense of fear and grief had gripped him. His only safe answer had to be that Kiley was like a daughter to him.

"In that case, I'd best get back to work. I imagine your correspondence is back logged," Kiley remarked pulling away from his arms. Feeling safe was too addictive. Reality didn't offer her safety. "Where is my assigned workplace at these headquarters?"

"Right out front across from Dallas," Mark answered. He felt a bit foolish for allowing his feelings to be so apparent. Quickly switching to his poker face he sat back down at his desk. "If you feel up to it, you can get to work right away."

Kiley knew which desk was hers as soon as she walked through the large double doors. It was the desk stacked high with personal letters. She delved into the pile happily content to fill her mind with work.

Two hours later she returned to Mark's office. "There are three letters here from your daughter. They must have been mixed into the other letters. I thought you'd want them."

"Thanks." Hauser took the envelopes. "I was wondering why she hadn't written to me in awhile."

"You are very fond of her," Kiley noted.

"You see how perceptive you are?" Mark grinned. "Perceive this. Tonight we will celebrate your safe return to the staff with a dinner party. Leave early tonight and go buy yourself a new pretty party dress. I don't want the spinster celebrating with us tonight. Got that?"

“Got it!” Kiley replied. She found herself smiling. A party! How delightful and fun. “All I have to do is find my billet. I’ll ask Dallas where my clothes will lay.”

“You’re staying with the rest of the staff. You’ll be here on the seventh floor. All our quarters are on that floor.”

Shopping in Algiers was exciting. The exclusive shops were filled with French creations. Kiley felt like splurging and after her dunking in the Mediterranean she wanted to feel feminine. She selected a slinky beaded satin dress that would *pop eyes out* as the clerk put it. The dress was a soft pastel green. In the evening she poured herself into the form fitting dress. When she looked at her image in the mirror she immediately became self-conscious. It was too late to change. Dallas was at the door. Once again he had been sent to be her escort.

Kiley wondered about Dallas. Hauser always selected him to bring her to parties, or take her to his private dinners. He never sent Sergeant Ryan, General Linden Matthews, General Randall Jones, or even Admiral Durham. Colonel Dallas Stern was always the man Hauser sent to take her anywhere in public.

Dallas stood with his mouth open when Kiley opened the door. “I um er ah well I’m here to pick up Kiley Burke,” he stuttered. “By the way, how did you get through security and who are you?”

“Jolly good bit of a joke, Dallas.”

“Kiley? I mean you resemble Kiley. Is that really you?”

“Oh do get on with it! I’ll get my wrap.”

Dallas stood in silence watching Kiley move in that dress. The gentleman he was forced him to place her wrap on her shoulders. “Kiley, if my heart wasn’t taken. You would be the temptation of its beating.”

“Is that a compliment soldier?” Kiley quipped walking to the elevator.

“Good God no! That is an oath.”

“Whoa!” Harry strangled out as he watched Dallas enter with Kiley. “Where did Dallas find that knockout? Think she might be more interested in a General than a Colonel?”

Randall added to the interest, “Cut my drooling tongue.”

Mark's eyes rounded in anger. Where was Kiley? He had ordered Dallas to fetch Kiley.

"I'll be damned!" Randall chortled. "That knockout bears a resemblance to Kiley Burke. Mark, does Kiley have a beautiful younger sister?"

"If she does, I say fire Kiley and hire her sister," Harry added.

Mark rose when they neared the table. He couldn't believe it. The woman on Dallas' arm was Kiley. He pulled the chair next to him for her to be seated. He whispered as she accepted the seat, "I asked you to get rid of the spinster. I don't think this old man's heart can bear the new siren."

Much to Hauser's consternation, Harry paid undue attention to Kiley. Harry's attention not only angered Hauser and Kiley. His blatant attention irritated Jane Dover. She was Harry's WAC mistress.

The other staff WAC guests weren't too thrilled with the attention Kiley received either.

Kiley promised herself she would never dress like that ever again. She didn't want to make jealous enemies of her WAC friends. Kiley played down the attention to the best of her ability.

The dinner lasted for hours including the after dinner drinks.

Mark made the decision to end the dinner party. He assisted Kiley to rise and put her arm in his.

It was obvious to Kiley that Dallas would not be assigned to cart her back and forth this evening. Instead, the general escorted her to an unmarked military car and assisted her inside. He sat next to her and the driver shut the door.

"Drive around the city a bit, soldier," Mark ordered. "I'm not ready to return to the hotel yet."

The young soldier saluted.

"He'll get us lost. Your young drivers always get you lost," Kiley teased.

"Tonight I hope he does," Mark retorted. He put his arm around Kiley and drew her into his muscled chest. "You never cease to amaze me, Kiley Burke. When you walked in with Dallas, every male in that room was drooling."

"Including you?" Kiley quipped.

"I was furious that he didn't bring Kiley Burke as ordered."

“You didn’t recognize me?”

“Not until you were close enough to be eaten by the brass wolves,” Mark laughed. “Burke, what am I going to do with you? How long have you hidden this Kiley?”

“Forever. There is a small devil that brings her out occasionally. The real Kiley is a little mouse that likes to hide away in her books.”

“Make sure you control that little devil. I don’t think I can keep all the wolves at bay for a great length of time. I need to concentrate on Nazi wolves, not Allied ones,” Mark chuckled. “Besides, I prefer the little mouse and her books.”

“Do you really general?” Kiley asked hopefully.

“I most certainly do,” Mark answered quickly. “It’s that little mouse that is intelligent and perceptive. She quickly helps sort out those social climbing and irritating people that knock on my door. Don’t doubt for a minute that I prefer little mouse Burke. She’s quite valuable to me.”

“You say the sweetest things,” Kiley sighed and snuggled into his embrace.

Mark couldn’t believe he had the most beautiful woman in Algiers in his arms. At the moment she looked the part, but she definitely was a beautiful woman through and through. Could he dare love again? The last time he relaxed his barriers he married a flirtatious Martie Maxwell. She had created a living hell for him. Is that what love is about? Is that what marriage is about? Social climbing? Public image? The selfish needs and wants of a partner? For this night he wouldn’t worry about it. He cared for Kiley. He had admitted that when he learned her ship had been sunk. If that was paternal love or something more fragile, he didn’t know or care about the answer. Kiley was back in his arms and it felt right. His hand gently rubbed her arm. She felt like silk. She smelled of fresh lilacs. Everything felt right. As they drove through the city, Mark pointed out several landmarks. He shared with her everything that had happened while they were separated.

The driver finally pulled in front of the hotel.

“I’ll walk you to your room,” Mark stated when they entered the hotel.

“You needn’t bother. You must be very tired. I know where my room is,” Kiley excused.

“No bother at all. Your room is next to mine.”

Kiley stopped short and looked directly into the general's eyes. "People will talk."

"Does that bother you?" Mark asked. Was Kiley like all women? Did she only care for money, power, and image? He had to find out.

"Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn," Kiley parroted a famous movie line. "It is going to give your press secretary a headache. I happen to like Dallas. He's a gentleman and totally devoted to you."

"I don't give a damn either Miss Burke," Mark chuckled. "It is just like you to be concerned for others. We'll manage the gossips somehow."

Stopping in front of her door he wanted very much to enter it and savor her female attributes. He cut himself short. He was old enough to be her father. It was paternal feelings he had for Kiley. He had to keep telling himself that. "Good night, Kiley. Get some rest."

"You too, general." Kiley nearly ripped her clothes off and sought the security of her soft bed. The thoughts running through her mind were torture. She wanted Mark to want her as a woman. She had to be crazy. The last time she wanted to be a woman was with her husband. That marriage was hell on earth once he had a ring on her finger. "No! Never Again!" Kiley shouted into the pillow. Men were evil. Her husband was proof of that.

The initial invasion had worked well. There were Christmas and New Year celebrations. Now the Allied troops were stalled. Rommel was like a vicious animal fighting for its life. Everyone in headquarters was testy.

Like clockwork, Kiley heard the general swearing as calls came in from the front. She wasn't surprised when summoned to Hauser's office.

"I'll be leaving for Casablanca in the morning." Hauser announced.

"You'll be meeting with your President then," Kiley stated. She was aware of all the security plans and memos. Although the meeting with Churchill and Roosevelt was top secret, Hauser had to be informed of the visit. He would be a part of the plan.

"I may not be back," Hauser said quietly. It was important to him to have Kiley understand that his job may be on the line. It

was three months since they landed in Africa and they still didn't have Bizerte or Tunisia. He felt he failed as a commander. He would understand if FDR removed him from command. It was strange his regret was that he wouldn't be seeing Kiley again.

"You're worried that you will be removed as commander of the ETO?" Kiley implied handing the general a cigarette.

Hauser took the cigarette and nodded.

"You think you've bungled it. Darlan didn't help one bit in securing those airfields you so desperately needed."

"Goddammit Kiley, I wish my generals were as perceptive as you are. We'd already be in Berlin."

"And we will be with you in command. Look at what you've done. You've managed to bring British and American forces to work together. That is a feat no other man was capable of getting done. You did it! Don't think for a minute that Roosevelt and Churchill aren't aware of it. They are. They both know of no one else that could pull that off and keep it working."

"You really believe that don't you?" Mark asked.

"Every word. You have a lovely flight. Take a small vacation. Have a good time and give my regards to the PM and your President."

"That does it then!"

"I'll see you in a week or two. If you excuse me, I have mountains of correspondence to deal with."

Mark watched her leave the room and whispered to her back. "You are the best, Kiley Burke. You always pick me up when I am down."

Chapter 11

Two nights later Kiley was wakened gently from a sound sleep. She rubbed her eyes and focused on the face of the voice softly calling her name. “General?”

“I wanted to let you know I almost didn’t make it back. You could have been wrong. I’m glad you weren’t.”

“I know I’m half asleep and you may be a dream, but would you mind explaining the statement? I’m a bit foggy,” Kiley complained. She started to sit up on the bed leaning on the pillow placed against the backboard of the bed.

“The B-17 I was flying in almost didn’t make it to Casablanca. The pilot managed to glide into the runway. Two of the four engines were down.”

“My God,” Kiley gasped. “Are you hurt? We didn’t hear anything about it.” Without thinking Kiley placed her hands on Mark’s face. She leaned forward placing her lips on his. “I’m so glad you made it back safely.”

“So am I,” Mark agreed returning the kiss. His kiss was deeper. His arms went around Kiley. His kiss changed from the warmth of welcome to the heat of passion.

Kiley fell into the abyss of the moment. She floated into the oblivion of love.

Mark found the kiss created a hunger. It was the hunger of a starving man. As a man he had never felt this filling of emptiness. His hands buried themselves in Kiley’s hair. His lips left hers. He tasted her eyebrows, eyes, lashes, nose, ears, lobes, and finally her throat.

Kiley bared her throat to his lips. His hands caressed her hair. Did she dare believe a man could love her? No that was silly. This was a physical moment. A moment she intended to enjoy.

“I missed you,” Mark mumbled. His one hand left her hair to explore the feminine globes beneath a satin gown. His intentions turned from innocent conversation to flaming desperation. Mark’s body was on fire. Only Kiley could put out the flame. Slowly he laid Kiley beneath him. His hand slowly removing her satin gown also branded her with his heat and passion.

In moments he had removed his uniform. In the warm glow of human pleasure the two lay together. His body was burning in the pleasure of her body. It had been so long since he had wanted, no needed, a woman. He couldn’t remember when.

Kiley blazed in the passion of this man. No man had ever touched her giving her pleasure as this man did. She heard moans. They were her moans. Between her thighs Mark’s fingers dipped into the heated honey of her femininity.

Mark suckled her breasts tasting each equally. His tongue laved each hardened nub. Gently he nibbled with his teeth as he suckled her breasts. Mark could hold back no longer. He thrust into Kiley’s welcoming haven. The entry was deliciously smooth. He fit as perfectly as if Kiley had been made just for him.

Kiley was about to beg Mark to enter her when he thrust into her. She arched her back as he thrust. She gave him a deep welcome. A small cry of triumphant pleasurable satisfaction erupted from her throat.

Responding to Kiley’s hunger and his own, Mark increased his thrusts. Mark felt no desire or need to breathe as he took pleasure from Kiley’s body. Never had he experienced such physical ecstasy.

Kiley responded to every movement of Mark’s in the sycophant rapture two bodies could share. Her body climbed to the heated passion with his. Together they burst into orgasm. Each expelled their fluids of shared love.

Gasping for breath Mark choked, “Good God, you could kill a man.”

“ I thought we both died,” Kiley answered breathing erratically. “And went to heaven.”

“If this is heaven, I’m glad I’m here with you.” Mark slipped out of Kiley and laid his body next to her. He pulled her to his side. His fingers combed through her long hair. “Your hair is like silk.” Mark found touching Kiley intimately felt wonderful.

Snuggling into Mark's hard strong chest Kiley murmured, "Tell me what happened in Casablanca."

"We had the endless meetings," Mark chuckled. He felt wonderful. He felt even better with Kiley in his arms. It was as if he felt whole for the first time.

"Did you meet with Roosevelt? Alone I mean."

"Yes, I had a private meeting."

"Do tell."

"He wanted me to give him my impressions of the French leaders. There is a concern for French holdings. He asked me when we would take Tunis and have French Africa in Allied control."

"What did you tell him?"

"I gave him my best guess. I told him the middle of May."

"I think that is a good guess. The winter rains will be gone, the 8th Army coming in from the southern desert uniting the forces. Best of all squeezing the bloody Nazis into a corner," Kiley said excitedly.

"Maybe I should give you a battle command," Mark teased kissing her hair.

"If I believed men would take orders from a woman I'd take you up on that general," Kiley chortled. "What else?"

"The President assured me the channel invasion is still on. There's a chance General Alexander will lead the invasion," Mark shared.

"Bunk!" Kiley declared. "You are the only one capable of leading the channel invasion."

"Did you ever think maybe I don't want the responsibility?"

"Who said you wanted the job? I'm saying no one else can handle it."

"I'm tired. You wore me out. No more talk."

"Was Newhall there?"

"He's my boss."

"He was there."

"Yes," Mark sighed. "No more talk."

Kiley understood Mark's relationship with Oscar Newhall. It was a love/hate relationship. Mark admired Newhall, but they clashed more than not. Newhall had such stringent dislikes. It was almost impossible to know how to act around the man. Kiley had

met him and took an immediate dislike to the man. There was something about him that seemed cruel, selfish, and even false. Those feelings about Newhall she kept to herself.

Mark's breathing had changed. Kiley looked up at his face. He looked so young. His person seemed to change to a young boy. Mark Hauser was sleeping peacefully.

Dawn's light broke through the window. Kiley woke up to movement on the bed. Mark was sitting on the side buttoning his shirt.

"Good morning," Kiley yawned stretching her arms.

"Good morning, Burke." Mark rose from the bed to tuck in his shirttails and zip his pants. He had already put his shoes and socks on.

"What time is it?" Kiley asked sleepily.

Mark picked his tie and jacket up from the floor. He placed his tie loosely around his neck. Leaning over the edge of the bed he kissed Kiley on the cheek. "We'll talk about this tonight."

Kiley detected a tone in that statement that made her defenses kick in at full speed. "This? What is the this we are going to talk about?"

Mark straightened at her tone. "You know what I mean. This!" He pointed at the bed.

"No I don't know what you mean," Kiley growled. "This war? This moment? This general? This woman? Perhaps you mean this magical sexual encounter."

"Goddammit Kiley, you know what I mean," Mark retorted. His face was flushing.

"My God!" Kiley exclaimed. "You're blushing, General Hauser."

Mark turned on his heels and headed for the door. "Goddammit Kiley, we'll talk tonight! Sean will be in my room at precisely six thirty. I've only got twenty minutes." Without looking back, Mark walked out the door.

Kiley spoke to the closed door, "You may have regrets General Hauser, but I feel pretty damn good." She slid beneath the covers and inhaled the masculine scent that was Mark. "Hmmm, this was pretty damn good, lover." She laughed, "Don't worry mon general. I don't intend to involve myself with the great and mighty American leader. I just enjoyed the moment."

Mark had undressed and managed to slip into his bed before Sean came into the room.

“General, did you come back last night?” Sean asked.

“Late last night,” Mark answered.

“I’ll get you a clean uniform. I’m sorry I wasn’t prepared for your arrival,” Sean excused.

“I didn’t know I’d be able to come back so soon. I wasn’t really needed. Newhall is coming here in a day or two. I’ll be informed about the decisions then,” Mark stated.

“I’ll prepare your bath,” Sean volunteered. “While you bathe I’ll get your breakfast.”

“Always punctual and precise, Sean,” Mark chortled. He stretched leisurely. What had set Kiley off, he wasn’t certain. He did know he felt really good. He couldn’t remember ever feeling this satisfied after a sexual encounter. What was he thinking? *He was old enough to be her father. Almost old enough to be her father.* Had he used his rank and position to seduce her? Could she ever forgive him? He hoped so. She was special. Kiley was very special. He admitted that he missed her when he was away from her. Could anyone guess he was panicked when he heard her ship was sunk?

Mark found himself buried in paperwork. His meeting with the President required him to seek more information on the slowed advance of the forces. Those airfields were more important than ever. He was determined to review every report sent in from the front. Mark was also anticipating General Newhall’s arrival. There would be more foundation planning on future battles. This would include, ‘Roundup.’ President Roosevelt had assured him that the plan to invade Europe across the channel had not been abandoned.

Kiley and Mark never had the discussion about ‘*this*’ that night. It was two weeks later and any conversations between them had been strictly professional. Mark surrounded himself with all his commanders.

Although Kiley knew his concerns were regarding the sluggish advance and winter months of the battlefield. She no longer thought about the night the general came to her bed. To Kiley the experience had been physically satisfying. It was

something that simply happened. She didn't hold Mark to blame. These things just happened. Kiley was buried in her work. More and more personal letters were sent to the general for her to respond to. General Hauser insisted that every letter needed a response.

Kiley didn't always drive the general to the front, but she heard he had stopped and talked to many soldiers. He listened carefully to all their complaints, ideas, and needs. She learned that Mark used that information and acted upon it. Kiley realized then what an unbelievably competent military leader and strategist, Mark Hauser was. "No wonder the Americans put you in charge," Kiley mumbled quietly. She had just read a letter from a soldier he had spoken to at the front.

More than battle equipment, we need bulldozers, jeeps, and shovels. Guns, ammunition, and armor are used only after we've dug our way through the rubble the Germans dump in our way. Roads are made impassable. This slows our advance. Sorry to appear to be a whiner, but when you stopped to talk to me you asked me to send you a line about what we really needed in the battlefield.

Your servant,

Private James McAdams

Kiley had been ordered by Hauser to give him letters that she thought he would want to read. This was one such letter. She knocked on his closed door. Sergeant Ryan opened the door for her.

Hauser looked up from his desk. "What is it Burke?"

Burke again! Kiley chuckled silently. She handed the letter to Mark. "I thought this was a letter you would want to see. As you know, I don't bring many. I only bring ones like this." She stood by as he stopped reading his report and read the letter. Kiley watched the famous smile spread across his face. His eyes suddenly seemed brighter. It was if he had woken up from a deep sleep. Did she see a glowing light bulb over his head?

"Sean, get me Admiral Prince, Generals Anderson and Mason. Get Dallas in here," Mark ordered.

"You look happy," Kiley commented. "It's a good change."

"I've had a lot on my mind."

"That goes without saying."

“What I mean is, I’ve been struggling with the North African campaign. There was something I’ve been missing. This private gave that missing piece to me. I’m going to get all that non combative equipment up here and Goddammit, we’ll see the changes.”

Kiley marveled at the way the general took tiny pieces and placed them together making them a complete piece of art.

“By the way, Kiley, I haven’t forgotten about our need to discuss this thing between us.”

Kiley ground her teeth. She just started feeling good about the general and he brought their sexual experience up once more. “I simply do not know what you are talking about,” Kiley replied hissing through her teeth.

Mark noted her anger. He simply did not understand her attitude. Before he could say anything more, Sean returned to the room with Dallas. Mark swallowed his words. The war was more important. He would put aside his feelings and needs a while longer.

“You sent for me?” Dallas asked.

“Yes I did,” Mark replied. “That will be all Burke. You were correct. I needed to see this letter.”

Kiley quickly turned on her heels and left the room.

“Dallas, I want you to get heavy dirt moving dozers, shovels, and jeeps requisitioned immediately. I’ll get Anderson to provide heavy trucks to move the supplies to the front. Prince will get them shipped here. He and Mason are heading back to the States.”

Mark was short tempered for the following days. Kiley thought it was because he put more pressure on himself than he needed to. In fact, Mark was short tempered because at night he couldn’t stop thinking about the night he and Kiley had shared. He wished he could attribute that night to lust and dismiss it. Unfortunately it wasn’t lust. He wanted Kiley back in his bed.

“Good morning, General Hauser,” Sean greeted with a huge smile. “General Newhall has arrived.”

“That may or may not be good news,” Mark grumbled rising from the bed.

“I don’t know about that, but the USO troupe is here. I can’t wait to see Carole Landis. They’re great you know. Martha

Raye, Kay Francis, Mitzi Mayfair, and Carole Landis,” Sean beamed brightly. “You are coming to the show aren’t you?”

“Wouldn’t miss it,” Mark forced out. He had another woman on his mind and wasn’t the least bit interested in show business women. He agreed to this visit because he knew it would be good for the men’s morale.

Newhall made his entrance at Hauser’s headquarters shortly after Mark had arrived.

Newhall stopped just outside the doors of Mark’s office and glared at Kiley.

Kiley looked up to see the glint of steel slicing her. She swore there was a sardonic smile on Newhall’s face. She did her best to ignore him and concentrated on another letter from a soldier in the front.

Newhall personally slammed the door behind him after he entered Mark’s office. “Martie sent these letters with me. She’s doing a wonderful job for you at the home front.”

“I’ll just bet she is,” Mark growled. He tried not to think of Martie. “How did the conference go in Casablanca? Any news on Husky?”

“Don’t you want to know how Martie is? She’s your wife!”

“General Newhall, my marital status is a private affair,” Mark rebuffed. “What conclusions did the President finally come to about Tunis? Sicily? Roundup? Will I be returning Stateside?”

“We’ll talk about Martie later. I want you to remember that important people notice your successes. You have a bright future ahead of you. You need a wife like Martie to be by your side,” Oscar chided. “Especially since you will be receiving your fourth star.”

Mark looked up from his desk in surprise.

“Congratulations, Mark. President Roosevelt approved your promotion. You will be in charge of Husky. The next few days we will be working on the Sicilian invasion.”

That night Mark joined his staff, Newhall, and several thousand G.I. soldiers at the USO show. Kiley was also invited. She sat with Dallas. Mark made an extra effort to introduce Sean to his idol, Carole Landis.

Kiley enjoyed Martha Raye the most. She liked the witty actress and her funny way of approaching reality.

Newhall and Mark left together in an unmarked car.

“You need to get rid of that woman. She’s bad for you and your image,” Newhall stated breaking the silence.

“I am,” Mark replied thinking Newhall was referring to Martie.

“When?”

“I was told the papers would be taken care of before spring.”

“Would you need me to push things along?” Newhall volunteered thinking he meant Kiley. He didn’t really want to help at the moment. Martie didn’t want Kiley to disappear yet. She wanted to project the poor cheated wife image. Martie’s own spy in Mark’s staff had informed her that Kiley has survived the sinking. Her spy had also assured her that General Hauser had not shown any romantic interest in Kiley Burke that he was aware of and he would have known since he barely left the general’s side.

“I’ll handle it.”

“Good. I’m glad to hear it. Have you gone over those temporary battle fronts we discussed?”

Mark and Oscar began discussing the Casablanca Conference in earnest.

Newhall left Algiers in complete agreement with current planning on the Tunisian front and the future invasion of Sicily. Alexander’s troops were moving swiftly across the desert. Soon he would be merging with American troops. The American forces would have to be ready for offense. The winter months had necessitated defensive action. That would change. He would visit Frederick at the front as soon as possible.

“Put on your battle fatigues and gas up the Cadillac. We’re going for a ride,” Mark ordered without looking up from his maps and papers. He pulled a map from under the papers and handed it to her. “We’re going there.”

“Yes sir,” Kiley snapped in attention. She turned quickly on her heels and left for the elevators. She would go to her room to change and study the road map.

“We leave first thing in the morning,” Mark shouted behind her. “It’s a six hour drive at best. It could be eight hours or more at its worst.”

Kiley couldn’t wait to get to her room and find out exactly where they would be driving. Obviously it would be near the front. She was right. They were going to Frederick’s advance headquarters. Mark had handwritten a note to her.

Kiley,

You will be driving me to the advance headquarters. Another G.I. from Frederick’s staff will be driving me to the front. Make certain you get some rest after we get there. I don’t know what day we’ll be back.

Mark

Kiley smiled. “You are some general. Right out in the front of battle with the troops. I’m damn proud to serve under you.” Kiley prepared for bed. Before Kiley closed her eyes, she remembered that night of pleasure with Mark.

Kiley was up before dawn. Last night she packed for at least a three-day trip. She pulled the car out of the garage and gave it a quick wash. Next she pulled it to the pumps and filled the gas tank. She finished just in time.

Mark walked straight to the car. He was carrying briefcase. Behind him was Sean carrying the general’s luggage. Kiley opened the car trunk for Sean to put the general’s luggage in. She quickly moved to open the door for the general.

He slipped into the car quietly without acknowledging Kiley’s presence.

Kiley shut the door with force.

The general didn’t even look up. Instead he opened his briefcase and pulled out some papers.

“Good morning to you too, General Hauser!” Kiley mumbled walking around the car to the driver’s seat. Kiley plopped into her seat behind the wheel. At that moment Kiley believed she would never understand General Hauser even if she lived to be two hundred years old. One could believe he was emotionally strained because of the pressure placed upon him being the commander of this entire operation. He was always concerned about being fired for not advancing. Yet, he seemed so kind and understanding with all his other staff. He even treated the

WACs better than he treated her. Did he really hate her? Or did he just hate her now because of that one nightstand. She stopped thinking about it or she would go crazy. It was wonderful to concentrate on the road and the map lay neatly next to her on the front seat.

The silence continued for several hours into the trip. Kiley only heard paper shuffling in the back seat.

Chapter 12

Kiley jumped an inch from the seat when Mark finally spoke to her.

“Have you heard from Colonel Deacon recently?” Mark asked casually.

“Yes. Bob writes every week. Don’t worry. He’s very careful on censorship. I don’t know anything I shouldn’t,” Kiley quipped.

“You needn’t be impudent,” Mark growled.

“Was I?”

“You know damn well you were. You know more on confidential and censored material than Deacon ever would,” Mark barked.

“Sorry general,” Kiley oozed sarcastically.

“Don’t apologize like that,” Mark growled. “You make me nervous. It isn’t the real you.”

Kiley decided to hold back her sarcasm this one time. “Actually Bob writes to me every week just like your wife, Martie.”

“You’re not so smart, Burke. I don’t get a letter from Martie every week. I’ve been fortunate to have only received two since I’ve left,” Mark snorted.

Kiley was truly confused. “But you do get one or two letters every week. I put them in with your mail every evening.”

“What?”

“Don’t you get them?”

“No I don’t,” Mark stated. “You aren’t making this up are you?”

“Of course not,” Kiley barked. “I would have no reason to make up a story like that. You truly receive one or two letters a week. You send out one or two letters every week.”

“The hell I do!” Mark roared. “The only letters I send concerning Martie are to my divorce attorneys.”

“Divorce..?” Kiley choked. This was a complete surprise to her. All of the staff knew of Mark’s wife, Martie. No one had ever hinted Mark wanted a divorce. There was not even a hint of trouble in the marriage. Kiley did put those letters from Martie on his desk in the evenings.

“I started divorce proceedings before I was sent to the European Theatre,” Mark shared. “We agreed to keep up appearances until Debbie was old enough to be on her own.”

“I heard your daughter is in her second year at Radcliffe,” Kiley inserted.

For no explainable reason, Mark continued. He was revealing his private thought and pain. “Debbie is the one wonderful thing that came from our marriage. I would live this marriage all over again knowing I had her. Martie didn’t want anymore children after Debbie was born. She hated the pregnancy. She hated the labor and delivery. She hated the responsibility of being a mother. Her father paid for a nanny. I certainly couldn’t afford it on a captain’s pay. Her father paid for servants. I was made to feel inadequate constantly in everything.”

Kiley didn’t know what to say. She thought it best to say nothing. There are times when a person needed to only listen.

“Everything was controlled by Martie and her Daddy. I had to take assignments I didn’t want because it would elevate my career. I had to become part of a social class I didn’t even care for. Martie was out to control my career and me. She did. I did become inadequate. I had to break away or all that was left of me would die. Before the war broke in England I was happily on my way to rebuilding my life. Martie was living with her parents in California and I was living in Texas on a military base. Things just snowballed from there. Here I am.”

“How is Debbie handling the separation?” Kiley asked conversationally.

“Debbie told me no matter how we tried to hide it from her, she knew we were unhappy. Debbie even told me she understood why I was miserable in the social soirees. She liked my parents’ home a lot better. She confessed to me that Martie’s parents were stiff and rigid. Even she couldn’t have fun around them,” Mark elucidated. “That’s my girl!”

“I take it your daughter has accepted this separation and pending divorce?” Kiley asked.

“Better than I had hoped for. She didn’t care for the charade we had to put on for the public when I left for London.”

“I guess I don’t understand. Why did you put on the image of a loving couple parting as the soldier goes off to war?”

“It was an order from General Newhall. As chief of staff he reminded me of my duty to country. It was my duty to show I was the same as the men that would be sent over here to die. I had to be the epitome of mom’s apple pie and all the other American dreams,” Mark explained. “I’m pursuing the divorce quietly. Once we win this war my marital status won’t matter when the husbands start coming home.

“I don’t understand the letters,” Kiley stated with confusion.

“Neither do I,” Mark agreed. “I haven’t seen these letters and I certainly didn’t write them.”

“I give them to you and I get yours. I swear I do!” Kiley defended.

“We need to investigate this when we get back,” Mark ordered. He was silent for a few minutes. “Kiley, we still need to talk about this thing between us.”

“There is no *this* between us,” Kiley objected. “Is it so impossible for you to address it as is? We shared a sexual encounter. Nothing more and nothing less.”

Her comment hurt Mark. He thought of it as a lot more, not less. For weeks he agonized about his indiscretion. He hoped she could forgive him for his lust and greed. After all, Kiley was only a few years older than his daughter. “You were repulsed by the encounter?”

“I don’t believe you,” Kiley snapped. “I enjoyed the sex immensely. It was wonderful. You made me feel things I didn’t know I could feel. It was a pleasurable, wonderful, magnificent, and wish we could do it again encounter.”

“You don’t think I’m too old for you?” Mark asked not believing his own ears.

“You may call it old. I call it marvelous experience.”

“You enjoyed the night?”

“Very much general. I enjoyed that night very much,” Kiley replied. “You needn’t worry about me expecting more. I’m

a big girl. I realize it was just a moment, but to me it was a wonderful moment and I want to keep it that way.”

Mark sat back against the seat. Martie had continually told him she hated sex with him. She complained about discomfort and his inadequacy to bring her pleasure. This woman was telling him she enjoyed him and the pleasure. “I want to keep it as a wonderful moment also.”

Kiley smiled. “That’s all I ask, sir.”

Mark had thought about this conversation for weeks. He dreaded it, feared it, and avoided it. Now he was thrilled he had it. Mark felt more relaxed than he had been in years. She enjoyed the sex. Suddenly he felt his male organ harden. Just remembering Kiley had brought his male appendage to life. He wanted to make love to her all over again. Where could they go? Everyone knew his car. Dallas was following in a jeep behind them. They just couldn’t pull over somewhere and find a grassy park. They were in the battlefield of rubble, pits, dips, and ruts. He found he was rarely alone with Kiley. This trip was planned with her driving just so he could talk to her. God, he hurt for her. He decided he’d better think and talk about the war or something very embarrassing for him and Kiley would happen. “I think we need to stop and get something to eat. You packed some rations didn’t you?”

“Or we can find a troop along the way. Maybe they might have some hot coffee,” Kiley suggested.

“That would also give me a chance to talk to some of my boys,” Mark said thoughtfully. “That’s the best idea, Kiley. Find a small squad and pull over.”

They drove for another half hour before they found a group of G.I.’s huddled together by a small campfire. The weather was foul. It was drizzly, cold, and the roads were muck.

“Holy Shit! It’s General Hauser!” a private shouted when he stood up. The private had watched the car stop and a slender figure open the door. He saw the general emerge from the car.

The other soldiers rose quickly dumping their plates, utensils, and cups with fast salutes.

Mark approached the men. He had a warm broad smile for the men. “At ease.” He returned their salute.

“What can we do for you general?” a corporal asked.

“I was hoping you might share your coffee and campfire. I’m hungry since I missed breakfast. I brought my own rations.”

“We’d be mighty pleased to share our camp, sir,” the first private offered.

Dallas, Kiley, and the jeep driver stepped in behind General Hauser.

Mark introduced his staff.

The next few hours General Hauser had several cups of coffee, rations, and intense conversations with the frontline troops. It delayed his trip to Frederick’s headquarters. Kiley found another group of soldiers for dinner. They were lucky to find lodging for the evening after it was dark. A small abandoned villa gave shelter for Hauser and his staff. Kiley found herself sleeping on a mattress pallet in one of the bedrooms. It was next to the master bedroom Mark Hauser was given. Dallas slept on a large sofa he found in the living room. A group of soldiers took up other places in the villa.

Kiley fell asleep almost instantly. She was exhausted. Driving the armored Cadillac on the mud roads was physically difficult. Braking the car demanded more physical strength on dry roads much less these muddied ones.

Mark couldn’t sleep. He knew Kiley was in the room next door. He wanted her. No, he needed her. He needed the magic physical experience they had shared. The stress of his job was getting to him. He needed that release. Still he couldn’t help but think about the regular soldiers scattered about the house. They needed the arms of a woman as much as he did. He couldn’t ask them to sacrifice if he couldn’t make the same sacrifice. Throughout the night, Mark tossed and turned between sleep and awareness.

In the morning Mark joined the soldiers and his staff for coffee and rations. His eyes were red and swollen from lack of restful sleep.

Kiley didn’t say anything to Mark until they were in the car and on their way to Frederick’s headquarters.

“General, you must get more sleep. Frankly you look like hell!” Kiley chided.

“Thank you for your observation, Burke,” Mark snarled testily. After all, it was her fault he couldn’t sleep.

“Flog me tomorrow!” Kiley growled in response. “Even the soldiers looked more rested than you. You simply have to get

more rest. We can't have our commander fall apart. Is there something I can do to help?"

Mark groaned. Was there something she could do to help? God yes! All she had to do was be near him, comfort him, hold him, and make love with him. "We'll talk about that later."

"You just let me know what I can do to help," Kiley pursued innocently. She had no idea what Mark had been thinking.

This was too much! One more comment and Mark would force her to stop the car and he'd have her in the back seat. That would be a sight wouldn't it? "Goddammit! I said we'd discuss it later! Stop by another group of my boys before lunch and before we get to Frederick's headquarters near Tebessa."

Mark's angry response was a verbal warning for Kiley to drop the subject. Her Irish stubbornness set in and she refused to say another word until she realized they were almost at the headquarters. She found a group of soldiers and pulled into their midst with the general's car. Kiley jumped from the driver's seat and opened the door for Mark to get out.

During those talks with frontline soldiers, Mark learned a lot about the front and problems.

"The complacency of these troops, especially their commanders are appalling!" Mark grouched to Kiley in the car. "That's Frederick's HQ up ahead. Pull over here. I want to walk around the camp before I call on the general."

Kiley pulled over immediately and opened the door for the general. She noted that none of the soldiers seemed to pay attention to the fact the general's car was there. Didn't these men realize there were four stars on the flag? To make matters worse, the noise from hammers and drills was deafening. What on earth were they doing with hammers and drills here?

"Goddammit, what the hell is going on here?" Mark roared. He made his way to a soldier whose insignia was from the corps of engineers. "What is the cause for this hammering and drilling," Mark inquired.

"We're tunneling into the ravine for the safety of staff," replied the sergeant.

"You've already set up defenses at the front line then?" Mark asked. He could have sworn the look on the sergeant's eyes was one of disbelief and ignorance for his question.

“The front has their own corps of engineers for that,” the sergeant replied.

Mark shook his head in disbelief. Never in his military career had he ever heard of a front headquarters so concerned about its safety it dug tunnels for protection. Mark walked directly into the secured tunnel. He had noted no one had paid a bit of interest in his four stars. This added to his concerns on discipline. A fighting unit had to have discipline and recognition of leadership.

Frederick greeted Mark, but did not salute. Again, the leaders themselves were too complacent, lax, and undisciplined. Mark remained silent because he had to understand the complete situation before he made any commitment to changes. He had learned a long time ago not to fly off the handle. That was a problem he had with his good friend, General George Patton. An extreme is an extreme no matter on what end of the ruler it laid.

“I want you to accompany me to the front line, Herb,” Mark ordered immediately.

“I’m due to meet with my staff in three hours. I’ll send my top man with you. Will that be alright?”

“I read once that in a battle front the command should be present. The tougher the battle line the higher the commander,” Mark reprimanded.

“That’s you,” Herb countered. He fingered Mark’s four stars. “I’ll get Colonel Marlboro for you. He’s the best I have.”

“What is the situation with General Smothers in Fondouk?”

“G-2 says that’s where the next assault will take place,” Herb answered. “We’ve deployed forces there.”

“That’s where I want to go first,” Mark indicated. “How soon do you expect an attack at Fondouk?”

“We have no indication. We are suspecting they will commence the attack in a week or two.”

Mark left the tunneled out ravine headquarters and walked directly to Dallas. “We’re going to the front in the jeep. I know the car won’t make it. I’m told the roads are even worse near Fondouk.”

Kiley had heard the exchange and put her helmet on. She walked to the jeep.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Mark questioned the saucy red head.

“To the jeep. I’ll drive you to Fondouk. I’ve studied all the maps,” Kiley replied in surprise. She had naturally assumed she would drive.

“It’s too dangerous out there,” Mark replied. “You’ll stay here in camp.”

“Dangerous?” Kiley shouted heatedly. “It’s too dangerous for me not you? The commander of this bloody war is in less danger than a driver? Oh no, I’m driving.” She stomped toward the jeep.

Mark pulled her by the waist to stop her. “Discipline starts at the top. You will stay here. That is an order. If you try to disobey that order, Burke. You will be shot!”

“But General Hauser,” Kiley objected.

“That is an order,” Mark restated firmly. Then with a wink and chuckle he thought he’d give her a tweak. “Besides, a man drives a jeep better than a woman.”

“OOOOOhhhh!” Kiley muttered angrily. She stomped toward the camp. She found a tent to use as a billet. If she couldn’t drive the general to the front she would just take a nap. Kiley took a long nap.

Mark made it to Fondouk at night. He had meetings with the commanders.

“Have you seen anything here?” Mark asked his good friend General Emerson. Mark trusted Ed Emerson. They were classmates at West Point. “Has there been any enemy movement yet?”

“I keep telling headquarters the attack is not going to be in Fondouk. Look at these maps.” Ed pointed to Fondouk and red dashed lines. “These lines are where my patrols have been. We haven’t run into any enemy buildups. G-2 simply won’t listen to me.”

“I’m going to Maknassy and Faid Pass. I will be decorating some brave men. Then I will go to Sbeitla,” Mark informed. “I’ll find out what the commanders are seeing there. That should end my little fact finding mission.”

“I wouldn’t do that, Mark. I tell you, Sbeitla is where the Nazis are going to break through. I know that’s where the build up is occurring. My patrols have extended that far. They’ve seen German troupes building up.”

“I’m here already,” Mark argued. “This front has to stop defending and start aggressive movement. Husky is a go. We’ve got to firm up front and get moving.”

“I’ll go with you,” Ed volunteered.

“You need to stay here with your troops. If you’re right, I’ll need you to get them moving immediately. Don’t worry, Ed. I have Dallas and Marlboro.”

“Get some rest first. Take my billet.”

Being in the theater and the serious matters at hand helped Mark forget his need for Kiley. Mark slept soundly and woke refreshed.

In the morning Mark decorated the soldiers at Fair Pass and left for Sbeitla.

Upon Mark’s arrival at Sbeitla, he talked to a corps engineer about the minefields and why they hadn’t been planted yet.

It was explained to Mark that a map was being drawn as they spoke for placements. It was also explained to Mark that the Infantry had only been deployed two days ago.

Mark always tried to keep his temper under control, but with this bit of information his temper exploded. He stormed into Colonel Johnston’s tent. His rage uncontrolled, “Goddammit, the Germans can prepare a strong defensive position ready to resist a counter attack within two hours upon arrival. The Germans plant mines instantly, install machine guns, and locate reserve troops nearby where they can resist any counter attack. You’re telling me it takes two days to plan where to put mines?”

“But!”

“Goddammit, I want action now! Right now!” Mark roared.

A mortar shell exploded the moment Mark did.

A private ran into the tent. “We’re under attack!”

Mark Hauser grabbed the radiophone. He called Emerson and ordered him to get his troops moving to Sbeitla fast. Then he called Frederick’s headquarters and ordered them to send troops to Kasserine Pass.

“Intelligence is expecting a counterattack in Fondouk,” Frederick denied. “We’re told to be ready to move there.”

“Goddammit, Frederick! I’m in the middle of the attack right now! Get your ass and troops to Kasserine,” Mark ordered. He slammed the radiophone down. “Dallas, get the jeep. We’ve got to get through to Tebessa. I’ve to get reinforcements up here! Quickly!”

The group was exhausted from the five-day fact finding mission. The counterattack was becoming fiercer. Necessity forced the group to drive to Tebessa.

Mark was jolted awake. The jeep was bouncing on the road like a Mexican jumping bean.

Dallas was hanging on to a roll bar. He had just been woken from his deep sleep. “General Hauser! Hang on. The driver fell asleep,” Dallas shouted.

The dazed driver now was awake. He was sitting on the side of the road. In his sleep he had fallen away from the jeep and onto the road.

The jeep careened off the road and came to a sudden stop. Without the gear down shift, the engine stalled.

The driver ran to the jeep, “General? Are you alright?”

“I’m fine,” Mark responded breathing heavily. It had been a fright.

Dallas jumped from the jeep and offered his hand to Mark. “We need to get the jeep back on the road, sir.”

Mark, Dallas, and the driver managed to get the vehicle upright. Fortunately the jeep had not been damaged.

Chapter 13

Kiley had heard about the Nazi counterattack in Sbeitla. There had been no news on Mark. She couldn't sleep. At dawn she was still pacing back and forth with nervous energy in the Tebessa headquarters.

A lieutenant ran into the office. "The General has arrived, General Frederick."

Kiley ran out of the office. She saw Mark walking toward her from the jeep. A breath of relief whooshed from her lungs.

Mark noticed Kiley standing in front of Frederick's headquarters. He brightened up seeing her and gave her a smile, but walked past her. His first concern was getting troops and equipment up to the front.

Kiley didn't see Mark again until the evening. They were served rations for dinner. She noticed he was issuing orders, commands, and listening for reports from the front.

At midnight Mark left once more for the front. This time he allowed Kiley to drive him. She had begged him after she heard his driver had fallen asleep.

Shortly after dawn they neared Kasserine Pass. They heard shelling in the distance. One round exploded a few hundred yards away. More shells came down. Mark pulled Kiley from behind the wheel and flattened her under his body on the ground.

"I shouldn't have brought you," Mark whispered in her ear.

"I should be protecting you," Kiley returned.

Mark snickered and gave her a peck on the cheek before he rose. "Next time. What ever happened to every man for himself?"

“That changed when they put you in charge,” Kiley replied brushing dirt from her slacks. “You are the most important and valuable person in the entire world at this moment.”

“I think there are some people that might disagree with you,” Mark corrected. “I’ll go on foot from here. You will stay here.”

“Let me come with you. I’ve got my 45. Let me at the bloody Nazi.”

“No. You have to stay here and make certain my jeep is filled with petrol. We may have to get out of here in a hurry!” Mark ordered.

Dallas accompanied Mark with other men of various rank. They walked up the hills and rocky cliffs toward Kasserine Pass.

Everything was brought up to the front. The Allies made a great rally and pushed the Nazis back to the original front. Kasserine was in their hands once more. It was a dear price they had to pay.

Dallas and Mark walked among the dead bodies. Mark came upon a tank corps. Men lay dying near shattered tanks. It was a sight Mark had never seen.

“I wish they would close their eyes,” Mark said to Dallas quietly. “This is all my fault. I should have given more direction. I should have checked G-2 and patrol information sooner.”

“That’s enough,” Dallas growled. “We need to get back. It’s getting dark.”

Mark spoke to several soldiers and then left with Dallas.

They returned to Kasserine camp late in the evening.

Kiley waited to eat with Mark. She noticed Mark was forcing his eyes to stay open. He looked very tired.

By the time Mark finished eating he no longer could keep his eyes open. Dallas had already gone to a tent to sleep. Mark had refused Frederick’s quarters. He was given a tent with a large cot.

“I’ll walk with you,” Kiley volunteered.

Mark nodded sleepily. He appreciated Kiley’s support. He couldn’t remember being this tired. His legs felt like lead. His emotional state was sullen.

Kiley supported Mark right to his cot.

He didn’t release her. He pulled her down with him.

“I’ll help you remove your jacket and shirt,” Kiley volunteered.

“I can’t move my feet,” Mark uttered.

Kiley bent over to untie his shoes, remove them, and removed his socks.

Mark reclined on the pillow and lay flat on the cot.

Kiley had difficulty but removed Mark’s coat and shirt. He was nearly asleep.

Kiley rose to leave the tent.

Mark suddenly grabbed her and pulled her down on top of him. “Kiley, I need you. Stay with me.”

“Very well,” Kiley agreed. She relaxed in his arms. “You are so tired. You need to sleep.”

“Kiley,” Mark hesitated. “I know you’ve seen what I just did a hundred times over. You’ve seen the dead and dying. God, Kiley, I’ve never seen the dead in a battlefield. By the time I’ve reviewed a battlefield, the crews have already buried the dead and cleaned it up. I couldn’t bear it.” He pulled Kiley closer. “Those dead boys. Some of the boys had appendages blown away. Some of them didn’t have faces.”

“I know what you’ve seen. It was the same during the Blitz,” Kiley comforted.

“I talked to a wounded soldier. He told me about the woman he loved. She was waiting for him. I was told he met every day with a smile knowing she cared for him. It didn’t matter what hell he endured. He would make it home to her.”

“That’s beautiful,” Kiley sighed.

“It made me realize I don’t have a special someone to go home to. I don’t have that dream or hope.”

“There’s Debbie.”

“My daughter. Kiley, I need the warmth and love of a woman. I need the comfort of softness and beauty. Stay with me tonight. I swear to you I won’t take advantage of you. I just want to hold you.”

“Of course,” Kiley whispered. “I could use some comfort too.” She snuggled next to Mark. His hand had already unbuttoned her blouse. His hand was warm and gentle fondling her breasts. She hadn’t felt so comfortable since she was a baby in nappies. Kiley noticed Mark’s breathing changed. He was sleeping peacefully. She fell asleep in Mark’s arms.

At dawn's light Mark woke Kiley with kisses.

"It's time to get back to headquarters," Mark remarked quietly. "Thank you for staying with me, Kiley. I needed you last night."

"I'm glad I did," Kiley murmured. "You're right. We need to get back to headquarters." She jumped from the cot and buttoned her blouse.

Mark sat on the bed and put on his socks and boots.

Kiley moved the flap and peered out the tent. No one was in sight. She fled the tent. It would serve no purpose to have gossiping about the general. Her first retreat was the jeep.

When Mark emerged from his tent he saw Kiley was washing down the jeep. Could he stop the feeling that Kiley felt perfect in his arms? She was everything he wanted and needed. It was time to admit his feelings for Kiley were more than paternal.

Returning to Algiers, Mark stormed the intelligence office. He found the commanding officer. "Why did you ignore the field reports from the front informing you the attack would not be at Fondouk?"

"Our sources all concurred the counterattack would take place at Fondouk," the officer replied firmly.

That response infuriated Mark beyond his normal control. "You will step down immediately. Within a week you will receive your transfer." After speaking those words he turned and left.

For several weeks Mark buried himself in the paperwork of war. To Kiley's consternation he would leave her behind and drive to the front for inspection tours.

"I don't think he wants to forget the horrors he saw," Kiley shared with Dallas on evening at dinner. "He feels personally responsible for every death."

"I believe he does, but he is also a commander. These losses are expected," Dallas replied. "Mark simply has a low tolerance for mistakes. He won't have them repeated."

"He's driving himself to illness," Kiley sighed.

"I think he thrives on pressure," Dallas chuckled.

"He's coming back. Someone is with him," Kiley noticed.

“It’s Patton,” Dallas informed. “The old man said he’d be bringing him back this time.”

“Old Georgie put the II corps together quickly. We’ll be taking Sicily soon,” Kiley commented. “Those two will be meeting for awhile. I think I’ll head up to bed.”

Mark went into Kiley’s bedroom at two in the morning. He removed his clothes silently.

Kiley didn’t wake until Mark had slipped under the covers with her.

“Are you awake?” Mark asked.

“I am now,” Kiley yawned. “I guess you need me tonight.”

“I need you every night. I just can’t have you every night,” Mark confessed. “Kiley, could you? I mean would you? Goddammit, does this old soldier have a chance with you?”

“Yes, you have a definite chance. I don’t know when, but I fell in love with you. I’m afraid of that, but I love you, Mark.”

“Kiley, I’ve tried to deny my feelings for you. I can’t. I won’t.” Mark took Kiley’s head in his hands and gently kissed her lips.

“You’re so important,” Kiley said breathlessly. “We’ll have to be careful.”

“I know,” Mark admitted. He concentrated on tasting Kiley’s lips, cheeks, and throat.

“What about your wife, Martie?”

“I got word today. Our divorce is final,” Mark answered huskily. “Goddammit Kiley. I need you. I need you badly.” His hands groped under the covers. In a moment he had removed Kiley’s gown.

Kiley palmed her hands on Mark’s back and shoulders. He felt smooth, but like a rock at the same time. Her body responded to Mark’s ravishing.

Kiley’s hands burned him like hot coals. He loved her. He needed her. His organ was throbbing for her warmth. Mark suckled her breasts. His finger wandered to her pubic haven. Slowly he probed and found the heated sweetness of her welcome. He positioned himself over her bracing the greater weight of his body on his arms. “I can’t wait, Kiley.”

Kiley responded with a moan. She pulled him down. Her soft lips laved his throat.

Mark drove into Kiley with a deep thrust. He groaned with pleasure.

Kiley arched into his thrust.

“I need you,” Mark repeated. His body pulsed in gratification.

“I need you,” Kiley breathed heavily in return.

Man to woman and woman to man, they shared the euphoria of physical coupling. With the epitome of exultation, Kiley and Mark shared the bliss of orgasm.

Mark covered with sweat collapsed upon Kiley’s body. “Woman, I do believe you will be the death of me.”

“Or you will be my death,” Kiley replied gasping for breath. She wrapped her legs around Mark’s back while still joined.

“I don’t think I’ve ever been so satisfied,” Mark murmured. “I’ve never known such pleasure.”

“Nor I,” Kiley agreed. “Mark, what are you doing to me? I swore no man would ever make me vulnerable again.”

“I would never have believed any woman could make me feel this way,” Mark shared. “Kiley, I just don’t know...”

“You don’t have to say anything. We enjoy each other. Let’s just go with that. We both share confused feelings and unhappy marriages.”

“You are the breath of logic, the foundation of reality, the goddess of allure,” Mark teased. “You’re right, we can enjoy these moments with each other and come what may.”

Kiley placed her fingers on his lips. “You talk too much. We haven’t much time before you must leave me and return to your Sean’s strict regime.”

Mark agreed in silence. His hands roamed and traced every curve of her body. His lips attempted to kiss every inch of her skin.

Kiley traced circles, letters, and shapes on every inch of Mark’s back.

In a short time the two coupled again sharing the ecstasy of mating.

It was about five in the morning, when Mark stared at Kiley as she slept. Her lips were swollen and deep pink from his kisses. Her hair cascaded on the white cotton bed pillow like radiant waves of red satin. Her cheeks blossomed pink from their

lovemaking. “Kiley, I’m afraid I love you more than a man should love a woman. Will I be good enough for you?” Mark kissed Kiley on those pink puckered lips and returned to his room. He felt exhilarated when he lay on his bed. He fell into a deep sleep.

Tunis was taken. A few weeks after the routing of Germans from Tunis the Allied forces staged a celebration. Parades, flags, banners, troops, and fireworks celebrated the day. Everyone was in a euphoric mood. Everyone was in a happy mood with the exception of Dallas. He had news he didn’t want to deliver.

As Mark walked down from the reviewing stand Dallas pulled him to the side. “I received news this morning, sir. Lieutenant Colonel Deacon was killed. I waited to tell Kiley. She seems to have enjoyed this parade. I didn’t want to ruin that for her. I thought you should know before I tell her.”

“No, Dallas. I’ll tell her. Have some handkerchiefs ready in my office,” Mark ordered taking the dispatch and reading it. He knew Dallas didn’t know the relationship he and Kiley shared. Mark also wondered how Kiley would take the news of Bob’s death. She was fond of Bob and shared the humorous anecdotes he would write to her in his letters.

Kiley drove the general back to his headquarters and wondered why he was so sullen and quiet. When Kiley drove into the villa she jumped when Mark spoke to her.

“I need to see you in my office.”

Kiley felt a chill run down her spine. A feeling of dread overwhelmed her. She didn’t know why she felt this way. Perhaps it was the tone of Mark’s voice. She put the car in gear, shut off the motor, left her seat, and opened the door for Mark.

Mark took her hand and led her to his large office in the villa. He shut the door behind him.

Kiley was really confused. Mark had never taken her into his office like this before. “What is it? What’s wrong?”

“Straight out, Kiley. Bob is dead.”

The news didn’t seem real. Kiley’s world spun, in a moment of ethereal eternity she heard Mark’s words echo in her mind. “No.”

“Yes, Kiley,” Mark soothed. He took her in his arms. “I’m so sorry.”

“How?” Kiley choked out. She grasped Mark’s uniform jacket and held on to it as if her life depended upon it.

“Bob was inspecting a mine field. It had been clearly marked. One of his officers fell and tripped a wire. Bob died instantly,” Mark informed soberly.

Kiley suddenly pulled away. Her body was shaking in grief and shock. “God, I hate this bloody war. Bob was such a gentle soul. He was so unfit for this bloody war. He wanted to play soldier. I don’t think he wanted to die.”

“Kiley, no soldier wants to die,” Mark said groping for something comforting to say. “He was a good soldier. He knew his duty.”

“Oh BLOODY HELL! Duty, Honor, and Country are nothing more than words. It’s death. It’s all about death! You bloody generals want simple, kind, unsuited soldiers to die!” Kiley sobbed.

Mark stood with his arms by his side. He wasn’t sure what to do or say. “Kiley, I know this was a shock. I wasn’t sure how you would react. I can’t seem to say the right things. I didn’t realize how much you cared for Bob. We all know he wanted to marry you. Goddammit Kiley. I just don’t know what to say.” Mark raked his fingers through his hair.

Kiley stared at Mark. She really didn’t hate anyone. She hated this war and the bloodshed. She had already lost relatives and friends in the Blitz. She had visited the wounded and dying with Mark when he made some inspections near the battlefronts and she was allowed to drive him. This was too much. She didn’t love Bob in a physical way. Kiley loved Bob in an intellectual way. She felt his loss. Abruptly she found her eyes tearing and her lungs sobbing for breath.

Mark grabbed the handkerchiefs Dallas had placed on the table before their arrival. He surrounded Kiley with his arms after giving her a handkerchief. “I’m sorry, Kiley. I’m so sorry.”

Kiley was fighting her emotions. She felt panic. She really did love Bob. Perhaps it wasn’t the way she was in love with Mark, but she felt deep soul wrenching grief. She had been so brave and stalwart for so long this emotion of sorrow was unbearable. She ran. Kiley ran toward her room in the villa. In the hall she slammed into Dallas. Ashamed of her emotions she

covered her face with one of the handkerchiefs so Dallas wouldn't see her tears.

"I gather the matter didn't go well," Dallas commented walking into General Hauser's office.

"I had no idea she would take the news this badly," Mark responded raking his hands over his temples.

"They were engaged. They were to be married," Dallas said in surprise at Mark's words.

"No they weren't," Mark enlightened. "Bob hoped they would be when the war was over. Kiley told me she was quite fond of him, but not in a romantic way."

"We all thought," Dallas hesitated. "My God, he sent her a letter every week. Just like you and I send a letter to our wives every week."

That reminded Mark of his conversation with Kiley regarding that same subject. He wanted to find out about these letters he supposedly wrote to his ex wife.

Kiley didn't come down for supper, breakfast, or lunch. She remained in her room without a word to anyone.

"This is foolish," Dallas grouched. "I'll go up and bring her down."

"A woman should," Penny contradicted. She was one of the five WACs that were part of the headquarters office staff. She stood straight and headed to the stairs for the upper apartments. A few minutes later she returned. "Stubborn woman. She won't answer or open the door."

"I'd better go," Dallas volunteered.

"It's better if I go, Dallas," Mark ordered. "She needs a firm hand and a commanding officer." He knocked on her bedroom door. There was no answer. He began pounding on the door. Finally he heard a response.

"Go away!"

"Kiley, open this door!" Mark shouted

"No!"

"Goddammit Burke! Open this Goddamn door."

"Shoot me!"

"Don't tempt me." Mark walked to his room and brought back his 45. "Burke, if you don't open this door I will blow it open."

“You wouldn’t!”

“Don’t tempt me.” Mark cocked the 45.

Kiley opened the door slowly. “Oh God, you would.”

Mark pushed his way into her room taking her arm with him. Under the light he saw her face. Her tears had made her mascara run. Her eyes were black with dark kohl streaks running down her cheeks. Her hair was a mess and her uniform disheveled. His heart melted. She had really cared for Bob. He sat on her bed and pulled her onto his lap. Gently he pulled her head onto his chest and stroked her hair. “It’s okay to care, Kiley. I know Bob knows you loved him.”

“I never told him I did,” Kiley sobbed. “I did you know. It wasn’t a kind of romantic love, but I loved him. He was good and kind. He actually made me believe that someone might care for me.” She broke into deep tears again.

Mark rocked her on his lap. He stroked her hair. “It’s okay Kiley. Cry all you want. I care for you. You can believe I care for you.”

“You do? Really?” Kiley sniffled.

“I really do. I know how you feel. I need to be cared about. I’ve never had that feeling either. Oh, my daughter loves me, but it’s not the same as knowing another cares for you like you care for them. I need that too,” Mark confessed.

Kiley couldn’t believe her ears. She just stared at Mark.

“The best thing for us to do is work. Work heals. We have a war to win you and I,” Mark admonished. “You need a bath, fresh clothes, and food in that order. That is an order, Burke.”

“Yes sir,” Kiley whimpered and gave a halfhearted salute.

“That’s my girl. I’d give you the bath myself, but I won’t let people talk about you. You’re too special. Get to it. I’ll be waiting supper for you. Don’t make us wait. If you do, you’ll have five hungry WACs and four officers with starved murder in their eyes facing you down.”

An hour later Kiley walked into the dining room. She had bathed, put on a fresh uniform, let her hair hang long down her back, and wore no make up.

Mark rose quickly and pulled out a chair next to his for her to sit down.

The evening was spent discussing the war, Husky, and the expected arrival of Oscar Newhall and other chiefs of staff.

Mark didn't go to Kiley's room for several nights. He thought it best. He had no idea that every evening Kiley hoped he would come to her and hold her.

She needed him, but didn't dare ask him to hold her in his arms. After all, he was the commander of the allied armies. He was needed to plan, strategize, plot, and lead every one to victory over the Nazis. Her needs were insignificant to his greater cause.

Slowly she began to heal emotionally. She buried all emotions in work. Dallas chided her several times for over work. Kiley would rise at dawn and return to her bed near midnight. Kiley worked in the office all day and volunteered to work in the hospitals at night. She would work in the kitchens, clean floors, and assist nurses with changing bandages.

Planning the invasion of Sicily occupied Mark's time. He met with the Air Corp, Navy, and Allied Ground Forces commanders. He left for meetings constantly and was gone for several days at a time.

Newhall arrived for invasion strategy at the villa.

Kiley was aware of Newhall's dislike for her and stayed away from him. She hid in other rooms when Newhall was scheduled for meetings with Mark. She ate her meals in her room and left earlier than usual for the hospital visits. She made certain Mark was kept informed of her whereabouts.

Kiley had just returned from a camp hospital and was disrobing when she heard a quiet knocking at the door. She grabbed her robe, put in on, and tied the sash before she answered the knock.

"Mark?"

"Hello. May I come in?"

"Yes, of course. What are you doing up so late?" Kiley asked.

"More to the point, why are you working yourself so hard?" Mark queried walking into her room.

"I've learned from the master," Kiley quipped from behind him.

“I’ve missed that,” Mark chuckled. “You are the most insubordinate person on my staff.”

“Really?”

“Without a doubt and I miss you,” Mark whispered. He turned to her and drew her into his arms. “I missed you.”

“You know why I’m hiding,” Kiley responded between their kisses.

“I don’t understand Newhall’s dislike for you. You’re so kind, sweet, considerate, soft spoken, and gentle. His favorite kind of woman,” Mark teased. “He’ll be leaving tomorrow and you and I will be going on a sea voyage.” Mark squeezed Kiley tightly.

“I don’t know, you know boats and I seem to lose each other,” Kiley chuckled. “Where are we going?”

“We’re going on a reconnaissance for the invasion of Pantelleria,” Mark replied seriously. “We need the air bases for the invasion of Sicily. Are you feeling better, Kiley?”

“You were right, Mark. I needed work.”

“Dallas told me he’s worried about you. He tells me you’re working to hard,” Mark informed. “You get some sleep tonight. I’ll see you in the morning before Newhall gets in. We’ll have breakfast together. Newhall isn’t expected in the office until ten.”

“I’ve missed you too.”

“Hush. Go to sleep,” Mark replied parting her lips for a long deep kiss.

Chapter 14

“Hauser!” Newhall roared. “What is she doing here? I thought you told me you were sending her back.”

Mark rose from his chair at the breakfast table. “Sir?”

“Never mind,” Newhall snarled. “Take care of this later.”

Kiley knew he was referring to her. *What did he mean ‘you told me you were sending her back?’* Kiley suddenly felt insecure. Of course she was dispensable. Mark could have any WAC he wanted. He didn’t need her. How could she begin to think maybe she was special to Mark? *Bloody Fool!*

Newhall grinned sardonically. I’ve got some rumors to spread back home to the right women. This is exactly what Martie wanted. She’ll be pleased. Wait until that vixen hears the radio call Mark is going to get. I can’t wait to see the disappointment in her face. I wonder if I should see if she’ll try for a bigger fish like me. A snicker escaped his lips.

Mark looked at Oscar and wondered what he was thinking about with that evil smile and little laugh. Mark admired Newhall as a brilliant strategist and military leader, but the man was difficult to understand or read. He definitely would not consider Oscar Newhall as a social friend.

“General Hauser,” Sean Ryan addressed holding a radiophone in his hand. “It’s a call from Mrs. Hauser.”

Mark reached for the radio automatically. His first thought was Martie was calling because something happened to Debbie. “Martie?”

The volume was turned up loud enough for everyone to hear the conversation.

“Darling, I’ve been so worried. News here is so slow arriving. I was told you are taking dangerous chances. I had to tell you how much I love you. I’m waiting for you.” Martie said over the phone.

Kiley froze. Mark had told her they were divorced. *What was going on?*

Mark heard Martie's voice but did not listen. It was typical of Martie to make a show. He didn't understand or know what she was up to at the moment. He was sure he would find out. He was furious that she was playing these games while a war was going on. "Is Debbie alright?"

"Oh my darling, our daughter is fine. She sends her love. Debbie just left me to return to classes. Come home to me soon my darling."

"Martie, I can't tie up this line any longer," Mark excused. Martie's syrupy concern was threatening to make his breakfast come up.

"Keep writing me every week. I love you my general, my own." The radio went silent.

Kiley was choking. She had shared her love and body with a man that would lie to her. *Bloody Fool!* Tears threatened to break from her eyes like a break in a dam. Kiley nearly passed out gaining her self-control back and calling up her stoic Irish reserve.

"You're lucky to have someone like Martie to be waiting for you at home," Oscar oozed with false empathy.

That remark was too much for Kiley. She rose from the table and left.

It was the right time for Oscar to lower the boom on Mark's belief the divorce was final. "I've got news from your lawyer's Mark. The divorce isn't final until I clear it. You're in the army and under army law. I'm not about to clear it until you try to make a go of your marriage. It isn't right to have our American Commander of the ETO not capable of handling his own marriage," Oscar whispered to Mark. "We risk setting a bad image with a leader who cannot manage his personal life."

Mark was dumbfounded. How did this happen? Damn the lawyers. Damn Martie. His face automatically switched to the poker face he was so well known for. Inside his heart was raging with fury. How could he hope for a future with Kiley when he still had the devil on his back? "My personal life is my own, sir."

"Not in the army it isn't. Your position in the public is of extreme importance. I will not sign those papers until I am assured of a positive public press."

“Goddammit Oscar, Martie and I have been separated for almost two years. That is long before this war started. The divorce papers were served well before we entered this theater,” Mark grunted. He couldn’t understand Newhall’s reasoning. The divorce had been kept quiet.

“Everyone has troubled times in a marriage. You need more time to work this out with Martie. Marriage is an institution that is until death us do part,” Newhall insisted.

“That may be the end result,” Mark snapped. He rose from the table and stomped away. “I’ll see you at ten.” His only thought was Kiley. He had to explain to her what happened with his divorce. He had noticed the shocked look on her face when Newhall lowered the boom and he knew Martie’s radio call upset her. She had tried to hide it, but because of their intimate relationship he reasoned it had to hurt. In moments he was outside her room knocking on the door.

“Go away,” Kiley shouted at the offending door. Tears had started to flow. Although she wasn’t sobbing, she didn’t want to be disturbed at the moment. It would have been too hard to face anyone.

“Kiley, it’s me, Mark.”

“Haven’t you made enough of a fool out of me? You’ve come for the bone?”

“Kiley, I need to explain.”

“You needn’t explain anything to me. I’m more the fool. I should have known. All you men are alike.”

“Goddammit Kiley! Open this Goddamn door.”

Kiley saw no reason to keep him away. She would be strong. She had to be strong. *Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.* Her father’s words echoed in her head. Kiley opened the door.

Mark strode in grabbing her arms. “I did get the divorce papers. That is true. What I wasn’t aware of is that Newhall has the final signature because of my tenure in the army. I’ll fix it somehow. I swear I will.”

Kiley braced with all the reserve strength she had sniped, “That radio call from Martie seemed rather loving to an outsider like me.”

“Martie is an actress worth academy awards. She and Oscar are closer friends that even I wanted to admit. Obviously

Martie knew Oscar was holding up my divorce papers. This was all an act," Mark explained.

"Why would General Newhall stop your divorce?" Kiley demanded angrily. Did he think she was such a fool?

"He's old fashioned in his thinking that marriage is forever, death do you part, and all that rubbish. He believes you should stay married even if it's hell on earth," Mark argued defensively. "I'll handle this I swear I will. Give me time."

"How much time?"

"I don't know. It may have to be handled after the war when I return to my insignificance."

"Do you believe after this bloody war you could possibly return to *insignificance*?" Kiley snapped accenting the word insignificance.

Mark smiled. "Old soldiers never die. They just fade away."

"Oh God!" Kiley groaned.

"Kiley, I'm an old man. I realize that I don't even have much to offer you, but I need you. I want you. You have become very important to me and my life," Mark affirmed. "Give me time."

"I would give you eternity," Kiley whispered lovingly. "Just don't play me for a fool."

Mark answered her with a deep passionate kiss. "I've got to get back to the office. I've sent for a tailor. You need new uniforms yourself. When I'm finished I'll send him up to you. That will give you an excuse not to have to drive Newhall and me to the airfield."

"I don't need any lollies, general," Kiley objected. "My uniforms are still suitable."

"They aren't lollies. They are uniforms. And your uniforms are not suitable. You're a mess. That's an order!" Mark commanded. "I'll see you tonight at supper. That's an order!"

"Yes sir!" Kiley replied. She snapped to attention with a saucy salute.

Mark gave her another kiss and left the room.

The uniforms were completed in time for Kiley to wear it when driving back to the villa near Algiers.

Mark had been working too hard planning Husky and the invasion of Pantelleria. Everyone including Mark thought it would be a good time to take a rest.

“Uh oh, we have company,” Kiley announced entering the gated arch to the villa.

“Who?” Mark and Dallas asked in unison.

“It’s the Prime Minister,” Kiley answered. “And something is about. He’s smiling.”

“What now?” Mark grouched. “I admire the man, but I think I’ll quit if he wants to harass me any more about going through Italy to Germany.”

“You are just the popular man, aren’t you,” Kiley teased. “The social status icon of the decade, Mark Hauser. Sad part is, you are never without company.”

“I really miss the monotony of being a social pariah,” Mark chortled. Unfortunately he really meant it. One of his reasons for coming to the villa was to have some quiet time with Kiley. There were so many exhaustive meetings planning Pantelleria and Sicily invasions. He went to bed exhausted. He went to bed alone. He wanted to go to bed with Kiley. With Winston Churchill here, he would be lucky if he went to bed before he had to wake up.

Winston loved late dinners and long talks well into the early morning hours. He would sleep in while Mark woke at 6:00 in the morning.

Winston met the car in the driveway and smiled broadly.

Kiley pulled over to the side, put the Cadillac in gear, set the brakes, and hopped out to open the door for Mark and Dallas.

“So good to see you, Burke,” Winston greeted. In fact, he liked the Irish lass and he also appreciated beauty. He believed the general needed the bit of brash Irish loveliness in the middle of the war and the pressures Hauser must endure. He walked past Kiley and brushed her cheek with a peck of a kiss. Standing next to her he offered his hand to Mark. “Welcome back to the Concubine’s Castle.”

“Hello Prime Minister,” Dallas said first.

“Sir,” Mark greeted.

“Winnie will do,” Churchill chuckled. “Everyone, including my friends and enemies call me Winnie.”

“How long have you been waiting?” Mark queried.

“Only a day or two,” Churchill replied. “Your people made me quite comfortable. As a matter of fact they have prepared a magnificent luncheon.”

“Great! I’m hungry!” Dallas piped in. He made a beeline for the dining room.

Winston put his arm around Mark’s shoulder and pushed him along. He turned and spoke to Kiley. “Come along, Burke. We need a lovely face to counter these war weary men.”

“Yes, sir.” She followed the men into a large feast the Prime Minister called a luncheon.

For a week Churchill, Hauser, and staff continued planning the invasions. Administrative, Air support, ground support, engineers, supply, and naval staff met with Mark and Winston for two weeks.

Kiley saw a great deal of Mark, from a distance. Winston Churchill made certain she would be near, but they were very busy with the war.

Hauser was exhausted. This certainly was no respite, but worth the effort. Everything was set in motion for the invasion of Pantelleria. He was confident of the plans.

“The operation is in motion,” Admiral King declared at dinner that evening.

“We don’t look for much resistance,” Dallas added. “The Italians have already had enough fighting.”

“I’ve heard rumors of signals being sent from the Italian government. They are trying to depose Mussolini,” Churchill stated. “I bet there aren’t more than 3,000 Italian soldiers on Pantelleria.”

“Reconnaissance reports there are closer to 10,000,” Mark corrected.

“I’ll wager five centimes for each Italian soldier taken on Pantelleria,” Churchill dared.

“I’ll take that wager, Prime Minister,” Mark joked. “How much American money would that be, Kiley?”

“I believe at 3,000 the Prime Minister would owe you about \$1.50 U.S. dollars,” Kiley calculated.

“That’s a deal!” Churchill declared. “Catch as many as you can General Hauser.”

“We’ll do our best,” Mark chuckled.

“We’ll do reconnaissance on our trip,” Admiral King stated. “I think we’ll get a better count then. You will be able to amass your fortunes to pay the general then, Prime Minister.”

“What reconnaissance? What trip?” Churchill asked.

“We were planning on a small boat trip,” Admiral King shared. “We’ll be taking a short cruise along the coast of Pantelleria.”

“Jolly good, I’ll look forward to that,” Churchill beamed. “Jolly good indeed.”

“Sir, a man of your importance couldn’t take such a chance. We’ll be very close to the enemy line,” Mark warned.

“Balderdash! You plan on going,” Churchill protested.

“I’m in the military, sir. That’s my job,” Mark countered.

“I’m coming along. Tell me what day you plan to go.”

Mark knew there would be no arguing with the Prime Minister, but they couldn’t allow him to accompany them. “We haven’t decided yet. A lot will depend on the weather.”

“Good. It’s settled then,” Churchill concluded.

The subject wasn’t brought up again, although Mark and Admiral King set the day. The invasion would commence in five days. Their little boat trip would be in three days. They would watch the air bombardment scheduled then. The plan was to weaken their defenses by two days of air attack.

Kiley drove Mark and Admiral King to the harbor at Bone. There they boarded the U.S. Fitzsimmons at midnight. She was shown to a berth and allowed to sleep.

General Hauser and Admiral King went to the captain’s cabin for private conversations.

Mark woke Kiley just after midnight. “Get dressed. You’ve got to see this.”

“Do I have to?” Kiley asked sleepily. The rocking of the ship had lulled her into a deep restful sleep.

Mark pulled her out of bed admiring the shape fitting satin gown. “Yes you have to.” He released her and found her uniform hanging neatly on a valet chair in her berth. “Put this on, quickly.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” Kiley grumbled. Still half asleep she didn’t even pay attention to the fact Mark was enjoying the view. She slipped off her nightgown, put on her brassiere, panties, shirt, slacks, socks and boots.

“You are a man’s temptation,” Mark smirked. “If I didn’t want you to see this view, I think you would be flat on your back right now.”

“You’re such a sweet talking devil,” Kiley teased. “You could turn the head of this Irish lass.”

“That will be the day,” Mark countered. “Come along!” He grabbed Kiley’s hand and literally pulled her out to the ship deck. He walked rapidly to the bow and stretched out his arm. “Look at that.”

Kiley caught up to Mark. “It is beautiful,” she said breathlessly. They were on the Mediterranean Sea running slowly just off the coastline of Pantelleria. The moon provided a soft light creating a path river across a calm sea. The cliffs glistened in reflection like small diamonds. The magnificence of Mother Natures painted canvas belied the horrors of the war the world was engaged in.

Admiral King joined them at the bow. “I never get bored with the sea.”

“Aren’t we a little close to the shore?” Kiley asked nervously.

“All we need is water beneath us. I’m following a channel cleared on submerged mines,” Admiral King shared.

“Mines?” Kiley gasped. “We’re traveling in seas with Bloody Mines?”

“The navy removed them. There might be a few floating mines, but nothing to worry about,” Admiral King assuaged.

“Bloody floating mines? What do you mean nothing to worry about?” Kiley demanded fearfully.

“At our speed the floating mines will float away in our cutting waves. It would be just bad luck in we hit one,” Admiral King laughed.

“Bloody Hell!” Kiley roared reaching for Mark and clinging to him.

“Sorry Admiral, Kiley has previously experienced having a boat shot out from under her,” Mark explained. He quickly put his arms protectively around her. “It’s alright Kiley. We’ve got plenty of lifeboats on board.”

Kiley moaned. She snuggled into Mark’s arms.

“I can assure Miss Burke, this is a flag ship with an admiral on board. Should we sink, I can guarantee a rescue ship within minutes.”

“Thank you. I feel so much better now,” Kiley quipped.

“I know I feel better,” Mark chuckled holding Kiley closer. “Nothing wrong with comforting a beautiful maiden in distress.”

“I’m jealous,” Admiral King laughed.

The trio stayed watching the sea until daybreak. Then they watched the bombers fly overhead. The bombing commenced on Pantelleria. The silence and beauty of the moment was once again forgotten. War took hold of the real world.

The ship returned to Bone. Mark was elated. The invasion plan was working perfectly. He also enjoyed the quiet romantic time with Kiley that he was more than often denied. She was becoming everything to him. He treasured his moments with her. It was then he decided that perhaps she was more than just a simple wartime companion. He needed Kiley in his life. Somehow he would break this deadlock with Martie. Until he did completely break with Martie, he couldn’t ask Kiley to be with him in the way he really needed her.

When they returned to the villa, an irritated Winston Churchill greeted them. “Off on a boat trip?”

“Prime Minister, you know it would have been impossible for you to take such a risk,” Mark reminded.

“It didn’t seem to be that much of a risk. You’re back unscathed,” Churchill grouched. “I see your Kiley went with you.”

“I am the most expendable of all,” Kiley remarked. “Losing me would affect no one.”

“Not necessarily,” Mark corrected. “A good driver is really hard to find.”

“Good night!” Kiley chuckled. “I’m far too tired to stay up late this evening.”

“You’ll be missing some fine brandy and good stories,” Churchill tempted.

“I’m certain I’ll survive this one night.” Kiley disappeared into the villa.

“Well come in gentlemen,” Churchill invited. “You’ve got a lot to share with me, don’t you?”

“We might want to discuss some more details of Husky,” Mark suggested. “Since you are here.”

“Did your wife ask you to take another bath?” Admiral King taunted the Prime Minister.

“Indeed she did. Thus the reasons for my regular visits to this Concubine Castle,” Churchill returned. “Since you choose to ignore my request for a sea voyage, I warn you to keep track of your Italian prisoners from Pantelleria. I do intend to keep my wager.”

Chapter 15

“The talk has started,” Newhall reassured Martie.

“It’s wonderful. The circle’s wives are going out of their way to make me forget the gossip,” Martie gloated. “They’re trying so hard to keep me occupied. They’re sympathetic, understanding, and reassuring me all the time. I’m on everyone’s invitation list. Thank you, Oscar. I’ve still got hold of him. We’ll work things out. My way.”

“I like things the way they are myself,” Oscar confessed. He pulled Martie back down on the bed. “No one suspects our little trysts. Lucille believes I’m comforting you and reassuring you about Mark.”

“Lucille is a silly little thing isn’t she?” Martie laughed pressing Oscar’s hands to her breasts. “She’s never had a clue about us.”

“Nor Mark,” Oscar snorted. “To this day he believes I’m keeping the two of you together based on some ridiculous notion on the sanctity of marriage. Little does he know the reason I keep you together is out of necessity.”

“Yes, my social needs and growth. Your need for Lucille’s money.”

“I think this is my greatest military campaign. I’ve won every battle for ten years now,” Newhall crowed.

“And just like Marie Antoinette, I can have my cake and eat too,” Martie agreed.

“Come eat your cake,” Oscar invited. “I’ll miss you when you go to California.”

“Papa wants me to visit. He has some big plans for Mark after the war. I believe he’s going to finance a senate seat. Isn’t that wonderful?”

“As wonderful as you are. Come here.”

“I think the idea is insane,” Dallas protested.

“Why do you mistrust the press corps so much, Dallas?” Mark challenged. “I seem to have more confidence in the press than you do.”

“I used to belong to the press corps. I rest my case,” Dallas snorted.

“When the press have no news and kept at arms length is when they begin to make assumptions,” Mark enlightened.

“And the point being?” Dallas argued.

“These assumptions have a tendency to be fairly accurate. The facts are bits and pieces that the enemy can put together. The picture is like a puzzle put together piece by piece. The Press don’t even realize they are giving this finished puzzle to the enemy,” Mark explained. He raised his hand before Dallas could counter. “If I give them the entire plan, they become responsible for the lives of those boys. They won’t reveal an item for the enemy.”

“I still believe you’re putting too much trust in them,” Dallas protested.

Mark looked up from his desk to Kiley. “What do you think?”

“I think it is a brilliant idea,” Kiley agreed.

“You’re just trying to impress the boss,” Dallas smirked.

“Unlikely,” Mark chuckled. “Kiley has the most acerbic tongue and contrary disposition in this staff.”

“Why thank you, general,” Kiley replied sarcastically. “I’ll remember that the next time you ask for an opinion. Even if I do agree with you, I’ll be the most contrary I can be.”

“Dallas, get the press together for an impromptu conference,” Mark ordered.

Dallas nodded and left the room. Kiley began to leave.

“No, you stay,” Mark ordered. He rose from his chair behind the desk. He walked to the door, closed it quietly, and locked it. “I have a need for you.” He turned to reveal his bulging tight uniform pants.

Kiley mouthed an “O”. She found herself in Mark’s arms in two of his strides. She opened her mouth to his invading tongue like a rose to the sun. Their tongues dueled in a frantic need. Kiley gasped when Mark’s hand removed her breast from the

protection of her brassiere. His lips closed over the pink teat and suckled. *When did he open her blouse?* His hand roamed freely over her curves. She felt his hand raising her skirt, pulling down her panties, and his hand separating her thighs under the garter belt holding her silk stockings. His fingers invaded her feminine haven while his thumb stroked her sensitive nub. Kiley's moans of pleasure were subdued as Mark's mouth closed over hers. His moans joined with hers.

Mark was harder than he had ever believed possible for a man. He couldn't last much longer. Kiley's hand unbuttoned his trousers and her hand enclosed his throbbing manhood. This was hell and ecstasy. Her hand massaged his aching desire. He would explode. There was no more time. Breaking away from her lips he moved her to the back of the sofa. Gently he bent her over the back of the sofa. Mark raised her skirt higher and pulled down her panties to her knees. His fingers were already dripping with her warm feminine honey as he thrust them in and out with more force. His other hand removed his pulsating organ from his trousers. "OH GOD!" Mark whimpered as he replaced his fingers with his hardened organ.

Kiley was ready for Mark by the time he entered her. She needed his complete fulfillment. In and out of her femininity in the fervor she desperately needed. A warm flush of desire ran from the tip of her hardened nubs to the core of her womanhood. Pleasure and need filled her as Mark filled her. Could he get any deeper? He felt larger than ever as he filled her and drove with a stronger force than ever before. Her body began to shake violently. Kiley bit her lip to hold back her cry of pleasure in orgasm.

Mark choked on his roar when he reached his orgasm and exploded his seed into the cone of her womb with several pulsating ejections. Mark collapsed onto her back, panting heavily still joined to her. "You drive me to madness."

Kiley still catching her own breath replied, "A madness I enjoy with you."

After several moments Mark removed his manhood from Kiley. He returned his organ to his boxer shorts, buttoning and zipping up his uniform trousers.

Kiley still breathing heavily and savoring the recent lovemaking felt Mark kiss her femininity as he slowly pulled up

her silken panties. He fondled her backside a little and pulled down her skirt. He pulled her up from the back of the sofa and embraced her. Soon Kiley was once more in his arms. "Mark, that was magnificent. You will never cease to surprise or amaze me."

"Nor you me," Mark breathed huskily.

Kiley buttoned her blouse and straightened her uniform.

A few minutes later Mark walked to unlock the door. At that same moment Dallas walked in.

"The press are ready for you," Dallas announced. He noticed Kiley's flushed face and wondered about what had just happened here. The door wasn't locked. It didn't matter if rumors were true. He always thought Hauser and Burke were made for each other. He smiled.

Kiley felt Mark's warm semen begin to ooze into her silk panties and down her thigh. "Excuse me." Kiley hurried to the restroom. By the time she had cleaned herself she found a seat in the back of the pressroom.

Mark walked into the room and stood by the dais. "Gentlemen, you have been asking about the plans for the invasion of Sicily. Today you will have your answers." For the next half hour he gave the newsmen all the information involving the invasion of Sicily including the commands, commanding officers, equipment, destination, and dates. He concluded, "You now know as much as I do. The life of thousands of allied soldiers is in your hands. Perhaps you will feel the weight of responsibility as I do."

The resulting silence was deafening. The reporters rose and clapped their hands in respect.

Mark left the room with Dallas.

Kiley rose to return to her station. A reporter grabbed her hand.

"Is what we were told the truth or is it another ruse?" the reporter asked.

"I would believe every word," Kiley answered.

"Then I'll believe it. You would know the plan."

"Would I? You put too much importance on a secretary in this war. I do know the honesty of the general. You can take that to the bank," Kiley retorted. She walked out of the room and back into the halls of the command staff headquarters. She had letters to answer.

It was two weeks later Kiley found herself once again on a ship sailing into the battlefield on a ship. This time it was the H.M.S. Hampton.

“Mark, here’s your jacket. You’ll catch a death.”

“I love your mothering, Kiley,” Mark chuckled. “You are going to join us?”

“I wouldn’t miss this for the world,” Kiley beamed. “I’m getting used to being on ships that could be bombed, torpedoed, mined, or shot at. Once you’ve been dunked it’s no big deal anymore.”

“That’s my girl,” Mark laughed. He kissed Kiley on the forehead while she buttoned his overcoat.

“I’m hardly a girl,” Kiley teased. “I think you’re aware of that by now.”

“How could I not notice, darling. You are a well-rounded woman. Why do you think I take these little cruises?”

“So I can share your tiny little berth?”

“Absolutely. Have I told you I enjoy close quarters?” Mark answered huskily. “I’ve got to thank Admiral King for his hospitality.”

“And understanding,” Kiley whispered. “Keep buttoned until the sun comes up. It’s a bit nippy out there right now.”

“I’ll take my castor oil when I get back,” Mark quipped.

Kiley raised an eyebrow. “I just may take care of that.”

“Make sure you come up,” Mark ordered as he left their stateroom. “There are going to be fireworks.”

On board the ship Kiley and Mark found the infrequent time together they treasured. Mark would hold her and she would snuggle into him. At these precious times there was only Admiral King and an officer about. To the rest of the ship they were shadowy silhouettes in the moonlight. It was precious time together.

“The attack is about to commence,” Mark whispered into Kiley’s ear. The British destroyer was on its way to the coastline of Gila and Licata in Sicily. The American paratroops would be landing in Gila and there would be an amphibious invasion on Gila.

“Where’s Patton?”

“He’s on that ship over there,” Mark replied. “He’ll be following the troops in.”

“He’s a hands on kind of guy,” Kiley remarked.

“With film crew and everything,” Mark snickered.

“That’s our Georgie.”

“And you’re my girl.”

“Right.”

Mark was finally at ease. He had worried for days. The weather had not cooperated. He had been inundated from radio calls. Newhall called several times. Churchill had added to the pressure.

Sicily fell in a month. The Civil Affairs Officers were placed and began operations in Sicily. They were trained to set up public health, conduct, sanitation, agriculture, industry, transportation, and other activities. The proper state of operations in North Africa was a lesson Mark had learned well. It was imperative to preserve peace and order in a conquered country. It was not humanitarian, but a needed order for success of the war. The Allies could ill afford to detach troops from the battle to preserve signal and road communications, protect dumps, and convoys, and suppress resistance forces.

“I sent the corrected press release,” Mark barked into the radiophone. He sat red faced with anger in his chair behind his desk at headquarters. “There can’t be a God. If there is, he’s supporting the wrong side.”

Kiley looked up from her typewriter and through the open door into the room.

Dallas rose from his desk across from hers. “I’ll get some coffee. That usually calms him.”

“Put some brandy in it. I’ll take my pack of cigarettes. He’s certainly in a mood today.” Kiley walked into the lion’s den.

“What is it now?” Mark roared slamming his fist on the table.

“I thought you might like a cigarette. You say you think better when you smoke.”

“What I need is a break for my boys. Weather is always favorable for the Nazis, we’re fighting malaria, and now I’ve got the American press corps on my ass.”

“I’ll shove them right off.”

“What?”

“Your *derrière* is mine to ride,” Kiley teased. “I should have told the press corps long ago. I’ll tell them to leave the general’s *derriere* to my tender mercies.”

Mark’s rage succumbed to Kiley’s sarcasm. He took the cigarette she lit and started to chuckle. “If I didn’t need you more, I should send you to baby sit Patton.”

“Does he need me more?” Kiley queried saucily.

“Not anywhere near as much as I do,” Mark replied quickly. He gave her a wink just as Dallas walked in with a hot coffee.

“What happened Boss?” Dallas asked handing Mark the mug.

“I’ve gotten it directly from Newhall. I have to relieve Patton.”

“For what?” Dallas choked. “He’s one of the best generals we have.”

“That *faux pas* with stateside journalists and my media corps giving misinformation. In ten minutes the damage was already done,” Mark sighed. He took a long drag from his cigarette and drank some of the coffee Dallas gave him. “Good coffee. A taste of brandy always adds just the right flavor.”

“What are we going to do? Patton is doing a hell of a job. Where are we going to put him?” Dallas asked worriedly.

“They’re talking about Roundup again. The German generals think Patton is the top dog and all campaigns would center around him,” Mark replied.

“They respect generals like Patton. They have no idea what the Allies and press think of men like him,” Kiley scathed.

“I’m reassigning him to the Mediterranean. He’ll be a public relations general,” Mark shared. He held down a chuckle.

“That’s what I say is the pan calling the kettle black. Maybe I should transfer to Georgie’s staff,” Kiley winced.

“Pot calling the kettle black,” Dallas corrected.

“Isn’t that what I said?” Kiley snipped. “George Patton is a warrior not a public relation person. Whose bright idea was this anyway? General Newhall?”

A broad smile appeared on Mark’s face. “It was my bright idea. I’m putting Patton in charge of a non-existent army. It’s subterfuge in the extreme. The German will think he’s going to

spearhead the invasion. We leak information to the Nazi about army movements, and they think we're going to attack Calais."

"Clever, General," Dallas praised.

"I've got to keep Patton in the war. We are going to need him when the Allies attack France."

"Does Patton know about the fake army?" Kiley asked.

"Not yet," Mark replied.

"When he does find out I'm sure it will nearly shatter him," Mark responded raking his hair. "I can only hope his stubbornness will pull him through until I can give him a command in Europe. If I can."

"Still no word on the command?" Dallas queried.

Mark shook his head. "President Roosevelt and Churchill are going to have another summit, this time in Cairo. The command for Roundup will be decided then."

"I'll get you more coffee," Dallas volunteered. He knew Mark was fretting over many things and his battle plan for roundup most of all.

When Dallas left the room, Mark took Kiley's hand. He squeezed her hand gently. "I'll come to your room tonight. I need you."

Kiley smiled for him. "I'll be waiting."

Chapter 16

Kiley and Mark were in the back office on his plane. It was dark and away from prying eyes.

Kiley was sitting on Mark's lap under a blanket they shared. Although it was late summer, the plane was cold while flying at higher altitudes.

"I can't believe we're going to pick up the President of the United States," Kiley marveled.

"You're really excited about this aren't you?" Mark teased.

"Excited? You have no idea. I mean this is better than meeting the king. You're President is absolutely charismatic," Kiley bubbled.

"I think I'm jealous," Mark quipped.

"You have nothing to fear. I'm yours for the duration," Kiley countered.

Mark's hand invaded the secrets of her brassiere and squeezed gently. "I'm counting on that."

"We two are a sad lot aren't we?" Kiley said inhaling quickly. Pleasurable warmth was already pulsating between the private regions of her thighs. Mark stroked her sensitive nubs tenderly squeezing them between his thumb and forefinger.

"A sad lot indeed. Here we sit with desire and need for each other, but separated by our own responsibility, honor, and promises." Mark's lips descended upon Kiley's with gentleness.

A few moments later Kiley added, "We are also separated by our own fears."

"You mean fear of commitment?" Mark asked nibbling Kiley's lip seductively.

"That's one word for it."

"Are you unhappy with our arrangement?" Mark queried nervously. He was content with Kiley in his arms. He was feeling

things he never felt with a woman before. He liked these feelings. He wanted something more, but this was not the time or place. He was under obligation as a commander to win this war, and of course there still was the hurdle called Martie he needed to deal with.

“No, I’m quite comfortable with our arrangement.” Kiley cupped Mark’s chin with her hand. “This is a lovely affair. I am going to enjoy every moment with you. What ever is to come later, we will have to face then.”

Mark relaxed immediately. He and Kiley spent the rest of the flight teasing each other with kisses and caresses.

President Roosevelt was waiting in his car on the airstrip in Oran when Mark’s plane landed. The President was immediately placed on board, wrapped well with blankets to protect him from the chill.

The plane was refueled, the secret service boarded, more press corps, and Roosevelt’s aides added to the passenger list. The President and Mark spent the flight time together discussing geography, history, old battles, and new battles to come.

Kiley acted as hostess for Mark and the President. She served coffee and sandwiches. Arriving in Tunisia, Kiley left the plane first. She hurried to the Cadillac to prepare it for President Roosevelt.

The color guard and band played “Hail to the Chief” as they lifted Roosevelt from the plane to the ground and placed him in a wheel chair.

Mark walked next to the President as they approached the Cadillac.

A secret service man hurried to Kiley. He attempted to move Kiley away from her car.

“I beg your pardon,” Kiley shrugged pushing the man’s hands away.

“Look Lady, get out of the way,” the secret service agent said rudely.

“I’m the driver,” Kiley snarled.

“The hell you are,” O’Malley nastily returned. “No woman drives the President.”

“This woman does,” Kiley snapped angrily.

The agent motioned for other secret service agents who physically removed Kiley and put her into the arms of the MPs.

Kiley didn't go quietly. She scratched and kicked at the secret service agents, protesting every moment of their manhandling.

President Roosevelt noticed the scuffle. "What are my secret service agents doing to that child?"

Mark watched Kiley scratching and kicking. "I think it is more like what is that child doing to your secret service men," Mark laughed. When he passed by the military police he ordered, "Let her go."

Kiley shrugged and straightened her uniform. She glared at the offending secret service agent, David O'Malley.

When the President and Mark were seated, the agent ordered the private to drive. The car didn't move.

"You can drive can't you?" O'Malley growled.

"Of course I can drive," the private answered. "I've just never driven a Cadillac. I don't know where the gears are. The shift stick is on the column. I've never driven a car with a shift on the column."

Mark and Roosevelt were holding back their laughter.

Several minutes later Mark finally intervened. He put on his poker face and suggested, "You might ask my driver, Burke. She seems to handle the Cadillac quite well."

The secret service agent grudgingly got out of the car. "Burke!" He motioned for her to come to the car. "Uh, it seems this private doesn't know where the gear shifts are."

Kiley opened the driver's side door. She sat on the seat pushing the private into the middle. She put her foot down on the clutch. "This is the clutch. You do know what the clutch is?" she questioned icily.

The private nodded sheepishly.

Holding the clutch in, Kiley went through the gears. "First, Second, Third, and Reverse." She repeated the steps again. "Got it?"

"Yes ma'am," the private replied quietly.

Kiley got out of the car and leaned over the private who had returned to his seat behind the wheel. She glowered at the secret service agent. "Up the Republic," Kiley growled and then

slammed the car door. She went to the car that held Dallas and other staff members to ride to Tunisia with them.

The Cadillac lurched forward and all through the ride the private lurched the car, ground the gears, and couldn't brake properly nearly running into the secret service car in front of them. The President's ride was quite uncomfortable.

Roosevelt commented, "I do believe I will now know what a cowboy feels like riding a bucking bronco in a rodeo, Mr. O'Malley."

The agent was red faced. "I'm sorry, Mr. President. I will get a new driver for you."

"You will indeed, Mr. O'Malley. From now on the lovely child will drive this car. She seems to know how to operate it correctly. What is her name again, General Hauser?"

"Her name is Kiley, Kiley Burke," Mark responded biting his tongue so he wouldn't laugh. His eyes were glistening with tears of humor. It hurt to hold back his guffaws. It was obvious to him that the President was also holding back his mirth at the situation.

"Mr. O'Malley, by Presidential edict, Kiley Burke will be my official driver in Tunisia."

Mark swore he saw the secret service agent shrink into his seat.

"Yes, Mr. President," O'Malley acknowledged.

The car finally pulled up to the villa.

"This is quite lovely, Hauser," Roosevelt stated observing the grounds and house. "What is the name of it?"

"Oddly enough, Mr. President, it's called *The White House*."

The Presidential entourage disembarked and Kiley went immediately to the Cadillac. She was under the impression she was out of earshot when she cooed to the car, "You poor baby. Did that dimwit hurt you? I saw you bucking all the way. I hope he didn't strip your gears."

Mark and Roosevelt turned around and burst out laughing.

"Burke, take the baby to the garage and have the mechanics check her out," Mark ordered.

“You can also tell baby that her mommy will be driving the President from now on,” Roosevelt guffawed. He turned to Mark and whispered. “I really like that child.”

Mark responded, “So do I.”

Roosevelt winked in understanding.

At dinner Roosevelt made certain that Kiley sat next to him.

Kiley was a star struck child with the President. He was witty, intelligent, and a wonderful conversationalist. He asked her questions about her family, her heritage, and her reasons for coming into the war as a volunteer.

Roosevelt was impressed by Kiley’s intelligence, charm, wit, and beauty. She had questions on his life, his choices, and the Presidency.

Mark found he could barely get a word in between the two. He knew the war would rear its ugly head once more and discussions would be serious. For now, Mark enjoyed their conversation and was very proud of Kiley.

Later in the evening Kiley excused herself and left the room for the evening. Roosevelt was tired from the trip and desired to retire for the evening.

It was the first time in a long time that Mark remembered going to bed this early when entertaining an important political figure. Mark thought about sleeping with Kiley, but rejected the thought with the President in residence. President Roosevelt had expressed his desire to spend an additional day to inspect battlefields. Mark would have to wake up early to prepare for the day. His first order for the morning would be to have the kitchens pack a lunch for expedition.

Kiley was aroused early by the knocking on her door by Dallas.

“Wake up sleepy head,” Dallas teased. “You’ve got to get the Cadillac ready. You’re going to drive the President today.”

“What?” Kiley shouted. She reached for her wrapper and lunged for the door. On the other side of her door stood Dallas grinning like a Cheshire cat.

“I thought that news would make you move.”

“How did this happen? Where are we going? What time?”

“Whoa! One question at a time tiger!” Dallas chuckled. “Just get dressed and get the car ready. The President has requested that you drive him.”

Kiley grinned wickedly, “I bet that infuriated O’Malley.”

“Let’s just say I think O’Malley is eating a little crow,” Dallas shared. “The President didn’t have a very comfortable ride.”

Kiley tied the sash on her wrapper. She was elated. “Where are we going?”

“The President and General Hauser are going to tour some battlefields.”

“I’ll be down to breakfast in a half hour,” Kiley bubbled. She was excited and made no attempt to hide it. She, Kiley Burke, would be driving the most important man in the world today. This is what she wanted to do when she volunteered her services in the war. She wanted to really serve and make a difference.

“I have to admit this is a much smoother ride, General Hauser,” Roosevelt commented lightheartedly.

“Burke is an excellent driver,” Mark agreed.

Kiley smiled at the comments. The tour of the battlefields was going very well. The only downside was having O’Malley sitting next to her in the front seat. He was rather sour faced. Kiley enjoyed his dour mood.

“That oasis up ahead looks like a good place for a picnic,” Roosevelt noted. “Child, pull over by those palms.”

When Kiley didn’t respond, Roosevelt pursued. “Child? Child?”

Kiley looked into the rear view mirror and realized the President was talking to her. “Me? I’m hardly a child, Mr. President.”

“You are young woman, therefore you are a child,” Roosevelt enlightened. “Pull over to those palms up ahead.”

O’Malley immediately interrupted. “Mr. President, we’ve set aside a secure area up ahead for your picnic.”

“He is the commander in chief,” Kiley chortled. She made a hard right into the grove of trees as the President had requested. She opened the door and Mark emerged.

“I’m going to check out those tanks,” Mark announced. He wanted to study the abandoned tanks for reference on how they were disabled and what was the reason they were abandoned.

“Come have lunch with me, Kiley,” Roosevelt requested.

The secret service agents appeared from the other cars. They surrounded the area with Tommy guns. Soldiers finished the circles with rifles. The President’s private staff served the sandwiches and drinks.

Kiley was surprised by the conversation.

“I think you should become a WAC,” Roosevelt suggested.

“You have to be an American. I’m a British Subject,” Kiley replied.

“Would you like to be an American citizen?”

“I don’t know, Mr. President. I’ve never really thought about it.”

“Think about it, Kiley Burke,” Roosevelt ordered. “I think this decision will make an important difference in your life. I will do this for you.”

“I will think about it. I promise,” Kiley responded thoughtfully.

“Is there any dessert?” Roosevelt queried after finishing his sandwich.

“I’ll check for you,” Kiley volunteered. She sought out the presidential aides and returned with a piece of pie.

While the President enjoyed his pie and Mark returned from inspecting the tanks, O’Malley approached the President.

“Mr. President, we’ve been here longer than I recommend. I believe we should be going,” O’Malley requested.

“You see how many bosses I have?” Roosevelt shared with Mark.

“But, Mr. President, you’re the Commander in Chief,” Kiley protested. “Don’t you tell everyone else what to do?”

“A good commander listens more than commands,” Roosevelt replied. “Isn’t that true, General Hauser?”

“Very true, Mr. President,” Mark agreed.

“That’s why I’m a volunteer and not in command,” Kiley joked.

“I think you listen well, Kiley Burke,” Roosevelt said affectionately. “We’d better go now.”

The Hauser staff flew to Cairo with the Presidential party. Mark had more private meetings with President Roosevelt. Their talks were primarily concerned about postwar Europe and the problems it would embrace. Churchill pursued the need for the capture of Rome.

“I like the Legion of Merit,” Kiley remarked fingering the medal in the velvet box. “It’s a real honor coming from the President.”

“That it is, Kiley.” Mark kissed her forehead. He finally had a few moments alone with the woman he was developing strong feelings for. “What have you been doing these past days?”

“I’ve been shopping. What else? I’ve bought my mother, father, and sister some gifts. I bought a gift for Debbie. Her birthday is approaching and I thought I’d help you select a gift for her.”

“What did I buy my daughter?” Mark laughed.

“You bought her a magnificent carved gold ruby bracelet,” Kiley informed.

“You’re wonderful,” Mark appreciated. “How much did it cost?”

“You’ll see the bill on your desk,” Kiley teased. You will have to trust me on getting a bargain.

“I believe you would do that,” Mark chuckled. “Did you buy anything for yourself?”

Kiley shook her head no. “I have little need of anything. I did buy something for you.”

“What?” Mark asked excitedly.

“I bought a flimsy white satin peignoir.”

“How did you know my size?” Mark teased.

“It’s the perfect size.”

“I can’t wait to try it on,” Mark chortled.

“Oh, you can’t try it on. You can snuggle next to it some wonderful evening,” Kiley enticed.

“I can’t wait.”

“Neither can I. It’s been so long since we’ve been able to share ourselves,” Kiley sighed. “What’s next mon general?”

“The President leaves for Teheran in a few days. Churchill returns to England, Patton heads for the Mediterranean, and I head for dinner with Newhall.”

“Oh joy!” Kiley groaned.

“He’s invited the entire staff,” Mark stated. “That means you too!”

“He hates me!” Kiley protested. “Surely he couldn’t have thought to include me.”

“He said my entire staff is invited.”

“Then he doesn’t know I’m with you,” Kiley insisted.

“Then he doesn’t. I don’t see any reason why you shouldn’t come,” Mark retaliated.

“I’ll go to be with you, but I’ll stay in the shadows.”

“Good. The dinner is at eight tonight,” Mark informed. “Newhall has rented a house here.” He handed her a map with an address. “Can you find it?”

“I can find anything. I found you.”

“Yes you did,” Mark agreed. They heard voices in the hall. He gave her quick kiss. “We’d better get ready for dinner.”

“This is a feast!” Kiley exclaimed wiping a napkin across her mouth. She had just finished eating a slice of turkey with gravy. On her plate were turkey, dressing, cranberry sauce, potatoes, and zucchini. Her salad had been removed earlier. On the side of her plate was fresh warm rolls and real butter. After the dessert Kiley felt like the turkey that was served previously, stuffed. It was a wonderful satiated feeling she hadn’t allowed herself to feel in a long time. She considered how fortunate she was at this moment when America, The United Kingdom, and all allied countries were sacrificing and on rationing. She was offered an after dinner cocktail, but declined. This wicked full feeling was enough for the moment. Kiley rose from her dinner chair and walked to the opened doors to the garden.

“Where are you going?” Dallas queried. Although no one had told him, or did he ever see intimate behavior, he knew there was a relationship between Kiley and Mark. He felt obligated to watch over her when Mark couldn’t. It was a duty he assigned to himself. You could call it loyalty if you liked, but he liked the both of them and wanted them to be as happy as he was in his personal life.

“I have to take a walk,” Kiley replied.

“I’ll come with you,” Dallas volunteered.

“You finish your dessert,” Kiley suggested. “I’ll just be out in the garden.”

“I’ll be out later then,” Dallas responded.

Kiley walked out into the cool evening breeze. It felt wonderful. She walked to the flowerbeds and stood enjoying the fragrance and beauty. Suddenly she felt a presence behind her.

“Mark has kept you I see,” Newhall remarked. “You must be something in bed for him to keep you this long.”

“I beg your pardon,” Kiley replied turning to look at him. If she didn’t like Newhall before, she despised him now. How dare he speak to her like a common strumpet?

“You like Commanders? I’ll show you a good time,” Newhall sneered. “I like Mark’s taste in women.”

Chapter 17

Kiley stared wide-eyed at Oscar Newhall. What did he mean by that? Before she could even think of an answer, she found herself be grabbed by Newhall. His mouth descended upon hers brutally. His tongue invaded her mouth with brutal force. Kiley felt one hand pull up her skirt. He groped at her thigh pushing his hand up into her panties. His fingers assaulted her feminine haven. He probed and pinched causing great discomfort.

“You like this don’t you?” Oscar breathed heavily. “You like a man touching you.” He inserted three fingers into her.

Kiley whimpered, “Stop it, you’re hurting me. Stop”

“Oh you like it. I know you do,” Oscar contradicted.

Kiley began struggling with all her strength. Newhall applied more pressure. She felt blood trickling from her lips. Her struggles seemed to entice Newhall more.

“You need to behave little lady,” Newhall growled. He removed his hand from her pubic area and slapped her hard across her face.

Kiley nearly blacked out from the force of the blow. She felt his hand tearing the buttons off from her uniform blouse. His hand slid into her brassiere. Immediately she felt pain as he squeezed her teat. Again she nearly passed out from the pain. Kiley struggled to keep consciousness. With all her might she fought Newhall’s onslaught. He threw her on the ground. Never before had she felt so helpless. Not even during the Blitz did she feel so hopeless.

“Kiley? Kiley?”

She heard Dallas calling her. At last, Kiley had a shred of hope. Newhall had managed to raise her skirts and was starting to pull down her silk panties. Kiley bit down on Newhall’s intruding

tongue. He pulled his mouth from hers long enough for her to scream. "Dallas! I'm over here! Help..."

Newhall's fist slammed into her mouth. "Bitch!" he whispered. "You get me all hot and then play cold fish!"

"Kiley is that you?" Dallas questioned as he neared the two.

Kiley was knocked out cold. She didn't hear Dallas. She didn't respond.

"Damn," Newhall mumbled under his breath. He heard Dallas nearing him. Quickly he rose from the ground and headed toward a hedge of bushes. It took him to another walkway back into the house.

Dallas had heard Kiley's plea for help before the silence. He was very concerned. He kept walking toward the last sound of her voice. It was dark in the garden. In the quarter moonlight, only shadows could be seen. He saw a movement and walked toward it. He tripped and nearly fell. Righting himself he saw a bared leg. It was Kiley. "My God!" Dallas fell to his knees next to Kiley. He saw her exposed breast and covered it. He pulled down her skirt. His hand cupped her face trying to wake her. He felt her warm blood oozing from her lip. "Kiley, poor Kiley." Dallas picked her up and carried her into his car that was parked near by. It was still early enough in the evening that no one would miss him. He didn't think Kiley would want anyone to know what happened to her. He drove to the hotel they were staying at and took her to her room. Once Dallas had put Kiley on her bed he went to find a doctor. When he came back to her room with a physician Kiley was waking.

"Where am I?" Kiley asked weakly.

"I brought you to your room," Dallas answered. "What happened to you, Kiley?"

The doctor was already examining Kiley's face. "You can ask questions later. I need to take care of this."

"Kiley, I'm going back to the dinner party to let General Hauser know you're hurt," Dallas stated.

Kiley froze. She pushed away the doctor's hands. "Goddammit! You must not tell Mark anything. Tell him I went home sick. Tell him I ate too much."

"You can't possible hide this," Dallas protested.

“Discuss this later,” the doctor growled. He gently pushed Kiley down against the pillow. “You be quiet and lay down. I need to take of this. You look like you’ve been through a battle and lost.”

“I did lose,” Kiley choked. It was then she fell apart and started sobbing.

Dallas left her room. He fell apart after he closed the door. He knew someone had attacked her and was trying to rape her. He felt sick to his stomach. He used every bit of will power to pull himself together before he faced Mark.

“Dallas, where did you go off?” Mark questioned.

“I had to take Kiley back to the hotel. She wasn’t feeling well,” Dallas evaded.

“What’s wrong?” Mark asked worriedly.

“I don’t know for certain,” Dallas fibbed. “I just thought you would want to know she wouldn’t be able to drive you back to the hotel.”

“I’ll check on her before I retire,” Mark said.

“No!”

Mark furrowed his brow. “Dallas, what the hell is wrong?”

“Nothing, General Hauser. I meant that Kiley wasn’t feeling well at all. Maybe she should sleep and not be disturbed.”

“Maybe you’re right.”

“If you don’t mind, sir, I’d like to head back and call it a night,” Dallas requested.

“Go ahead. I’ll get a driver later.”

Dallas took his leave and drove back to the hotel. He met the doctor coming out of Kiley’s room. “How is she?”

“Badly bruised.”

“Was she raped?”

“No, I think you interfered with that when you called for her. At least that’s what she told me. I found no semen upon examination. I found only bruising.”

“Did she say who did this to her?” Dallas asked.

“She told me she couldn’t tell,” the doctor replied. “I think she was lying.”

“Can I talk to her?” Dallas requested.

“I gave her some sedative. She’s still awake, but she’ll be sleeping soon. You can talk to her for a little while. I think she could use a friend right now.”

“Thanks, doc.” Dallas went into Kiley’s room. “Hi!”

“Dallas, thanks for coming out,” Kiley said weakly. “You saved me. Hero!”

“From the looks of you I didn’t do too good of a job,” Dallas teased.

“I look that bad don’t I?”

Dallas became very serious. “Kiley, who did this to you?”

Tears streamed down Kiley’s cheeks. “I don’t know.”

“You’re lying, Kiley. Tell me who did this.”

“Dallas, there are times when things can’t be fixed or made right. Leave this be.”

“Kiley...”

“And for God’s sake don’t let Mark find out,” Kiley pleaded.

“How are you going to hide that shiner?” Dallas demanded.

“I’ll tell him that after you brought me home, I was so sick I fell into the door.”

“I’m just glad you weren’t violated. Then I would refuse to be silent,” Dallas grumbled.

“I wasn’t. Leave this alone.” Kiley was getting very sleepy. “I’m tired, Dallas.”

“Go to sleep.”

In minutes Kiley was sound asleep.

Dallas sat in the chair next to her bed. He was worried that whoever did this to her might try again. He was hardly a knight in shining armor, but he would stand watch tonight.

Fortunately Mark didn’t return to the hotel that evening. He remained at Newhall’s rented villa. Mark and Oscar continued talks and planning through the next day.

It gave Kiley an extra day to recover. She planned on staying in bed and her room. She planned on hiding. Her plan failed. The doctor Dallas found turned out to be one of President Roosevelt’s attending physicians. He reported the incident to the FBI and the President. Her visitor later in the morning was the President. She tied her wrapper and answered the knock.

“Good morning Kiley,” Roosevelt greeted as he wheeled himself into her room.

Kiley stepped aside. She raised her hand instinctively to cover the side of her badly bruised face and swollen lip.

“Don’t try to cover it, Child,” Roosevelt chided. “I know what happened last night. Doctor Philips is on my personal staff. What I want to know is who did this to you?”

“Mr. President, I don’t know.”

“You do know. Doctor Philips told me he thought you were lying. I know you are. Tell me who attacked you.”

“Please. I can’t tell you.”

“And why can’t you tell me? I can only assume it was someone high on my staff,” Roosevelt questioned.

“I c..c..can’t,” Kiley stuttered.

“You can and must. I will handle this carefully, child. I promise you.”

Kiley’s tears streaked down her face. She couldn’t control the sobbing that began.

President Roosevelt waited several minutes until Kiley calmed down. “You can trust me.”

“What am I to do? It was General Newhall,” Kiley confessed.

“I thought as much,” Roosevelt accepted. He rolled his chair to the window. “I’ve had reports. I didn’t want to believe them and I certainly can’t allow this to become public right now. I need him for the war. He is the best strategist on the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I can and will reprimand him. Don’t worry, child. I promise there will be no retribution to you or General Hauser.”

“What does General Hauser have to do with this?” Kiley gasped. She suddenly got a deep lump in her throat.

“I’ve seen the way you look at Hauser. I’ve watched the way he looks at you. You can’t fool an old fool,” Roosevelt revealed. “It’s alright. I understand. These things happen and I believe he needs you.”

“Mr. President,” Kiley addressed clearing her throat. “I don’t want anyone to know. Even Dallas Sterns is only guessing.”

“You have my word no one will know. I want you to get well quickly so I will be staying an extra day in Cairo. My personal physician will attend you and my chef will prepare your meals.”

“I’m fine, Mr. President. You needn’t trouble yourself.”

“It’s the least I can do. One of my own hurt you. I’m responsible,” Roosevelt raised his hands so she couldn’t interrupt.

“Other than that, the physician that attended to you suggested you eat soft foods for at least a day. That is what you will eat.”

“You are very kind,” Kiley appreciated.

“I want you to get better, child,” Roosevelt replied. He turned his chair to leave the room. “I have another person to attend. Excuse me, Kiley.”

Kiley couldn't speak. She was overcome with emotion. She was shocked that a man of such importance would even care about her welfare.

Roosevelt returned to his room. An agent was waiting for him.

“A dossier already?” Roosevelt questioned.

“This flew to Hoover,” the agent revealed. He handed the paper folder to the President.

“Get me Hauser. I don't want him to hear any story but mine. This is a delicate situation,” Roosevelt ordered reading the report in the folder. It was amazing how quickly J. Edgar Hoover received information, especially of a private matter.

Roosevelt had just finished reading the report when General Hauser walked into the room.

“You sent for me, Mr. President?”

“Yes I did. Take a seat General Hauser.”

Mark felt uneasy. Roosevelt's face was grim. The President's face was usually warm and friendly even when discussing the war. Mark obediently took his seat.

“Something happened last night and I want to be the person to tell you,” Roosevelt announced grimly.

Mark sat on a stuffed chair near President Roosevelt's wheelchair. Thoughts raced through his mind about what this conversation could possibly be about. He was not prepared for what the President told him.

“I'm sorry to say that last night Kiley Burke was attacked and injured. The child was not violated, but according to the physicians she is badly bruised,” Roosevelt explained.

Mark sat rigidly. He couldn't believe what he heard.

“Kiley is a proud woman. She made me promise I would not let anyone know what happened. I will keep that promise. My purpose of this conversation is to inform you that I know the perpetrator of this heinous act. I will handle the situation without

interference from anyone, especially you. That General Hauser is not a request, it is a Presidential order.”

“My I ask why, Mr. President?”

“No you may not,” Roosevelt stated firmly. “The child is going to tell you she stumbled and fell into a door. You will believe her story without question.”

Rage was beginning to build in Mark’s psyche. Not only was Kiley attacked and injured, the culprit would not be known to him and Kiley would be lying to him. It didn’t sit well at all. His hands began forming into fists. He wanted to know who hurt Kiley and slam those fists into his face. Yet he had to obey a Presidential order.

“I know this will be difficult for you, but being a commander in this war is difficult enough.”

Mark rose. “Yes, Mr. President. I think I’ll see to Kiley.”

“I understand General Newhall suggested you take a holiday. I suggest you take that time now,” Roosevelt added watching Mark walk to the door.

“I will do that, Mr. President.” Mark walked briskly to Kiley’s room. He didn’t bother knocking on the door first. Instead he grabbed the doorknob and opened the door. He was surprised to find it open, but more surprised to find Dallas with Kiley.

Dallas stopped applying the cool compresses on Kiley’s cheek when Mark walked in the room. He stood stiffly and saluted the general.

When Dallas dropped the cool compress Mark saw the bruising on Kiley’s face. He saw her bruised and cut swollen lip. Fury flowed from his body like a raging river. He covered up his emotion with that stoic Poker face. “What happened?”

“I wasn’t feeling well last night. Maybe I ate too much food. I felt dizzy, stumbled, and fell into a door,” Kiley lied.

Mark was hurt when Kiley lied to him. Obviously she didn’t trust him. It took all he had to maintain his calm and obey Roosevelt’s order. He walked to Kiley’s side and touched his fingertips to her bruises. “You did a real number on yourself.”

Kiley winced when Mark touched the bruises. Her face was still extremely sensitive. “Yes I did. Don’t remind me about what a klutz I am.”

“Sorry. I wanted to stop in and let you know that tomorrow we’ll be taking a little holiday to Luxor,” Mark announced. He

wanted to take Kiley in his arms and kiss away her hurts. Instead he had to pretend he knew nothing and believe her story.

“Luxor? How marvelous!” Kiley exclaimed happily. The smile hurt.

“Pack up your bruises tonight. We leave in the morning.” Mark smiled broadly even though he was seething in rage. He wanted to know who did this to her. He wanted to tear that person limb to limb.

“It’s a good thing the doc gave me some sedatives,” Kiley yawned. “Otherwise I’d be so excited I wouldn’t be able to sleep.”

Mark sat by the edge of the bed. He stroked Kiley’s hair while her eyes fluttered fighting the sleep she needed.

When Kiley was finally sound asleep Mark asked, “Dallas, who did this to Kiley?”

“She told you. She fell,” Dallas lied. He had promised Kiley he wouldn’t tell Mark he found her unconscious from an attack.

“Dallas, President Roosevelt told me Kiley had been attacked. There already has been a FBI report made. The President told me he wouldn’t tell me who did this for security reasons. Don’t lie to me,” Mark sighed taking Kiley’s hand in his. “I want to know who did this to her.”

“I honestly don’t know,” Dallas admitted. “I found her out cold in the garden. Her clothes mused. I brought her back here. The doc told me that the location of her bruises indicated she was attacked. Mark, she made me swear not to tell you.”

“I don’t know why she doesn’t trust me,” Mark responded sadly.

“Maybe we have to think like a woman,” Dallas suggested. “Maybe she thinks you would think that she enticed whoever did this.”

“That’s crazy,” Mark growled. “No woman would entice anyone for a beating like that.”

“I agree, but she’s stubborn. You know that. I’m sure she has her reasons.”

“I don’t know if we’ll ever find out who did this, but I won’t let this happen to her again,” Mark vowed. He took her hand and kissed her knuckles lovingly.

“You really care for her,” Dallas noted. “I mean more than a staff member. I mean...”

“It’s alright, Dallas. Yes, I care for Kiley a great deal. It is more than merely a staff member,” Mark confessed. “How did you know?”

“Instinct alone,” Dallas replied. “I wish the best for you and Kiley. The two of you seem happy together.”

“It’s a long hard road. We’ve both had bad marriages. Commitment scares the hell out of both us,” Mark explained. “I still have Martie to deal with. Newhall won’t sign the papers.”

“Not including a war,” Dallas agreed.

“We’ve got a lot going against us, but there is no reason Kiley should have to deal with this,” Mark rumbled. He didn’t know who did this. He wouldn’t know who did this, but he wanted to make sure it wouldn’t happen again. “I never want Kiley to be left alone again.”

“I’ll see to it,” Dallas stated.

“Without every saying a word or asking you’ve been her escort,” Mark noted. “Keep up the good work.”

“I failed this last time,” Dallas complained.

“Or succeeded. Kiley wasn’t violated. I think you interrupted the assailant.”

“I’ll keep a better watch,” Dallas announced.

“Thank you. Tonight I’ll keep the watch. Get some sleep.”

“If you’re sure,” Dallas replied.

“Go,” Mark ordered. He pulled a chair from the wall and placed it near the bed. “Will you see to it tomorrow that the car is ready to drive to the airfield?”

“Yes, General,” Dallas answered. “I’ll get a driver as well.”

“No, Kiley will drive. We’ll let her think I believe that bull about falling into a door.”

Dallas smiled and left the room.

Mark turned his attention to Kiley. She had already turned on her stomach and was sleeping soundly. Mark picked up the sheet and covered her shoulders. “Sleep well lovely Kiley. I’ll have some quiet time to think about the war.”

In the morning Kiley packed for the trip to Luxor. She dressed in her uniform and reported for duty. The car was ready for her to drive to the airfield. She had no idea Mark had spent the night in her room watching over her.

The trip to Luxor was magic. Mark and Kiley enjoyed the magic of the Sphinx, Temple of Karnak, and the obelisks of Ramesses II.

Kiley bought a new camera and they took turns taking pictures of this historic place.

The two days they spent were a great respite for the general and his driver.

Kiley was already on the mend physically.

Chapter 18

It was back to the war too soon. Mark visited more troops on a regular basis near the front in the following months. Salerno and Naples were in the hands of the Allies. Churchill was putting pressure on Mark to liberate Rome. The Nazis knew of the city's importance as well as the reluctance of the Allies to bomb it. The Nazi central communications for France, Italy, and Germany were in Rome.

At one of the visits to the troops in Caserta Mark was greeted with smiles from muddied soldiers. They joined in unison to a hearty welcome. "Welcome to sunny Italy, General Hauser."

The weather had been horrible. Where the soldiers gained ground from the Nazis, the Nazis left rubble. The rubble coupled with cold rain turned roads into impassable mudslides.

"You're going to love this story, Kiley," Mark chuckled cutting a piece of roast on his dinner plate. "General Coffey's driver came in complaining about this crazy country. He said *every durn river in Italy is named Volturno.*"

"Every river we've crossed had that name," Kiley agreed laughing. "I think he's right."

"There is no doubt in my mind that my boys are very special. Regardless of cold, mud, and enemy entrenchment, they joke," Mark bragged. "To me this war will be won on ingenuity and attitude."

"Speaking of ingenuity. Those tank dozers are now the most sought after job in the infantry," Dallas added.

"If the man that thought of them were here, I'd pin every medal we have on the man," Mark stated sincerely. "That's the

ingenuity I'm talking about. You can't win a war on brute force and masses. A war is won by ingenuity."

"I agree completely. The army with the longest sword, then the longest spear, then arrow, horse, catapult, crossbow..." Kiley started.

"Gunpowder, cannon, howitzer..." Dallas added.

"Navy, bi-plane, jeep, and tank dozer," Mark finished. "This is why we are a great team. We think alike."

"And we learn from our mistakes," Kiley included.

"Indeed," Mark agreed. "Which brings to mind our moving the headquarters from Algiers to Caserta."

"We've started the initiative, General Hauser," Dallas informed. "Some of our staff members aren't too happy."

"That's the time to move. When the command is in a comfort zone it is easy to forget the war and the men on the front," Mark said firmly.

"Have I told you recently how wise you are," Kiley admired.

"Not recently. You may begin," Mark teased tweaking Kiley's nose. He treasured these rare quiet dinners. Dallas shared their secret. Mark could touch her and relax with her. Deep within his mind he wondered what their future might be. He wondered when Newhall would release his divorce papers. What could he do other than wait out this war?

In the quiet after dinner Dallas left the two sitting in front of a fireplace watching the flames. Kiley was securely embraced in Mark's arms. He feathered her face with gentle kisses. They would spend the night together. Mark would leave in the early hours and they would begin the war all over again with duty.

"A message from General Newhall," Dallas said handing a paper to Mark Hauser.

Mark read it and looked at Dallas. "What is this supposed to mean?"

"I don't know sir, but you are scheduled to fly to Tunis to meet President Roosevelt for his return home through Sicily and Malta," Dallas replied.

"Is Kiley ready?"

"Yes she is, general. Kiley is really excited about seeing President Roosevelt again," Dallas responded.

“They really hit it off. President Roosevelt requested that Kiley come with me,” Mark shared.

“He may be President. He may be confined to a wheelchair, but he has a discerning eye for beauty, charm, and wit,” Dallas chuckled. “I’m happy you asked me to come along.”

“I need you as bodyguard for Kiley. Remember?”

“I never forget, sir!” Dallas snapped a salute.

“Let’s catch that plane. The President is waiting.”

When the plane landed, Kiley was the first one off. She walked directly to the President’s car.

President Roosevelt greeted her warmly, “Hello, child. I’m glad you could make it. I do so enjoy your company.”

“I’m thrilled to be here. And honored, Mr. President.”

“At times like these I must say I really appreciate my office. A beautiful woman honored to be in my company,” Roosevelt teased. “Here comes General Hauser. I have much to tell him.”

“I’ll sit in front with your driver if it’s alright with O’Malley,” Kiley chided.

“It’s alright,” O’Malley replied grudgingly. He got out of the President’s car and allowed Kiley to slide in.

Kiley grinned mischievously and sat between Roosevelt’s driver and O’Malley.

“Mr. President,” Mark addressed as the car door was opened for him. He started to enter the car.

“Mark, it has been determined that you are to be the allied commander of Overlord. The invasion of the European Continent across the channel,” Roosevelt announced before Mark sat down.

Kiley gasped.

Mark’s knees buckled and literally fell into the seat. “Mr. President. I thought you were considering Newhall for the position of commander of Overlord.”

“I did. Things have occurred that made me change my mind. Besides, you have a good working team,” Roosevelt noted. “I’ve been informed that it is difficult to remove commanders and replace them with another. We don’t have the time to create a new team.”

“That is very true, Mr. President.”

“I do want everyone to understand the importance of this position. Allied Commander won’t do anymore. I’m thinking Supreme Commander,” Roosevelt shared.

“That’s an impressive title,” Mark marveled. “This appointment was a difficult decision. I hope you won’t be disappointed.”

“A title for an impressive position,” Roosevelt returned seriously. “I’m confident in my appointment and so should you.”

“First, we have to discuss your safe return to the States,” Mark interjected. He was overwhelmed with the surprise of the appointment. He focused on the immediate concern for the President and his safe trip back to the United States. “We’re spending the night in Tunis and flying you to Malta in the morning.”

“I want to personally award a citation to Lord Gort and the garrison for their gallant defense of the island.”

“We’ve arranged for that as you wished. The next day we’ll be in Carthage for General Matthew’s decoration.”

The General and President continued to discuss the details for the planned trip until they arrived back at the rented villa.

During dinner the discussion revolved around Hauser’s transfer to London. Roosevelt also discussed two important points that concerned him. Mark was concerned about the timing of the announcement of his appointment. The other concern was what the President toyed with in regard to the proper title for the commander of Overlord. He played around with Supreme for most of the night. Roosevelt decided that the announcement should wait until he was in Washington. He would continue to think about the title.

Kiley took the back seat to the war once again. Mark was consumed with planning operations for his staff for overlord. He spent hours in planning sessions with his staff and aides.

“Hello there! Any coffee left?” Mark asked Kiley. He had walked into the kitchen and found Kiley sitting at the table drinking coffee and reading a book.

“Yes General. I’ll get you some.” Kiley rose and pulled a mug from its peg. She walked to the stove and poured Mark a cup of coffee.

Mark liked his coffee black and strong.

“This should be strong enough,” Kiley said handing Mark the coffee mug.

Mark took a sip. “It’s good. Just the way I like it.”

Kiley looked up from her book and smiled. “You’ve been really busy.”

“I’ve neglected you.”

Kiley reached across the table and placed her hand on Mark’s hand. “Don’t ever think that. I don’t matter at all. The defeat of the Nazis is the only thing that matters. You can do that. I believe you can, President Roosevelt believes you can, the Allied Forces believe you can. This is all that matters, winning the war.”

“I wish I was as sure as you are about my abilities. I’ve been worrying, strategizing, and contemplating the reassignments, the staffs, the team. If only I was certain as you are.”

“Take my word for it,” Kiley ordered with a large smile on her face. “Obviously we can’t all be wrong.”

That made Mark laugh. It felt good. He had been serious for too long.

“When did President Roosevelt decide when he was going to announce your appointment?” Kiley asked as she poured herself another cup of coffee.

“I haven’t been told,” Mark replied. “I have been told he is going to make a significant speech Christmas Eve. Until then we have to keep this a secret.”

“Christmas Eve is only three weeks away.”

“Enough time for me to do a tour of a battlefield in Italy.”

“You’re not!”

Mark looked at Kiley strangely. “What do you mean by that?”

“You’re about to begin the bloody end to this war and you intend to take a chance at the front?” Kiley growled. “Are you out of your bloody mind?”

“Yes. I always have been,” Mark countered. “My boys need to see their commander up at the front with them.”

“Let them see their new commanders. Not you!” Kiley declared.

“They won’t be new commanders for awhile. We have to wait for the formal announcements,” Mark stated.]

“There is no talking to you about sanity is there?” Kiley questioned.

“Especially since you are part of my insanity,” Mark replied quite seriously.

Kiley cocked her head. “I’m part of your insanity?”

“Darling, what can I offer you? Yet, you are always around for me. You hold me when I need to be held. You love me when I need to be loved. You never complain when business takes control. You’ve never asked anything of me. I don’t understand why I need you. I’m not even sure why I feel about you the way I do. Still I’m crazy for you,” Mark explained. “That’s insanity.”

“Mark, you offer me what I need. I am held when I need to be held. I’m loved when I need to be loved.”

Mark rose from the table and walked to Kiley. He lifted her into his arms and kissed her deeply. “Thank you for being here with me.”

“My pleasure,” Kiley whispered breathlessly between kisses.

“How was your trip?” Kiley asked greeting General Hauser after he disembarked from his plane. He had returned from the Italian front and had landed in Tunisia.

“Informative and beneficial,” Mark answered. He was always in a good mood when Kiley greeted him after a trip. He missed her more each time he was away.

Kiley opened the car door and whispered into Mark’s ear when he bent to enter the car. “I missed you.”

“I did too,” Mark responded.

When Kiley had taken her position behind the wheel she announced, “The Prime Minister and many of his staff are waiting for you.”

“Thank you for the warning,” Mark sighed. “It will be a long night.”

Churchill was waiting when Mark arrived. The staff immediately met to discuss the Anzio invasion. The talks went on for days.

On Christmas Eve Kiley, Dallas, Harry, and Mark listened to the radio. President Roosevelt announced the appointment of General Mark Hauser as Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Forces.

“That’s an imposing title,” Kiley remarked after hearing the announcement.

“How am I going to fit that exalted title on stationary?” Harry teased.

“I have complete confidence in you,” Dallas laughed.

Sean appeared in the room. “Christmas dinner is waiting.”

After dinner the staff was treated to a skit presented by Noel Coward.

During the show Dallas pulled Mark out. In his hand he held a telegram he gave to Mark. “It’s from General Newhall.”

Mark opened it. “He wants me to come to Washington. Get him on the radiophone.”

In minutes he was talking to his superior officer.

“Merry Christmas, Mark,” Newhall greeted.

“Thank you, sir. Happy Holidays. I hope Lucille and your family are well.”

“We are. I spoke to Martie and Deborah just this morning. They are having a lonely holiday without you, but Lucille and I are doing our part to cheer them.”

Mark said nothing. He was upset that Newhall still seemed to intimate that he and Martie were still a couple. “I spoke with Deborah yesterday.”

“Yes she told me.”

“About your telegram,” Mark reminded.

“You should come home for a breather before you start your new assignment. You’ve been away from your family and country too long,” Oscar reprimanded.

“General Newhall, time is limited. I must familiarize myself with the essentials of the problems there.”

“Let someone else run the war for twenty minutes,” Oscar commanded. “That is an order.”

“I’ll tie up some loose ends and then I’ll return for a breather. It should be sometime mid January.”

“We’ll be expecting you,” Oscar stated. The radiophone connection ended.

Time raced by as the New Year approached. Mark had little time to set up his replacement administration and plan for Overlord. He managed to do both in a short period.

Kiley served patiently during these busy days for her general. There was no time for each other, but that was understood.

“General Patton is here,” Dallas announced to Mark while he was finishing his notes on administration, replacements, promotions, demotions, Anzio invasion, and the move of the headquarters to Caserta.

“Send him in,” Mark responded.

Patton entered the room quietly. He was a subdued personality ever since his reassignment as a figurehead general in the Mediterranean.

“George, thank you for coming,” Mark greeted.

“You’re the commander,” Patton replied. “This must be important for you to call me here.”

“I wanted to tell you first. I’m promoting Bradley to be the highest American ground command in Overlord. I wanted you to know that since you were previously his superior,” Mark elucidated. “Can you accept that?”

“I’m happy for Bradley. He’s a first rate soldier. He deserves the promotion and the position,” Patton stated without hesitation.

“Good, because I’ll be giving you a command in Overlord. You’re an army commander and a good one,” Mark praised. “But Goddammit George, you’ve got to keep your mouth shut.”

“Give me a command and I’ll have it sewn shut,” George pleaded.

“You’re going to have to get it sewn now, George. I haven’t finalized anything yet. I still have Newhall and the joint chiefs to convince,” Mark explained.

“I’ll do anything to be back in this war. I was born for it. I need to be a part of it. I’ve put my foot in it. I know,” Patton sighed. “I’ll do anything.” Tears flooded his eyes.

“You see, George,” Mark ragged. “Soldiers do cry.”

Patton stood steadfast choking back his emotion.

“What you can do for me is win battles,” Mark requested.

“I’ll make you a hero and a genius. I promise,” Patton said firmly. In the future he would keep that promise.

Hauser toured Italy one last time and returned to Algiers only to learn that Churchill was very ill at Tunis.

Churchill had made it to Marrakech and asked Mark to join him there on the way to the United States.

“Be careful. I’ll be thinking of you,” Kiley said to Mark in his office before he departed to Marrakech. It was the only private moment they had since President Roosevelt’s announcement on Christmas Eve.

“You take care also,” Mark warned. “Stay close to Dallas. I don’t want you falling into any more doors.”

“Don’t you worry, I’ll be a lot more careful,” Kiley promised.

“Kiley, I can’t promise you anything. You know that.” Mark wanted to tell her how much he loved her. He wanted to ask her to marry him, but he couldn’t because legally he was still married.

“I do know it. I accept it. Whatever the future brings we will live with it. We have too! This bloody war has taught me a powerful lesson in reality.” Kiley had seen too much death in this war to believe in perfect happiness.

“What I want you to know is that I’m returning to the States because of orders, but I’m going to try and get this marriage with Martie ended,” Mark explained. “I can’t promise you anything.”

“Please come back to me,” Kiley choked out. “I can’t ask more than that.” Kiley moved her mind to something else so she wouldn’t cry. She walked over to her desk and retrieved a leather camera case. “One favor.”

“What is it?” Mark asked.

“This is my new camera. You know how much I love snaps. Could you take pictures of Washington for me? Please? I’ve put in several rolls of film.”

“I’m going to the White House. Those should be nice snaps.”

“Thank you,” Kiley replied happily as she handed the leather camera case to Mark.

Dallas and Harry walked in at that moment. Kiley and Mark separated quickly. Mark finished putting his papers in his briefcase. “Now that you are here I want you to know I’ve sent transfer papers for all of my administrative office staff. You will be sent back to London. Harry, I want you to locate a suitable office for SHAEF in London. Dallas, I want you to see if Cable

Cottage is still available. If it is, I want you and Kiley to set it up for my return. If not, find something similar.”

“Yes, General,” Dallas replied quickly. “Your car is ready.”

“I’m not driving you?” Kiley asked in surprise.

“Not this time,” Mark answered. He couldn’t tell her in front of Harry and Dallas that he didn’t want to leave her behind. It hurt badly enough here. It would be worse at the airfield. “Finish off all the current correspondence and see to it is forwarded to the new headquarters. You can keep in touch with me through the joint chiefs if you need me.”

After those instructions Mark left for his car leaving Dallas, Harry, and Kiley standing in the office.

“I don’t think the boss likes good byes,” Dallas noted. He said it mainly for Kiley’s sake. She looked quite forlorn.

Kiley quickly recovered her emotions. She was made of sterner stuff. Life must go on. “We’d better get back to work. We have a lot to do.”

Chapter 19

Mark Hauser arrived a day earlier than expected. His plane had arrived at the airfield at 1:00 in the morning. On his arrival he was met by various aides to the joint chiefs and met with them for several hours. His arrival had been announced to President Roosevelt at 5:00 in the morning. The President requested a meeting immediately. Mark was already being driven to the White House.

“You’re not too tired are you?” Roosevelt asked with concern.

“I slept comfortably on the plane. I am quite rested. I hope this isn’t too early for you,” Mark answered.

“I’ve been awake for several hours and I’ve already sent for our breakfast,” Roosevelt replied. “We’ll be spending most of the day together. We have a lot to talk about.”

Roosevelt and Mark did spend nearly the entire day discussing the invasion, strategies, and logistics.

During lunch an aide handed a message to President Roosevelt. The President smiled, folded the paper, and nodded to the aide. “Thank you.” Roosevelt turned the conversation to personal matters after receiving the note. “How is Burke?”

“She is doing well,” Mark replied. He wondered what suddenly brought her as a subject up in the President’s mind.

“I have an autographed photo for her. She asked me for one you know.”

“I didn’t know,” Mark answered honestly.

“I want you to give it to her. You will see her again. You’ve sent her to London?” Roosevelt queried.

“Yes sir.” Mark wasn’t surprised that the President already knew he had ordered his immediate administrative office staff to England.

“There is talk in Washington about the two of you,” Roosevelt related calmly.

“It’s a shame that’s all the gossips have to talk about,” Mark joked.

“I agree. I have my own share of gossips to deal with,” Roosevelt laughed. “Still, I want you to know that I am fond of Kiley Burke. I don’t want her hurt. She’s already had a share of sorrow and burden.”

“I don’t plan to hurt her,” Mark defended. He wasn’t sure how much the President knew about him and Kiley. He also wasn’t certain how much he should reveal.

“See that you don’t. Make things right between you. A man isn’t often given a second chance,” Roosevelt cautioned wisely. “As for the two of you, I want you to know I understand.”

“I’m not sure what you mean,” Mark responded. He didn’t know what to say.

“Things will work out. You’ll see,” Roosevelt answered with a wide grin. “I think you should go home right now. Your apartment in Washington, correct?”

“I had almost forgot about it,” Mark confessed. “I was thinking about acquiring a hotel room.”

“Your visit here is confidential. It would be kept more a secret if you stayed at the apartment,” Roosevelt recommended. “I’ll have my car take you there with an agent.”

“Thank you, Mr. President, but that isn’t necessary,” Mark rejected.

“No problem at all,” Roosevelt grinned broadly. “You’ll see. Everything will work out for you.”

Mark thought the President seemed to know something he wasn’t sharing. He shrugged the thought and shook the President’s hand as he was leaving. An agent met him in the hall. He was holding a paper wrapped package that Roosevelt had told him was the autographed photo of himself that Mark was to give to Kiley.

The agent opened the car door for Mark when they arrived at Mark’s Washington apartment. He took his briefcase and the camera bag Kiley had given him. He had already taken pictures of

the White House for her. He had to admit he enjoyed taking pictures and could see that turning into a hobby for him as it was for Kiley. To Mark's surprise the agent had a key to the apartment and opened the door for him.

Mark entered his apartment. He hadn't been there for over a year, but everything looked in order and cleaned. He immediately wondered if Martie was using it while he was in Europe. While he was thinking of Martie he realized he actually heard her voice. It was faint, but definitely her voice. He was ready to walk out the door when he heard a male voice. *What the devil is going on?* Still carrying the camera case he walked toward the bedroom. He heard Martie more clearly. She was making throaty sounds. The male voice was making moaning sounds. "Goddammit, Martie is having sex," Mark whispered to himself. An idea struck him immediately. "There must be a God."

Mark pulled out Kiley's camera. He took two bulbs for the reflector and set the camera to take the first picture. He opened the bedroom door silently. He saw a naked male body on top of his ex wife and took a picture.

As the flash went off a growl was heard. The man on top of Martie had reached his climax. It wasn't until the second flash of light did the entwined pair realized they weren't alone.

Mark put another bulb in the reflector. He took another picture as the man turned to face him. He clicked the shutter and realized who the man was.

"What the hell?" Oscar snarled.

Martie groaned. She grabbed a sheet to cover herself. "Oh my God."

The agent walked in behind Mark.

"I always suspected this," Mark stated sourly. "I simply would not have believed it would be you, Oscar."

"Mark, we need to talk," Newhall attempted to excuse. He grabbed his shorts and put them on.

"Yes we do. You and Martie get dressed. Agent McNamara and I will wait for you two in the living room."

Newhall was the first to appear in the living room. He walked to the side bar and poured himself a drink of Scotch.

“You seem to know your way around,” Mark noted. Newhall knew exactly where the Scotch, soda, ice, and glasses were kept.

Martie walked in tying a large sash on her purple silk robe. “You weren’t expected home until tomorrow,” she snarled to Mark.

“Obviously,” Mark sneered. “How long has this been going on?”

“What difference does it make?” Newhall snapped.

“Do you even care?” Martie growled.

“Yes I care,” Mark snarled in return. “The two of you had made certain my life remained tied in knots.”

“So sorry! I can’t believe you didn’t take advantage of that little Irish trollop! I know all about that little whore you want,” Martie spat angrily.

Mark found it difficult but did not respond. Instead he shut out his anger and remained calm. “How long?”

“It really doesn’t matter now does it?” Newhall answered regaining his own calm. “Several years.”

“You’re nothing without my father’s money. You think your war will change this? The war won’t last and then what are you going to do?” Martie challenged. “You need me no matter what the terms.”

Mark continued to ignore Martie. He walked to the wet bar and poured a scotch.

“What next?” Newhall questioned. This calm of Mark’s was nearly unnerving. “I’m waiting for the accusations, assumptions, and anger?”

“You have to really care about your marriage to get angry. I don’t,” Mark replied.

“How dare you!” Martie shrieked with rage. “I gave you everything. Money! Social Status! Manners! I even gave you a child!”

Mark turned to Martie. “You gave me our daughter. She is the one bright light to our marriage. The money and status is your daddy’s. As for manners? The fancy lace napkin doesn’t determine class and which side of the plate a spoon rests. Emily Post doesn’t determine class.”

“You clod! You dull clod!” Martie raged. She rose to strike Mark with her balled fists.

Mark blocked her punches and grabbed her wrists. "Sit down and be quiet. We have issues to address."

"We have no issues," Martie snarled pulling her wrists free. "I've sacrificed my life to bring you to this point. I've been the perfect hostess. I've wined and dined all the right people. Everything for you and your career."

"You did all that for you, Martie," Mark countered. "You love being the Army wife. You love showing off to all the wives. It never had anything to do with me."

"You can't survive in the military without daddy and me," Martie shouted. "Go ahead and try. You'll see!"

"What do you intend to do?" Newhall asked downing the last of his scotch.

"I want my divorce papers signed," Mark demanded. "I want them handed to me tomorrow."

"Is that all?"

"You are my superior officer. I respect you and admire your knowledge and skills. The fact you have been lured into bed by my flirtatious wife is a small matter I can overcome," Mark elucidated. "You must remember, Oscar, my marriage was over a long time ago. I've been separated for more than two years. I'm tired of the charade."

"You hold no ill will?" Newhall asked. He was not only surprised by Mark's attitude, he was shocked. A husband usually went into a rage when he found his wife in bed with another man, even if he was divorced.

"Oh, I do hold ill will. It can wait until after the war. As for Martie, nothing she does surprises me. Our marriage has been sour for a long time. I am finally what I want to be."

"And what pray tell is what you want to be?" Martie snipped. "This great thing you have achieved without the right connections?"

"I'm a general in the war. I am playing an important role in the winning of this war," Mark bragged. "I'm doing what I was trained to do and I'm doing it well. I am doing what needs to be done with my own knowledge and skills. It has nothing to do with your teas, Martie."

"I'll give you the papers tomorrow," Newhall interjected. "I want those pictures you took."

"I'll keep them. You give me the divorce papers tomorrow and I won't show them to Lucille. That was rather hypocritical of you, Oscar. You kept telling me about the sanctity of marriage while you were sleeping with Martie."

"That's rather sanctimonious of you, Mark. You've been sleeping with that Irish woman," Newhall countered.

"I won't bother answering that," Mark replied solidly. "I haven't been sleeping with Lucille."

"She wouldn't have you," Newhall growled defensively.

"No, you're right, Lucille wouldn't have me. She loves you. Lucille really believes in her marriage."

"I love you," Martie defended.

"You have a strange way of showing it. How many other men?" Mark asked.

"Mark, let's work this out. We'll try again," Martie pleaded.

"No!"

"When are you going to tell Deborah about your divorce?" Martie queried snottily.

"Our divorce, Martie. It's our divorce," Mark responded heatedly. "Give me the papers tomorrow Newhall and I'll visit Debbie this week."

"Mark, I'll give you the signed divorce papers, but for God's sake we can't let this go public. Surely you realize this," Newhall said reasonably.

"No I don't realize that," Mark snapped angrily.

"Look at what the press did with Patton. How are they going to handle your divorce and your precious driver?"

Mark immediately thought about Kiley. He couldn't let her suffer a minute because of his marital mistakes. It wouldn't be fair to her to put her through a scandal she was innocent of. Kiley had more than her share of tragedy and sorrow. No he wouldn't let the press badger her. "I do understand. All right, the divorce will be final but there will be no public announcement. I will tell, Debbie."

"It's best this way," Newhall assuaged. "We both agree that winning this war is the priority. We don't want to jeopardize all we've already worked for."

"When the war is over, this charade is over," Mark said impatiently.

“Agreed,” Newhall stated. “I’d better get back home.”

“I think you should take Martie with you,” Mark suggested. “I don’t want her here and I’m dead tired. You’ve had Martie as your guest previously. I’m not expected until tomorrow. You can tell Lucille that Martie is nervous expecting my arrival.”

“I’ve done it before,” Newhall agreed. “Martie, why don’t you get dressed and pack some things?”

“It will just take a minute. I certainly don’t want to be with him tonight. Not in his mood,” Martie capitulated.

“What about your watch dog in the kitchen?” Newhall asked. He was curious how Mark managed to enter the apartment and happened to have a secret service agent with him.

“President Roosevelt assigned him to me. You needn’t worry about him talking to anyone. He’s under the highest authority,” Mark assured. He remembered once again he thought it strange the agent had a key to the apartment. Mark realized instantly that Roosevelt had known Oscar and Martie were here. The President had planned this rendezvous all along. A smile covered Mark’s face. “Thank you Mr. President. I’ll make you proud for this,” Mark whispered.

Several minutes later Martie appeared. She was dressed and had a small bag. “I’ll see you later, Mark. We’ll discuss things when we both have clearer minds.”

Newhall took Martie’s arm and led her from the room.

Mark watched them leave. “I think Oscar really cares for Martie,” he marveled.

“If you won’t be needing me, sir, I’d like to return to the White House,” the agent stated. “I’ll return in the morning.”

“Thank you,” Mark appreciated. “I am tired and I do want to sleep.” He walked the agent to the door. In minutes Mark had stripped down to his boxers and crawled into the bed. He slept soundly until morning.

Mark woke to the smell of coffee and the aroma of bacon and eggs.

“Good morning General Hauser,” the agent greeted. “I took the liberty of making us breakfast. I’ll be assigned to you as your bodyguard for the duration of your visit.”

Once again Mark was surprised. He knew the gentle hand of Roosevelt was involved again. “You know how to cook?”

“Yes sir. I’m a bachelor. If I don’t cook I don’t eat,” the agent chuckled.

“I’ve learned to be somewhat of a cook myself. How about grilling some steak tonight?” Mark offered.

“I’d like that sir,” the agent responded serving the general his plate of eggs. “The President said you would be stateside about a week.”

“I have some meetings today with the joint chiefs and then I need to visit my daughter at Radcliffe.”

“I’ll arrange everything.”

Two days later Mark and Martie boarded a train for Cambridge to visit their daughter.

“Separate sleeping compartments?” Martie grouched.

“You could have brought Oscar,” Mark retorted. “If you’re lonely.”

“That is beneath you,” Martie snapped.

“Perhaps, but don’t count on me keeping you company,” Mark answered. “I’m immune to your flirtatiousness.”

“You’re my husband!”

“Not any more!” Mark declared. “We are divorced and finally I am my own man.” It did feel as though a load had finally been lifted from his shoulders. He felt more confident about his role as a military leader in this war. Martie’s constant harping had worn him down and she did make him believe that he was nothing without her, her father, and her father’s money.

“I’ll never let you go,” Martie warned. “You may have your divorce, but I’ll get you back. You’ll come back to me. You’ll see!”

“Don’t count on it,” Mark returned heatedly. He was tired of Martie’s threats. “This will be the last time we’re together. We will tell Debbie about the divorce.”

“You’ll tell Deborah. I won’t. This is a temporary situation at best.”

“Goddammit Martie, we’re through! Finished! Ended! Believe it!”

“You live in a fantasy world. You always have,” Martie shouted.

“I think you’re the one that lives in the world of fantasy,” Mark returned. “I’m leaving for my compartment.” He left her

compartment and went to his. He slammed the door shut and locked it. He had to get control of himself once again. He was free at last. All he had to do was tell Debbie.

Mark pulled maps and papers from his briefcase. He studied the coast of France and the five tentative plans for invasion. He closed his eyes, removed his glasses, and rubbed the bridge of his nose. His thoughts drifted to Kiley. What was she doing now? If his orders had been followed she would be with his administrative staff flying back to England. He wanted her back in his arms. Mark daydreamed about holding Kiley. Together they would watch the flames in the fireplace of Cable Cottage. She loved the simple things in life just like he did. At last he could tell her he loved her, wanted her, and needed her. He realized he wanted her with him forever. He would ask her to marry him. Then he suddenly froze in fear. Would Kiley want an older man? What would Debbie think of him?

These thoughts were dangerous and frightening. All Mark's decisions about the war were solid and certain. What would people think of him if they knew he was afraid of his feelings for a woman?

"I've got work to do," Mark said to soothe his worried mind. He through himself into his files, maps, and papers.

Martie was fuming. She paced the railcar planning her next move. She hadn't worked this hard to get into this social stratum to lose it because of an errant husband. Obviously threatening Mark with money didn't work any more. It would be different once the war was over. He would need her money once more. She would just have to play a few games with Mark and the public a little longer.

"You'll come back to me," Martie swore under her breath. "I'll simply play your game a little longer." Her resolve was strong. Sitting down on a chair after pouring herself a drink, Martie planned her next moves.

They arrived in Cambridge in the early morning hours. Agent Mullins had a car and driver waiting for Martie and the general at the train station. They drove to a hotel near Radcliffe University.

Mark registered for two rooms.

Martie was quiet throughout the ride to the hotel and didn't protest when Mark gave her the key to her room. He paid a bell boy to take Martie and her luggage up to her room.

Mark traveled light. He and Mullins took their luggage up to the room they would share themselves.

"I've sent word to your daughter of your arrival," Agent Mullins reported. "She's expecting you and your wife to take her to dinner this evening. I've arranged for a dinner table at Heathcliff Sides."

"Efficient as always," Mark noted. "Roosevelt has loaned me one of his best men. I'm grateful."

Mullins smiled.

"I think I'll nap before I prepare for dinner."

Chapter 20

“Daddy!” Debbie greeted waving happily. She was waiting out front the sorority house when her parent’s car arrived.

Mullins got out of the car and opened the door for Debbie to enter.

Mark greeted his daughter with open arms. He was so happy to see her. “You look more beautiful every time I see you.”

“Oh Daddy, every father feels that way about their girls,” Debbie giggled and snuggled into her father’s arm like she always had for as long as she could remember. “Where are we going to supper?”

“Hello darling,” Martie injected.

“Hi Mommy,” Debbie returned. “I guess I was so excited about seeing Daddy I forgot my manners.”

“You’re forgiven this time,” Martie allowed. She knew her daughter was the single thread that kept her near Mark. “I have been fortunate to see you more often than your father.”

“What is going on anyway?” Debbie queried. “You and Daddy haven’t been in the same place for almost four years.”

“Sweet Pea, we have something to tell you,” Mark said clearing his throat. His daughter was bright. He knew there were no hiding their difficulties of marriage from her. Martie had used Debbie as an excuse to stay married even if they would lead separate lives.

“Go ahead,” Debbie responded. “I don’t want to waste our time together with useless conversation of avoidance. You and Mom have done that far too long. I’m a grown woman now.”

“You are still and always be my little girl,” Mark countered with a large smile. Debbie indeed was a woman. She was a lovely and intelligent woman he was proud of.

“Oh Daddy,” Debbie blushed. “I love you for that. Still get on with it.”

“Your father is trying to tell you that we are divorced as of this morning,” Martie blurted out. She hoped her daughter would be shocked and weepy. If Deborah were upset she might cling to Mark’s sense of duty a bit longer.

“I’ve expected this for some time,” Debbie replied calmly. “I’m sure it’s for the best. Neither of you have been very happy in this marriage. I wish you both well. So where are we going to dinner?” She wasn’t surprised. She didn’t understand why her father had stayed as long as he did. She heard the arguments at night when her parents thought she was asleep. Even she felt strangled under her mother’s dominance and harping. College was her freedom and she was happy for her father that he now had his. She would tell him later or in a letter when he returned to the front. Her father’s position had made her the most popular and influential student at Radcliffe. It was nice but she was worried for her father and his life the same as the other students were about theirs.

“We have reservations at Heathcliff Side,” Mark answered. He didn’t believe how calmly Debbie had taken the news. Martie had railed him for years how devastated their daughter would be by a divorce. Another load had been lifted from his shoulders. This trip to Washington had been worthwhile for the strategy of the war effort and his personal life.

“How long can you visit?” Debbie asked worriedly. She wished she could spend a little private time with her father. She wanted to share her senior year with him, her grades, and more importantly the young man in her life. She and Charles had agreed to keep their romance a secret until graduation. As the daughter of the Supreme Commander, she was under too much scrutiny and she wanted to tell her father about Charles before the press did.

“I’ve only got three days,” Mark stated sadly. He wanted more time with his daughter, but the war was more important than his personal life.

“And we’ll spend these three days as a true family,” Martie inserted. This was a thread she could use to carry on the façade of marriage. She wouldn’t let Mark go. He would have no peace until he came back to her.

Mark ignored Martie’s remark. He didn’t want to spoil this short time with his daughter with arguments.

The family did have a quiet dinner. Debbie told her father about school, her friends, her life, and graduation.

“I won’t make it to your graduation,” Mark confessed. “My heart will be with you.”

“I know, Daddy,” Debbie soothed. “What you’re doing is more important. We’ll have time later. We’ll make up for it then. Imagine, my Daddy is Supreme Commander of Allied Forces.”

“You make that title sound greater than it is,” Mark beamed. “You make me feel important.”

“You are, Daddy,” Debbie beamed. “I’ll take every moment we have as a treasure.”

Debbie was true to her word. Father and daughter took off early in the morning for a walk on the University grounds. It was during that private time she introduced Charles Blanchard. She was thrilled when her father accepted her future husband and approved of their relationship.

Later in the afternoon Debbie introduced Charles to her mother. Debbie thought her mother was acting rather strangely. Normally she would intimidate and dominate all conversations. This time her mother was soft spoken and unusually restrained. Although she didn’t understand it, Debbie took advantage of it.

Even Mark was surprised by Martie’s behavior, but he was grateful. The three days he had with his daughter were some of the happiest memories he would have from this war. The other happy memories were in England. He found he missed Kiley more than he thought he would.

Martie remained in Cambridge with Deborah when Mark returned to Washington. She told him and their daughter she would be taking a train to California to visit her parents.

Mark had several more days of meetings in Washington before he once again returned to England. He would return with several of his new staff including his good friend, General Spyder Jones.

The phone rang in Cable Cottage. Dallas moved swiftly into the hall from the living room to answer it. He had been enjoying a quiet drink in front of the fireplace with Kiley. They had been enjoying simple small talk and enjoyed the quiet times of this brief respite.

“This is Colonel Stern,” Dallas identified. “What? Yes sir!” He put the phone back on to the cradle and took a deep breath. He moved rapidly back to the living room. “Kiley! Kiley, do you remember telling us you can drive in a complete blackout and still find your way in London?”

“Of course. Why?”

“The Boss is back. The fog is so bad in London his plane was diverted to Scotland. They’re on their way from Glasgow,” Dallas informed.

“Let’s go,” Kiley responded. She was suddenly thrilled to learn Mark was on his way back. Back to her! She had missed him dreadfully. Why she let any man get to her she still couldn’t explain, but she cared for Mark.

“The fog is really heavy out there,” Dallas reminded grabbing his coat and hat. Kiley was already out the door and headed for the car.

Parking the general’s car near the station was no problem. Kiley had found her way through fogged London easily, just as she had bragged. Getting into the station turned out to be quite difficult. The stationmaster had been informed that the Supreme Allied Commander would be arriving on the next train from Scotland. Security was so tight, even Dallas and Kiley had a difficult time convincing them they were there to meet General Hauser. It wasn’t until a British Officer had identified Dallas as one of the general’s staff they were allowed in.

“Lord it’s cold,” Kiley shivered.

“That’s what you get for running off and grabbing your slicker instead of your winter coat,” Dallas chided. “Anxious to see the boss again?”

“You know very well I am,” Kiley replied. “Lord help me, I care a lot for him.”

Dallas rubbed Kiley’s back affectionately. “I know you do. I hope things can work out for the two of you.”

“I don’t know if I am the type to have anything work out. I only know at this time and moment I need him.”

“I think he needs you too,” Dallas agreed. He embraced Kiley and kept her sheltered in his arms. His warmth protected her from the cold and his embrace gave her emotional strength.

At last the train pulled in. It was a small private train. Both Kiley and Dallas looked toward the front of the train for the boss.

“Dallas, Kiley,” a voice called from behind them.

Kiley turned to see a shadowy tall muscular form in the foggy mist. “Mark,” she whispered. A smile spread across her lips.

Mark saw Kiley and her smile. She was standing under a lamppost. His heart skipped a beat. He was home. It was home not in the sense of America, but when he was with Kiley he felt like he was home. His feet automatically moved faster.

Kiley was frozen to the spot. She was so happy to see Mark she found she couldn’t move.

Dallas moved forward to greet General Hauser. “Welcome back!”

“It’s good to be back. We have a lot to do. How has Montgomery been handling headquarters?”

“He thinks he is the Supreme Commander. We had bets going that he shot down your plane, which would explain your landing in Scotland,” Dallas teased.

“I’m here now to take command,” Mark replied. He walked directly to Kiley.

“Welcome home,” Kiley squeaked. Simply being near Mark made her quake with desire.

Mark took her arm and placed it in the crook of his. “Have you set up Cable Cottage?”

“Everything is in order,” Kiley answered.

“Good. You’ll drop off my retinue at Connemara Hotel and we’ll go on to Cable Cottage,” Mark ordered. “You’re not to tired are you?”

“Me tired? Heavens no!” Kiley declared. “I have nothing but rest in your absence.”

“I will have to put you back to work,” Mark stated cheerfully.

“I’m ready,” Kiley agreed readily.

Pleasantries were exchanged while walking to the car. Kiley motored to the Connemara Hotel where everyone disembarked with the exception of Dallas and Mark. The three continued on to Cable Cottage. They arrived at the cottage about midnight. Mark’s luggage was taken to his room. Sean put

everything away immediately. Dallas stayed and talked with Mark for a while, then excused himself to go to bed. He was tired. Sean retired leaving Kiley and Mark alone.

“I visited with Debbie on this trip,” Mark shared.

“How wonderful for you,” Kiley responded happily. “How is your daughter?”

“My little girl suddenly grew up into a woman,” Mark said sadly.

“I’m certain she didn’t grow up suddenly,” Kiley teased.

“Oh yes she did,” Mark countered. “Debbie introduced me to her fiancé.”

“What?” Kiley gulped. She was surprised. There was no indication of any romantic ties in any of her letters. At least the letters Mark had shared with her.

“My reaction exactly,” Mark said stroking Kiley’s cheek with his hand. “Suddenly I feel very old.”

Kiley took his hand and kissed it lovingly. “I don’t think you’re old at all. You are very young and handsome to me.”

“I’ll have your eyes checked by the doctor next time he is around,” Mark joked. He suddenly turned serious. “Kiley, on the plane I was thinking I should release you from my staff.”

Kiley’s eyes opened wide. She couldn’t believe what she was hearing. “What made you think about this?”

“Kiley, they’re gossiping about you in the States. Roosevelt talked about it. It isn’t fair to you,” Mark explained.

“I think I’m capable of determining what I can and cannot handle in gossip,” Kiley retorted angrily. “Don’t think to little of me, General Hauser.”

“Kiley, what can an old man offer you?” Mark asked. “You’re young and beautiful. You can have your choice of any man.”

“I’ve made my choice,” Kiley countered. “You offer me what I need.”

“Kiley, it would be better for you if you left.”

“Is that your decision?”

“I changed my mind the moment I saw you at the train station. I want you to stay, but it isn’t fair to you. If you want to go I’ll understand.”

“Oh shut up and do something worthwhile with those lips,” Kiley ordered.

Mark covered Kiley's lips with his. His kiss was deep and passionate. How could he live without Kiley? He couldn't. Inside he felt euphoric that Kiley had decided to stay. As a commander in the military he was always in complete control. Even in his marriage to Martie he had managed to maintain self-control. With Kiley he lost control. In moments he had taken Kiley to his bed, removed her clothes, and was enjoying her naked body in ultimate pleasures for the both of them.

Still slightly breathless, Kiley sighed, "You're wonderful, Mark. Absolutely marvelous!"

Mark removed himself from Kiley. He lay next to her. His hand stroked her breast. "Kiley, would you want a baby?"

"Yours?" Kiley teased touching her fingertip to Mark's nose.

Mark took her finger and bit it seductively. "Yes, mine. Is there someone else who asked you to have a baby?"

"Not recently," Kiley joked. "As a matter of fact, you're the only one that has asked."

"Well?"

"Yes. I want to have a baby very much. I think it would be best to win the war first. Children have a lot of growing to do and it would be better in a peaceful happy society. I don't want to bring a child in the world right now. Do you want a baby?"

"I've always wanted a lot of children. I'm fortunate to have Debbie, but since I've been with you I can't stop thinking about what our children would look like. I wonder if it's possible to start all over again," Mark confessed.

"When do you want to start over?"

"Soon. I want this war to be over. Like you, I want the world to be safe and free once more."

"Let me know when you're ready," Kiley answered and snuggled into Mark's body. "You know you are really sexy."

"You mean it?"

"Of course I mean it, love stud," Kiley chuckled. "Hold me."

Mark complied. The long flight, train trip, return drive to Cable Cottage, and their lovemaking had exhausted him. He gave in to sleep. Kiley remained in his arms all night and it was one of

the most comfortable and deep sleeps he had enjoyed in a long time.

Mark awoke to movement in his room. Slowly he opened his eyes to see Sean Ryan moving about in his room. He realized Kiley was in his bed and if she woke, she might be embarrassed. Quickly he covered her with the quilt. “Sean, I think I need extra rest this morning. I’m especially tired from my return trip.”

Sean nodded in understanding. He left the room. Although he gave no indication to General Hauser he was aware of Kiley being in the general’s bed. He had been aware she was there. He wondered how often he would find her there and if his duties would change. While he waited to be summoned he decided it was a good time to write a letter.

Mark had already determined that every night he would spend at Cable Cottage his bed would be shared with Kiley. He would instruct Sean later in the day that whenever he was spending a night at Cable Cottage he would call Sean when he was ready for him.

Chapter 21

A taxi pulled into the private driveway of the Maxwell residence after his passenger was announced to the guard at the gate. A phone call from the gate informed the Maxwell family of their daughter's arrival.

"Welcome home, Mrs. Hauser," Robert Manson, the Maxwell butler greeted opening the taxi door. "I hope this visit finds you well."

"I've been better, but thank you Robert. Where is Papa?"

"He is in the library," Manson replied.

"I'm going to Papa immediately. Pay the taxi driver and see to it my luggage is taken to my room. I'll be staying with Papa for the summer."

"Yes, Mrs. Hauser. I'll see to it," Manson said bowing slightly when Martie stepped out of the cab.

Martie walked through the open door, down the hallway, and made a right down another hallway until she came to the library door. Since childhood it was a strict rule never to enter the library unless Papa allowed you entry. She knocked softly, "Papa?"

"Pumpkin? Is that you Pumpkin?"

"Yes Papa, I'm home and I have a problem. I need you."

"Come in Pumpkin," George Maxwell greeted his daughter opening the door.

Martie went into overacting instantly. "Oh Papa," she sobbed hysterically. "Mark took up with that Irish whore in England. Those rumors were all true." Martie continued with the sobs and hysterical weeps. "Papa, he divorced me so he could play around with that foreign trash. Oh, Papa, what am I to do?"

George Maxwell took his daughter in his arms and patted her gently on the head.

Martie hated that patting, but she knew it was necessary to act the part of the little girl to get her father to do what she wanted. “Oh Papa, what I am to do? I love Mark so much. Even after all these years I love him so much,” Martie sobbed seemingly inconsolably.

“There pumpkin, stop this crying,” George soothed. “Surely he can’t be serious about this divorce?”

“Papa, his lawyers gave me the papers months ago. I fought the divorce, but lost to that hussy.”

“Let me see the papers,” George told his daughter.

“They’re in my luggage,” Martie sniffed. “I brought them to show you. I still can’t believe Mark divorced me.” She left the library and walked briskly to her room. She went directly to a smaller piece of luggage placed by the side of her bed. A maid was already removing her clothes from the larger luggage and putting them in the closet or chest of drawers. Martie put the small valise on her bed and opened it. She pulled out a large envelope. “Here it is.”

George Maxwell had followed Martie to her room. “Are those the papers?”

Martie turned to hand the envelope to her father. “Yes Papa.”

George took the envelope. He opened it and pulled out the papers. Adjusting his glasses he started reading. He walked to an elaborate satin chair and sat in it.

It seemed like hours to Martie while she watched her father read the documents. The clock ticked out fifteen minutes.

“I can’t believe this,” George said looking up to his daughter. “Why didn’t you call me when these papers were first served. I could have stopped this. Mark has always listened to me. Whatever problem he had, I could have managed for him. You’ve had problems with your marriage before. We’ve solved them.”

“I didn’t tell you because I couldn’t believe he was doing this,” Martie choked. “Not for one minute could I imagine he would end our marriage. He knows I love him. I gave him his daughter.”

“Of course he knows, Pumpkin. He’s just confused because of this war, his new responsibility, and a power hungry woman he’s met. I’ve heard the rumors. I tried to make

allowances for such behavior, but not this. No, I'll make him see the error of his way."

"Will you Papa? Will you help me get him back?" Martie whined pathetically.

"You can count on it. I'll make plans to visit him in England soon. I have some business deals to close, but I'll see him in a month or two," George replied. "No need for you to come along or worry. I'll handle him better alone."

"I trust you Papa," Martie sniffed. "You know how much I love Mark."

"Of course I do, Pumpkin," George said reassuringly. He rose from the chair to walk to Martie. Once again he patted her head when she laid her head upon his shoulder.

Marge Maxwell walked into the bedroom to witness the tender scene. "Martha! I was told you returned home." She held a glass filled with gin and tonic high. "What's the matter? More problems with Mark?"

Marge's speech was slightly slurred.

"Mother, why don't you go lie down? Papa will handle this, nothing for you to concern yourself with," Martie snapped rudely.

"Whatever you say, Martha. You're always right. You're so smart."

"My name is Martie, Mother!"

"Yes of course darling," Marge responded. "I think I'll lie down until dinner."

"You do that," George said sweetly. "We'll see you tonight at dinner. I'll send Jeanie up to help you change."

"Thank you darling," Marge replied. She turned her back to walk down the hall. She was humming happily as she made her way to her room.

"I will never understand how you can be so patient with her. Mother is so, well.." Martie hedged.

"Difficult? Your mother is quite compliant actually. She drinks heavily but gives me little to no problem," George answered.

"Aren't you embarrassed?"

"There are times she embarrasses me, but I am patient with those rare times. I prefer your mother to be this pliant supplicant woman," George explained. "You're patient with Mark aren't

you? You've put up with his errant ways, absence, infidelity, and stubbornness."

"I understand, Papa," Martie oozed. "You're so wise."

"I'll always take care of my pumpkin," George responded. "I'll take care of Mark. We'll solve this problem of his. We'll even have another little wedding ceremony here. It may have to wait until after the war, but he'll be back with you."

"If you tell me," Martie gurgled. "I know it is true. I'll wait as long as I have too." Martie smiled demurely. She was happy now. There is any thing her father couldn't do. His money bought everything. Twenty years ago she wanted the up and coming lieutenant and her father bought him for her. Even Mark didn't know how her father manipulated him. Papa had him transferred to a nearby camp. He saw to it that Mark was invited to the proper military social circles. George's personal friends in the Military were brought in socially and Mark came along. Mark was promoted quickly and brought up through the ranks.

"I'm exhausted," Kiley sighed. She was sitting at the table with Dallas eating supper. Mark was with his top brass at Chequers this weekend discussing alternate plans for Overlord. Kiley didn't go this time. She spent the weekend catching up on correspondence. For the past four weeks they had been driving all over England visiting troops. The day would begin at 5:00 in the morning until close to midnight every evening. There was no time to do daily work. After a long day, Kiley and Dallas had returned to Cable Cottage for dinner. Kiley begged off to catch up and she was tired. "I can't keep up with him."

"He is a driven man," Dallas concurred. "It's going to be like this for some time."

"I know," Kiley agreed. "Until Overlord is completed Mark will devote every waking moment to the planning."

"I'll bring the horses up to Cable Cottage," Dallas said suddenly. "He loves to ride. Do you think you can coerce him to ride with you?"

"What a marvelous idea. I won't have to coerce him. Mark loves to ride," Kiley bubbled. "You're brilliant, Dallas."

"Hey, that's why I get the big bucks and work with the big man," Dallas teased. "Whoa! Watch it, you could fall into your dinner."

Kiley was fighting to stay awake to eat. She was so tired she felt her eyes close and began to nod in sleep. “Sorry.”

“That does it. There are times you need to sleep more than eat. Today is that time.” Dallas rose from the table and took Kiley’s hand. “To bed with you!” He walked to her room and opened the door. “Can you handle the rest?”

Kiley laughed, “I think so.” She gave Dallas a peck on the cheek. After she closed the door she forced herself to undress and put on her nightgown. Within minutes of lying down on the pillow she was sound asleep.

“Something wrong, General Hauser?” Churchill asked between bites of food.

It was almost midnight. After four weeks of 18-hour days it was beginning to take its toll on Mark. He loved working this hard. It helped him forget about Martie, Newhall, and his personal life. Life was easier when he focused on his job. It was also an excuse not to ask Kiley the question he feared to ask.

“Forgive me Prime Minister,” Mark answered. “I think I’m just too tired to eat. I would ask you excuse me so I can go to sleep.”

“Of course old boy,” Churchill boomed. “I think this discussion is complete. We’ve agreed on three of the plans. All the staff agrees. We’ll talk more about that next week. You need some time off. Why don’t you spend an extra day at that cottage you have hidden away?”

“You know about Cable Cottage?” Mark choked. He thought he had kept that a good secret.

“Of course I do,” Churchill laughed.

“You’ve never dropped in on me there,” Mark chuckled.

“Every man has to have a place of quiet,” Churchill said cheerfully. “I have a place in Scotland I visit when I need those moments of quiet.”

“I do believe I will take a few days off,” Mark said cheerfully. He was tired and he wasn’t feeling well.

“You’re burning up,” Kiley stated in alarm. She took her hand off Mark’s forehead. “You need to be in bed.”

“I just came from there,” Mark chortled. “And you weren’t with me,” he whispered for Kiley to hear.

Kiley ignored him. She looked to Dallas as he walked in the kitchen. "Dallas, get the doctor over here. Mark has a fever. I believe he has the flu."

"On it!" Dallas responded.

"I'm just under the weather a bit," Mark protested.

"You've been driving yourself too hard," Kiley chastened. "You're wore out and this bug could get worse if you don't take care of yourself."

"What do you suggest?"

"I suggest you get back into bed and drink some juice. I'll ask Sean to make you a hearty broth. When the doctor gets here, let him examine you."

"Anything else?"

"Wear some warm pajamas and stay under the covers."

"You could keep me warm," Mark chortled softly. He reached for her hand and squeezed it.

"And you wouldn't get any rest," Kiley whispered back. "Off to bed with you. I'll be up shortly." Kiley watched Mark return to his room. She went to the kitchen to prepare a breakfast of lightly buttered toast, honey tea, warm cider, and light chicken broth. She worked closely with cook, Mrs. Tiderdom, who came in every Saturday and Sunday.

Sean assisted Mark to once again undress and return to warm pajamas.

Mark climbed back into bed and felt a little better already. He wasn't about to admit to anyone he felt terrible. He was tired. His throat hurt. It seemed as if every bone and muscle in his body ached. The warm bed was a comfortable haven. Mark knew he needed rest. He knew he was sick. He just wouldn't give in to the illness, or admit to it.

Kiley was in Mark's room a half hour later. She carried a tray into the bedroom and placed it before him. "I want you to drink and eat, everything!" With those words Kiley left the room.

Mark sniffed at the hot honey tea. "I hate tea!" he mumbled. But it was hot and he wanted something hot to soothe his raw throat. He found the honeyed tea to his liking and felt good on his throat. Mark nibbled at the toast and drank the hot broth.

Kiley returned to Mark's room with a steaming towel saturated with menthol. She wrapped the towel around Mark's

neck and tucked it into the collar of his pajamas. “There now, doesn’t that feel good?” Kiley asked while removing the food tray. She walked toward the door.

“I haven’t had this type of tender loving care since I left for West Point. My mother was the last to take care of me like this. I like it, Kiley.”

Kiley returned a large smile to the General who looked very much like a little boy at this moment. “I like taking care of you.”

“Are you coming back?”

“I’ll be back after I return your breakfast tray to the kitchen,” Kiley promised.

Mark settled back into the large pillow and relaxed. He waited for Kiley to return.

When Kiley came back she had a book in her hand. It was a pulp western. The kind of book Mark loved to read for relaxation. She pulled a chair next to the general’s bed and began to read the western. Her hand occasionally brushed Mark’s brow.

Mark was so content he fell asleep after the first five pages were read. He was blissfully asleep when Dallas brought the doctor. Kiley left her chair and the room when the doctor walked in. She had kept watch over the sleeping general.

After his examination of General Hauser, the doctor spoke to both Kiley and Dallas. “You’ve taken excellent care of the general. If he had continued with his Intensive schedule I fear he could have developed pneumonia. He is a difficult patient at best so to confine him to an oxygen tent would have been a trial. I extend to you my gratitude.”

“I think we’re all aware of that and understand our difficult patient completely,” Dallas joked.

“What is the prognosis, doctor?” Kiley queried.

“I’ll leave you some antibiotics. He’ll need to take them for a week. For that week he should have at least three days bed rest. I also suggest he ease up this week. Do you think you can keep him at Cable Cottage this week?” Doctor Adams asked.

“No problem,” Dallas volunteered. “I’ll get a radiophone, set up a Teletype, add a squadron to run back and forth to London, and strap the general down.”

“We’ll manage, doctor,” Kiley stated stifling her laughter. Dallas was nearly accurate in assessing the situation. She hoped

the antibiotics would be strong enough to at least slow the general down a little.

“I’ll be back every day,” Doctor Adams said giving Dallas the antibiotics. He left the cottage and returned to London.

For the next three days Mark woke to Kiley’s smiling face. She would bring his breakfast and medications. Dallas ran messages back and forth to London. With help from Dallas, Mark kept in constant contact with his aides. Nothing occurred without Mark knowing or conferring. Only Mark’s top aides, Prime Minister, and President knew of the general’s confinement. The press was however becoming curious. They were used to daily appearances by the general.

“What shall I tell them, General Hauser?” Dallas asked before a run to London.

“It’s only a few more days,” Mark replied thoughtfully. “I might use this to give the Nazi something to think about. Release to the press that I’m in private meetings for this week.”

“You’ve never lied to the press,” Dallas chortled. “A new era?”

“I’m not lying,” Mark defended. “Maybe a half truth.” He was thinking of Kiley. He enjoyed this quiet time with her. He found he didn’t fight the confinement because he loved her reading to him. He enjoyed her fussing over him. It was one of the best vacations he ever had; yet he was still working and nothing passed his planning for Overlord. In his mind he was in private meetings with Kiley.

On the following Saturday, Doctor Adams had given Mark the okay to return to his normal duty. Mark extended the weekend as part of his regular schedule. Dallas had brought the horses to Cable Cottage. Mark and Kiley spent most of the day riding.

“Stop here,” Mark ordered reining his horse inside a small opening in a wooded copse.

Kiley obeyed. She sat upon her horse and inhaled the early spring air. Everything was beginning to bloom once again in England. Kiley felt the magic of new life in the woods and cherished it. It was times like this she could forget the war.

Mark dismounted and walked to Kiley. He lifted her from her mount and placed her on the ground. He placed his lips upon

he traced her cheeks, chin, and neck with his tongue. His hands treasured Kiley's soft curves.

Kiley responded immediately to Mark's caress. It had been many months since she had any private loving time with Mark. "I've missed our time, Mark," Kiley breathed heavily.

"So have I," Mark responded passionately. He took hold of his physical need and gulped large amounts of air to calm his body. This was a planned outing on his part. This was the time and place he selected. Holding Kiley in his arms he placed her head against his chest. "Kiley, I can't remember ever being this happy or content."

"It is beautiful here," Kiley murmured into the warmth of Mark's jacket. She was feeling euphoric after the ride and the fresh spring air.

"I want to make it permanent," Mark said seriously. He took a deep breath. "Kiley, marry me."

Kiley's head jolted back. She looked into Mark's eyes. "What?"

"Marry me, Kiley," Mark repeated. His eyes softened into a look of genuine love. "You don't have to answer me now if you don't want to. I mean, if you want to think about it."

Kiley couldn't find her voice. "I need to think. This is quite a start," she finally choked out. It was true. Kiley was completely surprised by Mark's proposal. The war was still upper most in his mind and hers. Perhaps if she hadn't such a difficult first marriage, hadn't lost some of her family in the Blitz, and hadn't seen so many burnt bodies after bombings, she would have accepted immediately. She had rushed into her first marriage with deep regrets later. This time she was going to be absolutely certain that any future marriage would be a good one. Kiley felt she needed time to analyze her feelings and truly look at Mark without rose-colored glasses.

Mark swallowed hard. Suddenly he was frightened. Would she break his heart? He remembered his first proposal. She had been his high school sweetheart. She told him quite frankly the military life was not for her. She wanted a man with a future. He had been heart broken for months afterward. He reprimanded himself for asking Kiley. He had thought she cared for him. Maybe he was too old for her. Maybe that's why she hesitated. "Do you want to go back?"

“No,” Kiley replied returning into Mark’s arms. She circled her arms around his chest and snuggled into his jacket. “It’s beautiful here.” Kiley looked up to Mark’s face. It was filled with worry. She stroked his furrowed brow. “Hey, I didn’t say no. I just want time to think a bit.”

Mark found those words a little reassuring. He returned Martie’s embrace. “Let’s walk the horses back to the stables.”

Chapter 22

June approached too quickly. The dates were selected for the invasion. Everything was in the ready. The only thing being a block was the weather.

Kiley had just delivered Mark to one of his meetings. This time she remained outside of Governor's Square by the car. A strange humming followed a dark object in the sky. Suddenly a large explosion followed the descent. Kiley watched two more streaks across the skies of London. Explosions followed both strange objects. Kiley watched one descend close to where she was standing. Instantly she was on the ground covering her ears.

A Military Policeman screamed as Kiley went to the ground, "Incoming! Hit the Dirt!"

An explosion shook the ground. A few of the windows of Governor's Square shattered for the explosion. The building shook.

"What the Hell?" Mark uttered. He hadn't heard any planes. There were no air raid sirens. His first thought was of Kiley. He bolted out of the meeting and ran through the halls, down the stairs. Once outside he looked for Kiley. He didn't see her and felt panic. Smoke and dust rose in the air followed by flames several blocks away. Mark looked up and down the street. He saw soldiers, civilians, and Military Police rise from the ground. It was then he heard feminine whimpering near his car. Dallas was on Mark's heels when the general darted to his car. On the other side of the car he found Kiley still lying on the ground with her ears covered. She was crying.

"God, I can't take any more of this," Kiley cried. "Bloody Nazi! I wish you to hell. I'll go over and kill you all myself. I swear!" She couldn't stop her sobbing. She felt gentle arms lift her from the ground. She was surrounded by strength and familiar manly scent.

“Are you injured?” Mark asked stroking Kiley’s mussed hair. Her severe bun was falling open. The pins had fallen out when her hands covered her ears from the explosions.

Kiley couldn’t stop sobbing to answer.

“You’ll get your chance to even the score,” Mark whispered in her ear. “I promise you. We’ll end this war together.”

“Hold me,” Kiley whimpered. She was trembling violently.

“Was Kiley wounded?” Dallas asked in concern. He came from behind Mark.

“No, I’m not hurt. Just shaken up,” Kiley replied trying to gain control of her terror.

“We’d better get her inside and have a doctor look at her,” Dallas suggested.

Kiley was still dazed and followed Mark’s guidance into Governor’s Square.

Doctor Adams was called in. After an examination he reported to Mark Hauser who was waiting in his old office. “Fortunately she wasn’t wounded, but she is badly shaken up. I’ve given her a sedative. She’ll be fine.”

“Is there anything we can do for her?” Mark asked.

“You’ve been working her pretty hard, along with yourself. I realize Overlord is at a critical point right now, but try to take it easy. As soon as you can, send Miss Burke for a rest somewhere. Perhaps the two of you should take a week or two off.”

“I’ll take it care of it, doctor,” Mark responded. He would give Kiley a vacation as soon as he could.

A few minutes later Mark found another driver to take them back to Cable Cottage. This time he tucked Kiley into his bed. She was asleep in minutes. Another dose of the sedative had taken affect. He finished his paperwork around ten in the evening. He climbed into bed with Kiley and gently pulled her into his arms. He fell asleep holding her. He wanted so desperately to make this good feeling last. He wanted so badly to hear Kiley say she loved him and would be his wife. He was afraid to push her because he felt she wouldn’t accept him for his age. This was not the time to deal with personal emotional problems.

The next morning he was given a report on the London attack. The Nazi had developed a new weapon. It was the V-1. They were a new technology of bomb using jet rockets. Later in the day he shared the news with Kiley.

“It’s bad enough to die knowing your enemy, but when the enemy is nothing more than a hunk of metal?” Kiley growled.

“That’s precisely what I worried about,” Mark explained. “The morale of the British people and her allies could be affected by this. These V-1 attacks couldn’t come at a worse time.”

“Is there any way to fight these flying nightmares?” Kiley queried.

“We haven’t figured out any way yet,” Dallas piped in.

“We have to find a way, and the invasion is more important than ever. They are ahead of us in jet technology. We have to defeat the Nazi now.”

Even the king was present at the final Overlord meeting. The weather was still a critical problem. Kiley stayed in the background and found a seat in the back of the room. What an honor to be where history is being made. She listened intently to the King of England, Winston Churchill, Mark Hauser, and other top Brass. Kiley breathed heavily with excitement. At long last the invasion on the Continent would begin. With forces invading Normandy and then Italy, they would join later, and battle together for Germany. For the first time since the Blitz, Kiley felt the Nazi would be eradicated.

Less than a month later, Mark called the troops back because of the weather. He didn’t the second time. He was told there was a chance of fair weather for a day or two. The meteorologist informed Mark that the Nazi didn’t have weather stations this far west and they would think the weather would remain foul. With this information Mark correctly thought the Nazi wouldn’t expect an attack. He gave the okay for the invasion.

After Mark made the final decision at headquarters, Kiley approached Mark. “Your car is ready, General Hauser.”

“I’ll be there in a minute,” Mark responded. He spoke to his aides and left the meeting. In minutes he was in the back seat of his Cadillac heading for south England and the troops and paratroopers preparing to disembark for the invasion. He wanted

to personally talk to his boys. He wanted to be upfront and give them a boost of morale.

Dallas sat in the back seat with Mark. Conversation was about the invasion. Mark talked incessantly about the beachheads, Juno, Gold, Sword, Omaha, and Utah. He talked about the paratroopers. The most important person on his mind was General Charles de Gaulle. He was worried that the French general would not address the French and ask them to lay down their arms when the Allies invaded. Mark had gone out on a political limb with a promise to de Gaulle that was against the policy of FDR.

There was temporary headquarters at Portsmouth. Mark wanted to be close to all pre invasion activity. He had visited no less than 26 camps in the past month. The regular soldier knew who the Supreme Commander was by sight.

No one noticed the Cadillac pull up near the tarmac. Mark had ordered Kiley to cover the four stars before they left.

When Mark walked to the group of paratroopers, they recognized him immediately. The soldiers quickly surrounded him.

Kiley watched with pride and emotion.

The soldiers and Mark chatted for more than an hour. He stayed on the tarmac as the soldiers marched into the planes. He stayed and watched the planes taxi from the tarmac to the runway. As the planes lifted off, Mark saluted them. When the last plane had disappeared, Dallas, Kiley, and Mark returned to the temporary headquarters in Portsmouth.

Mark drank several pots of hot black coffee. Kiley cleaned ashtrays. Kiley guessed that Mark must have smoked two packs of cigarettes since the afternoon. It was nearly two in the morning and she was exhausted. She could barely keep her eyes open. Everyone else had gone to bed. She and Mark were alone. "I can't stay awake a minute longer. I think I'll retire."

"Just one more thing," Mark requested. "Read this and let me know what you think."

Kiley read a statement Mark had written. It was a press release if the invasion failed. "Do you really want to know what I think?" Kiley asked.

"Yes."

"Burn it! How can you take sole responsibility for this invasion?" Kiley growled.

"I'm the Supreme Commander. This war is mine."

"Yours? Are you bloody mad? Give some others the responsibility for this war. Hitler? Nazi? Japan? We didn't attack them. They attacked us. Give some of us credit. I can't wait to stand on Hun land and shoot that bastard right in the eye."

"I believe you would," Mark laughed. "Thank you for bringing a moment of reason in this madness."

"Me? Reasonable?" Kiley laughed. "General I think you are quite tired and should go to bed."

"I couldn't sleep any way," Mark uttered softly. His head turned to the radio when he heard a voice with a French accent. "It's de Gaulle. He's speaking to the French people." There was a small sign of relief in his voice.

After de Gaulle's announcement, Winston Churchill addressed the audience. When the Prime Minister was finished, the allied people heard President Roosevelt's address.

Mark sank into a chair. "There's no turning back. It's on, Kiley."

"At last," Kiley soothed. She massaged Mark's shoulders. They were hard from tension. She felt the best thing to do was leave Mark alone with his thoughts. Kiley handed Mark his cigarettes and left the room quietly. Mark was so deep in his thought she was sure he didn't even notice her absence.

"This isn't a good time, Martie," Oscar murmured softly. "The invasion is on. Didn't you hear the President's address?"

"Of course I did. That's why this is the perfect time," Martie contradicted. "Papa hasn't been able to see Mark because of this damned invasion. You swore you'd help me, remember?"

"I will do everything I can to help you. Including getting your father to England when I can," Oscar grunted. "There are some things that are a bit more important than your personal life, Martie. This war is one of those things that are considerably more important."

"We've waited patiently," Martie whined. "I can't afford to wait much longer. He's sleeping with her. You read the letter. Mark is sleeping with the tramp! If we don't move now I could lose him."

"We can't have that, can we?" Oscar implied sarcastically. Inside his very soul there was a tiny fear that Mark would take the

lurid story of Oscar's affair with Martie to the press. That would destroy his career. He would help Martie but he was desperately trying to keep a distance from her. His affair had to end to protect his reputation and career from scandal.

"No we can't," Martie snarled softly. She was not about to make a scene in Oscar's office. Everyone must believe her to be above reproach. She was aware of Oscar's distancing. She didn't mind. There was always another man. She glanced at the mirror. She was still a very attractive forty eight year old woman. She was also in demand as the poor lonely wife of the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces. No one must even suspect she was now officially divorced from Mark. She was certainly more attractive than that twenty eight year old hussy Mark was interested in. She had gotten pictures in the mail of that plain and unattractive Irish tramp. That tight spinster hairdo was ugly to say the least. Martie shook her head. She couldn't believe Mark was sleeping with that waspish looking woman. "When can you arrange for Papa to take Deborah over to England?"

"They will be cleared to visit in two weeks," Oscar conceded.

"That works out well," Martie responded stroking her chin. "Deborah graduates next week from Radcliffe. Will you attend?"

"It would be good press relations," Oscar replied. "Yes, I will attend."

"Good, bring Lucille with you. That will look even better," Martie chortled. She gave Oscar a mock salute. "Tata, General." Her next stop would be a visit to Deborah and then a call to Papa.

"You can't go," Dallas repeated. "This is the worst storm ever."

"The boys need me more than ever. The quartermasters are having trouble bringing in supplies and troops. I need to be there with them for moral support," Mark stormed heatedly.

"All planes, trains, and ships are dry docked," Harry confirmed. "There is absolutely no way to get you to Brittany."

"Goddammit, I should have left yesterday," Mark growled.

"The Prime Minister called you to the meeting at Governor's Square. You had to attend."

Mark nodded in defeat. "What's the news so far?"

“The same as it was five minutes ago,” Harry chuckled. “I promise I’ll get you on a ship the minute the weather clears.”

“I should visit the relief troops in Portsmouth getting ready to ship out,” Mark suggested. He had to do something or he would go crazy. The initial invasion had gone better than planned, but the resistance further inland was deadly. This storm was making it impossible to supply the troops and Mark was worried. He also couldn’t stop thinking that this would have been the day of the invasion if he hadn’t taken the risk on June 6th.

A familiar knock was heard at the door.

“Come in Kiley,” Dallas called out.

“General Hauser, you have visitors,” Kiley announced.

Behind her were Deborah Hauser, Charles Blanchard, and George Maxwell.

“Sweet Pea?” Mark choked. He couldn’t believe his eyes.

“Daddy!” Debbie exclaimed and ran into her father’s arms. She was glued to her father.

Mark hugged her tightly. He placed gentle kisses on her forehead. “How did you get here?”

“We flew on a special transport to Ireland, yesterday. From Ireland we took a barge to England. We arrived in London just now,” Debbie answered still hugging Mark. “It’s so good to see you, Daddy.”

“How did you get a flight in the first place?” Mark queried. He was completely surprised at how his daughter, her fiancé, and his ex-wife’s father managed to get to a war zone.

“Grandpapa has been working on this surprise for quite awhile. General Newhall gave his permission. He let us use his plane. Wasn’t that sweet?”

“Very sweet,” Mark sighed gratefully. After these stressful weeks it was comforting to hold his little girl. He opened his hand to Charles Blanchard. “I see you are in uniform.”

Charles was wearing his lieutenant uniform. “Yes sir. I joined the Army after my graduation in January. I chose early graduation so I could join. I’ve been promoted to Second Lieutenant.”

“Congratulations,” Mark beamed. His daughter had chosen a good man. At least in his eyes he thought Charles was a good choice. “Where are you stationed?”

“Fort Meade in Maryland,” Charles replied. Then with a stiff salute, “Sir! It’s an honor to be here to meet you. I hope to be transferred to the Front soon.”

“You’ll serve where ever the Army needs you the most, Charles,” Mark answered returning the salute. “When have you and Debbie planned for a wedding day?”

“We thought we would wait until the war is over and you’re home. Although I wish it could be sooner, we both agreed we would wait for peacetime and you to give her away,” Charles replied.

Yes, Debbie did get a good man.

“Hello, Mark,” George greeted extending his hand.

“What brings you to London?” Mark asked.

“I came as Debbie’s chaperon,” George replied. “And I wanted to talk to you about some personal matters.”

Mark knew immediately what personal matters he meant. He had been through this so many times before. He had always caved in. He wouldn’t this time. He was legally divorced. “Later.” He wanted to enjoy his daughter for the time being.

“Where will you be staying?” Dallas asked the group.

“See if they have room at the Connemara for George and Charles. Debbie will stay with me at Cable Cottage,” Mark ordered. “Is your luggage still in the car? I presume you came by car?”

“Daddy!” Debbie said in exasperation. “Actually we arrived by army mule.”

Mark arched his eyebrow but gave his daughter a loving smile. “Let’s go and get everyone settled.”

After George Maxwell and Charles Blanchard were settled into rooms at the Connemara, the group went to lunch. George sat next to Kiley.

“I’ve been wanting to meet you,” George whispered to Kiley. “I want to talk to you. Give me some time this evening.”

“I will if I can,” Kiley answered in hesitation. You couldn’t imagine why Martie’s father wanted to talk to her. It made her feel uncomfortable and ill at ease. “It will depend if General Hauser needs me to drive.”

“I believe that he will be spending time with Deborah and Charles at the hotel before he takes Deborah to that cottage he

talked about,” George said quietly. “We’ll have quiet time to talk right after our lunch.”

George Maxwell was right. Mark, Debbie, and Charles were talking in Charles’ hotel suite. George motioned for Kiley to follow him.

George walked out of the room and down the stairs to an open-air garden behind the hotel. “There’s a bench over there,” he indicated.

Kiley sat down and George stood in front of her.

“I don’t beat around the bush. I get straight to the point,” George stated.

“The point being?” Kiley said bravely. She didn’t feel brave. She hoped he didn’t notice her knees knocking. This man made her feel almost as uncomfortable as Oscar Newhall. A shiver ran down her spine when she remembered his attack.

“How much money do you want?” George snarled.

“Money?” Kiley asked completely dumbfounded. “What on earth are you talking about?”

“How much money do you want to stay away from Mark,” George reiterated.

“What makes you think you can buy me?” Kiley replied angrily.

“Your kind always has a price,” George snickered contemptuously. “Wave enough money and you’ll do anything. That’s all you want isn’t it?”

“Want for what?”

“A comfortable sum to stay away from Mark,” George answered rudely. “That’s all you want is his money. Would you be surprised to know that Hauser hasn’t a dime? I supply the money. He is nothing without me. So? Take my money and run, Miss Burke.”

“You can’t buy me, Mr. Maxwell. What I feel for Mark is free and without price,” Kiley said quietly. “You can keep your money in the bank.”

“Hauser doesn’t have a dime. Without me he’ll collapse into nothing. He’ll return to my daughter. He has no choice. Take the money and run,” George warned. “You’ll regret not taking the money. I’ll hound you to the gates of hell.”

“I’ll see you there first,” Kiley threatened. “You’ll find Kiley Burke is not a woman to be trifled with.” She rose from the bench and walked straight backed away from Maxwell.

“Don’t walk away from me, Missy!”

“Find someone else to bully. Our discussion is over!” Kiley made a decision there and then. She would talk to Mark as soon as she was able to have a quiet conversation with him.

Chapter 23

“You like Daddy don’t you?” Debbie asked Kiley at the breakfast table in Cable Cottage.

“I like your father very much,” Kiley admitted.

“He’s really sweet on you. I can tell,” Debbie stated between bites of pancake. “Are you going to marry Daddy?”

Kiley almost choked. “What makes you ask that?”

“I’ve rarely seen that glint of happiness in Daddy’s eye. I see it all the time when you are near and he’s looking at you. It’s kind of the way Charles looks at me.”

“Aren’t you so smart,” Kiley laughed and squeezed Debbie’s hand.

“What’s going on here?” Mark asked entering the kitchen. “Are my two girls sharing a big secret?”

“No big secret, Daddy,” Debbie replied smiling warmly. “Just women talk.”

Mark bent to give Debbie a kiss on her forehead. “Are you still planning to fly with me to visit the troops?”

“Charles and I can’t wait,” Debbie answered.

“Is it safe for Debbie to go across the channel with you?” Kiley asked worriedly.

“You went with me last week,” Mark reminded.

“Yes, but that’s different,” Kiley excused.

“You’re both very special to me. If I didn’t feel it was safe, I wouldn’t have allowed you to come with me,” Mark repudiated. “It’s good moral for the troops to see the Supreme Commander and civilians of the female persuasion.”

“I want to spend as much time as I can with you these next two weeks, Daddy.”

“We’ll go everywhere together,” Mark promised. He sat between Kiley and Debbie and placed a hand over theirs.

Kiley stayed at SHAEF headquarters when Debbie and Mark went to the Connemara. Twice she had endured the insults of Mark's male acquaintance and remained silent. If it weren't for the friendship of Dallas, the admiration of President Roosevelt, and her meetings with Patton and other staff members, she would have second thoughts about her decision.

After returning from the Front, George requested to speak to Mark in private.

Mark agreed because he wanted this discussion to be over with. He wanted the cajoling, bribing, and threatening to be done with so he could enjoy the precious company of his daughter.

"I'd like to know why you didn't discuss this divorce with me first?" George demanded. He looked directly at Mark and blew a smoke ring with his Cuban cigar. "Martie was so ashamed of the new wrinkle you created she wouldn't tell me until it was too late."

"This isn't a wrinkle. It is a divorce. Why Martie chose not to tell you about it would be her own personal reason," Mark replied. "This marriage break up was our business anyway."

"Martie's happiness is my business and always will be," George argued. "Just as Debbie's happiness is yours."

"This is true, but a father can only interfere in a child's life to a point. You must understand our marriage was not happy for either of us," Mark attempted to explain. "There is no way to have saved our marriage."

"You've had problems before. I've always fixed it. I could have fixed this," George countered. "A man doesn't give up on his marriage. It's his duty to take care of his family regardless of any problems or he isn't a man. I know this from personal experience with Martie's mother."

"It isn't the same," Mark protested. "We are also different people."

"Look Mark, let's be honest. You have a great future. I've supported that future financially. It was my money that got you here in the first place. I intend to take you even farther and my daughter will be there with you," George said angrily. "I'm calling in my markers. You owe me, Mark."

"That is where you are wrong. I owe you nothing," Mark retorted holding his anger in check. "Your money was spent on

what Martie wanted and the comforts she wanted. Everything was what Martie wanted. Martie wanted the position in Washington. Martie wanted the tour in Europe. It's always been for Martie, not me. I owe you nothing."

"We made you what you are today, the Supreme Commander!" George stormed smashing his cigar into the ashtray.

"No, I made me what I am today," Mark countered. "This is a result of my education, my experience, and what I am all about. It has nothing to do with you or Martie."

"My money put you with the right people at the right time," George roared.

"That may be true, but even your money couldn't make it work if I weren't the right man for the job."

George realized this bullying wouldn't work anymore. He tried another track. "I'll support your future. You have a great career in politics after this war. You can become a Congressman or even Senator. I'll finance your campaign."

"And all I have to do is remarry Martie."

"We've all worked so hard to get there."

"Get where?" Mark snarled. "A miserable life? Constant arguments? Infidelity? That's not the life I want."

"I've invested so much in your life," George grumbled. "All I want is my return."

"You invested in Martie's life. That is your return," Mark replied in exasperation. He walked out of the hotel room. "I'm going to get Debbie and go to Cable Cottage. Have a nice evening."

George was furious. He had failed to bully or bribe Mark into doing his wishes. He had wanted to push Mark into politics. It would have opened more doors for his businesses and more profits. He also wanted his daughter to be the queen of all the Washington ladies. He would have to come up with another plan. He would return to the United States. He would calm down. He would confer with his good friend, Frank Carr.

George didn't try talking to Mark after that. He remained in the background and finally made an excuse of pressing business matters that required his immediate presence back in the states.

"You need to pack and return with me, Deborah," George told his granddaughter at dinner after he told her of his arrangements to return home.

“I’m going to stay with Daddy. I was given a full month to stay and it’s only been a couple of weeks,” Debbie protested stubbornly.

“Important business has come up and I must go home,” George scolded. “You cannot stay here with your fiancé unchaperoned.”

“Grandpapa, I have lots of chaperons around, besides I am with Daddy.”

“General Hauser is running a war,” George replied angrily. “You are my responsibility. Your mother put you in my care.”

“I love you, Grandpapa, but Mom didn’t put me in your care. I am a grown woman. I understand that you must return for business, but I am here to visit Daddy with my fiancé and that is exactly what I intend to do,” Debbie responded quietly.

“I’ll speak to your father,” George grumped angrily. He left the room to walk to SHAEF headquarters.

“You can’t go in there, sir,” a military policeman said. He blocked George Maxwell from entering Mark’s office. “The general is in private meetings with the Prime Minister.”

“Then tell General Hauser his father in law is here to see him. It is important that I speak to him. I haven’t much time,” George stated in exasperation.

Fortunately Winston Churchill left the office at the same moment.

“George,” Mark greeted. “I thought you’d be packing to return to the States?”

“Roy is taking care of that right now,” George answered. “You must speak to Deborah. You must tell her to return with me.”

“Why? I’ll take care of her while she’s here.”

“It’s unheard of to leave her unchaperoned with her fiancé,” George growled.

“Goddammit, I’m her father!”

“A father that doesn’t present an idyllic image. You’re sleeping with that woman doesn’t set an example for my granddaughter.”

Mark’s that slur invoked his wrath. He pulled George into his office and slammed the door.

“You have no idea what you are talking about,” Mark roared. “I suggest you leave immediately and leave my daughter to me.” Mark balled his fists. He was furious at his ex father in law for making those personal remarks in front of his staff. “My personal life is my own. It no longer belongs to you or Martie. Leave now.”

George stormed out of Mark’s office. Nothing had gone according to his plan. He had never failed to get his way before. This was a new and distasteful occurrence.

A few days later at Cable Cottage Kiley, the staff, and Debbie were once again scrambling to the shelter after sirens warned of a new wave of V-2s.

“Bloody Hell,” Kiley growled. “This is ridiculous.” She looked around the shelter. “Where is General Hauser?”

Everyone looked around.

“He must still be in the house,” Debbie gasped. “He can be so stubborn at times. He’s been complaining that those irritating little flying bugs are keeping him from getting his work done.”

“He has been complaining about running back and forth to the shelter,” Dallas remembered. “Maybe he’s right. They fly blindly. We may not be in too much danger. I think I’ll go join him. I’m sick of this too.”

“Dallas, you’re an idiot! We don’t know if those Nazi have put guidance controls on them. They may be zeroing in on this cottage knowing Mark is here,” Kiley scolded. She ran out the shelter and toward the house.

“Where is Kiley going?” Debbie asked.

“To get your father I presume,” Dallas chuckled.

Kiley ran into the cottage to the rattling of the windows after a V2 exploded some miles away. She searched every room until she found Mark in the kitchen. “What are you doing?”

“Fixing a sandwich. I’m hungry,” Mark chuckled. “I thought you went to the shelter?”

“I did, but you didn’t!” Kiley chided. “You are now!” She grabbed Mark’s arm and pulled him toward the back door.

“Kiley,” Mark protested. “We’ve spent nearly the entire day running back and forth to that shelter and nothing has happened. It’s a waste of time.”

“I agree that nothing has happened. That doesn’t mean something might happen. You’re not immortal Mark Hauser!”

“Kiley, nothing has happened and I need to get some work done.”

“Mark, please! Come with me.”

Another explosion. This explosion was closer.

“Please!” Kiley pleaded.

Mark took her hand and walked toward the door.

Once they were outside Kiley pulled Mark across the lawn.

A V2 exploded much closer. It was so close the ground shook. Kiley stumbled and twisted her ankle. “Oh God!” she screamed. She fell down and started to cry.

“What is it, Kiley?” Mark asked worriedly falling to his knees beside her.

“My ankle. It’s my bloody ankle. I twisted it,” Kiley sobbed.

Another whining sound and there was another explosion.

“I can’t bear this any more!” Kiley screamed. Her body was shaking uncontrollably.

Mark picked her up and carried her into the shelter. He placed her gently on a cot.

Debbie followed. “Daddy? Are you hurt? Is Kiley hurt? That bomb sounded so close.”

“It was bloody close!” Kiley growled testily. “I heard the windows in the cottage break.” She was still shaking.

“Kiley twisted her ankle,” Mark told his daughter. “She’ll be alright. She needs some rest and maybe a glass of water.”

“Get her a glass of water, Daddy. I’ll sit with her,” Debbie volunteered.

“Debbie, I realize he’s your father, but you can’t tell a Supreme Commander to fetch a glass of water for an underling,” Kiley laughed. “Don’t worry about me. I’m fine. I think I was a little shaken up.”

Dallas came from behind and handed Mark a glass of water. “A glass of water for Kiley.”

“Thanks, Dallas.” Mark sat on Kiley’s cot and handed her the glass. “I think you need a vacation.”

Kiley shook her head. “I need to get myself back together. These bombs are driving me crazy. You see, I don’t think I’d mind dying, but I don’t want to be killed by a thing. These bombs

are things. I mean even a Nazi bomber plane has a pilot. These are just things!” She was still shaking. Mark took the glass back and held it for Kiley as she drank some of it.

Debbie and Dallas left the two alone.

“I’m sorry, Kiley,” Mark apologized. “I didn’t realize how upsetting these V2s are for you.”

Kiley laid her head against the pillow on the cot. “Mark, there’s something I’ve been meaning to talk to you about. I thought I should wait until Debbie left, but after this display of temper I think I should discuss it now.”

“Certainly,” Mark agreed quickly. He wanted to help calm Kiley down. Talking always seemed to calm Kiley when something was bothering her.

“You’ve been kind in not pressuring me for an answer to your proposal of marriage. I have an answer for you. I’ve had it for several weeks.”

Mark swallowed hard. He held his breath. This was something he was afraid of. He didn’t know how he would handle Kiley’s rejection.

Kiley took Mark’s hand and placed it palm up on her cheek. “I would be honored to be your wife.”

Mark released the breath he was holding in a rush. A grin widened across his lips. “You’ve made me very happy.”

“There’s a catch before you get too happy.”

Mark arched his brow. “A catch?”

“You know I had a very difficult prior marriage. I’ve learned from that mistake. My ex husband told me he needed me and told me he wanted me. He never told me he loved me. You’ve told me you need me. You’ve told me you want me,” Kiley paused. “Mark, do you love me?”

“Kiley, I love you very much. If love means caring for you, missing you when you aren’t near, sharing your smiles and tears, and wanting our worlds to join? Yes, I love you,” Mark answered lovingly. He leaned over so their lips would join. They shared a brief yet sweet kiss. “Thank you for accepting my love and name.”

“My pleasure,” Kiley smiled. “One more thing.”

“Anything,” Mark laughed. “Anything a man is capable of doing.”

“I’d like to marry in Paris.”

“Done!” Mark exclaimed. “You’ve made me very happy, Kiley.”

“We’ll be here a while. I still hear explosions.”

“You’re right. I might as well get some rest myself.” Mark sprawled out on a cot next to Kiley’s cot. He reached across the space to take her hand in his.

“What are you grinning about?” Kiley teased watching Mark’s smile.

“I like the name?”

“What name?”

“Mrs. Kiley Hauser,” Mark chuckled. “It has a nice ring to it.”

“Yes it does,” Kiley laughed.

“What’s going on?” Debbie asked. “Are you feeling better Kiley?”

“Much better,” Kiley answered. She smiled as Mark released her hand. He seemed a little embarrassed at Debbie’s entrance.

“Sit down Debbie, Kiley and I have news for you,” Mark ordered.

“When are you getting married?” Debbie laughed. “You may think it is news, Daddy. Actually I guessed some time ago. Don’t worry. I like your Kiley a lot.” Debbie sat next to Kiley and took her hand.

Mark’s mouth dropped open. When did his daughter get so smart? “We’re not sure when, Sweet Pea. Right now we just know where.”

“Where will you be married?” Debbie asked Kiley.

“Paris,” Kiley answered without hesitation. “As soon as our troops have firmly taken back the city of Love, we’ll be married. How does that sound?”

“Positively wonderful,” Debbie beamed. “I’d like to talk to Charles. Do you think we could make it a double wedding?”

Both women looked to Mark.

“I think that’s possible,” Mark replied. “I take it everything is okay with you, Sweet Pea?”

“Daddy, I couldn’t be happier for you and Kiley. I wish you all the joy in the world.”

“Thank you, Debbie,” Kiley offered lovingly. “I’ll try to be a tolerable wife for your father.”

“Oh Kiley, I don’t think he even deserves you, but I hope you two will have a wonderful life. I really mean that.”

“Thanks Sweet Pea.”

“You’re welcome, Daddy,” Debbie chuckled. “You two make sure you let me know ahead of time so Charles and I can marry with you. Wow! Won’t that be famous?”

“Yes it will,” Kiley smiled. “It will indeed.”

“I’ve just had a smashing idea!” Debbie bubbled happily. “Let’s go shopping for our wedding dresses together.”

“This is my second marriage. I don’t think I’ll be wearing a white gown,” Kiley laughed delightedly. She really liked Mark’s daughter.

“Oh Pooh! We’ll have ever so much fun,” Debbie replied.

“Just where do you think you’ll shop?” Kiley asked. “Your visa expires in a week. You’ll be returning home. London is not a place currently to shop for a wedding dress.”

“Oh heavens, no! I was talking about New York!” Debbie exclaimed. “We’ll shop in New York.”

Kiley raised her eyebrows in shock.

“That’s a great idea, Sweet Pea,” Mark agreed.

“Are you two crazy?” Kiley queried.

“Not at all,” Mark crooned. “You need a vacation. What a better place than the States. I’ll get Dallas on it right now. He can accompany you and take a break himself. He wants to see his wife, anyway. And you, Kiley, you need to secure your U.S. citizenship that FDR started for you. It’s a wonderful idea.”

“But..” Kiley hesitated.

“No but!” Mark exclaimed. “You have a ball and shop. Who better to take care of you than my own daughter.”

“See?” Debbie chortled. “Daddy agrees. We’ll have a swell time.”

“I’m not so sure,” Kiley doubted. “Wouldn’t your mother want to shop for your trousseau with you?”

“Mommy is in California with Grandmother and soon Grandpapa will join them. She hates flying. She doesn’t even like Charles. Mommy will be in Washington to meet me in mid August. This will be so much better,” Debbie argued decisively.

“It’s settled,” Mark stated. “We’ll get your passport ready and you’ll return on a U.S. passport. You may want to visit Bob’s

family while your there. They live in Maryland. You'll help Kiley won't you, Sweet Pea?"

"Of course, Daddy," Debbie replied. "I'll take you any where you want to go."

"I guess it is decided then," Kiley agreed throwing up her arms in defeat.

"What's up?" Dallas asked entering the small sleeping room off the main shelter.

"We are going to New York," Kiley said flatly. "Exciting isn't it?"

Chapter 24

“There she is, the Prettiest Lady in America,” Dallas bragged. He pointed to the Statue of Liberty from the back of the limousine that was sent for them by President Roosevelt when their plane landed at Idyllwyld Airport.

“Would you like to visit?” Debbie asked Kiley.

“My dear, I would love too!”

“It’s loveliest at night,” Dallas interjected. “That’s the first thing we’ll do once we’re settled in the hotel.”

“What do you think Charles?” Debbie queried. She leaned closer into his arms.

“I think that’s a great idea. However, Mother and Father will be waiting at the hotel. They want to have dinner with us. I think they want to discuss the wedding. I’d like to tell them about our plans.”

“And I should be there,” Debbie understood.

“All of us should be there,” Charles added. “I need you to be there. After dinner we could make a late night visit.”

Margaret and James Blanchard were waiting at the hotel when they arrived. Warm embraces and kisses were exchanged. Kiley was introduced and greeted politely. Charles parents seemed to be kind, friendly, and down to earth.

“Charles told us that two of General Hauser’s staff members would accompany Debbie,” James stated. “Of course we had no idea the general had such a beautiful staff member. Are you English?”

“Irish actually,” Kiley answered.

“Kiley is a valued staff member,” Dallas supported.

“She is also going to marry my father,” Debbie announced abruptly. “Which is what Charles and I want to talk about with you. We want to plan the wedding.”

“You’ve chosen a day?” Margaret asked excitedly. She liked Debbie and was happy Charles had chosen her to be his wife. Charles was her third child. He had an older sister and brother who were already happily married. Margaret and James had three grandchildren. This wedding was going to be a fun wedding for them. They had been through the society weddings for the first two.

“Actually not the exact day,” Debbie hesitated. “We have the place.”

Margaret and James looked at each other, “Place?”

“Paris,” Charles announced.

“I think this is going to be an interesting dinner,” Margaret suggested. There was a smile on her face. She took Debbie’s arm and Kiley’s arm. “Let’s get to the rooms and get comfortable. We are going to have a great chat.”

At dinner Debbie, Charles, and Kiley shared the information on the planned double wedding. Charles parents were delighted with the plans and agreed to assist with the details. It would be a small quiet affair. The discussions continued throughout their visit to Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty.

The next morning the women went shopping. Margaret took Kiley and Debbie to the most exclusive Wedding Shops on Manhattan.

“Kiley, that is ravishing!” Margaret complimented. “That gown is made for you!”

“You think so?” Kiley asked turning back and forth in the empire waisted satin gown. The tiny pearls and rhinestones on the bodice glittered in the store light. The skirt flowed in soft whispers of movement on the chiffon over satin. Since this was her second marriage, Kiley chose an ivory colored gown. She had selected a simple veil with a pearl flower crown. When Debbie emerged from the dressing room showing her wedding dress selection, Kiley quickly undressed and returned her dress to the clerk. She changed back into her uniform and returned to the floor to watch Debbie turn to and fro wearing her wedding gown and veil. “You are quite lovely.”

“I do so love this dress,” Debbie responded smoothing the satin bodice on her waisted wedding gown. The neckline was heart shaped with long sleeves ending at a point. The skirt was covered with pearl flowers and hemmed with lace. Her train was at least six feet long. The veil was short in front and the length covered her train. Debbie would wear a crown of pearls in the flower pattern of the wedding gown. “I hope Daddy can afford it.”

“Don’t worry your father with this,” Margaret stated firmly. “James and I are buying the dress and covering all the wedding costs.”

“I couldn’t ask that,” Debbie gulped.

“You didn’t ask!” Margaret explained. “James and I volunteered. It’s the least we can do for all your father is doing and sacrificing for us.” She leaned over to hug Debbie. It was then Margaret noticed Kiley standing near the dressing room door. “Kiley, why did you change? Don’t you want Debbie to see your gown?”

Kiley couldn’t bring herself to admit she couldn’t afford the gown. She loved it and wanted it, but gasped when she was told the price. This was her second marriage and it would be perfectly acceptable to wear her uniform or find a pretty ivory suit. “It didn’t fit,” Kiley lied.

“They alter it, dear,” Margaret suggested. She was a bit surprised since the gown fit Kiley’s perfect figure like a glove.

“Really, I don’t like the fit,” Kiley insisted.

Margaret knew by Kiley’s look she wanted to cry. Something was up. She would talk to the clerk and find out. “Will you walk with Debbie across the floor? Debbie should know how it feels to walk with the long train.”

“Certainly,” Kiley volunteered. She brightened up immediately. Debbie would be a beautiful bride.

Margaret went into the dressing area and called for the clerk who was helping Kiley. “I was told the dress didn’t fit. Couldn’t you alter the dress Miss Burke wore?”

“The fit wasn’t the problem. I’m afraid Miss Burke doesn’t have enough money to purchase the gown,” the clerk shared.

“Put both the gowns on our charge,” Margaret ordered. “Have both gowns delivered to my room at the Carleton Arms.”

“Yes madam,” the clerk obeyed. It would be a wonderful sales bonus today.

Margaret walked back out to the floor. “Silly me, I forgot my pocketbook in the dressing room. How do you feel walking in the gown?”

“Heavenly, Mother Blanchard,” Debbie bubbled.

“Positively heavenly.”

“Wonderful!” Margaret exclaimed clapping her hands.

“Let’s go on to buy the trousseau!”

When the women returned to the hotel room they were exhausted. They went to their rooms to take a long soaking bath before dinner.

Kiley felt terribly guilty for spending an entire month’s wage on a peignoir made of softest Chinese silk. The emerald green robe had long bell sleeves edged in black lace. The gown was emerald green, spaghetti strapped, and the hem was edged with the same lace as the robe’s sleeves. She excused her purchase with the thought that at least her wedding night would have a special gown. She did love the wedding gown, but that price was far too costly for a simple workingwoman like her. When she walked into the room she saw a dozen long stemmed red roses in a vase placed on the cherry wood table. Kiley walked to the flowers and took the card in the center of the flowers. *Dearest Love, I miss you already, Love Mark.* “I miss you too! I wish you were here to share all this luxury with me. I wish I could ask you about what you’d like for our wedding.” She sighed and wearily walked into the large bathroom. Quickly disrobing, Kiley sank into the bubbles of her hot bath and allowed her weary body the luxuries of this swank hotel.

Dressed for dinner, Dallas collected Kiley as her escort. They had a wonderful dinner with the Blanchards and Debbie.

“After three days of shopping have you had enough?”

Dallas teased. He had walked Kiley back to her hotel suite, put the key in the lock, and opened the door for her.

“More than enough. Margaret and Debbie are inexhaustible.”

“Get some rest. We’re going to Washington on the train tomorrow. You have a meeting with President Roosevelt.”

“I can’t wait to see him again. He’s such a wonderful man,” Kiley sighed. “To think he is bestowing me with citizenship by Presidential order.”

“Glad to have you finally on our side,” Dallas chuckled.

“I’ve always been on your side,” Kiley laughed and playfully punched Dallas in the arm. “What I don’t understand is why you’ve stayed here in New York. I know how anxious you are to see your wife, Vivian.”

“I’m not about to leave you alone in New York. The last time I let you alone you were beaten up pretty bad.”

Kiley automatically rubbed her chin. “That was pretty bad wasn’t it?”

“I wish I knew who did it to you.”

“No you don’t,” Kiley contradicted. “You really don’t.”

Dallas put his hands on Kiley’s shoulders. “Why can’t you trust me? Don’t you realize I’m your best friend? I’m devoted to the boss just like you.”

Kiley choked back her tears. The memories became fresh in her mind.

“Tell me, Kiley. You need to share this with someone.”

“All right, Dallas,” Kiley conceded. “Come in and sit down.”

Dallas sat on the chair and crossed his arms. He looked at the roses. “Nice! Mark?”

“Yes. Isn’t he the sweetest most thoughtful man?”

“I wouldn’t know that side of him. I’m not pretty enough,” Dallas teased.

“No you’re not. Thank heavens. I think I want him for myself,” Kiley joked in return.

“Quit evading, Kiley,” Dallas challenged. “Out with it.”

“You may not believe me,” Kiley hesitated.

“Kiley!”

“It was General Oscar Newhall,” Kiley said in a breath. “You can see why this must remain a secret! Why Mark can never know.”

Dallas choked, “My God. I would have never suspected. He comes across as such a.. a..”

“God fearing Christian?” Kiley finished.

“A bit holier than thou, yes,” Dallas confirmed. “Wipe me up with a broom. My lips are sealed.” He rose to leave the room. “Get some sleep. We are leaving early in the morning.”

“Good night, Dallas,” Kiley replied. She gave Dallas a peck on the cheek. “You are a good friend. I feel better sharing the secret with you.” Dallas smiled at her as she closed the door.

She opened the door to her bedroom. On the bed were two boxes. One was quite large. The other was smaller. Kiley found an envelope on the large box. She opened it. *Dear Kiley, accept this gift as a thank you for all you and General Hauser have done to keep our country safe and freedom secure. Yours, Margaret and James Blanchard.* Kiley opened the large box to find the wedding gown she had tried on and wanted to buy this morning. In the other box was the veil and crown. Kiley was beginning to like America and the Americans.

The trip to Washington City was exciting for Kiley. She enjoyed the countryside views as the train made its way to the Capitol of the United States. When the group arrived at the station Secret Service agents greeted them. A Presidential limousine was waiting for them. They were driven to the White House. President and Mrs. Roosevelt welcomed them and provided a quiet dinner in the White House. They were asked to stay the night as guests. No one was happier than Dallas. Vivian was waiting for him behind Mrs. Roosevelt. It was the best surprise ever.

Kiley admired the deep love Dallas and Vivian had for each other. Tomorrow she knew Dallas would be holding his four-year-old son in his arms. His ten-year-old daughter would also be vying for his attention. Tonight was a treat for Dallas and Vivian. They would have the night together and alone. It was no surprise to Kiley when the couple retired early. Kiley went to the private quarters of the White House where Eleanor Roosevelt witnessed the private citizenship ceremony. By Presidential order, Kiley Burke became an American Citizen. She was then inducted into the Women's Army Corp. Eleanor Roosevelt offered a gift of two WAC uniforms. Kiley was thrilled. Yes, she was really beginning to like this country.

The next day Debbie and the Blanchards took Kiley sight seeing in Washington. They visited the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument, and the Library of Congress. She wore her new WAC uniform.

The following day they visited Virginia. Kiley toured Mount Vernon. She loved history and this was history she never would have believed she would see. Debbie was becoming a good friend. She already adored the Blanchards. Everything was going fabulously. It was too good to be true.

It was too good to be true. The following day while enjoying lunch together in Debbie's hotel suite she received a phone call from her mother. Martie was in Washington City and expected to have Debbie stay with her at the house Mark had rented while he lived in Washington.

Debbie was reluctant, but finally conceded to her mother's wishes. She and Charles took her luggage to the house.

Kiley felt alone for the first time in America. She decided the best thing to do was take a short rest. She stayed in her room for a full day and found she was not the type to sit and do nothing. The next morning she called Bob Deacon's family and made arrangements to meet with them.

Elizabeth and John Deacon drove to the Hamilton Hotel from their home in Maryland. It was their plan to have lunch with Kiley at her hotel.

"Everyone of Bob's letter contained your name," John told Kiley. "He wrote us that you were the smartest and most beautiful woman he had ever met. I see he was right."

"He wrote us how much he loved you and couldn't wait to bring you home as his wife," Elizabeth shared holding back her tears. "So you see, we are really happy to finally meet you. You became a part of our lives because you were so much a part of Bob's life."

"Bob was very dear to me," Kiley told his parents. "He talked about the two of you all the time. He shared his childhood memories. There were times I found it very hard to believe that a family was a close he said his family was. I guess all the stories he told me are true."

"What stories did he tell you?" Elizabeth asked. It would keep her memories of her son stronger if she knew what were his memories.

Kiley spent the next five hours sharing every story Bob told her that she could remember. The three of them laughed at many of Bob's stories. When Bob's parents left that evening Kiley knew the three of them had closure on Bob's death. It was a good Irish Wake.

Debbie came to the hotel the next day and sought Kiley out. "Mommy has been very busy."

“Really? How?” Kiley asked knowing that Debbie was bursting to talk out her obvious frustration.

“Grandpapa is here with Mommy. They planned a huge engagement party. Half the people in Washington City are invited,” Debbie groaned. “I don’t care for all these fake people. That’s why Charles and I want our quiet wedding.”

“Have you told your mother your plans?” Kiley questioned in concern. Mark had never told her anything about his ex wife. Debbie was a font of information on her mother’s quirks, harangues, and controlling behaviors. She wondered if Martie Hauser would give Debbie problems about her wedding plan.

Debbie looked at Kiley forlornly. “Would you believe I’m a coward? I haven’t. I’m afraid she’ll ruin everything.”

“You must tell her,” Kiley urged.

“I know, but I’m afraid.”

Kiley took Debbie’s hand. “This is your wedding. Remember you have control of it. Perhaps if you approach this engagement party with enthusiasm you can ease her disappointment in planning your wedding.”

“I knew I could count on you to help me think straight,” Debbie appreciated. “No wonder Daddy loves you so much. You help him think clearly too, whether you realize it or not.”

“Thanks, Sweet Pea.”

“You miss Daddy, don’t you?”

“Yes. I miss your father very much.”

Chapter 25

“What?” Martie screamed angrily. “How could you do that?”

“Mommy, calm down. She’s a wonderful person,” Debbie answered softly.

“How dare you invite that strumpet to your engagement party? Don’t you realize she is the woman that drove your father and I apart?” Martie snarled furiously. “That woman lured your father from me and is the reason we’re divorced.” Martie picked up one of the flower vases that were selected for the engagement party’s centerpieces and smashed it on the floor.

“Mommy, you and Daddy were separated before he left for Europe and met Kiley Burke,” Debbie responded logically.

“He would have come back to me if it wasn’t for that woman!” Martie shouted. She realized this would get her nowhere with her daughter. It was time to bring on the tears. “Don’t you realize how much I love your father and miss him? It would wound me terribly to face the woman that stole your Daddy.”

The tears softened Debbie as Martie had hoped.

“Mommy, don’t cry. We have to get on with our lives.”

“You’re right dear,” Martie sobbed creatively. “She’s been nice to you and was your chaperon on the way back home from your father. I should be gracious.” In her anger Martie had come up with an idea for retribution. She would make sure Kiley was invited. After Debbie left the house to have dinner with Charles, Martie called many of her friends that she had invited to the party and used her manipulative methods to set them up for her revenge on Kiley Burke.

The next weeks were busy for Kiley. She worked with Margaret Blanchard on wedding plans and how they would coordinate the details. Kiley, Debbie, and Margaret shopped in

Washington City, visited every sight a tourist would visit. Kiley took pictures of everything. She went through rolls of film.

"I must be crazy for going," Kiley sighed leaning her head against the car window.

"You were invited," Vivian reminded. "You would disappoint Deborah if you didn't attend her engagement party."

"I'm going for Debbie, but I don't know any of these people," Kiley choked.

"Nonsense! You know me, Vivian, Debbie, Charles, Margaret, and James," Dallas corrected. "I'm sure there will be some brass that if you don't already know, will have heard of them."

"You're worried about Mark's ex wife, aren't you?" Vivian asked wisely.

"Martie invited you!" Dallas remarked. "She wouldn't dare do or say anything publicly. It isn't her style. I can guarantee she'll be the epitome of politesse."

"Why don't I find that comforting?" Kiley laughed.

"You'll be fine. You are drop dead gorgeous tonight. As a matter of fact, I would be jealous if I didn't trust my Dallas completely," Vivian chuckled. "Besides, Dallas and I will be with you all the time."

"I really do appreciate you and Dallas," Kiley said. She sighed heavily.

"Kiley, I've seen you withstand bombings, death, and inconceivable pressure," Dallas noted. "I've never seen you scared. Don't startle me with a surprise tonight."

"I'll do my best," Kiley replied. There was one more sigh before Dallas drove the car into the parking lot of the private country club. She looked around to see nothing but Cadillac cars and black limousines.

"I don't suppose President and Mrs. Roosevelt are here?" Kiley joked.

"Martie invited them," Vivian chortled. "Unfortunately they did have other engagements."

"My Packard looks out of place here," Dallas quipped. "Are you sure we were invited?"

"Here's the invitation, love," Vivian laughed holding the card.

“Oh look,” Kiley sniggered. “There’s a Ford!”

“Don’t park near that,” Vivian ordered. “I couldn’t lift my head if our Packard were found parked next to a Ford.”

The three laughed together so hard their ribs hurt. Fortunately they had regained their composure before they entered the private club.

Handing their cards to the herald, they were introduced. When Kiley’s name was announced the three felt most of the women’s eyes were on her.

“Why do I feel like the main course?” Kiley asked Vivian quietly.

“Most likely because this is Martie’s turf and I would guess you are a spicy piece of beef,” Vivian teased. “Don’t worry. Dallas and I are going to stay close.”

“Promise you’ll rescue me if I fall between the knives and forks of the madams,” Kiley pleaded playfully.

“I’ll protect you with my life,” Vivian promised with a wink.

“Do you girls want a drink?” Dallas asked.

“I’d like a sherry,” Vivian requested.

“Gin and lime,” Kiley asked. “On second thought, make it Scotch and water.” She felt several women staring at her.

Dallas raised his brow and gave Kiley a wink. “It’ll be okay. Relax and have a good time.”

Dallas brought back the drinks and they started toward the tables set with fruits, pate, caviar, crackers, and cheese.

Kiley started sampling the fruit. It had been so long since she had fresh fruit. The tables had apples, bananas, oranges, cherries, and strawberries. While enjoying a dipped strawberry, Kiley watched wearily when Dallas and Vivian were taken to the side by their friend’s, Dave and Monica Hardy. Kiley moved to a pillar and leaned against it. She couldn’t help but overhear some of the conversation behind it.

“Jane has absolutely nothing to worry about.”

“But her husband, Colonel Davis is actually flaunting his affair with that WAC.”

“My dear, men may play during the war with other women, but they never leave their wives. That floozy will meet her just desserts soon enough.”

"I suppose you're right. Men may enjoy other women, but they'll always return to the home fire."

Kiley moved away from that conversation. She wondered if they knew about her and Mark. No, they couldn't know.

"Hello, Miss Burke," a smooth voice greeted. "When I heard you were invited I simply had to meet you. I'm Mrs. Holms. I understand you know my husband, General Dylan Holms."

"Yes, I've met the general many times," Kiley responded politely.

"Is it true you're General Hauser's driver?"

"I'm his driver, secretary, and assistant."

"Everything in one," Mrs. Holms quipped. She leaned close to Kiley's ear and whispered, "Is it true that you sleep with General Hauser? There has been some gossip here in Washington."

"That is what it is Mrs. Holms. It is gossip," Kiley replied calmly. She couldn't believe the audacity of this woman. She wondered what Mrs. Holm's would say if she asked her if she knew her husband slept with so many women of ill repute he was under medical care in London for venereal disease.

"I'm glad to hear that. It is quite nerve wracking for us military wives here stateside. We worry so much about women stealing our husbands. I'm certain even Martie isn't immune from such worry," Mrs. Holms stated.

Kiley realized immediately this was a planned conversation to upset her. She decided she would take flight and not fight. "Excuse me. I find I am quite hungry for some more of those strawberries and real cream." Kiley fled to the powder room for a little respite. She had looked for Vivian and Dallas, but they had left the main room. This time Kiley overheard a conversation in the powder room across from her when she powdered her nose. Voices came from behind large potted plants in the powder room.

"I can't believe Martie invited that woman here. The very woman that is committing adultery with her husband."

"Those women overseas are veritable whores."

"I heard they do anything to sleep with American Officers."

"I heard they do anything for a pair of nylons."

"They throw themselves at our husbands!"

"And Martie invites the very hussy here!"

"If you ask me it is the best way to handle it."

"What ever do you mean by that?"

"Martie is showing that brazen hussy just who is more of a woman and will hold on to her man. She's not crumbling to that English bitch at all."

"You're right. Martie is letting her know a wife and mother of your child is above a mistress. She's showing that marriage is more important and lasting than an affair."

Kiley couldn't listen to any more. Did they know she was there? Why are all these women discussing her anyway? Didn't they have other things to worry about? Food? Shelter? Children? The War? Obviously these women had never faced bombs, fire, and hundreds of bodies. She stepped outside the French doors for a breath of fresh air.

"Kiley! I've been looking for you!" A voice came from behind her.

Kiley turned to see Debbie Hauser. In moments Debbie was next to her and giving Kiley a kiss on her cheek.

"I'm so glad to see you," Debbie bubbled. "Mother has kept me quite busy this past week."

"Your party is quite," Kiley stumbled for the correct word. "Elaborate."

"This is quite normal for Grandfather and mother," Debbie informed. "You'll finally meet the dragon lady."

"Must I?"

"Be a sport! Daddy and I have lived with Mother for over twenty one years," Debbie teased playfully.

"Somehow I don't feel like a sport at all," Kiley groaned.

"Come on," Debbie urged. "Dinner is being served. I have to go back in. You don't have to meet Mother. I was teasing. I'm just happy to see you. Have you heard from Daddy? I've heard that our armies are moving rapidly to Paris."

"I've listened to the radio and know as much as you do," Kiley replied. "I haven't heard from your Father."

"You miss him a lot," Debbie stated leading Kiley into the dining room. "I do, too! You and Dallas will be returning in a week. I'll have to wait for you and Daddy to call."

Once inside Kiley was whisked away by Vivian.

"There you are! Dallas is waiting for us at our table."

Kiley followed obediently.

After the main course was served Vivian whispered to Kiley. "Martie may soon be out of the picture as a problem to you and Mark."

"Why do you say that?" Kiley asked.

"Those two up there," Vivian replied subtly pointing her finger. "Martie has been flirting with that man all evening. She's got her hooks out for him. It seems old Papa is promoting the two."

"He looks vaguely familiar," Kiley remarked. "I've seen him somewhere before."

"Dallas, do you know him?" Vivian asked her husband.

"Yes, he is Prescott Hawthorne. You may have seen him in London. He travels there a lot. He is one of the wealthiest men in America. The Hawthorne family owns oil shares from what I understand," Dallas answered.

"Hawthorne is into more than oil," Kiley commented. "He is also married with five children. He has four sons and a daughter."

"Married with children wouldn't stop Martie. You have met him then," Vivian said with interest.

"I've never met him. I've only read about him and seen his picture," Kiley responded. She remembered his dossier from her brief time with British Intelligence before she was transferred to drive for General Hauser. British Intelligence was watching Prescott Hawthorne. They had discovered his Nazi connection in supplying arms, finances, and a deep anti Semitic hatred. They also discovered many secret bank accounts affiliated with the Nazi. Prescott Hawthorne was supplying arms to the British and the Nazi, which is why he wasn't brought up on charges of treason. She knew she couldn't say anything. All those files were confidential.

"Kiley, you're white as a sheet. I have a feeling there is more to this Hawthorne than you've said," Dallas noticed.

Kiley pasted an artificial smile. "No really, I've only read about him and seen his photograph." She picked up her wine glass and took a large swallow.

"I don't believe you, but we'll drop it," Dallas answered.

"Of course we'll drop it," Vivian agreed. "Let's enjoy this wonderful food. I haven't eaten this well in a long time. Some of us are on rations."

“You mean all Americans don’t eat like this?” Kiley quipped anxious to change the subject.

“Only the absolute wealthy are exempt from rationing like the rest of the world,” Vivian informed. She cut a small piece of steak and savored the cut in her mouth moaning delightfully.

“Keep that up and I’ll never make it back to Europe,” Dallas teased Vivian. He made a small growling sound.

Kiley adored the fact that Dallas and Vivian were so much in love and completely happy with each other. It gave her hope that there were such rare occurrences as a happy marriage. Maybe those women were wrong. Maybe Mark did love her and was going to marry her. They were happy together. It had to last.

When dinner was over, Kiley thought Vivian and Dallas should have a little more time alone. This time she stepped outside the French doors and walked into the garden. She found a bench between some fragrant bushes and sat down. It was a lovely summer evening. The moon was full and the stars were bright. Her solitude was suddenly interrupted.

“It is a lovely night isn’t it?”

A woman sat next to Kiley.

“A beautiful night,” Kiley agreed. “I needed a breath of fresh air.”

“I understand,” she laughed. “Those people tend to be a bit stuffy.”

“You know from experience?” Kiley chuckled.

“Years of experience,” she shared. “I’m grateful my mother taught me the proper use of wealth. It is to be used to help not obtain more wealth. Most of those stuffed shirts don’t even really have a lot of money. They pretend they do.”

“I’m Kiley Burke.”

“I’m pleased to meet you. I’m Lucille Newhall. You’ve met my husband, I presume. You are General Hauser’s aide and driver I’ve heard about?”

“The gossip?” Kiley questioned with sadness.

“Of course the gossip,” Lucille laughed. “Don’t let those jealous tongues bother you. Small minds talk of small things.”

“Don’t you want to know if the gossip is true?” Kiley asked. She was surprised by the kindness and sweetness of the wife of the man that brutally attacked her.

“I only care that you seem to be a genuine person and probably someone I’d like to know better,” Lucille replied taking Kiley’s hand. “Maybe after the war we might have some time to talk about the world’s joys and sorrows. I have a feeling you’ve seen it all. Your leave must be over soon.”

“I go home in a week, but when this war is over I’d like to talk with you more,” Kiley responded genuinely.

Oscar had noticed his wife’s disappearance. He always kept an eye on her. She was so gullible and susceptible to a bleeding heart story. When he spotted Lucille sitting with Kiley terror ran through his veins. He couldn’t afford to lose his power base. The Stone family and their millions were his ticket to the position he held. If Kiley Burke told her what he did? The thought terrorized him. He ran to the bench. “There you are, my love. I was worried.”

“My Oscar worries for me,” Lucille explained to Kiley. “I’m fine dear. I just met General Hauser’s aide, Kiley Burke. You’ve met her, haven’t you?”

“Yes, of course. Hello, Miss Burke,” Newhall addressed nervously. “We need to go back to the party, my love. You might catch a cold out here.”

“Silly man,” Lucille chortled. “It’s summer and at least 75 degrees outside. You do worry too much. We’ll go back now so you don’t worry any more. I enjoyed talking to you Kiley. I hope we can meet again soon.”

Kiley waved to Lucille and shook her head. Oscar was such a beast married to such a beautiful person. Her thoughts were quickly shattered by a singsong voice that made her spine shiver.

“So you’ve met the sweet Mrs. Newhall. It’s time to meet me,” Martie said menacingly. She stood in front of Kiley. “Don’t get up. I’m here to tell you this; you will never have my Mark. I’ll get him back. I didn’t spend my life working to put him with the right people to have a whore like you seduce him into oblivion. He’s right where he’s supposed to be and soon will be even higher. Set your sights a little lower. Mark belongs to me.”

“Mark makes his own choices,” Kiley defended. The gall of this woman was incredible.

“You don’t really believe that do you? You really are a stupid woman. Money and power define everything. My father’s money made Mark Hauser what he is today,” Martie boasted.

“Just what is Mark?” Kiley challenged.

“He’s a war hero and on his way to a great political career. He has been groomed and selected. That life is mine,” Martie hissed. “Disappear for your own sake.”

“What would Mark think of Prescott Hawthorne?” Kiley questioned wondering about her flirtation with this despicable man.

“The question is, what would some plebian commoner like you know about power, politics, and the presidency,” Martie sneered.

“You are so right,” Kiley agreed quickly. “A simple commoner like me would never understand. You are telling me that the millions of Prescott Hawthorne are going to take Mark Hauser to the Presidency?”

“At least you understand a part of it,” Martie sniggered. “I am currently negotiating the funding of Mark’s Presidency. It’s what I’ve always done for Mark’s career. Mark needs me more now than ever before. It is the culmination of his career. It is the White House.”

“Are you sure this is what Mark wants?”

“He doesn’t know what he wants. He’s never known what he wants. That’s why he needs me,” Martie chirped egotistically. “That’s why you are no good for him. You’ll destroy him and everything he can be.”

“Why are you doing this? You and Mark are divorced. You won’t share the White House with him. Does this Prescott Hawthorne know you are divorced?” Kiley questioned.

“There isn’t anything that Prescott Hawthorne doesn’t know. He also knows that Mark will come back to me after the war. Politics, power, and the presidency means Mark will return to the all American family. He won’t risk any scandal. Our divorce is the best-kept secret of this war. There is money and power behind that secret. Money and power will bring Mark back to me,” Martie crowed.

“I see,” Kiley replied. She stood and left the garden. She approached Dallas and told him she was going to call for a cab. She didn’t want to spoil the party for Dallas and Vivian, but she couldn’t bear another minute. Martie had shaken her deeply. Kiley wanted to go back to her hotel room and fall apart. The stiff upper lip of the British couldn’t be held much longer.

“Don’t be silly. We’ll all leave in the comfortable Packard together,” Vivian contradicted. “Dallas and I have had more than we can bear of this party ourselves. We have our limits on enduring self serving demi gods.”

Dallas led the way with keys in hand. He was quite concerned about Kiley. When she had approached him and Vivian about leaving, she was white and shaking badly. He knew it wasn’t Oscar Newhall. He had kept an eye on him and Oscar only left the party for a few minutes returning with his wife Lucille on his arm. Dallas also knew it would be impossible to pry from Kiley what her problem was. He had never seen Kiley so shaken before. He had seen it too many times on this trip. Dallas was almost relieved that the leave was up and he and Kiley would be returning to England. He would miss Vivian, but watching Kiley fall apart was difficult. It was as if she reflected the backbone of the war and Mark. It was the right time for Kiley to return to her love.

Chapter 26

“Ahh, home at last,” Dallas teased stretching out his legs in the back of General Hauser’s car. He was concerned when Kiley didn’t respond to his comment. She had been too quiet for the entire trip home. She spoke only when spoken too. Like this moment, she simply stared out the window in deep thought. Something was up and he wasn’t sure if he should push her into revealing what was troubling her. He had kept her safe. The problem was something Mark needed to take care of.

Arriving at Connemara Hotel, Kiley went directly to her room. She stayed there the entire evening including taking her supper in her room.

The next day Dallas watched Kiley while she dug into the overflowing inbox of unanswered letters. Her fingers clacked on the typewriter incessantly. Dallas was about to scream when Kiley broke for lunch. He wondered if he could stand the afternoon when Mark walked into the office.

It was obvious he had just returned from the front lines in Normandy. He was jubilant.

“We’ve taken Paris!”

The general’s aides surrounded him and issued congratulations. He spotted Dallas and walked to him.

Dallas caught Mark’s eye looking at Kiley’s area and returning a questioning glance to him.

“Welcome back, Dallas.”

“Thank you, General Hauser.”

“Did you have a safe trip?” Mark asked Dallas with a questioning intonation.

Dallas understood. "It was very comfortable. Kiley and I were treated well. She'd tell you herself, but she just went to lunch."

"Good. Good," Mark responded with relief. He returned to his office to finish some paperwork. He had been told Dallas and Kiley were due back yesterday. He finished his inspections hurriedly and returned to England as fast as he could. He missed Kiley and couldn't wait to hold her again. Once in his office he finished his reports quickly. Soon after Kiley had returned to her station he came out of the office and announced, "Let's go to Cable Cottage and start our weekend."

Dallas folded his documents and rose immediately.

Kiley also complied.

There was a new driver for General Hauser's car. Mark had become accustomed to a sharp motorcycle driver while touring frontlines in France.

Kiley froze with dread. Perhaps all the things she had heard in that party were true. Perhaps Mark was through with her and returning to Martie. Kiley realized she had nothing to fight the power of money. All she had was her love for the man, Mark Hauser.

Once in the car and on the way to Cable Cottage Mark relaxed and took Kiley's hand in his. He lifted her hand to his lips. "I didn't realize how much I would miss you. I don't think we should be separated this long again."

Kiley looked at Mark. His eyes spoke the truth. He had missed her, but those words from Martie had really shaken her. Kiley chose to say nothing. She allowed Mark to continue holding her hand throughout the ride to the cottage.

Dallas felt the tension in the car. Mark was feeling Kiley's apprehension, as was he. When they arrived at the cottage, Dallas wisely excused himself with some duties he needed to take care of. He took the driver to a nearby town.

Kiley and Mark were completely alone in the cottage.

"What's troubling you?" Mark demanded. "Don't tell me nothing! I know you intimately. I love you. What is it?"

All of Kiley's fears erupted into anger. "You Bloody well know what's wrong. Why did you send me to the Colonies? A test to see if I could survive the feasting of your cats?"

“Goddammit! What are you talking about? I sent you to America to get your citizenship so we could marry. I also wanted closure on Bob Deacon.”

“Don’t lie to me. You were hoping I’d collapse and leave you,” Kiley shouted. “Well your Bloody plan worked. I’m turning in my request for transfer back to the British Intelligence Office.”

Mark was completely confused and hurt. “No you’re not!” Mark growled angrily. “You’re not leaving me.”

“Oh yes I am!” Kiley roared.

Mark couldn’t help himself. He grabbed Kiley’s shoulders and shook her. “Goddammit! What the hell happened at home? If you don’t tell me, I’ll lock you up until I get to the bottom of this. What do cats have to do with anything anyway?”

“You wouldn’t dare lock me up!” Kiley screamed defiantly.

“I would dare!” Mark promised.

Kiley couldn’t handle her own anger and fear any longer. She broke down crying.

Mark took her into his arms and kissed her forehead while his hands caressed her back and arms. “Tell me what happened. Please tell me what has upset you.”

Kiley choked out in sobs, “I met Martie Hauser.”

“Goddammit. I didn’t want that to happen. How?”

“Debbie wanted me to go to her engagement party. I couldn’t say no to her.”

“I understand that. I find it difficult to say no to Sweet Pea myself. Is that where you met Martie?”

Kiley sobbed and nodded her head.

Mark held Kiley tighter and stroked her hair lovingly.

“Shhhh, it’s alright. I’m here. Martie can’t hurt you.”

“She already has,” Kiley sobbed. “Actually scared me to death.”

Mark’s patience turned to rage. “Martie threatened you?”

“Not my life, yours! Actually she told me about your future, her plans, and your remarriage. Power, politics, and the presidency as Martie put it,” Kiley wept. “I have nothing to offer you like that. I have only my love.”

“There is nothing more valuable to me than your love. Absolutely nothing in the world is more valuable to me than you,” Mark comforted.

Kiley looked up into Mark's eyes. She knew she was telling her the truth. She allowed him to walk her to the large sofa in the small living room.

"I have something for you," Mark announced. He took a box out of his pocket and placed it in her hand. "You promised to marry me. I intend you to keep that promise. We took Paris yesterday."

Kiley couldn't believe her ears. Mark still intended to marry her. Those women were wrong and so was Martie. Mark did love her. She opened the box. Inside was a large peridot stone surrounded diamond baguettes.

Mark took the box from her, removed the ring, and slipped it on her finger. "Once Paris is secure I'll send for Deborah. Then you, Kiley Burke, will keep your promise and become my wife."

Kiley was overcome with emotion. "Yes, my darling. Oh yes my darling." She craned her neck to kiss Mark passionately.

Moments later they were in bed together sharing their commitment.

Dallas came home with the rest of the staff. Mark and Kiley didn't come downstairs and no one disturbed them. Dallas felt relief at their absence.

Lying in Mark's arms after a pleasant consummation of love, Kiley sighed, "I love you so much."

"Why did you want to leave me?"

"I'm in so deep I was afraid I would love you more. If you left me I was afraid I couldn't survive life without you," Kiley confessed. "You can call it self preservation."

"Even if you would destroy me doing it? I told you I had no idea I would miss you that much."

"Those women at the party and Martie were so convincing," Kiley confessed.

"From now on I want you to only listen to me. Promise?"

"Yes my general."

"You know what I'm thinking about?"

"Not a clue. What?"

"I'm thinking I want to make our baby. Would you like a baby?"

"I want your baby very much."

Mark chuckled and nuzzled Kiley's neck. "Good let's get back to work. I want to keep you full of my babies. Did I tell you I've always wanted a big family?"

"Yes you did. Now I know you mean it," Kiley laughed feeling his hard organ pressing against her thigh.

"Oh yes I do," Mark chortled. He spent the next minutes pleasuring Kiley until together they shared the euphemistic joy of each other's orgasm.

Dallas was up early the next morning. He blocked the stairway when Sean approached them to wake General Hauser. "You're not going up there this morning," Dallas stated.

"What are you talking about?" Sean asked attempting to continue his trek.

"I'm saying the general needs to sleep in. Leave him alone and let him come down when he's ready."

"She's with him isn't she?" Sean asked snidely.

"That is not your business. Nor is it mine. I am merely stating the general has been working hard and comes to Cable Cottage for a rest. Let him rest," Dallas growled. He knew Kiley was with the general, but it truly was no ones business but theirs. Of course he was the only one in the inner circle that knew the two were going to be married.

"Let it be your head that rolls when General Hauser wakes up late and I'm not there to dress him," Sean warned. He shrugged his shoulders and headed back to the kitchen.

Upstairs Mark was beginning to wake. He was content finding Kiley still asleep in his arms. *You look like an angel when you sleep.*

Kiley woke to soft gentle kisses on her forehead, cheek, nose, and lips. "Good Morning."

"I love you waking up my arms," Mark whispered lovingly. The words were followed with gentle kisses on her lips.

"What time is it?" Kiley asked stretching lazily.

"I don't know," Mark chuckled. "I don't care."

"I do. Sean is always here for you at six every morning.

Mark groaned, "I forget everything when you're here, but he has to get used to us sleeping in the same bed when we're married."

“That’s then. This is now. I don’t particularly want Sean to see me here,” Kiley grumped.

Mark squinted at the clock on the bureau. “I don’t think Sean is coming this morning. It’s already six. He would be in here by now if he were coming.”

“Thank heaven for small favors,” Kiley said jumping from the bed.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Mark barked grabbing for Kiley and missing.

“To get dressed,” Kiley chuckled avoiding Mark’s grabbing hands. “You better call Sean up here or he’ll think you’re dead.”

Mark laughed with joy while watching Kiley leave the room. He couldn’t wait until that lovely fun woman was his wife. He had never enjoyed intimacy like this before. It’s as if they were made for each other. He sank back onto his pillows and closed his eyes. He allowed himself the luxury of a moment of daydreaming. In his daydream Kiley was very pregnant. He was palming her abdomen and felt his child kicking. He didn’t care anymore if he might be too old. He was looking forward to making Kiley his wife and watching her grow full with his baby. It was several minutes before he reached for the phone to call for Sean.

Sean came in a few minutes later and Mark dressed for the day. He wore a short-sleeved shirt, pants, and golf shoes. This would be a day of relaxation. Tomorrow he would go riding with Kiley enjoying their precious little time together. After breakfast with Kiley in his arms, he made a radio phone call to Debbie.

“Hi Sweet Pea! We took Paris. Everything should be secured by the end of September,” Mark announced. “Do you think you and your guy can be here then?”

“We’ll all be there, Daddy,” Debbie bubbled happily. “We’ll plan on getting married mid-October. Is that alright? We will need a little time to get things organized.”

“Whatever time you need, Sweet Pea. As for Kiley and I, well I’ve waited this long for the love of my life. I’ll force myself to wait a little longer.” Mark squeezed Kiley lovingly.

Kiley was thrilled. Suddenly everything was turning up roses for her. It seemed almost too good to be true.

Mark went to play golf with the inner circle of aides. Kiley took her place to watch on the bench hidden in the garden.

Sunday, after their ride Mark told Kiley he would be returning to Normandy and flying for a needed meeting with Montgomery on the battle strategies.

Monday, Kiley and Mark drove to headquarters. Kiley went to her tasks at the office. Mark filled his briefcase with his maps and papers and left for a flight to the Normandy battle front.

A day later Kiley and Dallas were informed by coded teletype the general's plane was overdue on his return.

"I'm going over there," Kiley stated. She was filled with terror. She couldn't imagine her life if her love were killed in action.

"No! You need to stay here!" Dallas ordered. "I'll get a plane. I'm going!"

"Goddammit!" Kiley snarled. "I've got more at stake than you do! We'll both go!" She straightened the papers on her desk and grabbed her purse.

Dallas was right behind her.

They drove to the airfield. Quartermaster that he was, Dallas obtained a small plane. They left immediately for the Normandy Coast. The general's itinerary was in Kiley's hand. They would follow his path. His first visit was to be with Montgomery. Later he would fly on to visit with Bradley and the first army near Lavon. Mark's aides were in radio contact. The entire headquarters was on alert.

General Montgomery had been contacted. He informed headquarters that General Hauser had indeed visited him and that the general left by small plane to visit Bradley. Bradley was concerned beyond measure when he was called and informed the general was overdue. He told headquarters that General Hauser had visited with him and planned to return to Caen.

Kiley and Dallas landed at Caen. There was a small airfield the Army Corps of Engineers had set up. This is where Mark would have returned for the plane to gas up and the mechanics to check before he returned to Portsmouth. His car was still waiting for him there.

Kiley pulled out her road maps. "The pilot would have followed the coast and train trucks until Eureux. We are going to follow that route. Do we have a jeep?"

A driver and jeep appeared on the airfield.

“Will this do?” Dallas quipped. He was trying desperately to hide his deep concern for General Hauser’s well being.

Kiley was in the jeep next to the driver in a flash of light. Dallas climbed in behind her. Kiley and Dallas scanned the landscape looking for any sign of a downed plane. The driver was told to drive slowly.

An hour after Kiley and Dallas started their rescue trek, another jeep approached theirs on the road.

“It’s Mark!” Kiley shouted. “Pull over to that jeep.”

Their driver cut in front of the oncoming jeep.

“Goddammit!” Mark screamed. His face contorted in pain when his jeep came to a stop.

Kiley jumped from her seat and ran to Mark. She saw his face and hands were covered with sweat and dirt. Then she saw his leg. It was wrapped with shreds of shirt tying two limbs on either side. His trousers were stained with grass, dirt, and blood. Her instinct was to touch his wound. A corporal pointing a rifle at her stopped her short.

“At ease soldier,” Mark grimaced hiding his pain. He moved to address the soldier and his leg hurt like hell. “These people are with my staff.” With another grimace he turned to Kiley and growled, “What the hell are you doing here?”

“Looking for you,” Kiley snapped. “What the hell happened?”

“I took a stroll through the woods,” Mark growled. “With the plane. Goddammit Kiley, don’t touch the leg. It hurts like hell.”

“Where’s the nearest field hospital?” Dallas asked the group that had found Mark and his pilot.

“Down the road 5 kilometers. We were driving him there when you stopped us,” the corporal responded.

“I didn’t see any hospital,” Kiley retorted.

“Where did you come from?” the corporal asked.

“We started at Caen,” Dallas answered.

“10 kilometers out of Caen is a fork to the right. The field hospital is 2 kilometers from that fork on the right.”

The drive was difficult for Mark. The jostling of the Jeep on the rough roads caused great discomfort to his broken leg. By the time they arrived at the field hospital Mark was in a terrible

mood. The medics who came to take General Hauser into the hospital were greeted with angry expletives.

Kiley whispered into Mark's ear, "Stiff upper lip General Hauser. You must set example. Think of those soldiers that lost their appendages or have a hole blown in their stomach."

Mark calmed down immediately. He turned to Kiley. "You are my perfect half. You keep me grounded and in reality."

Kiley and Dallas followed Mark into the hospital. While they waited they visited some of the wounded. Kiley helped the nurses change bandages on a few wounded. She took letters from several soldiers and promised she would post them. Dallas talked to the wounded about what they had faced, been through, and what they thought they could have used.

Later they would report to Mark a confirmation of his own reconnaissance information, the line had advanced so quickly their supply lines were spread to thin. The Red Ball Express ran day and night. They stopped only for repairs. Antwerp needed to be taken soon.

"General Hauser will need to keep off his leg for a week. The next month or two he can use crutches," Doctor Malden announced. "I've put a cast on his leg. He should have it x-rayed again by his own physician."

"Why the cast?" Kiley asked. "Is his leg broken?"

"A hairline fracture on the fibula near the malleolus." Dr. Malden indicated where the fracture was located. "It should heal quickly provided the general follows doctor's orders."

"We'll get him back to England right away," Dallas stated.

"I suggest he rest for a week before any heavy travel."

"Dallas, wasn't Mark setting up a SHAEF headquarters in Versailles?" Kiley asked.

"Would it be alright to drive the general to Versailles?"

Dallas questioned Dr. Malden.

"I've given him a shot of morphine. It should last until you get him there. I've met some Parisian doctors. They are top notch," Dr. Malden informed. He turned and walked toward the ward tent. "Excuse me, I have some rounds to make."

General Hauser walked out on crutches. "Let's go."

When they got into a car Dallas procured for the ride Mark asked where they were headed.

“We’re going to your new headquarters in Versailles. The doctor said you need some time to recuperate,” Dallas answered.

The morphine had eased the pain and he was becoming drowsy, but the thought of having Kiley alone to himself for a few days in the romantic city of Versailles in the beautiful villa chosen for SHAEF.

Chapter 27

Mark woke up in a large luxurious canopied bed. His mind was clear from the morphine shot. The sun was beginning to peer through opened French doors leading to a patio. On the patio was the shadowy figure of a woman. “Kiley?”

The figure turned and walked into his room. A light came on when the figure flicked an electrical switch.

“Are you in any pain?” Kiley asked walking to Mark’s bedside. She was still wearing a silk nightgown.

“No. Even if I were, seeing you in the silk thing would immediately eliminate all discomfort,” Mark chuckled. “Come here.”

“I am here,” Kiley teased standing by Mark’s bedside.

“I mean here,” Mark instructed patting the bed after flipping open the covers.

“Yes sir!” Kiley laughed giving Mark a salute. She climbed into bed next to him.

“Mmm, that’s better,” Mark said softly. His hands immediately slipped behind the silk nightgown to cup Kiley’s firm breasts. His fingers manipulated her pink teats. His thumb and forefinger were squeezing them playfully. Leaning over Kiley his lips began tasting Kiley’s welcoming lips. “I love you, Kiley,” Mark breathed between kisses.

“I love you,” Kiley repeated breaking away from Mark’s lips. “When I didn’t know what happened to you and I thought you had crashed and been killed I nearly died myself.”

“I won’t die. We’ve only begun our life.”

“Have we?”

“Yes. Soon you will be my wife.”

“Mark, I want to ask you something that has been on my mind for sometime,” Kiley shared moving closer to Mark.

“Ask me. If it’s been on your mind I’d like to know what it is,” Mark conferred.

“What is Martie like? I mean what do you think about her? Why did you divorce her?” Kiley asked. “I heard what she thinks about you and your marriage to her. What did you think of your marriage to you?”

“I don’t know what she is like. I think she’s a woman unlike you. Let me start at the beginning of our marriage. I thought I fell in love with Martie. I soon learned I fell into her trap. She looked at me as a malleable husband who would lead her to her future and her way of life. She was right. I was a poor farm boy impressed by her family’s wealth and position. Her father and Martie bought my way up the ladder of promotion. They had the money and knew all the right people. The reality is I probably wouldn’t be here now if it wasn’t for that money and connections. The reality is also that I was miserable. I had to do what they wanted me to do. I had to go where they wanted me to go. I finally realized that although they put me in the right places, it was my skills that make me. I had a feeling Martie was unfaithful. She was even though I didn’t find out for certain until after the divorce. Does that answer your questions?”

“Yes. I know I like that you think I am completely unlike Martie.”

“Completely unlike Martie.” Mark brushed a sweet kiss across Kiley’s lips. “What was your husband like?”

“A man that loved only himself. He had no love to share with a spouse. He was far too involved in himself.”

“I think that’s a better way to describe Martie.”

“So we have another thing in common,” Kiley chuckled. “Narcissus ex spouses.”

“Are we done talking?”

“I believe so,” Kiley replied. She placed her hands on Mark’s chest. “We have much more interesting things to do. We won’t have this type of privacy or quiet time too long.”

Debbie arrived in Paris the end of September with Charles, Margaret, and James Blanchard. Her father greeted her as she emerged from his private plane. Mark still managed to look the Supreme Commander in his crisp uniform even though he needed crutches to walk. They embraced, entered his car, and drove to the Versailles.

Kiley, Debbie, and Margaret busied themselves in the planning of the wedding. It would be a small wedding held in the privacy of the Versailles headquarters. The guest list would include Margaret and James Blanchard, and Dallas. Margaret and Dallas would witness both marriages. Margaret was thrilled to be the witness for her son's wedding and her son's father in law's wedding.

"In essence I am the Matron of Honor for both weddings and Dallas is Best Man for both," Margaret bubbled.

"And Daddy gives away the Bride to take his own Bride," Debbie added. "This is so famous!"

"At least it is most unusual," Kiley agreed. "What are we going to do for flowers?"

"I noted the gardens are filled with roses. We could use them. I'm good at arranging flowers," Margaret bragged. "I bet I could even create two beautiful bouquets for each of you."

"That would be lovely," Kiley beamed.

"I'll get to work on it right away," Margaret responded. "We've agreed on the meal?"

"Yes. Dallas is handling that and Daddy's cook has already been flown in from England," Debbie informed.

"Everything is going so smoothly."

"How is your mother going to handle this secret marriage? I understand she wants to bankrupt your father with a huge society wedding," Margaret noted.

"Which is why when we return to the United States I'll tell her Daddy couldn't afford the wedding she wanted so Charles and I had the wedding we wanted," Debbie replied.

"That's a novel thought!" Kiley laughed.

"What?" Margaret and Debbie asked looking at Kiley with confusion.

"Having the wedding you want, not what someone else wants."

The three women laughed together.

“That’s exactly what James and I did,” Margaret shared.

“Our parents didn’t appreciate the match and when I told my mother we were engaged she went into a tizzy planning the correct wedding. James and I didn’t what the muss and fuss. We eloped. It was heavenly. I never regretted it.”

“You didn’t, mother Blanchard,” Debbie gasped.

“We did,” Margaret bragged. “We’ve been happily married ever since.

“That’s famous!” Debbie bubbled.

“Don’t get any ideas,” Kiley teased her future step daughter. “Your father would be very upset. He’s been looking forward to giving you to Charles.”

“I think he’s looking forward to marrying you,” Debbie returned in good humor. “I’ve never known Daddy to be so happy.”

“It might be that he’s content knowing what he’s doing for his country is winning this war,” Kiley countered. “I’m very proud of him.”

“As are we all, but the man is completely enamored of you,” Margaret stated. “I know that look. It’s the way Charles looks at Debbie and the look James and I share.”

“Am I so transparent?” Kiley asked.

“Like glass,” Debbie giggled. “You are really in love with Daddy, aren’t you?”

“Very much.”

“I’m really happy for you and Daddy. Even as a child I felt that there was little love between Mom and Daddy. I want him to be happy. He’s the best you know,” Debbie said happily.

“Yes, I know,” Kiley agreed thoughtfully. “I think we gals should head for our bedrooms. We have to get up early tomorrow morning.”

“Daddy isn’t going to make a sudden trip is he?” Debbie suddenly asked worriedly.

“Fortunately for us, the general has been grounded by his doctors, General Newhall, and President Roosevelt,” Kiley replied leading the way to immense grand staircase leading to the upstairs. “President Roosevelt was most severe in clipping the general’s wings. The President told Mark in no uncertain terms he was forbidden to take any more chances.”

“Thank you, President Roosevelt!” Debbie cheered.

The three women walked to their rooms. Debbie and Kiley were restless. They were anxious, happy, excited, nervous, and several other emotions together.

Kiley was the first one to wake. She went to the kitchen in her robe for a bite of breakfast. Sean was already in the kitchen preparing breakfast for General Hauser.

“Morning Sean,” Kiley greeted pouring a cup of coffee. Sean was devoted to Mark. Kiley liked him for that reason, but he always seemed to keep her at arm’s length. These past weeks Sean had waited for Kiley to leave Mark’s bedroom before he would enter. Sean was always polite and pleasant, but Kiley felt there was something between them.

“Good morning, Miss Burke.” Sean placed a white linen napkin over Mark’s breakfast tray. Picking the tray up Sean turned to Kiley and asked, “Are you sure you’re doing the right thing marrying General Hauser? His life is different from yours. He belongs to America.”

Kiley was taken back by Sean’s comment. “We never know if we do the right things. We only try. As for Mark belonging to America, I know that. I belong to him.”

“Yes ma’am,” Sean replied politely. He turned and walked up the backstairs to Mark’s bedroom.

Kiley couldn’t help but feel uncomfortable about Sean’s question. She didn’t have much time to dwell on it because Debbie came in to the kitchen.

“My stomach feels like a zillion butterflies are flitting about,” Debbie stated clutching her abdomen. “Aren’t you nervous?”

“No. I’m not nervous. I’m scared to death.”

Debbie took Kiley’s hand in her hands. “Me too! This is a big step. I mean becoming a wife. I think Charles loves me and understands me, but how do I really know?”

“Maybe that’s why I’m so scared,” Kiley admitted. “I think I have an idea on how to help our nerves.”

“What is it?” Debbie asked eagerly.

“You and I will be married in four hours. Maybe we should start getting ready. We can do our nails, our hair, but first

take a long leisurely hot bath. Then we can help each other get dressed.”

“Pact!” Debbie agreed squeezing Kiley’s hand.

“Is this a private party? Or is everyone invited?” Margaret Blanchard asked cheerily entering the kitchen.

“Mother Blanchard!” Debbie greeted. “Come have breakfast with us. Later, Kiley and are going to bathe then prepare for this special day.”

“A special day indeed,” Margaret agreed pouring a cup of coffee.

Several hours later Margaret placed Kiley’s veil on her head. “You look lovely my dear.”

Studying her reflection in the mirror Kiley smiled. “Thanks to you Mrs. Blanchard.”

“Perfectly all right my dear,” Margaret stated brushing her lips across Kiley’s cheek. “It’s time to descend the staircase.”

Margaret straightened Kiley and Debbie’s trains and left for the ballroom where the wedding and reception would be held. At the bottom of the staircase she found Mark and Dallas waiting patiently for the brides. “Mark, I do believe you are slightly nervous looking,” Margaret teased.

“I would say the general is very nervous looking,” Dallas chuckled.

“That’s enough!” Mark growled anxiously. “Remember Dallas, I can bust you lower than a private.”

“What is lower than a private?” Margaret quizzed.

“A major,” Dallas laughed. “A quartermaster major.”

Mark laughed heartily and had just calmed down when he looked at the top of the staircase and saw his daughter standing with Kiley. He felt his heart stop. He anxiously fingered his collar. Kiley was beautiful, but never as beautiful as she looked today. Her auburn hair was upswept revealing a long slender neck. The wedding dress dipped into a heart shape across her breasts showing just enough of her feminine globes to entice. An empire waisted bodice glittered like a thousand jewels. The veil was a soft billowy halo framing her auburn hair accenting her fine features. A soft breeze wafted the chiffon skirt give Kiley the illusion of an angel in flight. Mark choked back a lump in his throat. He leaned

heavily on the cane he was using to walk. The doctor had created a smaller walking cast for him.

The musicians began the wedding march. Debbie took her father's arm to walk down the aisle first. Kiley and Dallas walked behind them.

Mark's eyes misted as he walked down the aisle with his daughter. She was all grown up. He suddenly felt old and here he was taking a young wife to start a new family. Was he crazy? Yes. He was crazy for Kiley. The army chaplain asked who was giving this woman to Charles Blanchard. Mark heard his question as if hearing a long distance echo. "I do," Mark replied with a kiss to Debbie's cheek. Mark placed Debbie's hand in Charles' hand. He stepped to the side and waited for Kiley. Within a similar echo Mark heard the chaplain ask the identical question.

"I do," Dallas replied placing Kiley's hand in Mark's hand.

Mark's throat went dry. Throughout the ceremony Mark had to clear his throat before he could speak.

The chaplain introduced Captain and Mrs. Charles Blanchard and General and Mrs. Mark Hauser to the witnesses.

It was completed. Mark wondered if this feeling of happiness and euphoria would last. He certainly hoped so.

The wedding party had completed the wedding portraits and was sitting for the meal when an uninvited guest appeared.

"George?" Mark asked rising to the shadow at the entrance to the ballroom.

"General, what the devil is going on here?" Patton asked walking with long strides into the ballroom.

"A wedding," Mark chuckled.

"A wedding I can see. Two brides? Son of a Bitch! Miss Burke! I can see Mark has finally made an honest woman of you," Patton laughed.

"That is Mrs. Hauser," Mark corrected squeezing Kiley's hand. "Come and join our celebration."

"Thank you," Patton appreciated. "I will enjoy this festive occasion, but unfortunately I must leave this evening. I only came to give you a report of concern to me."

"The war always comes first," Kiley stated quietly. "After you enjoy this wonderful food, I will understand the necessity of your private meeting with my husband."

Mark looked at Kiley with a large grin. "I love you, Mrs. Hauser. I will do my best to be a good husband."

It was much later in the evening when Mark returned to his wedding. The information Patton had brought required an alteration of a major battle plan. Mark and Dallas had to send new directives out to his commanders in the field. He returned to find Kiley changed into her uniform and Debbie changed into a beautiful traveling suit. Charles and Debbie were escorted into a waiting limousine to begin their honeymoon in Paris.

News photographers started snapping pictures of the young couple. It had leaked to the press that a chaplain, caterer, and marriage license had been taken to the Versailles villa. The reporters knew the general's daughter and fiancé were staying at the villa. This was a definite photo opportunity. It was a chance to take pictures on the young bride and groom.

"They don't have a clue we were married," Kiley whispered to Mark. "The press is surrounding Debbie and Charles like sharks in a feeding frenzy."

"They're off now. They're safe," Mark reassured. "Kiley, you aren't upset that we choose to keep our marriage a secret?"

"Not one regret at all," Kiley replied smiling. "We both know what would happen if this news was released. You and I wouldn't have a moment of peace. Nothing must interfere with the war."

Mark was so proud of his new wife. How lucky was he to have such an understanding spouse? "I see you are all dressed up with no place to go. Want to go upstairs and undress?"

"Only if you help," Kiley teased taking Mark's hand leading him back inside the villa.

"This is going to a spectacular night!" Mark exclaimed.

"Fireworks and all," Kiley agreed.

Chapter 28

“Mark married her!” Martie shrieked at the top of her lungs. She crushed the letter she was reading. Rising from her chair she walked briskly down the hall to her father’s study and pounded on the door. “Papa! Papa!”

“Come in Pumpkin,” George invited. He looked up from his desk when Martie stomped in his office.

“Mark’s married the bitch!” Martie screamed angrily throwing the crumbled letter on her father’s desk. “You promised me he wouldn’t! You promised me the White House. I am supposed to be the First Lady!”

George Maxwell didn’t respond. He opened the crumpled letter and read it. “It seems my granddaughter married in Versailles.”

“I read that too!” Martie snarled. “The important thing is that you promised Mark would go to the White House and I would be the First Lady. Just how are you going to make that happen now?”

“Don’t you care that Deborah married without telling us? I was planning on a large publicized society wedding,” George complained. “The Blanchards are a well known society family.”

“The important point here is Mark marrying that bitch!”

“Pumpkin, watch your language,” George chided.

“Watch my language? Don’t you understand what has happened here? You promised me. You promised me!”

“Calm down Pumpkin. I didn’t spend all this money on you and Mark to lose my dream, and yours,” George replied quietly. “I’ll call Prescott Hawthorne. He needs to know this and we’ll find a solution. He wants Mark in the White House for his own reasons.”

“I hope he has her killed,” Martie stated vehemently. “This wedding has been kept a secret. Perhaps Mark feels bad press would hurt his commander profile in the war. I could release it to the press.”

“Pumpkin, don’t do anything until I talk to Prescott,” George warned. “I’ve always taught you never to make rash decisions.”

Martie returned to her well-used sulk. “All right, Papa. I’ll wait for you to take care of this. You always take care of me, Papa.”

Two days later Prescott Hawthorne was a guest at George Maxwell’s home.

“This is a difficulty, but not insurmountable,” Prescott said stroking his chin after reading the letter.

“I should hope not! You promised me. You promised Papa!” Martie said petulantly crossing her arms over her breasts. She pouted putting out her lower lip.

Prescott raised his eyebrow and cast Martie a disapproving look.

Martie bent her head and stared at her arms. She wasn’t about to anger her new lover. He had told her in bed last night he liked his women to be subservient and obedient.

“As I was saying, this is a difficulty. I believe later we can persuade Mark Hauser to realize the importance of his future. His second marriage was quiet, so can a divorce,” Prescott continued.

“In actuality he has kept both Martie’s divorce and this second marriage a secret from the public,” George suggested. Even he was a bit nervous in the presence of this wealthy and powerful man.

“It is obvious Mark is the man for the job. He understands the necessity of privacy and the ability to maintain secrecy for personal dealings,” Prescott observed. “It’s best to wait for now. I’ll continue to watch this situation.”

“Our plan for Mark to obtain the Oval office is still a go?” George questioned.

“Most definitely,” Prescott replied casually. “I need to put a man in as commander and chief who will lead a quiet time in our country. During this time I can begin my business plans and prepare the White House for my son.”

“Speaking of business plans,” George included. “Perhaps we should continue this discussion in my office. I have some papers for you to sign regarding our Marriott Congress.”

“An excellent idea,” Prescott agreed. He rose to follow George. Passing Martie at the dinner table he whispered into her ear. “Come to my bedroom tonight and we’ll continue our pleasures.”

“Yes,” Martie replied flirtatiously. *Pleasures? One hiccup and you’re through. Even Oscar was more fulfilling. If I didn’t need you to get Mark back for me I’d tell you straight away I would get more pleasure from a good chocolate bar.*

Prescott looked at Martie and gave her a wink. *Pleasure? You are as enjoyable as a carousel ride. I gave those up when I was seven. If you weren’t the only available ride at the moment I wouldn’t even talk to you. I can’t blame Mark for dumping you.*

The beauty of the falling snow on the grounds of the Versailles villa gardens transfixed Kiley. “It is so beautiful here. My life is wonderful. I can’t believe an ugly and horrible war is just miles away.” Kiley jumped when arms encircled her. She hadn’t heard anyone enter the bedroom.

“Unfortunately, there is that ugly war in the midst of this beauty,” Mark sighed. He crushed Kiley’s back to his rock hard frame. “Good morning my beautiful wife. Breakfast is waiting. When you didn’t come down I started to worry.”

“I’m sorry my darling. I started looking outside and I think I was hypnotized by this first snow,” Kiley replied squeezing Mark’s arms. “Why were you worried? I couldn’t be safer any where.”

“Well, I thought maybe we might have created a baby and you had morning sickness,” Mark replied stroking Kiley’s flat abdomen slowly. He really hoped his Kiley was carrying his child. Some might think it was an ego driven need to prove virility, but he wanted children. Kiley was a perfect wife and would be a perfect mother. Mark loved family life and wanted it passionately. The war was pushing the Nazi back into Germany. Mark thought more and more about peacetime.

“Nothing would make me happier, my love,” Kiley sighed leaning onto Mark’s chest. “Not yet.”

“We’ll keep working at it,” Mark chuckled huskily.

"I hope so," Kiley teased pressing her finger upon Mark's nose. "Not now. I am hungry."

"Far be it from me to deny a meal to a hungry woman," Mark laughed.

The Ardennes occupied a great deal of Mark's time. The winter conditions and flooding of the Rhine River were difficulties of the Allied Forces.

"I've been called to London," Mark grumbled during dinner. "This is no time to leave my troops."

Kiley reached across their private dinner table. "Darling, this is the best time to talk to the Prime Minister about your plans and.."

"And Montgomery," Mark added with his famous grin.

"I can't believe he told the press he was commanding Bradley," Kiley grunted. "He's a bold peacock."

"An excellent commander for a peacock."

"Just pick his plumes a bit," Kiley laughed. "I'll miss you."

"Miss me?"

"When you go to London," Kiley reminded taking a bite of stew.

"You won't miss me at all," Mark chuckled. "You're coming with me. I thought you might slip over to Fanore and visit your father."

"You mean it?" Kiley asked excitedly. She hadn't seen her father since the war began. Mark knew she hadn't told her father about their marriage. She wanted to wait to tell him in person. She hadn't even told anyone in her family, but her father was special to her and he was to be first to hear the news.

"Of course I mean it," Mark replied seriously. "Do you think I would go to London for a week without my wife? Besides, its about time your family learns about us."

"Will you come to Fanore with me?" Kiley hoped.

"We'll be in London for three days. I thought your mother could join us for dinner on the third day before we fly to Fanore."

"Oh my darling!" Kiley exclaimed. "Have I told you how much I love you?"

"Not in the past half hour," Mark reminded smiling broadly. He placed his hand over hers. "I love you, Mrs. Hauser."

The trip to London was uneventful. Mark spent three days of intensive meetings with Churchill, but always made certain he was back at the Connemara Hotel at a reasonable hour.

“I can’t believe it,” Mary Deegan stated shaking her head. “My daughter is married to the Supreme Allied Commander.” Mary leaned into the overstuffed divan in the private suite Mark had rented in the Connemara Hotel. “I don’t know if this the most wonderful thing to happen to you, Kiley. Or perhaps I might say you are out of your mind.”

“I think it is a bit of both,” Kiley laughed sipping her tea. “The war is the most important obstacle in our personal lives.”

“Hiding from the world and keeping your marriage a secret would be an obstacle to me,” Mary commented retrieving her cup of tea from the server.

“Mark belongs to the world. I belong to him. This is our private life. I don’t want anyone taking that part of our lives,” Kiley replied firmly.

“I still don’t like this sneaking around,” Mary countered. “It just doesn’t seem right.”

“Mother, please just be happy for us,” Kiley requested.

“Of course I happy for you. I’m thrilled my daughter married so well. I simply have reservations, that’s all,” Mary placated. “Have you told your father? Sister? Brother?”

“Not yet. You were the first,” Kiley replied.

“Does Mark’s daughter know?”

“We were married together.”

“You mean it was a double wedding ceremony in Versailles?” Mary questioned in surprise.

Kiley nodded.

“No wonder you managed to keep this a great secret,” Mary laughed. “When will you tell your father?”

“Mark and I will be leaving secretly this evening for Fanore. Do you want to come with us?” Kiley invited.

“We’ve been separated too long now. I don’t think your father would relish my visit,” Mary snickered.

“Don’t you every miss the manor?”

“I have always preferred London, my dear. Even in ruin, I prefer London to Fanore. I’m not a country girl,” Mary admitted.

“You go on. Your father, the Major, will be thrilled with your marriage. He’s such a military nut.”

“I appreciate your support, mother.”

“I understand. I will keep your secret, but I don’t approve of this secrecy,” Mary retorted stubbornly.

Kiley smiled and brushed a soft kiss across her mother’s cheek.

“If I didn’t love you so much,” Mary chuckled taking Kiley’s hand. “Will I get to see Mark this trip? I’d like to congratulate the two of you together.”

“I was hoping he’d make it in time,” Kiley sighed. “He’s been so busy with the Prime Minister. There are a number of logistics to work out. The weather is horrendous.”

“That’s enough. Your husband has taken the war to Hitler’s back yard. That’s all I want to know. If he could stop the V bombs I’d be happier. When this is all over, I expect visits with grandchildren,” Mary teased.

“That we plan on,” Mark voiced from the hall entrance. “I’d like to fill your flat with lots of little Hausers.”

“Darling! You’ve come home in time,” Kiley cried with joy. She ran into Mark’s opened arms.

“And it wasn’t easy,” Mark joked. “The Prime Minister wanted me to have dinner with him at Chequers.”

Kiley groaned.

“Is that a bad thing?” Mary asked. “I’d love to have dinner with the Prime Minister. It doesn’t happen with us commoners.”

“The Prime Minister has dinners that last until the early hours of the morning. We plan on leaving tonight for Fanore. Will you be coming with us?” Mark asked Mary Deegan.

“You’re the only military I’ll visit with,” Mary scoffed. “You and my daughter go visit the old Major yourselves.” She rose to place a kiss upon Mark’s cheek. “Congratulations. Take good care of my little girl.”

“That’s my plan,” Mark replied smiling. He pulled Kiley closer into his hug. “And take good care of all the little Hausers we’ll bring to visit Grandmother Deegan.”

“Have you told your mother?” Mary questioned Mark.

“No. My divorce with Martie was difficult enough. I thought I’d wait to tell her personally. Kiley and I will visit with her after the war.”

“How much longer do you think?” Mary queried.

Mark cocked a brow.

“Never mind. Confidential and all that,” Mary chortled. “It’s time for me to get whisked out of her and disappear before I’m seen.” Mary picked up her coat and purse. “Is my escort ready?”

“It’s beautiful here. It’s the middle of winter and everything still looks so green,” Mark commented as Kiley drove along the roads to Deegan Manor in Fanore.

“Since childhood this has been my haven,” Kiley shared. “Home is just up ahead.”

They pulled up to large iron gates lit by lanterns on each side. Kiley left the car and opened them. She drove down a small asphalt lane lined on each side by hedgerows. The large brick manor house loomed before them.

“Daddy is waiting up for us,” Kiley stated pulling the car into the circular driveway.

“Welcome home Miss Kiley,” Albert greeted opening the car door. “Major Deegan is in the front parlor waiting for you.” He raised a brow when Mark emerged from the other side of the car. Mark Hauser was a photographed figure in the British Isles. Everyone would be able to recognize him. The household knew all the rumors about his mistress and the Supreme Commander. They had dismissed them as simply rumors. The staff knew Kiley had volunteered her services to the war effort and served as driver and secretary on the General’s staff. Now he wondered how true the rumors were.

Kiley took Mark’s hand and walked toward the family parlor in the manor. It was wonderful to be home. She walked down the familiar Connemara tiled hall. On the walls were the Georgian paintings her father loved to collect. A light ahead welcomed her into the Georgian furnished room of the front parlor. Her father waited there for her. As she entered she smelled the familiar aroma of his cherry tobacco pipe.

Major Deegan sat on the Georgian divan. A snifter of brandy in one hand and his paper was in the other. He looked up to see Kiley enter.

“Ah, Kiley me girl,” Ronald greeted cheerily. “I’ve missed seeing you.” It was then he saw Mark behind her. “What’s this? You’ve brought the famous General Hauser with you?”

“How do you do sir,” Mark greeted extending his hand in friendship.

Ronald put down his snifter and laid his pipe in a glass tray. He saluted stiffly. “Welcome to my home. My daughter failed to inform me that she was bringing a most auspicious guest.” Ronald took Mark’s hand for a brief shake. “Please rest yourself.”

“Thank you, sir,” Mark accepted. He allowed Kiley to lead him to the Georgian chair facing her father. She stood behind Mark.

“I’m pleased to welcome you to my home, but I would be wandering why you’ve come,” Ronald stated taking his seat on the divan once more.

“I’m certain you’ve heard rumors of your daughter’s relationship with me,” Mark started.

“Of course. I’ve tended to ignore such gossip. Is this the reason you’ve come. You needn’t have worried me lad,” Ronald informed. “I trust Kiley implicitly.”

“Actually father,” Kiley intercepted before Mark continued. “We’ve come to let you know the rumors are true.”

Ronald choked on his brandy. “What?”

“Only partially true,” Mark explained. “We wanted to tell you in person that we’ve married.”

Ronald sat stiffly. He wasn’t sure he heard what he did. “You’ve married? Each other?”

“That’s the way it usually works, father,” Kiley teased.

“Good God,” Ronald inhaled quickly. He was thrilled beyond measure. He was a military man through and through. If it weren’t for his crippling wound from WWI he would be in the thick of it right now. The fact his daughter married the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces was thrilling beyond belief. “I must say this is shocking but happy news. Is there a reason I haven’t been told or released to the public?”

“We thought it best to keep our marriage a secret, sir,” Mark explained. “As commander of the European Theatre we didn’t want my personal life to interfere with the importance of commanding the theatre.”

“Of course that makes sense,” Ronald agreed. “The services must be above all, including personal ties.”

“You’re not upset with us for waiting to tell you?” Kiley asked her father.

“Of course not my girl,” Ronald bubbled happily. “I understand completely. How long will you be staying with me at the Manor?”

“We’d like to take a weekend holiday, if you don’t mind,” Kiley informed.

“Stay as long as you like. I will inform the servants to keep your visit here confidential of course,” Ronald replied.

The three days at Deegan Manor were wonderfully relaxing for Mark. The Major went out of his way to make him feel comfortable. He and Kiley went riding every day on the estate. Mark also enjoyed golf with Major Deegan on the estate. He couldn’t remember enjoying life so much. Waking in the morning with Kiley at his side was a comforting and serene feeling. He almost forgot there was a war going on for a time. It was a mental break he needed. He certainly enjoyed Major Deegan’s company. They discussed campaigns of the Major and gained insight from the Major’s experiences.

Kiley was delighted with her holiday and her father’s friendship. She enjoyed listening to her father’s stories of WWI and Mark’s interaction in the discussions. She regretted her goodbye to her father and Deegan Manor.

It was back to the war and Versailles.

“What?” Mark roared angrily. “I will not be a prisoner in this villa.”

“Orders from the President, sir,” Dallas attempted. He knew General Hauser was a hands on commander. “The FBI found a plot to assassinate you but the Nazi.”

Kiley was terrified by hid it from Mark. “You are the Supreme Commander, but President Roosevelt is the Commander in Chief. You cannot disobey his orders.”

“Goddammit! I’ll go stir crazy!” Mark shouted. “I won’t capitulate to those Goddamn Nazi on any terms.”

“The President believes you are too valuable an asset to winning the war. He gave a Presidential Order, sir,” Randall Jones added.

“You could take over any time, Randall. So could David Brady,” Mark countered slamming his fist on his desk.

“We could, but unfortunately this would give Monty the perfect opportunity to take over. We can’t allow that. Can we Dallas?” Randall joked.

Mark cocked a furious brow. His look would have struck down an archangel.

Randall backed out carefully and slowly. “I intend to follow orders from our Commander in Chief. So should you.” He was near the door and made a hasty retreat.

Dallas left the room and closed the door leaving Kiley alone with the furious beast locked in a palatial cage.

“This is intolerable,” Mark snarled.

“Far from perfect, but you will still command. Everything will be brought to you,” Kiley assuaged. How she wanted to keep Mark locked up and protected. She dare not say a word to that effect.

“That’s not the same and you know it,” Mark barked.

With a quiet voice Kiley managed to reply, “No. It is not your command style at all, but it is temporary. You often refer to the horrendous conditions your boys must endure. It seems to me this is a minor inconvenience you can easily overcome.”

“Kiley my love, your logic is irrefutable, but annoyingly correct,” Mark capitulated. “Have I told you lately how much I love you?”

“Not since this morning,” Kiley replied. With a wicked grin she added, “Of course there were alternative reasons on your mind.”

“And there always will be,” Mark laughed. He took Kiley in his arms and held her there for a long wonderful time.

Chapter 29

“Sorry to barge in,” Dallas apologized entering the room finding his commander in an intimate embrace.

“Perfectly alright,” Mark excused separating from Kiley. “What’s the matter, Dallas?”

“We’ve just received news about the Nazi. They’ve broken all history of warfare and launched an offensive attack,” Dallas informed.

“Where?” Mark responded seriously.

Dallas walked over to the wall map in Mark’s office. “Here.” He pointed to a section of Belgium near the German border. “The Nazi have found a weakness in our line near Luxembourg.”

Mark was immediately surrounded by his closest staff members, Randall Jones, Harry Durham, and Dallas to name a few. He received calls from his field commanders, David Brady, Linden Matthews, and numerous others including George Patton.

“Yes Georgie, you were right,” Mark ground out listening for an opening. “That’s why I have always considered you to be one of my most valuable field commanders. Now is the time to for paybacks, Georgie. I want you to meet with Brady and his selected commanders. I’m getting information right now. Our paratroopers are surrounded. Get back to me about your plans.” Mark slammed down the radiophone. He was worried and trapped in the confines of the Versailles villa due to the assassination threat.

The next day Kiley woke to an empty bed. Not finding Mark next to her did not surprise her. He was concerned about what the press now referred to as the ‘*Battle of the Bulge*’. She

knew she would find him surrounded by his staff. A meeting with his field commanders would be taking place today. Mark would be attached to the radiophone. She would once again remain as unseen as possible and maintain a low profile. This was necessary to keep their marriage as secret as possible. It was turning to be the biggest secret of the war. Kiley also knew that Mark was in a foul mood with this latest setback. Reports had come in that the Nazi had infiltrated the army by using decoys that spoke fluent American. Signs were turned to create confusion as well. He was also angry that it was at this time he was under house arrest as he called it, simply because of a death threat.

Kiley's thoughts turned to the holidays. Christmas was a few days away. She hoped the paratroopers in Bastogne could be rescued by then. This would be their first Christmas together as husband and wife. She had hoped her present would be a baby, but it would not be. That was a disappointment she kept to herself. Kiley rose from bed, bathed, dressed, and went to her desk to begin answering Mark's mail.

Kiley didn't see Mark all day. He was sequestered in his office discussing the plans to push the Nazi back and rescue the paratroopers of Bastogne. Mark's office that was usually busy was currently a beehive activity. She had a quiet dinner by herself and went to bed early. She actually was surprised when Mark came into the bedroom, changed, and climbed into bed. Kiley rolled into Mark's arms. "Have we broken through and rescued the troops?"

"I didn't mean to wake you," Mark whispered lovingly brushing through Kiley's hair with his fingers.

"I want you to wake me," Kiley returned treasuring Mark's warm embrace. "Have we rescued the troops?"

"We're blessed, but even we aren't that good. Georgie did plan for this Nazi offensive. He promised to liberate the besieged 101st airborne by Christmas."

"Isn't the 3rd Army on the other side of Luxembourg? How can he get to Bastogne so quickly?" Kiley queried. She did know as much as any of Mark's military aides. She also knew more than any of Mark's aides. She knew Mark. She knew his thoughts, ideas, and plans. He often confided in her because she would be devil's advocate to his plans. No other aide wished to give Mark such an honest service. There were times Mark didn't reveal his

plans, but listened to the others taking the one most like his own. Only Kiley knew this.

“Georgie planned for this offensive. He also anticipated where the Nazi would break through. He had spotted a weak area in our defensive front and already ordered the 3rd to march towards Belgium,” Mark answered. He gently invaded Kiley’s nightgown and cupped her soft breast. It was his intention to make love to his wife this evening. He needed his wife for a sense of love and serenity after his brutally stressful day. Unfortunately he was too exhausted and fell into a deep sleep.

Kiley pulled the coverlet over her sleeping husband. She stared at Mark for a few minutes. Clucking her tongue Kiley laughed quietly. “You look so much like a little boy when you sleep.” Kiley snuggled into her husband’s sleeping body and fell into a deep sleep.

Mark was frustrated throughout the campaign to free the 101st Airborne. He wanted to be near the front and handle battle details hands on. He hated making decisions without his personal reconnaissance.

The reports from George Patton were encouraging. His 3rd Army was making phenomenal time and pushing back the Nazi into the former frontline. The German resistance was weakening and the force of the Nazi Army was rapidly deteriorating.

December 23rd, Kiley came into Mark’s office holding a paper in her hand. “It’s from Patton.”

Everyone in the room looked up. The happiness in Kiley’s voice and the smile on her face revealed good news.

She handed the paper to Mark. “He says, ‘Merry Christmas from the 3rd and the 101st.’ He sends his greetings from Bastogne.”

“I don’t care about this Goddamn supposed death squad,” Mark shouted. “Get me to Montgomery. We’re going to have this showdown.”

“The weather prohibits flying. And for God’s sake will you get away from the windows. There could be a sniper!” Dallas warned pulling the draperies closed.

“This Nazi plot is designed just to keep me from doing my job,” Mark snarled. “The weather won’t stop trains. Get that

private train you said I have and then radiophone Montgomery to meet me in Brussels,” Mark ordered with intonation brooking no rebuttal would be tolerated.

Dallas cast a pleading look to Kiley for help.

Kiley shook her head negatively. She knew Mark well enough to know there were times when he was completely a commander and his orders were precisely that, orders!

“Don’t try to talk me out of this,” Mark snarled to Kiley noticing his aide’s body language signal.

“I have no intention of trying,” Kiley replied walking to Mark. “When you are giving orders commander, your orders will be followed.”

“I have an order for you,” Mark softened.

“Not on Christmas Eve,” Kiley groaned. “No work, this is play.”

“Come outside with me,” Mark ordered walking toward the draped French doors opening to a large patio.

“You can’t go outside,” Kiley cried. “You could be shot.”

“That’s bunk,” Mark growled. “This is a plot of the Nazi to keep me buttoned up so tight I’ll go mad. Then they’ll win. We can’t have that can we? Besides, don’t you want your Christmas Present?”

“Only if it’s diamonds, minks, or gold,” Kiley teased following Mark outside. She hoped Mark was right and that his life was not in any immediate danger.

“Christmas is a special time for special gifts,” Mark answered pulling Kiley outside. He pulled out a deep blue velvet box and gave it to Kiley. “Merry Christmas my love.”

Kiley opened the box. “They’re beautiful. What are they? They’re too big for earrings and too small to be buttons.” Kiley fingered the pair of beautiful sapphire stones inlaid with five tiny gold stars. In a half circle were the letters SHAEF. What a thoughtful precious gift.

“They are your insignias. You see my love; I was told some time ago and confirmed yesterday that I would receive my fifth star. You have been there for me as an important aide since the beginning. I wanted you to have the five stars you deserve as my aide and my wife.” Mark pulled out one of the pair from the box. He removed the standard insignia on her lapel and replaced it

with the five star jeweled insignia. “Do you like it?” Mark asked hopefully.

“I love them,” Kiley choked. “I couldn’t love them more if you had given me a sack of diamonds.”

Mark grinned and put the other insignia on the other lapel. “Are you coming with me to Brussels?”

“You couldn’t keep me away,” Kiley replied quickly kissing Mark in the solitude of the patio. At this moment she didn’t care at all if anyone saw them. She loved this man with her entire being.

The snowstorm inhibited Mark’s train only a bit. They headed to Brussels and arrived on time. Montgomery was waiting in a staff car.

Kiley peeked out the window from Mark’s private car. She noticed Monty didn’t even salute Mark. She watched Mark and noticed he had no captivating grin. His grin was usually evident even during the most stressful of times when he was with his boys, aides, adjutants, and politicians. His jaw was set. Kiley thought of the pulp westerns Mark enjoyed and laughed. “You look like one of your cowboys ready for a showdown.”

The men walked into the railcar used as an office for Mark when traveling by train. The office car was connected to Mark’s private car. Mark and Monty entered the railcar. Dallas and Monty’s aide remained outside.

Kiley didn’t want to be seen so she returned to the comfortable sofa. Opening more letters from the boys, Kiley began to transcribe responses. She couldn’t understand what was said, but she heard Mark’s voice raised in anger. Kiley knew that Monty had pushed Mark too far with his criticism of American troops and Mark’s command. Even General Patton was a problem child but never gave Mark as much trouble as Montgomery. Mark needed Antwerp taken. The Red Ball Express was working 24 hours a day non-stop to supply the troops, but could not keep up with the need. Mark needed the port of Antwerp and not only was Montgomery criticizing Mark and SHAEF, he was also holding back on a offensive attack to take Antwerp. One of Mark’s biggest problems was Montgomery holding back. The port of Antwerp was necessary to open a closer point to supply the troops with food, clothing, and armament. The taking of Antwerp was

essential to winning and shortening the length of the war. Montgomery needed to be reminded of this importance of this military objective as well as the importance of obedience and respect to command.

Montgomery left the railcar grim faced. A week later a private letter was sent to Mark in Versailles pledging his allegiance to SHAEF and its commander. Publicly Montgomery started complimenting the efforts of SHAEF and its commanders.

Several months later Kiley put down a British newspaper on the breakfast table. The Allied Forces were about to cross the Rhine and were in Germany. They had just set up a new headquarters in Reims. "I don't know what happened between you and Monty, but it certainly has made a difference."

"Eat your breakfast," Mark mumbled.

"Not ever a hint?"

Mark sat back against the back of his chair. "I merely reminded Montgomery the necessity for absolute structure and discipline of military command."

"Is that all? How marvelous it worked."

"A little more."

"Do tell me," Kiley urged.

"I told him I would resign as Supreme Allied Commander if he continued with criticism. I would force the issue of command with President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill."

"Excellent clubbing," Kiley snickered. "Montgomery knows as we all do that Roosevelt wouldn't like that at all, and the Colonies are footing the costs of this bloody war. Montgomery wouldn't dare push you out. He'd lose his command before you did."

"Yes, he sort of did figure that out," Mark chortled. "Now eat your breakfast. You're losing weight again. What on earth are worried about now?"

"I'm just behind in the correspondence," Kiley lied. She had missed her monthly flow and was hoping she was pregnant. She wanted so desperately to have Mark's baby, but didn't want to tell Mark unless she was certain. She couldn't be certain until she went to a doctor. She didn't want to go to a doctor until she was certain. This duplicity was driving her crazy. "You know how upset I get when I get behind."

“You’ll catch up. I promise you. For one thing I won’t be here to bother you for awhile,” Mark informed.

“What’s going on?” Kiley queried. He never talked like that before, or did he? She felt pregnant. Her emotions tended to go all over the place recently. Kiley was unusually emotional.

“I’m going to the front lines and do a tour. I promised General Newhall I would meet with our Russian allies and discuss the current battle plans. The Russians are making inroads into Poland. We expect them to enter Berlin in two months.”

“The war will be over then,” Kiley wished out loud.

“At least in the European Theatre,” Mark answered.

“Make sure you eat while I’m gone. I don’t want to come back and find you ill.”

“Promise.”

Mark had his conferences with the Russians. The final battle plans were agreed upon. Mark was determined to continue to be a hands on commander and visited some frontline troops. It was while he was talking to a small group when an American jeep rolled into the area. He looked up to see Kiley driving.

It had been months since Kiley had driven anywhere. She had stayed hidden in the headquarters so as not to draw attention to their marriage by the press. As far as they knew she was simply a WAC working in administration at Mark’s headquarters. Kiley had successfully blended into that role with the other WAC administration women.

“What the devil are you doing here?” Mark barked irritably. It wasn’t just the fact that Kiley was in public view. It was also the fact that he was a husband worrying about his wife. Being this close to the front Kiley would be in danger of shellfire or snipers. He never considered those obstacles for his personal safety. He only worried for Kiley.

Kiley uncharacteristically took Mark’s arms and spoke very softly. “I’ve been listening to the BBC.” Tears flooded her eyes. She could barely speak. Her voice choked with emotion. “It’s President Roosevelt. The BBC reported his death today at Warm Springs.”

Mark made no response. Kiley felt his body tremble slightly.

“The Vice-President, Harry Truman was sworn in,” Kiley informed choking on her tears. “I feel as sad as if my own father had died.”

Mark squeezed Kiley’s hand. “If only I could have won this war so he could have seen it. I was too slow, to hesitant.” Mark found himself choking on his own tears. “We’d better get back to headquarters. There are some things we need to do.” He sat in the jeep next to Kiley and let her drive him back to Reims.

Mark covered his grief on the death of President Roosevelt by pushing his commanders harder than ever before. On a return from a visit to the frontlines Mark walked past Kiley’s desk without his usual grin and wink for her. To Kiley, Mark looked pale and badly shaken. He sent everyone out of his office and stayed there alone for several hours. He sat in his office alone until late in the evening. He even took his meal alone.

Kiley went to their bed and waited for Mark to come in. She turned on the small bed lamp near their bed and pulled out one of Mark’s pulp western books. Kiley was surprised to learn that she was beginning to enjoy the reading. It was a great escape from the realities of this terrible war.

Finally Mark walked in. Without saying a word he undressed climbed into bed. He pulled the book from Kiley’s hand. “My God. Kiley, after what I’ve seen today. I need you to hold me.” His voice was shaky. “I need your love to embrace me tonight and reassure me there is still love in this world.”

Kiley obeyed. She laid Mark’s head on her breasts and stroked Mark’s head with a loving tenderness. “What is it? What happened?”

Mark sighed deeply as if trying to control his emotions and relate the facts. “I visited a place called Gotha today. It was a death camp. What I saw made me violently ill. I talked to a survivor. He told me what happened there. I saw the bestiality of mankind that is unbelievable. I saw naked dead bodies piled up like a heap of compost. There were large meat hooks used to impale prisoners. Death, starvation, brutality, and inhumanity.”

Kiley couldn’t believe her ears as Mark related all that he saw and what the survivor had told him. Just listening to Mark’s description made her ill. Tears flowed from her eyes. Even the horrid bombings and death of London did not compare to what she

heard about the Nazi death camp. They discussed the German people and tried to reason how the people themselves could allow their society to allow such atrocities.

“Maybe the people didn’t know what went on in the camps,” Kiley excused.

“How could they not know?” Mark demanded angrily. He wasn’t angry with Kiley. He was angry about what he had witnessed.

“The Nazi kept all these prisoners contained. The Nazi ran these camps strictly independently from what you have told me. There never seemed to be any interaction from the general German population,” Kiley shared. She didn’t want to believe that others would allow such inhumanity.

Mark suddenly sat up straight. “By God then I’ll make sure they know about it now. I want them to know exactly what happened right under their noses. I want them to suffer these sights just I did and my boys did when they liberated these camps.”

“What are you planning?” Kiley asked suspiciously. She recognized the firmly set jaw. Mark was angry. He had a plan.

The next morning Mark issued orders for the citizens of the Gotha area. Every man, woman, and child over the age of twelve would be marched through the death camp and witness the horror. The males of the area would bury the dead. He also issued orders that no one would be exempt and no one would be allowed to turn their heads. Patton wouldn’t even enter the area after the 3rd had liberated the death camp. Patton was ordered to enter the camp and handle the orders. He was also ordered to handle the press corps.

“I am now more determined than ever not to speak to any Nazi until all papers of unconditional surrender have been signed,” Mark commented to his staff. “I never want this to happen ever again. I want the Nazi machine completely destroyed.”

“We’ve heard that Hitler’s mountain retreat, Wolf’s Lair has been captured,” Dallas shared with his commander.

“Burn it! Burn it to complete ashes!” Mark growled out his order. “I do not want any symbol left of that madman left.”

Mark’s staff agreed completely. It was not unusual after a major conflict that some people still kept memorials to fallen

leaders.” Wolf’s Lair was burned to the ground. Only ashes were left.

On April 30th, 1945 the Russians entered Berlin. The Russians found the underground shelter of Adolph Hitler. The Russians informed SHAEF that Hitler had indeed committed suicide and had his henchmen burn his remains so he would never be taken alive or dead.

The Nazi war machine was soon destroyed. The Nazi tried to contact Mark and arrange for surrender. Mark ignored all pleas. The surrender would not be arranged. The surrender would be unconditional.

Chapter 30

Kiley was there when the documents of surrender were signed. The war in the European Theatre was finally over. Happiness and relief were celebrated throughout the day. Still she couldn't help but wonder what Mark and her future would be now. She had finally set up an appointment with a doctor to validate her pregnancy. She had missed two complete monthly periods. Her breasts were tender. She had to be pregnant. As soon as she verified her pregnancy she would share this wonderful news with Mark.

The news was positive. Kiley was indeed pregnant. She was further along than she thought. The doctor told her she was beginning her second trimester. Kiley couldn't wait to tell Mark, but was stopped when Mark told her to pack quickly. He had been given the responsibility of overseeing the rebuilding and administration of Germany. He and Kiley would be returning to London while he attended meetings, received numerous awards, and met with the new President Truman and the British Prime Minister.

Kiley thought it best to keep her news a secret until this round of public appearances was ended. It still wasn't the time to reveal their marriage and if Mark knew Kiley was carrying his child he would make the public announcement.

Kiley and Mark were kept busy nearly every minute. Mark attended meetings, conferences, awards, and special invitations. Kiley barely saw Mark. She didn't understand why or how, but she was sequestered in a different room on a different floor from Mark. Sean explained to her that General Hauser would need absolute rest. The days were long and draining, so Kiley tried to understand her separation from her husband.

The following days and weeks were a blur. Kiley and Mark attended a Noel Coward presentation in London and the following day Mark received the key to London. It was an award that meant a great deal to Mark. Kiley kept her stiff upper lip even though Sean and the military kept her away from Mark. Her only true friend was Dallas and he had to remain in Reims. Dallas was needed to begin the military administration of Germany. Even though Kiley was home at last with her husband, she felt alone and a bit afraid.

The final blow was struck when Kiley was informed she was to return to Reims and Mark had already left for America. Kiley knew she could never return to the WAC group and Reims. She was pregnant with Mark's baby. She didn't understand why Mark just left her without a word. Kiley was afraid and alone. What was going on? There was only one thing for her to do. She resigned from the service and would go to her one haven in the world. She would go to Deegan Manor. Kiley didn't even tell her mother or sister what she would do.

After turning in her resignation, Millie one of the women of the WAC staff handed her an envelope.

Kiley didn't bother to look at it. She had packed her belongings and the cab was waiting to take her to the train station. The train would take her to the English coast where she would board a ferry to Ireland. In a day she would be home. Once she settled in she would send word to Dallas. He would be able to reach Mark and let him know where she was. She would wait until the celebrations would calm down.

Mark was on the plane to Washington when he opened the letter. It was a neatly typed letter from Kiley's personal typewriter. He had been given orders to return immediately to Washington for discussions on the Allied administration of Germany. He wanted to tell Kiley, but was rushed away. Sean told him he had told Kiley of Mark's immediate departure to the States. Sean reassured him she had understood and would be waiting for him in London.

Mark choked back his emotions after he read the letter. He folded the letter neatly and placed it in his briefcase. "Kiley, how could you do this to me?"

Kiley arrived at Deegan Manor the next day as planned.

“Child, what are you doing home? I thought you’d be off to the Colonies with your husband,” Ronald greeted taking his daughter in his arms.

“I need you Daddy,” Kiley pleaded. “I’m all confused and in need of a haven.”

Ronald led his daughter into the cozy softly lit parlor of Deegan Manor. “You’re always welcome home my child, but I would think a haven is something a husband should provide. Has something happened between you and the general?”

Kiley folded into her father’s arms. “I don’t know. I haven’t even been able to talk to him for a month. We’ve been separated and he left for America without even telling me. I was given orders to report to Reims.”

Ronald sat his daughter next to him on the divan. “Is there a reason you aren’t at Reims?”

“I resigned from the WAC group,” Kiley shared.

“At this happiest and most successful time, the end of the war in Europe and you resigned? Why?” Ronald queried.

“Oh Daddy,” Kiley began to sob. “I’m pregnant.”

“That explains your resignation,” Ronald sighed patting Kiley’s arms. “Why the tears? Aren’t you happy? I thought you wanted children? I’m thrilled to be a grandfather once again.”

“Daddy,” Kiley sobbed. “I’m so happy, but...”

“What is it child?” Ronald asked encircling his daughter.

“I never had the chance to tell Mark he’s going to be a father. He just left without a word,” Kiley cried.

“He didn’t even give you a note?” Ronald growled. He was furious with Mark Hauser for treating his daughter like this.

“The envelope. I forgot about the envelope,” Kiley remembered. She had been in such a hurry to catch the train she forgot she put the envelope in her hand luggage. Kiley asked Albert to retrieve her small hand luggage.

Albert returned a few minutes later and handed Kiley the small piece.

Kiley opened the luggage and retrieved the envelope. It was the SHAEF letterhead. “Do you think this is from Mark, Daddy?”

“You won’t know until you open it.”

Kiley opened the envelope and began reading the letter. She turned white and began crying. "Daddy!"

Ronald took the letter from Kiley's hand and read it. "That no good bastard!"

"Daddy, what am I to do?" Kiley cried.

"Nothing! Absolutely nothing," Ronald growled pulling Kiley into his arms. "Don't cry my special one. Daddy will take care of you and the baby. We'll have a happy little baby."

Kiley fell into her father's arms and wept for nearly an hour. Finally exhausted, Ronald had his chambermaid Alice assist Kiley to bed.

Alone in the parlor with Albert his faithful butler Ronald sipped the brandy he poured. "Any and all letters from the Colonies, their services, and or General Hauser will be given to me. My daughter Kiley is not to see them. Should General Hauser seek to learn anything about my daughter I wish to be told and he will be told nothing."

"As you wish," Albert replied bowing slightly.

"That bloody bastard will not get anywhere near my baby and hurt again," Ronald swore heatedly.

"Those bloody Americans have no morality," Albert concurred. Ronald had shared the story and the letter with his trusted servant and friend. "We will protect our Kiley."

Mark emerged from the plane after landing. He still was shaken after reading Kiley's letter. He wasn't sure what he would do next. He certainly wasn't prepared for the reception waiting for him. There were thousands of people at Dulles airport, a brass band, General Newhall, his daughter Debbie, and Martie.

After Mark greeted General Newhall Martie ran into his arms and planted a large and long kiss on his lips.

"What the devil do you think you're doing here?" Mark growled softly after he disengaged Martie from his arms.

"It's show time, General Hauser!" Martie bubbled. "No one knows about our divorce and we do need the hero of the European Theatre to show American family values. Mom's apple pie and all that. Surely you can bear a little while of the charade."

"I have a wife," Mark countered.

“Not here,” Martie reminded. “Behave or you’ll spoil all your chances for a beautiful future. Besides, you can’t disappoint your adoring public. These are the families of the boys overseas.”

Mark felt obligated to the people here to greet him. They were the families of the troops still in Europe. He knew in the midst of the throng were families of young men that would never return from Europe. He felt obligated, but he was enraged with Martie and how she always took advantage of situations. Even if Kiley didn’t want him any more, he still loved Kiley and wanted her back with him. He bit back his temper when Martie climbed into the open limousine with him and Debbie. It was just as Martie had declared. It was the epitome of the all American family.

Debbie had never revealed her father’s secret marriage to Kiley and wouldn’t now in the public eye. Before a dinner at the White House she addressed him privately. “Daddy, where is Kiley?”

“I don’t know,” Mark confessed sadly. “We were separated on our return to London and then I got a letter from her.”

“A letter?”

“A letter asking me for a divorce. She told me our marriage was a mistake. It was only an infatuation with the Supreme Commander. She realized she didn’t want to be married to an old man.”

“Daddy,” Debbie reprimanded. “I don’t believe that for a minute. I was with Kiley long enough to know she really loved you. I can’t believe she wrote that.”

“Well she did!” Mark snarled. He was still hurting inside and wanting Kiley. He calmed himself and grinned. “We’ll discuss this later. I want to see that brand new grandson you gave me.”

The change in subject soothed Debbie immediately. “You will love our little David. He’s beautiful and such a good baby.”

“I can’t wait to see him.”

They both turned to walk toward the East Room when they heard the marine band playing *Hail to the Chief*.

Mark spent a week with Debbie and little David. Debbie tried to convince him that Kiley could never have written such a letter. In his heart Mark wanted to believe Debbie, but who and why would anyone but Kiley write such a letter?

Mark wouldn't have time to pursue the mystery anyway. General Newhall kept him in meetings for the administration and reconstruction of Germany. Two months flew by. Mark was then ordered on a cross-country tour of the United States. Every town and city wanted to see the hero of the European Theatre. When Mark returned to the United States he thought it would be only a few weeks of meetings. His return home had now lasted nearly six months. His final visit was to Arkansas where he visited with his mother.

"Something is troubling you," Martha told her youngest son as she served dinner. She was proud of her son the general, but was just as proud of her home.

It was a simple four bedroom white clapboard two story home. On the main floor was the large kitchen. Here, mother and son began to eat their dinner of roast beef, mashed potatoes, corncoobs, and sugar beets.

"I've been meaning to tell you something for a long time and now it seems I have nothing to tell," Mark admitted.

"Son, that makes no sense whatsoever!"

"After my divorce from Martie I met a woman. She is everything I've ever wanted. Or I should say, was everything I've ever wanted," Mark elucidated.

"Is this woman named Kiley Burke?" Martha queried pouring gravy over Mark's mashed potatoes.

"Yes. How did you know?"

"Son, even backward Arkansas hears rumors. Do you love her?"

"More than you can imagine. I married her."

"Married? Where is she? A wife should be with her husband. When did this happen? Why didn't you tell me?"

"Our marriage was a secret. We couldn't afford bad publicity to interfere with our life and the war."

"The war is over," Martha scolded. "Where is she?"

"I don't know. I've sent messages to Reims and all I've found out so far is that she resigned her commission."

"Where is her home?"

"London. London is a big city. But she is a United States Citizen now. She could be anywhere."

"Mark Anthony Hauser. How on earth could you lose a wife?"

“Any husband can lose a wife that doesn’t want to be married anymore. She sent me a letter telling me she wanted a divorce. She didn’t want to be married to an old man.”

“Do you still love her and still want to be married to her?” Martha demanded.

“Yes, Mom. I sure do. I can’t believe how much I miss her. She’s good for me,” Mark replied sullenly.

“Then get off your pity pot and go get her,” Martha ordered. “I’d like to meet my new daughter in law.”

“Easier said than done. She said she doesn’t want me,” Mark countered.

“Nonsense. You beat the Nazi, win a war, and you cave into losing your love. You go get her and make her want you all over again. You did it once, do it again,” Martha scolded shaking her hand at Mark. “I can’t believe I’m sitting here listening to my son the war hero confessing he’s a coward.”

Martha had told her son exactly what he needed to hear. “You always give me the best guidance, Mom.”

“Of course I do. I’m the mother,” Martha laughed. “You go get her and bring her back here.”

“You really think I should go after her?”

“Son, you should know now that I never liked Martie. I never thought your marriage would work. The only good thing that came from that marriage was Debbie. She’s a great girl. From what I’ve heard about this Kiley of yours, and your happy letters since meeting her, I believe the two of you were made for each other. No more said. Eat your dinner. You’re starting to look emaciated.”

Mark always obeyed his mother. He thought about his strategy for getting Kiley back on his flight to Washington. After his last meeting with President Truman he would be on his way to Reims. Surely Dallas would know where Kiley was. He would make her love him all over again. This was a simple battle plan compared to what he just lived through.

“Let me hold my grandson,” Ronald demanded. He held out his arms for the bundle in Kiley’s arms. She was cuddling the precious little bundle in her arms. Today Kiley had left the hospital in Fanore with her son this morning and was returning to

her home Deegan Manor in Fanore. David Ronald Deegan Hauser had a blond hair and blue eyes. He looked very much like his father. Kiley adored her new son and would only be happier if Mark was here to share the joy of the love they created. "Of course Granddaddy, here is our little David."

"Ah, he's a fine specimen of a lad," Ronald cooed. This wasn't his first grandchild, but it was the first one with his name. It was the first grandchild he was present at the baby's birth. Ronald couldn't be prouder. He would protect this boy with his very life and make sure he kept his daughter safe, secure, protected, and happy. He had already sent two letters and three wires back to Reims unopened. He had no idea if it was Hauser or someone else. He sent them back. No one would hurt his baby girl again.

Ronald carried his new grandson to the redecorated nursery. He and Kiley enjoyed preparing the new nursery. The room was bright and sunny in the afternoon. It was on the second floor of the manor with a private enclosed balcony and large French doors that opened to it. Kiley had selected muted yellows for the wall color and draperies. The accessories were in done in white Irish linen and lace. Ronald placed the newborn in a large bassinet covered with Irish lace. The bassinet was placed near the large hearth in the nursery. A wooden crib stood nearby. There were two armoires, a mahogany dressing table, and matching dressing table in the room. A large carved oak padded rocking chair sat on the other side of the hearth.

Ronald had already hired a nanny. Mrs. Mosely stood nearby the bassinet. Ronald covered the sleeping with a soft woolen yellow blanket.

"Would Mrs. Hauser be doing alright?" Mrs. Mosely questioned. She looked down into the bassinet. "He's a good looking lad."

"And strong too! Wait until you hear the lad wail when he's hungry," Ronald bragged.

"He should be waking soon," Kiley announced entering the nursery. "I fed him before we left the hospital. That was two hours ago. He's a hungry little piglet."

"I'll prepare the bottle," Mrs. Mosely offered. "Why don't you lie down for a while, Mrs. Hauser?"

“I think I will,” Kiley responded. She walked into the room next door. She left her childhood bedroom to take the suite next to the nursery. She wanted to be near her baby. The nanny would take the room on the other side of the nursery. Kiley wasn’t tired physically, but she wanted to be alone for a few moments. “Thank you Mark for our son. You may never have loved me, but I love you and I love our son,” Kiley whispered into the air. She lay down on the huge poster bed and wept.

“Come in Dallas,” Mark ordered. He had just arrived from Washington. “Close the door. This going to be a private conversation.”

Dallas shut the door. “Something a problem?”

“Where the hell is Kiley?”

“Sir, I don’t know.”

“Goddammit! Kiley trusts you. She loves your wife. She would tell you where she disappeared to,” Mark growled.

“Obviously she doesn’t trust me enough,” Dallas returned angrily. “Don’t think I haven’t tried to find her and find out what happened. I heard she just up and resigned. What the hell happened between you two in England?”

“Even I don’t know. We were separated most of the time. I was recalled to Washington. Sean handed me a letter from Kiley before I left,” Mark explained.

“What did this letter say?”

“She said our love was only a dream. The reality was I’m just an old man,” Mark choked. “Here is the letter. Read it for yourself.” He handed Dallas the SHAEF stationary envelope.

Dallas sat on the chair in front of Mark’s desk. He opened the envelope, pulled out the letter, and read it. He shook his violently. “I don’t believe one damn word of this. In the first place Kiley doesn’t write like this. She didn’t write this. I know she didn’t.”

“Who else would?” Mark barked.

“How the hell should I know, but I know Kiley didn’t write this. This is as mysterious as those supposed letters you wrote to Martie,” Dallas countered.

“I’d forgotten about that,” Mark admitted. It made him think maybe there was something else going on. “Dallas, I have to find her. I have to talk to her. Where can I start looking?”

“I do have an idea where she might be,” Dallas replied.

“Tell me,” Mark earnestly requested.

“I thought it strange that Kiley resigned without even calling and talking to me,” Dallas answered thoughtfully. “I thought her mother might know where she could be.”

“Did she?” Mark asked hopefully.

“No. She was surprised to find out Kiley had resigned. She hadn’t seen or heard from Kiley since your dinner together in England. She was also furious at you being seen so often with your ex-wife in America when you were married to her daughter. She told me she thought Kiley was with you hiding in the background for some strange reason.”

“If only that were true,” Mark signed heavily. “I’ve missed Kiley desperately. I had nothing to do with Martie being in places where pictures were taken. She was just there. It was staged and I knew it, but Kiley’s letter had hurt me to the quick.”

“Kiley’s mother gave me the address to Deegan Manor. Apparently the two of you were there the last she heard. She told me that Kiley was close to her father. He might be able to help. I sent several letters that were returned unopened. I then sent radiograms that were refused. If Kiley wasn’t there, why would Major Deegan return everything unopened?”

“Let’s go,” Mark agreed. “We’ll get a plane immediately. We’ll ask Sean to pack a few things.”

“On it,” Dallas replied rising from the chair and heading to the door.

Chapter 31

Mark and Dallas stopped short outside the drawing room in the villa. They heard Sean talking on the phone. Dallas and Mark looked at each other when they heard Sean addressing a Mrs. Hauser. They each thought it might be Kiley, but were surprised because it was obvious for a long time that Sean had always avoided contact and conversation with Kiley.

“Yes, I’ve sent the letters to you signed by General Hauser just like I always did, Mrs. Hauser,” Sean said into the phone. “No, that Kiley woman is nowhere to be found. She’s disappeared and out of General Hauser’s life for good. Those letters worked.”

There was silence for a few moments.

Mark thought he recognized Martie’s voice speaking through the receiver.

“Don’t worry, Mrs. Hauser. I’ll take very good care of General Hauser. I’ve taken good care of the general and will continue to do so. Goodbye.” He put the phone receiver back on the cradle.

Dallas walked in ahead of Mark. “What goddamn letters were you talking about? What the hell have you been doing, Sean Ryan?”

Mark was directly behind Dallas. “I want to know what my trusted aide is doing talking to my ex-wife? You’d better sit down and start telling me what is going on.”

Dallas began the interrogation and it continued for several hours. Sean told them everything he had done for Martie since the war began.

When Mark had learned everything he found he couldn't even be angry with Sergeant Ryan. Ryan had actually believed he was doing everything to help Mark. Martie had controlled Sean and used his devotion for Mark. She had convinced Sean that there were great things ahead for Mark, but a scandal like Kiley Burke would ruin everything. She had influenced Sean completely.

"We've got to find Kiley right away," Mark stated. "How could I have been so foolish?"

"None of us had any idea what was going on," Dallas soothed. "The important thing now is to find Kiley and get this straightened out."

"I'm really sorry, sir," Sean apologized. "I really thought I was doing the right thing."

"Martie has a way of manipulating people. We do need you to do the right thing now," Mark excused. "You will come with us to Fanore, Ireland. You'd better hope that Dallas is right in his suspicions and Kiley is at Deegan Manor."

"Go pack for the General now, Sergeant Ryan," Dallas commanded. "I'll arrange for our transportation."

On the plane Dallas and Mark agreed upon a battle plan when their plane landed at the air landing in Shannon. A car was waiting for Mark. They drove directly to Deegan Manor. It was sunrise at Shannon when they arrived. They pulled into Fanore near noon and went to Deegan Manor after lunch. Mark slid down into the car seat when the car pulled into the Manor driveway. Dallas opened the car door and went immediately to the Manor entrance. The driver pulled ahead where Mark would be out of sight from the door.

Both men had agreed that Kiley had not wanted to be found. She must be furious and hurt as a result of the letter Sean had sent to her. The best plan was to get Dallas in there first.

Since Major Deegan was in Fanore with Albert looking at new horseflesh this morning, a new chambermaid answered the door. She had been not been informed of any house rules so early

in her employment. There had also been no letters or inquiries for Kiley in several months. The household had relaxed.

Megan opened the large oaken door. Before her stood a tall handsome man in uniform. She knew of Major Deegan's past in the military from all the paintings and collections she had to dust.

"Morning sir. I'm afraid the Major isn't in this morning."

"Good morning, Miss?" Dallas returned.

"Megan sir. My name is Megan. Would you like to leave a card for the Major when he returns?"

"Actually I'm here to see Kiley, your mistress."

"I've never heard of Mrs. Hauser receiving visitors. Especially visitors that would be men. Poor lass, she must have lost her husband in the war. Unless, well you wouldn't be the mister would you?"

"No. I am not Mrs. Hauser's husband. I am Dallas Stern and a friend of Kiley. We worked together during the war. I'd like to see her. I was just in the area and thought I would stop by." Dallas couldn't help but grin. This was too easy. He was right. Kiley was hiding here at Deegan Manor in Fanore. He felt smug and wanted to dance for the general.

"Do you have a card?"

"No I don't. I'll wait here while you tell Mrs. Hauser I'd like to see her."

"Yes sir," Megan replied with a little curtsy. She turned and walked briskly toward the staircase leading to the upper floors.

Dallas took the opportunity to return to the car. He slipped in the back seat. "She's here. I knew she had to be. Their maid is getting her for me."

Mark started to reach for the door handle. "Thank God! I've got to see her."

"No General Hauser. We agreed upon this plan and we will see it out. Remember, Kiley received a letter from Sean as well as you did. We must dissuade her from his lies. We can't do that until we know exactly what she read and what she believes," Dallas reminded. "I must return now."

Kiley was in the nursery with little David. She had just given him his bottle and was changing his nappy. The servants rarely had a difficult time finding Kiley. She followed a strict schedule. In the morning she would be found with David,

following breakfast she would ride her horse for an hour or two. She would return to bathe. Kiley would spend the rest of the morning with David, take lunch, and work with her father on the manor accounts. Once again she would return to little David. Then there would be dinner and David would be brought to the parlor for favor with his grandfather. In the evening Kiley would read in the library. Her life was set and serene. Her life revolved around her son and she was content.

“My Lady, there is a gentlemen caller in the hall to see you,” Megan announced.

Kiley was holding David. His soft blonde hair was pressed against her cheek. He smelled sweetly of talc powder. Kiley felt her body go stiff. She hadn’t heard from Mark. She never received any divorce papers. She had sent none. She wanted her son born with his father’s name. Had Mark come now to demand his divorce? “Did this man give his name?”

“Yes my lady,” Megan replied. “He’s military.”

Kiley held David closer as she choked back a dreadful fear.

“He said his name is Major Dallas Stern. He said he is a friend of yours come by to visit. You used to work together?”

Inside Kiley was both relieved and saddened. “Of course I’ll see him. Mrs. Mosely, come take David. Do not bring him downstairs.” Kiley placed the happy gurgling infant in the nanny’s arms. “Mommy will be back shortly. I love you my little angel.” She brushed a gentle kiss on his forehead.

Dallas looked up when Kiley descended the stairs. “Kiley! It is so good to see you.”

“It is so good to see you, Dallas,” Kiley greeted extending her arms. “What brings you to Fanore?”

“You specifically,” Dallas grinned. “I’ve been worried for you ever since I received an unexplained resignation from my Kiley.”

“Oh that.”

“No Kiley! That is not that!” Dallas declared. “I want you to tell me what happened. Why did you suddenly leave the service?”

“Sit down, Dallas,” Kiley ordered. She pulled the bell for the parlor maid. “Millicent, would you please bring the major and I some tea and biscuits?”

“Coffee for me, please,” Dallas countered. “No offense Kiley, but I never did develop a taste for your English Tea.”

“Some coffee for Major Sterns, please,” Kiley revised.

“So, while we are waiting for the tea and coffee. Tell this old friend what happened.”

“It’s a long story, Dallas,” Kiley replied.

“I have all afternoon.”

“I don’t,” Kiley stated. She thought about little David and wasn’t about to tell Dallas about him yet.

“Then I suggest you start now,” Dallas chided.

“When we returned to England after the war Mark and I were separated. I didn’t think anything about it for a long time until he suddenly departed for the Colonies,” Kiley began. “I didn’t know what to do so I went home to Fanore. Daddy took me in and then I read the letter Mark had written.”

“What letter?” Dallas queried. He didn’t want to reveal too much at once. That was the plan.

Kiley told Dallas about the letter she received on SHAEF stationary from Mark. She went into detail as to the contents of that letter.

“May I see it?” Dallas requested.

“I see no harm in it,” Kiley agreed. She rose to leave the room as her father walked in.

Ronald was in a rage when he heard there was an American officer in the parlor with Kiley. He had carefully shielded Kiley from any intrusions. He cursed himself for being so lax as not to make sure the new maid had been informed on rules. Once he entered the room he knew it was not General Hauser, as he feared. “Get out!” Ronald roared. “Get out now!” His voice was angry and threatening.

Kiley knew nothing of the returned letters and wires. She didn’t know about the instructions given to the servants about never allowing access to Kiley by any military people, British or American. “Daddy?”

“It’s alright baby,” Ronald reassured lovingly. He turned to Dallas and roared viciously, “Whomever you are get out immediately or I shall call the constable to remove you.”

Dallas rose to leave. His plan had been thwarted. “Kiley, I’d like to talk to you. If not here, somewhere.”

“Leave my baby alone!” Ronald roared. “You Americans have done enough damage and hurt.”

“Daddy, Dallas is my friend.”

“No American is your friend,” Ronald snapped. He stretched out his arm to show the way for Dallas to depart.

“Very well. I will leave, Major Deegan.” Dallas looked to Kiley. “Please contact me. I’ll be at the Shamrock Inn Bed and Breakfast.”

Albert appeared and escorted Dallas out.

“Well?” Mark asked Dallas when he entered the car.

“Our conversation was cut short. I didn’t even get coffee.”

“Goddammit! What happened?” Mark asked Dallas angrily when he entered the car.

“Like I said, our conversation was cut short. I didn’t even get coffee.”

“Goddammit! What happened?” Mark repeated.

“Daddy showed up. He asked me very impolitely to depart,” Dallas replied. “At least I know why my letters were returned unopened. Daddy is protecting Kiley.”

“Protecting her from whom and why?” Mark questioned thoughtfully.”

“Obviously he’s protecting her from us. The Americans.”

“I don’t understand,” Mark stated shaking his head. “Why would Kiley need protection from us? I’m her husband and you are her friend.”

“I was in there long enough to find out that Kiley didn’t understand why you two were separated in England, why you left suddenly for the States without her, why Martie was seen everywhere with you, and why you sent her that letter telling her you never loved her,” Dallas informed.

“I never sent the letter. Didn’t you tell her that?” Mark asked with frustration.

“I never had the chance. Once she showed me the letter I was going to convince her that you would never write it. Then you would tell her you didn’t. That was our plan, but Major Deegan came home and ousted me immediately,” Dallas shared in exasperation. “At least I got to tell Kiley where I was staying. I’m hoping she’ll contact me. I think it’s about time to come up with another plan.”

“I’m all for storming the castle walls,” Mark said truthfully.

“Can’t do that without our armor Sir Hauser,” Dallas joked. “Let’s get to the Bed & Breakfast. Hopefully Kiley will call me there.”

“I won’t wait too long. I’ll go in there with a battering ram if I have too,” Mark promised vehemently.

“I’ll be on a white charger behind you,” Dallas chuckled. “That Major looks pretty formidable.”

“It’s Destrier, not charger,” Mark corrected.

“Huh?”

“Never mind,” Mark dismissed. “Drive back to the Shamrock,” Mark addressed their driver.

Ronald embraced Kiley. “Are you all right, baby?”

“Daddy,” Kiley responded. “Dallas is a friend of mine. We worked together during the war. He was part of SHAEF.”

“Which is precisely why you shouldn’t see him,” Ronald said firmly. “He has connections to Hauser. I won’t have anyone hurt you again.”

“Dallas would never hurt me, Daddy,” Kiley corrected. “He has always been a dear friend.”

“Do you want to talk to him?”

“Yes, Daddy. I do want to talk to him. I shall talk to him. I’d like to invite him for dinner,” Kiley requested hesitantly. She adored her father and knew he was trying to protect her and David.

“Do you really think that is wise?” Ronald asked sincerely. “He may be your friend, but Hauser would be his boss. Wouldn’t he?”

“I don’t think Mark cares about me. For all I know he’s still in the Colonies,” Kiley excused. “I trust Dallas. I always have and I always will.”

“Do you want him to know about our David?” Ronald queried worriedly.

“I don’t know yet, but I loved seeing him. I’d like to find out how his wife Vivian is doing. She is so sweet and kind.”

Ronald put up his hands in surrender. “All right. Go ahead and invite the man to dinner.”

Kiley stood on her toes to give her father a peck on his cheek. “I love you, Daddy.”

“I love you, baby,” Ronald repeated. “Let’s go upstairs and visit our little David. You need to give that Dallas some time to return to the Shamrock.”

“Right, Daddy,” Kiley agreed.

They walked hand in hand up to the nursery.

“Hello?” Dallas responded. “Yes this is Major Dallas Storm.”

Mark was by Dallas’ side instantly.

“Yes Kiley, I’d love to come to dinner. Just promise me your father won’t be armed,” Dallas teased.

“So what do we plan now?” Mark asked. “You are invited to dinner. What do I do?”

“You stay here. I’ll talk to Kiley after dinner. I’ll tell her I have to get back to the Shamrock and would like to meet her tomorrow. Maybe we can get her away from the fortress. It doesn’t matter though. I’ll get her to bring me the letter and I’ll start working on her,” Dallas instructed.

“Revising the war strategy?”

“We have no choice, Mark. Do you or don’t you want to see Kiley?”

Mark glowered at Dallas.

“I thought so. I’ve got to get dressed for dinner.”

This time Ronald Deegan received Dallas more courteously. The dinner was quiet and small talk was exchanged. Dallas shared the current restructuring of Germany by the Allied Forces.

After dinner Ronald excused himself for a matter of importance and went upstairs. This was his time to play with little David and he wasn’t about to give it up. Kiley walked Dallas to the door.

“I really want to see that letter, Kiley. I simply can’t believe Mark would write a letter like you told me,” Dallas said seriously. “Can we meet tomorrow somewhere? I don’t have much time left on my leave.”

“I never go further than the garden at Deegan Manor,” Kiley replied. “Come tomorrow early afternoon. I’ll show you the letter then. I don’t understand why you think Mark didn’t write

that letter.” Kiley found hope in her heart that Dallas was right. Maybe there was something in the letter she had missed.

“Because Kiley. I know you and I know the general. I’ve known from the beginning that you two were meant for each other. I know you love Mark and Mark loves you. It simply doesn’t make sense.”

“I wish I could believe that, but he’s never tried to contact me. He went right back to Martie,” Kiley choked.

“Don’t worry, Irish,” Dallas reassured wiping a tear from her cheek. “I’ll be back tomorrow.” He wasn’t about to tell Kiley that Martie was the last person Mark would have gone back to. He certainly wasn’t going to tell her that Mark was waiting for him at the Shamrock. He wouldn’t tell her that it was difficult enough keeping Mark from charging in after her like a mad bull.

Mark was waiting for Dallas. “Well?”

“Tomorrow,” Dallas replied with one word. “Her father will be out checking manor lands and she has agreed to show me the letter. She loves you. I can see it in her eyes. That letter Sean wrote in your name nearly destroyed her.”

“I never wanted to hit a woman like I want to hit Martie. If there was ever a mold for witch, Martie would fit perfectly.”

“The important thing right now is to get Kiley back. Deal with Martie later.”

“I’ve talked to a few local people in the pub while you at dinner,” Mark started. “Don’t look at me like that. I kept a low profile. I asked indirect questions. I learned a lot in subterfuge from the Brits.”

“Okay, what did you find out?”

“The local people know the Deegan family and like them a lot. They made reference to Kiley saying how strange it is that she doesn’t even come into town. This one man said she was a bubbling and happy child. The talk is that maybe she was grievously disfigured in the war and refuses to be seen. The chatter is that her hermitage is most mysterious.”

“Kiley mentioned to me that she doesn’t wander farther than the garden. I can assure you she is still as beautiful as ever. Perhaps she is even more beautiful. She has a glow about her that I can’t describe.”

“Are you going to meet in the garden? Kiley always loved gardens. She loves to read there,” Mark reminisced.

“Yes, her love for the garden hasn’t changed. The nights are chilled, but Kiley assures me the brisk afternoon in the garden is still her favorite place,” Dallas shared. “I agreed because having a tea in the garden would allow you much easier access to Kiley. I checked out the garden before dinner. Here is the battleground. Hedges on this side would cover you until I give the signal,” Dallas said eagerly. He continued to describe in detail what he remembered from the garden. They discussed their plans.

Mark went to sleep a happy man. He would have Kiley back in his arms tomorrow afternoon.

“Here is the letter,” Kiley stated handing the letter she had kept for six months.

Dallas opened the envelope and pulled out the folded sheet. Some of the ink of the typed letters had run. Dallas guessed correctly it was from tears. He noticed Kiley tense and her eyes begin to fill with tears. He shook his head in disbelief while reading the typed words. Slowly he folded the letter and put it back in the envelope. “I want you to read this letter.” Dallas pulled out another envelope identified with SHAEF stationary. He hand it to Kiley. “I want you to note the date it was typed.”

“What’s going on?” Kiley asked taking the envelope and opening it.

“I haven’t quite been honest with you,” Dallas confessed.

Chapter 32

“Dallas, what are you saying?” Kiley asked skeptically.

“Just read the letter,” Dallas ordered.

Kiley opened the letter and read. “I never wrote this!”

“Mark believed you did.”

“What?” Kiley gasped near hysteria. She began to choke and grabbed a cup of tea.

“Did you see the date? It was a few days before you received yours. I know for a fact who actually wrote those letters and gave them to each of you.”

“How did you get this? How do you know who wrote these? Who?” Kiley’s mind was filled with a thousand questions. She was trembling. “I’d never call Mark an old man. I loved him.”

“Loved him?”

“I love him. Goddammit! I love him, Dallas!” Kiley let the tears drop from her eyes.

“That’s what I wanted to hear,” Dallas chuckled. He rose from the chair, turned toward the hedges and motioned someone with his arms.

Mark emerged and walked briskly to Kiley.

Before Kiley could even focus her eyes or mind, she was in Mark's arms.

"It was Sean. We caught him. He had other letters on his person," Mark whispered into Kiley's ear. He held her tighter than he should. He knew that, but she felt so wonderful in his arms. It had been too long he thought. Kiley felt firmer. She felt especially firmer in one place. It took all his will power not to pick Kiley up and find the nearest bed.

Kiley felt his hardened manhood pressing against her abdomen. She had missed him, his arms, and his love. It took great will but Kiley pushed Mark away. This was all too much. Her head was swimming with questions. She remembered little David. What would Mark think of her? She had kept his son from him. If all of what Dallas had said was true, how could she explain to Mark. Why did Sean do this horrible thing? Suddenly the world became dark. Kiley fainted.

Mark still held Kiley in his arms. He quickly put his arm under her legs and ran to the open French doors of Deegan Manor.

Albert came from the hall at the loud footsteps. "My God Man!" he shouted heatedly. "What have you done to our Kiley? Give her to me."

"Take her from me over your dead body," Mark snarled menacingly. "Where's her room?"

Dallas was behind Mark. He grabbed Albert by his tie. "Tell me where her room is!"

Albert began choking. His bravado was quelled immediately when he saw the look of fear for Kiley in Mark's eyes. He pointed to the large staircase.

Megan stood in the room shaking noticeably. She had not been reprimanded, but completely informed about the manor rules regarding any and all male military men. She had heard about General Hauser from news reports, but it never occurred to her that Kiley Hauser was General Hauser's wife. His name was certainly never mentioned in the household.

Dallas barked at the trembling girl. "You, lead us to Kiley's room."

Megan was terrified. She looked to Albert pathetically.

Still choking from the strangle hold Dallas had on Albert's neck, he nodded in affirmation to Megan.

"This way sir," Megan beckoned.

“Good man,” Dallas addressed. He straightened Albert’s tie and smoothed his lapels. “Now be a good lad and call a doctor.”

Mark followed Megan up the stairs and down the hall.

Megan opened a closed door and moved aside for Mark to carry Kiley into the room.

Gently Mark placed Kiley upon the robins egg blue satin comforter. The room was bright with sunlight reflecting off the white walls.

Kiley’s breathing was erratically. Her face had lost its pallor.

Mark instinctively unbuttoned her blouse.

Megan removed Kiley’s shoes. “If you would leave the room sir, I’ll undress Mrs. Hauser and get her into bed for the doctor.”

Mark pushed aside Megan’s hands. “Go check on the doctor. I’ll take care of my wife. Just get me one of her night dresses.”

“Your wife?” Megan gasped raising her hand to her throat for the surprise of it. “We thought the...” Megan cut herself short. She was told this Major Dallas Stern would be allowed in the house, but not one word was to be mentioned about little David Hauser. “I mean we all thought you were dead.”

“I’m hardly deceased. Where is that nightgown?” Mark asked a bit more gently.

Megan went to the armoire and retrieved a lovely white satin nightgown. It had little bows for the straps. Mark had always loved that gown.

While Megan went down the stairs to check on her next instructions, Mark undressed Kiley and put her under the quilts. Dallas was with Albert listening as he spoke to the Fanore doctor. Mrs. Mosely heard the strange male voice in Mrs. Hauser’s room. She wasn’t so bold as to enter, but she was curious as to what was about. Little David was still asleep so she left the nursery to go down downstairs and find out a little gossip.

Mark sat on the side of the bed next to Kiley. He was stroking her luxurious red hair that was longer. “I love you, Mrs. Hauser.” He heard a strange noise like a low squeal. The door to the next room was slightly ajar. He thought he heard erratic movement. Then he heard more little gurgles and movements. It

sounded like Debbie when she was a baby. Was he imagining things? The sounds continued. Mark warred with himself. Should he leave Kiley's side?

The decision was made for him. He heard a newborn crying. There was a baby in the next room. Mark responded to the crying. He opened the door to find a nursery. He asked himself why would Kiley's room be next to a nursery? The answer struck him like a thunderbolt. His knees shook while taking small steps to the bassinet near the hearth. Looking down he found a newborn child with blonde hair and big blue eyes. The child was the spitting image of his own baby pictures. He had a child. "Of course," Mark muttered. "I haven't seen your mommy in six months. She was carrying you the last time I saw her in England." Mark reached into the bassinet and lifted the tiny being. "You are wet little one."

Little David gurgled at the stranger looking into his eyes. His little hands swung wildly.

Mark looked around and found fresh powdered nappies on one of the dressing tables. "Let's get you changed little one." Mark laid the baby on the dressing table and changed the nappies. "I knew you were a boy. I knew Kiley and I would have a son. What's your name?" Mark drew the freshly diapered infant close to his heart. His large hands gently folded the blanket around the baby. Mark brushed his lips across the soft blonde hair.

David gurgled in response and his little legs kicked under the blanket.

"Say hello to your Daddy," Mark beamed. He walked back into Kiley's room holding his son. "Kiley Hauser, you have made me the happiest man in the world. I am a jerk for letting you slip away for this short length of time when you gave me a son. You'll never do that again. Never!" Mark sat on the bed next to Kiley still holding his son.

Dallas was in the parlor with Ronald. He showed the letters to Kiley's father and explained what had happened. He told Ronald how Martie had used Sergeant Sean Ryan. Dallas had just finished his explanation when the doctor arrived.

Mrs. Mosely had stayed in the kitchen and cook was telling her about General Hauser showing up. The kitchen gossip was a flurry of scenarios. Mrs. Mosely had nearly forgotten about her charge. She certainly hadn't heard any crying and when David

was hungry he could be heard across the entire manor. She knew he would be waking up soon for his feeding. She prepared his bottle.

Ronald followed the doctor to his daughter's room. He found Mark holding and talking to his grandson.

Mark turned to see the three men standing in the doorway. "Dallas, I have a son. That's why Kiley never left Deegan Manor. She wouldn't be more than a hundred yards from our baby."

"What makes you think that baby is yours?" Ronald demanded protectively. "We could have adopted an orphan."

Mark grinned broadly. "There is no way you could convince me this is not my son." Mark beamed and dropped the blanket revealing the little blonde head. He showed Dallas the baby's face. "Is this my little clone, or not?"

Dallas went to Mark and looked down upon the little face. "No doubt about it. This is your son." Dallas was a little envious. He and Vivian wanted a child desperately.

Doctor Williams ignored the scene and went to Kiley. He took her pulse, checked her breathing, and her eyes. "Kiley has fainted. She'll be fine. I'll wake her with smelling salts, and leave some powders. She just needs some rest. I have a feeling I know what went on here. It was just a bit much for her. Anyone for that matter." Doctor Williams opened his case, retrieved a capsule, and broke it open beneath Kiley's nose.

Kiley woke up instantly to Doctor Williams face looming over her. "What happened?" Kiley asked holding her throbbing head.

"You fainted," Doctor Williams replied. "It appears the father of your child turned up from the grave." The doctor chuckled. He had recognized General Hauser. Unlike others, he had suspected Kiley's child was the General's. He also assumed David was illegitimate, but never said so.

"Thank you for taking care of my wife," Mark told the doctor. "And my son."

"Wife? You're married then?" Doctor Williams queried.

"Yes we are married," Mark replied incredulously. "We've been separated due to interference from an outside source. I'm here to change all that."

Kiley reached for Mark's hand. "Mark, darling. I wanted to tell you, but the letter."

"Sean fooled us both. There are no explanations necessary. My only regret is that I was too stupid to find out what was going on. It took Dallas to set things right. Can you forgive me for not being here for my son's birth?"

"Mark," Kiley whispered. "You can make up for it when our next baby arrives. I love you so much."

"What have you named our son?"

"David Ronald Deegan Hauser."

"He's perfect," Mark beamed.

David decided he was hungry and let loose with an indignant wail.

"I'll take the lad," Mrs. Mosely said in the background.

"He's hungry. I have his bottle and he most likely needs changing."

"I've already changed his nappies," Mark boasted.

Kiley raised her eyebrow in surprise.

"I'll feed my son. Let me have the bottle."

"Do you know how?" Mrs. Mosely asked skeptically.

"I took care of my daughter Debbie. I'm completely capable." He reached for the bottle. Once in hand Mark guided the bottle skillfully into David's mouth. "There you are son, eat up." Mark sat next to Kiley.

"Are you happy?" Kiley asked. She patted the soft blanket surrounding her son.

"My love, my life, I couldn't be happier. You have my oath nothing will separate us again. Dallas and I will work out a press release. You are coming with me to Reims."

"No more secrets?"

"No more secrets. This is my life and no one is going to take away our happiness ever again," Mark swore. He disappeared into the nursery and reappeared with a nappy on his shoulder. Little David was resting on Mark's shoulder and Mark was patting his back. "Little David needs a burp."

"You seem to be quite an expert in babies," Kiley remarked. Mark was quite proficient. David let out a large burp followed by an upchuck of milk. The diaper protected Mark's uniform. "Yes indeed. An expert."

Mark returned to the bed and continued feeding the greedy little newborn. “Kiley, you are everything to me. You’ve even given me everything I’ve ever wanted. I love you.”

Kiley leaned into Mark’s arm. The rest of the audience left the room.

Two weeks later, Kiley and Mrs. Mosely had settled in to the huge villa in Versailles. Photographers surrounded the palatial villa trying to get snaps of the world famous couple.

Contrary to Martie’s belief, the world fell in love with the General’s new family. Mark was more popular than ever.

Sean was reassigned to Washington under Newhall.

Kiley, Mark, Dallas, Mrs. Mosely, and Little David were in the grand parlor. The activities were centered on David, as they usually were. After a long day of administration, Mark would call for his family. Christmas was near and Mark was showing David the pretty Venetian glass ornaments. David would reach out for the shiny spheres.

Amidst the laughing a somber butler announced the presence of a visitor.

Kiley recognized him at once. It was a man she abhorred. Prescott Hawthorne.

“This is quite a family scene,” Prescott commented. “All that I’ve heard is truth indeed.”

“There is a purpose to your visit?” Kiley scowled. She took David from Mark.

Mark noted the change in Kiley’s demeanor.

“He is a cute little fellow,” Prescott ignored. Using his finger he attempted to stroke David’s chin. “I have four boys and a daughter.”

Kiley stepped backward and covered David’s face in a protective stance. “How fortunate for you,” Kiley purred.

Mark had no idea why Kiley was acting that way.

Prescott resumed his attention to Mark. “I have come to discuss your future with you, General Hauser. Perhaps we could go to a private place to discuss it.”

“I have no secrets from my wife,” Mark replied firmly. “Anything you want to discuss will be said here.”

“Very well,” Prescott conceded. He took a seat. “Your future is very bright General Hauser. You are popular with the American people. All you need is the backing.”

“Backing? For what?” Mark queried taking a seat next to Kiley and retrieving his son.

“The Presidency. We’ll give you the financial backing to obtain the White House. We expect you to occupy the White House in 1952,” Prescott encouraged.

“Who are we?” Kiley asked skeptically. She didn’t want Nazi money financing Mark for anything.

“The Republican Party of course. Everything will be on the up and up,” Prescott replied.

“And what would you and your fellow Republicans want in return?” Mark queried. He was not the least bit oblivious to politics and lobbyists.

“If you follow the Republican Party, its precepts, and ideals, we’ll all do well,” Prescott answered. He would be running for the Senate and be in Congress when Mark was in the White House. What better way to control his interests than be in power and have the White House as a friend. He also needed time to groom his own son for the White House in the future.

“You were pretty close to Martie the last time I saw you,” Kiley blurted out angrily. She distrusted this man completely. “She even told me you were going to support Mark for the Presidency and she would be First Lady.”

“Martie was half right,” Prescott replied smoothly. “I have every intention of supporting Mark right to the White House. Martie never was or would be the right candidate for First Lady. Kiley, you are the perfect wife and mother to support the President.”

Kiley didn’t trust any of Prescott’s slippery words.

“What do you think, Kiley?” Mark asked. “Do you want to be First Lady?”

“Mark, you would be the best President the United States would ever have. You are wise and the best in administration. You know politics. You know foreign policy,” Kiley said lovingly. “It is your choice. I will follow you to the ends of the earth.”

“You can tell the Republican Party I will accept the nomination in 1951.”

“Wonderful!” Prescott rejoiced. “I’ll return to America tomorrow and let everyone know the good news.”

“You do that,” Kiley oozed.

Once Prescott had left Mark turned to Kiley. “What was that all about?”

“Prescott Hawthorne was a Nazi sympathizer. He traded and helped develop the Nazi war machine. Even President Roosevelt didn’t trust him,” Kiley replied.

“How do you know all this?” Mark queried.

“I learned about Prescott Hawthorne when I was with British Intelligence,” Kiley enlightened. “Don’t ever trust him.”

“A wise man listens and learns,” Mark smiled. “Do you still want me to run for the Presidency?”

“Oh yes, my darling,” Kiley replied kissing Mark on the cheek. “I meant what I said. You would be the best President. Just don’t ever trust Prescott, or turn your back on him.”

“Your advice is heeded.”

Epilogue

“Happy?” Mark asked stroking Kiley’s rounded belly. They were sitting together on a large sofa on the second floor of the White House.

“With you? Always, Mr. President,” Kiley answered leaning into Mark’s arms.

“Baby Hauser seems restless tonight,” Mark commented. He loved feeling his baby move inside the love of his life.

“Not any more restless than the other Hauser children,” Kiley chuckled.

It was family time in the White House. It was just before dinner.

Mrs. Mosely brought in David now seven years old, Catherine who was five, and Mark Hauser Junior who was two.

“Ah,” Mark laughed. “Here are the troops.”

His children ran into their father’s open arms.

“Tell us the story again, Daddy,” David requested.

“We love the story,” Catherine pleaded.

“A true fairy tale starts with a prince and a princess,” Mark started. “I’ll tell you the tale of the *Five Star Affair*.”