

Chapter Two



The Klaxon alarm blared over the *Enterprise's* loudspeaker, followed by the announcement, "General quarters, general quarters, all hands man your battle stations!"

John Walsh tossed aside his magazine and hurried to the fighter squadron ready room. His commanding officer scowled as the pilots entered. "Gentleman, the Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor."

John gaped at him. The Japanese were picking a fight with them? Did they really believe they could defeat the United States of America?

The *Enterprise* should have returned to Pearl yesterday. Rough weather had hampered their efforts to refuel the aircraft carrier's escorting destroyers, so they were a day late. Would their presence have helped defend the base? Or would the carrier have been destroyed?

They had delivered a Marine fighter squadron to Wake Island several days earlier. Wake lay closer to Japan than to Pearl. The tiny coral atoll must be a plum target for the enemy.

Listen for the Chickadees

Delivering that squadron must be a death sentence for the men.

John's friend Glen Palmer slumped in his leather recliner. Scowling at nothing, Glen muttered his main concern about the attack. "We're supposed to leave for the mainland on Saturday. Christmas in Bremerton, I told my wife. She's gonna meet me there. Now we're at war. We're not heading east any time soon."

John clenched his teeth to avoid snapping at him. Pearl had been attacked with how many men killed, and Glen was whining about missing his leave?

The squadron leader continued. "Gentlemen, this is the real thing. It is not a drill. I don't need to tell you eighteen planes from Bombing Six have already launched to fly an air search between us and Pearl. They flew right into the hornet's nest. Some of our own men have already died."

Shocked exclamations rose from the assembled pilots. John tried to picture the scene—planes shooting at them, engines flaming, bullets tearing flesh, men bailing out. He shifted in his seat.

"We've received a report of an enemy force to our southeast. Torpedo Six and the rest of the dive bombers will be accompanied by our A Flight. B Flight stays here to guard the ship."

John blew out his breath. He belonged to A Flight's Red Section. He nodded to Glen, who was in B Flight, and headed for his Wildcat. What did they hope to accomplish? The enemy planes had to come from at least two carriers. If they found the carriers in the fading light, did they really expect their few airplanes to sink them? More likely, they'd all be shot down.

After searching an empty sea for an hour and with darkness descending, the A Leader took the bombers back to the carrier.

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To avoid crowding on the deck during a night recovery, the Wildcat fighters were ordered to head for Pearl and land at their base on Ford Island.

When the harbor came into view, John gaped at the sight. Fires glowed all around the anchorage. The Navy had been thrashed. Battleships still burned, and one of the behemoths had rolled over.

Lowering their landing gear, the planes entered their normal traffic pattern, which led them over the carnage of Battleship Row.

One of the ships started shooting. In the next moment, everyone was firing at them. As the Tail End Charlie, John watched in horror as one plane crashed in flames. In the light of the tracer bullets, he glimpsed another pilot bail out of his burning plane, much too low for a safe landing.

He doused his lights and turned away. The Army's Hickam Field beyond Hospital Point might be safer. He flew south and passed close by a ... battleship? Why was a battleship moored near the hospital? Bullets fired from the battleship whizzed at him, clanging into his plane. On his approach to Hickam, more bullets zeroed in on him. He wasn't welcome anywhere.

Swinging back toward Ford Island, John ignored normal traffic patterns. His engine coughed and spit. He needed to land. Now. He touched down too close to the end of the runway. Mashing the brakes, he spun off the runway and onto the tiny nine-hole golf course beside it. Nearby, another bullet-pocked Wildcat tilted in a sand trap.

Bullets sprayed his plane, and his windshield shattered as a bullet whizzed past his head. He scrunched down. The tower had encouraged him to come in, so Ford Island couldn't have been taken over by the Japs. Could it? Or was it a trick?

Loud swearing penetrated his confusion.

Listen for the Chickadees

“Stop shooting, you idiots. I’ll make sure you’re all court-martialed. Are you mad?”

John peered through the windshield shards. Hank Sherman stalked toward a group of Marines, brandishing his sidearm. That must be his Wildcat in the sand pit. John scrambled out of his cockpit and promptly collapsed.

“You all right, Walsh?” Sherman stepped closer, still leveling his pistol at the Marines.

One of John’s wheels had plowed into a golf hole. That would make it hard to take off. “Been better.”

One of the Marines inched forward. “You’re covered in blood.”

John touched his cheek with the back of his hand. It came away wet and sticky. Exploring higher, he discovered something hard embedded in his temple and pulled out a shard of Plexiglas. “Someone shot up my windshield.” He held out the shrapnel. “Was that you?”

The Marine stepped back. One of his pals said, “We thought you were Japs.”

“Ha!” Sherman continued to wave his gun at them. “Do we look like Japs? See that plane? That big white star? That’s an American star. We were in the landing pattern. It’s what the *Enterprise’s* planes always do.”

“You’re from the *Enterprise*?” Another Marine raised his sidearm. “Big E isn’t here.”

John stood and limped toward Sherman. Another piece of shrapnel protruded from his thigh. He tugged it free and winced. “The *Enterprise* will enter port tomorrow. Will you fire on it too?”

The first Marine approached John. “There’s an emergency treatment center set up at the BOQ. Let’s get you over there and patched up.”

He and another Marine grabbed John’s arms and hauled

him to a nearby jeep. They took off, bouncing across the golf course. An ambulance prepared to pull away from the barracks as they drove up. John wobbled out of the jeep, feeling woozy.

“John?”

He turned slowly at the shocked feminine voice.

“John? Oh, my. John!”

A nurse rushed up to him. She gently cupped his cheek and brushed his hair from his forehead. “Oh, John. They shot you down, didn’t they?”

He blinked. Something about her was familiar. Concentrating hard, his vision cleared, and she came into focus. He recalled a long-ago day when he and his best friends, Daniel and Stefan, had been building a tree house. Daniel’s little sister and cousin insisted on interfering. Daniel’s sister Theresa always rubbed him the wrong way, but their cousin always smiled like she was happy to see him.

Could it be?

“Glor ...” He cleared his throat. “Glory Hallelujah?”

Her soft “Humph” didn’t match the sudden sparkle in her eyes. She pulled him into a hug that took his breath away.

Wow. Her embrace chipped away at the day’s roughness. His arms circled her without any thought on his part. He could become used to this. But then she pulled away. Holding him at arm’s length, she inspected him.

“A battleship’s gunners shot up my plane, and then these guys tried to finish me off,” he said.

Someone behind Gloria muttered, “Morons.”

“Let’s get you into the ambulance and over to the pier for the Naval Hospital.” Gloria tried to turn him toward the waiting car.

John dragged his feet. “I live here.” He flapped his hand at the barracks. “I just need an aspirin for a lousy headache.”

She twisted her mouth as if he was a whiny boy.

Listen for the Chickadees

“Okay, we’ll go in here, but you’re bleeding in two places. We need to clean you up.”

After everything that had gone wrong today, here he was with Gloria Bloch fussing over him. Who would have thought? Gloria Bloch ... here ... in Pearl Harbor. When? How? Why hadn’t Daniel warned him?

Later. He would figure that out later. Right now, he needed to lie down.

* * *

On Monday, the air remained pungent with smoke and another ghastly odor. John’s eyes burned, his nose flared, and his throat closed. He held back a cough. It seemed disrespectful to choke on the fumes of fellow Navy men. That ghastly odor was their burned flesh.

The *Enterprise* glided silently into the harbor. Its sailors lined the deck, their heads bare, gazing at the destruction of Battleship Row. Earlier that morning with the aid of a cane, John had wandered all over Ford Island, tallying the previous day’s losses. Several battleships sunk. One overturned, as well as a former battleship, now a target ship, on the other side of the island. The beached battlewagon that fired on him was the *Nevada*, now towed from Hospital Point across the channel to Waipio Point. The *Arizona* was no more than twisted metal.

Unbelievable carnage. The flames still spewing from some of the ships lashed him with heat. Heavy black oil escaping from ruptured bunkers stained the sea. Everything in the harbor wore a thick, gummy coat of oil. He had to watch his step. Ford Island was covered with broken pieces blasted off the ships. Even an anchor. And body parts. A group of men removed the bodies piled on the shore. John turned away.

A twinge in his leg reminded him of his part in the chaos,

and a chuckle escaped him. Little Gloria Bloch had insisted he needed stitches and gently cleaned the gash on his thigh. He imagined if Theresa had been the nurse and shuddered at the thought. She would have taken pleasure in causing him pain. Not her cousin. When a harried doctor sat down to stitch his wound, Gloria held his hand. He hadn't missed the way her thumb strayed to his pulse.

A corpsman must have given him some kind of painkiller. The needle hadn't hurt as the doc mended his gash. Still, relief had filled John when a simple bandage proved sufficient for his head.

He blamed the painkiller for his loopy behavior. He groaned as he recalled his words to Gloria. "I made a hole-in-one when I flopped my plane onto the golf course. I oughta take up golf."

She'd grinned her amusement but, thankfully, hadn't said anything.

John's gaze strayed across the channel to the Naval Hospital. Yesterday had been Gloria's day off, but she'd put in more than a dozen hours with the attack. The hospitals must be overworked, so no time off today, either, no doubt. He studied the still-burning wreck of the *Arizona* and thought of all the burn injuries the men must have sustained. His flight leader crashing into a house last evening replayed in his mind. John had gotten off easy with only two minor lacerations.

After *Enterprise* was secured to the wharf, Glen Palmer disembarked from the gangway. He gawked at John and his cane. "We heard a lot of our planes were shot down."

John nodded. "Blue Section was wiped out. All three of them, dead. Killed by our intrepid sailors and Marines."

Service trucks swarmed on the wharf. *Enterprise* was prepping to sortie again soon. He nodded at a stack of crates. "Any idea what's in the offing?"

Listen for the Chickadees

“Scuttlebutt says we’re gonna hunt for the villains.”

Again, unease spiraled through John. By now, the enemy should have retreated. Even if they hadn’t, what could one carrier accomplish against their fleet?

Rumors floating around the island claimed a submarine had been sunk trying to sneak into the harbor, and that one prisoner had been captured. A fleet of enemy submarines hanging around Hawaii to finish off any ship not damaged in their attack sounded like a safe bet to John.

His musing halted at Glen’s next words.

“We’re gonna avenge Pearl Harbor. Those sneaky devils will rue the day they laid a hand against us.” Glen stared across the island at the smoke still rising from the *Arizona*. “We’ll make them pay.”

“What happened to Christmas in Bremerton?”

A careless shrug. “I’ll send Lois a telegram to stay home. We’ve got work to do here.” Glen turned to him. “You’d better report aboard. With that cane, I’m guessing you won’t be coming with us.”

John’s plane wouldn’t be going, either. After hauling it off the golf course, mechanics found a five-inch shell in the Wildcat’s Pratt & Whitney engine. A dud. Had it detonated, John would be dead.

John hobbled aboard the carrier and tried to avoid all the men hurrying about. Instead, they stepped aside upon seeing his bandaged head and the cane, the awe in their gazes making him self-conscious.

Entering the ready room, he found the squadron commander, who gave him a double take. “Glad to see you’re still among the living, Walsh. But you’re not heading out with us. Stay here and heal.”

John gathered his gear and departed.

Back on the wharf, he looked around. He should pay a visit

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to the *Nevada*, find the guys who shot him and make them aware of what their deeds had accomplished.

Or better, a visit to the Naval Hospital. Call on the little girl who had delighted in climbing trees, particularly the one with Daniel, Stefan, and his tree house. She sure wasn't a little girl anymore.

Yeah, that held much more appeal. He had a slew of questions for her. His friend Daniel would be shocked if he knew John's thoughts regarding his little cousin.

Gloria had always been friendly, but now she was a caring woman, dedicated to helping others. And she was gorgeous.