

REDEEMER  
Book One of the Redeemer Chronicles

by

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## CHAPTER ONE

The punch clock bit holes in Rosie's time card with a satisfying *ka-chunk*. Another week's work done and another thirty-one dollars and forty-seven cents to tuck into the bank. Rent got paid fast with six single working girls living in a three bedroom house, everybody putting in their ten dollars a month from the first week's paychecks and another ten from the second week, for household food. Sundays they cooked for the week, because nobody had the energy when they got home from work. Bread, pies, roasts--things that could be eaten cold and brought for lunch. Practical matters. Things the men coming home from war never had to think about, because their mothers or wives or sisters had always made certain they were attended to. Rosie made her own lunch, and wondered if her fiancée even knew how.

And the rest, well. Everybody spent a little on Friday nights, didn't they? Dinner at the diner, a celebration of the work week ending. Rosie's stomach rumbled, notification of a good appetite after a day's work. And if it was just a burger and shake, and not a movie afterward, that only made sense. Men were coming back from the European theatre. Theatre, as if they'd been out for an evening's entertainment instead of being sent away for months and years to fight and die for their countries. Anyways, they were coming back and that meant they'd need work, and Rosie wouldn't be a riveter anymore. Neither would Sally or Irene, or any of the other girls at the house, and how were they going to pay rent if none of them could work? Better to skip the movies, maybe, and save a few more pennies toward

the future.

Somebody jostled her from behind. "Hey, Rosie, c'mon, either punch in for overtime or get out of the way! I got a letter from my Donny last night, he's coming home in a month, so I only got four Fridays left til I'm somebody's girl again. I gotta make the most of 'em!"

A wolf-whistle and raucous laughter punctuated by applause split the air. Rosie shifted away from the punch clock and waved her time card in the air. "Another day another dollar.."

"Now let's go and make 'em holler!" Somehow a dozen women clocked out at once, the hulking black clock's two-minute hand clicking loudly over the bite of its chunky teeth. Then there was a mass of girls heading down the echoing hall, their voices bouncing off steel walls and shaking the bare bulbs that dangled to provide light. Rosie swept along with them, elbowing back when she got elbowed, smiling, helping tug grey coveralls off slim shoulders. Men wore their slacks and button-downs beneath those coveralls, but the girls were a rush of dungarees and nipped plaid shirts by the time they reached the break room they'd converted into a changing area.

Household mirrors lined its walls. Rows of metal clothes racks, welded by women who'd just learned the skill, bore dresses and high-heeled shoes looped over wooden hangers. The room was crowded already, women pouring in from all over the factory. Big girls, little girls, girls younger than Rosie's twenty-two years, and on the other end were the mothers and grandmothers in their thirties and forties and even fifties. Rosie thought they were admirable. She'd been working since the war began, since she was eighteen, and it was all she knew. To start work in a factory at forty-five, take a job after being a mother and living through the Great War, to have that initiative and willingness to change, that was the kind of woman she wanted to be someday. Bold and beautiful, because the riveters-- whatever their actual job--all seemed beautiful to Rosie.

"Rosie, what is it, you've got lead in your pants today? Scoot!" Someone from the punch clock line elbowed her out of the way and fell into a gossiping group as Rosie stepped aside. "I, for one, can't wait until the boys get home. I mean, look at my fingernails. Is that worth thirty dollars a week? No, I don't think it is. And my hair. I had to cut it, even pin curls take too long. All I want to do is marry some handsome soldier, have some babies and never work again." The rest of her litany was muffled as she squirmed into a dress, but others took up the conversation, half complaining and half happy.

"Seems like half the plant's already quit. I've been on double shifts all week. Did you know Carol Ann's husband is back? She just up and left three days ago. And before that it was Ruby. No, the other Ruby. The machinist. Yes, just last week, and I didn't even know she was married. Funny the things we know about each other and the things we don't. I mean, I know you stuff your bra with tissues, Ethel--!"

"I do not!" Outrage broke above the rest of the babble, then was modified by false dignity: "I stuff it with cotton batting."

More laughter swept the aisles. Rosie slipped between racks, searching for her own dress. It popped out from a rack as if by itself, green pinstripes folded so it looked improbably thin. Rosie took it, then ducked to look through the remaining outfits on the bar. "Irene. Thank goodness, I thought maybe my clothes had come to life." She toed her work shoes off and shrugged her coveralls down before slipping the dress on.

Her housemate grinned through the clothes, then let them swing down again as she pulled her own dress on. "Did you hear Carol Ann's husband is back? She quit Tuesday. And I just heard Maxine's gone too, as of last night. I tell you what, Rosie, if I was any of them I wouldn't have gone running home to my husband, not if that sheik they've hired was my new supervisor. Have you seen him? His name's Johnny," Irene went on without waiting for an answer. "Back from Europe since March, he got his hip shot up and has a limp. But he's

swell, Ro, you should see him. All pale and convalescent, with haunting dark eyes. Working the night shift, they say it's so he doesn't have to face so many people at once, but I think it's because the girls are friendlier at night. Even Carol Ann was stuck on him, and her married it turns out! Shame, shame, Mrs. McKay!"

Rosie flattened her hands against her stomach, smoothing faint wrinkles from the fabric, then frowned over the clothes rack at Irene. "Carol Ann McKay?"

"Sure, honey. Do you know any other Carol Anns working here?"

"No, but Carol Ann McKay isn't married."

Irene pushed the racked dresses apart again, peering through them at Rosie. "Are you sure? Say, you look swell, Ro. The green really suits you. Is Rich home? He'll be a happy man to see his girl looking so good."

A cold pang ran through Rosie's belly, cutting off any hint of hunger. She felt like Betty, the girl whose Donny was coming home soon. Rosie was glad Rich was coming home, of course she was, but he wouldn't like her working, and she didn't know how else to be. "Not yet, no, he isn't. And you know how things are there. Anyways, yes, I'm sure Carol Ann's not married. I've known her since I was twelve. McKay's her maiden name."

"I know how things are there," Irene muttered. "But does Rich?" She stepped through the racks, pulling her shoes on as she came, and spun a quick circle to send her skirt flaring. "Do I look swanky, hon?"

Rosie glanced up, then looked again, a smile blossoming. Irene wore green, too: a full-skirted swing dress in silk rayon with white accents. "You're beautiful. Got a hot date tonight?"

"I hope so. I'm going to the USO homecoming. Planning to meet me an officer."

Dismay creased Rosie's forehead. "Not you too, Rene."

Irene shrugged and spun again, making both her skirt and her hair flare again. She was

a real beauty, not just strong and confident from working with machines and doing a man's job all day. Her hair was an auburn you couldn't get from a salon, though a lot of girls tried, and her fair skin hadn't a freckle on it. "What else am I going to do? The men will need the jobs."

"Go to Hollywood," Rosie said, only half kidding. "Be in the pictures."

Irene rolled her eyes. "The things you say, hon. But the USO's closer and a sure thing. Won't you come along? It'll be fun. Might as well enjoy it before Rich gets home, right?"

Rosie pursed her lips and glanced at her own cotton shirt-dress. "I'm not dressed for it. And I've been sweating all day."

"We've all been sweating," Irene argued. "You look pretty as a picture, and we can stop at home on the way for a spit bath. You can borrow a dress if you want to doll up. Come on, say yes."

"Oh, all right. Just so I can watch the officers fight over you." Rosie tucked her coveralls under her arm, glad it was Friday and she could scrub them and let them dry over the weekend. "Are you ready?" They joined the flow of girls heading outside, bits of gossip passing over them and Rosie adding her piece as their heels clacked against concrete floors. "Did you say Maxine quit too? That's strange. I saw her yesterday, she didn't say anything about leaving."

"Maybe her fella came home last night."

"No, she doesn't have one. Max has never gone with anybody. It's just her and Ruby all the time, thick as thieves, ever since high school. I know for a fact three boys asked Ruby to prom and she went with Max anyway because Max didn't have a date."

Irene rolled her eyes again, though she smiled. "You just know everyone, don't you, hon? Small town girl."

"Detroit's not that small."

"It is compared to New York!"

Rosie laughed. "What isn't, compared to New York? Anyways, you're the one who came out here to work."

"Well, sure, hon, I was seventeen and Mama told me to marry Danny O'Brien or get out. She had it all set up, but he was bad news, Rosie, he really was. I knew a couple of the girls he went steady with. Nobody walks into doors that often, you know? So I got on the train and came out here where I knew I'd get work. Mama still hasn't forgiven me."

"See? You know the girls you grew up with, I know the ones I did, that's all. Maybe everywhere's a small town. Wait." Rosie scanned the women around them, looking for the one who'd spread the other piece of gossip she'd heard. "Someone said Ruby quit too, machinist-Ruby, that they didn't know she was married either. But that's Maxine's Ruby. They both quit?"

"Sure, I guess so. Why, is that so strange?"

"No, I just thought they..." That they were like me, Rosie finished silently. Wanting to work. Liking the job, the independence, being new women for a new era. But she'd thought Irene was like that, too, and "Look, Rene, I think I'm going to stop by Max and Ruby's place and see what the story is. I'll meet you at the USO later."

"Sure you won't." Irene lifted her hand to shield her eyes as they stepped outside into sunlight reflecting hard off the factory's walls. Heat rose in shimmering waves off the asphalt, and not just Rosie and Irene, but all the girls heading for town faltered. Irene gasped and fanned herself. "I thought it was hot in the factory. We're both going to need to wash up before we go to the USO, and I know you, Rosie Ransom. If I let you go see Max and Ruby alone you'll never get to the dance. So we'll go there and then home for a sponge bath and then to the party. Jeez but it's hot! I'm catching the bus and hang the expense, if I walk my dress will melt right off."

"That'll get you an officer for sure." Rosie laughed and skipped out of reach as Irene threatened her with a fist, but neither tried harder than that to attack or escape. Too hot, and the air much too muggy. "The bus will be stifling too, Rene. And it'll smell worse than we do."

"Faster, though. Besides, doesn't it go right by Max's place? We can kill two birds with one stone. Maybe they'll want to go out with us. I'm getting ice cream at the diner, nevermind what it'll do to my figure. It's too hot to care!" Irene rattled on cheerfully as they made their way onto the bus with dozens of others. Mostly young women excited for their evening out, but their exuberance made the quieter ones, the older women, that much more noticeable to Rosie. It would be so much harder to work a long day at the plant only to go home and feed, bathe and entertain children for the few hours before bedtime. She was lucky she and Rich hadn't gotten married before he shipped out, or she might have had a four year old to go home to herself.

"Lucky for a million reasons," she said under her breath, and Irene gave her a sharp look.

"You're thinking about Rich again? Don't lie, I know you are. You get a certain look, hon. You can't dump him, Ro, you're what he's coming home for. Besides, you won't be able to keep on at the factory. What will you do if you don't get married? Be a secretary? You'd be bored. At least babies keep you fit."

Rosie flexed her arms instinctively, feeling the hemmed sleeves tighten around muscle. Irene had managed to remain petite, but lifting a riveting gun, leaning into for a punch of steel, it had all left a mark on Rosie's physique. She'd lost weight, too, whittling her middle as her shoulders got broader, and the boxy fashions with their tucked waists gave her a surprisingly appealing figure. She'd been a bit soft, coming out of high school. Rich hadn't minded. Neither had Rosie, not until she got strong. The idea of going back--and babies

wouldn't keep her as fit as riveting did--made her nose wrinkle. Irene sighed loudly enough to be heard over the general clamor and elbowed Rosie's ribs.

"You should be glad you've got a man, Ro. At least you won't be out there with the rest of us, trying to find one. It'll be easier for you."

Easier. As if change was easy, as if giving up her independence was to be thought of as a relief. But so many of the girls she knew thought that way, it made Rosie wonder if she was wrong. Maybe it would be easier and more comfortable to be a wife and mother instead of a steelworker and wage-earner. "I know. And you'll like him, Rene, you really will, so don't let that officer you're going to catch take you too far away. Come on, now. The next stop is Maxine's house."

They pushed through packed-in girls to the front of the bus, waved a good-bye to friends, and together staggered into the shade of Maxine's tree-lined street. "Maybe Max didn't quit," Irene wheezed. "Maybe it was just too hot to come to work today. Jeez! I wish I had a tub of ice to sleep in!"

"It'll be cooled off some by the time you get to sleep anyway." They hugged the shade as best they could, grateful to turn down Maxine's short driveway a few minutes later. Max's car was there, a big 1941 Oldsmobile she'd paid a whopping \$545 for. Its green paint gleamed even though most everything else seemed to have a thin coat of dust, and the heavy steel body gave off heat waves of its own. The windows were both rolled down, safe enough with the dry spell, and probably keeping Max from roasting like a chicken the moment she sat in the car. Rosie envied her the big beast of a vehicle, but not quite enough to have bought one of her own. Rich would want a car when he got home, but there was no point in having two when only one of them would be going to work. And that would be five hundred dollars she hadn't saved, five hundred dollars that wasn't money all of her own. Too much, no matter how tempting the Oldsmobile was.

"Come on, you silly goose." Irene was already at the front door, knocking vigorously while Rosie lingered over the car. Max owned the house, too, like she owned the car, and that wasn't a bad thing at all. Her father was on the deed, of course, because Max was a woman without a husband, but the white-painted siding and yellow trim and everything within belonged to Maxine. Rosie envied that, too, and wondered what Rich would think if he came home to a girl who'd bought a house of her own.

That wasn't something to worry about just now. Rosie hurried up to the porch, elbowing Irene as the other girl called "Come on, Max, we're cooking out here! Invite us in for some lemonade!" She tried the knob, found it unlocked, and pushed the door open to stick her head in and shout again. "Max? Ruby? We're going to the USO, come on, you should come with us, it'll be swell! Jeez, where are those girls?"

"Maybe if they quit they went off for a weekend holiday to celebrate." Rosie cast a dubious glance at the car, then at the open door. "Only Ruby doesn't have a car for them to take, and they left the door unlocked..." She edged inside and was met by a breeze from a fan hidden behind the door. Sagging with relief, she came all the way in to a smart living room, furniture and carpets so new they had no signs of wear. "Whew, it's cooler in here, at least. Max? Maxine?"

A knee-high dog shorn down to her tan undercoat against the heat appeared from another room. Rosie smiled and crouched, wiggling her fingers at the animal. "Hey, Duchess. C'mere, sweetheart. Where are your people? Where's Max, huh?"

"I'm right here." Maxine followed Duchess into the living room. Rosie straightened with a squeak of surprise, and Irene, just behind her, launched into a good-natured scold. "Gosh, Max, didn't you hear us shouting? We were getting worried! Sorry to barge in and all, but the door was open and--"

She kept going, but Rosie was caught by Maxine's red-rimmed brown eyes and faint

white streaks on her cheeks. She was a big girl, big and strong, always had been even before the factory jobs came along, but she looked thinner now, not in a good way. Like the life had gone out of her. Like the soul had gone away. Her healthy summer tan was sallow, and her nose, like her eyes, was red. "Hey," Rosie said underneath Irene's chiding, "hey, Max, Maxi, what's wrong?"

"Ruby," Max said, and tears came. Not deep sobs, but restrained, reserved silver sliding down her face, the only breach in a facade of calm. "Ruby is dead."

## CHAPTER TWO

Irene made the lemonade, in the end, while Rosie sat on the couch with Maxine and didn't say a word as the other girl's grip crushed her fingers. "She didn't quit," Maxine said for the dozenth time. "She didn't come home last Thursday, but I knew she was working a double shift so I didn't worry. And she had to visit her grandmother over the weekend. I wasn't going to see her until Monday, maybe even Tuesday. But Sunday her Nan called me, and Ruby's Nan is older than phones, she doesn't trust them, she thinks someone's listening in. And they are, of course, party lines always have people listening in, but she called anyway because Ruby hadn't gotten there."

"Why did she wait until Sunday?" Rosie wondered, though it hardly mattered.

Maxine gave a tight, watery smile. "She thinks fewer people listen on Sundays. I figure more do, Saturday everybody's out but Sunday it's church and a family dinner, so kids at least and sure, nosy adults, I figure they pick up the phone to see if they can catch some gossip on the QT. But Nan doesn't think so, and she said girls will be girls, she thought maybe Ruby had forgotten or was working or we were out, and she wanted to be sure and that's when I knew she hadn't come home. It's that new supervisor," she snarled, reserve suddenly giving way to rage. "He did something to her, I know it. She was fixated on him."

"Aw, honey." Irene came out with the lemonade, set it on the coffee table, and crouched to take Maxine's hands. "Girls go and fall in love all the time. Doesn't mean something's happened to her. Maybe they're having a fling, she's staying with him?"

"Not Ruby." Maxine cast Rosie a desperate glance. "Tell her, Rose. Ruby never fancied any of the boys at school. We're, we're mates, she and I. There's nobody else."

"Could just be he's the one, honey," Irene began, but Rosie shook her head uncomfortably.

"Ruby's pretty, Rene. I mean, pretty like you, Hollywood pretty, not just home-town pretty like me or Max. Boys were after her all the time and she never went with any of them. All the girls were jealous, we wished we had a girlfriend like Ruby and Max, together through thick and thin. Ruby leaving would be like splitting up peanut butter and jelly. I can't imagine it. They'd be married if one of them was a boy." Rosie winked and Maxine's cheeks turned red under the tear stains. "Well, you would be!"

"Aren't we lucky we don't have to bother with all that," Max whispered, but her eyes flooded again and she wiped them dry. "Rosie, it's not like Ruby, it isn't. Something's happened to her. I know it. I feel it."

"Why do you think it has something to do with the new supe? Johnny, you said his name was?" Rosie shot a look at Irene, who nodded.

So did Maxine, bitterly. "Private First Class John Goode. He's all right, if you like the consumptive look. He works the midnight swing shift and half the girls are out of their heads over him. It was like he'd mesmerized Ruby, Ro. She kept talking about him, she even made us sit at a different table at lunch so she could look at him. But then when we'd get off shift she could barely even remember what he looked like, nevermind being hot and bothered over him. Carol Ann was like that too, and she's gone too. Something's not right, Rosie. It's not right."

"Did you talk to the boss?"

Maxine sneered, such an ugly expression Rosie wished she hadn't asked. She hadn't really needed to: the plant supervisors were men, and most of the girls knew their concerns

would be chalked up to women being unable to handle doing a man's job. Worse, if the complaint was about one of the supes themselves. A girl concerned about a newly-returned war hero's effects on her friends would be laughed out of her job.

"I'm sure Ruby's okay," Rosie said with less conviction than she was trying for. "Tell you what, sweetie, I'll go back to the factory tonight and talk to some of the other girls under PFC Goode's supervision. Maybe one of them saw Ruby, or maybe I can find out what he's doing to make them all like him so much."

"He's a handsome man just back from the war, Ro," Irene blurted. "That's all he needs to do."

Maxine and Rosie both shook their heads, though Max let Rosie do the talking. "No, not if Ruby and Carol Ann were mad for him. Ruby never cared very much about boys and Carol Ann's a prude. She wouldn't admit she could get ants in her pants if Gary Cooper put them there himself. I'll just go talk to a few girls. It won't take long."

"But the USO!"

"Take Maxine," Rosie said firmly. "No, don't argue, Max. You need something to take your mind off Ruby, and Irene needs someone to make sure she doesn't get married before morning. I promise I'll be there before midnight."

"It's only six o'clock now!"

"Then I have lots of time." Rosie squeezed Maxine's hand, then stood up and made a shooing motion at her and Irene. "Go, get burgers and milkshakes and have a good time."

"You'd better drink this lemonade first," Irene muttered, and Rosie did, gratefully, before she left to catch another bus. It was hotter than ever after Maxine's fan-cooled living room, and a worm of regret squirmed in Rosie's chest. There was nothing she could do, of course, if she discovered something hinky going on, which meant she'd volunteered to go back to the sweltering factory instead of out for an evening of fun for no good reason.

Especially if Goode worked the swing shift, ten at night to six in the morning. He wouldn't be there for hours yet. That might make girls more willing to gossip, though, and she could still get a look at the PFC before going to the dance. And maybe she would find something, so that when Rich got home she could put him on it. They might hear him out, take a man's concerns more seriously than hers or Maxine's.

She donned grey coveralls when she got back to the factory, and slid heavy boots over her feet to clump along the concrete halls in. Clocking in would be too much, but at least she could look the part. No one would question another girl hurrying from one station to another.

Hardly anyone, anyway: a couple girls caught sight of her and called her name teasingly. Rosie waved them off with a laugh. "I couldn't stay away. Decided I needed that extra dollar in the bank!" Which wasn't so far from true, though she had other things to worry about just then. She picked up a riveting gun and slipped into place on the line, half-acknowledging the curious women around her. "Taking over for Ruby. What happened to her, anyway?"

"Got married." "Got bored." "Got sick."

"Got out," said someone beneath the more usual answers. Rosie ducked to get a look at her, a girl she didn't know. Slim and almost pretty, more a face they'd call interesting or handsome, she met Rosie's eyes a moment, then glanced away. She was pale, unhealthily pale, like she'd forgotten the sun even existed. Rosie nodded and changed the subject, grousing about the gun's weight, about her own weight, about tight-fitting shoes and an utter lack of a romantic life. Others picked up on the good-natured complaints, muttering about sweat and steel and veering the discussion into territory that made even the least modest of them blush. Rosie's own ears burned, but she laughed too, and wouldn't commit either way when the girls next to her wanted to know if she'd gone all the way with her

fiancee before he left for war.

She had, as a matter of fact, and had dated a couple of other boys seriously too. Rich didn't know about them, but Rosie was a little proud of them. Liberated woman with a job and a sex life and a future of her own, if only she could figure out how to build it. Truth was she loved the weight of the riveting gun, loved the kickback and even the bruises it sometimes left. Giving it up to be a housewife wasn't the worst fate ever, but it made her wonder what her mother, who'd been a suffragette, would think. She'd never asked, for fear she'd be told to accept things the way they were.

But then, if the suffragettes had done that, women wouldn't have the vote, nevermind the chance, no matter what the reason, to work in a man's job like this one. The scent of hot metal and blue flame, the squeak of steel sheets and the relentless thud of rivets driving home would always be a part of Rosie's memories now. They might take the job away, but they'd never take the knowledge that she could do it. She set aside her riveting gun to help balance a stack of metal sheets being lifted across the floor, then took up the slack on a line of welders, idly asking about Ruby every time she shifted into a new group of workers. No one had seen her, and as the shift got later fewer girls wanted to chat. Fingers, hands, arms could get crushed in the machines if a girl wasn't careful, and night shift started out tired already. Rosie fell into the pattern of work, too, focused entirely on the bang and thump of machinery.

"Why were you asking about Ruby?" The pale girl stopped at Rosie's elbow, startling her. She turned her welding torch's flame off and stepped back from the job, rubbing an arm across her forehead to wipe away sweat.

"She hasn't been home since Thursday, is all. Her roommate's worried. Have you seen her?"

"No." There was no conviction in the girl's whisper.

"You said 'got out'," Rosie murmured. "Why'd you say that?"

The girl's gaze shifted like she expected trouble from any side. "I can't tell you here or now. He's coming on shift. In the locker rooms later, where for sure he can't hear."

"Already?" Rosie glanced for a clock she wouldn't be able to see. The factory had a few, always obscured by pieces of machinery or vast steel girders. Time went faster when they couldn't see it passing, and whistles told them when to take a break. But if it was already ten, she wasn't likely to make it to the USO at all. Irene hadn't believed she would anyway, but Rosie had thought she might. She hoped the girls were having fun, and even more that she'd have good news to bring Maxine. "Should be lunchtime any minute. We can talk then?"

The pale girl nodded and hurried away, leaving Rosie looking down a line of shifting bodies, each doing their part to support the war effort for just a little while longer. The European war was over. Japan couldn't hold out much longer, not against America's determination, Rosie was sure of it. Almost sure, at least. She rekindled the torch flame again, but the supe--PFC Goode, it had to be--crossed the head of the aisle, and for a moment caught Rosie's eye.

She shouldn't be able to tell from the distance that his eyes were brown, not just shadowed. She shouldn't be able to see circles under his eyes, either, or the gaunt line of cheekbones under bare light bulbs. His hair was almost black and tidy, but not a soldier's crew cut. Not the parted wave that lots of men were wearing, either: somewhere in between, military cut growing out. He wore slacks and a a shirt, but they did nothing to hide a thin frame that reminded Rosie of the pre-Captain-America Steve Rogers. He looked like he couldn't have passed the physical to be a soldier, nevermind have gone to war and come back alive.

Consumptive, Irene had said. Handsome if you liked that sort, but a chill ran down

Rosie's spine as he broke gazes with her and moved on. She didn't see his appeal at all, and if she didn't, it seemed impossible that Ruby had.

A few minutes later the lunch whistle blasted. Women up and down the line put tools down, patted the section of airplane they were working on--for good luck, everyone agreed--and became gregarious again. Rosie trailed behind the bulk of them, veering off toward the changing rooms when she got the chance. The pale girl would be waiting, if she hadn't chickened out.

She hadn't. She waited among the clothes racks, hiding her slim form between slimmer pickings for dresses. The late shift came in already wearing dungarees and shirts, with no expectation of dolling up to face the morning, and the racks showed it. Still, the girl chose to hide. Rosie's heart went out to her. Rather than make her more uncomfortable by exposing her, she idled near the end of the racks and murmured, "I'm here, if you want to talk."

"You gotta get out of here." The girl's intensity drove her from her hiding spot. Color was high in her cheeks, making her prettier than she'd been on the plant floor. "Honest, Miss, just go before he notices you. You're just what he likes. All the girls who are disappearing have dark hair and light eyes like you do. At first it was some of the Negroes, some who could almost pass. Girls with soft black hair and those funny grey-green eyes a lot of them have? But there were only two or three even working in the factory and once they were gone it started being the white girls." Her speech picked up speed as she went on, until the last words were a blurted rush. "I feel terrible, I didn't even see the pattern until the white girls started going missing, I guess I'm gonna go to hell for that, but maybe God'll take a little time off my sentence if I get you out of here safe. You gotta go, Miss, you really do."

"He already saw me." Rosie knew the confession was a mistake before it left her lips, but couldn't stop herself. The girl's shoulders slumped like all the air had been squeezed

away. Rosie came up to her carefully, offering a hand. "What's your name, honey? Oh, sweetheart, your hands are like ice. If the supe's got you so scared, why are you still here?"

"Pearl. I'm Pearl, and where else am I gonna go? I'm not his kind." She gestured at her light brown hair. "I've got no husband, not even a boyfriend, and this job is my only way out. I can't quit, don't you see?"

"I understand." Under different circumstances, Rosie would have commiserated with the girl--with Pearl--and might still, later. But now she squeezed Pearl's hand and tried to sound encouraging. "Tell me about them going missing, okay? You're sure it's missing, not girls quitting to get married?"

"Some, sure, but some of everybody quits. Redheads, blondes, brunettes, Negroes, everybody. And they talk about it before, they're excited that their fellas are coming home, or that they've met somebody and are giving up work for the easy life. Carol Ann and Ruby and some of the others, they never said a word except for to the supe, and had stars in their eyes when they were doing it. And then they were gone, just gone, between one day and the next."

A whistle blasted, drowning Pearl out. They both turned to the break room clock, which said lunch hour was nowhere near over. The whistle gave way to the blare of an alarm. Pearl paled. "Something's happened. That's their order for when someone's gotten hurt or killed on the line. It happened once before while I was here."

"Maggie Byrnes." Rosie nodded. It had been a night shift accident then, too, the only really bad accident in all the time Rosie had worked for the factory, but it had been enough to scar everyone, even those who hadn't been there. A lot of girls had quit after Maggie's death, but more had come to replace them, their need greater than their fear. The rest of them had gotten more cautious, and almost two years later the caution still lingered.

Pearl tugged Rosie's hand. "We'd better go. You can get out of here and be safe. Don't

come back, Miss." They hurried from the break room, other women leaving the lunch room well ahead of them. The whistle and alarm roared again, making both Rosie and Pearl jump. Both sounds faded away, leaving the lingering thin edge of a scream behind.

Rosie stopped, resisting Pearl's pull, and looked back into the factory. "She's still alive. Whoever's hurt is still alive. Someone must be helping her, right?" Another scream cut through the air, and another whistle blast tried to cover it. Rosie pulled away from Pearl. "You go. I'm going to check on her. I know someone's there, someone's helping, but--"

"Don't go," Pearl pleaded, but her grip loosened. "Miss, please don't go. The factory's not safe at night, not for a girl like you. He's out there."

"Go on." Rosie broke away and into a run, following the echoes of the scream. Halfway across the factory, with only one more whistle-drowned cry to guide her. Someone was doing that deliberately, they had to be, and that could mean whatever girl was trapped *wasn't* getting the help she needed. Rosie cursed the weighty overshoes she wore, but didn't stop to kick them off until after she careened into a long room with the belly of an airplane hanging from the ceiling.

There was no one there, only abandoned riveting guns, shut-down welding torches, drills and hammers, screws and nails. Someone's red kerchief was slung over a ladder's step, abandoned in the expectation of a quick return. Tools of the trade, familiar items to Rosie's calloused hands.

And, bewilderingly, an old wind-up phonograph, hissing the song of an empty record as black vinyl spun endlessly on the wheel. It screamed as Rosie approached, and she shrieked too, then clapped her hands to her face in embarrassment. "What on earth!"

"I told you not to come, Miss." Pearl spoke from behind her, bleak with misery.

Rosie startled again, spinning to face the other girl. "You...you lured me?" she asked, as embarrassed by uncertainty as she'd been by her shriek. "You brought me to the break

room so I'd be behind the others? So I'd hear the screaming..." She looked at the phonograph, then back at Pearl.

Pearl shrugged, sad hopeless motion emphasized by a lack of hope in her eyes. "He said he'd kill me if I didn't. I saw him the first night, see. When he took Tildy, the Negro girl. I saw what he did and he...he said find him girls, or I'd be next."

"Next for what? What's he doing? Pearl, you can't--" Rosie reached for Pearl, ready to shake her until she started making sense.

She never made it. Instead the phonograph shrieked, not the recorded woman's scream but the high squeal of a needle scratching vinyl. Pieces broke from the turntable, distinctive ping of metal bouncing against the concrete floor. The record player itself thudded more loudly, its days as an entertainment piece ended with what Rosie judged had been a sharp kick.

Pearl flinched and backed away with her hands clenched at her mouth. A spike of dread shot through Rosie's heart, breath-taking and cold. She turned to see the phonograph sprawled across the floor in pieces, and PFC Goode crunching the record beneath his feet as he approached.

He looked like Pearl, up close. They shared the same pallor, like neither of them had seen sunshine in far too long. Her eyes, though, were haunted, and his were dead. Rosie didn't see how he could inspire the lust Ruby and the others had felt, though she understood Pearl's fear well enough.

Then he smiled, and everything about him changed. Gauntness became slenderness, dead eyes became bright, the wink he offered suddenly charming. Rosie smiled in return, then shook herself and backed up a step. Closer to Pearl, in hopes the other girl would be made braver by Rosie's presence. "Whatever you're doing, Mr. Goode, it has to stop. It *will* stop."

He grinned, full of fresh healthy American good looks. "'Mr. Goode'? Jeez, Miss, that's my dad. You call me Johnny, why don't you? What's your name?"

"Rosie." Rosie bit her tongue too late, astonished that she'd answered. Like she'd had to. Like she'd wanted to, even though she had sense enough not to give this oddly threatening man anything. "Mr. Goode," she repeated, more firmly and maybe, if she told herself the truth, maybe more desperately. "Pearl says a lot of girls have gone missing, that you're responsible. It's going to stop."

"Shucks, Rosie, of course it's not. You're not even going to remember a bit of this, are you? It's just me and Pearl here, stealing a cig in the factory when we're not supposed to be." He came closer as he spoke, and Rosie forgot she'd meant to back up further. Goode glanced beyond her at Pearl, offering the other girl a smile of her own. "Good job with this one, Pearl. She's got a lot of life in her. She might even finish the job for you."

"The job?" Rosie made her feet move, concrete cold through her socks. That helped her keep moving: as long as she didn't stay still long enough to warm the floor where she stood, she was doing all right. But Pearl was following her now too, boxing her in. Rosie edged toward the belly of the plane, trying not to look like she was running. "What job? Pearl's got a job here, she's a riveter like the rest of us..."

"Not that kind of job. Some of the blood splashed on me, see," Pearl whispered. "I thought it was my own, I'd cut myself earlier so I stuck my finger in my mouth. But it was his, and now I just keep being hungry for more. I'm almost there, Johnny says I'm almost there, just a little more to drink, but he's gotta keep refreshing his own, too. You shoulda run, Rosie. You shoulda done what I said."

Bile filled Rosie's throat, though she barely understood what the other girl meant. She swallowed and forced a laugh. "Blood? What, you think he's a vampire? Sweetheart, you have to stop watching all those Dracula movi--"

Goode picked up a welding torch, twisted it into uselessness, and tossed it away as Rosie's words died in her throat. Cold drained from the top of her head to her fingertips, through her chest and all the way to her toes, numbing her body with disbelief.

It felt like forever before her heart started up again, a single thick beat that pushed back against cold. Not hard enough; she just stood there, stupefied with astonishment, until Goode spoke again and she jerked hard in response to his voice.

"Most of it isn't true. Turning to mist, turning into a bat, no reflection..." Goode brushed his hair with his fingertips, familiar action of a vain man. "Good thing, too. Nobody would cut the hair of a man they couldn't see in the mirror."

"Vampires aren't real," Rosie said blankly. "They're not--you can't be..."

Goode shrugged and picked up another torch, flicking this one on. "Whether they are or aren't, I'm sure something, aren't I? Tell you what, Rosie. You start running, and if you get away, I'll never hunt you again. I'm not fast," he promised with an unnervingly sweet smile. "Go on, Rosie. Run."

Rosie's gaze flickered to Pearl, who nodded once. "He always lets them run," she whispered. She looked worse than pallid now. Fragile, desperate. *Hungry*. "Better go."

Rosie took another step back. It jarred her out of stupefaction, let her think again with the clarity of fear. The plane was above her now, burnished steel hanging too far overhead to touch. Ladders still leaned against it, abandoned by the women who had been working there not long ago. Women who would find Rosie's own body, maybe, crushed in some machine's teeth. The other girls who had gone missing hadn't been found, though. She clung to that, reaching for an answer as if it would save her life. "Where are they? The others, what did you do with them?"

Goode waved his torch, hissing blue flame making a short streak in Rosie's vision. "I ate them, Rosie. A man can't live by blood alone, you know. I made bread from their marrow."

His eyebrows flicked together. "It's harder than it looks, isn't it? Making bread. My loaves are like logs."

Rosie's stomach turned, though macabre humor washed some of the sickness away. Bread wasn't *that* difficult to make--even, she bet, if the fat used was something as disgusting as human bone marrow. No wonder Goode wanted Pearl. A wife to cook and clean for him, just like every other man back from the war.

Except every other man couldn't bend steel, or dance his fingers through blue-hot flame the way Goode was doing now. Rosie's heart lurched again. No one was in the factory to hear her scream. No one would save her. No one but herself. Her hand closed around a riveting gun. She lifted it, the familiar weight a sudden comfort, and Goode's voice dropped with disappointment. "Oh, Rosie, what are you doing?"

The riveting gun's weight steadied the jackhammer beat of Rosie's heart, letting her whisper "There's nowhere to run and you know it. This factory's full of machines more dangerous than you are. I'm not going to let you chase me into one of them so I can be written off as a terrible accident."

"Pearl." All the pleasantries left Goode's voice, making him the unsettling man Rosie had first laid eyes on.

*He* may not have been quick. Pearl was. Quicker, anyway, than Rosie expected her to be. Quick with desperation, maybe. She veered wide of the riveting gun, springing at Rosie's shoulders from the side. Rosie spun, the gun's weight giving her momentum, and to her own shock, metal hit flesh with a resounding *thunk*. Pearl collapsed to the floor, her temple already bruising. Rosie drew in a sharp breath, gaping, then snapped her attention back to Goode.

He gazed at Pearl with surprise before lifting his eyebrows at Rosie. "Guess I should've picked me more of a fighter for my first wife. You might just do instead, Miss Rose." He took

a step forward.

Rosie, cheeks hot with horror at having downed Pearl, hefted the riveting gun at arm's length, her hands cold and steady. "Not one more step, Mr. Goode."

He smiled, almost recovering the mask of charm he'd worn before. The one that had almost drawn her in, that had made Rosie give up her name when she didn't want to. It wouldn't work again. Not with her heart fast with fear, not with Pearl a huddle at her feet. Maybe men at war felt this resolved, facing the enemy. Goode's smile widened, showing teeth, and he spread his hands. "Or what, Rosie? You'll shoot me? An unarmed man?"

Showing *teeth*. Showing a mouthful of too-long, hollow-looking *teeth*, like snake fangs except by the tens instead of just two. She couldn't see their bottoms, but they narrowed as they pressed against his lower lip, and Rosie just knew they ended in vicious points.

"You're something wrong, mister," Rosie breathed. "Something unnatural and wrong. Men might put up a sweet lying front, but they don't bend steel and they don't cup fire in their palms. I don't know what you are, but you are not a man."

"I was once," Goode said, and took one more step forward. Put his chest against the gun, and reached for its neck, to throttle the air flow and render it useless.

Rosie shot him.

The gun made the same sound it always did, familiar comforting *bam!* of air slamming a rivet into place.

Goode sounded nothing like airplane steel being punctured.

A soft sound, a wet sound, one that went with the sudden red mist and chunks of white that were things Rosie didn't even want to think about. He looked surprised, in the instant before his hands splayed open and his whole body caved backward, away from her. Blood smeared first the air, then concrete. Goode was louder hitting the floor than taking the rivet, a *pop* like a hollowed-out grapefruit when his skull made contact.

Revulsion and relief tore through Rosie. Her hands shook, though she didn't release the gun, didn't even lower it. Couldn't if her life depended on it.

Her life *had* depended on it.

Rosie laughed, short ugly sound that did nothing to push away the dizziness sweeping her. Gold light unlike anything the factory had to offer danced around the edges of her vision. It coalesced above Goode, gathering into a small dust devil that spun ever-tighter. She took a step back, riveting gun still choked in her grip. The light was beautiful, warm and comforting, but Goode had almost tricked her into believing he was beautiful too. She didn't know what happened to vampires when they died, but if she had to shoot the burgeoning light, too, then she would.

It became a column, spinning so quickly it wobbled. Goode's body arched as its pull lifted him a centimeter or two from the floor. A silver glow stained with blood eked out of his pores, drawn toward the golden column. Rosie wet her lips, knotted her finger around the gun's trigger, and waited in horrified fascination.

The blood stains stretched and loosened, coming free from Goode's--*soul*, Rosie thought, and wanted to laugh at herself, but couldn't. The stains spiraled upward, taken into the whipping gold column, then spattered outward, cast away. Rosie's gaze snapped to follow them, but they disappeared before they reached even her, and she was still quite close to the man she'd killed.

Unstained, unblemished, uncorrupted, Goode's soul rose after the blood, sucked into the column's vortex as well. But it shot upward when released, a bright streak reaching for Heaven. The column collapsed, and Goode's body fell to cold concrete.

Rosie edged forward. Under the hard factory lights, Goode had the skin tones and musculature of a youth who had been badly injured and a long time recovering. He was handsome now, cheeky all-American good looks, despite the trauma his body had seen. The

horrible hollow-looking teeth shrank back into his gums as she watched, distending his mouth and then disappearing. With their retreat, his sickly pallor faded, more than just vitality fading in death's cool grip. It was as if a poison had been eradicated, thoroughly cleansing the young PFC of his life's misdeeds.

*Whole*, Rosie thought; he was whole, when he hadn't been before, and without knowing why, she dropped to her knees and cried.

## CHAPTER THREE

The police found her there, serene with exhaustion. Horror had spun away with the golden column, leaving a deep, gentle regret in Rosie's breast. She had never wanted to hurt, much less kill, anyone, but the peculiar certainty that she had done well made facing the police easier. They awakened Pearl, whose sob when she saw Goode's body cut through Rosie like a blade.

"He hit her," Rosie told the police, "and came after me. I had no choice."

Even through tears, Pearl's attention sharpened at the lie. Then she dissolved again, agonizing loss in each caught breath. She didn't, though, dispute the story Rosie had told. Better to be the victim than the accomplice. Better to escape the factory and face Rosie alone later than reveal her unnatural desire for Goode's blood. From the sick thud of her heart, Rosie knew she would mete Pearl a similar fate, if necessary, but maybe it wouldn't be. Maybe with his inhuman lure extinguished Pearl would return to normal.

"You weren't hurt, were you, Miss?" One of the officers offered her a hand up.

Rosie took it gratefully, shaking her head as she stood. "Just frightened." She recounted what had happened--how she and Pearl had been chatting, lingering in the changing rooms when the alarm sounded. How they'd heard a woman's screams and followed them instead of leaving as they were supposed to. How they'd discovered the record player, and how Goode had attacked them. How he'd confessed, even, to killing and--Rosie shuddered, theatrical but heartfelt--killing and eating several women who had recently been thought to

have left the factory's employment.

The officer paled, muttered, "Stay here," and went to get his supervisor. A few seconds later the older man's voice shot up: "*Eating* them? We got a God damned lunatic *cannibal*--" He broke off, glancing self-consciously toward Rosie and Pearl, and through the calm haze of survival, Rosie almost laughed. The girls at the factory said saltier things every few minutes, but she supposed admitting that to a man born last *century* would only shock him.

He strode over and towered above them, a big fella with a touch of black still coloring the hair at his temples. Most of the police looked ruffled in the night's heat, but his collars were crisp and his tie straight, and his shirt wasn't yet stained with sweat. It made him that much more professional, and made his expression that much grimmer. "I'm Detective Johnson. I'm sorry, girls. I know you've had a rough night, and I wish I could just send you home, but you're going to have to come down to the station so we can get the whole story."

Pearl shot Rosie a panicked look, but Rosie only nodded at the detective. The other girl had heard the version Rosie'd spun; the rest was up to her to deliver. Rosie hoped the police wouldn't find any of Pearl's belongings at Goode's home for her own sake as much as Pearl's, but if they did, she would amend her own story to another version of the truth. No one would believe the full truth, not even after she heard another officer say "What the hell?" as he found the welding torch Goode had mangled.

"Could I call the USO?" she wondered aloud. "My friends were expecting me there tonight. Somebody could get a message to them."

"Soon as we get to the station," Johnson promised, and Rosie went with him, grateful to leave the dead man behind.

She hadn't been inside the police station since she'd gotten her driver's license six years ago. Not much had changed: concrete walls painted cream were yellower than they'd been, wide-open windows were stained with tobacco smoke and dirt, and the noise, even

late at night, was consistent. There were fewer young men than there had been: all the officers were past enlistment age, and some looked like they'd come out of retirement. Johnson told the receptionist to let Rosie use the phone, but she stood with its black earpiece curved in her palm and couldn't think what she would say. Max deserved to be told about Ruby in person, and anything than the truth would offer no excuse for Rosie's failure to show at the USO. After a minute she put the phone down. The receptionist showed her to a seat and offered an apology and a cup of coffee, both of which Rosie accepted.

Johnson sat at his desk half the room away, talking to Pearl. Rosie could hear the detective's questions but not Pearl's answers, which the other girl mumbled at her lap. Once she dissolved into tears, and Johnson glanced Rosie's way with a frown. She didn't pretend not to be watching, and when he finished with Pearl, Johnson beckoned Rosie over. "You look like you're holding up all right."

"It's the coffee." Rosie smiled wanly and smoothed her skirt under her thighs as she sat. "Good thing it's Friday, though. I'd never be awake enough to work tomorrow."

Johnson looked toward the wall clock, ticking past one in the morning, and nodded. "I meant considering you just killed a man."

The coffee turned acid in Rosie's stomach. She folded her hands over it, pressing. "He was trying to kill us."

Johnson shifted in his chair, sitting back. It creaked, both springs and leather needing attention. "Well, Miss Ransom, I must say you're a better liar than Miss Anderson is."

Rosie's gaze jerked up again, surprise so sharp she didn't even feel guilty. "I am? I mean, what? I haven't lied."

"Haven't you? Why don't you start at the beginning, Miss Ransom. I'll tell you where you're going wrong."

She stared at him a moment, heat flaming in her cheeks. Anybody would blush, she

thought, being accused of lying to a policeman. Her mouth dried up and it took two tries to speak. "Pearl and I were lingering in the changing room--"

"Right there," Johnson said, and Rosie broke off with another stare. Johnson waited a few seconds, then, gently, said, "She was his accomplice, wasn't she, Rosie? She as much as said so. You've got a good heart, trying to protect her, but it won't do her any good. My boys will find evidence they've been living together back at Goode's apartment. So why don't you tell me what really happened?"

"It happened like I told you," Rosie said after a long moment. "Except Pearl followed me through the factory, we didn't go together. And she tried to grab me so PFC Goode could--I don't know what. So I hit her with the riveting gun, and he came after me anyways, and I shot him."

"That's it?"

"Isn't that *enough*? I *shot* somebody, Detective. I *killed* a man." Rosie's voice rose and broke, emotion surging up from a buried place within her. "And my friends are dead, girls I've known since school, and that monster *ate* them, and--!"

"Monster," Johnson murmured under her tirade. "Why do you use that word?"

The image of Goode's unnerving teeth retreating into his skull made Rosie snap her jaw shut. Breathing hard, voice still high, she said "What else would you call someone who kills and eats girls?"

Johnson's shoulders sank a fraction of an inch. "Monster's good enough for me. Miss Ransom, you lied to protect Miss Anderson. Why?"

Rosie slumped in her chair. The station was too hot, even with floor fans buzzing and pushing a thick breeze through the big room, and it dulled her thoughts as badly as emotion draining away did. All she had as an answer was the truth, and it couldn't be good if the truth seemed like a last resort. She offered it anyway. "Because I heard my friends talking

about how he seemed to hypnotize girls. I thought maybe Pearl didn't have any choice, that she was stuck under his thumb and didn't know how to get out. I wanted to give her a chance, I guess. She didn't seem bad, just...scared."

"That's mighty noble of you, Miss Ransom. Foolish, maybe, but mighty noble." Johnson opened a pack of cigarettes and offered Rosie one. She shook her head. He shrugged, tapped one out for himself, and lit it before going on. "I'd like you to press charges against her. A lot of girls are dead and she had a part in all of it. We can probably make it stick without your help, but it'd be a lot easier if you were on the prosecution's side."

"I don't think it's a a good idea." Pearl's visible hunger came back to Rosie and she shivered. "I don't think you should hold her, Detective. I think you should let her go and..."

*And let me deal with her, if necessary.* Rosie couldn't say the words if she wanted to. They were too absurd. She'd been terrifyingly fortunate in facing Goode: she'd had a weapon on hand, one that she understood, and she had, in the moment, been willing to use it. His strength, his resistance to fire, his horrifying teeth, they had all been enough to push her beyond the edge of civilized behavior. Rationally, she could never expect herself to do something like that again.

But a cool certainty sat inside her chest, calm and steady and born, Rosie thought, from the purity of light that had risen from Goode's body. She *knew* she could pull the trigger a second time, or that some other weapon would come to hand, if she again faced something like Goode had been and Pearl was becoming. That knowledge was nearly as frightening as Goode himself had been. Rosie pressed her eyes shut and after a long few seconds whispered, "I can't press charges. I'm sorry, Detective, I really am, but I just don't think it's a good idea."

She opened her eyes again to find Johnson watching her through a cloud of smoke, fiery end of his fag glowing and dimming. "What really happened at the factory tonight, Rosie?"

"Just what I told you," she answered quietly. "I'm lucky to be alive."

"That," Johnson said with a certain amount of force, "is probably true. What I do know is that Miss Anderson's story corroborates yours, at least as far as you acting in self-defense, and I guess that means you can go. I'll get one of the boys to drive you home. Hank?" His voice rose and he snapped impatiently.

A kid not much older than Rosie stuck his head out of a side office. His yellow hair was cropped soldier-short and he looked fit. Rosie stared at him curiously as he called, "Yeah, boss?"

"This young woman needs a lift home. Get your coat, call it a night when you've dropped her off."

"It's too hot for a coat, boss." The kid--Hank--disappeared back into the office anyway and came out a minute later with a fedora clamped against his head and car keys jangling in one hand. "All right, doll, let's go."

He favored his left leg, limping heavily as he headed for the door. Rosie watched him a few seconds, then stood, shook her skirt smooth, and followed him. A moment later, Johnson's voice came after them both: "Don't leave town, Rosie Ransom. We're going to need to talk to you again."

"Where would I go," she said under her breath, and didn't say *Pearl is here, and she'll need me* aloud at all. The door opened easily, creating a breath of slightly cooler air that faded as quickly as it had come. Rosie caught up to Hank in a step or two, glancing at his legs.

"Monsters." Hank didn't so much as look at her, just threw the word out. "Tore my fucking knee out over in France. Got any other questions?"

Rosie's eyebrows lifted. "I didn't ask."

"You would have."

"I suppose everyone does."

He looked at her that time, eyebrows drawn down in appraisal. "Yeah. Unless I'm sitting on my ass when they meet me, then they ask why a strapping young fellow like myself isn't on the front lines. That's my car."

*That* was a long-nosed, narrow, curvaceous red two-seater with its top down. Rosie slowed, then stopped and wet her lips. "What is it?"

A smile crept over one corner of Hank's mouth. "Jaguar SS100. She's a beaut, isn't she?"

Rosie swallowed, then put her hands over her cheeks, feeling the heat of a blush. She'd have to be dead to be from Detroit and not enchanted with the vehicle's low, lean lines. "It's beautiful. It's not American. The steering's on the wrong side."

"British. Hardly made any of 'em but my old man bought one. I brought it back when I came home."

"Your father's British?"

"Mom is. Real romantic love-in-combat story there. She was a nurse in the Great War and followed him to Detroit afterward. Get in." Hank waved Rosie around the car and climbed in himself with no evidence of his knee bothering him.

Rosie hesitated at the door, which was scooped so low she might have stepped from the runner board into the car without risking her modesty. Hank, watching her, quirked a grin over the same corner of his mouth. It was attractive. *He* was attractive, in a clear-eyed Captain America kind of way. But he looked like he knew what Rosie was considering and that he was challenging her to do it.

Swiftly, before she thought about it more, Rosie opened the door properly and tucked her skirt out of the way before closing it. Hank's smile twisted further and he keyed the car on. "Where's home?"

She gave him the address over the engine's rumble. The Jaguar's seats were soft leather

that still retained warmth from the day, even at two in the morning. Rosie glanced over her shoulder at its folded-down canopy, then eyed the hat smashed on Hank's head. "Won't that come off?"

"Hasn't yet. So you're a factory girl. Where's your husband, Europe or Japan?"

"My fiance is in Europe." It sounded prim and Rosie knew it.

Hank noticed too, a grin in his reply. "Fiance, sorry. I knew you weren't married, anyway. No ring. You like the work or are you counting days til your soldier comes home?"

"Can't I have both?"

He gave her another look, more appraising, as they left the station parking lot for quiet Detroit streets. The Jaguar announced its presence for blocks to come, a big purr that would awaken light sleepers. Rosie closed her eyes against wind that slipped around the screen. It felt good in her hair, speed finally offering respite from the heat. If the car were hers she might drive for what remained of the night, escaping not just the warm air but the memories of the past several hours. Maybe go down to the river and find a breeze, or find some relatively high point to look over the city from, and try to make sense of the day.

Hank's voice came as a startlement. "You in a hurry to get home?"

A thrill of cold ran through Rosie's hands. Smart girls--good girls--didn't go off on night-time jaunts with boys they'd just met, but the question ran so closely parallel to her thoughts that she said "Not really" without hesitation.

"Great. I know a place on the waterfront." Hank changed lanes and sped up. Rosie turned her head away and bit her knuckles, half-grinning at her own boldness. No one knew where she was, though Detective Johnson knew who she was with, which might be close enough to the same. Besides, if Hank worked with the police he was trustworthy. Rosie tried the thought on for size and accepted it, but her heartbeat ran quick anyway.

"It's right next to a refrigerated shipping center and it's always about ten degrees

cooler than anywhere else in the city," Hank yelled over the wind. "My favorite place in the summer. How fast do you want to get there?"

Rosie's smile split from behind her knuckles. "How fast *can* we get there?"

Fast enough that it seemed like the headlamp light pooling ahead of them should be overtaken by the Jaguar's smooth speed, it turned out. Hank handed her his hat and Rosie clutched it, tears and shrieks of laughter spilling from her as they raced through the streets. She didn't *feel* bottled up, but letting go so much emotion was a relief.

Hank braked hard outside a tall set of gates, the car's tires squealing as it whipped around. Rosie caught a glimpse of company logos as the gates swung open and she Rosie pushed against the foot well, straightening up in her seat. "Hank, we can't come through, this is private property, it belongs to Vaughn Enterprises. They say Harrison Vaughn's a beast about security. I just got out of jail," she said with a weak laugh. "I don't want to go straight back in."

"You were at the police station, not in jail. Big difference. Anyway, don't worry. They know me here." Hank put the car back in drive and eased it through the gates, waving at the security guards who scurried to close it behind him. The Jaguar's engine echoed off steel-sided warehouses as they crept closer to the river, and the silence when Hank killed it was loud.

The air, as promised, was significantly cooler. Rosie took a few deep breaths, enjoying it, then said "But you work with the police, not on the docks. Or is that how they know you, from the police?"

"These days, sure." Hank got out of the car, limped to a locked door, opened it, and a moment later turned back with a bottle of amber liquid in one hand. "Want some? You've had a rough night."

"Not rough enough to drink with a strange man."

Hank's eyebrows shot up as he came back to the car and leaned against the driver's side door. "Then you are one tough broad, Miss Ransom. I'm impressed. I think my mother would like you."

"An Army nurse? No, she must be much braver than I am."

"Maybe. Don't think she's ever killed a man, though."

"I did--" Rosie broke off with a swallow. *I didn't kill a man*, she'd been going to say, but that was nonsensical. "I didn't have a choice," she said instead.

"That doesn't make it easier for most people. Did you see his soul?"

"I think so. It was stained with blo--" Rosie choked off her answer, gawking ashen-faced at Hank.

"Stained with blood," he said conversationally. "Stained with death and horror, and when you killed him all the blackness siphoned away and his redeemed soul rose up free."

Rosie, staring at him, worked her mouth and made no sound.

"You thought I meant Nazis, when I said they'd torn my knee up," Hank said softly. "But I meant what I said, Rosie Ransom. I meant monsters."