

Chapter 1

“Keep Calm”

She wasn't a hero. Heroes, as she knew them, were titans compared to man. They towered over us like an ever watching god, tired but vigilant. Heroes were ageless, genderless, ambiguous figures that had us standing only in the shadows they cast. However, she wasn't a hero. She was something far greater still.

Heroes are not really defined by their actions, nor even by their merits. Heroes, as it turns out, are defined only by the ones they save. Who they are and what is said about them transcends even that of death- reluctantly piercing the veil of themselves more than whatever it was they did. These starbound idols, glittering in torn tapestry, written in blood and vengeance, look back on their actions and sigh. They aren't heroes any more than the evils they stamped out were villains.

Tipping the global scale a miniscule amount towards humanity, they ride the coattails of stories and fables and legends. But they are never outright called on as heroes; simply as “them.” “They” who gave it all, “they” told them what for, “they” who were buried in mass graves. Heroes wear the banner of “they,” and they quietly fade into the oblivion of memory, becoming a twinkle of sobering honor and misty pride. Stale hands fold crusty flags in remembrance of heroes.

But there is another, more potent honor to give out to the ones who gave their lives in an all too real situation. Beyond the realm of heroes, tirelessly working behind the scenes in silence, pulling the strings too heavy for mortal eyes to see. They fought not only for the lives of all, but for their very existence. While the heroes saved the world, they saved the heroes. People will always remember the heroes- heroes always remember her.

Born September 7th, 1921, she was the most unlikely of girls to fall into one of the dirtiest of holes, and they called that hole London. The night of her birth was an eerily dark one as the final wispy strips of clouds gathered 'round to bear witness. The curtains swayed and opened sickeningly as the breeze echoed and danced. It was apologetically warm that night, warmer than most September nights London had to offer. The winds moaned with gusts of sorrow, picking up the crisp leaves for one last flight before forever disintegrating into dust.

The dimly lit streets had wrapped themselves in a veil of crisp air, every sound bouncing daintily off tin rooftops and clattering shutters. The bustles sank with the sun and retreated to crevices of the city not yet discovered. Everything seemed peaceful, except for one faintly approaching sound. Tiny clip-clops of a pair of raggedy heels bought not all that far from the shops around them. Her mother clambered onward, feeling the tattered ends of her dress, her hand swaying, brushing against the swollen womb that carried her daughter. Dodging over the warm blood on her sweater, she still touched it faintly enough to know it was real.

Her mother hurriedly dragged herself up the empty streets. The grey cobblestones still damp with the cold rain, one the sides littered with small brush, barely a reminder of the Earth

beneath the city. Her eyes found the small hospital nestled next to the abbey. Crying silently, she continued on. Each step she took accompanied a quick sob for breath feeling heavier and heavier. Weight was pressed on her temples, scathing hot pain meandered through her ears and melted her thoughts. She was dying, she knew that much. Though that wasn't the concern for getting to the hospital so quickly. Despite the blood, despite the tears, despite the aching agony that swelled inside her like a fire, there was only one thing: to protect her unborn child.

Memories rushed to meet her with a degrading sob.

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Her husband had loved her. Once upon a time, anyway. He had been a boy in those days. Small, fluttering hands had folded tiny pieces of paper into misshapen cranes that would be left on her doorstep. He'd set them off to the left side knowing that Annabelle's mother had a tendency of walking out the door with not much care for what's underfoot.

"Annabelle," he'd whisper into almost shut windows. "Are you awake?"

"Half," she whispered back, rubbing the sleep out of her shut eyes. "What might you want?"

He'd blush a bit and then lightly slide in his letters signed with a lovesick pen. Sweet words used to come easy to him.

"Oh, Paul," she'd sigh sweetly. "You're such a dumb git."

"I'm a what?" he blushed, smiling.

Annabelle would open her window a little wider, but only so much fearing her mother would hear.

"You're a dumb git," she breathed with a hint of lust on her lips.

Trembling slightly, he stepped forward and kissed her. It was a small peck on the lips. As he pulled away she touched his cheek. With force and her other hand, however, she quickly cupped his face forward onto hers and kissed him passionately.

She had met him one day while he was silently reading next to the big oak tree.

"Oi, what are you reading there?" she asked, noting his handsome jaw.

He, not being as versed in the languages of flirtation, looked up from his book sheepishly, and answered honestly.

"It's a book of poetry," he said embarrassed. "I've almost finished it."

"Reading it for school?"

"No. It's just something I picked up."

"Do you like poetry?" She asked, actually rather surprised.

"Oh, it's my favorite, actually," he blushed. "Would you- would you like to borrow this once I'm finished?"

She smiled at him.

Months passed and the two went on countless dates, hiding their love from Annabelle's

parents. Paul's mother had died and his father didn't much care about him, not really. He mostly just sat around listening to the radio and thinking about his lost love, so when Paul would "borrow" his father's car to take Annabelle out those nights, he never really minded.

On an uneventful Sunday they went to an orchard in the countryside. Paul had brought with him a small, indifferent ring. He hadn't had much money and saved up as much as could washing dishes. He bought the first one he could find, so it was a bit scratched and a bit dull, but to Annabelle it was absolutely perfect. They married that summer.

But then the war came. Paul went away to fight the Germans just like father told him to. The boy never returned. Instead a man did, and he looked like Paul but stretched his skin more like a trunigate; wore his beard a bit more shaggy.

He drank often, and she drank with him. She didn't like the whiskey, but it kept them warm on the cold nights and it kept him warm when she couldn't. One particularly cold night in the dead heat of August, he noticed she looked different. She was a mess, drinking all the time like him.

"Annie," he stumbled out. "You can't keep drinking like this."

"Why not? Eh? You do."

"Annie. It's my whiskey to drown in."

"So? I helped pay for it, I'm gonna sip a few and lose myself with you- here, have another glass, love."

"No," he stood up; he staggered a bit, but stood. "No, you're not."

He grabbed the bottle from her hands but she refused to let go.

"Give it here," she struggled.

"No," he pulled.

"You're not gonna take this from me."

"Fuck, give it here."

"No! I want some too!"

"God damnit, woman, give me that-"

The bottled slipped through their hands. It shattered on the floor, spilling the brown the liquid into the disgusting blue carpet.

"Look at that, you fucker," she spat. "Now look! What are we supposed to do? We can't afford another bottle for at least a week. Why do you always do this to me?"

"What did I do?"

"You do this every time. Why did you have to leave me? Why did you have to go?" She was starting to tear up.

"It was my- my duty."

"So, then why do you have to leave me now?" She was crying now. "Why you do you leave me every night too?"

He saw the fear in her eyes. He looked over, at the mirror on the wall and saw fear in his eyes too. She was sobbing and she was terrified. This had to end, and it had to end now. That

night they cried and sobbed together, holding each other close. They made promises they weren't going to keep.

"Darling, let's have a child," he whispered. "We'll stop drinking and have us a proper baby."

"Can it be a little girl?" she sobbed. "I've always wanted a little girl."

"We'll try, love," he smiled. "We'll try."

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Like all good things, the events that unfolded to destroy it happened in quick, methodical progression. Paul lost his job down at the plant the next month. His war flashbacks came next, haunting him in his sleep. He found his way back to the pubs without telling Annabel. Soon a day didn't go by he wasn't drunk. The night he left her for good he watched her sleeping in the bed they'd made. He looked around at the place they'd called home for two years and a tear dribbled down his cheek.

He collected his things silently, moved swiftly through the room with precision, saying goodbye to everything sweetly. Finally, he turned to his pregnant wife and with the heaviest lump in his throat and the most horrid weight in his heart he did what he thought he should do. She kept wanting to follow him when he left and that wasn't healthy for her or their child.

No, it couldn't have been, he thought.

He took out a small piece of scrap parchment from the desk and wrote in the most loving words he could:

"I'm so sorry it couldn't have been better."

He took out the money he'd been saving for some weeks now. It wasn't much, but it'd be enough for her for a little while. Fighting through drunken and shaky hands, he folded it into a paper crane and set it on the note.

"I'm so sorry," he whispered.

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Giant doors slyly contained the compact hospital; heavy things that swung on creaky hinges. Annabel had a hard time knocking loud enough to alert the staff, but eventually a cheeky nurse with a weathered smile opened the doors and let her in.

Inside there was a peculiar smell of lilac and peroxide. In the doorway, an oddly sized fellow with oversized gloves surveyed the situation. The drastic kindness in his eyes stabbed through her worse than the pain. She began to weep louder.

The strange little man walked over to her and held her hand. He choked up a smile. He knew, deep down, what she knew. This would be her last night on this earth, be damned if he didn't show her some courtesy.

As her guard went down, her labor started that very same moment, and the pain she had thought had been the end all of pains suddenly jolted itself to new heights. Doubling over, she screamed at the top of her lungs, cursing the very womb in her body. She loved a child whom she never was to meet. A love like that radiates into the room. It stinks the air with gushy solidity. The cheeky nurse began to whimper slightly and suddenly very much wanted to contact her mother and father.

The doctor, to his credit, did everything he could that night to save the mother and child. But, there were only certain things you could do for someone so far gone. Someone with so little time. But the baby wasn't coming.

She pushed and pushed for hours. Feeling her life drain with each exertion. Hours passed. Seconds began to feel like minutes, minutes felt like years. The sweat and tears of those in the room cumulated into the strangest display of humanity. But it was just that, it was as a human a birth as possible.

Finally, at exactly three till midnight, the mother couldn't push any more. Her heart, worn from the night, worn from her life, simply ceased to beat. The Doctor looked at her longingly. He refused to believe this was it. He wasn't going to lose this child, so he began to clean his knives.

As he turned on a leaky faucet, the rusty pipes lurched and squelched and heaved up water. The clank of the pipes seemed to be loud enough to wake the dead.

Annabelle gasped. A final breath leaked out of her with a final and assertive request.

Her mother had been named Molly and she had always loved that name. Her mother had been a beautiful woman with a heart of pure gold. When her mother had died, she had wept with a sincerity of a child.

"Molly," she said, gasping for life. "Her name- is Molly- Waters." And with that, she died.

Molly was dropped like a bag of bricks and slapped onto the ground.

The nurse screamed. The doctor rushed to the other room to grab whatever equipment he had to save this poor little girl.

He came stumbling back in with every life support system he had to offer, his boots squeaking with every hurried step. But as he bent over to pick up the little girl, she looked at him with the most innocent of eyes and smiled.

The nurse, suddenly flushed with an over zealous heat, ran to the window and flung it open. The breeze of the night moaned into the room.

"I'm sorry," it seemed to say. "I'm so sorry."

The small and fragile Molly felt a little tickle from the breeze and looked wide-eyed at the new world around her. She was alive, it should seem, and she was here.

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Molly Waters shut her cupboard doors with a sad, wooden clunk. A small piercing of

light burrowed itself into the room, but it didn't go far for fear of intruding. The faded red curtains with the missing rings had one patch. Not two patches, like the room next door, but only one. Molly was, considering, rather wealthy in this flat.

There was a noise coming from the distance and it was buzzing. Possibly a fly got caught inside her room. Looking around, she noticed the curtains were still open. The dusty little room before her sported a small bed and a wooden crate; the peeling striped wallpaper which at one point had been green was more a squeamish yellow now than anything

She turned to shut the curtains and glared at the sky outside. A red glow on the horizon. The clouds licked the edge of the sun's halo as they too retreated into the night. She envied that sun. Unlike her, it could run away from the world. It could hide itself behind the planet and let the moon do the dirty work of providing light. It irked her to see it say goodnight to the world, and she forced to into the dark. Today it said goodnight to September 6'th. She was nineteen now, and would be turning twenty very soon.

Growing up Molly had grown to dislike birthdays. It was a symbol, the other kids at the orphanage would say.

"One year less cute," she muttered under her breath. She lived on her own now, but birthdays still reminded her of watching the children younger than her getting picked for new families. She was never chosen, Mother Superior told her, as she was a trouble maker.

Trouble makers were sent to their rooms when a couple arrived to adopt, they weren't worthy of standing next to the hastily washed faces and nervous smiles of the others. Molly had learned her tiny room well over the years of listening to the adults coo over the children, it had a single mattress on a rickety, metal frame that made up what could be called a bed if one was feeling generous enough. Her only worldly comfort was the uncertain and flickering light of an oil lamp that always threatened to go out in the dead of night.

"I didn't do it!"

The lamp's flame shook and flickered as two nuns rushed a little girl into her room.

"I didn't do anything!"

"You little brat, you. You can't tell me you didn't throw that rubber at me! I turned my back to write on the blackboard and you threw it!"

"I swear to you, ma'am, I didn't."

"Oh, yes, threw itself, then, did it? And I suppose next you'll be telling me the Devil is actually an alright bloke!"

The one sister smacked Molly on the arm and pushed her to her bed. They left the room and locked the door behind them.

Molly still had the lamp. The sisters had taken pity on her once she reached age and let her keep it. She light it at night with just enough oil to keep the shadows far enough in the corners. The buzzing continued.

When they were sixteen the children of the orphanage were allowed leave to see whatever they'd like around the city. Most children went to buy candy with the little money they

made doing small chores around town, others would go to fun parks. Molly would usually go the cinema to see some silent film. One particular day she saw the feature that would open with the newsreels.

She had gone in to see the newest Myrna Loy film, but as the news rolled she watched the headliner of a horrible accident. It involved one of those giant Zeppelin airships as it was landing in New Jersey. Somehow it had caught fire and began to explode. The usual monotone of the news caster was drowned out over the sight of a black in white flame engulfing the ship. The image burned into her eyes. All of those innocent people in that monstrosity of a vehicle. It was so mind numbingly big it made her sick.

She had to leave the theater without finishing the story. Around her, things seemed to have changed. The lights weren't as bright, the darks were treacherous. For years she would barely even speak.

At nineteen she walked over to her kitchen, prepared to start another sleepless night. Another day that marks a year closer to death. She poured herself some tea in a cup with a chip in it and took out a small piece of cake she had been saving since last year. It was, of course, stale. She took a bit of the cake and calmly looked out the window. The explosions in the distance trickled and crackled. She jolted to a sleepy attention. She realized now what the loud annoying noise had been; it was the air raid sirens. She looked down at the sad piece of baking and slowly put it back. She hesitantly made her way to the window.

Across the city she saw with some sadness the place she used to get her meats from crumble away in a blaze. She sighed. She'd have to put the cake away and probably forget about it for another year. With some reluctance, she made her way down the stairs to the shelter in her basement and waited with the rest of her neighbors for the bombs to stop.

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The blitzkrieg had been bombing for a good month now. Day and night London was forced to run for shelter. The Underground was packed full every night with refugees trying to escape the oncoming slaughter. Houses were leveled, buildings demolished, entire streets left scorched.

Molly prepared to turn off the dim lights in her part of the bunker and watched as some of her neighbors huddled together. The children were of course scared, but they played games all the same trying to forget about what was up the stairs. Parents would shush them and try to get them to sleep, though they knew no one would. Some of the younger adults cried with each other, worried about their houses or their relatives.

Only two people looked disinterested in the mess. Molly, who right now was more concerned that her cake still be there for her when she returned, and an older black gentlemen in simple clothing but nice suspenders.

"You know, I fought the Germans once too," he sighed to her. "They used to only be as scary as the spikes on their helmets."

He didn't expect her to reply, and she wasn't going to. They sat together in a rhetorical

silence for a moment until finally Molly felt compelled to tell someone something.

“It’s my birthday tomorrow, er-,” she glanced at her pocket watch. “Today, now.”

“Happy birthday,” he chuckled. “If I didn’t know any better I’d say you must be growing older than me today, haven’t seen that much resolve on a young face since before you were born.”

She pushed the corners of her mouth upward slightly in a display of kindness. It wasn’t for nothing, either. She really did want to smile for the man, to show him that youth wasn’t wasted on the young. But she was tired, and he was too, and they both sat together in their tired solstice.

The German war machine churned. She could hear them grinding overhead and feel the shake of another building coming down; boom, crump, boom, crump, crump crump. She flinched ever so slightly each time. Finally dimming the lights and sending bits of plaster dust flying, her and the old man slept while the others worried themselves all night.

Chapter 2

“The Man in the Bag”

When she awoke the next morning, the old man had left. Only a few people still remained. She looked down at her watch again. Seven-thirty. She had to be at the bookstore by eight.

“There’s a war on, chaps!” her boss, Oliver would belt. “It’s our duty to sell them folks books! Keep the economy strong!”

Molly figured they could bomb his bookstore and he’d still try to sell the bits of pages he had in the ashes.

“Here you are, sir,” he’d say. “I’ve got pages 23 to 27 of Richard Aldington!”

As she came outside she was relieved to see her flat still stood, and as she walked down the street she was upset slightly, but still also relieved to see the bookstore stood as well. She might not really like the job, but any money was decent money.

Oliver Pender of Pender and Pender’s Books was the only Pender left in the book business. Rudolph Pender, Oliver’s brother, was out somewhere over enemy lines in the Royal Air Force. Oliver was a conscientious dissenter and refused to fight in the war.

“Damn, bloody Germans.” He shook his fist at no one. “Blew up another chemist’s place. How am I supposed to get my Ergotamines?”

“You’re such a complainer, Ollie,” Molly announced as she walked in for work. “Why don’t you just join the war already? Churchill really thinks you should.”

Her sarcasm laid thick on Oliver and he loved that about her.

“If I joined the boys now, why, who would sell my books?”

“I could,” Molly said seriously.

“I don’t doubt that, my lovely, but I’m afraid war’s just not my cup of tea.”

“Mmm, speaking of- would you mind putting the kettle on for me, Ollie? It is my birthday after all.”

She moved about the oaky old shop. It smelled of dusty covers and bad writing. The shelves were constantly needing reordered every morning after the nightly bombings, so Molly would turn on the radio to a low hum to listen to some American dance number that seemed so far away, and she’d begin picking up the books and shelving them.

Oliver looked half longingly towards a distantly bright future somewhere across the street. When he realized it wasn’t coming, he snapped himself back to the reality around him. Molly’s words never reached him, but their echo bounced just one last time to the older man’s senses.

“Oh, is it really?” Oliver came back from the office and walked toward the front desk, unlocking the register. He straightened his bowtie and combed a final stroke into his greased back black hair. His thick mustache corresponded with his blue eyes. With a quick snap of his suspenders, he stood watching her shelve.

“Happy birthday, Molly my dear. Have a cup on me.” He smiled and motioned toward the office, implying that he’d already had a pot going and a cup with her name on it. Oliver was in his late forties and never married, so he never had children, but he always considered Molly to be the closest thing to an heir next to his nephews.

She smiled and stopped shelving. Oliver Pender was one of the few people who could still make her smile, and frankly after that devastating attack last night, this particular boast of kindness was a bit much on her tired heart. She smiled a bit wider and her eyes got a little misty.

“Oh, of course,” Oliver said, looking as if he’d seen something, but remembering he still needed to unlock the back door, leaving the desk.

As he walked out of her sights, she turned to see what he was looking at. There wasn’t anything there. The old tosser must losing it, she thought to herself, and pushed back one of the askewed books on the shelves into its proper place.

The kettled howled out in the back room.

“There you are!” Oliver stepped back into the room and pulled out two small tea cups from a shelf. He eyed the whiskey they had been sitting next to, but then decided against it. A drink is always nice though, he thought.

“Drinks? At this time of day?” Molly asked.

“Hey now, I’m just getting cups and saucers,” he sighed. “That’s all.”

With a light flick, he shut the cupboard to reassure her.

“See? Just tea. Is something bothering you Molly?” he sat down and poured the hot water into the two small cups, then administered the little baggies of leaves.

“It’s all a very big blur lately. The war, the Blitz, the city’s in the piss. I don’t know what’s a girl got to look forward to these days, you know?”

Oliver opened his mouth quizzically but was interrupted.

“And I swear on my mum if you say one word about a ‘good man’ I’ll strangle you.”

He quickly covered up his almost interjection by putting the cup up close to cool it off. Molly laughed.

“Olive, darling, I’m just not the marrying type. You of all people should be able to relate.”

“I’m not saying you need a man to complete you, child, just more a solid plan. Do you really expect to work the rest of your life in a bookstore?”

“Do you really expect to own a bookstore the rest of your life?”

He smiled coyly.

“Fine, have it your way. If you’re happy, you’re happy, dear. But if you’re not, and frankly you seem more on the ‘not’ side of things, I’d really consider doing something.”

They both sat in a comfortable quiet for a few minutes, finishing their drink.

“Well, I suppose I’d better get back to work then,” Molly said, breaking the silence. “Still all of the mystery section knocked down.”

Oliver smiled knowingly and got up to finish the day’s inventory reports.

She worked the rest of the day in a haze. Every book she put on the shelf she carefully weighed and examined, looking at their titles. She imagined the far off places they would describe, the adventurers they contained, each place more exciting than the last. She lost herself to the notion of exciting things so heavily that she completely ignored the day’s lack of customers. Oliver however, even disgruntled at the lack of business, still heartily gave Molly her fiver for the day. She tried to give it back to him, but he refused to keep it.

“It’s your birthday, Molly. Take it with you to the pub or something. Go meet yourself someone nice. Maybe not to marry, but at least they’ll be nice.”

Oliver said goodbye and walked into the office, and Molly, smiling for the first time in a long time, strolled happily over to the door. She was in such a good mood it opened much more lightly than ever.

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The air this September had thinned to a crisp, chesty wheeze. It stung as it trickled down your throat and into your windpipes, freezing your lungs as they hurriedly pushed the icy intruder back out. She heaved a little as she clutched her jacket closer to her. Molly didn't own a thicker one and regretted that. Perhaps that's what she'd spend her pay on this time, it seemed right.

She eyed a small alleyway with a few shops down it. Some still had dim lights burning in their windows. Maybe she'd be able to get a warmer jacket now rather than wait through one more cold night. One of them was, thankfully, and the warm little shop owner smiled as she pushed through his tiny door, making the bells jingle.

She browsed a bit, then found and bought a nice heavy coat. It wasn't much to look at, but it was warm. She thanked the man at the counter and handed him the fiver. He rang her up and opened the clanky old register to hand her her two quids and five pence. She left and smiled at the jingles on the door.

"Ma'am," the old man cried after her. She hadn't even gotten but two yards away. "Could you please shut the door behind you? It's cold this evening."

"Oh," she turned around. "Terribly sorry, of course."

Without even having time to step forward, the door shut itself quickly in front of her. The man at the counter stared at it wide-eyed and then at her. She gaped at the door confused, the hurriedly turned away.

Ignoring the tight squeeze of the cold air in her lungs, she made strides down the alley, almost towards home.

Just gotta sort this out Molly old girl, she thought. You're fine. You're perfectly fine.

Was she fine? Could she be fine?

Of course you are. Who would you be if you weren'?

The door shut itself, hadn't it?

No.

But you saw it.

So? It was a breeze.

There wasn't a breeze.

Had to have been.

She took a wrong turn down an alley, but didn't even notice.

Look at you Molly, you're losing it. It's cold, you're crazy, the door didn't shut itself you dolt, that doesn't happen.

You're such an idiot, Molly.

"You're such a trouble maker!" Mother Superior rang in her head.

"No I'm not!" she stopped and screamed.

"Yes you are, you little trouble maker you," a voice said, but it wasn't Mother Superiors.

"You must be a trouble maker, how else did you get here?"

A man dressed in tatters and stubble crawled out of the shadows from one end of the alley.

"You're a long way from the East Side, miss," he growled.

"I'm not going to give you any trouble, sir," she said alarmed.

"No, no trouble. But that jacket of yours looks new- and *warm*."

She was backing away from him now, but another man shuffled into the alleyway on the opposite side, startling her.

"You can't just take my jacket- I need it. It's cold."

"Oh, I knows," the other man said. "We're cold too."

"Now listen 'ere," the first man spoke clearly. "We're not interested in hurting you. Just give us the coat and we'll be on our jolly way."

Molly looked around desperately for some help or a way out, but there wasn't any. Each end of the alley was closed off by a large man with an appetite on his grin.

"Just stay back!" she shouted. "You can't have it!"

"Then if you's not going to give us the coat, could least gives us a kiss," the other man said singsong.

Closer and closer they drew. The space between Molly and freedom was closing in on her. Panicking, scared, and all around confused, Molly reached out of the only object could see to defend herself with.

But it was too far! Just to her left was a bottle in the garbage. If she could just reach it, she'd be able to smash it over the first man's head and make a run for it.

"No!" she shouted. "Stay away!"

She reached with all of her might towards the bottle, making a last ditch attempt to grab it. It was too far, too far, too far, come closer, come-

Suddenly it was in her hand. She felt its cold glass safely in her grip. She tightened around it and eyed her attacker with a fire previously too frightened to shine through.

"Fuck off!" she cried and with every ounce of strength she could muster she lifted the bottle over her head and brought it down on the first man's head with a loud, shattering crash.

Blood spurted from his cuts and his eyes rolled slightly back on themselves. He hit the

ground with a meaty thud. Molly didn't even stay to hear it, as she was already stepping over him, making her way out of there. But it wasn't any use. There were now five more unsettling men coming into the alley and they were very disheartened at what had just happened to their friend.

Molly backed into the alley again, faster than before. They weren't about jokes now, now they wanted blood for blood.

"Oi, you made a 'uge mistake, lassy," a large one with a bloody black beard said. "You's gonna 'ave to pay fo' that'en."

"I'm afraid she's all out of coin good chaps!" A voice rang out overhead, but it didn't belong to any of these vicious lips. This voice sounded helpful with it's stiff upper lip attitude.

"Say who?" one of the brutes choked upward. "Who goes there?"

"You lads haven't heard the rumours going about? There's this vigilante in the midst, they say. He's going around, beating up hapless crooks like you."

"Show yourself!" another one said. "Come out 'ere and fight like a man!"

"Not just *a man*," the voice said. "Your man!"

Stepping from the shadows was the exact same bloody black beard, except the original hadn't moved from his perch. They could have been twins except the first man looked more like he was staring at a ghostly reflection rather than a brother.

"What's wrong?" the right voice came out of the wrong lips. "Do I look familiar?"

The men rushed at the copy of their leader, ignoring Molly.

"Oh, this brute will do," the copy said.

With the matched force of the original, the second bearded man began to attack the men one by one, whacking them up and about the alley, knocking a few of them unconscious in the first swing.

"Now now, perhaps this is too much confusion," the copy exclaimed.

As the rest of the crooks were scrambling to bring themselves back to their feet, the copy stepped into the shadows, seemingly vanishing.

"Where'd 'e go?" one said.

"Right here, gents!" said the voice.

Stepping from the shadows this time was not the bearded fellow, but instead-

"No bloody way!" one of the men shouted. "It's the bloody fucking King!"

Molly blinked in a corner, too dumbstruck to even consider what was happening, to frightened to run. But the bastard was right, before here, clear as day, was King George VI himself, dressed smartly and pristine in usual suit and tie.

“You lads have had quite a show,” the voice teased.

“But I’m afraid I can’t allow you to leave here without at least one broken bone,” suddenly said the King in his correct voice.

The remaining men screamed in terror. It was, after all, not every day the king of the monarch threatened to break your legs or worse. They tried to run, but this “king” was faster than them, knocking them all back for a final go. He was quick and stealthily, like some sort of machine. His precise attacks were obviously trained and his blows were menacingly deadly.

As the last man stood trembling from exhaustion and fright, his weak fists still held in front of his face as if though he were going to strike back at some point but dared not let down his guard.

“My dear,” the voice in the King’s mouth said. “Do you think he’s learned his lesson?”

For the first time her savior looked in Molly’s direction. The king, if that’s who he really was, smiled sheepishly. He turned back around at the man and jumped toward the shadows one last time. As he stepped into the light, he was now wearing a fancy tuxedo complete with red cummerbund and carnation. His head was hung low and his face, whoever’s face he had this time, was hid in shadow.

As he stepped out he pulled a thick, brown paper bag over his head.

“What the fuck are you, mate?” the last man spoke, a hint of a scream escaping every other syllable.

“Why, can’t you tell?” the voice said, pointing at the bag. “This is my mask!”

“What the bloody fucking hell are you-” he was curt short and the man with the bag grabbed him by the collar and pulled him close.

“I’m a *superhero*,” the voice whispered triumphantly.

With that, he butted his head into the man with a large thunk and crumple. The last man went unconscious and the voice turned toward Molly, the hint of a smile clearly evident even though it wasn’t visible under the bag. His eyes, shone through holes cut only big enough for him to see, glistened as they caught the light from the streetlamps, but were otherwise construed in darkness.

“You’re mad as a hatter, that’s what you are,” Molly said shakily.

“Goodness me, I almost forgot to introduce myself- where are my manners?” He cleared his throat.

“Good evening my dear, my name is-”

“You’re wearing a bag over your head. You know that?”

“Well, yes, it-”

“Do you wear that around town? Or is it just your fancy to at night, get your kicks or

whatever it is you-”

“Well, now, no it’s-”

“And bloody hell in a handbasket! Was that the king? Boy, how’d you pull that one off? Bloke looked just like him. Damn, even I was convinced. Where’s he off to anyway?”

She looked around into the darker regions of the alley, stepping over a few unconscious bodies on the way there.

“You back there? You can come out now, your partner’s finished his trick, it was a riot.”

But no one answered her. She stepped further into the shadows and felt around but only the cold air was there to grasp.

“If you’ll excuse me for intruding on your investigation,” he sighed. “I believe I could explain it all myself a tad better. It’s called a shock and awe technique, but that’s hardly the point right now I need to-”

“Hey wait a tick, were you there the whole time? Just sort of floating around?”

“Yes, I came when I heard you call for help.”

“Then why did you wait so long? You’ve clearly got enough manpower to take them out first thing, why didn’t you?”

He paused a moment and then under the bag he shuffled. His head turned toward the first attacker and the broken bottle which was now surrounded by a puddle of blood.

“What?” she looked down.

“You did that, didn’t you?”

“Well, of course I did, I wasn’t going to just sit here.”

“And I applaud your tenacity for courage, I do, but that bottle was a good throws distance from your hand, wasn’t it?”

Molly looked only at the bottle and not anywhere else. The man ignored the lack of answer and continued.

“I saw you pick the bottle up.”

“Yes, that’s all, I reached over and picked it up.”

“No, you didn’t have to reach, but you still picked up the bottle. I thought that, perhaps, you didn’t need my help at first, but then I realized.”

“Well, thank you all the same, really, truly. I don’t even know how to repay you-”

She reached into her pocket and pulled out the change.

“Here, have a quid on me, really, thank you.”

“I don’t want the money. I don’t need it.”

“Oh, well then, have we settled it then? You saved me and I thank you kindly and I’ll do

anything you'd like to repay the favor, but if that's not necessary, I'm a bit shaken and I'd really like to go home."

She turned away and began to leave and actually thought that she heard the man turn away.

"You know, I can help you, with the problem."

She flinched.

"What problem, sir? The only problem I can see is you not letting me go home and it's cold."

He stepped forward a bit, apprehensive but calm. His took on an aura of complete control and swagger.

"My dear, there is a world out there that you're not aware of. One with so much more available than the one you call home. They both have their perils and joys, both their own ups and downs, but I can promise you, one will leave you out in the deep darkness by yourself and alone, and the other? The other will make you family."

She stood there, for a minute, pondering.

"No, I can't leave. I don't know what happened tonight and frankly I hope I never do."

"Should you ever need me, I'm always at Maplewood."

Suddenly, piercing the veil of that impossible reality, the air raid sirens blared through the city.

Molly's head snapped to attention like a trained dog.

"I've got to get to a shelter!" she screamed, forgetting everything.

Without looking back, she ran down the street and turned towards her house. The fear of the sirens had never felt more real than right that moment. She felt the terror inside her push her to run faster than she's ever ran before.

She hit the door to the bomb shelter with full force, blowing it open. She tore at it and shut it almost as soon as it had been opened. Everyone inside looked at her with dumb, shocked expressions. She sighed and relaxed.

She looked around at all of her shocked neighbors, moving towards her usual place. But something didn't feel right. Something, or someone, wasn't there.

"Where's the old gent from the other nights?" Molly asked her neighbors.

"Which one?" the older landlady said nervously. "We've got a few, you know."

"The one who talked to me the other night, he wore the expensive braces."

"Oh," another man in a dirty coat cuddling two frightened children. "Mr. Fitz, room three thirty two. My neighbor, that one."

“He was a no-show,” the landlady muttered. “We thought so were you until you-”

“Did anyone check his room before the sirens?”

No one answered.

Molly, shaken from the events of the evening, was in a mood entirely different to her. Without even thinking she got up, ran up the stairs, and swung open the heavy shelter doors. The others cried out but she couldn't hear them over the sirens. She shut them behind her and headed into the apartment.

She saw the first wave of bombing tear down the apartment a few blocks over. The rumbling shockwave sent dust and debris into the air, blocking her view.

“Mr. Fitz?” she cried, trying to drown out the noise.

She made her way into the apartment and ran up the stairwell until she saw the third floor and room three thirty two. The rest of the doors had been shut behind them, but his was slightly ajar. Molly rushed towards and flung it open.

There sitting on the floor, underneath a fallen bookshelf, was Mr. Fitz wearing the same plain shirt and fancy suspenders as the few nights before.

“Now how did you get yourself stuck there?” she asked, half joking, half worried.

“I was trying to reach a book on my top shelf when the sirens went off,” he sighed. “I wasn't expecting it, hate to say it, but it scared me so bad I fell over, pulling this damned thing with me. I can't seem to get it off me.”

“Oh dear,” she said, bending over him. “Do you think you broke anything?”

“No, I'm pretty sure the bookcase is just fine.”

She looked into his old, grey eyes. There were tears in them despite the warm smile.

“I thought this was it for me,” he whispered. “I... I thought...”

“Shh, now now, it's ok. We'll get this off, ok? I'll get you to the shelter with the lot.”

She pushed on the bookshelf but it wouldn't budge.

“Dearie, I don't mean anything by it, but I tried to push it myself. It's solid oak.”

Boom! An explosion shook the building, glass shattered, bits of it getting caught in Molly's hair. The sounds of German planes roaring overhead, the whining engines competing with the sirens. The building next door was crumbling and the smoke and dust bellowed into the now open window.

“No! No no no no, please!” Molly cried, warm tears starting to swell on her cheeks. She thrust on the bookshelf with her entire force but it wasn't enough. She didn't feel like she had felt only twenty minutes ago. Suddenly she felt helpless.

“Please, go. Leave me, I'm an old man, I've seen enough. I'd rather die alone than have

us die together, you trying to save me.”

“I’m not leaving you!” she screamed, pushing on the bookshelf.

The ground shook and the building swayed in a violent lurch.

“Please! Just go!”

Another plane screeched over. Their flat was the next target.

“I won’t leave!” she looked him in the eye pleading; not with him, but with whatever God that would allow such a sweet old man to get into this position to give her the strength, this time give her the strength.

She pushed hard and couldn’t move anything. She threw herself onto the cold wood floor and stared, tears streaming down her face. She clutched her legs and pulled them closer, rocking forward and backwards crying. Then she screamed at the top of her lungs.

The scream echoed through the apartment and lifted itself out the window and into the sky. Molly felt herself let go, she felt herself lose everything she had left, and she felt herself let go of gravity.

Her body swayed strangely, her feet dangling now when they hadn’t before. She hovered and bobbed over the floor on an electric bubble of air. The room flowed through her, the objects in it felt like mere extensions of her arms, the tables became fingers, the chairs became thumbs.

She looked over at Mr. Fitz, his face twisted in awe and fright at Molly. She lifted an arm and without even trying, the bookshelf rose above them and off of Mr. Fitz. He tried to stand but a jolt of immense pain shot up his leg and into his spine. It was probably broken. With the strength he could muster, he scooted over to Molly and huddled next to her. She floated toward the ground feeling exhausted. A trickle of blood began to descend from her nose.

“Are you alright? Are you ok?” Mr. Fitz was screaming, the joyous tears now solidly in his eyes.

“I... I can’t feel my...”

The building shook a final time and the ceiling began to crumble.

“Hold on girl!”

Mr. Fitz grabbed onto Molly and she grabbed to him. The bomb exploded outside a few floors below them and started to drag the building down. Everything went black and she was very still.

...

Her breath was short. The pain in her head was faint but still there. Cold sweat trickled down her forehead and down the back of her neck. She had been having a dream. She had been

falling, like in some of her other dreams, but then she didn't hit the ground. She was flying, swaying, moving around in the air like a plane.

She sat up and looked around, her eyes adjusting to the morning sun. Around her was the smouldering ruin of her apartment. Black, charcoaled wood and stone strewn about in smoking pieces. It was still warm from the fire.

A policemen in his funny blue uniform was taking notes of the rubble. He noted the location and the number of people living in the apartment. The rest of her neighbors had come up from the shelter to survey their destroyed homes. The police were doing body counts, trying to see who to report dead or missing.

"Whe-" she coughed. Her throat felt like fire and tasted like blood. "Where is Fitz?"

"Excuse me, who said that?" The policemen asked. "Is someone in the rubble? I told you to stay back until we were sure it was safe!"

"Me!" Molly croaked. "I'm over here!"

"A survivor?" The policeman threw down his notebook and cobbled his way over the blackened terrain.

"Holy mother of Jesus," he stumbled over a half melted beam. "We thought no one was in here, ma'am, I'm so sorry."

"Where's the old man? His name is Fitz."

"Well, I have him marked as dead, but then I had you marked too. I take it you're the Miss Molly Waters, eh?"

"Yes, that's me."

He helped her up, grabbing her by the arm not the hand.

"I heard what you did, you know," he smiled. "Ran out of the shelter to save the old man's life. Very brave."

"Apparently not brave enough," she said emptily. "He's not here."

"Darling, I don't know what you know about bombs by now, but there really isn't any way someone should be able to survive that inferno."

"I did," she brushed the soot off her raggedy and destroyed coat.

"And that's a bloody miracle, that is," he scoffed. "Here, lemme get you in a paddy and send you down to St. Barts."

"No, no hospitals. I'm alright."

"Ma'am, really, I insist."

"No! No hospitals!"

She stormed off and wouldn't look back. When her neighbors were out of sight she let

the warm tears sting her face, turning her cheeks pink.

. . .

Somewhere, Big Ben struck eight. She was going to be late for work.

. . .

Molly slunk down the street towards the bookstore. Her eyes glazed over. She turned the corner and there, sitting on a radio, was Oliver. He had his head in his hands. He sighed deeply and looked up. His expression changed drastically when he saw Molly's tattered, blackened clothes.

"Dear lord, Molly, what in heavens name are you wearing?"

"My new coat," she sniffled. "I just bought it yesterday. Do you like it?"

He managed a sad smile. He grabbed Molly and held her close to him, not letting go for a solid minute or more.

"This is probably the worst time to tell you, and I know that, but I have to anyway," he sighed. "The bookstore was hit last night."

"I... I know," she said wearily. "I could tell."

"Do you- do you need somewhere to stay?"

"I don't know. I don't know what I'm doing."

"Were you not in a shelter last night?" he asked now worried.

"I was, for a few minutes. I had to save him, Ollie. He was the only one of them who had ever been nice to me."

"Who? What happened?"

"What's the point, Ollie? What's the point of all this power if I can't use it to save anyone."

"You're not a superhero, Molly."

"Not today, I'm not."

She hugged Oliver again and turned to walk away.

"Wait, Molly, where are you going?"

"Should I ever need him, he's always at Maplewood."

"What does that mean?"

"I don't know," she turned back around. "Do you know?"

“Maplewood is that old abandoned asylum, out in the country.”

“I think I need to go there. That’s my plan now. It’s all I have left.”

She turned again and began heading towards the country.

“Do you need a ride?”

“No, I need to go alone. Don’t worry Ollie, I’ll be back. I promise you.”

“Take this with you, Molly Waters,” he said sternly. “Just in case you need to be reminded where I am.”

He handed her a book. It was tattered and the cover was a bit scorched from a flame, but the contents were still tangible. It was Hemingway's *Farewell to Arms*, and written on the first page in bright red stamped letters it said: “purchased from Pender and Pender’s Books, 315 King Street, London, England.”

“I’ll be back Ollie. I promise.”

She kissed him on the cheek and hugged him one last time.

Chapter 3

“Welcome to Maplewood”

As she approached the large, castle-like building, a strange sense of dreadful familiarity washed over her. The large, concrete walls invoked a fearful hello as if the very walls of the orphanage had been transplanted and replaced. Institutions like this made her uneasy, and this one was no exception. The front yard was unkempt, or was it meant to appear that way? It was so skillfully tattered and let go, but it was still perfectly fine to walk through without catching a stray briar patch or some thorny plant.

The tan coat on the outer walls was peeling back to reveal the dirty grey stone. The roof was a molded tile of mismatched shingles. The windows were tinted over time and still mostly intact, some simply cracked but none shattered. On the wall next to the giant front door, slightly to the left of center, was a sign with missing letters, but only enough missing that you could still make out what it said:

“Maplewood Asylum - Est. 1844.”

What am I doing? Molly thought. Am I really about to go into this old moldy place? All because of a man in a paper bag had told her to. The realization of her mistake hit her like a cool brick. This was some setup, she was going to be robbed or killed- or worse. Still, without anywhere

else to be, she worriedly tried to first step, checking for cave in. When the step held her weight, she moved up to the second, the third, and the fourth, until finally she was at the front doors.

The large brass knocker was stained with rust. She touched it lightly, feeling the rough, smooth, rough, smooth, rough texture as her fingers went further down and finally rested, clasped around the handle. She swung it back, but stopped. She let go and turned around and walked down the stairs, less carefully than before.

A crow, somewhere, cawed at nothing and the fluttering of its wings as it took off echoed throughout the courtyard. Perhaps a spy? She shook her head at the nonsense of the idea, but then knowing the things she knew now, she wasn't exactly sure what was possible anymore. So she turned up again toward the large doors and the brass knocker, but she stopped once more.

"Am I actually doing this?" she whispered to herself.

Suddenly the fear that this might be deadly to her came back like a bump in the head. She looked around shiftily and spied a wooden spire that must have belonged to some long forgotten piece of furniture. It was chipped and the stain was scratched, but it was sturdy and could very well be a nice makeshift club. She held it in her right hand behind her back and one last time approached the knocker.

THWAP-BANG. BANG. BANG.

Then silence. She stood for what felt like an hour waiting as scurrying noises shifted from beyond this gateway. Mice? Men? It was unknown; she clutched her makeshift weapon tighter. A crippling sense of doubt was ever present and the dust covered window sills blew clouds as the breeze blew by.

The large doors creaked open with a substantial push, jolting the loose boards and vibrating them dangerously.

"HELLO, LASSIE!" said a large, bald man with a thick, thick Scottish accent.

He grabbed her shoulders and shook her jovially.

"Welcome, welcome, welcome!" he smiled so large his teeth seemed to pop out of the seems. His dark skin was glistening with a morning sweat, and the towel around his neck indicated it'd been from some sort of workout.

"You mus' be the one erry'one was talking about," he beckoned her to enter the door.

He was insurmountably oversized, incredibly huge. He towered over her at a spacious seven foot if not more. The air around him smelled sweet and the pure fear of dwelling so tightly under him enclosed all other senses. His eyes beamed with a type of joyful abandon only that of a child could possess.

She walked forward nervously, forgetting about her makeshift bat. The large fellow spotted the piece of wood and laughed with a hearty laugh that shook the whole front lobby.

“My dear lass,” he said, still chuckling. “I admire yer spirits, I do, but that wouldn’ have done much.”

He quickly grabbed it out her hands. She was without much protest as the shock outweighed the fear. Quickly and routinely, he grasped the, what to him appeared miniscule, bat and smiled. He squeezed and with one hand crushed into splintering pieces what a normal man would have broken teeth on.

“Dun worry, you won’t be needing that anyway,” he said walking forward. “We’re all friends here, thas’ all.”

He stepped over a patch of floor that was missing, rotted away by time long ago, and made his way to a rickety elevator. Molly followed up until he got in and she eyed the stability of it a long with the large man outweighing the entire thing.

“Not ever’ thing in the building is original,” he smiled and pressed a button. “This is only a few years old. We installed it after the place was abandoned.”

She stepped reluctantly into the elevator. It was a bit of a squeeze, but she was small enough to just take up the space he left her.

“My name’s Molly,” she said shakily, extending a cramped hand. “Molly Waters.”

“My name’s John O’Hare, but not a single person on his earth has called me tha’ for nigh twelve years. You can call me War Tank.”

There was a spark in his eye as he said the name, and his smile curved ever so menacingly. He was a devious man, Molly could tell. He was much more cunning than he would have liked you to believe.

“Nice ta meet you Molly,” he grinned.

“I can tell we’re going to get along swimmingly.”

War Tank pushed one final button, lighting up the entire control panel. The elevator, without warning, jerked into life with a mechanical groan and hiss. The doors shut and the thing dropped so quickly downward she felt her stomach turn over twice.

Over the noise of the machine, Tank tried to give her a bit of a tour.

“Ya’ see, the main building, the asylum, has nearly three hundred rooms available to us,” he shouted. “It’s where we all sleep.”

He pointed down to the floor.

“Underground is where we built our real base o’ operations. It’s not much, but it suits our needs.”

“So,” she shouted back, trying to match him. “You’re a group of real life superheros?”

“Well, in not s’many words, aye. We’re a rag tag group a’ supers.”

He could sense the awe in her voice when he said he was a hero. She looked up at him

and couldn't really look away. He smiled to himself.

The elevator finally screeched to a halt. They must have been ten or twenty miles down, maybe more. The doors opened with a rickety clank to reveal a second door, one that was polished metal and shiney. It opened a few seconds after with a glide and a faint woosh. Standing in the doorway was the man wearing the bag.

"Ah! Why, hello my dear. I don't believe we've been properly introduced, my name is Alan Randolph Scott. I suppose you could say I'm sort of the leader of this quaint little operation."

"Your name is just Alan? Nothing fancier than that?" Molly asked.

"Whatever do you mean?"

"Well, the big one there, says his name was Tankman or The Tank or--"

"War Tank," the man in the bag said coyly.

"Right, that. Do you mean to tell me you run around with a paper sack on your head and they don't call you anything?"

"Well, I've been called a numerous amounts of things," he chuckled. "But I do have a code name, if you will, they call me The Bag Man, or just Bag, if you would."

"The Bag Man, hmm, I like it. It suits you. Do you moonlight as an actual bag man over the grocers?"

"No, I'm afraid my skills are a tad limited in that field. I'm much more suited for field combat and espionage."

She scoffed at the strangeness of the whole thing, but smiled all the same. Molly was one to quickly attach herself to personalities, and she could tell at least this place had a bit of a sense of humour about itself.

"My name's Molly Waters, Bag, nice to meet you."

He stuck out his hand in an orderly fashion and she shook it just the same. War Tank smiled.

"It's very nice to meet you, Molly. I have great expectations from you."

He let go and she stepped back to the comfort of her original position. She hadn't moved from the spot until that point. Something was bugging her though. Something about the other night.

"It's a bit strange though, you wearing a sack on your head," she eyed him quizzically.

"What exactly is under there?"

Those who had been standing around listening smiles suddenly softened and faded. They looked around nervously at each other.

“Well, whatever it is you want really,” he stopped, and removed the bag from his head.

Underneath it was a familiar face. It was her face, staring back at her as if it were in a mirror, but it wasn't a mirror. It didn't move when she moved, it was an uncanny stillness.

“Molly,” said her voice, but it wasn't her voice. It wasn't coming out of her throat nor was it like a dusty record. It was clear and precise as she imagined it sounded to others when she spoke. “I wear this bag for a very complicated reason.”

The other Molly sighed, her voice was thicker with an accent that was not her own.

“How the bloody hell did you do that?” the original Molly gaped.

“I'm a shapeshifter,” the other Molly said, then put the bag back over her head.

“I can mimic any person I should choose,” suddenly Bag's voice.

“You weren't joking then,” she stammered. “You really are a proper superhero, like the ones in the pulp magazines?”

There was that hint of a smile under the bag, even though it wasn't visible.

“Yes, we are,” he said confidently. “And I think so are you.”

...

The underground base, or The Sanctuary as Bag had called it, was a large and commodious hole. It was sleek and pristine, clearly polished with the latest technology.

“Where'd you get all of this?” Molly asked, gaping.

“Some of it is salvage,” Bag explained. “Some of it is purchased through a few government channels.”

He paused and she looked at him confused.

“Oh, they're not strictly legal channels, of course. Most of it is counterfeit identifications and misuse of old ranks that haven't been pulled in years.”

“You a military man, then?” Molly asked.

“Once upon a time, yes.”

“You used that... uh, power, of yours?”

Bag said nothing.

They continued walking, Molly looking at everything in the giant room. There were awe inspiring surveillance devices, multiple tube screens and radars. Giant magnetic tapes rolled, chugging with the rest of it, collecting information.

“The Sanctuary below Maplewood is operating at its peak efficiency. A cog in the wheels of war, you see. Churchill is the only top brass who's even aware of our existence. The old cook

is prepared- armed to the teeth. Royal air has spotted some very interesting fields over enemy lines, fields used to train some interesting folks.”

He stopped, and motioned towards a collection of tube screens. Some large, some small, each flickering with different black and white images- moving pictures of the porch Molly had just entered through, keeping eyes on it, a few of what looked like Moscow, another of the White House in America. He pulled a swiveling device over that looked like a typewriter, but had no spool of paper, just wires to the machines running the reels of tape.

He typed something with silky precision, pressed the return key with a triumphant clack, and brought up some aerial shots of Germany.

“See those dots there? We’ve gotten field reports from the frontline- strange, unusual, and super-humans with abilities much like ours. Trained on these very fields. They’re called the Gruppe der Macht by Hitler himself, but those of us here have gotten to calling them the Axis Blackness.”

“They’re like der Fuhrer’s bloody ol’ SS, but so much worse, lass.” War Tank added. “They black out everything they touch, and that’s not just’ fittin’ metaphoric shit, they cut the power to cities and start kidnapping the regular folks.”

“What for?” Molly asked.

“For their god-awful experiments.” Bag answered.

The walls around the screens were papered with multicolored maps of London and England. Green fields marked with red ink, pink tubes under blue streets and black sidewalks. A barrage of strategies and planning. Tables with models of streets with small figures were scattered with forgotten coffee stains and crumpled pages.

There, below the word and below the screen was a small wheelchair. In it sat a tiny woman fiddling with different wires and machines.

“Ah!” Bag exclaimed. “Here’s the old girl who does most of to work on our equipment, Dr. Lichtenstein.”

“Old? Good gods, Tasche, I am not that old. Three hundred and eighty four is quite young considering.”

As the woman turned herself around, her overly large cranium became entirely visible. Her head was the size of two heads and her sunken eyes and wrinkled lips still held an incapable beauty. The spark in her eye when she smiled was just as Molly had seen in War Tank’s only twenty minutes ago.

“I’m sorry, beg your pardon. Did you say three hundred and eighty?” Molly asked.

“Three hundred and eighty four, correct.”

“Dr. Lichtenstein has been part of the underground super-movement since I was just a

young lad. She was the one who mentored me.”

“Found him when he was only a wee child. Scared of the world, shape shifting like he had no hope. Gave him a home, yes. Gave him food. Gave him purpose!”

Bag sighed.

“She’s the closest thing I have to a mother. She’s a mother to every super we find.”

“Do you go out looking?” Molly asked. “For... for supers? Like me?”

“Yes. There are more of us out there, my sweet child. More than you could possibly imagine.”

“It’s a genetic mutation. Dr. Lich’s work has helped isolate what we call the ‘super-gene,’ the anomaly in each and every one of us here that allows us to do the amazing things we can do. Operation: White-Out, issued by Churchill himself directly to me when he found out not only of our going-ons, but also that of the Black Ax, to try and stop the German war machine as they begin using superhumans to fight. Fighting fire with fire, you see.”

“But you’re German, aren’t you?” Molly asked nervously.

“HA! Yes, my schatz, but I’m from long forgotten Deutschland. One that was never this bitter. I love my landsleute, but they have demented into something evil. I intend to save them.”

“So this a government operation? Backed by the crown and everything? You’re like... some sort of... uncanny... gmen.”

“Pah! Hardly gmen!” scoffed Bag.

“Who’re you callin’ uncanny?” War Tank squinted. “I’d say we’re more... *astounding* than anything.”

“Now!” Bag interrupted. “I’m going to need to know where to put her.”

“Put her?” the wrinkled woman scrunched her glare at Bag.

“Yes, *put me?*” Molly questioned, curious as to what exactly he meant.

“Well, I mean for training purposes. We need to identify your mutation, your power so to speak. Do you fly? Can you walk through walls?”

He looked over at War Tank.

“Perhaps you have diamond hard skin and a stiff resolve to live forever?”

War Tank laughed.

“Not forever, mate. I’d like to see ya’ in hell when we get there. Besides, I’d be damn’d saddened up here all by me lonesome.”

“I- I don’t know what I can do.” Molly stuttered into the silence, breaking the two’s thoughtful smiles. It was clear to her that the two had been through a lot together.

“Merely semantics, child.” Lich piped in. “I can tell you what you are, all I need is your

blood.”

She reached out and grasped Molly’s arm lightly. The leathery skin brushing on her smooth limb was a different sensation, and the act altogether made her hair stand on end.

“Hey now,” Molly pulled back and stepped away from the group. “Let’s not get caught up in anything, I never said I was going to... join... or whatever it is you want me to do, initiate, sign up, assimilate. I’m not even sure if all of this is real or a very vivid dream yet.”

Bag, slightly taken aback by her distrust, motioned toward her. His steps were easy, and he put an arm out to stop the others from following. Eventually, Molly slowed her pace to match his then stopped. He gained space until he was only a few steps away from her. If the light had been better, she could have seen the whites of his eyes through the holes.

“Molly, I know all of this is rather very frightening to take in right now, but the choice is yours. We can’t force you to be here, if you want to leave, Tank will show you out.”

“Molly, lass, I know that-” Tank started to speak, but she stopped him.

“No no. This all seems... great and all. Really, it does. I don’t have a home right now, I don’t have a job either. But you can’t just expect me to uproot myself like a proper vagrant. I need... some time to think about it. That’s all. Just... let me think.”

“Fair enough, Molly.” Bag said, and waved his hand at Tank, pointing him toward the elevator.

They rode together in almost complete silence, except once when Tank spoke quickly and in a sort of whisper.

“I know what you feel,” he sighed, his accent still coating his words, but clearly not as exaggerated as he was forcing it before.

“I was in your shoes once, lass. Scared, alone, nowhere to go. I was a black man in the middle of London. I used to be a fighter- boxed an’ all that. I thought that’s all I was ever going to be good for, and then...”

He looked behind them, Molly had been so nervous she hadn’t noticed the plate glass that made up the back wall of the elevator. She could see other floors of the institute. More screens and machines like before, more people running around with paperwork in their hands. Some were flying it around, others carrying huge loads that’d normally require two or three men.

“They gave me hope in a world where there wasn’t none,” he said, placing his hand on the glass.

“When I was a lad, I used to read the pulp mags and the funnies and all. Used to think heroes were the greatest of the great. When I figured I had me a power of sort, me mum threw me to the streets ‘cause all she saw was a freak. I sat there crying in the rain, all of my comics soggy over my head. I asked God how He could let this happen. How could me own mum? Then

ol' Baggy found me.”

He turned back around, finished with his story. Maggy, not having intending to speak the whole ride, looked at him and began to open her mouth to offer him something, what that was she wasn't sure of. However, he cleared his throat to finish and cut her off.

“Maplewood made me who I am today. It made me better, and stronger, and smarter. Maplewood gave me a home. Gave me food. Gave me hope. Maplewood made me believe in those heroes again.”

Chapter 4

“Kommt der Gruppe der Macht”

With the walk up to Maplewood having taken a good couple of hours, combined with her time spent there and the eventual walk back, it was already dusk and going on sundown by the time she made it back to the city. She was exhausted and hungry, and she had nowhere to go. Preparing to collapse into tears, she sat down on the stoop of the nearest building on the edge of town. She landed hard and something sharp in her back pocket jabbed at her leg.

She pulled out the old book Oliver had given her. Of course! His apartment was only a block down from the bookstore, and it was still standing. He had to have a place to stay, or at the very least, know someone who could put her up for the night. She made her way down the empty cobblestone streets to get to downtown, making sure to avoid dark alleys at all costs.

...

When she finally arrived, Oliver, it just-so-happened, was looking longingly toward the street, hoping he'd see her face.

“Molly!” he shouted, embracing her. “I was deathly afraid you'd perished, or worse, got caught up with some fiendish cult!”

“I joined the Queen's army, actually. I leave for bootcamp in the morning.”

“Ah, see? Joined a cult, I knew it!”

They laughed, and the genuine laughter lightened her up significantly. Things weren't that bad, after all. Maybe this whole Maplewood nonsense could be put behind her. She'd let those merry band of screwballs fight in their own fool's crusade of superpowers and super egos. She was a normal girl with a semi-normal life, and she intended to keep it.

...

Oliver set up the cot he kept in his back room for when one of his nephews came over in the front room. He adorned it with pillow after pillow trying to make it as comfortable as possible. As he ran out of pillows in the room, he began to walk back to his own bedroom to pluck the one's off his bed when Molly finally stopped him.

“That's quite enough, Ollie. Thank you. This will do splendidly.”

“So, miss Molly Waters. You must tell me, where did you go squandering off earlier today?”

He turned, his good ear still pointed in her direction, and briskly stepped over to the kitchen, opening a few cupboards as he looked for something.

“It's quite a story, Ollie,” Molly said, following him to see what the commotion was about. “I'm not sure you'll believe me.”

“Ah ha!” he screamed, and twisted the cap off of a large bottle of brandy. The golden liquid swooshed and slipped about the slick glass bottle as he held it up to his eye level inspecting it. “Then that sounds like a drinking story!”

“Oh, no Ollie, I can’t. That’s your good brandy, you told me you were saving it.”

“My darling, I don’t know how much longer I’m going to have a roof to drink it under, let alone glasses to put it in without my store. I’d hate for it to get thrown away undrank.”

“Well, I suppose if you insist,” she giggled, holding out the cool rock glass as he plucked some ice from his icebox and clanked them into the mouth. He poured over the ice, filled his own glass the same, and then together they toasted their glasses.

“To a long life and good health!” Molly laughed.

“To a long schlong and my blessed bookstore return!” She playfully slapped him on the wrist, laughed, and together they downed the whole glass. Molly squinted hard and shook her head as she held down the bitter sting.

Oliver drank his quickly and without reaction, then placed his elbows on the counter and poured another glass for the two of them.

“So. Tell me everything, love.”

She began with the other night- telling him about the blitz, and the old man under the bookshelf. He was listening intently, only breaking his gaze at the very dark parts to pour more alcohol. To Oliver, drinking won’t drown your problems like some think, but it will definitely haze them away, even if only for awhile.

She told him about the gang of bastards attacking her in the alley, how she reached for a bottle clearly out of grasp, but grabbed it anyway. How the man in the bag (another glass for that) had saved her and told her of a place called Maplewood. She explained about the war and how Hitler has an army of superhumans himself, and how she was supposed to join them in all of that.

When she was finished, she and Oliver were pleasantly drunk, and while her tail end of the story had been slurred slightly, he still understood the whole piece.

“So now you know, Ollie-boy” she sputtered out. “I’ve got a disease that makes me fly.”

“You won’t grow *wings* will you?” he scoffed, giggling and stumbling a bit.

“Nooo, that’d be right up disturbed, that’d be,” she glanced around what she thought was slyly. “Besides, I’m not just some bird-thing. Hey! Do you want to see if I can do it again?”

“Do what?”

“My... *power*... *power*...”

“Ooh! Yeah, yeah. That’s got to be a riot. Show me, show me.”

She set her empty glass down on the table.

“Watch... close...ly,” she murmured.

Molly squeezed her eyes shut tightly and concentrated as best she could on that moment where she was in the flat with Mr. Fitz. She happened to be in luck, as the alcohol made it easier to place herself back into that emotional state. Though the connections she felt before were

incredibly weakened this time, and the buzzing of the alcohol in her head dizzied her perception, she could at least feel the glass in front of her, becoming an extension of herself. The glass was now an arm, the almost empty bottle of brandy was a leg.

She lifted the brandy slightly at first, and then opened her eyes. Oliver sat in bewilderment. The seemingly pure magic in front of him was almost enough to shock him to sobriety. Molly lifted the brandy the rest of the way, pouring it ever so delicately into her glass, sloshing and spilling some, but still achieving slow results. When she finished, she let the bottle hover to down to the table and land, letting go a bit too soon, and the bottle hit hard and wobbled around a little before sitting in place.

Then, much to Oliver's dismay, she lifted the glass into the air and held it there for a short time in front of his face. He eyed it once, twice, three times confused at this amazing thing before him, waving a disbelieving hand under and over the glass, checking for pulses or wires. But there were none, and he sat, wide eyed and sheepish as Molly reached out, plucked the glass from the air, and smugly took a victorious sip.

"You didn't think I could," she spat out. "I know this is crazy, but I feel better knowing I'm not the only one to s-see it."

"Molly... why," he gasped. "Why you could make a fortune!"

"What? No! Ollie, no I can't think like that! Could you imagine what people would say? What they might do? I'm Churchill's secret, who knows what some hairbrained scientist might try and do!"

"I suppose you're right," he said, calming down. "I suppose even just telling me is a trifle of lunacy."

"Oh, Ollie," she got up and embraced him, burying her head in his chest. "I'm scared."

"Dearie, we're all scared," he pushed her away slightly, and put his arms on her shoulders, looking down at her with a worried gaze. "I worry every day what I'm going to do. My business was in shambles even before it was in actual shambles, my brother's away at war and we haven't heard of him since, his wife, bless her soul, is calling me constantly, her and her boys are worried sick- and now we've got to figure out a solution for you."

"We?"

"Well, of course, we! I'm your boss aren't I?!"

Tears threatening to roll down Molly's face, him almost entirely sober now, he bent slightly and kissed Molly on the forehead.

"Besides," he chuckled reluctantly, "I'm the closest thing you're going to get for a proper pa, aren't I?"

"So you mean you won't abandon me? I don't have to go to that strange place?"

"Not over my dead body."

She hugged him again, tighter this time. She didn't even care that she was acting like a small child. She'd never had a moment like this in her entire life. She had had to be an adult since before she even knew how to talk. This was her first time putting her trust into anyone but

herself.

“So now, how’s about we all call it a night and-”

But he was cut short. Both of their ears perked up, the hair on their necks reached out. They both stared out the window, eyes wider than a deer’s.

They forgot about the blitz. The sirens had just started whining for the night.

“Molly! We need to get to a bunker, right this instant!”

Oliver dashed around his apartment, grabbing all of the essentials. Molly, stunned in silent shock and fear, was too nervous to dare move until he got back. The sirens wail alone was a frightening enough sound to send even the strongest of the strong running to their mother’s. She looked out the window to the streets below. People scurried about as they prepared for another night of fire.

Oliver returned shortly, this time with not only Molly’s cot from before, but the other one he had in the back as well, all of the pillows wrapped neatly in some blankets.

“Molly,” he handed her a pile. “Carry this, will you dear.”

She still said nothing, but grabbed them anyway and awaited further instruction. Oliver turned back inside one more time to make sure he hadn’t forgotten anything important, grabbed Molly’s hand, switched off the lights and hurried them both down the stairwell towards the street.

The sirens were even louder when outside, and when drunk they were all the more menacing. They made it halfway down the street when Molly suddenly stopped, dropping everything and clutching her pockets.

“The book!”

“What?” Oliver was startled. “What book? We need to go!”

“No! I can’t leave it, it was the book you gave me this morning! It’s what led me back here to you, I need it! It’s the only thing I own! I can’t believe I left it!”

“Molly! I’ll get you another damn book, now is not the time.”

“No! I need it! I need it now!”

He tried to grab her arm, and then her waist, but he was still drunk and she was far too resistant, so she slipped out of his grasp, stumbled as she fell, got up and made a break for his apartment.

“Molly!” he yelled back at her. “Molly no! Please!”

But it was not use, she wouldn’t stop. The book meant something, she knew it. Maybe it was the alcohol talking, but Oliver had said it himself, he was the closest thing she was ever going to get for a father in this life, and be damned if she loses the first gift her new father had given her.

Oliver grabbed all of the dropped pillows and blankets and sprinted, hands full and barely able to see over the pile, running as fast as he could to the bunker doors. As he reached them, the sirens still blaring, he threw the piles down the hatch, shouting to everyone to watch them for him, he’d be back shortly. He looked up and back at Molly, her figure still visible but shrinking

fast.

“Damn that girl!” he shouted, and reluctantly darted after her.

The apartment in a few short minutes now felt like a room abandoned for years. The muffled siren was quieter but still audible over her short shuffles as she desperately looked around the room for the charred book.

“Molly! Are you stupid?”

“Ollie! No! You shouldn’t have come back with me! This was my fault I left the book, not yours.”

“Molly, you are going to get yourself killed! Come on, the planes are coming!”

As if on cue, the familiar chug and groan of the engines whined about above, mixing and mingling with the echoes of the siren to create a symphony of dread and fear.

“No! Please, Ollie! I can handle myself, I’ve done it before. I need to find that book.”

“Molly, is that about that Mr. Fitz? You tried to save him Molly, and that was very noble of you, but this book is not a person. Let it go!”

“I swear to all, Oliver, if you don’t get out of here now, so help me I’ll-”

But she stopped. She stopped not because she was cut off by an explosion or an engine or anything else flying dangerously low. She stopped because it was the very lack of those things. The sudden rise in her voice as she realized with a jolt that she was shouting over nothing, the ringing echoes bounced through their ears. She stopped because the sirens had stopped. Because the blitz had just up and stopped.

“Is it... is it over?” Oliver asked, frightfully.

“It can’t be,” Molly said, not breaking her stare. “Where were all the bombs?”

Molly looked nervously out the window. Everything was still. There, sitting on the windowsill, was her book. She embarrassingly grabbed it and ran toward the door. Oliver was right behind her.

“There,” he whispered. “Let’s go! Now!”

They opened the door of the stairwell and dashed onto the street. The eerie quietness was unsettling, especially after the commotion the sirens caused. They made a break down the street to the corner, but suddenly a shadow of a man grew onto the front of the building. Molly, startled, stopped and skid, Oliver running into her, almost falling.

“We need to go now!” Oliver whispered, almost only mouthing.

“Shh! There’s someone there!” Molly pointed to the shadow.

“The bunker is right around this corner, we should just go through the alley.”

“What if they see us?”

“So? It’s nothing, love- it’s just some hooligans who stayed out. Or maybe they gave the all clear. That could be why the sirens stopped.”

“Kapitän!” the shadow bellowed from around the corner. “Ich denke, dass ich etwas zu hören.”

“What?” Oliver gaped. “Germans? Here? In England?”

“Ollie, please, let’s just go, get back to the apartment. We’ll hide there until the army or someone comes and gets them, please.”

But Oliver wouldn’t budge. He stood perfectly still, not making a single sound.

Seemingly from nowhere, reaching to his back pocket he pulled out a small .38 caliber revolver.’

“Ollie, no!”

Oliver put his hand up to silence her, and stepped in front of her, the gun raised next to his ear. He stepped forward slowly, only ever so slightly.

“Elektrisch-Kerl,” the voice screamed, making Oliver jump and stop in his tracks.

“Schneiden Sie die Lichter!”

Suddenly, though the sky that night had been absolutely clear, a bolt of lightning struck a nearby power line with a crack and a boom.

“Noch einmal!” it screamed louder.

A second bolt, larger than the first, shot down, cracked the wires and sent sparks flying everywhere. Thunder clapped a second time, closer than either them had ever heard it, this time sending them to their knees clutching their ears. The power lines burst into a line of flame, and one by one, block after block after block, lights went down. It was pitch black.

“Black out.” Oliver muttered under his breath.

Molly gasped, but put her hand to her mouth. Just then, out of the shadows a tall, dark silhouette stepped forward. His stride was controlled and menacing, completely aware of every step he took. Placing one foot in front of the other, carefully missing the small obstacles that weren't there.

Beneath a stout, black peaked cap a face concealed by shadows. A shining gold eagle spreading its wings pinned in place glimmered in the flickering light. A pair of dark black circles, welding goggles, were donned on the menacing figure, the only thing visible of his face was the reflection of the flames’ warm glow as it trickled and danced around the lenses.

As he stepped slowly into the light, a sliver caught sight of his mouth. His lips were thin and tightly pressed into a scowl. His face was rough, but shaven, wrinkled with time. As he stepped toward Molly and Oliver, he grimaced slightly, flashing yellowed but perfectly straight teeth. They grinded slowly, back and forth with every step.

When his full figure was finally exposed by the dim light, the rest of his dark black uniform slithered with the face. His greatcoat was trimmed and slim, hugging his broad shoulders. His arms were folded neatly behind his back and his steel toed rubber boots clicked like a timepiece as he methodically approached the two. An entourage of German soldiers moved in formation behind him, ever ready with MG-42s.

He stopped short, his mechanical stiffness holding his leg out ever so slightly. He placed it down gently and turned his head to the side, quizzically eyeing the strangers in the street.

“Did you not hear the sirens?” he cooed in English, his accent clearly present but buried deep under a classical education. “I do believe that you should have scurried down to your little

rat holes ages ago.”

He bent down slowly, Molly flinched but barely. As his black, glass eyes met hers, his tight frown loosened, he sniffed deeply, and suddenly smiled widely.

“Frightened, are you, *fräulein*?” his arms now unwrapped, his gloved hands clasped around his knees.

She didn’t move, didn’t speak. Her eyes were wide with terror and her mind was blank.

“I’ll be frank, *meine kostbar*, as I have hardly any time. You see, we’ve been flying all over London in search of a very specific talent that we know you *inselaffe* posses.”

Reaching for his pocket, Oliver stiffening his gun arm, the man pulled out a rumpled piece of paper.

“This,” he unraveled the sheet and held it out to her, “is an order given by the highest office of the empire, *das führer* himself.”

It was stained crumpled parchment with messy type. Written entirely in German, it was illegible to either of them. Realizing that, the man quickly and neatly folded it back to his coat pocket, tucking it in with care.

“Ah, but the bureaucracy is not a matter, is it? What matters is that we find what we’re looking for, *ja*? Let us get to the brass and the tax, shall we?”

“Who are you?” Oliver whimpered. “SS?”

“No, my dear fellow, what I am is not important, more so, who I am. I am *Inspekteur Diederich* of the first unit *der Gruppe der Macht*.”

The two stared blankly. Diederich frowned.

“Has neither of you fine folk heard of me? Oh dear, I was lead to believe my reputation was one that preceded me.”

His right hand motioned slowly to his left, peeling the leather glove off. The scarred skin, rough and pink, was trembling with anticipation. He reached out toward Oliver, who flinched, again gripping tighter his gun. He gave in feverishly and reluctantly allowed Diederich to place a few fingers on his forehead.

“Hmm, *nicht* to you then, good sir, not the type we’re after.”

He pulled his hand off then slowly turned toward Molly. His stale breath perfumed the air with the stench of death.

“Don’t you dare lay a bloody finger on her!” Oliver shouted, but one of the German soldiers butted him in the back with their rifle to silence him. Diederich never once lost his gaze on Molly.

“And what is it we have here?” He placed another couple of fingers on Molly’s head, leaning back easily and slightly, soaking in her essence.

Do you know it, yet?

His voice was clear as it ever was, but his mouth didn’t once move.

“Know what, sorry?” Molly gasped.

Have you felt the energy? The pure adrenaline? The second sight? Surely you must have

noticed something by now.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Liar! If you don’t think I can’t feel it in you, you’re mistaken. I’ve been waiting years to find you, fräulein, and at last my search is over. It appears the stories are true.

“I don’t understand what you’re saying!”

“Molly, the man hasn’t said anything!” Oliver blurted, confused and nervous.

Molly, sensing that the situation was about to escalate in the wrong direction quickly, began extending her reach outside of her body. Without even thinking, the fear and the waning alcohol doubling her sense, she reached out and realized her new-found appendage was one of the soldier’s machine gun.

Without hesitation, Molly quickly pulled the gun up and into the jaw of the soldier, knocking him down with a full force.

“Hinterhalt! Überfall!” screamed one of the others, flailing to pick up his comrade.

The rest of the band quickly began firing warning shots into the air, trying desperately to avoid a real fight if possible. The blare and blasting of the gunfire sent everyone into a panic. Molly shot up and began to flee, knocking Diederich onto his behind.

Oliver, having assessed the situation, took a chance and also leapt up. Molly made it around a corner and, thanks to the distraction, was now almost invisible, hiding behind some empty waste bins. Oliver, unable to find her, crouched behind the wall, hidden as well.

If you don’t think I can’t still see you, Molly Waters, you are sadly mistaken.

“No matter!” Diederich shouted to his men, calming them down from their fury. He spoke to them in German. “She isn’t a concern of us now, she is still weak! We will have our girl when the time is right. Until then, round up the rest of the block, find the bunkers, bring them to me. I have more experiments to run and tests to be had.”

The group of soldiers spread out to the city and began searching for their neighbors, who lay dormant in their bunkers, completely unaware. Oliver had seen enough. As soon as the men with the guns were gone, he decided to do something drastic.

“Rudolph, wherever you are mate, you always called me a coward,” he muttered under his breath. “Well how about I make myself a proper Nazi killer?”

His back turned, Diederich was strolling carefully down the alley toward his men. Oliver lined up his shot just as Molly moved to the corner wall.

“No!” she whispered, but it was of no use. Oliver couldn’t hear her over the shouting and commotion.

Oliver closed his left eye and lightly stuck out his tongue, extending his right arm and gently squeezed the trigger.

Crack-blam!

Diederich stopped, his fist as fast as lightning had raised to meet the shot. Floating just inches away from the back of his skull was the bullet from Oliver’s gun. He unclenched his hand and the bullet fell, clicking onto the pavement below.

“Good shot.” His grin turning devilish.

Oliver gaped at what he had just witnessed and began to prepare for another shot, but Diederich was too fast for him. His palm closed again as swiftly as it had opened, and instead of manipulating a bullet, his invisible force was now wrapped tightly around Oliver’s neck.

Choking for air and grabbing at his throat, Oliver dropped the gun and fell to his knees. His eyes were bulging and his face was turning blue. Diederich said nothing and not once turned around. Without even missing a step, he flicked his fist and a pop. Oliver collapsed to the ground, eyes still open in confused fear. Blood trickled down his lip. His neck was broken. He was dead.

Do not test me, Waters. Diederich thought. *Do not think that we will not meet again.*

Molly, tears streaming down her face, crumbled to the ground, unable to move. She sat there, silently sobbing to herself. The Germans had rounded up several of her neighbors and brought them in shackles and chains to the intersection where Diederich stood.

“Auf Wiedersehen, Britain!” He shouted, smiling. “Wir werden uns bald sehen!”

With that, he gave an order to one of his men. The soldier pressed a button on something small and metallic on his wrist and with a bright flash the ascended into the sky on a beam of light, all within seconds.

Molly sobbed. She stayed there until morning, moving only once to hide Oliver’s gun. Her eyes red and misty, her nose crusted over, she sat there quietly as the morning patrolman assessed the damages done the night prior. They collected Oliver’s body and asked her a few questions. Once satisfied with the answer she gave them, they left with Oliver and continued to make morning rounds.

One of the officers took pity on her after noticing she was upset.

“Is there anything I can do for you, miss?” He asked.

“If you-,” she croaked. “If you don’t mind.”

She cleared her throat, stood up and stared into the eyes of the officer with great conviction.

“If you don’t mind, I need to get a cab. I need to get to Maplewood.”

Chapter 5

“Britain Shall Not Burn”

“Alright, that’s as far as I can go. Road’s been condemned here on out, you’re gonna have to hoof it. You sure this is where you want me to drop you off?” the cabbie asked, nervously.

“Yes, my... uncle’s house is just a ways behind the old asylum. He’s a hermit, you know. Lives out in the country.”

“Alright, love. Be safe.”

She thanked the man silently, not looking him in the eye when she handed him her fare, hoping he’d not see the fresh tears starting to swell again. Her eyes were already damp and bloodshot, any more crying and she’d figure she’d run out. But sure enough, the tears were there and as soon as the cab was far enough away, her choked sobs began the flow of stingy droplets and salty taste on her already cracked lips.

The walk up the path this time was almost second nature now, as any fear she once had for the place and its inhabitants were drowned out by the image of Oliver’s blood staining the pavement. His poor, wide-mouth gape as his face hit hard. His empty eyes, though looking right at Molly, not really looking at her. Looking through her to some ethereal plane that she only wished she could accompany him to.

She was already at the door, the big brass knocker already tightly clenched in her hand, before she came out of a trance. She hesitated, wondering if she’d already knocked and began to when she heard the whirrs and clicks of the locks like before. It was Bag who answered the door this time.

“Molly! I-” he started, jubilantly, but then stopped short.

Her eyes, still soaked, flittered and searched in vain to find a comforting face, but the bag only made her more distraught. She was struck with panic, wondering if this was to be her life now, staring at men and women in masks instead of real faces. These weren’t real people, she thought. They were like gods and goddesses who merely pretended to be human.

“Molly, whatever is the matter, my dear?” Bag asked, taking her by the shoulders. The sun finally pierced into the peep holes on the bag, illuminating in small circles a pair of dark green eyes. They were old, but not incredibly so, and they were worried.

Molly collapsed onto the steps in a fit of wails. Bag, confused at first, tried to catch her thinking she was falling. However, their combined weight brought him to his knees. She sat and, her legs bent beneath her, her arms hung at her side defeated, she cried. Bag, unsure of what else to do, lightly clutched her, but added tested force until he found what wouldn’t break her. They sat together for some time, him just holding her silently as she wept into his chest.

Soon others, wondering where Bag had gotten to, came to see. Tank and some of the few came over, not speaking a word, and helped Molly to her feet. They all walked, Bag still at her side, to the rickety old elevator.

. . .

Molly had been in this room for a little over an hour now. The blanket they had given her came off the bed she was resting on, and her tears had started to soak into the pillow. Only once had someone come in and that was to give her a warm meal at supper. She picked at it a bit, but ate what she could, drank the then lukewarm tea in a hurried gulp, and flung herself back onto the bed.

She was so exhausted she could barely move now, and the bed was a quiet friend, embracing her with its warmth. She fell asleep soon after, one last time did anyone enter her room, and that was to silently turn off her lights.

. . .

Her dream that night was vivid, but in a way that was still oddly hazy. She was high up in the sky, clouds rushing by as she flew over an ocean. Her shadow swept and licked the waves moving too fast to be seen, small against the water, growing larger as it passed onto a cloud. She looked ahead to see the familiar lights of London. Or was it London? It seemed to whisp and change the more she looked at it. The harder she tried to focus on it, the less easy it was to see.

A word was silently whispered in her ear, but was deafened by the ocean winds to be heard. A large chugging plane swept over her, it's huge wingspan seemed to go on for miles. The plane's engine rocketed the word again, this time more audible.

"Manhattan," the plane was saying.

Manhattan? Molly thought. What about that?

It extended its landing gears and the wheels unfolded beneath it as it prepared to descend. Suddenly, the great plane, diving like an eagle to prey, swooped over the lights of the city below, bellowing a screech so loud it rang in Molly's ears far after it was over.

The plane's landing gears, now scaley, thin legs donning three taloned fingers, clutched a round, metal object. As it seemingly neared its target, it dropped the husk of a thing and screeched once more, belting out a chant to echo the rest.

"Manhattan!" it screamed. "Manhattan!"

Suddenly, as the husk of metal struck the ground, it burst into a bright light. It's illumination burned Molly's eyes, like a second sun erupting from the earth below. Instinctively she tried to desperately squeeze her eyelids shut to shield from its light, but it was no use. Wherever she was, she had no eyelids to speak of, or at least, if she did, they no longer functioned.

"Manhattan!" screeched the bird. "Manhattan! Manhattan!"

The large explosion in the distance, a column of pure light collapsing upward into a giant cloud, rumbled and roared, destroying everything in it's blast wave. The wave, moving fast, soon

engulfed even the giant eagle, and Molly as well. Her skin was ripped from her body in an immense heat, her muscles melted and her bones disintegrated. The white hot pain scorched her very being. She screamed.

...

“Woah woah, easy now, easy now,” a voice advised. It was one she’d never heard.

Molly tried to open her eyes, but the buildup of dried tears and eye rubbish had glued her lashes together. She rubbed them and blinked, trying to see who it was.

“I’ve been to Manhattan, you know,” the voice said cheerfully. “My pa took me there when I was a little girl.”

This woman’s voice was nothing like she’d heard before. It was soft and sweet, the words dripped out of her mouth like honey. Her flat tone and more careful pronunciation intrigued Molly, and she could hear the paused breath between each syllable. She was American.

“Are you from New York?” Molly choked out. Her own King’s English felt messier than the other woman’s, and her dry tongue had scratched her voice. She coughed quickly to clear her throat.

“Good heavens, no. We ain’t rich enough to afford no New York. Nah, I’m from Richmond. That’s in Virginia.”

“I think I’ve heard of it,” Molly said, slightly embarrassed.

She finally got to get a good look of the woman sitting before her. She was young, in her mid-twenties. Her hair was tied up into a thin red bandana, blonde, but only barely. The roots of her hair clearly showed signs of coloring it. Her cheeks were high and her smile was small, very unlike the girls around her. Her skin was sun soaked and tan, soft, with dark hair faintly visible on her freckled arms if looked at in the right light. She smiled and her nose crumpled up on itself near her forehead.

Her shoulders were broader than Molly’s, as well her build. She was a good foot higher than her and probably weighed a few stones heavier. The sun’s warm, orange glow complimented her dark brown eyes well, catching glimpses of gold as she swayed. She had opened the window, and her pink strapped sun shirt that bore large white polkadots bustled about around her almost bare shoulders. Strangely she wore pants, a dark grey boiler suit that she’d cut the top off and roped around her waist so they bagged around her ankles. She wasn’t even wearing shoes.

“Manhattan was a pretty swell place, though. You ever been?”

“Oh, uh-” Molly was taken a bit aback by the informal style she spoke in. “No. I wasn’t even really there in my dream. At least I don’t think so.”

“Ah, well maybe one day me and you can go see the sights. I’ll show you Coney Island, best dogs on the planet.”

“Dogs?”

“Hotdogs, sorry. Like... uh... little sausages in a bun,” she mimed their size.

“Oh,” she blushed. “Yes, of course.”

“Sounds like a plan, Stan.”

“Oh, I’m Molly Waters, by the way.”

“Molly! Lovely name. Very dainty and shit.”

“Oh, you are very brash.”

“Brash? If that’s a limey compliment for vulgar sophistication, I’ll accept it. The name’s Sylvia Barnes. But around here they call me ‘Pilot.’”

“Oh?” Molly asked, quizzically. “And why’s that exactly?”

“I’m the best damn flier this side of the Atlantic.”

“You fly a plane?”

“Ha, airplane,” she leaned in close, her breath just on Molly’s lips. “Don’t *need* an airplane.”

Molly shuddered. This woman was sharp tongued and even sharper in her jaw bone. Her stare was menacing, almost daring Molly to challenge her. The intimidation was tense and palpable. Sylvia smiled, and suddenly the room sighed and the sun warmed again.

“You’re cheeky!” Molly grinned.

“Well, glad to see you’re alright after all,” she got up. “How’re you feeling?”

“I’m... not great.”

“But...”

“But I’m okay. At least for right this moment.”

“Well good,” she smiled again, but then her face turned more serious. “Look, I hope you don’t mind me saying this, but I just want you to know something.”

She sat on the bed again and clutched Molly’s covered knee with sincerity.

“What happened to your friend, uh-”

“Oliver. How do you know what happened?”

“Word gets around. Bag can only keep to himself for so long. What happened, though, it wasn’t your fault.”

Molly flashed back momentarily to the other night, watching Oliver being shot. She cringed and shook her head to shake away the images. But suddenly the scene of Oliver melted into the sight of the eagle, soaring over a city, screeching “Manhattan.” She shook her head again.

“I... thank you.”

“So, what can you do?” Sylvia asked.

“Not much. I’m pretty good at getting myself into trouble.”

“Nah, not that,” she crossed her legs. “Your *powers*?! What can you *do*!?”

“Oh! Well, uh, it seems that in a pinch I can... summon things.”

“Woah, like make them appear out of thin air?”

“Well, no, not so much appear, more so, if there’s something in front of me that I can’t

reach, it'll move so I can reach it."

"Sound convenient. So if you were sitting around after dinner, listening to the evening news, you'd be able to grab us all beers without lifting a finger?"

"Yeah, something like that."

Molly focused her attention on the small alarm clock sitting on the nightstand. It was out of her reach, but she put her hand out for it. The sensation was a little easier now that she'd done it more often. She felt the trickling force of her ever extending fingers, though physically they moved nowhere. Soon, the clock was wrapped in her grasp, becoming just as much her hand at the end of her wrist as her actual palm. She reeled it in slowly until it met her fingers, and she snatched it from the air.

"Well I'll be a shitting cow," Sylvia gasped. "I didn't think you meant it, but be damned if I didn't just see it."

"Is this... is this something no one else can do?"

"If there is another, I ain't ever seen it," she got up again. "Come on, we need to get you down to Bag and the Lich. They're gonna want to see this."

...

"Extraordinary! Simply extraordinary!" Lich cried, watching Molly demonstrate her ability again. "What else can you do?"

"I'm not really sure. I only figured out how to do this because I was frightened."

"I am speculating that you have been doing this since childhood, no?"

"I don't really know. When I was a little girl the sisters did used to get mad at me for things I'd never done, but I always thought the others were playing games to get me in trouble."

"That's what the Luftwaffe's been looking for all along, you see," Bag chimed in, everyone turning around to see him as he entered. "It's Hitler's greatest deception yet."

"You mean the blitz?" Molly asked.

"Precisely. I can't believe we never even realised it. Oh, it's very much about destroying Britannia as we know her, but there's a more sinister underbelly."

"They were looking for me?" she asked.

"Not just you, but the amazing ability you possess."

"Why didn't anyone tell me? I would have taken better care of myself. I would have stayed away from Oliver! He'd still be alive!"

"Molly, Molly!" Bag grabbed her arms to try and calm her down. "I should have warned you. I know. I take full responsibility for what happened last night, but you have to believe me when I say I had no idea they'd target you. Diedrich and his forces are--"

But he stopped. His eyes beneath the bag widened and his voice trembled with a sudden strike of terror.

"Oh... oh no, of course," he stepped away from Molly. "How could I have been so daft!"

Diedrich! He's the only other-"

"One like me?" Molly demanded. "The only other person on this Godforsaken planet to have this power and that slips your mind that maybe he'd be looking for me? I'm supposed to be this great hero, but I can't save anyone."

"Molly. I'm terribly sorry for my negligence getting Oliver killed. This wasn't his fight."

"Nor is it mine!" Molly snapped.

"Molly," Bag said, a trembling in his voice. "We need you now more than ever. You've witnessed first hand their plan of attack that we've been trying for months to crack."

"Do you? You need me for what? Some harebrained scheme, some death-defying mission of do-gooder heroics? Well count me out! I couldn't care less about this bloody war or the bloody people in it."

She got up close to him then, her eyes matching up with his. She breathed heavily as she spoke and chose her words with utter precision.

"I don't owe you anything. I'm sorry that I have... *whatever* it is I have. Some disease probably. Some blood clot or tumor ravaging my skull until I go bloody mental lifting things out of the blimey thin air. I'll die, thank you very much, peacefully. At home. Alone. Just like it always was."

She turned quickly, not bothering to look anyone else in the eye. She stormed out toward the elevator and pressed it's large, metallic button to call it.

"Molly," Sylvia's voice perked up the first time in this conversation. "Where are you going?"

"I just," she started, sighed, then turned around. "I just need some more time to think. Ollie just died. It's been... hard."

The elevator chimed. As the heavy doors opened, the shadows gave way to the straight lipped smile of a large man in black nazi outfit.

"Diedrich!" Bag shouted "Molly get out of the way!"

Diedrich and his two men held up weapons and fired blindly into the room. Molly, having reacted quickly enough to Bag's plea, dove out of the way just as bullets whizzed over her head, brushing the strands of hair with white hot zips.

Several of those in the room were hit, causing a few to fall in pools of their own blood. Bag and the others took cover, while Sylvia and some flew up toward the catwalk. Tank dove in front of Molly, letting the gunfire ricochet off his enormous hulk. When the reign of bullets ceased and the smoke cleared, Diedrich stood straight. His arms wrapped neatly behind his back, his coat barely swaying at his ankles. His booming voice pierced into the room and bounced off the walls.

"Good afternoon, Maplewood Institution for the Criminally Insane! I was quite surprised to find you all here, your records indicate the place has been abandoned many years prior. I see those records are in need of update."

He glanced down to where Molly had buried her head in her arms cowering behind Tank,

hoping desperately to remain invisible.

Good to see you again too, Fraulein, he thought to Molly.

How are you doing this? She thought back.

Telepathy, my dear. It's an amazing gift what we have. So full of surprises.

"You can't take the girl!" Bag shouted, now taking an offensive stance.

He threw something sharp and shiny at the two German goons. They whipped and whizzed quickly, striking them both of them square in the foreheads. A small trickle of blood came out one, and within seconds the armed guards were downed. The rest taking cover stepped out.

"*Her?*" he scoffed. "Interestingly enough, I didn't expect her to be here Alan."

"I don't use that name, Diedrich," Bag said. "I'm not that man any more."

"Ah yes, of course. Your little nicknames and all, yes yes."

He raised his hand and stepped forward, the others stepped back.

"Hmm, I know you have him here, I can sense that much. But he's not on this floor. Perhaps deeper? Where are you hiding him?"

He turned toward Bag, stopped, then raised his hand higher. Bag choked for a moment, and suddenly his feet no longer touched the ground.

"Get yer hands off o' him!" Tank screamed, prepared to rush forward. But Diedrich raised his other hand and Tank flew clear to other side of the room, his body leaving a small cracked indent where he slammed against it. He fell back towards the ground and landed unconscious on the floor below. Molly stared wide-eyed and exposed.

"I'll only ask this of you again, else I'll start going through your little troops one by one, breaking their necks until you give me an answer."

"I won't," Bag coughed. "Tell you."

"You are leaving me no other choice."

"I can't. I promised him-" Diedrich tightened his grip.

"If you do not tell me where he is then I will start killing all of your-"

He stopped when he was suddenly hit with one of the stray tables lying around. It knocked him over causing him to release Bag. As he regained his composure he stood and turned toward the source of the projectile.

There stood Molly, both hands outreached, another table floating near her prepared for launch. Diedrich, anger slowly reddening his face, reached out and clenched his fist, the table splintering into a collapsed mess.

He screamed and darted towards her, trying to grab her in his invisible grasp. But she could feel it becoming her. The same sensation of an object becoming one of her limbs, now she felt herself becoming one of his. She realized it and stabilized herself, securing her footing on the ground with her mind. Diedrich grabbed and, when confronted with an object he couldn't move, tripped over himself, in the process flinging himself into the air.

Molly reacted quickly, grabbing at his foot, making it her foot, and lifting it high into the

air. Diedrich flailed as he was caught mid-launch, and was flung toward the floor at deadly speed. He hit with a painful thud. One of the others quickly ran to Molly's aid, trying to land a hit on Diedrich, but he spotted them and threw them back. No one could get close to him but Molly.

"I must admit, Fruhlinge," he coughed. "I have never met an opponent who could best me before."

Molly smiled, crouching down ready for another go.

"But you are still *weak*."

Diedrich put his hands to his temples and directed his reflective gaze to her. The air around him seemed to bend in waves as a loud, incapacitating screeching noise exploded inside her ears, vibrating her skull and melting her thoughts. She screamed and clutched her head, her eyes were throbbing so she squeezed them shut.

The sound was everywhere. It had no direction. It was coming from inside her, like there was a chalkboard in her head and he was dragging his unkempt and dirty nails down it with an agonizing slow pace. Blood began to slowly drip from her nose.

She opened her eyes, looking through Diedrich's cold, glass stare. She saw his head, filled with nasty and evil monologue. Whatever awful and terrible things he planned to do here, he also thought that they were absolutely right. She directed her pain, the coursing anger he flung at her, swimming inside her like a typhoon of apathy. She clutched her sides aching.

Something inside her gave in like a forceful wind pushing the greenery of her thoughts into view. This had to end. He had to leave. She felt around, the pain so terrible it blinded her. With white, hot anger steeping at the edge of her visions she pushed back with a kneejerk reaction. The squealing, unsourced noise was still there, but now she felt like an echo chamber, plowing it right back at Diedrich.

"What? What is this?" He stopped, stifling a gasp. It was there now in his head too, faint, but audible.

"This is impossible." His teeth clenched.

Molly gripped tightly to the wall, barely standing. Was she causing this? Was she actually fighting back? She began to slip again, the blood rushing back out. Suddenly, he gave in, realising Molly was actually in his way.

"You might have hid him well this time, my friends, but do not think I won't be back."

Rubbing his temple lightly with a gloved hand, Diedrich left, Molly still scrambling desperately on the floor, clawing at her ears. A few tried to approach him one last time, but he swatted them away, drifting effortlessly over the bodies of his fallen comrades. The piercing noise didn't stop until after the elevator doors had closed.

Molly barely held on, her eyes bulging as she swayed and convulsed on the cold floor.

"Molly?" Sylvia asked, as she knelt down to look her in the eye. "Molly, are you alright?"

Her breath was short, her mouth gaping and gasping. She looked around and everything

began to blur together. She sighed and let her head fall back and eyes close. She was met with drifting darkness.

...

When she awoke again she was not met with the warm look of Sylvia but instead the startling vision of a faceless stare.

“Molly,” Bag asked slowly. “Are you quite alright?”

“No. My head feels like it’s a sack of potatoes.”

“Well, we’ve gotten someone to clean up the potatoes for now. What happened?”

“That noise,” Molly sighed. “There was a noise.”

“A noise?”

“A noise inside my head, see. He put it there, I could just tell. But I couldn’t just keep it in. Something inside me pushed it out.”

“A body’s natural defense,” Bag remarked. “My my, Molly, you must know what this means?”

“No, not quite, really, my head’s swimming.”

Bag stood up, patted Molly lightly on the head, then moved to the back of the room where more concerned onlookers were waiting.

“What’s it all mean Baggo?” Sylvia asked, concerned.

“It’s exactly what I’ve feared. Diedrich and his forces have found us and are looking for Crawler. they’ve been using the blitz as a cover. Alas, there is still good news.”

“That being?” Tank asked from the hall. He had clearly not been invited to the conversation, but his concerns for Molly had him come anyway.

“It would seem that Molly is something we’ve only encountered once before. She’s a Reader. An honest to god psychic.”

“But that’s a myth, ain’t it?” Sylvia said. “The only reason Diedrich is the way he is is because of experiments.”

“Or so we’re to believe,” Bag added. “We know very little about the twisted projects Hitler and his boys have been running over there in Germany. Perhaps Molly plays a greater deal more part in this than we realize.”

Sylvia furrowed her brow and stepped over to Molly. She kneeled down and propped her head up beneath her hands and slid a pillow. Molly sank back into the feather’s softness and sighed in relief.

“What was he doing here?” Molly whispered to Sylvia, not out of secrecy, but due to pure exhaustion. “How did he find us?”

“I don’t know exactly the details about that one, but I’m sure Bag will fill us in.”

“Molly,” Bag approached, tentatively. “What I’m about to ask you is something highly important and of the the utmost level of secrecy. Do you think you can handle that?”

“I suppose I can, if you get me a glass of water.”

Sylvia sprang up and ran down the hall. Bag continued.

“Molly, Diedrich’s arrival coinciding with yours here at Maplewood can only mean something of dire importance is happening on the front lines, or worse, it’s one of the most terrible coincidences to ever occur.”

Sylvia returned quickly with a glass of water in her hands. She delicately handed it to Molly, who grasped it close to her mouth with both hands. She thanked Sylvia for it, sipped, swallowed slowly, then looked back up at Bag.

“Okay, tell me then.”

Bag began to explain.

...

“You mean to say that there’s a deranged and highly psychotic man living here at Maplewood?”

Molly had regained her composure and had listened to Bag explain the situation carefully.

“I mean, I know this is an asylum and all, but I honestly thought that was just a clever ruse!”

“Molly,” Bag interrupted. “You must understand. He wasn’t always this way. He used to be one of us. He was a personal friend to many.”

“And you’re saying that the Nazi’s took him and did- did *experiments* on him? And now they know I’m here too?”

“Yes, but Molly-”

“No buts about it, Bag, this is lunacy! No, this is worse than lunacy, this is just suicidal. You’re keeping the experimental patient from Nazi scientists right here in the place you live and sleep?”

“Well, I’ll admit it’s not the best of places but we have very few places we can-”

“And you mean to tell me, you think I’m somehow related to this Diedrich fellow because we both have some psychic power?”

“Well yes but there’s a very good reason to-”

“And now you want *me* to help *you* by going into the the cage you keep the madman and try to read his thoughts?”

“I... well... yes. Molly, it’s a hard pill to swallow, but I’m afraid we have very little choice.”

Molly put her head in her hands and took a deep breath for a second. Trying to take it all in was a bit overwhelming. It was all happening so fast, she was thrust into it so quickly. She pulled up a chair and sat down momentarily.

“Alright. I think- I think I can handle this. I’m feeling a little uneasy about it, but I don’t

see much else of what I can do.”

“Right, good good,” Bag sighed. “Now, I know it’ll be a difficult task to complete given we’ve never encountered someone with your unique skills, but of course we will do the best we can to aid you.”

“Will this,” Molly thought aloud suddenly. “Will helping you do this, will it get back at Diedrich in a big way?”

“Sorry?” Bag asked, confused.

“If I help you read this crazy bugger’s head, it’ll give you information about this Diedrich fellow right? It’ll make him pay for what he’s done?”

“Well, a vendetta is hardly the best way to describe it, but yes, I suppose in a way you could say that. It’ll certainly aid us in stopping him and the rest of the Nazi’s in their tracks.”

“Then I suppose that’s really all I need. If this’ll help you get back at the man who killed my friend, then I’ll do it.”

“Oh, wonderful Molly, now know we can’t force you to do this so we’re very glad you’re-”

“How soon?”

“Beg your pardon?”

“How soon can we do it?”

“Oh. Oh well, if you’re that eager, we can do it as soon as you think you’re ready.”

Molly reached into her back pocket and felt the page she kept, the only piece left from the book Oliver had given her. It still felt bumpy from where he had signed his name, asking her to remember him no matter where she went.

“I’m ready.”

Chapter 6

“The Prisoner”

Bag pressed a button on the elevator panel for the lowest floor available, Molly and the others waiting patiently.

“Now, we’re not rushing into this, are we?” he asked, nervously. “She should go through proper training first-”

“Training from who, though?” Tank asked. “We don’t have any Readers.”

“She’s the only one besides Diedricht, Bag.” Sylvia added. “We might not get this chance again.”

Molly, ravishing in her newfound courage, driven by her now hatred for all things Nazi, piped in.

“I’ve read minds before. Honestly, this whole situation is coming on quite naturally these days. Sort of forced into the life, eh?”

“I just don’t want you to get in too far over your head, my dear.”

The doors opened and revealed a long metal hallway. It was featureless all the way down, except for a small door and a window into a white, padded room.

“Is he in there?” Molly asked, the nerves starting to creep back.

“He’s encased in the thickest walls we could afford him. They seem to block out Diedricht’s ability to read him.”

“So then I’ll have to go in there.”

“I’m afraid so.”

“Wait, maybe this isn’t such a good idea.” Tank added