

The Eyes of the Enemy



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Prologue

June 6, 1944—Helmerton, Nebraska

It was still dark when the shouting began in the Syverson home. Even on one of the longest days of the year, the first rays of early morning sunlight hadn't yet appeared when the joyful cries sounded from the living room and raced to the sleeping family's beds.

“It's on! It's on! THE INVASION'S ON!”

Kathy Syverson rolled over and barely managed to get her feet planted on the chilly wooden floor before she fell out of bed entirely. She pulled her curly rust-colored hair out of her face and looked over at her alarm clock. She hadn't been awake this early since the last time she helped with the harvest on her Uncle Morten's farm.

She was still getting her bearings when she heard the *thump! thump! thump!* of excited footsteps racing up the stairs. Outside her room, she could hear the rest of her family stirring and stepping into the hallway to greet the one person who hadn't been asleep.

“They hit the beaches right at H-Hour! Perfect timing! France is seven hours ahead of us, you know, so they've been fighting since around eleven. I knew I should have stayed up and listened for it.”

Kathy grinned to herself as she got up to join the gathering. The excited voice outside her room belonged to Andy, the

youngest of her three older brothers. At age sixteen, he was counting the days until he could enlist in the Army and join the World War the country had been fighting for the past two and a half years. He knew what was happening on all the battle fronts around the globe, from the fight against Japan in the Pacific Ocean and in China to the fight against Germany and Italy in Europe. For the past few days, as rumors and reports claimed the Allies were about to cross the English Channel and invade France, he hadn't talked about anything else. It was actually a little surprising that he *hadn't* stayed up all night listening to the family radio for news.

By the time she stepped into the hallway, her parents were standing in front of Andy, her mother looking cross while her father hung slightly back, looking sleepy. "Andrew Syverson!" her mother exclaimed, slightly shaking a head full of curlers. "What on earth are you doing at this hour? You'll wake half the neighborhood, let alone all of us!"

"But, Ma!" Andy cried. "We're finally sticking it to the Krauts..."

"Well, they won't have beaten Hitler by breakfast," her mother chided, cutting him off. "You can catch up on everything then." She glanced around at the rest of the family before redoubling her glare at him. "Now, go back to bed! Your father has an important meeting first thing today."

Andy groaned in protest, but like all the Syverson children, he knew better than to argue. He turned and slumped back down the stairs instead, heading back to the radio. Before she went back into her room, Kathy exchanged glances with her seventeen year-old sister Ingrid. She looked more annoyed than anyone else. Kathy figured Andy must have interrupted her beauty sleep or something. Her oldest brother, twenty-two year-old Lew, wasn't home

yet. He worked as a foreman on the night shift at the electric motor plant just outside of town.

There was one other member of the Syverson household, and Kathy found herself thinking of him as she went back to bed. Her middle brother, twenty-year-old Danny, was on the other side of the world. Not in Europe, among the men storming the beaches at that very moment, but in the Pacific, as a United States Marine. He had already been through one battle, and when they last heard from him, his unit was training for its next campaign. One of her brothers may have been excited by the thought of going into battle, but she couldn't help thinking about the other brother who had actually done it.

Kathy loved everyone in her family, of course, but Danny was special. She was only fourteen, and as the youngest child, she often felt like she got lost in the daily bustle. Danny had always looked out for her, and she had missed that since he left. She also missed talking to him about the things they both enjoyed, things that didn't interest most girls her age, like baseball and the suspense-filled radio dramas she listened to every week. She knew that Danny was off fighting for his country, for freedom—for *her*—but she still wished he could be home instead.

She turned on her bedside lamp and opened the drawer of her nightstand, reaching inside it to pull out a handful of small coins. Danny had sent them to her, a few at a time. They were from all over the Pacific, even as far away as Australia. When she'd gotten the first batch, she carried them around in her pocket, until one day when she got them mixed up with her American money and tried to buy a bottle of soda pop with one. Now they stayed next to her bed, where she could take them out and look at them when she felt her brother's absence too much.

As she held some of the coins, a song came into her head. She had to think for a moment before she realized what it was—an Australian tune called “*Waltzing Matilda*.” In one of Danny’s letters, he had mentioned that it was his division’s battle hymn. She had only heard it a few times, but now it was perfectly clear in her mind. She was even able to hum it to herself.

The tune was still in her head as she put the coins away and flopped back into bed. The last thing she remembered thinking was what a surprisingly effective lullaby it made. Then she was asleep again.

Chapter One

August 12, 1944—Helmerton, Nebraska

“Get out of here, you dirty Japs!”

“Why aren’t you in a camp somewhere?”

“You’d best be glad I don’t have my beebie gun with me!”

Kathy heard the voices and rushed to the rescue. The taunts being hurled across Helmerton’s town park could only mean one thing. Some friends of hers were in trouble.

Sure enough, she spotted a group of boys surrounding two smaller children. Eight year-old Morten Fong was trying to defend his older sister, ten year-old Maddie, who cowered behind him. He swung his fists at several of the boys in turn, but they all dodged him easily, laughing as they did. Finally, one of the boys lunged in and pushed him into his sister, sending them both tumbling to the ground.

“Oh, so solly!” the boy said in a fake Japanese accent. He reached up to his face and pulled his eyelids taut, mockingly imitating the way an Oriental person’s eyes looked. “Please no report me to honorable Tojo!”

By that time, Kathy was on the scene. She grabbed the nearest boy and shoved her way past him, putting herself in the middle of the circle. After a quick check to make sure the Fong children were all right, she turned to face their tormentors. As she had expected, their faces were all new

to her—probably children of families that had just moved to town. Fortunately, they were all smaller than she was.

“Hey! What are you doin’?” cried the boy she had pushed out of her way.

“You ain’t protecting these Japs, are you?” another boy shouted angrily.

“They’re not Japs!” Kathy shouted back at them. “The Fongs are *Chinese*. China’s one of our allies.”

The boys hesitated, gathering around the biggest of them as they looked curiously at her and the Fong children. She turned and saw that Morten was already back on his feet. Maddie, however, was still on the ground whimpering. She offered a hand to help the girl up.

“What are a couple of Chinese kids doin’ here?” another of the boys said at last.

“Their family has lived in Helmerton for as long as there’s *been* a Helmerton,” said Kathy. “Morten’s even named after my uncle. Haven’t you been to Fong’s Market before?”

She pointed toward the edge of the park, where the market was clearly visible. In its window was a poster with American and Chinese flags crossed in a “V” for “victory,” and the words, “PROUD TO BE AMERICAN CHINESE.” That made all the boys stop and think. At least some of them had been there before.

“Yeah!” Morten cried belligerently. “So you guys knock it off and leave us alone!” He stepped out in front of Kathy, his fists up and ready again. Kathy wondered if she would have to grab him and pull him back before he started the fight all over.

By that time, the fracas had caught the attention of others in the park. Among them was Kathy’s best friend,

Robyn Taber, a small, wiry girl with short brown hair and eyeglasses. She had run over and was hovering just outside the range where the boys might notice her.

Fortunately, the boys had grown tired of their game. The biggest of them rolled his eyes at Morten and walked away, calling for his friends to follow. Once they reached a safe distance, Robyn dashed over to Kathy's side. "Are you all right?" she asked breathlessly.

Before Kathy could say anything to Robyn, Maddie threw her arms out and hugged her from behind. "Kathy, you saved us!" she cried. "I was so scared!"

"Aw, I would have licked 'em," said Morten, although Kathy couldn't help noticing the relief on his face now that the danger was past.

Maddie spotted it, too. "You would not," she chided him, slapping him lightly on the arm.

Kathy laughed. "Let's just be glad you didn't have to find out," she told them.

"Who *were* those boys?" Robyn asked.

"Just some new kids in town," Kathy sighed. The electric motor plant where Lew worked had drawn a lot of new people to the community in recent months. That and the need for people to work on farms in place of the men who had gone to war.

"They thought we were Japs!" cried Maddie.

"*I ain't* no Jap," Morten declared, still looking like he was ready to punch anyone who suggested otherwise.

Now it was Kathy's turn to roll her eyes at the boy. "Why don't we get you home before you start any more rumbles?" she teased.

“We were going to Grammy’s,” Maddie told her.

“Well, that’s even easier,” said Kathy, her face brightening. “It’s on my way home.”

Kathy shared a special bond with Maddie and Morten. Their families were two of the three that had founded Helmerton back in 1899. The children’s grandmother was the old widow Hannah Fong, Helmerton’s last surviving founder. According to the town’s official history, her husband Charlie had been a railroad worker before he met Kathy’s grandfather, Helmer Syverson, and the town’s other founder, Olaf Sommervold. Kathy still remembered him from when she was little. He used to sneak her a piece of penny candy whenever her mother went shopping at the market. Widow Fong, on the other hand, had always been more reclusive. Some people said it was normal for Chinese women to let their husbands handle everything outside the home. Others with more vivid imaginations believed she practiced some kind of ancient Chinese mystical arts she had brought with her from Hong Kong. But Kathy had never paid attention to those stories. Widow Fong had always seemed like a normal old lady to her.

Robyn tagged along with them as they walked through town, stopping only to look over the movie posters as they passed the theater. “Aw, I hope Peter Lawford does another picture soon,” she moaned as she caught up to them again. “Something as heroic as *The White Cliffs of Dover*.”

“I want to see *Dragon Seed* next,” said Kathy. “Katharine Hepburn’s playing a Chinese freedom fighter!” She had idolized Katharine Hepburn for years, ever since the last time *Little Women* played in town. They had the same hair color and spelled their names the same way, and she had adopted the movie star’s style of wearing trousers instead of dresses.

“Do you really think Katharine Hepburn can play a Chinese woman?” Robyn wondered. “She doesn’t look much like the Fongs.”

“They have makeup men for that,” Kathy said dismissively. “I just think it’s good they made a movie that’ll remind people the Chinese are on our side. Maybe then Maddie and Morten won’t get picked on.”

Robyn mulled over the idea. “I guess you’re right,” she conceded. “I was just hoping for something else. We never have enough to do around here.”

“What are you talking about?” said Kathy. “We just did another scrap drive and helped with the Red Cross packages, and Ingrid’s already getting ready for our next turn at the Canteen in North Platte.”

“But that’s all war stuff!” Robyn complained.

“And a war *movie* isn’t?” said Kathy, trying unsuccessfully to stifle a laugh.

“Oh, you know what I mean,” said Robyn. “We get all the boring parts of the war. Over in Kearney, they’ve got an Army Air Field. Wouldn’t it be swell having all those dashing pilots around, and watching them fly through the sky over us?”

“I’d like that!” Maddie cried excitedly. Kathy laughed again, not bothering to hide it this time.

Robyn’s face flushed slightly. “Sure, go ahead and laugh,” she grumbled. “You have a brother in the fight, so you get to hear all about what’s going on. The war’ll be over by the time my brothers are old enough to join up.”

“Danny never tells us about what the fighting is like,” said Kathy. With a grin, she added, “But you’re welcome to borrow Andy if you want to.”

It didn't take much longer to drop Maddie and Morten off at Widow Fong's house. Robyn left them at that same point, so Kathy was by herself when she reached home. Their conversation made her pause for a moment, looking at the Service Banner hanging in the front window. Before long, a second blue star would be added to it, the sign of a second family member on active military duty. The notion didn't thrill her as much as Robyn might imagine.

Her mood picked up when she walked into the house and found four small brown envelopes on the front table. Each was marked, "WAR & NAVY DEPARTMENTS V-MAIL SERVICE—OFFICIAL BUSINESS." It was a group of letters from Danny. They usually came in groups like that. For one thing, Danny often wrote a different letter to each member of the family. For another, sometimes there would be a logjam at the Navy censorship office, after which several of his letters would go through at once. Now there was a letter waiting for her, as well as one for each of her siblings. She guessed that her parents had already taken the letters sent to them. Danny always numbered his envelopes, and numbers "1" and "2" were missing.

She snatched up her letter and pulled it open. The letter inside was a small copy of a single page—Danny's original letter was still overseas, where it had been photographed onto microfilm for shipment. Still, a copy was better than nothing. Her eyes quickly devoured the brief message he had written:

Hey Squirt,

How's your summer going? I bet it's not as hot as it's been here. At least I hope it hasn't. You'd probably all melt!

But at least it's still quiet. With all this R&R, we'll be more than ready when it's time to fight again.

I'm glad you liked the coins I sent you. I'll get you some Jap ones when we ship out [the rest of the sentence had been blacked out by a censor]. There'll be plenty lying around for me to choose from, and the Japs won't be needing them any more, if you get my meaning.

What have you been up to? What's going on with The Shadow these days? I've only heard a couple of shows on the Armed Forces Radio. And how are the Belles doing this year? The only scores we get are from the major leagues.

Kathy smiled to herself. Danny always wanted all the news from home he could get, and he always asked his family members about the things that were special to them. In her case, *The Shadow* was a radio adventure they listened to together, and the Racine Belles were her favorite team in the girls' professional ball league that had started the year before. She would have to write back with all the details, maybe even so much that she would have to spend the extra money for sending a regular letter instead of V-mail.

By the end of the evening, she had heard all the other news Danny had written to the family. His unit was still at its training base, somewhere in the Pacific. She always imagined a giant summer camp when she heard about the place, with thousands of young men practicing their military skills. If there wasn't a war going on, it might have even sounded like fun.

As she got ready for bed, she took some of the foreign coins out of her nightstand again and looked at them for a

while, turning them over in her hand. By the time she put them away and turned out her light, the “*Waltzing Matilda*” song was playing in her head again. It had been doing that regularly during the past several weeks. As she drifted off to sleep, the tune seemed to be carrying her off, taking her someplace very far away...