

The

CODEBREAKER'S
DAUGHTER



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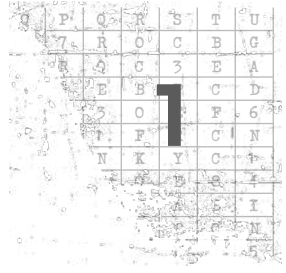
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To Lucy and Emma,
with all my love.



Dinah

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 1944

As the bell above the drugstore door gave its apologetic half jingle, Dinah Kendall turned casually on her stool to see who else had ventured out on such a blustery winter afternoon. She smiled at the trio in drab olive wool coats. Yes. These had to be her assigned marks, though they'd arrived later than scheduled.

The first man was older, tall and thin enough to place at least third in a Lincoln look-alike contest if he'd only grow a beard. He surveyed the drugstore with a frown, as if disappointed by how utterly twentieth century their surroundings were. A younger fellow stumbled after him, the tortoiseshell glasses on his round face obscured by the sudden fog of warmth. The third man, a college linebacker sort with perfectly coiffed blond hair, let the door fall shut behind them.

While they bantered and stamped slush from their boots, Dinah noted her first impressions—in her memory, of course. It would look suspicious to take out her notebook. All she knew

for sure was that they were agents of the Office of Strategic Services. The first two might be diplomatic spies or radio technicians, but probably not commandos parachuting into danger to support resistance groups. The third one with the blond hair and loud laugh . . . well, he had the build of a field agent, at least.

Time to insert herself into the conversation. Dinah smiled warmly as the three army men approached the counter. "You're brave fellows coming out in this weather."

"We were hopin' for a battlefield tour, but the park's closed for snow," Glasses said. His Southern accent made her wonder which side of the war his great-grandfathers had fought on. "Our bus driver recommended this place instead."

The blond linebacker glanced around doubtfully. This close, Dinah could catch a whiff of his spicy cologne, something most rural boys wouldn't be caught dead wearing. "He said it used to be a hotel, and Lincoln stayed here."

"He did," she assured him, knowing that the maze of boxes and bottles flanked by an ordinary diner counter would be a disappointment. "In fact, President Lincoln wrote the Gettysburg Address in a bedroom upstairs."

The older man's eyebrows shot up. "No kidding?"

She nodded. "Some nincompoop stripped the building of its brick and made it into a soda fountain. It's really too bad." The storefront ought to at least have a historical plaque, rather than windows plastered with advertisements for magazines and mouthwash.

Gettysburg was the only place in America in 1944 where if someone talked about "the war," you had to ask which one. If you closed your eyes to block out the cars and electric lights and newspaper headlines, it was easy to hear echoes of the Civil War all around town.

Come on, Dinah, you're not a tour guide. She'd given up on that dream. "Anyway, the Wills House can't be beat for a cheap meal."

They seemed to have a hearty appetite, placing hefty orders with the soda jerk and ribbing one another about how much they could consume in one go.

Dinah had to fight the feeling that, under ordinary circumstances, she'd enjoy a chat with these three without ulterior motives. Thoughts like that might make her go easy on them.

"Miss?" The freckle-faced jerk proffered a glass of root beer brimming with foam, and Dinah whisked it away.

In a confidential tone, she leaned toward the soldiers. "I came in to pick up a prescription for my mother, so I thought I'd drown my sorrows while I'm at it. I'm a student at Gettysburg College, and my last exam went rather poorly."

That was a lie, but at twenty, Dinah was the right age to be enrolled in college, and she couldn't have them think she was a flirty bobby-soxer still in high school or they wouldn't give her the time of day. And she needed some explanation for her presence in the empty drugstore on such a gloomy winter afternoon.

"Get them talking as soon as possible," the colonel had instructed her when he'd explained her unique volunteer assignment two months ago. *"Any fellow who can't hold his tongue and keep up his cover on our soil is likely to put his team in jeopardy once he's overseas. We need you to be thorough, Miss Kendall. Lives are at stake."*

"That's tough." Dinah blinked back to her current reality, where the older OSS recruit was nodding sympathetically. "I always thought things got easier toward the middle of term."

So he was college educated—and an optimist. "That's very kind of you to say, Mr. . . ."

"Stanley Hewitt."

"And I'm Milton . . . Milton Hardy," his bespeckled Southern friend was quick to add. She noted the slight pause before his surname.

When she glanced at the blond linebacker, he gave a movie-star smile marred only by one crooked front tooth. "Ralph Baker."

A strong start. Those were names on the list she'd been given—not their real names, only the aliases these men used during training.

The men took stools next to her, so far the only other customers, and the soda jerk hunched over the grill on the far wall to fill the extensive order. Dinah had found that, lacking alcohol to loosen tongues, a sense of privacy was the next best thing.

“My name is Dinah Kendall. And *do* call me Dinah.” She beamed at them. “Thank you so much for your service. It’s been wonderful having men in uniform around town.”

The men straightened, looking flattered, which was exactly her plan. Some of her targets made it clear they wouldn’t mind a little flirtation to get things started. Others were guarded, so getting them to talk usually meant an introduction on some practical pretext, like needing a nickel for a pay phone. Today, Dinah had gone with the part of the friendly girl next door.

They spoke of the ordinary things: where they were from, whether they had ancestors who fought in the Civil War—Stanley’s great-grandfather was a Union cavalry officer—and the snowy weather.

“I’m from Texas, y’see,” Milton continued, as if his accent hadn’t made that obvious, “where it’s only cold inside a Frigidaire, the way God intended.”

“Here, it never thaws until at least April,” Dinah admitted. “But our spring is lovely.”

Ralph snorted. “We’ll have to take your word on that, I’m afraid.”

She didn’t allow herself to react to that. Ralph had as much as admitted they’d be going overseas soon. “We’ll be sorry to see you all go. There’s something so patriotic about having handsome men in uniform striding through town. Surely it’s not so bad back at your base.”

“Oh, I’ll miss a few things,” Ralph said. He held up his thumb, counting off the list on his fingers. “First, the chow

isn't half bad. Second, some of our training is exciting. And third"—he paused to aim a wink at Dinah—"we get to drive across the state line for some quality time with beautiful girls."

The blush that Dinah felt creeping over her face wasn't feigned, although she was more embarrassed for poor Ralph than herself. If he thought about what was he was saying, he'd realize he'd given away the approximate location of his training camp—south of Gettysburg in the mountains of northern Maryland.

Stanley's eyes flashed with alarm, and he leaned toward Ralph, whispering something—in French? "Aw, can it, will you?" Ralph muttered in response. "She's just a local girl."

If only he knew. Dinah pretended to be occupied gathering napkins from the nearby basket, addressing Milton this time. "You've got to be awfully tired of conditions out in Camp Sharpe by now." Better to pretend she hadn't noticed the "state line" comment. "I'm sure the CCC didn't make those buildings for winter use. What's it like?"

By now, the soda jerk had shoved burgers before them, and Milton dug in with enough vigor to land a mustard stain on his collar.

"Just what you'd expect," Milton said, shrugging, after he'd swallowed. Had he taken a bite to give himself more time to answer? A good tactic. "Sparse and drafty."

No one corrected her false assumption. Dinah knew that they were not from Camp Sharpe, located a few miles outside of Gettysburg. Stanley, Ralph, and Milton had been bussed in from the Catocin Mountain OSS training camp in Maryland. No one was even supposed to know they were there.

No one, that is, except for army officials, OSS brass . . . and the daughter of the camp's lockpicking and safecracking instructor.

As Dinah thought through her next question, Milton pushed his basket of fries her way to offer her one, which she accepted.

Was that . . . a hint of guilt mingled with the salt?
All for the cause. Besides, you might get to make a good report for at least two of them.

"I really am grateful for your sacrifice," she said, with a bit too much of a flutter in her voice, but Milton and Ralph seemed to be eating it up. "We all are."

"We do what we can," Ralph said, wiping greasy fingers on his napkin. "For our country . . . and for you ladies back at home, of course."

How far could she push them? Ralph had already shown he didn't think much of his secrecy oaths. Time to press for some real information now. "You army boys are all the same," she teased. "Why, I just met a group of your kind last month at a New Year's dance. They worked as radio broadcasters, but that's all they'd tell me. I imagine you're doing similar work?"

This time, the pause was longer. Stanley was the first to speak. "I don't think we should say much about that."

She tilted her head so her light brown hair fell over her shoulder and smiled. "Oh, don't mind me. I just can't help being curious."

Time to direct the conversation to their training exercises—something that might make them reveal what sort of mission they were preparing for. "You know, I spend most of my days volunteering with the Red Cross, knitting and such, so I hear all about what they put you boys through in boot camp."

"When you're not in classes, you mean," Stanley interjected.

Dinah blinked. "Excuse me?"

"I'm sure most weekdays you're at the college, busy with your studies." An innocent-enough comment . . . except that Stanley was staring her down like she was on the other side of one of the interrogations the OSS recruits practiced on their instructors.

Smile, act natural. She could recover from a minor slip like that. "Oh, sure. But we've got loads of free time for volunteering, especially over the holiday break."

“Sure.” Stanley swiveled his stool slightly to face her more directly. “Say, I find it a little odd that the door over there had a notice posted that the pharmacist was out today, yet you said you picked up a prescription for your mother.”

Drat. Why did Colonel Forth have to send the smart ones her way? If the soda jerk had been standing farther away, she might have tried to claim he had filled it for her, but he was washing a stack of dishes within easy earshot.

Milton and Ralph were both frowning at their friend, clearly not following the point of these statements, but Dinah gave Stanley an assessing glance. Yes, he’d figured her out, and he wasn’t backing down. Good thing she wasn’t a real spy, she had to admit, because she’d just blown her cover, tangled up in the half-lie part of her half-truths.

“But mostly, what I want to know is,” Stanley continued, “why are you asking all these questions?”

There was nothing for it now. Dinah made a note to be more careful in the future, but for now, she might as well make her point perfectly clear. “Did you gentlemen know that before the war, not far from here, there was a summer camp run by the German-American Bund? It trained boys and girls in the principles of Hitler Youth, children who would now be about my age.”

Milton scrunched his nose beneath his glasses, clearly missing the implication, but Ralph’s eyes had gone wide with alarm. Clearly at least he recognized the name of the homegrown Nazi organization that Roosevelt had banned after Pearl Harbor. “You don’t mean . . . that is, you weren’t one of them?”

“No. But for all you knew, I might have been.” She’d known a few local boys, in fact, from German families, who had attended, coming back spewing propaganda and bitterness. “During wartime, there are no guarantees that the enemy isn’t listening. No place is safe, and especially no person . . . no matter how much she might seem like a sweet, innocent local girl.”

Ralph shut his gaping mouth long enough to look chagrined at that.

She lowered her voice. "You know Colonel Godfrey Forth? War hero with the build of a grizzly bear and the voice of rooster?"

Milton choked out a laugh at this description of the camp commander and his braying tones, but Stanley only nodded at her to continue. "He mentioned in his orientation speech that you would be closely monitored during your training, and that you were to keep to your cover stories at all times."

The fact that she could quote this speech seemed to confuse Milton further. "But . . . how does . . . ?"

"You're working for Forth," Stanley guessed. "You were trying to get us to reveal secret information while on leave." He made connections quickly, a useful asset in someone who worked in espionage. There was leadership potential in him. She'd put that in her report.

Dinah shrugged. "Better me than a friendly Axis gal . . . or a home-front fifth column spy."

"Then it looks like you're the one who blew your cover," Ralph teased, but there was a hint of nervousness in his cocky demeanor. As well there should be. He was the one of the trio who hadn't passed the test. Would it be enough to dismiss him from the OSS?

Dinah smiled wryly. "Let my mistakes be a lesson to you." Underhanded as it might seem, she felt no shame about her role. Like the colonel had pointed out, these men were only months away from carrying confidential information in and out of enemy territory. It was vital to know they could maintain secrecy.

"Do not speak to your fellow soldiers about this." After a half dozen tests, these three were the only ones to have found her out. "There are a few of us placed about town for this assignment, and we haven't gotten to all of your cohort yet."

“I should have known you’d be beautiful *and* clever.” Ralph leaned closer to aim another wink her way, hitting her with the full force of his cologne. “But we did all right, didn’t we?”

“I thoroughly enjoyed our conversation,” Dinah said, dodging the question. “And I mean that, all pretense aside.”

Ralph’s tense shoulders relaxed, as if he thought a bit of flattery had struck his mistakes from the record.

Not a chance. Whatever Colonel Forth did with her report, she had to write it honestly, including his slipups. *Sorry, Ralph. But careless talk costs lives.*

Milton swallowed hard, eyebrows still shot up his forehead. “Golly. You mean, this whole time . . . you’re really . . . ?”

“That’s right. I spy on the spies.” Dinah couldn’t resist a smug smile as she stood. “Enjoy your leave, gentlemen. And I do hope you have time for a proper tour of Gettysburg. There’s always another secret to uncover.”