

No Leaves in Autumn instantly transported me to Iceland of World War II with a heartwarming story I couldn't put down. Impeccable research and vivid writing combine in a book brimming with faith and romance. A solid choice for historical romance lovers!

~ Roseanna M. White,
bestselling author of *The Imposters* series

Terri Wangard's action-packed book, *No Leaves in Autumn*, transports us to Iceland in a little-known World War II setting. Wangard paints such a realistic picture of the setting and events that you tend to believe the author was there herself. With suspenseful drama and romance, the book's well-developed characters and intriguing plot are guaranteed to keep you engaged. I highly recommend this book to anyone who enjoys reading historical fiction, especially stories based on true events in World War II.

~ Marilyn Turk,
award-winning author of *The Escape Game*

Not many think about the Land of Fire and Ice in relation to World War II, but the unique island nation of Iceland had a special part to play. Through her immersive novel, *No Leaves in Autumn*, Terri treats readers to a lovely book that sets an enduring love story against the backdrop of Iceland's majestic landscape. As the wife of an Icelandic Viking myself, I was delighted to read about this era in the country I love and lived in. Fans of World War II stories will not want to miss out on this distinctive story.

~ Jenny Erlingsson,
author of *Her Part to Play* and
Milk & Honey in the Land of Fire & Ice

Unsung Stories of World War II - Book Two

NO
LEAVES
IN
AUTUMN

TERRI WANGARD



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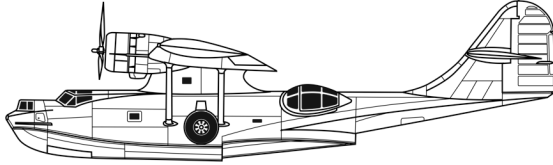
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*“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows,
is God in his holy dwelling.
God sets the lonely in families.”
Psalm 68:5-6*

Chapter One



Reykjavik, Iceland

April 1943

Disbelief filled Marie Foubert as she watched her date scurry from the dining room. Again. Before he left the first time, he'd offered a weak excuse about phoning someone. But the other four times? Did he need to continually visit the toilet? He should see a doctor.

She lowered her fork before spilling her food. Fish and potatoes, Icelandic staples, lay unappealing on her plate. Still, it was better fare than if she had stayed at the naval air base and eaten in the mess hall with her Red Cross colleagues. Dinner would have been some version of Spam and dehydrated vegetables. Fresh vegetables and fruit didn't exist in Iceland. They weren't in season, of course, but she craved a juicy apple, or a tender pear, or succulent strawberries.

Don't go there.

The doorway remained empty. Why had George invited her to dinner if he wasn't going to eat with her? Was she such

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awful company that he had to keep escaping? She should have suspected something when she had to find her own way into town.

She dragged her fork through the remains of the potatoes and scooped up a bite. The food may be boring, but she should be grateful she didn't go hungry. The war in Europe was destroying people's homes and larders, leaving them to subsist on minimal rations. Her shoulders rose and fell with a deep sigh. A beady-eyed gull stared at her in censor from the print on the wall beside her.

The waitress brought an order to the neighboring table and sent a quizzical glance in Marie's direction. After depositing the meal, she turned back and spoke in limited English. "The man eat woman other room."

What?

The waitress waved toward the other side of the dining room, hidden from view by the kitchen on one side and the cloak room on the other. "Table other room."

Understanding dawned. George was eating with another woman on the other side?

That explained a lot.

She balled up the napkin on her lap and slapped it onto the table. On shaky legs, she followed the waitress through the passageway. The change in décor served to form her first impression. Instead of waterfowl, soothing prints of Iceland's spectacular waterfalls covered the walls.

Her eyes landed on George and—was that Lettie James, a member of her Red Cross recreation group? The woman wore the blue-gray Red Cross uniform, which was required at all times. Her red hair gleamed in the soft lighting. It had to be Lettie. Marie struggled to inhale.

The recreation workers had traveled together to Iceland in early March, crammed into the same storm-tossed troopship.

Lettie laughed when they were instructed on wearing life belts. Cross their arms and their legs if they had to jump? Lettie would cross her fingers.

When the ship bucked and rolled during particularly rough weather, they and two others had ended up in a tangle, sliding across the floor. A steward joked that they resembled arm-wrestling octopuses. Lettie received a bloody nose from someone's elbow or knee, and Marie was poked in the eye. She was sure they hadn't wounded each other, but the incident didn't create a bond between them, either.

Now they had something to bond over.

Hands clenched, Marie straightened her shoulders. She approached the table with dignity, her head held high.

"Good evening, Lettie."

"Why, Marie, I didn't know you planned on coming here tonight." Eyes bright, Lettie turned to George. To introduce them?

Marie grabbed the initiative. "George, I was concerned you weren't feeling well with all your mysterious disappearances. And here you are, having a second meal."

George opened and closed his mouth like a fish in an aquarium. The color leached out of his face.

"Second meal? Disappearing?" Lettie's cheeks blossomed into a bright red that clashed with her hair. She slapped the table and shoved back her chair. "That's why you keep running off? You've been two-timing?"

She snatched her clutch, stood, and linked arms with Marie. "Are you ready to go?"

They strode out of the Borg Hotel's restaurant like they owned the place. Bright smiles hid their consternation. No one would guess Marie's heart pounded like a bass drum, battering her chest. She sucked in the cold air as they stepped outside.

Lettie dropped her arm and whirled to face the hotel.

“Ooh, that really blows my top. How dare he treat us like this? What was he thinking?”

“I don’t think he was thinking. When his mouth stopped doing the fish act, he didn’t have a word to say.” Marie pulled on her coat and buttoned it up to her chin. “Do you think he would have left both of us to pay the bills?”

“Ha. I’ll bet he planned exactly that. I didn’t bring any money. Did you? Did you have to meet him here? How are we going to get back to base?” She shivered and hurried into her coat. “It’s so cold. By late April, I’m used to temperatures in the sixties, not the forties.”

Now Marie remembered why she hadn’t spent much time with Lettie. The gal chattered nonstop.

“Sunsets after nine-thirty are what I’m not used to. In two more months, the sun will barely set at all.” Marie glanced around. “An officer from the base gave me a ride. If we start walking, someone’s bound to offer us a lift. At least it’s not raining at the moment.”

The rain was another Icelandic feature Marie found difficult to adjust to. Rain fell and stopped and fell and stopped again. The sky often wore a sullen gray guise. She’d quickly learned to appreciate periods of sunshine.

After a brief hesitation, Lettie nodded and fell into step beside her. “I hope we’ll be transferred elsewhere before winter. I know we’re supposed to be here for a year, and I don’t mind twenty-four hours of sunlight, but I don’t fancy having twenty-four hours of darkness. That will be so depressing.”

The long daylight hours offered an advantage. Outside of Reykjavik, the roads of red-lava gravel were rough for driving. Marie did not care to walk here in the dark. Thoughts of tumbling and suffering a sprained ankle, a skinned knee, or worse, a broken tooth, caused her to shudder.

A Jeep pulled up alongside them. “Good evening, ladies.”

A corporal doffed his cap. "May I offer you a ride to Camp Kwitcherbelliak?"

"You most certainly may." Lettie clambered into the Jeep before it came to a complete stop.

Marie squeezed into the back seat. "Actually, our quarters are by the hospital."

"Of course. I'll give you door service." The corporal drove, letting the Jeep bounce over the rocky road. "Did you ladies have a nice evening?"

"Oh, my." Lettie prattled away, enlightening the poor man to every aspect of their double date. "And we ate horsemeat stew. Can you imagine?"

"Horsemeat?" Marie swallowed hard. She'd heard large herds of ponies called the island home, as well as sheep, but they slaughtered the horses to eat?

Her mind drifted back to the year she was eight. She'd received a battered copy of *Black Beauty* for Christmas. The book ignited a love for horses. How she'd longed for the chance to visit a farm just once and see a real, live horse.

But apparently in Iceland, they ate horses.

The corporal's words pulled her out of her memories. "Have you had any whale meat yet? That's common hereabouts. Fairly cheap, and of course, now easy to get."

"Why is that?" The wind picked up, and Marie snatched off her garrison cap before it blew away. "Isn't it dangerous for whalers to hunt while submarines are torpedoing anything that floats?"

The driver chuckled. "I don't know about whalers. It's the Allies that are killing the sea life. All those depth charges dropped to sink U-boats, you know. The shock waves travel and wallop the whales. Or sometimes, the flyboys think they see a sub beneath the surface and fire away but ... heh, heh, heh ... it's

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a whale. Some of them wash ashore. The seabirds are gorging on them.”

“I thought whales were mostly blubber.” Lettie looked a little pale. Her horsemeat must not be settling well.

“Oh, sure, but there must be some muscle.” Their chauffeur shrugged. “Horsemeat, whale meat. Think of it as an adventure. You’re in Iceland! Live like the natives.”

“Yes. Aren’t we lucky?” The fish Marie had dined on wasn’t whale. It was like any of the fish pulled from one of the lakes of Quebec, where she had grown up. “A convoy should arrive soon from the States. I look forward to the brief respite from our monotonous diet.”

“Emphasis on brief.” Lettie was off again, jabbering about what they’d had for breakfast and what family breakfasts back home in Texas featured.

Marie tuned out the food talk and gazed around the barren landscape. Not a tree in sight. In Reykjavik, a few trees struggled to grow. Outside the city, however, nary a one. She sighed. She’d see no leaves budding in the coming weeks. Iceland was covered in moss instead. She wasn’t sure if it was because the island was created from volcanic rock or if centuries ago, settlers had cut down all the trees. Maybe the gale-force winds she heard whipping across Iceland kept trees from growing. How could the people live without them? She would miss the colorful leaves in fall.

Her drifting thoughts skidded to a stop when Lettie’s words broke through.

“I haven’t had a decent night’s sleep since we arrived nearly two months ago. I can’t believe how noisy our barracks is at night. Women aren’t supposed to snore like some of our esteemed colleagues do.” She twisted in her seat. “Doesn’t it bother you, Marie?”

“No, but I grew up in a noisy environment. Silence would likely awaken me.”

“Not me. I had my own room until I went to college, and then I had one roommate. Now I have to share a tiny space with a dozen women.”

Did Lettie realize how rude she sounded? Was she including Marie among the snorers? No one had ever complained about her nocturnal respirations.

The corporal must have noted Lettie’s *faux pas*. He glanced back. “Are you from a big family?”

“No.” Marie laced her fingers together. “I grew up in an orphanage.”

Lettie spun back around. “An orphanage?”

She sounded outraged, like Marie should have told her before. Did she consider orphans to be riffraff? Plenty of people did.

The driver stared at Marie, his eyes wide. With pity? The smile he aimed at her resembled a grimace. “Why were you in an orphanage?”

“My parents and little sister were killed in a car wreck. The other driver was drunk and didn’t suffer a scratch. I was not quite four years old.”

Lettie gasped. “How awful. What about aunts and uncles? Couldn’t anyone take you in?”

“No one wanted me.” Marie exhaled and fought to keep the bitterness out of her voice. She parroted Sister Marguerite’s well-meaning words. “Times were hard in the years after the last war.” Resentment flared. “No one needed another mouth to feed.”

A vague memory rose. A sad-eyed woman hugged Marie, but set her down in the orphanage office and walked out, never to be seen again. Who was she?

She’d once heard Sister Marguerite tell another sister about

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the woman who asked how much money Marie's parents left. "She'd gladly take the inheritance, but not the poor child. Good riddance of her."

"How many girls slept in your room?" Bless the corporal for his attempts to divert her.

"We had twelve beds, and they were usually filled. Occasionally, someone was placed with a family."

No one ever expressed interest in Marie. And fortunately for her, no one asked about her best friends, Francoise and Ozanne. They'd pretended they were sisters.

The Jeep arrived at the sprawling US naval air base, passing the sign proclaiming Camp Kwitchebelligiakin. When Marie had first seen it, she dismissed the name as an Icelandic word. Only later did she learn the humorous moniker was English, sort of, for "quit your bellyaching."

Before the driver could head for the Quonset huts that served as the American Red Cross quarters, Lettie directed him elsewhere. "Please let us out at the headquarters. I need to drop something off, and I think we should file a report about George, don't you, Marie?"

"Good idea. Especially if he tried to sneak out of the restaurant without paying for one or both meals."

The driver chuckled. "I'd like to be a fly on the wall to see how he fared."

Marie stepped carefully out of the Jeep. "We never asked your name."

He tipped his cap. "Wilmer Case, at your service."

"Thank you for your gallantry." She raised her brows as she smiled and shook his hand. He inclined his head and winked.

Inside the office, Lettie hurried off to deliver her paperwork while Marie wrote a quick explanation of their evening. As she slid her account through the adjutant's mail slot, an arm snaked around her and spun her about. A man smelling of cigarette

smoke, beer, and sweat pulled her close. His mouth attached to her neck, and adrenaline shot through her. Was he biting her? As she tried to punch at his head, she imagined fangs.

The man let out muffled words in puffs of hot air. "Ah, sweetheart, let's find somewhere private."

She thrust her elbow into his chest and shoved hard, yanking the arm from around her at the same time. He stumbled back, and she saw pilot's wings glinting on his uniform.

"What's the matter, baby doll?" His smirk broadcasted his assurance that she must find him attractive.

More like revolting.

He advanced and slipped his arms around her again. He must have as many arms as a centipede. The more she fought, the tighter he gripped. Where was Lettie? If she screamed, would anyone hear?

"Let go of me." She forced her hand upward, and her fist connected with his jaw. "Help!"

"What's the matter with you?" The man glared, rubbing his jaw.

She ran for the door. Cool air bathed her face. She raised trembling hands to her lips as her breath came in gasps.

A Jeep pulled up. The pilot hadn't followed her outside, but maybe whoever was in the Jeep would help if she needed it.

A man strode toward her. He wore pilot's wings too. He smiled, showing straight white teeth. "Good evening, miss."

"Stay away from me. I don't like Casanovas."

His eyebrows shot skyward. He raised both hands as if in surrender, or maybe to ward her off. "Pardon me, ma'am." His voice turned stiff and formal. "Don't have a good evening."

Before he disappeared inside, he skirted around Lettie, who stood stock-still at the door.

Lettie's face was mottled with ... confusion? Disgust? "Why did you do that?"

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Marie blew out her breath. Leaning forward, she braced her hands on her knees. “Did you see the pilot inside? He-he tried to ravish me.”

Lettie’s face cleared. “Tony Dever. Yeah, he thinks he’s every girl’s dream.”

“Nightmare is more like it.”

“Hmm. He gave you a hickey.” She smoothed Marie’s hair, too short to hide her neck. “But why were you so rude to Stefan Dabrowski? He’s the sweetest navy pilot here. He really is every girl’s dream. I’d love for him to notice me.” Lettie paused to take a breath. “He flies the PB_Ys, you know. Did you know the *P* and the *B* stand for patrol bomber, but the *Y* doesn’t stand for anything? That is so strange.”

Marie stood still as Lettie continued to prattle. His smile had been friendly, not slimy. Her shoulders sagged. What else would go wrong this evening?