

HOLD BACK THE SUN

A NOVEL OF THE U.S. ASIATIC FLEET vs JAPAN

BY WARREN BELL

CHAPTER 1

(One)
Salon Kitty
11 Giesebrechtstrasse
Berlin, Germany
21 July 1941

Shosa (Major) Katsura Okuma, Imperial Japanese Army (IJA), stifled a yawn without visibly changing expression, then sipped politely from his glass of champagne. He wished to heaven that one of his military friends would come and rescue him from the minor *Gestapo* functionary who had cornered him at the buffet table. After all, this was his going-away party. He was supposed to have fun, not be bored to death by this buffoon's empty-headed blather about the *Führer's* military genius.

Okuma was big for a Japanese, about 182 centimeters (six feet) when barefoot. His gleaming brown cavalry boots made him even taller. Okuma's olive M.98 service dress uniform was impeccably tailored about his muscular frame. He had hardly an ounce of fat on his body. Raven hair was cropped close to his bullet-shaped head, and a pencil mustache graced his upper lip. A German decoration hung between the points of his Prussian collar.

He let his dark eyes drift around the enormous, high-ceilinged room, the former parlor of a Jewish millionaire industrialist. Dazzling crystal chandeliers sparkled in the subdued electric light. The floors were polished marble; the tall walls, covered with red and gold wallpaper; the windows, masked with red velvet draperies. A twenty-foot mahogany table groaned with *hors d'oeuvres*, all delicacies from the recent Nazi conquests: Polish hams and sausages; Norwegian smoked salmon and sardines; a variety of Dutch and Greek cheeses; Danish pastries; even Russian caviar. The hard bread was French, as was the champagne, which everyone was drinking. Still pretending to pay attention to his companion, Okuma spread sturgeon eggs on a piece of bread and began to munch on it.

On the eve of completing a two-year posting as Assistant Military Attaché at Japan's Berlin embassy, Okuma was currently the toast of the city. He was an asset to any hostess, a strikingly visible symbol of Hitler's new alliance with the greatest power in East Asia. Most German women considered him cultured and witty, while others knew him as a skilled and considerate lover. But their husbands recognized him for what he really was--an utterly dedicated military professional. He had come to Germany to study modern warfare. He was leaving as an expert on airborne operations.

"Ah, here you are, Katsura," came a familiar, welcomed voice. "You'll excuse the *Major*, I'm sure," the young *Luftwaffe* lieutenant colonel said to the man with Okuma. The colonel wore the uniform and polished jump boots of the Fallschirmjäger (Hunters From the Sky), the German Air Force' paratrooper wing. An Iron Cross, First Class, hung at his throat. "I simply must introduce him to our Madame Kitty."

"Thank you for getting me away from that moron, Ernst," Okuma said when they were out of earshot of the table. Ernst Echart was his best friend in Germany. They had been close since they were classmates at the Spandau paratrooper's school.

"Indulging politicians is the price we must pay for military glory," Ernst replied with a shrug. "*Mei fa tzu.*"

Okuma smiled at the familiar phrase, which he had taught to his German friends. It was the Chinese equivalent of *C'est le vive*. "I must confess that I'm anxious to meet our hostess. I understand that her girls are the best in Berlin."

"Not just Berlin," Ernst said with a laugh. "In all Germany."

The party was being given for Okuma by Ernst and his first cousin, Hermann, who was a *Schutzstaffel* (major) on *Reichführer* Heinrich Himmler's staff. The two Echarts were prototypical Nazi Aryans: blond-haired, blue-eyed giants with athletic builds. Hermann had cultivated contact with Okuma in the days immediately following the signing of the Tripartite Pact, which established the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo Axis. Okuma realized that his initial objective was purely political, but that had not inhibited the development of a genuine friendship. While Ernst was a true comrade-in-arms, Hermann's access to the inner sanctums of German power was a valuable source of intelligence for Okuma's superiors in the Second Bureau of the Imperial General Staff--Army Intelligence--and the *Kempei Tai*, the IJA military police and espionage service. Okuma enjoyed Hermann's more worldly contacts. The mansion in which this farewell was being staged was an exclusive *Gestapo* bordello.

“There’s Madame Kitty now.” Ernst indicated a voluptuous, dark-haired woman who was circulating among the guests. She had a younger woman in tow, a strawberry blond with a “peaches and cream” complexion. Both wore strapless evening gowns. Ernst waved them over.

“Madame Kitty, this is our guest of honor, *Major Okuma*,” Ernst said in introduction.

“I’m charmed, Madame,” Okuma added suavely.

“I’m very pleased to meet you, *Herr Major*.” The madam’s voice was low and husky. “Let me present Mademoiselle Genevieve, our new dancer from Paris. She’ll be performing for us later this evening.”

The French girl immediately intrigued Okuma. Although barely five feet tall, her emerald gown revealed a striking figure, and her face held a delicate beauty. Her bare shoulders were the color of polished alabaster. “That will surely be the highlight of the party,” he said as he gallantly kissed Genevieve’s hand. She was wearing a delicate French perfume.

“You have a long journey ahead of you, *Herr Major*,” Madame Kitty commented. “How will you get home, now that the route through Russia is closed?”

“Katsura’s flying back,” Ernst put in.

“Truly? I didn’t realize that’s possible.”

“Pan American still operates a Clipper service from Lisbon to New York,” Okuma explained. “They have another flight that runs from San Francisco to Manila, then on to Shanghai. Once there, I can connect with *Dai Nippon*.”

“What a fascinating time you’re going to have,” said Kitty, her eyes wide with wonder. “I wish I could come with you.”

“I’d welcome your company, but you’d have to buy your own ticket. I doubt that my government would be willing to pay the fare.”

“I suspect that *Kuma* will be doing more than just sightseeing,” quipped Hermann, who had walked over to join them. He wore the black uniform of the *Waffen SS*.

“*Kuma*?” said Genevieve quizzically.

“My Japanese nickname--meaning ‘Bear,’” said Okuma. “It’s a play on my size and my name.”

“The Pacific Clippers land at the American military bases in Hawaii and the islands to the west,” Ernst put in.

“Midway, Wake Island, and Guam are key links in the Americans’ line-of-communications to their Philippine colony,” said Okuma. “I could hardly fail to observe the details of their defenses.”

“I couldn't help noticing your medal, *Herr Major*,” Genevieve said to Okuma in a seductive French accent. “Isn't that the *Ritter Kreuz* (the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross)? I wasn't aware that it was awarded to foreign attaches.”

“*Kuma*'s no ordinary military diplomat,” Ernst said with enthusiasm. “See that parachutist's emblem?” He tapped the silver *Waffenfarbe* badge on Okuma's left breast, a diving eagle encircled by an oval wreath. “This man jumped into Crete with us. Without him, we might have lost the battle. We call him ‘The Bear of Maleme.’”

“The *Führer* himself hung the *Ritter Kreuz* around his neck,” said Hermann.

“But how can that be?” said the French girl in surprise. “Surely you're a neutral in the war with the English.”

“Ernst and Hermann arranged for me to go along as a war correspondent for a Tokyo newspaper,” Okuma said modestly. The decoration was something of an embarrassment to him. The Japanese Army would never have given him a medal for what he'd done. Such conduct was routinely expected of true *Samurai* warriors. “I fought the Anzacs because there was no other way to stay alive.”

“And you actually talked with the *Führer*?” Madame Kitty's eyes took on a messianic sparkle, and her face flushed with excitement. “I'd do anything for such an honor! What did he say to you?”

“He's an admirer of *Bushido*, our warrior ethic,” Okuma replied. “He'd like to bind your German forces to its doctrines. I gave him a translation of *Senjinkun*, our Field Service Code.”

“To a *Samurai* like *Kuma*, war can have only two possible outcomes,” Hermann interjected. “Victory or death.”

“It's more than just that,” Okuma continued. “Our armed services live by a set of precepts we call ‘The Grand Way of Heaven and Earth,’ which our Emperor Meiji proclaimed when we became a modern nation. Every command from a superior is taken as a direct order from our divine Emperor. Loyalty and faithfulness to the death, what you would consider uncommon valor, are considered our simple duty.”

“Does the *Führer* actually believe that European troops would live by such rules?” asked Genevieve, raising an eyebrow in doubt.

“Perhaps not the *Wehrmacht*,” Hermann replied, “but the caliber of our *Waffen SS* recruits is so high that we can become a caste of German *Samurai*.”

“You’ll need them before you’re finished with the Russians,” Okuma observed.

“Surely, you’re jesting,” said a surprised Ernst. “Our *panzers* are ripping the Reds to shreds. They’re surrendering in droves. We’ll have them beaten before the first snowfall.”

“You Europeans don’t appreciate the geography of Russia,” Okuma responded. “I came to Germany by rail from Vladivostok, crossing those interminable steppes. You could lose the whole of Western Europe out there and never miss it.”

“But the Red Army’s coming apart at the seams,” Hermann insisted. “Their government will have to capitulate when we’ve taken Moscow.”

“Napoleon took Moscow, but the Czar didn’t surrender,” Okuma replied. “Russians have always traded space for time, wearing invaders down by drawing them deeper and deeper into their vast territory. Beware of overconfidence when you do battle with them.”

“This is all quite fascinating,” said Genevieve, flashing Okuma a peek down her bodice as she deposited her champagne on a table, “but I’m afraid that I must change for my number. I do so want to hear more about your exploits in Crete, *Herr Major*. Perhaps you’ll tell me about them later.”

“Nothing would give me more pleasure,” he lied. He could think of innumerable things that he could do with the Frenchwoman that he would enjoy more than telling war stories. Once he got his hands on her, he knew she would be unable to deny him anything. During the past two years, he had seduced dozens of European women, making love to them in ways they had never dreamed possible. For Okuma was a master of the ancient Taoist Arts of the Bedchamber. His most prized possession was an original copy of *I-shim-po*, the Tenth Century classic on erotica, which he knew completely by heart.

I’ll have to figure out how to make the tale about Crete short, he thought as she took her leave of the group and went out of the room. Unconsciously, he started stroking a freshly healed scar along his right cheekbone.

Three bullets slammed into the rocks above Okuma’s head in rapid succession, forcing him to press his body even harder against the rocky soil of Crete. *Goddamn those Tommies!* he cursed silently. *How can they shoot so straight?* He had done two years of combat with Japan’s Kwantung Army in China, but never had he encountered infantrymen who could deliver such a

volume of massed, accurately aimed rifle fire as the British and Anzac troops on the hill above.

Opening his eyes for the first time in several minutes, he surveyed his immediate surroundings. The remnants of Ernst Echart's company of paratroopers were scattered in disarray in front of the south slope of a round-topped hill that dominated the Greek airfield at Maleme. The parched plain between them and the sea was a charnel house of shattered German bodies, the result of a hellish, low-level drop through intense British small arms and antiaircraft fire. The enemy must have realized that the airfield was a logical target for airborne attack, for they had been prepared. Like Okuma, the lucky *Fallschirmjäger* who had reached the ground unharmed were cowering behind whatever cover they could find. With blood still leaking from leg and shoulder wounds taken during his first moments on the ground, Ernst was hunkered down with his runner behind a low stone wall about twenty meters uphill from Okuma, trying desperately to get a wireless set to work so that he could call down air support. The British and commonwealth troops remained in firm control of the airfield. The German air-landing formations waiting in their transports in mainland Greece might as well have been on the moon.

Another volley of rifle fire peppered Okuma's boulder, spraying his head with fragments of rock. His padded, rimless parachutist's helmet deflected most of the shards, but one plowed along his right cheekbone, laying open the flesh like a saber cut. Unreasoned anger and shame boiled up within him. What was he doing hugging the ground like a coward? He was a *Samurai*. He had to fight back!

Springing to his feet, he sprinted toward Ernst's position, crouching low and zigzagging to throw off the aim of the enemy soldiers above. The *zing* of rifle slugs whipping close around him filled his ears. A Vickers machine gun opened up, its bullets kicking up puffs of dust as they chased him across the bone-dry field. Drawing on a final burst of adrenaline, he dived through the air to land in the shelter of the stone wall beside Ernst. The Vickers gun lashed the front face of the wall, showering them with dust and more fragments of rock.

"You're either the bravest man I ever met or the most foolish," said Ernst as Okuma lay gasping for breath.

Okuma ignored the comment. "Did you have any luck with the wireless?" he asked when he was able to speak.

"None at all." Ernst threw the radio to the ground in disgust. "It must have taken a round when we first landed. We've no way to communicate with our air support."

Okuma dug a cigarette out of one of the pockets of his camouflaged smock and lit it, then

shaded his eyes and looked up into the pale, blinding sky. High overhead, a number of ugly bent-wing *Stuka* dive-bombers were orbiting aimlessly, their pilots apparently unsure as to where the enemy positions lay. He pushed himself up on his elbows and scanned the plain between the wall and the sea, memorizing the positions of the pinned-down German troops for future reference. A cluster of corpses about forty meters from the wall drew his attention. The shattered remains of three *Fallschirmjäger* were draped over what looked to be a heavy weapons container.

“Let me have your glasses,” he said to Ernst.

Without a word, the major lifted his Zeiss binoculars from his neck and handed them to Okuma. As the attaché focused the eyepieces, he saw that the object beneath the dead Germans was what he had hoped, a half-assembled infantry cannon.

A few feet beyond Ernst was a section of wall that had partially collapsed. Okuma crawled carefully to the spot and searched until he found a gap between the stones that was large enough to peer through with the glasses. Squatting on his haunches to remain hidden, he studied the enemy position on the hilltop for several minutes. The Tommies were dug in deeply just behind the military crest, their trench line reinforced with a number of machine gun nests. He estimated the range to be five hundred meters. Closing his eyes for a moment, he did spherical trigonometry calculations in his head, then crawled back to Ernst.

“I’m going to need some help.” He explained what he had in mind.

“Take Lance Corporal Steiner.” The *Luftwaffe* officer nodded at his runner. The man was slightly built, but wiry and tough.

Slithering on their bellies like snakes, it took Okuma and the German almost half an hour to reach the small cannon. The dead gunners had gotten well along with assembling the weapon before falling to enemy fire. The barrel and trail were already fitted together, and one of its spoked bicycle wheels was in place. The other lay alongside the drop container, which held a ten-round pack of ammunition.

Speaking in colloquial German, Okuma told Steiner what he wanted him to do. The lance corporal worked his body under the barrel of the piece until it rested on the center of his back. On Okuma's order, he heaved himself upward, using the full strength of his arms and legs to lift the weapon. Okuma slipped the second wheel onto the axle and dropped the retaining pin into its socket. Then they began the long crawl back to the wall, pushing the gun ahead of them and dragging the ammunition behind. Realizing what was happening when they were about halfway

home, the soldiers on the hill began shooting at them. Miraculously, they reached shelter unharmed. After resting for a few minutes, they moved the gun to the collapsed section of wall.

Okuma snapped an order to Steiner and rotated the operating lever of the breach. The gun broke open like a double-bore shotgun, the barrel swinging up to clear the fixed breechblock. After the German slammed in a 75-millimeter shell, Okuma swung the lever to cam the barrel back down against the block. He laid the piece himself, carefully lining it up toward the end of the enemy trench line and spinning the elevation wheel until the muzzle was pointing almost straight up. Then, leaving Steiner with the firing lanyard, he went back to his gap between the stones. When he got his glasses lined up, he gave the signal to fire.

The sharp crack of the gun nearly burst Okuma's eardrums. Mentally cursing himself for not having the sense to plug his ears, he observed the fall of shot. The projectile landed about fifteen meters in front of the trenches. He barked the correction instructions to Steiner. Two minutes later, the little cannon spoke for the second time. Okuma let out a whoop of elation when the shell fell right into the end of the trench, blowing several bodies straight up into the air. He crawled back to traverse the piece for the next shot, which took out another section of enemy defenses.

Five thousand feet above the battlefield, the *Stuka* squadron commander witnessed the bursting shells on the hilltop and decided to investigate. Alerting his wingman, he went screaming down to level off a scant four hundred feet above the beach before speeding inland. His sharp eyes picked out the scattered bodies and huddled survivors. Then the infantry gun behind the stone wall spewed out another plume of dirty smoke. Moments later, its shell exploded in a machine gun nest on the crest of the ridge. The fortifications were patently British, a precisely laid out trench system with heavy weapons bunkers. The squadron commander strafed them with his wing machine guns, and his rear gunner took out several men who raised their heads as the *Stuka* soared skyward.

"It's going to work," Okuma crowed to Ernst as the dive-bomber rejoined its formation. He loaded the last shell into the infantry gun and carefully laid the barrel on the machine gun nest at the north end of the hilltop position. He paused then, waiting for the airmen to act.

The first *Stuka* nosed over and dived straight for the Tommies, the air-powered siren beneath its belly wailing like a banshee. Okuma jerked the firing lanyard, dropping the 75-millimeter

shell directly onto the machine gun bunker. Zeroing in on that marker, the dive-bomber zoomed toward the ground until it seemed sure to crash. At the last possible moment, the pilot pulled her up sharply, releasing a cluster of anti-personnel bombs to fall squarely on the sharp-shooting Tommies. As the plane zipped by close overhead, Okuma saw that a leering shark's mouth was painted on its nose.

Again and again, the dive-bombers pounded the hill until it was shrouded in a cloud of dust and smoke. The enemy's rifle fire slackened, then ceased altogether. From all over the coastal plain, paratroopers rose up from their hiding places and raced toward Okuma's wall. The number that had survived unscathed amazed him. Overpowering battle lust suddenly swept over him. Nothing mattered except the compelling necessity to shed enemy blood.

Scooping up an MP-40 submachine gun from a dead *Fallschirmjäger*, Okuma vaulted onto the wall and shouted in German for the gathering soldiers to follow him. Then he went racing up the hill toward the British position. The *Fallschirmjäger* screamed at the top of their lungs as they swarmed up the slope behind him, firing their automatic weapons from the hip.

A low parapet of sandbags loomed up in front of Okuma. Without pause, he sprang up onto its lip and dropped down to the firing step below. The trench was empty except for bomb-smashed corpses. Dashing recklessly ahead, he turned a corner and found himself face to face with a section of towering New Zealanders. The submachine gun came alive in his hands, chattering and bucking as its bullets swept the trench like a deadly broom, knocking bodies helter-skelter. Then he realized with a start that the weapon had stopped firing. It was empty, and he did not have a spare magazine!

With a roar that was scarcely human, one last Kiwi came charging up the trench, the monstrously long sword-bayonet on the end of his Enfield leveled at Okuma's gut. Reacting without thought, Okuma flung the empty MP-40 at the bull-like soldier. It struck him dead in the face, breaking his nose and bowling him over backwards. Grabbing the muzzle of the Enfield as he fell, Okuma tore the rifle from the New Zealander's grasp and swung it high in an arc, crushing the man's skull with a single stroke. The force of the blow snapped the weapon's stock at the pistol grip.

The trench was rapidly filling with Germans bent on revenge. Okuma unsnapped the sword-bayonet and flung the useless rifle barrel aside. Never aware that he was now speaking Japanese, he waved the long blade above his head and shouted for them to follow him as he charged off in search of the remaining defenders. An irresistible tidal wave of death, the

Fallschirmjäger swept quickly through the New Zealanders' positions. It was all over in twenty minutes. Those Kiwis who survived the slaughter huddled submissively in front of their command post to witness their colonel's surrender. None would ever forget the ferocity of the blood-smearred Asian officer with the dripping bayonet to whom he capitulated.

In less than an hour, the first Junkers 52 transport plane put down on Maleme aerodrome and disgorged a platoon of air-landing troops. Soon, a steady stream of aircraft was coming in, pouring reinforcements into the airhead. Over a week of hard fighting lay between the Germans and total victory, but from the moment Maleme fell, the issue was never really in doubt.

The ringing tones of a spoon rapping on a glass snapped Okuma back to the present.

"May I have your attention, please," Hermann said when the guests had quieted. "I hope that everyone's having a good time."

A collective murmur of approval interrupted him briefly. He held up his hand to signal for silence.

"Madame Kitty always entertains us royally. But we're here tonight to honor a departing friend of the *Reich*--Major Katsura Okuma, the assistant military attaché for our ally, the Japanese Empire."

A round of enthusiastic applause caused Hermann to pause once more. When it finally subsided, he continued. "I'm sure you all know that Major Okuma's not your run-of-the-mill attaché, content to attend social functions and charm our Berlin ladies. He's a graduate of our elite *Luftwaffe* paratrooper school, and his exploits while observing our invasion of Greece and Crete are already legend. The *Führer* expressed the admiration and gratitude of our nation to the Major during a decoration ceremony earlier today. However, the many friends he's made here wish to present him with a small token of our affection. But before we do that, I believe that Madame Kitty has some special entertainment planned."

"Some very special entertainment," the madam purred. "It's a floor show, so I must ask you to please clear the center of the room."

As the guests moved back toward the walls, the small orchestra, which had been playing muted classical tunes, switched to a burst of wild Oriental music dominated by Berber hand drums and a shrill *mizmaar*, the oboe-like instrument of snake charmers. The short introduction climaxed with a tambourine and drum fanfare. When it ended abruptly, gasps of surprise and

pleasure broke the sudden silence as Mademoiselle Genevieve sprang into the parlor through the open door.

She was attired as a Turkish odalisque, the blue fabric of her brief garments contrasting starkly with the creamy white of her skin. A *yashmak* of white voile veiled her face. As the music resumed, she began to strut seductively around the room, adding the constant jangle of *kasiks*, tiny cymbals worn like rings on her fingers, to the torrid, exotic melody. Light shimmered from her costume as she moved: gold gleaming from the band of coins which held her hair in place and anchored her *yashmak*, from serpentine armbands and bangle bracelets and anklets, from the double waist chain which secured a star sapphire in her navel; jewels flashing from the gold lame halter which scarcely confined her full breasts; innumerable beads glistening from the medallions and dangling strings which adorned the low-slung, satin cincture supporting her diaphanous skirt. When she reached Okuma, she paused in front of him and put her palms together, bowing low in the Japanese fashion. Then she launched into a dance that was at once both artful and unimaginably wanton.

Okuma immediately realized that this was no burlesque parody, but authentic *du danse ventre*--North African belly dancing.

After several minutes of spectacular spinning and shaking, Genevieve sidestepped over to Okuma, moving in so close that they were almost touching. The musky aroma of a different perfume inflamed his senses. Her hands dropped to her temples and the *yashmak* fell free, baring her face to him. Then, rising onto her tip-toes, she wrapped the length of silk around his neck and pulled his face down until their lips met in a steaming kiss. He was sure from that moment that she was dancing solely for him, that all the others did not matter to her at all. A warm flush of self-esteem swept over him, followed closely by a wave of overpowering lust. More than anything else in the world, he wanted to possess this woman.

She kept her belly oscillating while she slowly sank to her knees at his feet. Her whole upper body was horizontal now, bent backwards just a few inches off the floor. Her arms imitated a swimmer's backstroke while her hips lasciviously rose and fell. Then she arched her neck again until the back of her head touched the floor just as the music soared to a frenzied climax, ending with a crash of cymbals. For several moments, she remained as rigid as a statue. Then the mesmerized audience burst into applause.

"This, my lucky friend, is our parting gift to you," Ernst announced to an exhilarated Okuma. "Mademoiselle Genevieve is yours for the rest of the evening."

(Two)
Central Security Office
Prinz Albrechtstrasse
Berlin, Germany
21 July 1941

Oberfeldwebel (Master Sergeant) Wolfram Röhm lit a cigarette and let his eyes wander proudly around his personal realm. The basement room contained five tables, each equipped with an electronic console and two recording turntables. Expert *SS* signals technicians manned the stations, each intent on monitoring his assigned circuits. Two were making recordings on wax discs. To Röhm, that was a clear indication that most of the patrons of Salon Kitty were still at the party in the drawing-room. When the action really got going, his men would be hard pressed to keep track of what was happening in all the bedrooms. Every room in the bordello was wired with super-sensitive microphones, all connected by amplified cable circuits to this listening post in *Gestapo* headquarters. During the one and a half years that it had been in operation, the brothel had provided *Reichsführer* Himmler tons of detailed reports on the attitudes of high German officials and foreign diplomats, poured out in fits of post-coitus euphoria to skilled *Waffen SS* courtesans. Unaware that their bedrooms were bugged to a recording studio, the women also prepared written reports on each assignation for their superiors.

One of the console operators raised his hand to attract Röhm's attention. I think you'll want to hear this, *Herr Oberfeldwebel*," the man said when Röhm reached his position. Stripping off his earphones, he passed them to the master sergeant.

After several minutes, Röhm handed the earphones back. "Put it on the speaker," he ordered the operator.

For the next few hours, the studio staff listened in fascination to the sounds emanating from Room 7--the rhythmic squeaking of the bed, animalistic male grunts, feminine moans and sighs, and shrieks of ecstasy.

"My God, the man must be an absolute satyr," Röhm finally opined. When the action finally quieted, he made sure that the recording discs were properly labeled and packed for shipment to *Brigadeführer* Walter Schellenberg, the head of "Operation Salon Kitty." He had no doubt that

Himmler himself would be listening to them before a day had passed.

CHAPTER 2

(One)

Skies Above the Northern California Coastline

7 August 1941

Lieutenant Frank Rhea sat quietly in the starboard gun blister of the PBY-5A, enjoying the view of the Monterey Bay coastline three thousand feet below. Cruising at 120 knots, the Navy patrol plane seemed to be moving in slow motion. The thunderous roar of twin 1200-horsepower radial engines mounted on its high parasol wing made conversation with the crew of the plane almost impossible, but Frank was content. The rugged shore of his native state had a natural beauty that always moved him, and this would be his last chance to drink it in for months, perhaps even years. He was on his way to San Francisco to take the Pan American Clipper to Hawaii, the first leg on the long flight to Manila, in the Philippine Islands. To avoid the usual month-long ocean voyage on a Navy transport, he had purchased the airline ticket with his own money.

A radioman tapped Frank's arm to get his attention. "Beggin' your pardon, sir," the man yelled to be heard above the engine noise. "The Skipper says our ETA's in about twenty minutes. If you're gonna stay back here, you'd better strap yourself in."

"That's a Roger," Frank replied to indicate his understanding, then settled into the gunner's seat and fastened the lap belt.

The *Catalina* dipped its right wingtip and turned inland above the foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains, breaking out over San Francisco Bay just south of San Mateo. Compared to the boiling surf of the Pacific beaches, the protected waters of the Bay looked placid. A few minutes later, the pilot swung north again to parallel the Eastern Shore. Frank watched the shadow of the plane dance across the barren stretches of the Oakland mud flats. Up ahead, he caught sight of the Alameda Naval Air Station on a long island that pointed like a finger toward San Francisco

across the Bay. New construction was evident everywhere. Hangars, parking aprons, and runways now covered acres, which had been empty marsh during his last visit to the area.

When Frank was released from active duty in 1938, the U.S. Navy owned fewer than a thousand airplanes. The Two-Ocean Navy Bill of 1940 authorized over fifteen thousand aircraft for the Sea Service. It took time to build aviation facilities and tool up the factories, but even longer to train new pilots. As the production lines began to flow, The Navy recalled Frank and hundreds of other Naval Reserve aviators to active duty. A bachelor with no entanglements, he accepted the recall without protest and applied for retraining in fighters. The Bureau of Navigation had other ideas. The detailers noted that he was still qualified as a cruiser floatplane pilot and posted him to U.S.S. *Marblehead*, an Asiatic Fleet cruiser home-ported in Manila.

Frank was disappointed but far from shattered. A cruiser pilot could become a more complete naval officer than his carrier-based counterparts. As assistant division officer of the “V” (Aviation) Division of *Marblehead*’s Gunnery Department, he would again become a qualified Officer of the Deck, as adept at running the ship from the bridge as any of his surface warfare contemporaries. If war broke out, the “V” Division would play a crucial role in any combat action. Their *Seagull* floatplanes were the cruiser’s “eyes in the sky,” vital for locating the enemy and spotting fall of shot for her guns. Some senior officers felt that it took more courage to fly *Seagulls* than the new *Wildcat* fighters. In a pinch, a fighter pilot always had high speed and maneuverability as assets. Floatplane pilots relied on their wits and raw flying skill, enlisting the sun and any cloud cover available as their allies.

With a clamorous squealing of hydraulics, the *Catalina*’s wingtip floats unfolded in preparation for a water landing. The pilot eased the big bird down until her keel began to kiss the calm surface of the bay. Spray cascaded against the Plexiglas of Frank’s gun blister as the plane settled deeper into the water, and then the frantic clamor of the engines modulated to a deep-throated growl as the pilot taxied toward the air station. More mechanical groaning followed by a resounding *thump* announced the extension of the landing wheels from their wells in the sides of the fuselage to lock in a down position. Then the *Catalina* climbed a seaplane ramp to the broad parking apron that ran along the waterfront. Five minutes later, it came to a halt in front of the air station operations building. The engine noise died, and the propellers coasted to a stop. The sudden silence was startling.

The plane captain, a lean little chief aviation machinist's mate who looked like a leprechaun, dropped down from the flight engineer's station in the wing pylon and came back to the waist gunner's compartment. "Need any help, Lieutenant?" he asked Frank.

"No, thanks, Chief," Frank responded in a deep, resonant voice. "I'll just find a head and change clothes." He'd worn a flight suit on the run north from San Diego. To leave the base, he must put on his dress uniform.

"You can use the head up front, but there's a lot more room in the one in the ops building."

"That's good advice. I'll take it."

Frank splashed hot water on his cheeks to wash away the last of the shaving lather and then inspected the results in the mirror above the washbasin. Pale blue eyes set in a deeply tanned face stared back at him. It was a good, strong-featured face; handsome in a rugged sort of way. His thick shock of brown hair was unruly, so he wet his comb and slicked it down. After packing away his shaving gear, he began to dress.

Frank felt a twinge of pride as he fastened the gold buttons of his double-breasted blue blouse. The twin rings of gold lace that marked the rank of full lieutenant encircled the sleeves, and the gold wings of a Naval Aviator glowed softly above the colorful splash of ribbons on his left breast. The uniform was over six years old, but it still fit perfectly. He'd been a track star during his years at the University of California in Los Angeles, and exercise remained a part of his daily routine. Standing an even six feet in his stockings, he weighed one hundred and eighty pounds, mostly muscle.

Frank finished repacking his flight bag, then set his white cap on his head at a jaunty angle and went out into the lobby of the operations building. The freckled-faced petty officer manning the information desk dropped the magazine he had been reading and sprang to his feet.

"I was just about to call you, Mister Rhea," the man said in a pronounced Georgia drawl. "Your car from the motor pool just pulled up. Do you want me to get your bag?"

"I can handle it. Thanks for your help."

"Anytime, Lieutenant. Good luck out there in WESTPAC."

"I have a feeling I'm going to need it."

The driver of the gray Navy sedan at the foot of the steps popped Frank a snappy salute as he held open the door. "Bosun's Mate Brown, at your service, sir," the petty officer bellowed.

"Afternoon, Brown," Frank responded as he returned the salute and climbed into the rear

seat. “How long’s the run to Pan Am?”

“About an hour, sir. Got to pick up another officer at the Oakland train station. He’s catching the Clipper, too.”

Frank chatted with Brown while they exited the burgeoning air station and merged with the Oakland traffic. Brown had been an Atlantic Squadron sailor until recently, so they shared their experiences in the ports of Europe and the Caribbean. When they reached the train station, Frank stayed with the car while the driver went inside to look for his other rider.

(Two)
Treasure Island
San Francisco Bay
7 August 1941

Master of Ocean Flying Boats Marty Ryan puffed confidently on his pipe as he marched up the pier toward Treasure Island. The strong breeze sweeping in off San Francisco Bay whipped away the smoke and tore at his salt-and-pepper hair. It was a perfect “Chamber of Commerce” day: clear, blue skies, temperature in the seventies, a good sailing wind.

The stocky mid-westerner was among the most senior pilots in the vast Pan American empire. A true aviation pioneer, he had flown a Martin 130 flying boat on the first passenger run from San Francisco to Manila back in 1936. Only nine hardy travelers had ventured that inaugural 8210-mile flight. Today, he would be carrying thirty-four passengers on the sleepover leg to Honolulu and sixty-eight on the daylight continuation to the Philippines. His aircraft, a Boeing 314 named *Manila Clipper*, was docked at the “Port of the Trade Winds,” the protected basin formed by Yerba Buena and Treasure Islands and their connecting causeway. The wonder of modern commercial aviation, the mammoth four-engine flying boat had performance and payload characteristics undreamed of a scant five years before.

For the past two days, 185 mechanics and inspectors had toiled around the clock, going through the 1,500 checklist items required to ready the big bird for her trans-Pacific flight. On the previous afternoon, Marty had reviewed and approved the preparations, then taken *Manila Clipper* up for a test flight before accepting her for the mission. Since then, the officers of his crew had toiled over the elaborate flight plan that the long, over-water flight demanded. At last satisfied that matters were now well in hand, Marty was on his way to the Pan Am offices to look over the passenger list. Expected to play congenial host for the airline on the five-day flight, he made it a point to memorize the names and key facts about important customers before they

arrived. When he reached the shore, he knocked the fire from his pipe and vaulted up the steps at the end of the terminal building.

The Treasure Island facility was the most elaborate in the Pan American system. Originally built for the Golden Gate International Exposition, the three-story, 400-foot semicircle of concrete held restaurants, a weather station and a control tower in addition to offices and the passenger terminal. Marty's leather heels echoed loudly off plaster walls as he went through a short corridor and entered the curved central concourse of the building, where the ceiling soared over fifty feet above the polished terrazzo floor. Sunlight streamed into the huge room through tall windows behind the front mezzanine observation gallery. The Pan Am offices filled a ring along the back wall of the concourse. Marty made straight for the check-in counter.

"Anything special today?" he asked the curly-haired booking clerk.

"About the normal mix, Captain" the young man replied in a squeaky voice. "Mostly businessmen. We have four military officers: two Dutchmen, two American Navy. I put them together in Compartment Three with a Dutchwoman doctor."

"Hope the lady isn't a pacifist." Marty's eyes narrowed as he scanned the manifest. The clerk obviously was not up on the air war in Europe. He made a mental note to give the second Dutchman a special welcome. "Anyone checked in yet?"

"Just one, a Colonel Dijker of the Dutch Army. That's him over on the couch--the guy with the newspaper."

The passenger got up when Marty walked over to introduce himself. Jan Dijker would have been an imposing figure anywhere. At three inches over six feet, he towered above Marty. His thick, bushy hair was snow-white, but his plain-featured face suggested a man in his mid-forties. They chatted politely, but their conversation lacked warmth. In precise, Oxford English, Dijker thanked Marty for his attention and expressed satisfaction with the arrangements. After chatting for a few minutes about the route and the schedule, Marty excused himself and went out to complete the pre-flight check on *Manila Clipper*.

"He's a cold bird," Marty muttered to himself as the doors closed behind him.

Had he known how Dijker spent the last year, Marty might have been kinder in his judgment of the man. Until five weeks previously, the Dutchman was Britain's most successful spy in occupied Holland.

Hearing English spoken with a Dutch accent, Jan Dijker looked up from his newspaper. He

immediately recognized the blond, square-faced young man at the counter, although they had never actually met. Captain Garrit Laterveer of the *Militaire Luchvaart-Koninklijk Nederlands-Indisch Leder* (Netherlands Indies Army Air Corps) was well known in London military circles, his name whispered with reverence in occupied Holland. He was a triple ace, the highest scoring ML-KNIL pilot serving with the British RAF. Puzzled to find him here in San Francisco, Jan walked over to his countryman and introduced himself.

“Are you going on leave?” Dijker asked after they shook hands.

“I’m being transferred home to teach advanced fighter tactics at our flying school at Andir.” Bitterness laced the younger man’s low-pitched voice. “I doubt that I’ll do much good unless someone gets us some decent aircraft.”

“I don’t understand,” Jan commented as they walked to the couches in the waiting area. “I thought that our purchasing commission was ordering modern American equipment for our forces. I’ve seen the small arms and light armor, and they’re all first rate.”

“The airplanes are obsolete junk!” Garrit snorted in disgust. “Have you ever seen a Brewster *Buffalo*?”

“Can't say that I have.”

“The damned thing's aptly named. It wallows about the sky. I could whip a whole squadron of them with a single *Spitfire*. If we go to war against the Japanese in those things, they'll cut us to ribbons”

“Perhaps it's well that the High Command picked a man of your credentials to train our pilots.”

Garrit laughed cynically. “I beg your pardon,” he finally apologized, “but that’s almost a joke. They pulled me out of combat because they think I’ve gone stale. They couldn’t afford the bad propaganda if some German shot me down.”

“Have you gone stale?”

“No, but the brass has good reason to think I have. Let me put you in the picture, and you can judge for yourself.”

In April of 1941, after downing his fifteenth kill to become a triple ace, Garrit was promoted to captain and ordered to London to be decorated by Queen Wilhelmina. He met Juliana Kortie at the Ministry of War. Like many wartime romances, theirs blossomed with volcanic intensity. Within a fortnight, they were sleeping together and planning marriage after the war. Then, in late May, the news that Juliana had been killed in a bombing raid shattered Garrit.

Unhinged by grief, he refused to stand down from flying. It proved a fatal mistake. After losing his wingman on one mission, he was himself shot down in the Channel. Rescued by an RAF flying boat, he found his fate sealed when he got out of the hospital. Until he got over the girl, he would employ his great store of experience by training the fighter pilots so desperately needed in Java.

"I understand how you feel," Jan said sympathetically. "I lost my entire family--my parents and my wife and children--when the Nazis bombed Rotterdam last year. I'll hate Germans until the day I die. It took a direct order from the Minister of War to make me leave for the Indies. He convinced me that the revenues they produce are vital to continuing the war against Hitler. We simply can't afford to lose them to the Japanese. Besides, I'm too hot to go back into Holland for the foreseeable future."

"Are you that Colonel Dijker?" asked Garrit, his voice filled with new respect. "My god, I didn't connect the name. Juliana told me about your narrow escape from the *Gestapo*."

"We were betrayed," Dijker replied without rancor. "I strangled the assassin they sent for me with my bare hands. I still have the Mauser pistol he meant to kill me with, a silenced *Gestapo* special."

Other passengers began to arrive as the two Dutchmen continued their conversation. Garrit let his eyes wander among the newcomers as he described the climate of Java to Dijker. A pair of vivacious young women caught his attention. He had a strange feeling that he should know them. They were obviously sisters, and each was strikingly beautiful in her own way. The younger woman, who was dressed in a carefully tailored suit of gray gabardine, held a black medical bag.

"Is something wrong?" asked Dijker.

Garrit realized with a start that he had stopped talking. "Oh, no, sir. It's that woman doctor. For some reason, I feel that we've met before."

"Her name's Van Wely--Cinta van Wely. We were introduced last night at the hotel. The other woman's her sister, Alette. The man's Alette's husband, Tommy Hawkins."

"Of course," Garrit exclaimed, snapping his fingers. "They're *Indische Jongens*--Dutch born in the East Indies--from Batavia. Their father's a big wheel with BPM."

"I beg your pardon. What's a BPM?"

"*Bataafsche Petroleum Maatschappij*, the Royal Dutch Shell subsidiary in the Indies."

Garrit eyed Alette closely, remembering her rumored promiscuity before her marriage to the

American. She was a pretty piece, all right, but then, so was her sister. He considered going over to greet them, but decided against it for the moment. They seemed to be involved in some sort of an argument, and he did not wish to become involved.

Cinta van Wely pretended interest in the conversation with Alette and her husband, but she actually was bored almost to tears. They'd been bickering constantly since the three of them left Houston, Texas, in Tommy's private DC-2 on the previous morning. Sometimes she wondered how Alette put up with her husband. Coupled with his big mouth, his Texas-sized ego was often just too much to stomach. Cinta had to concede that Tommy was a good father to her two nephews, and the fact that he insisted on doing productive work even though his father was one of the richest men in Texas was to his credit. But she suspected that he had physical attributes that were also scaled to Texas proportions, which she knew would count heavily with her sister. Alette was a very sensual woman, and Ada, the Indonesian *baboe* who virtually raised the sisters after their mother's death, taught them to express and gratify desire rather than suppress it.

"It still beats hell out of me why Little Sister's got to go all the way out to Borneo to practice medicine," Tommy was complaining. "There's plenty of sick people back in Texas. If she wants to treat burns, men are getting hurt every day in our oil fields."

"We've been over this a hundred times," Alette replied with exasperation. "Besides, if she's there, she can make Papa come back with her if the Japs start a war with us."

"That'll be the day," Tommy snorted. "Your old man's the best engineer Royal Dutch Shell has in the Far East. They'll never let him go, and he wouldn't walk away from a fight even if they would."

"At least, she could try." Eight years of living in Houston had tempered Alette's voice with a grating Texas twang, surprising for a woman who had grown up in Batavia, Java

Sometimes, Cinta found it hard to believe that sisters who looked so much alike could be so different. Each was a perfect size eight with a shape to turn men's heads at any gathering. The fine-boned features of their faces were almost identical, and their eyes were the same sapphire hue. But while Alette was a glowingly healthy blond, Cinta's shoulder length tresses were raven black, the legacy of a Spanish grandee in their ancestry. She looked younger than her twenty-six years, her fair complexion unblemished by time or the terrible stresses of her life as a physician.

Psychologically, the sisters might have been from different planets. Cinta became an introvert, an intelligent, dedicated professional who drew her fulfillment from always doing her

very best. Alette lived for the moment. Spontaneity was her strong suit. With an intensely social personality, she was happiest when entertaining. Before Tommy came out to Java on a survey for his father's oil company, Alette took a number of lovers, glorying in the practice of their *baboe*'s vast repertoire of Asian wiles.

A chorus of masculine guffaws drew Cinta's attention to the street entrance to the concourse. Then her hand shot to her mouth, and her heart came up into her throat.

(Three)
Oakland Train Station
7 August 1941

Petty Officer Brown came out of the train station trailing a sandy-haired lieutenant in rumpled blues. The driver stored a large leather suitcase in the boot of the car.

"Welcome aboard," Frank greeted the wiry stranger. He introduced himself.

"Jack Sewell," the man responded. He had a strong New England accent.

"Did you come far?" Frank inquired as Brown nosed out into the street.

"From Norfolk, Virginia. I just finished the Gunnery Officers course." Jack took out a gold cigarette case and offered a smoke to Frank.

"Naval Academy?" asked Frank when he noticed a heavy class ring on Jack's hand.

"Harvard Business School. I got my commission through ROTC. What about you?"

"I took ROTC at UCLA. They just called me back to active duty."

"What did you do as a civilian?"

"I'm aeronautical engineer for Hughes Aircraft."

"Wasn't that a war-essential job?"

"If we're going to have a war, I'd just as soon fight. I want to fly high-performance aircraft."

"You a fighter pilot?"

"Not yet, but I'm working on it." Frank explained his dilemma with the detailers. "I'm headed to Manila to join *Marblehead*, the old 'Gallop-in' Ghost of the China Coast.' What's your assignment?"

"The *Jonathan B. Rust*, a recommissioned 'four-piper' destroyer. She got 'Shanghaied' into the Asiatic Fleet last month."

"Those little 'cans' bounce around too much for me. Have you done duty in them before?"

“Four years in the North Atlantic. I've been going to sea in little ships since I was old enough to walk. My dad owns a fleet of fishing boats out of Gloucester, Mass. I was running the financial end of the business when I got my recall notice. It's kind of good to get away for a while. The folks keep pressuring me to settle down and get married. Don't have anything against matrimony, but I haven't found a woman I want to spend the rest of my life with.”

The Navy sedan broke free of the city and began the ascent to the trestles of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. Brown turned off at Yerba Buena and took the ramp down to the low-lying Treasure Island, stopping in front of the crescent-shaped Pan Am terminal building.

The two lieutenants placed their bags in the care of a porter and thanked the bosun before he drove away.

“Will you look at that view!” Jack exclaimed in wonder. “I should've come out earlier and spent some time here.”

The panorama before them was spectacular. To the left were the triple towers of the suspension bridge to the mainland; directly across the crystal waters of the bay was the San Francisco skyline; to the right, in the distance, the graceful lines of the Golden Gate Bridge were shrouded in sea mist. The lowering walls of Alcatraz Prison in the middle of the bay completed the picture.

Jack began to tell a ribald tale about a Mediterranean cruise he had been on back in 1936. As they came laughing into the passenger concourse, Frank suddenly stopped and whipped off his teardrop sunglasses.

“Good God, Frank,” said Jack. “You look like you've just seen a ghost.”

“Not a ghost, pal,” Frank replied slowly. “It's the only woman I ever asked to marry me.”

“What's wrong, Cinta?” Alette said with alarm. “Are you ill?”

“No. I'm all right. It's just that Frank Rhea's here.”

“Really?” Curiosity laced Alette's voice. “Show him to me.”

“Who the hell's Frank Rhea,” Tommy interjected, annoyed at being cut out of the conversation.

“You know, Darling, the California boy who proposed to Cinta before she came to Texas. Now, Cinta, which one is he?”

“The Navy pilot. The one who’s coming this way.”

Frank was walking briskly toward them, leaving his companion standing with a puzzled look on his face.

“Is it really you, Cinta?” asked Frank, taking off his hat.

“It’s good to see you again, Frank,” she said warmly, offering her hand. “You’re looking well. Life at sea must agree with you.”

“I’ve been a civilian for three years. They just called me back. You’re as beautiful as ever. I guess I’m supposed to call you ‘Doctor’ now.” He nodded at the medical bag in her hand.

“I just finished my residency. I’m going out to Borneo to live with my father. But I’m being rude. Let me introduce my sister and her husband.”

They shook hands all around and made small talk. Jack Sewell came over and joined the group. Finally, as the flight time approached, the two lieutenants excused themselves to finish checking in.

“I’ll see you on the plane, Cinta,” Frank said in parting. “We’ve got lots of catching up to do.”

As he walked away, Alette eyed Frank with approval. “I always thought you were a little crazy, Cinta, but now I’m certain. I can’t believe that you let him get away just so that you could stay in school. You must have been out of your mind.”

“He seemed like a nice enough fellow,” Tommy commented, “but, Honey, you’ve got to remember that Little Sister had to make some sacrifices if she wanted to take on a man’s job.”

“There you go again,” Alette retorted. “Who says that medicine’s only for men? She stood first in her class at med school, didn’t she?”

“And a damned good thing it was. After all the strings I pulled to get her into Texas Med, I’d have been the laughingstock of the Alumni Association if she’d quit to get married.”

The couple continued their banter in the good-natured manner of people who have lived together for years. Cinta scarcely heard them. Inside, her feelings were in turmoil. The chance meeting with Frank had awakened emotions she’d thought long dead. It had taken all her willpower to calmly converse while her heartbeat was racing, her body tingling all over at his nearness. Eight years before, Frank had forced her to choose between their love and medicine. Poor Frank never had a chance. She had been wed to her obsession to become a doctor since she was ten years old.

Entering *Manila Clipper* through the main access hatch from the port hydro-stabilizer, Frank was struck by an aura of spaciousness. He and Jack were assigned to the compartment just aft of the lavishly furnished passenger lounge. When one of the stewards showed them to their seats, he was pleasantly surprised to find Cinta already situated on the other side of the aisle, deep in conversation with the two Dutchmen he had noticed in the concourse. She glanced up and smiled sweetly at him.

Unbuttoning his blouse, Frank took the outboard seat by the porthole, while Jack sat down opposite him. They tossed their hats onto one of the empty chairs. When the last passengers finished filing through to the compartments farther aft, Frank stepped out into the aisle and introduced himself to the Dutchmen. As they cordially shook hands, he struggled to remember where he had heard Garrit Laterveer's name before. Marty Ryan's arrival saved him the embarrassment.

Ryan welcomed the group aboard, explaining his role as their Captain and host. Then he turned to Garrit. "I wanted to tell you, Captain Laterveer, what an honor it is to have a famous ace on board. You're invited to come up to the flight deck after we're airborne. We're very proud of *Manila Clipper*."

"Thank you, Captain," Garrit responded. "Perhaps I could bring Lieutenant Rhea along. I see that he's also a flier."

"Of course. You may all come up two or three at a time if you wish. If you'll excuse me now, I must see to the preparations to get underway."

Frank sat spellbound at the window as the pilot taxied *Manila Clipper* out onto the bay, turning her nose into the prevailing wind. The roar of her four 1600-horsepower Wright Cyclone engines rose to a fever pitch, and the plane began to rise out of the water. For the longest time, she seemed suspended between sea and sky. Then her keel broke free, and she was airborne. Alcatraz flashed by to starboard, and the long fingers of the San Francisco docks loomed ahead. The Clipper climbed steadily as she crossed the city.

"Take a good look, buddy," Frank remarked to Jack. "It'll be a long time before we set eyes on the USA again."

They could see the Golden Gate Bridge for several minutes as the pilot continued his climb to the cruising altitude of 11,000 feet. Soon, there was nothing left beneath but the white-capped tops of the dark blue waves.

Listening to Cinta and Dijker conversing in Dutch, Frank felt a stab of irritation. He realized that he was jealous of the colonel sharing her company and thoughts while he was excluded. Cinta van Wely was the one great love of his life, but his selfish pride had spoiled their chances of happiness. When they first broke up, he thought he would eventually get over her, but he never really did. In the years that followed, passionate women from the ports of the Americas, the Caribbean and Western Europe shared his bed but never his heart. He became the consummate lover who never fell in love. Frank's felt elated when he recognized Cinta in the terminal. Was he being given a second chance? If he showed patience and understanding of her need for professional fulfillment, could he possibly still win her love? One thing was certain: if he didn't make the attempt, he would regret it for the rest of his life.

"Are you a fighter pilot?" asked Garrit Laterveer's voice startled Frank from his musings.

"No such luck. I've been trying to get into fighters, but the Navy hasn't cooperated. I fly SOC's off cruisers."

"I'm sorry. I don't understand your acronyms."

"I should have realized. That's our unique Navy way to designate airplanes. We confuse our Air Corps guys, too. The first two letters stand for, 'scout, observation.' The 'C' means that Curtiss Aircraft was the manufacturer. We tag a number on the end to specify the model. An SOC-3 is the third plane of that type we've bought from Curtiss."

"I believe that I like the British system of simply naming the aircraft better."

The two aviators were soon engrossed in a deeply technical conversation. The Dutchman was a natural teacher, his thoughts well organized and their verbalization articulate. He was demonstrating the "four-fingers" fighter formation that the RAF copied from the German *scharms* when Marty Ryan appeared in the doorway. He suggested that Cinta accompany Garrit to the control deck, to which she readily agreed.

"That's a lot of woman," Jack remarked after Cinta had gone. "How'd you let her get away from you?"

"I couldn't compete with her career," Frank replied glumly.

Cinta and Garrit returned in about twenty minutes. Ryan invited Frank and Jack to visit the flight deck next. They passed a few passengers in the lounge, where chess sets, picture puzzles and cards were available for those who wished to pass the time with games. Some were simply sipping cocktails and conversing. The two lieutenants followed Ryan into the nose, where a stair led to the upper deck.

“I’ll be damned,” Jack swore as they reached the top step. “This place is bigger than the bridge of a destroyer.”

“I’ve been on cruisers without this much chart house room,” Frank agreed.

After Ryan introduced them to the rest of the crew, the First Officer, Harry Beall, let Frank sit in the copilot's seat while he explained the elaborate controls. Up ahead, Frank saw a wall of clouds stretching along the horizon. The solid undercast stretched out a thousand feet below the Clipper’s cruising altitude, and within a few minutes, *Manila Clipper* soared in brilliant sunlight above what looked to be an immense, level snowfield. Homing on a radio beacon sent out from Hawaii, Harry Beall was unperturbed.

After Frank left the cockpit, Marty Ryan showed him the aircraft log and the elaborate system of “howgozit” curves with which the crew charted the flights progress. By tracking fuel consumption against hours of flight and miles to destination, changed conditions such as wind velocity could be identified and compensated for. Miles versus fuel consumption on three engines were also tracked to assure the ability to return to base or continue to the destination if the “point of no return” had already been passed.

The passenger lounge was bustling when the officers came back down the stairs. A steward brought them cocktails, and Jack stayed on, attracted by a lovely Eurasian girl who seemed to be unattached. Frank took his Johnny Walker Scotch back to their compartment and resumed his discussion with Garrit about flying fighters. The time passed rapidly. The sun was far down against the cloudbank when Jack returned to flop down in his seat.

“Any luck?” Frank asked jokingly.

“Absolute zilch.” Disgust was evident in the New Englander's voice. “She belongs to that fat old Englishman from Hong Kong.”

“The fortunes of war,” Garrit chimed in with a laugh.

A little later, a steward came through to explain that dinner would be served in six relays because of the limited lounge capacity. Dijker, Jack and Garrit all asked to eat early. When Cinta decided to wait until later, Frank jumped at the chance to be alone with her.

“Some privacy, at last,” he commented when the others had gone. He moved across the aisle to sit facing her.

She smiled wistfully at him. “The years have been good to you, Frank. You don’t seem to have changed very much.”

“Maybe not on the outside, but I’ve grown up a lot. I’ve quit expecting everything in life to

go my way. But you've certainly changed. You're lovelier now-- more serene."

"I see you're still the glib charmer." She raised an eyebrow. "You've never married?"

"Couldn't find anyone who could measure up to you."

"Oh, Frank, you must have had other women."

"Nothing serious. Just passing fancies. What about you, Cinta? Are you involved with anyone right now?"

"I'm married to medicine. You, of all people, should know that. I've had men in my life, but I'm just not ready for any long-term relationships."

"Still the same single-minded pursuit of medical science?"

"Exactly. I nearly drove Alette crazy. She's been trying to play matchmaker for me for years. I've had to fend off droves of rich Texans since I left UCLA."

"I was in Fort Worth on business when I read in the paper that you graduated from UT Med School. You can't imagine how proud I was that you were at the top of your class."

"Why, thank you, Frank." She flashed a broad smile. "Coming from you, that's especially pleasing."

Frank leaned forward, his face suddenly dead serious. "I could see later how selfish I was when I insisted that you leave school for me. At the time, I only knew how much I loved and needed you."

"It all worked out for the best," Cinta said with a sigh.

"Maybe so. How long will you stay in Borneo?"

"A year or two. What happens with the Japanese will have a lot to do with it. I want Papa to leave if war becomes a certainty."

"Our fleet makes port calls in your islands. I'd like to visit you there if the opportunity arises."

"I'd like for you to meet Papa. The two of you are a lot alike. But you mustn't get romantic again."

"That's a promise I can't make. I never really stopped loving you."

"You're dreaming, Frank. We're two entirely different people now. A third of our lives have passed since we broke up. You may discover that you don't even like what I've become."

"You're wrong there, Doctor. I like you even better."

"Tell me about yourself. It's pretty obvious what I've been doing for the past few years. I know nothing of your life since college."

“There's really not much to tell.” But under the gentle prodding of her questions, he began to relate what life had been like for a fledgling Naval aviator in the mid-thirties. He found her laughing at his old sea stories and keenly interested in his descriptions of the ports he had visited in Europe. When the others returned, the steward shepherded the couple into the lounge for dinner, putting them at a table for two. They continued their reminiscences over braised roast beef served on fine china.

“Enough about me,” Frank finally said as the mess attendant poured coffee. “Your life hasn't been all school and books. Tell me about those wealthy oil men your sister's been trying to marry you off to.”

“Oh, Frank,” she laughed. “It's all so dreadfully boring.”

“It won't be to me.”

As Cinta told of her life in Texas, Frank realized what complete dedication it had taken for her to reach the goal she had set for herself so many years before. While the medical profession put up no official bars to women, her path had not been easy. Only when she spoke of Alette's endless rounds of parties did levity enter her story. Her descriptions of some of her suitors were downright hilarious.

After they finished eating, Cinta excused herself and went to check on her sleeping arrangements. Grippled by nostalgia, Frank returned to his seat and sat staring out the window, oblivious to the conversation around him. The moon had risen, casting bright, silver light on the flat plain of the cloudbank below. He closed his eyes and dozed until the steward woke him to make up his berth.

By 11:00 P.M., all the passengers except Cinta were lost in slumber. She lay tossing in her bunk, memories of her college days with Frank flooding her consciousness. She wondered what her life would have been like if she had given in and married him when he graduated. They'd been so young then, so full of life, so much in love. But the answers were all too obvious. She would be a housewife with small children, alone in San Diego grieving for her man gone off to war. Her self-assurance returned. She had chosen the only course in life that could have given her the professional achievement her soul demanded. Perhaps sometime in the future, she could have the other, more traditional rewards of a woman as well. She turned over and closed her eyes. Very soon, only the crew on *Manila Clipper's* flight deck remained awake.