

STORMS
FROM A
CLEAR SKY

DENISE FRISINO



DETAILS BY DENISE

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For my husband, Steve, who through the writing of my books, has been my rock. Thank you for reading the research along with me, for stepping over my stacks of files, piles of books and photos to bring me refreshments and encouragement, sometimes in the form of a sweet kiss.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

IN 2012, MY JOURNEY BEGAN WITH one interview: that of Captain Richard B. McNees, Sr., US Navy, RT. After our many riveting conversations, there was no turning back.

Since that time, I have chased down men and women wearing WWII caps in grocery stores, on ferries, at American Legion Posts, in nursing homes, virtually anywhere I might find these remarkable champions of our freedom. The dye for my story continues to be cast from the memories of those who lived through WWII. Some braved everything to return home from the European or Pacific theaters. Others supported our troops Stateside in any manner they could. Yet all whom I had the honor of speaking with, colored my characters with their private moments.

Sadly, McNees, along with so many of those I mention below, are no longer with us. Yet their stories must continue to be told and their contributions honored. The most remarkable aspect they all exhibited was their humbleness, brushing aside the scars from bullets and battles, claiming their efforts as their duty.

Along with those I mentioned in my preceding book, *Orchids of War*, I need to mention the next round of heroes who shared their hearts and experiences with me.

A special thanks to Dwight Stevens, who I leaned on several times for his incredible memory of his 33 sorties as he piloted his B-17 over France, Germany and Russia. And to Bob Harmon, who not only served with Patton during the Battle of the Bulge, but is admired by many as

Professor of History, Emeritus, Seattle University. Hats off to Bob, who gave me several hours of his precious time.

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A salute to Lieutenant Commander Phil Johnson USCG, Retired, for his consultation and additional editing.

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Patton always promised her a hospital, but she never got one, even in the freezing winter of the Battle of the Bulge. Rest in Peace.

Thank you to Gerald (Jerry) Robinson, founder of Robinson Newspapers, for an enlightening afternoon in the warm sun while he reminisced about Seattle and the impact of WWII.

PROLOGUE

HE IS GONE. JACK HUNTINGTON, the sinister man with the patch over one eye, who, for months, openly shadowed Billi O'Shaughnessy's every move, intimidating her to help him, dragging her into danger, forcing her to depend on secret hiding places and alternate identities for survival, is gone.

That arrogant bastard just walked out the door. But not before taking her willingly to his bed, and then to the altar.

Just before heading down the concrete steps, Jack glanced back at her. The mist from his warm breath hitting the cold December air did not conceal his steely look of hatred. Billi likened his intensity to a raging, fire breathing dragon bent on revenge. A chill spiraled down her spine with the clear knowledge that the next time Jack Huntington encountered Akio Sumiyoshi of the Imperial Japanese Navy, one of them would die.

ONE

BILLI O'SHAUGHNESSY HUNTINGTON STOOD LIMPLY LOOKING out the tall window of her mother's home at the empty street of 30th Ave South. It was just after 1 p.m. Piles of melting snow still lined the road. On the other side of the street, a snowman, built by the neighbor's children, glistened in the cool sun. The hat perched on their frozen creation slumped down hiding one large black button eye. The other button seemed to glare back at her, reminding her of her new husband, Jack Huntington, the elusive FBI agent with one good eye. How startling to look out this very window and not see his dark car occupying the accustomed spot under the oak tree. For months he had made an obvious point of parking there in order to watch her, at first to convince her to help him with his scheme then, ultimately, to protect her.

She felt the weight of Jack's black onyx ring with the diamond in the middle slip to one side of her wedding ring finger. The new object carried with it their promise to love and cherish each other, words spoken boldly that morning in St. Mary's Church before a small gathering. Her divorced parents had held hands as her mother shed a tear. Her best friend, Eileen Nakamura, was accompanied by her father and brother, Kenny. They sat with the other two most important people in Billi's life, the Gunner siblings, Danny and Dahlia. She had noticed Danny protectively put his arm around his sister Dahlia, whose sad, misty eyes spoke of her continued love for the unfaithful Eddy and the wedding she would never experience.

The thought of her only brother, Edward O'Shaughnessy, made her stomach flip. The startling news of Pearl Harbor erupted during their wedding celebration brunch. Their beautiful new beginning had crumbled before them with the devastating news she and Jack had worked so hard to forestall. As promised, the very words she had overheard Akio announce to his men in the Forbidden City Night Club in San Francisco had come to pass. "Christmas will bring these shores unimaginable presents." Indeed, the Japanese present, the bombing of Pearl Harbor, triggered terror around the world.

Billi jumped at the sound of a loud bang. Turning back toward the living room she watched Danny pound on the top of the tall mahogany radio, his anger and dread spilling into the room. At the teenager's outburst Pepper, her courageous guard dog, began circling at the foot her mother's large chair before lying down in confusion. His long Dachshund ears flopping as he looked around the room at the remaining celebrants who sat listening intently with mounting dread.

"Goddamn the Japs," Danny shouted above the voices on the radio.

The occupants in the room all looked startled at the vehemence of the youth's words.

Mrs. O'Shaughnessy sat upright in her large rocker prominently placed next to the fireplace. "Danny, don't take the Lord's name in vain. Especially on a Sunday."

"Sorry, Mrs. O." He forced a semi-apologetic smile her way.

In response, the older woman's shoulders raised and lowered in what Billi recognized as her mother's non-verbal expression of confusion. The earth shaking events of the last few hours must be hard for her mother to grasp. Just this morning Billi had announced, no insisted, she would immediately marry Jack. Then, hours after the rushed wedding came the blaring news of war, with the attack on the Pacific Island of Oahu, where Eddy's squadron stationed at Kane'ohe, were directly in the line of battle.

Aware the Japanese plot to conquer the Pacific and spread their control into the United States crept into motion almost one year earlier, Billi's heart ached not only for her parents but those parents whose sons perished in the early morning hours defending America. She hated the dark, frightening secrets she had come to know from her time spent

working with Jack. Posing as “Ginger the Vamp,” had only unlocked doors to the horror and greed dragging the world into an unwanted war.

She crossed the room, scooped up her beloved pup, putting one hand on Danny’s young shoulder. She could feel his tension and anxiety as she watched tears stream down his face. He had so wanted to follow her brother Eddy into service. Yet, as a senior at Garfield High School, and a member of the Army National Guard, his duties lay elsewhere.

Mrs. O turned and looked up at her daughter with unmasked strain. “Have they said anything yet about Kane’ohe Naval Base?”

Billi worked the lump in her throat to create a passageway for her answer. “I haven’t heard anything, Mom. But Eddy is fine.” She wished she believed her own words.

Her father inched closer to his estranged wife and knelt, grasping her hand. “Now Gertie, darlin’, Edward will be killin’ those Japs like nobody else.” His Irish brogue strengthened with determination as he repeated the promise he and Eddy exchanged at the train station so many months ago. “Head down an’ heart up. That’s how you’ll survive.” He patted her hand as if the mere action solidified a pact with God. “He’ll come home safe to us.”

The numbers of those killed that early Sunday morning of December 7th, 1941, continued to mount as the radio announcers scratched together the events unfolding in the beautiful islands of Hawaii.

Dahlia covered her eyes as she bent forward, her blond curls bouncing with the heaving of her shoulders. It was evident to all that Eddy remained the love of her life, a life that had been spent in each other’s company since childhood. Even though Eddy had recently professed his love for someone named Lani, an exotic island beauty where he now lived, color still rose to Dahlia’s cheeks at the sound of his name.

“Don’t worry, Sis. Nobody stands a chance against the likes of Eddy. Those . . .” Danny shifted under Mrs. O’s glare before continuing, “They don’t stand a chance.”

Billi watched the group wondering at their future. Since the beginning of last June, so much change had bumped into their lives. They had called themselves the ‘Gang of Five’: Billi, Raymond, Eddy, Dahlia and young Danny, their tag-along chaperone. But when Raymond

Richardson, her fiancée, unexpectedly died testing a new plane for the Army Air Corps, the security of their beautiful world shattered. Then Jack stepped through the cracks into their lives bringing with him suspicion, fear and hatred. Until today. It all seemed so impossible.

“And now we take you to Honolulu.” The announcer’s voice caught the attention of those in the room as they waited, their eyes now riveted on the old Lexington Superheterodyne. They were lucky to still have the large polished radio. It remained the only good piece of furniture that had lasted through her father’s many business ventures. Her mother took the radio, along with the children, when they parted ways so many years ago.

Billi focused on the emblem, “Made in the United States of America” just below the round speaker portal hoping one of the old tubes did not blow before the excited voice hurriedly let loose the latest updates.

“Hello NBC. This is KGU in Honolulu, Hawaii. I am speaking from the roof of the Advertising Publishing Company building. We have witnessed this morning the distant view of the battle of Pearl Harbor and the severe bombing of Pearl Harbor by enemy planes, undoubtedly, Japanese. The city of Honolulu has also been attacked and considerable damage done. This battle has been going on for nearly three hours. This is no joke. This is real war. We cannot estimate yet how much damage has been done but it has been a very severe attack. The Navy and Army appear now to have the air and the sea under control . . .”

A woman’s voice broke into the announcement, “Just a minute, may I interrupt for a second please. This is the telephone company. This is the operator.”

“Yes,” The man’s voice remained calm.

“We’re trying to get through on an emergency call.”

“But we’re talking to New York, ma’am.” The flabbergasted reporter responded.

The air waves emitted static before a different announcer’s voice took control of the situation, “Just a moment please.”

“They’ve lost contact with Hawaii.” Dahlia whispered.

Billi watched as her mother’s grasp tightened on her father’s hand, their bond strengthening with the disaster now facing every American with servicemen in Hawaii. She felt her knees buckle at the weight of

this reality. Letting a wiggling Pepper free, she sank down on the couch next to the sobbing Dahlia.

The pounding at the door startled them out of their trance and Pepper, with his piercing bark, charged out of the room toward the foyer.

Billi hurried behind her fierce little beast, adjusting her blue chiffon wedding dress. Jack must have left something. She felt her heart lighten, remembering the warmth of his touch and all he had taught her about lovemaking the night before their marriage.

As she passed through the large wooden pocket door toward the entry, she tried not to show her disappointment at the small figure that banged heavily, rattling the glass.

She hurried to open the door before his determination took its toll. "Hello, Victor."

"Hey, Billi." The puffs of his breath as he spoke signified the chill in the air. "Mom wants to know where Pearl Harbor is. She's real upset. Won't stop crying. She said you would know."

"Come in." Billi held the door wide, then waited as the youngster stomped in then respectfully removed his heavy snow boots.

Victor meekly followed Billi into the living room to wait for Mrs. O'Shaughnessy to answer his mother's question. Mrs. O, the block captain, knew everything, or at least that assumption spread through the neighborhood. Sometimes, that "everything" evolved into more than the neighbors wanted her to know.

"Come with me," Billi instructed the youngster when her mother seemed unable to comprehend the question. Of course, Billi realized, many people would not know where to find Pearl Harbor in the vast outside world. Until today, it was of no consequence, unless you knew someone stationed in paradise.

She lifted the multi-colored world globe from its stand and put it on the dining room table. This ball of a map emerged as a vital part of their existence when first Raymond, then Eddy, had enlisted.

She noticed Victor's eyes rest beyond the globe on a stack of untouched schnecken, her mother's famous sticky cinnamon buns encrusted with walnuts. "Go ahead," she encouraged him, "help yourself."

Someone should be enjoying their partially consumed wedding feast. Billi regarded the table where the half-drunk crystal glasses of

champagne, recently raised in toasts of good fortune, remained a testament to the startling impact of the news of Japan's attack.

She spun the globe waiting for Victor to choose a delicacy.

"We are here." Her finger marked Seattle, Washington, on the green landmass of North America. Then her finger moved across the blue representing the Pacific Ocean to land on a speck of a green island that sat among four other islands surrounded by lots of little dots. "This is the island of Oahu, where the Navy base of Pearl Harbor is located."

"That's far away." His statement sounded reasonable, even though a bit muffled as he swallowed the gooey dough. "Why is everyone so upset? How would the Japanese find us here?"

Billi almost dropped the globe, remembering the conversations between the Japanese spies she had overheard in the Forbidden City Night Club in San Francisco. She saw the image of the fan with the three Watatsumi, the Dragon Sea Gods, hiding the details of a new Japanese weapon. She began to tremble, the large orb shimmying with her fear.

"Hey." Victor's voice finally broke into her thoughts. "Isn't Eileen a Jap and her brother Kenny?"

She looked into his young eyes squinting with hatred for the enemy who had just plunged American into a war it never wanted. How could she explain something she herself did not understand? The Japanese Imperial Government's Special Envoy Kurusu arrived in Washington D.C. on November 15th, bringing renewed hope to the US. Across the country the isolationist believed that along with Ambassador Admiral Nomura, the two Japanese diplomats could convince the Land of the Rising Sun to build a compromise with America. Through the efforts of United States Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, a meeting had been arranged with President Roosevelt to garner such a deal for peace. Then on Wednesday, November 26th, 1941, Hull conveyed President Roosevelt's demands to the Emperor's ambassadors to relay back to Japan. Americans clung to this exchange as an opening for peace.

She could not imagine how to explain the Nippon lies and deceit. Over the last eleven days Emperor Hirohito and Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki had stalled for time so they could send their ships from Japan across the vast ocean for this early morning attack on Pearl Harbor.

“No. Eileen and Kenny are American, just like you and me,” Billi spoke her words with conviction as if not only answering Victor but shoring up her own misgivings.

Victor popped the remaining piece of his delicacy into his mouth then eyed her suspiciously as he chewed. She realized at that instant that those who did not already hold the American Japanese as friends would now view them only as the dangerous enemy. Furthermore, they made an easy target as few had strayed from what was known as Japantown, just a few blocks away. And, compounding the situation, there were those who refused to learn or speak English, depending on the younger generation to be their interpreters as they moved through their lives in this new country.

She encountered these facts personally while overcoming the language barrier and immersing herself in the Japanese way. Her gift for the Nippon language and culture recently plummeted her into danger, binding her to Jack.

As she lifted the globe back into its stand, she paused to observe how peaceful the world looked in the blues and greens of the sphere she held.

She turned to face Victor smiling at the dusting of sugar glaze clinging to his upper lip. Danny strode past the younger child, giving him a playful swat on the shoulder, before reaching for his deserted cup of coffee. Their friendly interchange continued when suddenly Billi felt her stomach lurch. Such youth, such beauty. How would this war affect these two young men?

Her gut-wrenching sensation mirrored her reaction from a few months ago. On October 27th, 1941, General Tōjō Hideki surprised the world by adding the title of Prime Minister of Japan to his role as leader of the Imperial Rule Assistance Association. At that moment Billi knew the world had changed for the worse. Tōjō's propaganda to expand the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, extending their empire beyond China throughout the Indian Ocean toward Australia, projected a tone for success through ultra-nationalist militant ways. There was no room for the human spirit, only the strict obedience to the wishes of their emperor, Hirohito, seen as their God. An emperor secreted away in his castles, far removed from his subjects, whose view of the world arrived on the lips of treacherous individuals such as Tōjō.

Her mind flicked to the dark alley in San Francisco when, posing undercover as the wayward Ginger, her identity and ability to understand Japanese became apparent to Akio, the spy. Her knees weakened at the memory of the look in his black eyes, lust mixed with rage. He would show her no mercy, as the Nippon soldiers would show no mercy to any captive.

She fought back her tears and began to pray. She prayed for those who had lost their lives this morning, hoping her brother was not among them. She prayed for Jack and those she knew would rally to fight for the United States. She pleaded with God that this new conflict would end quickly so that the youth of America, like the two young boys who innocently stood before her, would not have to endure the horrors of battle at the hands of the military machines like Akio.

Straightening, Billi mustered up a smile for Victor and Danny. She could not sit back and wait. She would find a way to utilize her unique abilities with the Japanese language and knowledge of their culture to help halt the spreading war that she and Jack could not expose in time to prevent this morning's surprise attack. Filled with the vigor of the call to duty she hurried past the two young men. No one could know of her intent, especially her new husband.

THE FREEZING WIND SWEEPED across Jack's face, bringing with it an icy rain that struck his bare flesh with stinging force. He blinked at the slight thud of a frozen pellet bouncing off the patch over his right eye. Most of the snow had melted away. Only the crests of the hills held the reminder of the white storm which camouflaged Akio's escape as his small boat slipped beneath the twirling crystal flakes on Dyes Inlet two days ago. The sound of the small motor retreating under the cover of the white blanket still buzzed through Jack's mind, reverberating defeat. He hoped Akio had bled to death from the knife driven deeper into his assailants' shoulder as they struggled, tumbling down the slick slope to the water's edge. Jack now understood the path of Akio's escape. His blood ran cold with the knowledge that Mr. O'Shaughnessy's home on Erlands Point lay on the other side of a small jetty of land, easily accessible by boat from this very spot on Bainbridge Island.

Jack leaned back under the cover of the long veranda that wrapped around the elegant house on the crest of the hill off Crystal Springs Drive. He had seen enough. This side of the island provided perfect viewing for all ship traffic passing to and from Bremerton Naval Base. Furthermore, the extremely convenient short distance by water to Dyes Inlet gnawed at his growing frustration.

A rap on the window from his assistant, Niles Duckworth, drew his attention. The look on Duckworth's face through the glass expressed the importance of his discovery. Jack stepped across the wide porch and inside. From almost every point in the deep-hued wood paneled living room, the view of the driving rain hitting the water provided a constant reminder of the ease with which the spies watched their prey. On a clear day, the view would be limitless.

"The closets showed little sign of anyone living here." Duckworth kept his voice low, controlled. "They must have known we'd come here fast."

Jack nodded then walked further into the room. The brick fireplace sat across from the windows. It would have been so easy to stand here in this dim room, with the dark wood floor to ceiling, and not be seen. If the large, wrap-around covered veranda offered too much exposure, then simply stand at any window to observe the sloping hill down to the beach and Sinclair Inlet. Across the Inlet, Illahee Dock protruded into the waters providing mooring for large US Navy ships. Also convenient, this inlet flowed directly to the Bremerton Naval Base to the north, the Pacific Coast Torpedo Station to the south, and just around the corner to Rich Passage at the foot of Fort Ward before continuing into Puget Sound beyond. The main thoroughfare for naval traffic sat in clear view. To examine any ship and its cargo from this vantage point became mere child's play. This home on the hill presented the perfect observation point as it posed as the summer home of the Japanese Consulate.

He knelt to check the thick pile of ashes in the fireplace. Very un-Japanese to leave behind these telltale clues. Some of the clumps of embers resembled books as they still clung together in one black heap. With his gloved hand he fished out the remains of a long, twisted article, possibly of clothing. As he held it higher for inspection it snapped in two. Then his one good eye saw it and he rocked back on his heels with relief. Tucked on the outside of the fireplace, caught in the groove of

the brick, was a button from a shirt. The opalescence of the pearl barely twinkled in the dim light of the late afternoon.

Akio had been sloppy in his retreat. True this summer residence of the Japanese Consul afforded the perfect placement for espionage. But more importantly it served as a refuge and safe harbor for the badly bleeding and injured Lieutenant Commander Akio Sumiyoshi.

Jack stood and headed for the kitchen with Duckworth following silently behind. The tall ceilings and high cupboards reminded him of the O'Shaughnessy home and his new wife he had left behind in pursuit of the one man he was bent on sending to his grave. The white walls and ceiling created a glaring contrast to the rest of the house. The light lingering aroma of cooked fish, garlic and onion reminded him of the streets in Japantown. He opened the stove, but the racks were bare and impeccably cleaned of any information. The cupboards held intricately designed Japanese plates, teacups and serving dishes. The embossed gold dragon swirling around the cups reminded Jack of the fan displaying three dragons spiraling out of the water. The fan presented to Billi as a gift by Professor Fujihara, which held the hidden valuable clue of the intent of the enemy.

Duckworth opened the last cupboard nearest the door. As Jack moved closer, he smiled. The bottle was in an image of a stout fisherman holding a large carp under his arm. The porcelain image sat on what looked like water, his black hair was pulled back, his small goatee and arched eyebrows enhanced his expression of humble richness. Jack lifted the sake bottle then shook it, only a splash of liquid remained. He flipped it over, noting the name, recognizing the origin and quality.

Kamotsuru Sake. Akio kept a supply of this brand in the room they shared at Toyon Hall while attending Stanford. Jack's anger mounted as he recalled the traitor's voice bragging about visiting the ancient Kamotsuru brewery, just outside of Hiroshima, during one of his many privileged excursions with his famous grandfather, Count Kawamuro Sumiyoshi. The Count was later bestowed with the rank of Admiral. On many occasions, as the sake surged through Akio's veins, his hatred and disdain for all things not Japanese seeped forth as he raged against the lazy and worthless Americans.

Over the last few months, Jack spent hours trying to reconstruct some of those scenes and to recall Akio's scraps of doodlings that he had protected with a vengeance. Those very abstract drawings represented more than mere idle folly. Suspicion bloomed with the realization those scribbles provided the blueprints for the development of advanced war machinery. However, how that new design would impact the war, still remained unsolved. Hopefully, the fan with the spiraling water dragons, now in Billi's possession, would lead them to more answers.

"The stairs are over here." Duckworth took the lead down the narrow hall to the lackluster steps to the upper floor.

As Jack stood in the middle of the one large room which created the second floor, the view again grabbed at him. He felt his heart pound in anger. Even with the pelting rain he could clearly observe a Black Ball Ferry slide out of Rich Passage and head toward Bremerton. From this vantage point the naked eye had several minutes to observe the cargo, but with the use of binoculars or any form of telescope, the details would be remarkable.

"Christ." He stood and took a deep breath. "Why the hell does the consul from Japan need a summer home, and why here?"

The rhetorical questions hung in the air. He did not expect Duckworth, who possessed many obscure facts, to answer.

Turning his attention to the stripped bed, Jack noted a rust colored blotch that spread against the white of the mattress only to trail off like a thin river. Blood. His excitement surged to anger when more of the life-giving fluid could not be found.

He examined the closet to find it matched Duckworth's description, only a few items hung sparingly from the rod. He checked each pocket then pounded on the walls looking for hidden drawers. The fact that very little dust lingered spoke volumes. The house was kept in impeccable shape. Someone had been living there year-round.

The sight of the small amount of blood disturbed him. Jack raced back down the stairs to the kitchen, jerking open every drawer to scan the contents.

Duckworth stood waiting in the archway to the living room when Jack faced him.

"It's not here," Jack growled.

“What?” Duckworth moved closer to look at the open drawers.

“The knife Billi stuck in Akio’s back.” Jack ran his gloved hand through his hair. “It was still embedded just below his shoulder when he escaped with Hatsuro. He has it and plans to return the favor. He will make it his mission to kill my wife using the very blade she planted in his back. Her father’s kitchen knife.”

He slammed the drawer shut then brushed past his assistant toward the front door. Together they walked under the protected ceiling of the porch and out into the sleet. Heading down the hill toward the beach, they passed the distinctive arches that created the base for the veranda. Jack ducked underneath the elegant arch on the north side only to emerge from one of the other four identical curved structures that graced the front. There was no trace of a small boat in the recesses under the decking.

The rocks slid under his foot and he heard Duckworth crunch behind him as they made their way down the shore. A small boathouse stood empty. All traces of footprints, or a boat being dragged ashore, now washed away with the receding tide. The telltale line of dried seaweed, bits of sun-bleached sticks tossed with specks of reddish crab shells, ribboned undisturbed down the shore. They climbed up to stand on the rooftop deck of the concrete boathouse. In silence they watched the blustering wind pushing white-tipped waves over gray water. A masterful view in any season.

“What the hell were we thinking.” Jack pulled his hat down lower adjusting his coat for the climb up the hill.

“The summer home of the Japanese Consulate was off limits until now.” Duckworth’s attempt to raise his bosses’ spirits missed its mark.

“We need to keep a watch out on 304 30th South for a bit longer. He’s probably out to sea by now. But that doesn’t mean he hasn’t sent someone else for his prize.”

He watched Duckworth’s expression as the stout man translated the meaning. Very little escaped his quick-witted assistant, and for that reason Jack trusted him to watch over Billi.

Duckworth blew out a deep breath as he regarded Jack, then nodded.

Both men understood that the “prize” Akio would be willing to pay anything for was Jack’s bride, Billi.