

# THAT'S LIFE

THE PATRICK AND IVY STORY



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BLUSHING BOOKS

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## PROLOGUE



DECEMBER 1944, ARDENNES-ALSACE COUNTEROFFENSIVE,  
BELGIUM

Two grenade explosions went off within four seconds of each other, sending mud, muck, and gore over the surrounding area. Patrick wiped his face with his sleeve, and he crawled forward on his stomach. His combat mind was aware of every shot fired, and he could pinpoint their position with an accuracy that had served him and his men well.

Patrick was acting on instinct as he continued to crawl forward, an invisible man blending into the mud. He threw another grenade and heard a short scream before death silenced the enemy. He was numb to death. There was little time for a conscience on the battlefield. As a frontline soldier, you quickly learned to stop the thing trying to kill you, or you died. It was a simple rule, one he had learned, lived by, and never forgot. He wanted to live.

Even after the firing stopped, and he rose to his knees, Patrick stayed low to the ground, watching his men approaching the small

stone building. Not much was left. The walls were crumbling, although a section of the roof was still in place. It was enough. It was shelter.

Franco and Cordell dragged three enemy bodies outside, face down, always face down.

“We’ll sleep dry tonight, Kid,” Mac said to Patrick with a grin. “Take a load off. You don’t look so good. Are you having another malaria attack?”

Patrick shook his head as he glared at Mac while his core group of soldiers, Franco, Cordell, Sioux, and Chester looked on, barely containing grins as they went about securing the area. Mac had decided in boot camp it was his job to watch after Patrick, and nothing had changed his mind since. No one called Lieutenant Patrick O’Shay, Kid, and got away with it except Mac and his guys.

He outranked them, now, not that it made a hell of a lot of difference to his guys. He hadn’t wanted or asked for promotions, but the bars were on his collar. They had all enlisted on the same day for varied reasons, hailing from different parts of the country. Thrown together in boot camp, they had formed a loose alliance, watching each other’s backs and nothing had changed. They still had each other backs.

For reasons he had never fully understood, Patrick had been targeted since boot camp for stripes and then brass. He guessed that no one could see he was as scared shitless as everyone else. Still, the army did not award field commissions to those who did not lead, and he had been told all his life that he was a bossy little bastard.

His rank put him in charge of his recon squad most of the time. Unseasoned first officers straight from training never lasted long in the field. Patrick supposed the higher brass had realized he was doing the job and left it to him.

He was barely twenty-two, yet he was an old man in the field, and he felt like it most of the time. He and his core group had

survived seven campaigns, fighting in North Africa, Tunisia, Sicily, Naples, Normandy, Northern France, and now Belgium. They had marched several hundred miles, and they had run hundreds more doing the *Truscott Trot*, named after General Truscott who trained them to trot four miles an hour for hours on end. Their last push had them crossing treacherous rivers, climbing mountains and scaling cliffs, all under enemy fire. The losses were immeasurable, but they had a foothold in the region now, and they would not relinquish it.

Patrick had seen the world; well, at least as much of it as the army wanted him to see. It was nothing like the world he had viewed in slideshows at home. Animals inhabited North Africa, and not the lion and tiger kind. The human butchers they stopped had destroyed everything in their path and left nothing behind, human or otherwise.

It was the job of the *Rock of the Marne*, the 3rd Infantry Division, to stop the enemy, and they did so with the help of other divisions and their allies. After North Africa was contained, the army gave the division amphibious assault training. Officers walked the lines, asking one question, "Can you swim?" Not that it mattered because when it was time to jump, you jumped and waded into enemy fire.

The 3rd Division had been part of the invasion of Sicily. They had been dropped off by DUKWs, small landing boats mostly constructed of plywood, which used heavy guns for ballast. Sicily was heavily mined and reinforced as the Germans were determined to hold their ground at all costs. Little did they know they had not faced the united forces of the allies yet.

Next, was the march to Naples by way of the Anzio landing. Naples was bombed buildings, and starving women and children. Most of Italy was in ruins, those originally left by the Romans, and now those created by the war. Once the allies occupied Italy and France, the Rhineland would be next.

It had been three long years, and Patrick thought they were

making headway. Regardless of where the Marne men fought, they doggedly refused to give ground to the enemy. Once, when asked, "I believe your division never gave an inch. Is this true?" Gen. Truscott had famously responded, "Not a God-damn inch!"

Patrick felt someone touch his shoulder, and he jerked awake. He had fallen asleep in a squatting position, resting against a stone wall.

"Eat," Mac ordered, handing him a can of beans.

Patrick automatically glanced around the room for his men.

"They've eaten," Mac snarled. "Davies is on guard."

"I'll relieve him."

Mac shoved Patrick to the floor. "After you eat and catch some shut-eye."

Patrick glared at Mac, but he was ignored as usual. His guys always knew when he was one of them, free to talk or joke around, and when he was in charge. They followed orders without question.

"Kid, do you think you will eat another bean if we ever get outta here?" Mac asked.

"Never," Patrick grunted around a mouthful he swallowed whole. He no longer bothered to chew, as there was less chance of gagging. "I want roast beef and potatoes, and stuffed chicken. Man, I love a roasted chicken. I don't ever want pickled cabbage again, either."

Mac chuckled, nodding his head in agreement. The entire squad had lived off canned pickled cabbage for three weeks in Sicily, after confiscating it from the remains of a canning factory.

Patrick settled against the wall, his legs outstretched in front.

"Chester's got the spooks," Mac said softly, settling against the wall and closing his eyes.

Patrick heard him, and he looked across the room at his friend. Chester was one of them. When a man got spooked or thought his time was up, it usually was.

He closed his eyes, not wanting to think any further. He must have slept because he jerked awake to cold rain, and fear. He never remembered his nightmares. He only knew they were not the same as the one he was living.

## CHAPTER 1



LATE AUGUST 1945, NEW YORK CITY

For all intents and purposes, Patrick O'Shay was a civilian, although he was not going to remind his superiors of it.

The bus dropped him off three blocks from Times Square. Patrick, along with other top medal recipients of the European Theatre, had returned home to a hero's welcome of parades and swarming reporters. He had received a little of the press coverage, but Audie Murphy had been the real returning hero, and it was his face that had been on the cover of *Life Magazine* and almost every newspaper in the country.

New York City had welcomed home their country's war heroes in style. Fresh off the boat, it had been the first parade of many. The spectators had loved it, and the politicians had preened with pride. The men on display had smiled and waved because they were under orders to present themselves to the public as happy, well-adjusted veterans of Hitler's war. Several days of fancy parties and



shaking hands were followed by a train trip to San Antonio and being temporarily assigned to Ft. Sam Houston.

Upon arrival, they were assigned thirty-day leaves, with permission to travel anywhere within the United States during that period. Before any of them could hightail it out of town, the services had rescinded those orders. The top ten medal recipients had been sent to major cities all over the country by train. They had been feted at each stop with parades, banquets, and speeches. After eight long weeks of being on constant review, Patrick was glad to be home again.

He had new orders in his duffel bag, and he had a pass in his wallet with no definitive end date. To his knowledge, it was one of a kind.

Now, he stood rubbernecking at Times Square with its marquees and bright lights. He remembered Broadway, famous for theatrical plays and vaudeville reviews. He had belonged here once.

The wartime dim-outs and blackouts were over. Patrick hadn't witnessed them, but he had read about them in Stars and Stripes. Now, Lady Liberty's torch glowed brightly, and the neon lights blazed in a city he hoped would never be dimmed again. Still, his city and his life were different.

The vaudeville theatre marquees he had grown up with were gone, replaced by movie houses and new Broadway shows. Patrick strolled past several familiar theatres, now closed. One marquee announced its re-opening at the end of the month with a newly released Warner Brothers Production, a movie with Joan Crawford called *Mildred Pierce*.

He stopped at Radio City Music Hall.

"Are there any seats left?"

The girl in the booth popped a pink bubble. She tore her eyes away from reading a Showbiz Weekly to regard the handsome, young serviceman with blond hair and pale, sky-blue eyes. "Honey, the show is almost over. Come back tomorrow night."

"I don't care," he answered, sliding a five-dollar bill into the money catcher.

The girl put her paper aside, popped another bubble, and grinned. "Just got home? Hey soldier, it's on the house, just don't rat me out to the manager." She slid his money through the catcher along with a ticket. "It's a balcony seat, sweetie."

"Thanks!" Gripping his duffle bag, Patrick took the stairs two at a time. Radio City Music Hall provided variety entertainment, a small leftover of vaudeville. He had missed the featured movie, but he had not come to see a motion picture. He watched a magic act, a dancing trio, and an acrobatic troupe before the famous Rockettes performed their high-kicking routines with perfect precision. For the first time in a very long while, Patrick felt a twinge of something familiar. He could not put a specific name to the feeling, but he thought it might be optimism.

It was nearly midnight when he left the theatre. The sidewalks were bustling with people as everyone had somewhere to go and something to do. Everyone was in a hurry. The streets were loud with honking, speeding cars and cabs. Patrick was a lone figure, a single man among the sweethearts and married couples, and the groups of friends milling around together. He was alone, yet, he felt more alive than he had in years.

New York was Patrick's city. He wanted to be a part of it again, except he wasn't sure he remembered how. He walked Broadway and then entered a basement-level nightclub named The Cellar where he checked his duffle bag and hat before he went to the bar.

"What will you have, soldier?" the bartender asked, eyeing Patrick's uniform, and taking in the rows of ribbons and chevrons.

"Beer."

At least he had managed to live past New York's legal drinking age of twenty-one. To Patrick's constant annoyance, he looked younger, even though his military ID would verify he was twenty-three. A uniform usually preempted the law, anyway. The rationale

was if a man was old enough to serve his country, he was old enough to order a drink.

Patrick observed a table of loud Marines who were shouting, laughing, and swearing. They were not exactly the image the services wanted to project to the general public. He had noticed lately that his manners were returning. He had spouted thousands of "Yes, sirs" and "No, sirs," but the manners drilled into him as a child had been absent for some time. When you were in an all-male environment of a military camp and looked younger than you were, being overly polite would get you tagged as a sissy or a Nancy boy, and he was neither.

The city was teeming with members of the armed forces, especially the Navy. Patrick received a few nods from other uniformed men and women. Whether it was recognition from the press blitz he had been on for the last several months or acknowledgment of his medal decoration, he had no idea. He and the other nine men were under orders to continue wearing their full insignia and decoration when in public.

Patrick sipped his beer and watched the floor show. It was an odd combination of western cowboy songs and big band tunes. Throughout the war, Hollywood had concentrated on making war movies as positive propaganda where the good guys always won. The movies could pretend. The soldiers on the ground could not.

A drunk stepped right up to Patrick's face and blocked him from moving. The smell of liquor was strong on him, and the man slurred his words as he poked Patrick in the chest with a pointed finger. "Those jerk-off recruiters said I had flat feet! I would have kicked those sons-of-bitches to kingdom come!"

"Sure," Patrick agreed, trying to sidestep the intoxicated man.

The bartender was paying attention. He snapped his fingers, and two large bouncers appeared to escort the intoxicated man to the door. With a shove, the drunk was ejected from the club.

"Thanks," Patrick said.

"It's on the house, soldier. If we had more like you and less like

him, the war might not have lasted so long," replied the bartender, nodding toward the ribbons on Patrick's chest.

"Amen," a tuxedoed man perched on a nearby barstool echoed, offering to buy the next round of drinks.

A half-empty glass was replaced by a second, and although he nursed it for a while too, Patrick was feeling the effects, and he did not like it. He was glad the club was closing soon. He had never learned how to handle alcohol, although he hadn't put much effort into increasing his tolerance, either. Alcohol and weapons were not a good mix, and alcohol was not a good mix for him. He had a personal bias against it, and he had his reasons.

The bar's clientele was in the mood to spot all the servicemen's drinks. More than a few of the Marines were heading for hangovers in the morning. Patrick had nursed his two beers as long as he could without appearing insulting. His third beer had slid across the bar with a wink from the bartender. It was birch beer. At closing time, he thanked everyone, collected his gear, and made his way to the sidewalk. Two blocks away, he stopped at Tony's All Night Grill and ordered a cup of black coffee.

The crowds were thinning as even the most die-hard New Yorkers, who loved their nightlife, were heading home. Patrick did the same. He took a cab to East 37th Street and got out at the corner. Mrs. Hudson's boarding house was a few blocks away.

He stood across the street and drank in the sight of the only place he had ever considered home. He had been living at the boarding house off and on since he was nine-years-old. It was an old four-story brownstone.

He knew the story behind the house. Mr. Hudson had bought it for his bride in 1901 during a stock market panic. He had purchased the four-story mansion for pennies on the dollar. Several years later, a truck had killed Mr. Hudson while he was crossing the street. With no income and no skills, his widow had turned the enormous mansion into a boarding house.

The old brownstone had not changed much. Patrick understood

the front door would be locked. It was a rule of the house. Be home by ten o'clock or use your key. He had the key to his apartment taped to one of his dog tags. He had lost his front door key, but he knew Mrs. Hudson kept a spare hidden on the back porch. He found the key in the same place under a pot of flowers. It felt good to know some things had not changed.

He made his way through the house by memory. There was a little bit of streetlight shining through the windows. In the darkness, it looked as if little had changed. Maybe it was a bit shabbier and more worn. The war had been hard on everyone. Patrick began the long walk up to his fourth-floor apartment.



IVY YEAGER HEARD footsteps in the hallway, and her eyes flew open in fear. It was either very late or very early. Whichever it was, no one should be wandering through the house. She instinctively glanced toward the other bed in the room before remembering her daughter was safe elsewhere. She crept from her bedroom, concerned for her aunt who occupied the second bedroom on the opposite side of the front room. Ivy sucked in her breath when she heard someone opening the apartment door. Searching for a weapon, she lifted a vase off a table.

The apartment door creaked as Patrick opened it, and he was reaching for the light switch when he sensed a movement in the dark. He immediately reacted to the danger and had his opponent on the floor in seconds as something crashed to the floor. His fist was clenched, ready to pound someone. Then he realized his left hand had connected with a soft protruding mound of flesh. He hadn't made contact with the hard muscle of a male combatant, but rather the warm, pliable softness of a woman's body. In the next half-second, he quickly recognized he had a swearing, fighting woman under him.

"Stop it," he ordered as he rolled with the woman and gave her a hard swat on her bottom.

"Oh!" the woman screeched.

The lights came on, and Patrick blinked in the sudden brightness. He was staring straight into a pair of furious blue eyes belonging to the body he was holding tightly against him.

"Paddy!" Mrs. Hudson exclaimed, standing by the bedroom door, smiling broadly.

"Let go of me," hissed the young woman.

Patrick rolled, reversing their positions. Now, the young woman was sitting on top of him, trying to make him release her hands.

"How dare you!"

"Hush, Ivy," Mrs. Hudson said as she tied the sash on her robe. "You will wake up the whole house."

"I want to wake the whole house," the girl snapped. "Call the police!"

"Hush," Mrs. Hudson repeated. "It's Patrick."

"I don't care who he is," Ivy snorted. "He doesn't have the right to break in and attack me. He got fresh with me!"

"Accidentally," Patrick admitted, and he grinned as he remembered how good the *accident* had felt for a few seconds.

The young woman pulled a hand free and raised it to slap him, but Patrick caught the hand firmly in his grasp. She was furious at his impertinence and flushed red with embarrassment.

"Before you get angrier," Patrick suggested, holding onto her hand. "Check out who is sitting where?"

"Oh!" the young woman squealed, suddenly aware that she was sitting directly on his crotch. She scrambled off him, landing on the floor with a thump.

"Hello, Mrs. Hudson," Patrick greeted, getting to his feet and taking a long look at the woman he had known since he was a boy. She was older, grayer, and a bit heavier, but still a wonderful, familiar sight. She also looked shorter than he remembered.

Mrs. Hudson hugged him tightly, and Patrick felt comforted and safe. He was home.

The young woman was left to get on her feet as they ignored her.

"I'm glad you are home, Patrick. We've been keeping track of you through the newspapers for the last several weeks. We are so proud of you. It's hard to believe our little Paddy is one of the most decorated servicemen of the war. We thought you would have called or at least come by to see us when you were in New York earlier."

"I wanted to, Mrs. Hudson, but I didn't dare," Patrick explained. "We were on army time. I still am, and I have to play their game. They have been parading us around with the press dogging us every step of the way. I didn't want to drag that mess in on you. I was put on extended leave this afternoon, so I thought I could come home now."

"You should have called first!" the young woman snapped angrily. "You scared me half to death."

"Hush!" Mrs. Hudson retorted. "Of course, you came home, Patrick. This is where you belong!"

"I'm sorry, I didn't know you were living here," Patrick apologized.

"We wrote you," the young woman hissed.

"The last mail I received had been floating around for seven or eight months," Patrick clarified matter-of-factly. "Now that I am stateside, maybe my mail will catch up with me."

The young woman's face remained flushed. "I'm sorry, but you scared me."

"I'm sorry, too," Patrick repeated. "Did I hurt you?"

She shook her head, rubbing her hand, and then hid it behind her.

"We couldn't leave your apartment empty with the housing shortage," Mrs. Hudson explained. "Every available space had to be used for the workers in the war plants and shipyards. We didn't

want to rent your apartment to strangers, so my niece, her daughter, and I took it while we rented out my old apartment. We were able to fit six boarders, all brothers, and cousins from Michigan, into it. Most of our rooms have been refitted for double occupancy so we could rent to more war workers. Everyone had to do their part."

"It's okay, Mrs. Hudson, I'm glad you did," Patrick insisted since the older woman appeared to be distressed.

His attention shifted to the younger woman. "Wait a minute. Are you the niece, Victoria, mother of Angelica, age seven, who wants to be a movie star when she grows up?"

"Yes, although her current goal is to be a ferry boat captain," the woman admitted, smiling for the first time. "Everyone calls me Ivy, and my daughter is Angel."

"Patrick O'Shay, I would like you to meet my niece, Ivy Yeager," Mrs. Hudson said, making the formal introductions. "Ivy, this is my Paddy, Patrick O'Shay."

Patrick smiled at Mrs. Hudson and kissed her on the cheek. He was pleased by the idea of her claiming him.

He regarded the younger woman and liked what he saw. She had shoulder-length, dark, curly brown hair, and beautiful blue eyes set in a heart-shaped face. She was a little thing, not much more than five feet. She was not plump, but she had curves, which she realized he was noticing. She was wearing the top half of a pair of pajamas, but not the bottoms. She pulled a crocheted afghan from a chair, and she wrapped it around her waist.

"You don't look old enough to have a seven-year-old," Patrick commented.

"Eight," Ivy corrected. "My daughter is eight now. You don't look old enough to be a war hero!"

Suddenly both of them were embarrassed, she for her lack of a proper dressing gown, and he for staring at her.

"I am sorry," Patrick repeated, glancing away. "As I said, I didn't know anyone was occupying my apartment. I'll find somewhere to



sleep. I can go to the Ambassador. The brass housed us there when we first came stateside.”

“Absolutely not,” Mrs. Hudson exclaimed. “It’s almost three in the morning. This is your home. I will sleep on the couch tonight and Ivy can take your brother’s old room. I have been using Michael’s room for a while. The war shortage, you know.”

“No,” Patrick said. “I wouldn’t feel right displacing you. I don’t want to make anyone uncomfortable.”

“Oh, nonsense,” Ivy exclaimed. She spoke with a southern accent he was unable to place. “You frightened me, but I don’t need your protection! The war has changed many of our views about propriety, and women have gotten tougher. We do what we need to do and to hell with decorum.”

“Ivy!” Mrs. Hudson chastised in a disapproving tone.

“Well, I’m sorry, Aunt Lucy, but it’s the truth,” Ivy replied. “I will share a bed with you tonight, Aunt Lucy. Lt. O’Shay, you may have your room. I’ll get fresh sheets.”

Patrick opened his mouth to protest and then closed it. He was home. He wanted to sleep in his bed in his old room and not go tramping into the night.

Ivy walked into Mrs. Hudson’s bedroom, and she soon returned, wearing a long robe and carrying an armload of sheets.

“Where is your daughter? I wouldn’t want her to find me here and be frightened.”

The young woman smiled, “It would take more than you to frighten my daughter, Lieutenant. My daughter is spending the night across the street at the Mulroney’s.”

“Little Stephanie?” Patrick asked, remembering her. “She was a cute little thing the last time I saw her. She was riding her red tricycle on the sidewalk.”

“She is eight years old, too,” Ivy explained, her eyes softening. “Her little brother, Herbie, rides the tricycle now. I’ll make the bed.”

“No, I can do it. I have interrupted your sleep enough.”

She hesitated before agreeing with a nod of her head and

handing Patrick the sheets. "Breakfast is at six, but we will make an exception for you if you want to sleep late."

"I remember the rules. I grew up with them," Patrick replied, talking to Ivy's back as she followed Mrs. Hudson into the other bedroom and shut the door.

He went into his old room and removed his jacket, shirt, and tie, and then he sat on the bed. Patrick flexed the fingers of his hands, remembering the softness of Ivy Yeager's small, full breast. Even though he had groped her accidentally, he had enjoyed the feel of a woman. He regarded the stack of fresh linens, and then he lifted the pillow from the bed to his nose to sniff at a light flowery fragrance. He decided not to change the sheets, and he undressed to his skivvies. Lying between the female smelling linens, Patrick closed his eyes in an attempt to turn off the second sense that had kept him alive for so long. It was much nicer to think about a woman's soft breast in his hand and to smell the scent on her skin.

He awoke with a jerk, and he automatically reached for his rifle. Except his rifle was no longer his constant companion. He was lying on a soft mattress in his childhood bedroom. Patrick checked his watch, and he was surprised to see it was half-past ten in the morning.

Looking around, he realized his old room had changed. A youth-sized bed was shoved into the small alcove where he had kept a comfortable old chair. The alcove had been his place to read and do lessons. Stuffed animals were posed carefully against the pillow on the small bed, and feminine things were arranged neatly on top of the chest of drawers. A clothes rack stood against one wall with women's clothing hanging on it.

His childhood haven of science fiction books, baseball cards, and autographed photographs of his favorite vaudeville acts had been feminized. The mother and daughter duo, the writers of the letters he had received in Belgium, now shared his room.

Patrick took a long hot shower, and he dressed before heading downstairs. He met Ivy on the second-floor landing. She was

carrying a basket of what appeared to be freshly laundered clothing.

“Good morning,” Patrick greeted.

“Good morning. If you go to the kitchen, we’ll make you breakfast or an early lunch. Aunt Lucy is in the kitchen or close by, just holler for her,” Ivy instructed with a smile. She passed Patrick, and he covertly watched her climbing the stairs. She had terrific legs!

Mrs. Hudson was dusting in the hallway, and she hustled Patrick into the kitchen. “What will you have, dear?”

“Coffee?”

“I’ll make a fresh pot,” Mrs. Hudson said.

“No,” he objected. “Coffee is rationed, isn’t it?”

Mrs. Hudson sighed. “Yes, but it’s a special occasion. It’s your homecoming.”

“I can drink whatever is left, Mrs. Hudson,” he insisted.

She took the coffee basket from the percolator, and she plugged in the pot. “What would you like to eat, dear?”

“I’m not hungry,” Patrick replied, realizing he was regretting the drinks of the previous evening. Alcohol did not lie easily on his stomach. “Coffee and toast will be fine.”

Mrs. Hudson gave him a sharp appraisal as she clucked her tongue. “You are too thin, Paddy. You don’t look healthy.”

“I have always been thin, Mrs. Hudson, and I’m as strong as an ox. You were constantly trying to fatten me up as a kid. It’s too bad sugar is rationed. I could do justice to a piece of your chocolate cake.”

She smiled and poured him a hot cup of coffee, putting two pieces of bread in an old-fashioned toaster dating to the early 1920s. Then she carried a covered cake plate to the table, and she removed the lid to reveal a yellow cake with white icing. It was not as good as her chocolate cake, but better than anything Patrick had eaten in the mess tents.

Ivy came into the kitchen, announcing, “Aunt Lucy and I will move our things today.”

"Where? I thought you said every room was double-bunked."

"Room 207 is empty," Ivy answered. "It's one of the few single rooms. A torpedo plant worker left last Friday, but the room still smells of cigars."

"The three of you can't fit into a single room," Patrick protested. "If it couldn't house two people, it can't house three. I'll take the single room."

Ivy pressed her lips together, and Patrick recognized a stubborn woman when he saw one. He could see she wanted to argue with him until she glanced at her aunt who nodded agreement.

"I'm taking room 207. Deal with it!" Patrick announced with finality.

"All right, but it's temporary until we can make other arrangements."

"So, what are your plans, Paddy?" Mrs. Hudson asked. "Are you resting for a couple of weeks? Will you travel around and visit friends, or will you stay in the city?"

"I can't travel far until I'm discharged, and the army won't discharge me until—" Patrick stopped mid-sentence. "Well, we have unfinished business. Everyone hopes the VE day agreements hold, but the army is hedging its bets by keeping officers on reserved status. Officially, I'm still attached to Fort Dix, active duty. I'm on leave until my discharge. As far as I know, I am staying here. I've had my fill of traveling and hotels."

"Mrs. Hudson, do you know anything about a lawyer named Chessingler? He sent me a letter telling me the Creevies had died quite a while back. Perhaps he can tell me what happened to my belongings. I hope they didn't throw them away."

"We have most of your things stored here in the attic," Mrs. Hudson said. "Mr. Chessingler contacted me after the accident that killed Mr. and Mrs. Creevie. He was Michael's lawyer, too, before we lost him. Mr. Chessingler said since you were overseas he had taken charge of your finances."

"I received a letter from him about three years ago," Patrick

stated. "It had been heavily censored, so I couldn't make much sense of it. I made out the part about the Creevies' car accident, but not much more. The censors were thorough. I could decipher something about a will, and something about an estate, but there wasn't much left to read, only a word here and there, so I don't know what it was about."

Mrs. Hudson shrugged. "Mr. Chessingler came here and introduced himself. He said he was assuming responsibility for both Michael's estate and the Creevies' until you returned from the war. Michael had put Mr. Creevie in charge of his financial affairs when he enlisted."

"I know. Mr. Creevie considered me part of the package," Patrick answered, taking a deep breath to tamp down the irritation that still rankled when he thought of his brother's decisions on his behalf. "Michael and I argued a lot before he shipped out."

Mrs. Hudson looked at Patrick with concern. "Michael had your best interests in mind, Paddy. I am not family, so Mr. Chessingler would not give me much information. From what little he told me, it sounded complicated."

"Aunt Lucy and I have been sending the proceeds of the boarding house to the financial firm as he directed," Ivy added. "I wrote you about it, but we didn't hear back."

Patrick grimaced. "I never received the letter. The army delivered millions of letters, but my mail was mostly lost in transit. The few letters I did receive had gone through so many censors, there was little left to read."

"Mr. Chessingler leased the Creevie house rather than leave it empty, so it had to be cleared of personal belongings," Mrs. Hudson explained. "He sent several boxes marked with your name, and we stored them. We also packed most of the personal belongings in your apartment and put them in the attic."

"Thanks. I'll go through the stuff later. Right now, I guess I need to talk to the lawyer, Mr. Chessingler."

"Do you have a coat?" Ivy asked. "Fall is coming fast this year."

There has been an unusual chill in the air for the last week. It's not September yet, but the temperatures are dropping."

"It's in my duffel," Patrick began as Ivy jumped to her feet and exclaimed, "I'll get it!"

She dashed from the kitchen ignoring Patrick's command of "No!"

He was not accustomed to having his orders ignored, and he must have looked angry because Mrs. Hudson patted his hand.

"Let her be, Patrick. She is young and wants to help."

"The duffel is too heavy for her to carry," he insisted, crossing the room.

"Then she will drag it," Mrs. Hudson replied with a laugh. "Ivy is resourceful. Now tell me what you want for dinner tonight. I'll fix something special for your homecoming. We didn't tell anyone you were home because some of my old-timers would have awakened you."

"Some of the old tenants are still here?" Patrick asked in surprise. At one time, the house had been rented exclusively to vaudevillians.

"Oh, yes," Mrs. Hudson responded happily. "Several of our old tenants are with us. The acts are different, or they have gone to work in the war plants, but they stayed. They have been living here for so long; they consider it home. They will be so pleased to see you. We are very proud of you, Patrick."

"Thank you. Excuse me."

Patrick moved quickly, and he met Ivy Yeager midway on the second level of stairs. She was dragging his army duffel bag. He took the bag from her, and he carried it to the single room he would occupy. She removed a ring of keys from her apron pocket, unlocked the door, and handed him the key. The room was small and dingy, and it did smell strongly of cigars. It was still an improvement over sleeping on the ground.

"We'll clean and air it out today," Ivy declared, propping the window open with a stick.

"It's okay," he replied, dropping his duffle bag on the bed. "Don't try to carry this bag again. It's too heavy. You don't listen well."

"I am your employee, Lt. O'Shay. It's my job to make our tenants comfortable."

Patrick fell silent. He was annoyed by her words. His brother had owned the boarding house, not him. He found his overcoat and the small packet of letters inside. He pulled out the envelope from the lawyer's office, but when he turned, Ivy had taken his coat from the bed. She was gone before he could stop her.

When he returned to the kitchen, she was using the steam kettle to smooth the wrinkles from the heavy wool.

Mrs. Hudson intervened. "Patrick, dear, you didn't tell me what you wanted for your special dinner."

"I don't know what time I'll be back, Mrs. Hudson. I don't want you going to any extra effort. I will eat almost everything except beans, cabbage, or anything pickled. I may never eat them again."