

ALAN GRATZ

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *REFUGEE* and *TWO DEGREES*

HEROES

Pearl Harbor. A country attacked.
A friendship tested.





A L A N G R A T Z

HEROES

Scholastic Press / New York

For my grandfather, Frank A. Hull III of the USS *Pelias*, and all the other service members and civilians at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941

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A NOTE TO THE READER

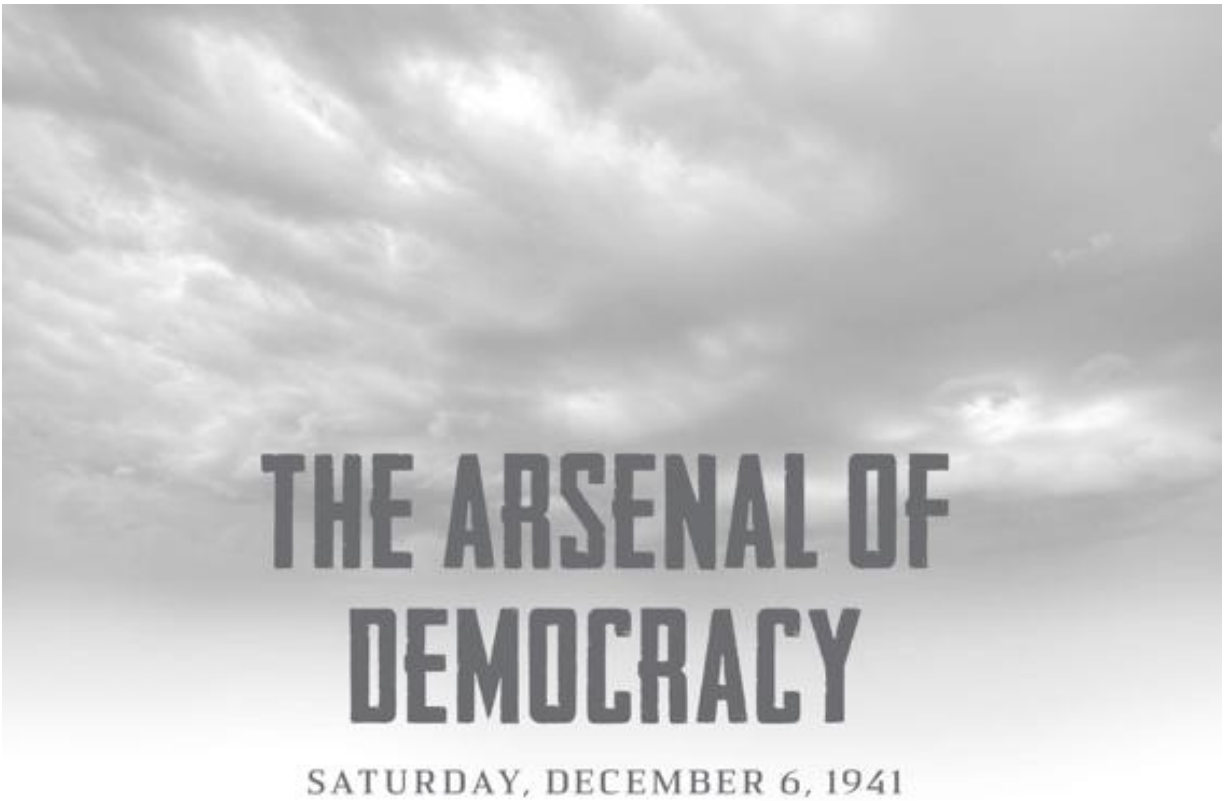
In order to accurately reflect the historical time period, some characters' dialogue in this book includes racially offensive language that was used in the United States during the 1940s.

We must be the great arsenal of democracy.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt
Radio broadcast to the American people
December 29, 1940

— PART ONE —

BEFORE



“It’s an attack!” Stanley cried. “Enemy airplanes—dozens of them. Coming in low over the water!”

“They’re shooting machine guns,” I added, turning in my seat. “Dropping torpedoes—”

“Fire! Explosions! Shrapnel everywhere!” Stanley said.

The water around us was a sparkling mirror, the sky bright blue without a cloud—or plane—in sight. My best friend Stanley Summers and I were sailing across Pearl Harbor in our little aluminum motorboat, headed home from baseball practice. Stanley was steering and I was sitting facing him. We were talking out a story idea for the superhero we were creating together. I was the writer and Stanley was the illustrator. It was going to be the greatest comic book ever.

“And flying up to meet them,” I went on, “is Warhawk, Protector of the Innocent. Guardian of Freedom! He smashes one plane with his fist and uses his heat vision to destroy another. Bullets ping off his chest—”

“Wait, Frank,” Stanley cut in. “Warhawk has too many superpowers.”

I paused, confused. “What do you mean?” I asked. “He’s got as many powers as Superman.”

“Superman’s a cheat!” Stanley said. “He’s super strong and super fast, he can fly, he has X-ray vision, *and* super hearing, *and* super breath. It’s boring!” He shook his head. “Our character should have *one* superpower. Like how Captain America has super strength or the Flash has super speed.”

I leaned forward in my seat. “Oh, come on,” I said. “You’re telling me you’d rather be Captain America than Superman?”

“Heck yeah!” Stanley said. He took his hand off the tiller to give me a crisp salute. “Stars and stripes, baby! Wouldn’t it be amazing to get the Super Soldier Serum?”

I wanted to say yes. But Steve Rogers hadn’t known *what* that Super Soldier Serum was going to do to him before he took it. What if it had killed him? Or turned him into a monster? I wouldn’t have taken that risk. Not even for the chance to be Captain America.

But I wasn’t going to admit that to Stanley.

I held tight to the sides of the boat as Stanley steered us toward Ford Island. A light breeze wafted the smell of pineapple and sugarcane across the bay, and the palm trees along the shore swayed. Somewhere a radio played the soft, plinky sounds of Hawaiian ukulele music.

In some ways, it felt like someone had already slipped me the Super Soldier Serum. I’d grown *twelve inches* in the last year. Now, at thirteen years old, I was taller than my mom. I was like one of those Charles Atlas ads you saw in the back of comics: *Send for this free book, and go from scrawny runt to Greek god in just three months!* Only I didn’t feel like a Greek god. I was always tripping over my own big feet, and I felt clumsy and awkward in my new body.

Stanley was the opposite. He was comfortable in his skin, with a casual confidence that I tried to copy but could never quite get right. Like his clothes. While I wore a T-shirt and rolled-up jeans like most boys our age, Stanley stood out in his white shorts and oversized Aloha shirt with bright red flowers. He did his own thing and didn’t worry what anybody thought of him. Stanley and I looked different in other ways too—I was white, with

skin that turned pink from sunburn, blue eyes, and wavy light brown hair. Stanley was a cross between his Japanese American mom and his white dad, with tan skin, dark brown eyes, and straight black hair. But we were brothers, forever and always, thanks to our love of comic books.

“How sold are you on the name Warhawk?” Stanley asked, pulling me out of my thoughts.

“Hmm? Not particularly,” I said. We’d taken his name from the type of fighter plane my dad flew in the Navy, but I’d never loved it. It made our hero sound like he was always looking for a fight. “You got any other ideas?” I asked Stanley.

“No,” he said. “You’re the writer. I was hoping you had something.”

I thought about it as I looked out across the water. Ringing Pearl Harbor like stone sentinels were the steel-gray battleships and cruisers and destroyers that made up the US Pacific Fleet, all enjoying a lazy Saturday afternoon in port.

The big ships gave me an idea.

I turned toward Stanley, feeling a rush of excitement. “How about ‘the Arsenal of Democracy’?” I said. It was something I’d heard President Roosevelt call the United States on the radio.

There was a war happening overseas. Adolf Hitler, the evil leader of Nazi Germany, was trying to conquer all of Europe—and maybe the world. Hitler had made a pact with Italy and Japan to form the Axis powers. Great Britain, Russia, China, and most of the other countries in the world—the Allies—were fighting against the Axis. But so far America had stayed out of the war. We still wanted to help, so the US had become “the arsenal of democracy,” cranking out ships and planes and tanks and guns to loan to the Allies.

“I don’t know,” said Stanley. “It’s kind of ... *wordy*.”

Stanley’s lack of enthusiasm took some of the wind out of my sails, but I wasn’t ready to give up.

“It’s like the Sentinel of Liberty,” I argued, knowing how much Stanley loved Captain America’s nickname. “And we can call our character Arsenal for short.”

“Okay, yeah,” Stanley said, smiling as he came around. “And maybe he uses a shield, just like Cap. Something like this!”

Stanley pulled a pencil and paper from his pocket and started sketching.

Which was a bad idea, because he was the one driving the boat.



“Stanley!” I cried, my voice so shrill it cracked. “Stanley, steer the boat!”

Stanley got up, moved to the middle seat, and bent over his piece of paper. “You steer,” he said, intent on his drawing.

I gulped. Stand up in a moving boat? Cross the middle seat? *Steer?* I never steered!

Without anybody to guide it, our boat swung slowly to the left, heading straight for the USS *Nevada*—a five-hundred-eighty-foot-long, thirty-thousand-pound battleship.

That was not good. Because when big boat hits little boat, big boat always wins.

I fought to release my death grip on the sides of our boat and stood quickly, before I did something stupid like faint. I lurched over the middle seat like Frankenstein’s monster and practically fell onto the seat at the rear of the boat. I almost went over backward into the water, but at the last second I managed to grab hold of the tiller on the outboard motor. The boat

swung wildly as I pulled myself back up and swerved us toward the dock on Ford Island.

“Holy cats, Frank!” Stanley said. He held his pencil up off his paper until the boat stopped rocking. “You okay?”

“Great!” I lied. “Just lost my balance for a second.”

Stanley nodded and went back to his drawing.

I stared straight ahead, squeezing the handle on the tiller so hard my knuckles went white. I had to remind myself to breathe. How could Stanley *do* something like that to me?

But then, Stanley didn’t know the truth about me. The secret I’d kept carefully hidden since I’d first arrived in Hawaii a little over a year ago.

The one thing I was desperate to not let anybody know.



WORST-CASE SCENARIO

I was afraid. Of pretty much *everything*.

Like right now? There were a hundred ways to die at Pearl Harbor. I could drown if I fell over the side of the boat. That was why I insisted we always keep a life preserver on board. Of course, the outboard motor could chew me up before I ever got to use the life preserver. Which would bring the sharks. Native Hawaiians said Pearl Harbor was home to a shark goddess and her son, and we'd all seen shark fins circling ships in the bay.

Worse than the sharks were the giant eels. Everybody forgot about the giant eels! There were also stinging jellyfish and poisonous centipedes everywhere.

Plus, the whole territory of Hawaii was built on volcanic islands, and some of those volcanoes were *still active*. Maybe not on the island of Oahu, where Pearl Harbor was, but on the Big Island, which was close enough. A volcano had actually erupted on the Big Island just before my family and I moved here, filling the air with smog.

Stanley kept sketching, and I focused on steering the boat and trying to stay calm. That had always been hard for me, ever since I was little.

I was born cautious. I was the kid who always held the railing going downstairs. Who waited until his hot cocoa was lukewarm cocoa so it wouldn't burn his mouth. Who carried scissors upside down, fist wrapped tightly around the closed blades, and never, *ever* ran with them.

And then in third grade, when my dad was stationed in Pensacola, Florida, came The Incident. I shuddered even now, remembering it.

The Incident changed me from a kid who was careful to a kid who would do *anything* to never get hurt again. My constant fear had gotten so bad that sometimes I wouldn't leave the house unless I had to.

But here in Hawaii, things had gotten better. *Much* better. And a lot of that had to do with Stanley. When we got to talking about comics, and making up our own characters and stories, it was like I forgot to be so afraid.

“And with a stupendous scribble here, and a deftly drawn dimple there,” Stanley said, putting down his pencil, “the illustrious illustrator brings the Arsenal of Democracy to life!” Stanley talked like that sometimes—like the narrator in a comic book. That was one of the great things about being friends with him. In his own way, Stanley was as much of an oddball as me.

Stanley tried to hand me the drawing. “What do you think?” he asked.

“Here—switch back,” I said, and clumsily traded places with him so he could steer again.

Once I was safely settled in the middle seat, I looked at his drawing. Stanley was an amazing artist. When I came to Hawaii, I'd had notebooks full of comic scripts and ideas I'd written down. But I couldn't draw, so I'd never thought I could actually make any comics. Not until I met Stanley.

He'd drawn the Arsenal tall and muscular, wearing a white V-neck shirt with the sleeves rolled up and a neckerchief like the ones US sailors wore. He had on shorts like Captain Future, and long gloves and boots with the tops folded down like Green Arrow. He looked Japanese American, like Stanley, and wore a pair of goggles pushed up into his mop of black hair like Smilin' Jack from the Sunday comics. He stood confidently with one

hand on his hip, while the other hand held something tall and narrow that tapered at both ends.

“Is that a surfboard?” I asked.

“Oh,” said Stanley. “No. It’s supposed to be a shield.”

“And what’s this glow around him?” I asked. Stanley had drawn the Arsenal with a crackling force field, like the flames that surrounded the Human Torch or the electricity that sparked around the son of Professor Supermind.

“I don’t know,” Stanley said with a shrug. “I just thought it looked swell.”

“It does! Maybe it’s a force field that protects him and anybody he’s close to.”

“Or maybe he has a magic surfboard he can fly around on!” said Stanley.

“Hmm. Maybe,” I said. It wasn’t quite right. Not yet. But it was fun figuring it out.

Stanley pulled the boat up to the dock on Ford Island, and he leaped out like he’d done it a thousand times before. Which he had.

Stanley had grown up in Hawaii. He’d been the one to explain to me that “Pearl Harbor” was both the body of water where the US Navy’s Pacific Fleet parked its ships *and* the name of the whole military base. Ford Island, where we lived, was a little island in the middle of the harbor that was part of the base. The rest of Pearl—the fleet headquarters, repair docks, submarine base, barracks, and base hospital—filled the coastline all around the harbor.

I stood up shakily in the boat and tried to focus on the towering green mountains in the distance. Pearl Harbor was about ten miles due west of the city of Honolulu, on the island of Oahu—one of the many islands that made up the US territory of Hawaii. Everyone on Ford Island called Oahu “the mainland,” which was super confusing. To me, the real “mainland” was the continental United States, which was five days away by ship. Because Hawaii sat smack-dab in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, a third of the way between the US and Japan.

Stanley held the boat while I climbed out, which I managed to do without imagining all the bad things that would happen to me if I slipped and fell.

“Okay,” I said. “Now that we’ve got a name and a look for our superhero, he needs an origin story.”

“That?” Stanley said as he tied the boat up. “He crawls through a cave with magic crystals in it or something and gets superpowers. Easy.”

“No. I don’t mean *how* he gets his powers,” I said as we started walking toward home. We were due at Stanley’s house for an early dinner with our families. “Once the Arsenal *has* his powers, why does he decide to be a hero?”

“Like Bruce Wayne deciding to fight crime as Batman because his parents were killed by a mugger?” asked Stanley.

“Exactly,” I said. “Getting superpowers is one thing. Choosing *how* to use your powers is another. *That’s* what an origin story is.”

We headed along the one road that ringed Ford Island. To our left, a row of houses separated us from the blue water and the parked battleships. To our right, beyond some palm trees and administrative buildings, a patrol bomber took off from the runway at Ford Island Naval Air Station, where our dads worked.

“Maybe the Arsenal is the son of a sea king,” Stanley suggested. “He surfs around the coast, righting wrongs.”

“Or he lives in Atlantis,” I said, “and a huge kraken destroys the city and eats his entire family, so he goes on a one-man crusade to rid the seas of giant monsters.”

Stanley chuckled. “You always come up with the worst things to happen to our characters!”

“I guess I do,” I said, forcing a laugh. If Stanley only knew.

A green US Navy fighter plane zoomed overhead, and Stanley and I waved. The pilot responded by tipping his wing down at us. We couldn’t see his face, but he must have been someone Stanley and I knew through our dads. I smiled as we kept walking.

Then I froze.

Just ahead, under a huge old banyan tree, two boys named Arthur Edwards and Johnny Ross were hovering threateningly over a younger boy named Charlie Moore. Stanley and I knew all three boys. The school we went to on the mainland was small, and the community of military families here on Ford Island was even smaller. Charlie was a grade younger than us and played saxophone in the school band.

Arthur and Johnny were in ninth grade, and they were bullies.

When I'd first moved to Pearl Harbor, Arthur and Johnny had picked on me like they picked on everyone. But then something strange had happened. As I'd gotten bigger and stronger, I'd gotten better at sports. Which made me more popular. Suddenly kids like Arthur and Johnny and their friends started saying hey to me in the halls. And I was pretty sure Arthur's younger sister, Maxine, who was in my grade, was sweet on me. Which was new too. I didn't know how to handle any of it, so I just avoided them—Arthur and Johnny most of all.

“Hey, McCoy,” Johnny said to me now, and Arthur raised his chin to acknowledge me.

“Hey,” Stanley said, even though they had conspicuously *not* said hello to him. He frowned. “What’s going on?”

It was perfectly clear what was going on. Arthur and Johnny had found some excuse to pick on Charlie. And Stanley and I both knew that the best way to not have them pick on *us* too was to keep on walking.

“Come on, Stanley,” I said. “Let’s get home.”

“Charlie stole my bike,” Arthur said, grinning.

A red bicycle lay on its side among the roots of the banyan tree. A red bike we all knew belonged to Charlie.

“I did not!” Charlie cried. “This is my bike!”

“Pretty sure he’s right,” said Stanley.

“Pretty sure you should mind your own business,” Johnny told him.

I didn't like where this was going. There were a hundred ways this could end badly. A thousand. And in almost every case, someone was going to get hurt.

“Stanley, don't,” I said, but he was already stepping up close to Arthur and Johnny.

“Beat it, creep!” Johnny said, and gave Stanley a shove.

“Pick on somebody your own size!” Stanley said, and he shoved Johnny right back.

“Stop! Don’t!” I yelled, blood thundering like battleship guns in my ears. Things were spiraling out of control, and fast.

Arthur threw a punch at the side of Stanley’s head, and Stanley staggered back and kicked at Arthur’s shins. Johnny tried to get Stanley in a headlock, and suddenly it was two on one.

I ducked and cringed with each punch, but I stayed rooted to my spot like the big banyan tree. I wanted to help, but I didn’t want to get hurt.

Not again.

Charlie used the distraction to run away, abandoning his bike.

“Wait!” Stanley called after him.

Johnny hit Stanley in the stomach when he wasn’t looking. While Stanley was doubled over in pain, Arthur snatched up Charlie’s bike, hopped on, and started pedaling away as fast as he could. Johnny sprinted after him, laughing all the way.

Stanley picked up a rock and hurled it at the boys as they fled, but it missed them by a mile.

The danger gone, my feet became unstuck from the ground. I hurried over to Stanley, but he pushed my hands away.

“What the heck, Frank?” Stanley said. His voice was angry and wounded, his left eye swollen. “You’re bigger than both of those guys! We could have beat them if you’d helped me. Why didn’t you?”

I knew the reason. It was because of The Incident.

Because I was afraid of getting hurt.

Stanley stood there and waited for me to say something. Anything.

When I didn’t, *couldn’t*, he turned and stalked off for home.



Stanley didn't say another word for ten whole minutes, which was like Captain Marvel not saying "Shazam!" for an entire issue. I glanced sideways at him as we walked, trying to see if he was sore at me, or sore from taking punches.

Probably both.

I cursed inside. For a whole year, I had managed to hide how afraid I was from everybody in Hawaii. But now it was going to be Pensacola, Florida, all over again.

After The Incident, when kids at school had seen how scared I was of everything, they made merciless fun of me. Called me lily-livered. Yellow-bellied. *Chicken*.

After that, nobody dared to be my friend.

When the Navy moved my dad and the rest of the Pacific Fleet here to Hawaii last year, I got a chance to start over. I swore I would never let anybody see my fear. And it had worked.

Until now.

Now Stanley had seen the real Frank McCoy.

We turned into Stanley's house, which was right next door to mine. Everybody called the row of bungalows we lived in Nob Hill, like the swanky neighborhood in San Francisco. It was a joke, because we were Navy families, not rich nobs. We all lived in small two-bedroom houses, and the only hill was under Admiral Bellinger's quarters, which sat on top of an old First World War concrete bunker. All the Ford Island kids loved to play in that bunker. We called it the Dungeon.

Right then, I wished I could disappear into the Dungeon and never come out again.

Mrs. Summers, Mom, and my big sister Ginny were setting the table as we walked through Stanley's front door. Stanley's mom was pretty in a floral-print sundress, her black hair cut short. My mom wore a blue dress in the same style, and her blond hair was up in a bun. Ginny, as usual, wore a short-sleeved blouse and pants.

Mrs. Summers gasped when she saw the state Stanley was in. "What happened to you?" she asked.

"Nothing," Stanley lied.

"We need to get these cuts cleaned up at once," my mom said, taking Stanley's elbow and leading him to the bathroom. The other Navy families on Ford called Mom Commodore McCoy because of the way she took charge whenever there was anything that needed doing.

"Mitsuko," Mom called to Mrs. Summers, "where is your iodine?" To Ginny she said, "Bring some ice in a hand towel so we can keep the swelling down on this bruise around his eye."

I smelled meat cooking on the grill out back and tried to slip away, but Ginny was too fast for me. She left a tray of ice on the counter and stopped me in my tracks.

"*Frank*," she whispered, "have you and Stanley been *fighting*?"

"What? Me and Stanley fighting? No!" I protested.

Ginny had been my one constant friend through our family's many moves. She knew me better than anyone else, even better than our mom,

and the squinty look she was giving me now said she knew something was up.

“Then what’s going on between you two?”

I shook my head and swallowed. I couldn’t tell her. Couldn’t admit what a coward I’d been.

Ginny sighed. “Listen, bub. We moved to a tiny island in the middle of a harbor of a *slightly less* tiny island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, where the nearest other girl my age is a thirty-minute boat ride away,” she reminded me. “But you, Frank McCoy, you got lucky. You moved in *right next door* to a kid who’s not just the same age as you, but who likes all that comic book stuff you’re into. You know how rare that is for us.”

Ginny was right. It was hard for Navy kids to make friends. And keep them.

Not that I wanted to talk about any of this with her now.

“You better get that ice to Mom before it melts,” I said.

Ginny turned, and in the split second she was distracted, I slid past her and went outside.

Mr. Summers and my dad stood at the small portable grill in the backyard alongside Ginny’s boyfriend, Brooks Leonard. Dad held a spatula to flip the burgers sizzling on the grate, and all three of them held bottles of golden beer that perspired in the sun. The burgers smelled great, but I kept my distance from the hot flames and popping grease.

“Frank!” my dad called, waving me over. Dad was a big, tall guy with a clean-shaven face and short sandy-brown hair. Off duty this afternoon, he wore an Aloha shirt, khaki slacks, and white loafers.

“How you doing, Stretch?” Brooks asked me with a smile, and I couldn’t help but smile back. Brooks was a seaman second class on the USS *Utah*, and the power-hitting catcher for the ship’s baseball team. Sailors who lived on their ships like Brooks couldn’t keep civilian clothes on board, so he was wearing a white uniform and cap today, even though he was off duty.

In the ten months he and my sister had been dating, Brooks had become the older brother I’d never had, and I secretly hoped he and Ginny would get married and make the situation permanent.

“Where’s Stanley?” Mr. Summers asked me. Stocky and muscular, Mr. Summers had a neatly trimmed black mustache and colorful tattoos that peeked out from under his shirtsleeves. Stanley’s dad was a flight crew chief at the air station, so he was in charge of fixing and maintaining the planes my dad flew as a pilot. Which meant my dad’s life was literally in Mr. Summers’s hands every day.

I frowned and looked at the ground. “Um, he’s inside, getting cleaned up.”

I heard the screen door creak open behind me, and I cringed, expecting it to be Stanley. It was only Ginny though, back from her errand for Mom. She walked over to Brooks and wrapped her arm around him.

Brooks and Ginny *looked* like a couple—both tall and tan with brown hair turned golden by the Hawaiian sun. They’d met because Ginny was a huge baseball fan. She was a pretty good player too. When she was a kid, she’d played on all the base youth baseball teams when there weren’t enough boys to fill the rosters. Ginny had graduated from high school last spring and had a job in the secretarial pool at Dole Pineapple in Honolulu.

“Don’t get me wrong. Hawaii’s a paradise,” Dad said to Mr. Summers, continuing a conversation I had apparently interrupted. “But I didn’t become a Navy pilot to sit on my hands out here in the Pacific while the war is happening in Europe. I want to be *in the fight*.”

I sighed. *Of course* they were talking about the war. It was what everybody talked about all the time now.

“What business is it of ours?” Mr. Summers said. “The countries of Europe have been fighting each other for thousands of years. The last time we stuck our noses in, my dad and a bunch more guys came home with missing arms and legs.”

Dad got a distant look in his eyes, and I knew he was thinking about how close he’d come to fighting in the First World War. As a young man, Dad had enlisted and was training to hunt U-boats in seaplanes when the war ended in 1918. Dad had once admitted to me how lucky he was to have missed out on the bloodiest war in human history. Which was why it was so surprising to me that he wanted to fight now.

“A hundred thousand soldiers never came home at all,” Ginny said, looking up at Brooks.

“Exactly,” said Mr. Summers. “And for what? Nothing changed, and now they’re fighting all over again. I say we stay out of it.”

“You and half the US,” said Brooks.

I nodded. Everywhere you went in Hawaii, people talked about how they didn’t want to go to war. If the radio was right, most people from California to Connecticut felt the same way. And I agreed with them. Maybe the only thing I feared more than getting hurt myself was seeing somebody I loved get hurt, and everybody I loved was connected somehow to the Navy.

“Frank, toss me another beer,” Dad said, and I went to the cooler to fish one out of the half-melted ice. I worried about all the things that could go wrong lobbing a wet bottle at my dad—a vision of clonking him in the head with an eighty-mile-an-hour submarine pitch came immediately to mind—but I swallowed my nervousness and threw him the bottle. It sailed through the air in a perfect arc, and Dad caught it without having to budge. He gave me an impressed smile as he popped the cap.

It was silly, but I swelled with pride. Dad and I had never been close. He kept trying—taking me on father-son outings like going deep sea fishing, or climbing to the top of a volcano, or flying around the islands in a Navy seaplane. But I was always too scared to enjoy myself. Still, I loved Dad for making the effort. He wasn’t ready to give up on me, and I wasn’t ready to give up on him.

“What do *you* think about the war?” Mr. Summers asked, turning to Brooks.

Brooks smiled. “I just want to finish my tour and come home and play baseball.”

“Nothing else?” Ginny asked flirtatiously. “Like, start a family maybe?”

Brooks blushed, and the rest of us laughed.

“She’s got your number, kid,” Dad said, giving Brooks the same smile he’d given me. I clearly wasn’t the only one who hoped Brooks and Ginny would get married.

“Well,” Mr. Summers said, taking a sip from his bottle, “we’ll be fighting the Japanese over here before we know it.”

“You think so?” I asked, my stomach tying itself into a knot.

Ginny shrugged. “Why else would Uncle Sam have sent Dad to Hawaii?”

I knew that my dad and the rest of the Pacific Fleet had been moved to Pearl Harbor because Japan had invaded half of Asia while everybody was busy with Germany. Now the radio said that the Japanese were threatening to expand east—toward the United States. But I hoped it wouldn’t come to war.

Dad shook his head. “No way. Pearl is a fortress. They’d never attack here.”

Standing in the shadow of the gigantic battleships parked offshore, it was hard to disagree with him. Each dreadnought was as long as the Washington Monument laid on its side, and their steel hulls rose tall and gray like skyscrapers. The *Arizona*. The *Tennessee*. The *West Virginia*. The *Oklahoma*. The *Maryland*. And those were just the ones I could see from where I stood. Everybody called it Battleship Row. To me, it was a lineup of superheroes as big and powerful as the Justice Society of America, and it sat two hundred yards from my back door.

Dad flipped the burgers with the spatula, making flames shoot up as grease dripped onto the coals. “Frank, grab the buns behind the cooler and lay them on the grill to toast,” he said.

To anybody else, that might have been a simple request, but for me it triggered a quiet panic. Put hamburger buns on the grill? *With my bare hands?* What if the charcoal flared up and scorched me? What if I accidentally touched the grill and burned my fingers? What if hamburger grease popped into my eyes and blinded me?

I took a bun out of the bag and got as close as I dared to the heat radiating off the grill. I held the bun as far away from me as I could and nudged it onto the grill. I didn’t nudge it far enough though, and it fell off onto the grass.

“*Frank,*” Dad said.

“Well, I’m in no hurry to fight anybody,” Mr. Summers said, going on like I hadn’t just been asked to *risk my life* for the sake of toasted buns. I pulled another bun from the bag, took careful aim, and gave this one an underhanded toss, like I had with Dad’s beer. It sailed through the air and landed perfectly between two hamburgers. Ha!

“What about helping the people of Europe?” Ginny asked Mr. Summers.

“Your dad said it—this is paradise,” Mr. Summers argued. “Why would we give that up to go fight in somebody else’s war?”

I took out another bun and held it ready. I focused on where I wanted it to land, and I flipped it end over end toward the grill.

The bun slipped perfectly between the grates and landed right on top of the coals, where it burst into flames.

“Oh, for crying out loud, Frank,” Dad said, giving me an exasperated look. He took the bag of buns from me, and in ten seconds flat he had the rest of them laid out on the grill. By hand. I shrank away, Dad’s earlier pride in me gone like the tide.

I didn’t have to look at her to know Ginny was rolling her eyes.

“How’s the food coming?” Mom called from the door. “We’re starving in here.”

“Everybody go on in,” Dad said, piling hamburgers on a plate. “I’ll be right there.”

I followed Mr. Summers and Brooks inside slowly, nervous about seeing Stanley again. Ginny held me back and gave me the stink eye. “Whatever’s going on between you and Stanley, *fix it*,” she whispered.

I nodded. I *would* fix it. If Stanley let me.

After I got cleaned up, I went to the dining table. I liked the little alcove where it was set, because that’s where Stanley’s mom displayed her Japanese family heirlooms. There were color woodblock prints of Mount Fuji, a famous snow-covered volcano just outside Tokyo. Framed, sepia-toned pictures of Mrs. Summers’s Japanese ancestors, the men and women wearing kimonos and looking serious. And the real showstopper—an honest-to-goodness samurai sword, with a fancy diamond-patterned hilt and a polished lacquer scabbard. I couldn’t help but stare at it.

“That katana belonged to my great-great-grandfather,” Mrs. Summers told me proudly as she sat down. “My grandfather brought the sword with him when he moved to Hawaii.”

I nodded. I knew most of the story, because Stanley loved to show off the katana to anyone and everyone who visited.

It was rare for Japanese Americans to live on base. Most of the servicemen and their families here at Pearl Harbor were white. *Off* base, though, it was almost the opposite. There were way more Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders than there were white people in the rest of Hawaii. There, my family and I were in the minority.

Stanley slunk into the room and sat down at the table. Our moms had cleaned him up, and he’d changed his shirt, but he had a big black bruise around his left eye that didn’t look like it was going away anytime soon.

“Ouch,” my dad said, sitting across from Stanley. “I hope the other guy looks worse.”

Stanley shrugged. “I tried,” he said.

And Frank didn’t. The unspoken truth lurked between us like Kent Thurston, the Invisible Hood.

There was only one seat left for me at the table, and that was next to Stanley. He didn’t look up at me as I sat down, staring at the empty plate in front of him instead.

The silence that surrounded Stanley and me grew bigger and bigger until it swallowed the adults at the table too. I could sense them looking at each other and wondering what was wrong, but knowing better than to ask.

Ginny was right. I needed to fix this. I *wanted* to fix this. But I didn’t know how. Not without telling Stanley everything. Which could mean losing him for good.

“Hey, guys,” Brooks said to Stanley and me, acting like he couldn’t tell there was something going on. “Why don’t you both come by the *Utah* tomorrow morning before the big baseball championship? I’ll give you a tour of the ship, and then we can go to the game together. What do you say?”

I didn’t know whose idea it was, his or Ginny’s, but the invitation was clearly designed to bring Stanley and me back together.

I hardly ever got to set foot on a working battleship, so I should have been excited by Brooks's offer. *Would* have been excited. Except that I was too busy worrying that I'd lost my best friend.

"That'd be swell," I said flatly.

"Sure, Brooks," said Stanley. "Thanks."

Our answers seemed to make the adults think everything was fixed, and they got to passing the food around and talking about the war again.

It was my turn to say something to Stanley. To explain why I'd let him fight Arthur and Johnny alone. But I still couldn't do it.

"Hey," I said instead. "Maybe the Arsenal's origin story has to do with him being a sailor on a battleship. We could see something on our tour tomorrow to put in our comic."

"Really, Frank?" said Stanley. He looked at me for the first time since the fight, and this time it was like I was a stranger. "How do you think you can write about heroes if you can't be one yourself?"



Stanley's words were still ringing in my head the next morning as we rode across Pearl Harbor.

I blinked, bleary-eyed, at the bright sun rising over the submarine base. I'd stayed up too late last night, replaying yesterday's events like they were scenes from the movie the sailors were watching on the fantail of the USS *Arizona*, just offshore. I hadn't been able to see the screen, but I could hear the soundtrack through my open window, see the flicker of blue-white light. If only I could rewrite yesterday's script. Change the action and the dialogue, and recast myself as the hero. But it was too late. That was a wrap on me and Stanley.

Stanley leaned back in the boat, closing his eyes and spreading his arms wide.

"Another beautiful day in paradise," he said with a smile.

"You got that right, kid," said the sailor at the tiller.

Stanley and I couldn't exactly take our little motorboat to the *Utah* and leave it tied to a battleship, so we were riding in one of the Navy motor launches that pattered around the harbor. I held fast to my side of the boat, trying to not look too uneasy as we bounced across the water.

It was early, and most of Pearl Harbor was still asleep as we came around the east side of Ford Island, past the hospital ship *Solace*. I glanced over at Stanley. After he'd dropped that bomb on me at dinner, I'd finished my hamburger as fast as I could and hurried home. I hadn't said a word to anybody or come out of my room again until this morning.

To my surprise, Stanley had met me at the pier in his usual good spirits, talking about how excited he was for our battleship tour. The black eye he'd gotten yesterday was full-on purple now, and as big as a baseball. Otherwise it was like nothing had happened. Which I couldn't believe. Stanley was pretty easygoing, but was all really forgiven? His disappointment and anger *had* to still be there, lurking under the surface like a shark. Or a giant eel.

I remembered Florida, and how my friendships there had died slow and painful deaths. First, Stanley would be too busy to hang out one weekend. Then he would start taking the ferry home from baseball practice instead of us riding together in his boat. Then he would stop sharing his comics with me, and tell me he'd already read the ones I offered to share with him.

Then he would find somebody else to draw superheroes with.

Stanley opened his good eye and looked at me.

"You know the best part about going to the *Utah*?" he said. "No Japanese school!"

While I got to sleep in and eat pancakes and read comic books on Sundays, Stanley's mom made him go into Honolulu after church for Japanese school. Stanley was always griping about how they made him learn Japanese and all these Japanese tradition things, like how to arrange flowers and pour tea. Japanese school was one of Stanley's favorite topics to complain about, even though his grandmother taught the classes.

"That's good," I said cautiously, still waiting for Stanley to drop the act and tell me we were through as friends. Instead he leaned forward.

“Hey—I was thinking about the Arsenal last night,” Stanley said. “Maybe he’s some kind of space ranger.”

I blinked. “You ... want to talk about our comic book?” I asked. “But I thought you said—”

I bit the rest of that sentence off. Yesterday, Stanley had questioned my worthiness to write superhero comics. But if he was over it today, maybe that meant our friendship *hadn’t* imploded like Krypton.

“Sure,” I said cautiously. “Maybe the Arsenal is the guardian of his planet and defends it against alien invaders.”

“He should definitely protect his own planet,” said Stanley. “But he should travel to other planets and fight for other people too. A real hero steps in when they see people getting hurt, no matter what.”

Ah. There it was. Stanley had only brought up the Arsenal to hammer home his point about me. He hadn’t let it go after all. He’d just been waiting to drop a lightning bolt on me like Shock Gibson.

I shrank against the side of the boat. We really were over. Me and Stanley. I wished suddenly that I *would* fall overboard, and that a giant eel would just eat me and put an end to it.

“That’s what superheroes do,” Stanley said, talking on like he hadn’t just killed me. “That’s what makes Superman so awesome.”

I stared at Stanley, trying to see the spite behind his eyes. That’s what he was doing, wasn’t it? Rubbing it in? I’d seen nastiness in the eyes of kids back in Florida when they’d made fun of me. Cruelty. But it was weird—there was none of that in Stanley. Not that I could see, at least.

“I thought you didn’t like Superman,” I said warily.

“He has too many powers,” Stanley said. “But I *do* like that he uses his powers to help people who’re in trouble, for no other reason than it’s the right thing to do.”

Okay, I thought. I get it. I looked away with a frown.

Our boat rounded the north end of Ford and turned down Carrier Row, headed for the *Utah*. Carrier Row was where the Navy’s aircraft carriers were usually parked. Today the *Utah* and the light cruisers *Raleigh* and *Detroit* were docked there, because the carriers were all out at sea on patrol. A couple of civilian bum boats had pulled up alongside the Navy ships to

sell newspapers and cigarettes and treats, and a launch with sailors dressed up for church gave friendly salutes to a passing boat filled with groggy sailors coming back from a night out partying in Honolulu. Otherwise, most everybody else not on duty was sleeping in.

I looked at Stanley again. I had to explain why I hadn't fought with him yesterday, so he'd understand. But before I could build up the courage to speak, the launch came alongside the *Utah*.

Stanley and I climbed a ladder on the port side of the ship, and I tried to think of *anything* besides falling into the water and getting crushed between the hulls of the battleship and the launch. I reminded myself that *port* meant "left" on a ship when you were facing the front, and *starboard* meant "right." Today, the *Utah* was parked so that the port side faced the harbor, and Ford Island was to starboard.

"There's my guys!" Brooks Leonard said as we came aboard. "Right place, right time." He smiled and shook our hands like we were adults.

Brooks had on his white baseball uniform with the word *Utah* written in cursive on the chest. Not many of the other *Utahs* were up and about. Amidships, a sailor in white shorts and a white T-shirt sat on an air vent with his legs up on the rail, reading the Sunday comics. Farther aft, the *Utah's* band had assembled, ready to play the national anthem when the color guard raised the American flag.

Despite the tension with Stanley, I felt an electric thrill standing on the deck of a real battleship. It was just so ... *big*. And solid. Every inch of the *Utah* was wood and steel. It felt powerful. *Invincible*. Like the safest place in the world.

I wanted to never leave.

"Let me give you guys the grand tour," Brooks said, waving for us to follow him. "The *Utah's* a battleship, but an old one. She was decommissioned from fighting after the First World War. She weighs more than thirty thousand tons, and from stem to stern she's about one and a half football fields long."

Freshly scrubbed teak decks stretched out in every direction, and enormous wooden covers shrouded what must have been the *Utah's* guns. Round gray air vents sprouted from the deck like metal mushrooms, and

ropes and chains were coiled everywhere I looked. Hatches and doorways led to stairs and ladders that disappeared into the decks below, and the outside edge of the deck was ringed with rope railings.

Brooks explained that the *Utah* was only used for anti-aircraft gun training and target practice now. “We cover the decks with loose lumber, and planes drop dummy bombs on us,” he said, putting his hand on a big stack of timbers as thick as tree trunks. “These protect the real deck, and show the pilots where they hit.” He laughed. “Pretty funny, huh? I join the Navy and the only people shooting at me are other Navy guys.”

Stanley was totally focused on what Brooks was saying, but I was still distracted. Stanley was the best friend I’d ever had, and I couldn’t bear the thought of him thinking less of me. I had to make things right with him. It was time to tell him why I was the way I was.

Brooks asked us to follow him to the rear of the ship, and I saw my chance.

“Stanley, I’m sorry about yesterday,” I said.

Stanley stiffened. “It doesn’t matter,” he said.

“It does to me,” I said. “I didn’t mean to— You see, a few years ago, I —”

Dang it! I wasn’t saying it the way I wanted to say it.

“See, back when I lived in Florida, there was this Incident—” I started, but I didn’t get a chance to finish.

Because that was the moment the whole world turned upside down.



“Whoa, look at all those planes!” a sailor on deck cried.

Stanley and Brooks and I turned around. Coming in low from the northwest, from the direction of Pearl City, was a whole squadron of fighters. Dozens of them, broken up into flights of four planes each. I could hear the buzz of their engines echoing across the water.

“That’s weird,” said Brooks. “The carriers send planes in for tune-ups on Ford, but never that many at once.”

Boom. The sound made us all jump, and Stanley and I raced to the starboard side of the ship. A fiery explosion erupted on the south end of Ford Island, and I gasped. That was near the seaplane ramp! Eight or nine planes dove and circled in the air above the explosion, and I flinched as there was another *boom*, and another, and another. A hard, tightening knot grew in my stomach as black smoke and flames rose from the island. Something about this was *not right*.

Brooks and a few other sailors came over to watch with us, but they didn't seem troubled.

"Maneuvers? On a *Sunday*?" a sailor said. "What are those papayas at headquarters thinking?"

"Of all the damn times to have a drill," said another.

It was true that the Army and Navy ran exercises like this all the time, with fake bomb explosions and antiaircraft guns firing blanks as planes buzzed the airfields and docks. But something about all this felt off, and it wasn't just the timing.

"Those look like real bombs they're dropping," I said.

"No," said Brooks. "They would never."

"They hit the water tower!" Stanley cried.

I turned to see flames explode up from the base of Ford Island's water tower, and we all gasped as it toppled to the ground.

"Ooh! Somebody's gonna catch hell for that!" said one of the sailors.

"This is the best damn drill the Army has ever put on," Brooks said with a grin.

He was right. If it *was* a drill.

The sound of droning planes drowned out the *Utah* band playing the national anthem, and the back of my neck tingled. This didn't *feel* like a drill. But what else could it be?

Suddenly one of the planes pulled out of its bombing dive and zoomed right toward us. It buzzed the *Utah*'s conning tower, flashing by so close and so fast that everyone ducked. Stanley waved to it, like we always did to the pilots flying around Pearl. But I didn't. I was too busy trying to see the markings on the underside of the plane's wings.

A shiver ran through me, and I grabbed Stanley's arm.

"*Stanley, come on!*" I yelled over the sound of more explosions, pulling him back to the port side of the ship.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Those planes," I said. "I think I saw a meatball!"

"*A meatball?*" Stanley cried.

We ran to the rail, where the sailor who'd been reading the funny papers stood staring. More planes filled the air, swooping and diving and

dropping more bombs. A geyser of water shot up across the harbor and splashed down. I couldn't believe what was happening!

Another plane buzzed by so close we almost could have touched it, and I grabbed Stanley's arm again and pointed.

There, painted on the bottom of the plane's wings, were the "meatballs" I thought I'd seen before: the round, red circles that formed the "rising sun" of the Japanese flag.

"Stanley, it's not a drill," I yelled in his ear. *"It's a Japanese attack!"*

*Yesterday, December 7, 1941—a date which
will live in infamy—the United States of
America was suddenly and deliberately
attacked by naval and air forces of the
Empire of Japan.*

President Franklin D. Roosevelt
Address to the Joint Session of Congress
December 8, 1941

— PART TWO —

DURING



“It’s a trick,” said Stanley. “A prank. It has to be.”

This time I wasn’t the only one rooted to the spot with fear. Both Stanley and I stood staring in horror as three more Japanese planes swooped down in a V formation, headed right for the *Utah*. Right for me and Stanley.

The planes flew impossibly low, almost like they were coming in for a landing, then leveled out at the last second. I watched with wonder as one of them peeled off to our right, toward the USS *Raleigh*, and then all three planes dropped long, finned cylinders in the water.

“*Fish!*” the sailor with the funny papers cried out, backing away from the rail.

Brooks rushed over, grabbing me and Stanley and dragging us away. “Run!” he yelled.

I looked back over my shoulder. Three V-shaped wakes were streaking toward us underwater, and I understood what the sailor meant by *fish*.

Torpedoes.

The planes that had dropped the torpedoes roared overhead, just barely missing the antennas on the conning tower and making us all duck. And then—

THOOM.

The ship lurched. The *Utah* rose and fell, a thirty-thousand-ton battleship knocked about like it was a toy boat. Water shot into the air and cascaded over the rail. My legs buckled, and I threw my arms out to keep from falling to the deck. Stanley fell, and so did Brooks. I helped them both up in time for the second torpedo to hit—*THOOM!*—and this time all three of us went crashing down onto the deck. I heard the shriek of rending metal, and the screams of injured men.

And then, slowly and steadily, the *Utah* began tilting toward the harbor.

“The torpedoes must have blown holes in the side of the ship!” Brooks yelled. “We’re taking on water. The *Utah*’s sinking!”

My heart caught in my throat. *This couldn’t be happening!* I had just been thinking about how sturdy the *Utah* was. How safe. How *invincible*. Two torpedoes later, all that was out the window.

Brooks was pulling Stanley and me to our feet when a sailor with his face half-covered in shaving cream climbed out of a nearby hatch. “What in the Sam Hill is going on?” he asked.

“I think we’re at war with the Japanese!” said Brooks.

With a shock, I realized Brooks was right. We *hadn’t* been at war with Japan. But we had to be now. Only, how were Japanese planes attacking Pearl Harbor when we were four thousand miles away from Japan?

The other sailor blinked in surprise. “Well, if it really is them, this is the beginning of the end of the Japanese empire.”

Right now it looked like the end of the US Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor. I stood on the swiftly tilting deck and watched, mesmerized, as suddenly there were *hundreds* of Japanese planes in the sky, flying figure eights and swooping down to bomb and shoot. And no one was shooting back! Waterspouts erupted all over the harbor, and black smoke rose from Battleship Row, from the submarine base across the bay, from 1010 Dock and the airfields on the mainland, from the other side of Ford Island.

My heart stopped. Ford Island!

Mom! Ginny! Dad! I'd left them at home that morning making pancakes and listening to ukulele music on the radio. Now bombs were falling right on top of them! Had our house been hit? Did they have any warning? Were they all right, or were they—

Stanley turned on me, wild-eyed, and grabbed my arm so hard it hurt. He must have been thinking the same thing about his family.

"Frank!" he yelled. "We gotta get off this ship! We gotta get home!"

"You're not going anywhere right now," Brooks told us. "Take cover!" He pointed us to one of the big stacks of timbers on the deck. "I've got to get to my station, but I'll be back."

I nodded, but my legs didn't seem to get the message. I stood frozen as the big, once-empty deck filled with sailors coming up from below. Some of them were in their Sunday uniforms, but others wore only white shorts or pants. One sailor stretched and yawned in bright red pajamas. They all blinked in the sunlight, trying to figure out what was going on.

A Japanese plane buzzed down low and unloaded on the deck with tracer fire—*shoom-shoom-shoom-shoom-shoom*. I cowered as bullets pinged all around me, throwing hot sparks that burned my skin. The half-shaved sailor did a jerky dance and fell backward into the hatch. I gasped. Was he dead? Was *I* going to die? A voice inside me was screaming to *run*, to *duck*, to *hide*, but I couldn't move. Couldn't think. It was all too much.

This was every one of my nightmares come true all at once.

"Frank, get down!" Stanley cried, pulling me with him behind the big stack of wood.

I threw my hands over my head as bullets struck the bulkhead around us and chewed up the timbers. I remembered Brooks joking about the target practice drills, complaining that the only people who ever shot at him were US planes. I bet he wished he could take that back now.

Brooks! Where was Brooks? Was he okay? I looked around, but he was long gone.

"All hands to battle stations!" somebody cried. A bugle call repeated the command more loudly, and I ducked as another explosion boomed somewhere nearby.

Another plane roared overhead, and I recognized it from my plane-spotter's guide at home. It was a Japanese fighter plane called a Zero. I had learned the name and the plane's silhouette but had never thought I'd actually see one.

The sounds of battle around us got louder and louder, like somebody was turning up the volume knob on a radio. I put my hands over my ears and tried to make myself small. *Everybody said this was impossible!* Pearl Harbor was a *fortress*. Battleship Row was the Justice Society of America. The US Pacific Fleet was there to protect Hawaii. To protect *me!* But right now it couldn't even protect itself.

And did nobody else remember the *Utah was sinking?*

"We gotta look for an opening, get off the ship," Stanley said, peeking around the side of the timbers. Bullets chipped paint from something metal behind us, and Stanley ducked back down.

Look for an opening? Had Stanley lost his mind? If we set one *toe* out from behind those timbers we would end up like the half-shaved sailor.

Other sailors ran here and there on deck as bullets whizzed by and bombs exploded in the water all around us. My pants were drenched, and I wasn't entirely sure whether it was from one of the geysers or from me peeing myself.

A young, pale sailor wandered by, looking as shell-shocked as I felt. He stopped just beyond the stack of timbers where we were hiding, staring out at the planes and the burning ships like he wasn't in the middle of a firestorm.

"Hey, mister!" I yelled, my voice croaking. My throat was dry as a bone, and I swallowed hard and tried again. "Hey, mister! Get down or you're gonna get killed!"

It was like the sailor didn't hear me. He stood still, muttering something under his breath as bullets tore up the deck all around him.

Stanley and I looked at each other. This guy was toast if he didn't get a move on!

I thought about going out to grab him, but what if a stray bullet hit me? What if I slipped on the wet deck and tumbled over the side? What if—

But before I could think of another what-if, Stanley jumped up and ran for the sailor.



THREE HOTS AND A COT

Stanley grabbed the sailor's shirttail and dragged him down behind the timbers with us right as—

CHOOM-CHOOM-CHOOM-CHOOM-CHOOM.

Bullets pounded the bulkhead behind us, and another Japanese Zero zoomed overhead and disappeared into the smoke.

I blinked at Stanley and the sailor huddled beside me. They were both okay. They hadn't been hit. But the sailor would have been, if Stanley hadn't been there. If it had been only me, the sailor would have been chewed up by tracer fire while I crouched frozen with fear.

It was Stanley and the bullies all over again, only this time it had been life and death.

"Hey, you okay?" Stanley asked the sailor.

The sailor shook his head slowly. His eyes seemed to be on something two thousand miles away in California. He muttered words I couldn't understand.

“What’s he saying?” Stanley asked.

I leaned in close and listened.

“He’s saying *Three hots and a cot*,” I said. “*Three hots and a cot. Three hots and a cot. Over and over again.*”

“What is that?” Stanley asked him. “What does that mean?”

The question seemed to break the sailor’s trance.

“It’s why I joined the Navy,” he said. “I grew up poor, and the Navy promised me three hot meals and a cot to sleep on. Not this. Never this.”

Stanley and I looked at each other across the sailor. Our dads hadn’t joined the Navy because they were poor. They’d joined because they wanted careers in the Navy. How many other guys here at Pearl were like this sailor though—just here because they needed a job and Uncle Sam was paying?

The ship lurched, hard, and the three of us were jerked backward, against the stack of wood. The timbers creaked and shifted, and I worried about being crushed by them. But where else were we supposed to go?

“What was that?” Stanley asked. “Another torpedo?”

The sailor blinked and looked up. “No. It’s the hawsers,” he said.

I suddenly understood. The ships parked around Ford Island were tied to concrete pillars with big, thick ropes called hawsers. Usually those ropes hung loose as the ships drifted gently in the still water of the harbor. But now that the *Utah* was tilting, its hawsers had stretched taut, jarring us all as they caught. The mooring ropes would keep us from capsizing—as long as they didn’t snap. Which would be really, really bad.

When ropes that big snapped and whipped around, they could cut a person in half.

I held my breath and waited. The *Utah* groaned and strained underneath us. The stacked timbers shifted and squeaked. The smokestack and conning tower high above us tilted at a dangerous, unnatural angle. But the ropes held. The ship wasn’t going to flip! I breathed a big sigh of relief.

“Why aren’t we shooting back?” Stanley asked, craning his neck.

Japanese Zeros kept shooting and dropping torpedoes and bombs, but so far we hadn’t heard the familiar sounds of American artillery.

“The anti-aircraft guns are covered up from our target practice,” the pale-faced sailor told us. “It takes a crane to get those things off.”

Of course—the big wooden shrouds we’d seen when we first came on board! All the *Utah*’s guns were covered to protect them from practice bombs. I peeked out at the deck and saw three white sailors and two Black sailors trying to lift the protective box off one of the guns, but it was too heavy.

I did a double take. Every ship had Black sailors, but they were support staff—cooks and stewards and laundry attendants, things like that. I knew that these Black sailors were not trained for combat and not expected to be on deck in the middle of a fight. But here a couple of them were, trying to help get their ship’s guns firing back. They didn’t have to put themselves in harm’s way, but they were doing just that.

“What I want to know is, where are all our *planes*?” the sailor next to us asked.

Stanley and I looked at each other in horror, both of us clearly thinking about our dads.

It would have taken my dad and Mr. Summers only a few minutes to run from our houses to the airfield. Mr. Summers and his crew would have gotten a Warhawk prepped and ready in no time, and Dad should have been in the air by now, hunting Zeros.

Unless—

Unless they’d both been killed right away when the bombs fell on Nob Hill.

“We gotta get home!” Stanley said, and I nodded, too scared to speak.

Before either of us could move, there was a sound like a giant whip cracking—*whop-PISH!* A stack of timbers on the other side of the deck exploded like a bomb had hit them, but there was no fire. No smoke. There was another whip-crack sound, and screams, and the *Utah* lurched and started tilting even faster than before.

Oh no. The hawsers had snapped. The *Utah* was capsizing!

“Abandon ship!” somebody cried. “Abandon ship!”



I stayed frozen in a crouch, watching as sailors in all states of dress appeared out of nowhere, running and sliding down the deck. The *Utah's* bugler repeated the signal to abandon ship.

“Come on!” cried the sailor Stanley had rescued. He sprinted out from behind the stack of timbers and tumbled down the tilting deck toward the rail.

Stanley stood to follow him. I was building up the courage to do the same when Brooks appeared. His white baseball uniform was ripped and smudged with grease and blood.

“No, don’t jump off that way,” Brooks told Stanley. “If you don’t swim fast enough, the ship will roll over onto you!”

My eyes went wide. How had I not thought of that? Usually I was the first to imagine the worst thing that could happen, but my brain wasn’t working right now. All the bombs, the bullets, the screeching of the ship and the screaming of the sailors, they made my thoughts a traffic jam, like

when everybody got in their cars to leave the base at five o'clock every afternoon. Total gridlock.

"We have to climb up the deck and jump off the starboard side!" Brooks yelled.

I looked at where Brooks was pointing. The deck was tilted at an almost forty-five-degree angle. To get to the starboard rail we would have to climb the deck like hiking up a hill.

I flinched as another Japanese Zero buzzed by, shooting at something I couldn't see. The thick dark smoke had suddenly turned morning into night.

Brooks and Stanley were already scrambling up the tilting deck. I knew I should follow them. I knew the *Utah* was capsizing, and me with it. But I couldn't think. Couldn't move. I stayed right where I was, huddled and shaking behind the groaning, shifting stack of timbers.

Brooks must have expected me to be right behind him, because he was halfway to the other side of the deck when he looked back and cursed. He signaled for Stanley to keep going without him and clambered back down to where I was frozen.

Brooks shook me and said something, but words had lost all meaning. I stared at him like he was an alien in a comic book, his word bubble written in an alphabet I didn't understand.

A stack of timbers on the other side of the ship broke loose and came thundering down the deck, taking screaming sailors with it. Brooks and I ducked as the planks crashed past us, followed by anything else that wasn't tied down. The landslide of debris clipped the pile of wood we were hiding behind and knocked it loose too. The lumber tumbled down the deck and tore through the flimsy railing, crashing down on all the fleeing sailors who hadn't swum far enough away.

Brooks and I looked at each other in stunned silence. It was a miracle we hadn't been swept away, and we both knew we wouldn't be so lucky next time.

Brooks grabbed me by the arm and pulled. I had to follow him on hands and knees. The *Utah* was turning over quickly—faster than I ever could have imagined a ship could roll. The forty-five-degree hill we'd had to ascend a few seconds ago had turned into a sixty-degree mountain. We

used vent pipes and hatch cleats as handholds, helping each other along like rock climbers. I moved on autopilot. Once frozen into inaction, I now climbed because Brooks had started me climbing. I would have kept going all the way to the top of Mauna Kea if you'd pointed me in the right direction.

CHOOM-CHOOM-CHOOM-CHOOM-CHOOM!

The wooden deck all around us exploded in a typhoon of bullets and splinters. I tried—hopelessly—to get small. The attacking Zero zoomed by overhead, and Brooks made a rude gesture at it.

“Brooks,” I said, “I hope you marry my sister.”

Brooks laughed once. “Me too, kid,” he said. “And when we get out of this, I promise I won’t waste any time in asking her. But right now we have to *climb*.”

We were climbing almost straight up by then. Farther amidships, one of the cranes attached to the deck went crashing down with a howl of wrenching steel and screams. The conning tower groaned and bent. Boom boats came loose from their stations and spilled down the deck, landing smashed and broken in the water below.

Everywhere I turned there was something that could hurt me.

Stanley was waiting for us at the top. He reached down to help Brooks, and Brooks pulled me up with him. I grabbed on to one of the ropes in the starboard rail, happy to cling to it and never move again for the rest of my life. But the ship was still turning over.

“We have to keep going over the side!” Brooks said.

“Yeah, um, that’s going to be a problem,” Stanley said. “Look!”

I peered over the rail, but I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. The *Utah* had listed so far that we wouldn’t be jumping into the water. We’d be hitting the side of the ship that was usually *under* the water!

“We’ll have to slide down the ship’s belly as it rolls over,” Brooks told us.

Wait—the *Utah* was turning on its side, yes. But *roll all the way over*? Brooks was bonkers! The *Utah* was the size of an apartment building. It couldn’t flip upside down.

Could it?

The conning tower and the smokestack hit the water with a crash that made the entire ship shudder, and the superstructure with the bridge and control top started to sink.

It was happening, whether I could believe it or not. The *Utah* was going belly-up.

“Go! Go!” Brooks said, pushing Stanley, and then me, underneath the rail and onto the side of the sinking battleship.



The side of the *Utah* wasn't as steep as the deck had been, but Stanley and I slipped and slid down the wet, slimy hull on our behinds. The battle still raged around us, overwhelming my thoughts, but I was more alert now, less in *freeze* mode and more in *flee* mode. I didn't need Brooks or Stanley telling me to move. I had to get home. Had to find my parents and Ginny.

I looked back over my shoulder and saw Brooks following us over the side, but then he was quickly lost in the smoke.

Another Zero burst from the darkness, machine guns blazing, and Stanley and I curled up into balls as bullets pinged around us. When the plane disappeared, Stanley and I got back up fast and kept scooting toward the water.

"What madness is this?" Stanley said. He was trying to use his comic book voice, but it came out strained. "Why are our two plucky heroes cutting up their butts on the bottom of a battlewagon as Japanese planes wreak havoc on the American armada?"

It *was* madness. What were Stanley and I *doing* here? Not just visiting the *Utah*, but living on Ford Island. Living in *Hawaii*. Why weren't we safe back on the *real* mainland, in the United States, far away from all this danger?

"Frank, wait!" Stanley said, stopping mid-scoot on the hull.

"What? No!" I cried. What was he doing? He was going to get us killed! "Stanley, we have to keep going!"

"No, listen," Stanley said, putting his ear to the hull. "I hear something."

I blinked and put my ear to the slimy hull. I could barely hear it over the roar of the Zeros and the rat-tat-tat of machine-gun fire, but Stanley was right. There was something there—something small and metallic-sounding, clanging on the inside of the hull right underneath us. *Tonk-tonk-tonk. Tonk-tonk-tonk.*

I grabbed Stanley's arm. "It's Morse code! Like from our Sentinel of Liberty kit!"

We'd both mailed in the application forms from our Captain America comics to join the Sentinels of Liberty—the *greatest army of red-blooded young patriots ever assembled under one flag!* For ten cents each, we'd received a metal badge and an official membership card. On the back of the card were the dots and dashes of the Morse code alphabet, which we had dutifully learned and practiced.

We listened again.

Tonk-tonk-tonk. TONK. TONK. TONK. Tonk-tonk-tonk.

"That's SOS!" we cried in unison.

I rapped on the hull with my knuckles. Not in Morse code, but randomly, just to see if anyone responded. Almost immediately more *tonking* rang through the metal wall, frantic and urgent.

"There are sailors trapped inside the ship!" I said.

"We gotta help," said Stanley. He looked around desperately, but there were no windows or doors or hatches. Just solid metal. This part of the *Utah* was normally underwater.

"Where's Brooks?" I cried. I searched for him in the smoke and chaos but couldn't see him.

The frenzied tapping from inside continued, and Stanley and I looked at each other helplessly. We would need the strength of Captain America himself to get through that hull.

“Stanley, we have to leave them,” I said sadly.

“No, there has to be something—” Stanley said.

An explosion threw a tower of water into the air that splashed down and drenched us. I grabbed Stanley by the shirt and pulled.

“We have to go,” I told him. “There’s nothing we can do!”

Stanley finally relented and let me drag him away.

As we scooted the rest of the way down the hull, I tried not to think about the men trapped inside the *Utah*. Which of course meant that *all I thought about* was the men trapped inside the *Utah*. Had they closed an interior hatch to get away from the rising water and sealed themselves in with only that air to breathe? Or was the water rising even now in their compartment as the ship continued to founder?

I imagined the sheer terror of being in a tiny room as water flooded in. Treading water as the air got thinner. The walls, the water, closing in. Nowhere to go. No air to breathe. Grasping for a screwdriver, a wrench—anything—and banging desperately on the hull in the hope that someone might hear me. And then a response! Two boys, sliding down the hull outside, hearing and knocking back. And then ... nothing. They’re gone again, and the water is rising, and the hull is getting closer, and no one is coming to save me ...

“Frank!” Stanley cried. “Frank, jump!”

I blinked, coming out of my spiraling thoughts like being awakened from a deep sleep. I was *outside* the *Utah*, not trapped inside it. And we’d reached the water, at last.

Stanley stood to jump into the harbor when suddenly the *Utah* shuddered. There was a sickening, gut-shaking *crunch*, and Stanley fell gracelessly into the water, arms and legs flailing. I held on as the *Utah* shifted, groaned, and finally settled, belly-up.

As impossible as it was, the *Utah* had officially sunk.

“Come on!” Stanley called from the water, and I jumped.



THE POWER OF PROMETHEUS

It was never too cold to swim in Hawaii, even in December, but the sudden dip took my breath away. I hung there for a moment underwater, savoring the peace and quiet while I tried to get my bearings. It was dark from the clouds of smoke above, and there was a gauzy film in the water I guessed was fuel or oil from the ruptured *Utah*.

The legs of sailors treaded water nearby. As I watched, bullets *shoop-shoop-shooped* around them, leaving diagonal air trails. One of the sailors in the path of the bullets stopped kicking and went still, and I realized being underwater wasn't as peaceful and quiet as I had thought.

I came up quickly and swam to Stanley. The sharp smell of burning gasoline and metal filled my nose, and I struggled not to swallow the oily water.

“Another beautiful day in paradise,” Stanley said grimly.

“Do you see Brooks anywhere?” I asked.

Stanley shook his head. Neither of us had seen him since we'd gone over the rail.

"He'd want us to get home," I said.

Zeros droned overhead, and deep, quivering explosions echoed through the water, shaking me inside and out. We couldn't stay here for long.

"Look!" said Stanley.

A motor launch like the one we'd taken to the *Utah* earlier that morning zoomed out of the smog and cut its engine in the middle of the stranded sailors. A rescue party! I was so relieved I wanted to cry. Stanley and I swam for the boat with the rest of the survivors, and the coxswain helped fish men out of the water with a boat hook.

A sailor I recognized from the *Utah* pulled me and then Stanley up into the launch.

"Where the devil did the Germans come from?" the sailor said, gasping for breath.

"It's not the Germans, it's the Japanese," said Stanley.

"I can't swim! I can't swim!" a sailor cried from the water, and our rescuer hurried to the other side of the launch to help him. *A sailor who couldn't swim?* I shook my head. I couldn't imagine knowing I was going to serve on a ship and *not* learn how to swim first.

A bee flew past my ear, and then another, and another, and I swatted at the air. How were there bees out here, on a boat in the middle of a battle?

A sailor fell on me and Stanley, pressing us into the floor of the boat, and tracer fire zipped into the wood where we'd been sitting. It wasn't bees, I realized in a panic—it was bullets, flying so close I could hear them go by!

"We have to get out of here!" I yelled.

"Where to?" yelled the coxswain. Our launch was full, and another boat had arrived and was pulling more *Utahs* from the water.

"Let's get these kids somewhere safe," said the sailor who'd helped us on board, gesturing to me and Stanley.

"We'll drop 'em off on Ford," the coxswain said, and I felt a rush of relief. *Home at last.*

"Wait! There are sailors still trapped in the *Utah!*" Stanley cried.

“Oh, he’s right!” I said. “We heard them tapping!”

The coxswain killed the engine, and the downtrodden Utahs suddenly came to life.

“Where? When?” they all wanted to know. Stanley and I did our best to explain.

“But that’s behind a couple of inches of steel plates,” one of the sailors said. “How do we get them out of there?”

“If the Human Torch was here, he could just point a finger at it and—*SHHHHHHHH*—slice right through the steel with a stream of flames,” Stanley said.

I cringed at Stanley bringing up a comic book character at a time like this. But his words seemed to strike a chord with a sailor who was wearing a mechanic’s jumpsuit.

“The kid’s onto something,” he said. “We could run to the *Raleigh*, grab an acetylene torch, come back, and cut ’em out!”

I could see the neighboring *Raleigh* through the smoke. The cruiser was still afloat, but she had clearly taken a hit from a torpedo and was listing mightily. I couldn’t believe these sailors were planning to climb on board *another* capsizing boat, even just to pick up welding equipment. But the mechanic’s suggestion was followed by shouts of agreement.

“I’ll take these kids to Ford first,” the coxswain said, nodding at me and Stanley.

“There’s no time!” I said, my heart racing as I imagined again that I was trapped inside the *Utah* with the water rising. I couldn’t let those men die like that. Not because their crewmates took extra time getting Stanley and me home.

“We’ll swim for it,” I said.

Stanley looked at me with wide-eyed disbelief, and I blinked, startled by my own words. Had I *really* just suggested that we climb *back* into the water, with all those Japanese Zeros still shooting at us?

I opened my mouth to take back what I’d said, but Stanley was already nodding.

“It’s not far,” he said. “We’ll be all right. Go! Go!” he told the sailors. Before the Utahs could object, Stanley was climbing back into the water,

and, Hawkman help me, I followed him.

The coxswain restarted the engine, and the sailors saluted us as they tore away for the *Raleigh*.

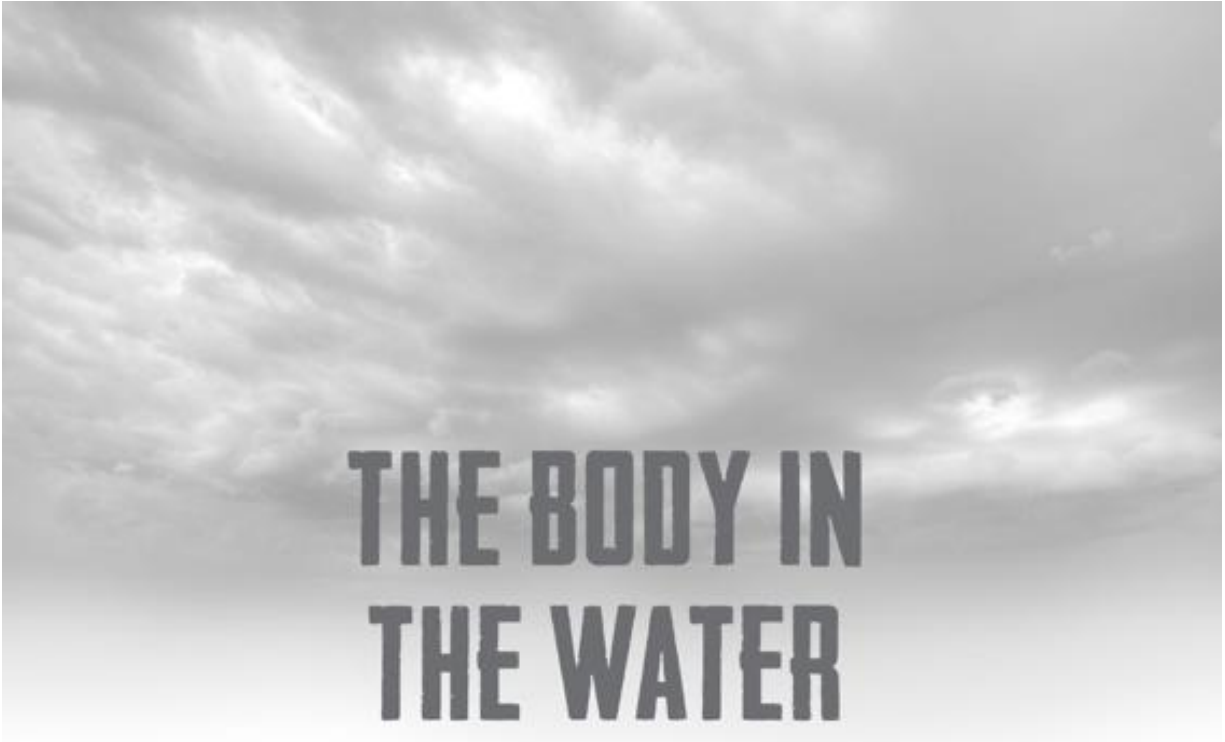
“Off they go, mettlesome mariners all, to harness the power of Prometheus and save their confined companions!” Stanley cried, and I smiled. For a brief moment, I felt good. Better than good. Somebody was going to rescue those sailors trapped in the *Utah*, and it was all because of Stanley and me.

Now we just had to swim all by ourselves across open water, dodging bullets, and bombs, and burning fuel, and—

“*Oh. Oh no. Frank, look,*” Stanley said. The quiet urgency of his voice made me expect something awful as I turned. A shark, maybe. Or a giant eel—everyone always forgot about the giant eels.

But it was worse than that. Worse than everything else.

Floating nearby in the water, facedown and lifeless, was a sailor dressed in the white uniform of the *Utah*'s baseball team.



Stanley and I had to keep moving. We had to get to Ford Island, to see if our families were all right.

But we couldn't. Not yet.

Not until we knew if the body in the water was Brooks.

Without a word, we both swam to the body. A Zero shot by overhead, and Stanley and I ducked as a bomb exploded next to the *Raleigh*, sloshing its deck with seawater.

We swam on.

Stanley and I got to the sailor at last and turned him over. When I saw who it was—when I saw his face, saw the bullet hole in his chest—I shook my head and backed away. I sobbed once and put a hand to my mouth, trying not to be sick.

The body in the water was Brooks Leonard.

Brooks Leonard was dead.

It didn't make sense. When had it happened? Where had he been when he was shot? It was just minutes ago that I had seen him alive. Held his hand as he pulled me up the tilting deck. Talked to him about Ginny.

Ginny. Suddenly all I could think of was my sister, and the way she talked about Brooks. The way she looked at him when he wasn't looking. The way she held his arm in both of hers when they walked together.

He was going to ask her to marry him.

How could I tell Ginny that Brooks was dead? And worse—

“This is my fault,” I said out loud.

Stanley turned to me, looking as sick as I felt.

“What?” he said. “You didn't kill Brooks. The Japanese air force did.”

Right at that moment, the Japanese air force dropped another torpedo. It missed the ship it was aiming for and hit Ford Island, sending dirt and trees and sand flying. Another Japanese plane came streaking down the line of ships on Carrier Row, blasting them with machine-gun fire, and Stanley and I ducked. We had to go. And we had to leave Brooks behind. There was nothing we could do for him now anyway.

“We have to swim to Ford underwater,” I told Stanley. “It's the safest way!”

I kicked higher and took a huge breath.

“Wait—” said Stanley, but I was already diving deep, deep down. I turned to make sure Stanley was all right, and saw him dunk underwater, cheeks puffed out from the breath he was holding.

Behind him, Brooks's body turned on its side, his dead eyes staring at me accusingly.

I turned and swam away as hard and fast as I could.



The battle was strangely muted under the water. Bullets hit all around me with the same little *shoomp* that my dad's car keys made when he threw them into the deep end of the pool for me to dive after. Bombs hitting the ships sounded like somebody whacking the side of a metal tub full of water. I could feel them too, the shock waves wobbling the water. *TOOMMMM*.

Ahead of me, another sailor's body hung lifelessly under the surface. I wondered if he was somebody else Stanley and I knew, but I couldn't stop to check. Couldn't add another dead friend to my tally.

Stanley didn't understand. But I did. I had killed Brooks Leonard as sure as if I'd been flying that Japanese plane.

Brooks had died because I had frozen up behind that stack of wood. If he hadn't had to come back for me, if he hadn't taken all that time to guide me up the tilting deck, he and Stanley and I would have been over the side a lot sooner, and Brooks wouldn't have been wherever he was when that Japanese plane shot a bullet right at that spot.

Right place, right time. Brooks had said those words when he'd greeted me and Stanley that morning. But because of me, Brooks had been in the wrong place, at the wrong time.

My fear of getting hurt had killed Brooks Leonard.

Something moved off to my side, but when I turned to look it was gone. My heart clenched as I imagined a great white shark swimming out of the dark, oily water, its huge mouth full of razor-sharp teeth.

TOOMMMM. Another explosion shook the water, and I realized that the sharks in Pearl Harbor were probably doing the same thing I was—trying to get the heck out of there. They would be back soon, especially with all these bodies in the water. But if they were smart, they were already long gone, out into the open sea.

I hoped somebody got Brooks's body out of the water before the sharks returned.

Ford Island was close, but it seemed like forever until I was finally pulling myself up, drenched, out of the water. The beach was rough and steep here, and I cut myself up scrambling out. A few scrapes were the least of my worries though.

When I turned to help Stanley out of the water, he wasn't there.



THE SUB-MARINER

“Stanley?” I yelled. “Stanley!”

He’d been right behind me!

Straight away I pictured a thousand things that might have happened to him. A stray bullet. A bomb. Maybe he’d gotten tangled up in a loose hawser. Or drowned. Or been eaten by a fleeing shark. Or—

Suddenly Stanley burst up through the surface, gasping for breath. But he was still yards away from the shore!

“Stanley!” I shouted. “Are you all right?”

He nodded wearily, gulped down another lungful of air, and disappeared under the water.

What was taking him so long? I crouched by the shore as Japanese planes circled like vultures and blasts echoed from every direction. I felt the old urge to *run*. Hide. But I couldn’t leave without Stanley.

I cowered as a piece of twisted metal came whistling across the harbor, chewing up the water like a saw blade. Had it hit Stanley? Was he

swimming deep enough? I remembered the dead body I'd seen floating underwater. If Stanley was hit, would I even know if he was dead?

Stanley burst from the water right in front of me, gasping for breath like a fish, and I cried out in surprise. A second later I had my wits about me and was stumbling over to grab him.

"How did you—swim so far underwater so fast—without coming up for air?" Stanley asked me as I helped him up the beach. "I came up for air—like three times!"

I blinked at that. Had Stanley really not been able to hold his breath the whole time? He'd been behind me, so I hadn't noticed.

"It's like you can breathe underwater," Stanley said. "Are you the son of a sea captain and an Atlantean princess or something?"

I smiled at that, but I couldn't tell Stanley the real reason I was so good at swimming. Not without telling him everything. And there was no time for that now.

I glanced over at Carrier Row. The black smoke and swirling orange flames were thick, but I could see that American ships were finally firing back. Antiaircraft guns on the *Tangier* and the *Detroit* were working nonstop : *M-chow-chow-chow-chow. M-chow-chow-chow-chow.* The *Raleigh's* crews were firing too, even though their ship had sunk straight down to the harbor floor and the gunners were now standing in one foot of water.

None of the shooting seemed to be doing much good though. When the American gunners aimed straight up, the black *pooms* from their exploding shells fell short of the high-altitude Japanese bombers. When the gunners aimed sideways, their shots missed the low-flying torpedo bombers and peppered our *own* ships across the harbor.

This was a disaster.

I watched as a Japanese bomber fired at the gun turrets on the *Raleigh*, then roared right over Ford Island. The plane was so close I could see both the pilot and the tail gunner—the guy who sat with his back to the pilot and shot a rear-mounted machine gun at anybody who tried to follow them. The Japanese pilot had on goggles and a brown leather bomber cap, and his white scarf fluttered out the side of his open cockpit window.

The tail gunner saw me and Stanley looking at him, and I could swear he smiled and waved at us.

“Holy cats—did you see that?” Stanley asked.

I nodded. I was absolutely speechless. I wanted nothing more in that moment than to punch that guy in his grinning face. I’d never felt so much anger—so much *hatred*—toward anybody in my entire life.

I looked back across the water in time to see the gun crew on the *Tangier* score a hit on a Japanese plane. Stanley grabbed my shoulder, and I held my breath as the meatballs spiraled toward the water, leaving a trail of gray smoke. *Boom!* The Japanese bomber crashed into the harbor, and Stanley and I cheered.

Another Zero came streaking in, wing guns blazing. Stanley and I dropped to the ground as bullets ripped across the beach, just missing us.

“Sure would be nice to be bulletproof like Superman now,” said Stanley.

That *would* have been nice. Or being able to turn invisible like the Phantom Lady, or shrink and disappear like the Atom.

“I think instead we need to make like the Flash and *run!*” I said, and we took off into the chaos.



Stanley and I had crossed Ford a thousand times. Getting to our houses from the beach was easy: All we had to do was run past a row of officer houses, slip through the hangars and buildings on the edge of the air station, and dash across the open stretch of asphalt runway.

The runway where Japanese Zeros were now looping and diving and dropping bombs.

“Maybe we should hide in one of the officer houses until the fighting’s over,” I said as we sprinted.

A Japanese plane strafed the ships behind us in the water, and we both ducked.

“Maybe that’s not such a bad idea,” Stanley said.

We started to veer for the nearest house when—

KABOOM!

A bomb hit the house and knocked us to the ground. I landed with an *oomph* and curled up into a ball as pieces of the building landed all around

us. Had there been any people inside? If there were, they had to be dead.

“Maybe hiding in a house *isn't* a great idea,” Stanley said.

I nodded, shaking as badly as Stanley was. I was scared out of my wits. But for the first time in my life, I didn't feel like I had to hide it. Because Stanley was just as scared as I was. Anybody would be.

Which made me think that maybe, finally, Stanley might understand what it was like to be Frank McCoy.

I looked up and saw a stand of koa trees between the officers' houses and the airfield's outbuildings. Koas were thick, gnarly trees with long, leafy branches that stretched out really wide. They could at least hide us from the Japanese planes.

I stood and yanked Stanley to his feet, little bits of burning paper and debris from the exploded house floating all around us. We stayed low and ran until we reached the koas. Together we hunkered down at the base of the biggest tree, catching our breaths as more Japanese planes buzzed overhead.

“Stanley, I'm afraid,” I confessed.

“Me too,” Stanley told me, his eyes wide.

“No. I mean, yes, I'm afraid *right now*,” I said. “But that's also why I didn't help you yesterday. When you were getting beat up by Arthur and Johnny.”

Stanley frowned, like this wasn't the time to bring it up. But if there was ever a time to talk about overwhelming, all-encompassing fear, it was when bombs were falling all around you.

Koa meant “brave” in Hawaiian, and I took a deep breath and tried to channel some of the strength of the tree at my back as I finally confessed my secret.

“I'm afraid of getting hurt,” I told Stanley. “All the time. Like ... I worry about getting hit in the head with a baseball. Or accidentally cutting myself with a kitchen knife.”

Stanley's frown became one of confusion. He opened his mouth to ask me a question, but I didn't let him. Not yet. I had to get all this out.

“I worry about sharks,” I told him. “And volcanoes. And plane crashes. I worry about the tires coming off our car when we're going around a curve.

I worry about losing my fingers and toes to frostbite. I worry about losing my teeth. Or getting struck by lightning. I worry about alien invaders from Mars, and burning myself on the stove, and wearing flip-flops. I stay up late at night afraid that I'll die in my sleep, or that my mom or my dad or my sister will die. I lie awake scared that *you'll* die, Stanley. And now Brooks —”

I didn't finish that sentence. I couldn't.

“I live in *constant fear of getting hurt*, Stanley. It's been a little better here in Hawaii but not totally. I was too ashamed to tell you, because I was scared that if you knew, you wouldn't want to be my friend anymore.”

“Wow,” was all Stanley said. It was a lot to take in, I knew.

Bullets suddenly chewed up the ground behind us—*shoonk-shoonk-shoonk-SHOONK-SHOONK!* Stanley and I covered our heads and shrank, but the big koa tree protected us.

“You're really afraid of everything?” Stanley asked when the danger passed.

“Pretty much. That's why I'm so good at holding my breath underwater,” I explained. “Before I came here, when my dad told me we were moving to a tiny island way out in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, I started taking advanced swimming lessons. Just in case I accidentally got lost at sea and had to swim for shore.”

Stanley was quiet, and I glanced sideways at him to see what he was thinking. Was he going to tell me I was stupid? Was he going to hate me? Disapprove of me?

Make fun of me?

As scared as I was of the bullets and bombs, the one thing I knew could kill me for sure was whatever Stanley said next.

“Okay, there's just one thing I need to understand,” Stanley said at last. “Why are you afraid of *flip-flops*?”



ONCE BITTEN

My mouth hung open. After everything I'd told him, *that* was Stanley's question? Why I was afraid of *flip-flops*?

"Okay, hear me out," I said. "First of all, no protection for your toes. You're just *asking* for a broken bone. But also—what if you're wearing flip-flops and a bear attacks you? Or somebody steals your backpack and you have to go after them? You can't run in flip-flops!"

Stanley nodded slowly, like he was listening to a toddler. I could tell I was losing him. It was all too weird, even for Stanley. My heart sank.

"Were you always this way?" Stanley asked after a long moment.

"I was always a worrier," I said. "But I got worse after The Incident."

"'The Incident'?" Stanley repeated.

I took a deep breath. This was what had changed everything for me in Pensacola. Made me so afraid of getting hurt that I'd become the laughingstock of my school. But I had come too far to not tell Stanley the whole story.

“When we lived in Florida, there was this big, mean dog chained up in front of one of the base houses,” I told Stanley. “Whenever I walked by him, he would jump and growl and bark and pull at his chain, trying to get at me. I was so afraid that big dog was going to break free from his chain and come for me, but everybody said it was never going to happen. And then one day it did!”

Stanley’s eyes went wide. “The dog attacked you?”

“Well, not at first,” I said. “I thought he was going to, but when he broke his chain, he ran straight across the road and attacked this little yappy dog in a neighbor’s yard. You should have seen them go at it! I thought the big dog was going to tear that little dog’s throat out.”

“What’d you do?”

“I ran over and tried to save the little dog!”

“No way!” Stanley said, impressed.

“I did!” I said. “And the big dog did this!”

I lifted up the tail of my shirt to show Stanley the thick, rope scars on my stomach where the big dog had mauled me. The scars were hard for me to look at, even all these years later. An old, familiar panic made my heart race, and it was like I could feel the awful stab and tear of the dog’s teeth again.

Stanley’s eyes went wide, and he whistled and shook his head. “But you saved the little dog, right?”

“No!” I said. “That’s the dumb thing. I mean, the little dog turned out all right. After the big dog tore me up, the two dogs didn’t fight anymore. They just stood there right next to each other, looking at me like I was the biggest idiot in the world! I ended up in the hospital, and the wound got really infected, and it was all for nothing. And worse, it made me so scared of getting hurt again that I’ve been a chicken about *everything* ever since.”

Stanley nodded sagely. “Once bitten, twice shy—literally.” He paused, then added, “Hey, the run-in with the dog, that was your origin story!”

“What?” I said, taken aback.

“It made you who you are, like Batman,” Stanley said. “Or like how Billy Batson was given superpowers by the wizard Shazam because his parents died and his uncle stole his inheritance. Or how Green Arrow’s

sidekick Speedy learned how to hunt with a bow and arrow after his parents died in the plane crash that stranded him on that deserted island.”

Stanley stopped and frowned.

“Wow, I never realized before how many superheroes were orphans,” he said.

Stanley’s eyes went wide and I knew that, like me, he was thinking about our parents again. “We’ve been sitting here too long,” he said. “Let’s go!”

I jumped up with Stanley, but I was still stunned by his words. *Was the incident with the dog my origin story?* I’d never thought of it that way. Getting bitten *had* made me the kind of person who ran away at the first sign of danger. Who froze up and got his sister’s boyfriend killed. But was that who I was going to be forever? Like a comic book character, would I never change?

An explosion up ahead of us rocked the earth, and Stanley and I stumbled and dropped to the ground. We crawled into the narrow space between two buildings on the edge of the airfield and huddled there with our backs to the wall.

“I’m not sure this was the safest route home,” Stanley said.

“Crossing the airfield *is* dangerous, because it’s clearly a focus of the Japanese attack,” I said. “But Ford Island is so small that basically everything is a target. Going the other way would have exposed us to the Zeros for a lot longer. *And* we would have been right by the battleships, which are *also* clearly targets. So this route is the safest. Well, safer,” I concluded.

“Wait—are you doing that all the time in your head?” Stanley asked. “Weighing how dangerous this is versus that, every moment of every day?”

I nodded. I was relieved that Stanley understood, but I was worried too. Usually when people figured that part of me out, they told me I was being foolish, and I should just get over it. Or they laughed at me.

“I take it back,” said Stanley. “Holding your breath isn’t your superpower. Your superpower is risk assessment!”

I couldn’t help but laugh. I’d never thought of what everybody else saw as a defect as something to be proud of. But that was Stanley, always seeing

the good in everything. And everybody.

“Come on, I think I see our dads!” Stanley said. He jumped up and raced for the airfield, and I hurried after him.

But the second we came out into the open, what we saw made us stop and stare.



DUCK AND COVER

The airfield looked nothing like the one we knew. The giant hangar where the flight crews had cookouts was a scorched, smoking skeleton. Planes Stanley and I had played on sat crumpled and burning on the tarmac. Bomb craters and debris littered the runway where I'd watched my dad take off and land a hundred times.

I looked around for my dad, or for Stanley's, but couldn't see them. Navy pilots and flight crews ran this way and that, some of them trying to shoot at the passing Japanese planes with rifles, others throwing sand and water on the spreading flames.

A Zero swooped down like a mosquito and took a bite out of the runway with its machine guns—*shink-shink-shink-shink!* Stanley and I dove for cover under a gray Navy service truck. My heart pounded as we hid, bullets zipping into the tarmac all around us.

“Fearing for their lives, our intrepid heroes take shelter from the pandemonium of the battle underneath a conveniently parked maintenance

vehicle,” Stanley said.

“Yeah,” I said. Once again, his narrator voice didn’t have the usual comic book bravado. The never-ending battle was taking its toll. On both of us.

“You said you saw our dads. Where are they?” I asked, searching the airfield as best I could from under the truck. I was desperate to know if my father was all right.

“There!” Stanley said, pointing. “Dad! Dad!” he screamed, waving his arms out in front of him like a football referee calling an incomplete pass.

I looked where he was waving and saw a team of Navy pilots and ground crew pushing an undamaged scout plane toward one of the hangars. My dad and Mr. Summers were with them! I wanted to yelp for joy—Dad was okay! Both our dads were!

“Dad! Over here!” I yelled, waving my hands and hollering with Stanley.

Stanley’s dad finally heard us. He saw us under the truck, and his eyes went wide with terror. He yelled something I couldn’t hear and broke away from the airplane, waving his arms as he ran toward us. When my dad saw what was happening, he started running and yelling and pointing at us too.

“Well, that’s not the reaction I was expecting,” Stanley said.

“Me neither,” I said. Were they angry at us for being here?

I felt something wet underneath me, and I shifted awkwardly to see what it was. It was hard to make out in the shade of the truck, but the liquid had a shiny, multicolored surface.

I touched a finger to the stuff and brought it to my nose, and goose bumps crawled up and down my arms. I searched the bottom of the truck, looking for a leak, but there wasn’t one. Which could only mean one thing.

“Oh no. Stanley,” I said, “I think we’ve made a very *bad* risk assessment.”

“What? How?” he asked.

I slid around the spill to the edge of the truck. I peeked up at the side, and suddenly I understood why our dads were running toward us in such a panic.

Stenciled on the side of the truck was a single word: GASOLINE.



“Gas tanker!” I cried, pulling on Stanley’s arm. “We’re hiding under a *gas tanker!*”

We scrambled out from under the truck as fast as we could. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the other ground crew and pilots running for a makeshift machine-gun nest ringed with sandbags. Our dads were still running toward us, but now my dad was pointing frantically at something in the sky. He was yelling too, but I couldn’t hear him over a shrill whine that was getting louder and louder every second.

I looked up and saw a Japanese plane diving straight at the gasoline truck.

Straight at *us*.

Seconds seemed to turn into minutes as a large round object detached from the plane. I couldn’t move. Couldn’t speak. All I could do was watch in stunned horror as the plane pulled up and away but the object continued to fall, getting bigger, and bigger, and—

“*Bomb!*” I yelled, finally coming to my senses. “Stanley, *run!*”

The second Stanley saw the falling bomb, he took off at a dead sprint like Lash Lightning.

Time was suddenly measured in thundering heartbeats, in the pounding of my feet on the hard, hot tarmac. The racket from the battle faded away, replaced in my head with the static between radio stations. My entire being became focused on getting as far away from the tanker as fast as I could. Getting to our dads, who were racing just as hard toward us.

“Run! Run!” I heard my dad cry as we got closer.

“Go! Go!” I yelled when we were almost on top of them. We couldn’t stop here! Our dads screeched to a halt as we passed them, and then they turned and joined me and Stanley as we raced for the ring of sandbags.

All the other Navy men had already beaten us there except for one member of the ground crew, who we quickly left in the dust. Like our dads, he had been expecting a leisurely day off-and was wearing an Aloha shirt and shorts.

But unlike our dads, he was wearing flip-flops.

“Come on! *Run!*” the others called out to us and the straggling crewman.

I leaped over the sandbags with Stanley and our dads just as—

Ka-THOOM!

The gas tanker exploded in an earth-shaking fireball that made my insides jiggle. The blast was deafeningly loud, and I threw my hands over my ears as metal pieces of the truck went whistling in all directions. Over the roar of a blazing fire, I heard the smash of wood and the creak and crash of steel.

When the last of the shrapnel had fallen, I peeked up from behind the sandbag walls. The bomb had struck the gas tanker dead on, blowing it sky high. The explosion had wrecked a plane, and another truck. It had also taken out a corner of the hangar, which had collapsed into a pile of broken timbers and twisted girders.

Just about the only thing the tanker hadn’t destroyed was the plane Dad and the others had been pushing toward the hangar.

“Holy cats—we were just hiding under there,” Stanley said, staring at the burning crater where the gas tanker had once been.

“Woody!” one of the Navy guys cried. He and a couple of the others hopped over the sandbags and ran to the man who’d been wearing flip-flops. Woody hadn’t made it to safety in time. He wasn’t dead, but he was a bloody mess. His arms and legs were all torn up, and I could see the back of his Aloha shirt burned into his skin.

The wounded man’s buddies picked him up and hauled him toward the dispensary, where he could get treated.

“Okay, wow,” Stanley said, sliding down with his back to the sandbags. “I get the thing about flip-flops.”

“*What are you boys doing here?*” Stanley’s dad asked. He and my dad looked furious as they turned on Stanley and me.

“Usually I can count on *you* to be somewhere safe, Frank!” my dad said.

He didn’t mean it that way, but his words still stung. I was a chicken, and everybody knew it.

“We’re just trying to get home!” Stanley told them.

“Dad, the *Utah* capsized, and the *Raleigh*’s sunk!” I said.

“Half the ships in the East Loch are on fire,” Stanley added.

Our dads looked at each other in horror, and Stanley’s dad cursed. Apparently they hadn’t known.

I took a deep breath, ready to tell Dad about Brooks, when Stanley cut in.

“Why aren’t there any American planes fighting back?” he asked.

Mr. Summers huffed, and my dad scowled.

“We asked for permission to get birds in the air,” Mr. Summers said, “but our commanding officer—”

“Who’s not even here!” my dad added.

“—ordered us to hide the planes in the hangars,” Mr. Summers finished. “Most of the planes aren’t flight-ready anyway. Headquarters was more worried about local sabotage than a bombing attack or invasion, so they had us disarm the planes and park them together out in the open so we’d see if anybody was messing with them.”

“Idiots!” my dad said. “It just made the planes easy targets—and it’s keeping us from hitting back!”

And right there, that was the fundamental difference between me and my dad. To me, headquarters’ idea made a lot of sense. The newspapers were full of warnings about saboteurs and spies, and one-third of Hawaii’s population was Japanese. Who knew how many of them were enemy agents? I would have played it safe and left the airplanes out on the runway too. Besides, the Japanese army actually *attacking* had been a million-to-one odds. Wasn’t that what everybody had always said?

“Well, seeing as there’s no hangar to park what’s left of the planes,” Mr. Summers said to my dad, “what say we forget orders and get at least one of these birds in the air?”

“Now you’re talking!” Dad said.

“I thought you didn’t want to fight,” I said to Mr. Summers, remembering what he’d said in the backyard yesterday.

“That was *before* we were attacked,” Mr. Summers said. “We’ve got to go to war now, don’t we? We can’t take a punch and not fight back.”

Stanley’s dad turned to his crew. “All right, let’s get that plane prepped and ready for takeoff ASAP!” he cried, and there were cheers as the ground crew hopped over the sandbags and ran to prep the airplane for takeoff.

Stanley got up to go with them, but his dad pulled him back.

“*No, no, no,*” Mr. Summers said.

“But, Dad, we can help!” Stanley said.

“Every Navy pilot and mechanic on the island is here whether they were on duty or not,” Mr. Summers said. “We have plenty of people to do this—guys who joined up and were *trained* for this.”

My dad put a hand on my shoulder. “I know I’m always telling you to take more chances, Frank, but you already have just coming here. The rest isn’t for you boys to do.”

Stanley was downcast, but I was secretly relieved. Every second we spent at the airfield was another second we could be hurt. Or killed. There was a difference between being brave and being stupid. This was our *dads’* jobs, not ours.

“You boys get to the Dungeon under Admiral Bellinger’s house,” Dad told me. “That’s where your mom and your sister went as I was leaving for the airfield. You’ll be safe there.”

Safer, I thought. But I didn’t say it.

Dad pulled me into a hug, which he hadn’t done since I was a kid. I was surprised, but I hugged him back. Hard.

“Remember what President Roosevelt said: ‘The only thing we have to fear is fear itself,’ ” he whispered into my ear. “You’re braver than you think, Frank McCoy.”

His words startled me more than the hug. Dad had always told me to *be* brave. Never that I *was* brave. I had just felt relieved that we were being sent away from the danger! Now he was telling me I was braver than I thought?

What did my dad see in me that I didn’t see in myself?

Dad sat back, his hands on my shoulders. “Tell your mom and Ginny I love them, and I’ll see you all when this is over,” he said, then climbed over the sandbags to run to the plane.

Dad’s words felt final somehow, and I choked down tears. He was getting ready to climb into a plane and fly up alone into the swarm of Japanese planes. There were a hundred different ways he could die. A thousand. He could be shot down by a Zero, or get hit by our own antiaircraft fire. He could crash on the mainland, or be killed in his cockpit and spin down into the sea, or parachute out and be shot in the sky, or survive a water landing only to be eaten by sharks, or giant eels, or—

Mr. Summers squeezed my arm. “Don’t worry about your dad,” he said, as if he could read my mind. “He’s a great pilot. He’s safer up there than we are down here.”

I wasn’t so sure about that, but there was nothing I could do about it now.

“And you two will be much safer in the Dungeon,” Mr. Summers told us. “But, Stanley, I need you to go by the house first. Make sure your mom’s not there. I told her to get to the Dungeon, but she wouldn’t leave the house. Not right away.”

“What?” Stanley said. “Why not?”

“I don’t know. She was in a state. Said there was something she had to do first,” Stanley’s dad told him, worry written all over his face. “I hated to leave her, but they were calling everybody to the airfield on the radio, and I had to run. I know your mom can take care of herself, but—just make sure she’s out of there and safe in the Dungeon, will you?”

Stanley was confused. I was too. But our houses were on the way to the Dungeon. We could quickly check in to make sure Mrs. Summers was gone.

Stanley’s dad put his hands on his son’s shoulders and looked him straight in the eye. “You’re going to have to look out for your mom now, Stanley. You hear me?”

Stanley pulled away, frowning. “What are you saying, Dad? You’re not gonna *die*, are you?”

“No, no,” Stanley’s dad told him. “I’m coming home when all this is done. I promise. You just ... things are going to be different now,” he said. “For your mom, *and* for you.”

Stanley still didn’t seem to understand, and neither did I. But there wasn’t time to say anything more. Zeros were strafing and bombing the airfield, and there were American planes to get flying.

“Go,” Mr. Summers said. He gave Stanley a kiss on the head and pushed us toward home. “And be careful!” he said.

He didn’t have to worry about me. *Careful* was my middle name. But I could see from the frown on Stanley’s face that his father had planted a seed of doubt in him that was suddenly making him question everything.

“Come on!” I said, grabbing Stanley’s arm. I wanted to be in the Dungeon twenty minutes ago, and if we were going to make a pit stop at Stanley’s house, we had to be fast.

I only looked back once, in time to see my dad’s plane climbing straight up into the smoke-black sky. I should have cheered, but as he roared off into the battle, I couldn’t help but wonder if I would ever see him alive again.



When we got to Nob Hill, I couldn't believe my eyes. Our houses had survived! From the *Utah*, it looked like the Japanese had bombed every inch of this side of the island. But there they were, the little homes still standing along Battleship Row. The last line of defense between Ford Island and the Japanese attack.

I ducked instinctively as huge spouts of water erupted offshore, four or five times taller than the tops of the *Maryland* and the *Tennessee*. It was hard to see what condition the fighting ships were in, but with all the fire and smoke, I knew it couldn't be good. The battleship *Arizona*, parked just behind my house, was a raging inferno. The air was heavy with the smell of burning oil, and I almost couldn't hear myself think for the crash and rumble of the ongoing battle.

Stanley and I ran for his house. I felt the pull of my own bungalow next door, but I knew better. Dad said that Mom and Ginny had left for the Dungeon.

Shiny things covered our front yards like hail, and I slowed to look at them. They were the metal clips that held strings of bullets together. Airplanes spat them out when they fired their machine guns.

You could usually find a few clips like these at the airfield, after the Navy pilots had run shooting drills. But these clips weren't American. They couldn't be. We didn't have that many planes in the sky. That meant they were *Japanese* bullet casings. I stared at the sea of metal clips strewn all over the grass. How many times must Japanese planes have flown back and forth over the island with their guns blazing to fill up our yards like this?

"Mom?" Stanley cried, throwing open his front door. "Mom? Are you still here?"

I hurried to follow him. Stanley and I split up to search his small house. "Mom? *Mom?*" I heard Stanley call in one of the bedrooms.

I ran into the living room. Wherever Mrs. Summers was, she'd left without turning off the radio. It was tuned to the KGMB broadcast out of Honolulu, and Webley Edwards, the host of *Hawaii Calls*, was breathlessly reporting on the attack that was happening right outside the window.

"Civilian employees are being told to not—I repeat, *not*—report to the base," he said. "The highway between Honolulu and Pearl is being strafed by enemy aircraft. Military authorities are warning everyone in Honolulu to stay off the roads and not block traffic. This is not a drill. Pearl Harbor Naval Base is under attack!"

"No kidding. *Really?*" I said sarcastically.

"Stay tuned for more information as it becomes available," he said. There was a second or two of dead air, and then Web Edwards, in a voice more like a stunned friend and less like a radio announcer, said, "Folks, this is the real McCoy."

That made me stop. I'd heard that phrase before, but I'd never thought about how it was also my last name: McCoy.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen," Web added dramatically, "your national anthem. You may never hear it again."

A record needle popped, and a scratchy recording of "The Star-Spangled Banner" blasted out from the radio's speakers. I got goose bumps. *You may never hear it again?* Did that mean that the Hawaiian Islands were

about to be invaded by Japanese troops? I slumped. But of course they were. I had been so stupid. That had to be why they were attacking from the air first—to soften us up for a ground invasion!

“Frank, come quick! Help!” Stanley cried from out back, and the bottom dropped out of my world.

The Japanese invasion must have already begun!



I hurried to the back door, sure I was going to see Japanese marines wading up onshore, rifles and bayonets at the ready. Instead what I saw was Stanley's mom, on her knees in the backyard, and Stanley desperately trying to pull her to her feet. Ships and trees burned behind them, and as I stood staring, a Zero burst out of the smoke, its guns blazing at something farther inland. Stanley ducked as the plane roared by, but his mom ignored it.

What in the Sam Hill—? What was Mrs. Summers *doing*?

“Mom! Stop!” Stanley cried. He looked up and saw me. “Frank, help me get her out of here!”

I banged open the screen door and ran for Stanley and his mom. When I got close, I saw that Mrs. Summers was hacking away at the ground with a little garden trowel. She'd cut a long, shallow trench and was trying to make it deeper, her hands and dress all dirty.

“*What’s she doing?*” I cried. “Stanley, we can’t be out here!” Japanese planes were strafing the water right behind us, and I cowered as a fireball exploded on the *West Virginia* two ships down on Battleship Row.

“I know!” Stanley said. He looked up at me with panic in his eyes. “She won’t listen!”

Mrs. Summers fought Stanley off and slashed at the ground again with all her might. “I have to bury it! All of it!” she yelled. “They can’t find it in the house!”

That’s when I saw the small pile of things beside her on the grass. I recognized some of them at once—they were the Japanese heirlooms from the Summers’ dining room. The framed pictures of Stanley’s ancestors, the woodblock prints of Mount Fuji, the family’s beloved samurai sword. There were also Japanese books and a stack of letters addressed in Japanese. Mrs. Summers was digging a hole to bury the whole pile. But why?

“Mom! Please! Stop!” Stanley begged. “I don’t understand!”

“Can’t you see? America and Japan are at *war*,” Mrs. Summers said, still digging. “And you and me, we look like the people who are dropping the bombs!”

I suddenly remembered the Japanese pilot Stanley and I had seen flying by, with his smiling, waving tail gunner. I remembered the anger I’d felt at them for destroying everything I loved. The *loathing* I’d felt.

A ball formed in the pit of my stomach, and I took a step back. Mrs. Summers was right. If I’d felt that angry, other people would too.

A lot of other people.

“What? But—no,” Stanley said. “We’re Americans! We were born here!”

“You don’t understand,” Mrs. Summers said, flinging dirt over her shoulder, her eyes frantic. “Where we were born, how we were raised—none of that will matter now.”

I’d never seen an adult so panicked, so frightened, and it scared me. But Stanley was right. Even though Hawaii was a territory and not a state, he and his mom were US citizens. Americans. Just like me and all the other transplants at Pearl. Just like all the Pacific Islanders and Native Hawaiians and the other Japanese Americans who were born here.

But my own thoughts had betrayed me. Back on the tarmac, when we'd been with our dads, I'd thought the Navy brass were right to be on guard for spies and saboteurs because there were so many Japanese Americans living here. But why had I assumed that those people would be spies? I gasped to myself. I had done to every Japanese American in Hawaii exactly what Mrs. Summers had just warned Stanley would happen. I'd judged them based only on what they looked like and where their ancestors were from.

Stanley's mom grabbed his arm, making him jump. "You've grown up in a bubble here in Hawaii, Stanley," she said, her face twisted in anguish. "It was so perfect, and I loved that for you. But it's over now, and you don't know how it is everywhere else. How it will be here after all of this. You and me, Stanley, we have to bury who we are."

Stanley staggered back like he'd been slapped. And that's when I finally understood what Stanley's dad had been trying to tell him at the airfield. Mr. Summers had realized how people would react to the attack. How it would be for his wife and son. Stanley and his mom were going to have to look out for each other while Mr. Summers was at war, because things were going to be very different for both of them from now on.

Mrs. Summers swept the pile of family heirlooms into the hole she'd dug and started pushing dirt on top.

"Mom, *stop*," Stanley said, trying to pull her away. "Frank, help me get her—"

Stanley never got to finish. Suddenly there was a great sucking sound, and then—

WHA-BOOOOOOM!

The biggest, loudest explosion I'd ever heard lifted me up and threw me across the yard.



A VOLCANO ERUPTS

Thwack! I hit the back of Stanley's house and fell to the ground face-first. All the air was gone from my lungs, and I couldn't get it back. I was suffocating. Dying! Twisted steel plates and pieces of machinery came hurtling at me, tearing up grave-sized divots in the lawn and punching giant holes in the wall of Stanley's house, but I couldn't *breathe*. I clawed at the ground, at my shirt, pounded my chest, and suddenly—

GASP! I was breathing again, gulping down great rasping lungfuls of air that felt like sandpaper in my throat.

Another explosion made me flinch. Then another. And another. *POOM! poom-POOM-POOM! ka-THOOM!* Explosion on top of explosion on top of explosion, like the grand finale of a fireworks show, each one shaking the ground and rattling my teeth.

A bomb must have hit the Arizona's ammunition room, I thought dully, and then—*KROOM*—I saw the *USS Arizona* rise up out of the water in a giant fireball. It bent, and buckled, and then the six-hundred-foot, thirty-

thousand-ton steel battleship snapped in half like a twig, falling back to earth in pieces.

FWOO-FWOOM!

I bounced in the air as the *Arizona* slammed back down into the harbor, and I landed on my side with another painful *thud*. Water swept up onshore like a tsunami, flooding half of Stanley's backyard. And still the *Arizona* burned and exploded. *POOM! POOM! poom-POOM!* What had been a battleship was now an erupting volcano of fire and smoke. Rivets popped and shot in every direction, and the air became a hailstorm of oil and steel and flames. I covered my head and curled up into a ball as the thousand million things that made up a battleship came raining down on me—anchors and hawsers, hatches and pieces of wooden deck, bits of the hull, claws for tying off lines, broken antennas, busted steering consoles, crumpled machine guns.

And body parts.

I turned away and gagged. With tears in my eyes, I remembered sitting in my bedroom window last night and listening to the movie playing on the fantail of the *Arizona*. There had been more than a thousand sailors on the USS *Arizona*, and most of them had to have been on the ship when she exploded. How many of them had survived?

Looking up at the angry red firestorm and the death-dark smoke that poured from the ship, at the bodies that littered the backyards of Nob Hill, I couldn't imagine that *anyone* had.

The shrapnel and debris stopped falling, and I knew I had to stand. I was tired, and sore, and my throat and lungs still burned. But I had to get out of here. Away from the horror. To Mom and Ginny in the Dungeon.

Stanley and his mother were huddled nearby, and I staggered to them. They were as scratched and bleeding and shaken as I was, but none of us was badly hurt. Not on the outside, at least.

I watched in shock as Mrs. Summers started to crawl back to the hole she'd been digging. To finish burying her and Stanley's past, while the world burned around us.

Stanley and I got to her first and dragged her away. She was too weak, too shaken, to really resist this time.

Stanley said something to me, but I couldn't hear a word of it. My ears were buzzing from the explosion. *We have to get to the Dungeon.* That's what I was thinking, and I assumed that's what Stanley was trying to tell me. It was the only thing worth saying.

And then I saw what had happened to my house.



My house was no more. Some part of the *Arizona*—a gun turret? A part of the bridge?—had crashed right into our living room, and the whole house had collapsed in on itself.

Everything that was left was on fire.

Somewhere in the back of my brain, a little voice said, *Go get some water! A bucket of sand! You have to put the fire out!* But the bigger part of my brain already knew it was hopeless. The house was a complete loss. Everything we owned was gone. All our clothes, our photos, our radio, all the souvenirs from Dad's previous assignments. The mystery novels my mom loved to read. Ginny's baseball trophies. My comic book collection.

And all the comic book scripts I wrote, I realized with a pang of grief. Notebook after notebook. Years of work. It was all burning up in the fire!

I started toward my house to see what I could save, but Mrs. Summers held me back. She looked haggard and heartbroken, but she'd come to her

senses. She shook her head. The past was dead and buried. For all of us. There was no going back.

Together, the three of us hobbled past Stanley's burning house to the road that ringed the island. No fire trucks came driving up. No ambulances. No military vehicles. The *Arizona*, the dead sailors, our destroyed houses—they were all just one more disaster in a day of disasters.

Above us, Japanese planes burst in and out of the smoky darkness like monsters from a dark closet. I saw a plane trailing smoke spin down into the water and crash, and my heart caught in my throat. Was that an American plane or a Japanese plane? What if that was Dad?

In all the chaos, there was no way to know.

It took a lifetime to stagger the few hundred yards to Admiral Bellinger's house, but Stanley and his mom and I got there at last. We headed straight for the Dungeon. Two boys stood guard nervously near the entrance, and ice crawled across my skin when I saw who they were: Arthur Edwards and Johnny Ross. The bullies who'd beat up Stanley. But we surely all had bigger things to worry about now, didn't we?

Stanley and his mother and I moved toward the entrance of the Dungeon, and Arthur and Johnny stepped in our way.

"Aw, come on," I said.

"*You* can come in, McCoy," said Arthur. "But no Japs allowed." He stared right at Stanley and his mom.

I gasped. Stanley jerked back, looking hurt and confused. His mother had *just* warned him people would treat him this way, but neither he nor I had expected to see it so soon.

"We're *Americans*," said Stanley.

"Yeah, well, you *look* Japanese," said Johnny.

"Stop this nonsense," Mrs. Summers snapped at Arthur and Johnny. "You know us. My husband works with your fathers. You go to school with Stanley."

"Not for long," said Johnny.

"We heard the Japs have already landed at Merry Point," said Arthur.

"And that the Japs who live here are storming the gates of Pearl Harbor with guns and clubs," said Johnny.

I didn't know if the invasion rumors were true or not, but I knew the Japanese Americans in Honolulu would never attack the army base. They had zero reason to. Half of them *worked* here!

"That's stupid, and you know it!" I said.

Arthur turned on Stanley. "Well, when the Japs *do* come, who are you gonna shoot? Us or them?"

Stanley looked more confused than ever. "I—I wouldn't. I could never —" he stammered.

This was so screwy. I knew Stanley. They did too! He was as American as the rest of us. He was a card-carrying member of Captain America's Sentinels of Liberty, for crying out loud!

"You and your Jap mom can go die in the Jap attack," Johnny said to Stanley, and he spat on the ground at his feet.

Mrs. Summers gasped, and I felt my blood boil. Before I knew what I was doing—before I could even worry about getting hurt—I threw myself at Johnny, fists swinging.



THE GOOD FIGHT

I'd never punched anybody before, and it was exhilarating—and painful. Turned out Johnny had bones under that stupid face, and my knuckles stung every time I connected. But I was just as big as Johnny, and he hadn't expected me to jump him, so it took a minute before he started hitting back.

“Frank, don't!” Mrs. Summers yelled, but I didn't stop. I hadn't stuck up for Stanley yesterday, and I wasn't going to make the same mistake twice.

Arthur was on me in seconds, trying to pull me away. Then Stanley was there, kicking and punching for all he was worth.

“Stanley! Stop!” his mother shouted, but we were in it now, fists and feet flying.

I took a quick look to see if Stanley was okay, and Johnny decked me. I staggered but didn't go down. My cheekbone stung something awful though, and when I wiped my lip with my wrist, I came away with blood.

Suddenly I realized how banged up I was from everything that had happened that day. I had cuts and scrapes all over me. Bruises blossomed painfully on my back, my legs, and my arms. My clothes were soaked and torn and bloody, and I sagged with exhaustion. I must have looked *rough*. The last time I'd been hurt anywhere *close* to this bad was The Incident, and I'd run from everything dangerous ever since. There was a part of me that wanted to run even now. A big part of me. But there was an even bigger part of me that knew that standing up for my friend was *right*. That this was a good fight. One *worth* getting hurt for.

You're braver than you think, Frank McCoy.

Johnny hit me again, and I hit him back. I hadn't picked this fight, and neither had Stanley, and I swung with all the righteous anger of the attacked. Johnny was about to come at me again, but then he saw something over my shoulder and froze. I thought he was trying the old *Look, behind you!* trick to get me to take my eyes off him, but then I noticed Stanley. He was gaping at something behind me too, his eyes wide.

I turned.

Shambling up the hill toward us was a monster straight out of a Saturday matinee. It was shaped like a man, but was hunched low and covered all over in black ooze. Two red eyes blazed up at us from underneath the slime, and its white teeth flashed in a terrifying grimace.

The monster pointed an oily finger at its throat and gurgled, as though threatening to eat us alive, and I screamed.



I took a horrified step back. So did Johnny and Arthur and Stanley, our fight suddenly forgotten.

And then Mrs. Summers did the most extraordinary thing.

She ran *toward* the monster, rather than away from it.

“It’s a sailor!” she cried. “Help me get him inside!”

I blinked, and suddenly I could see it. The hunched, shambling form was actually a young man, completely naked but for the gun belt and pistol he still wore. Whether he’d been nude to start with, or his shoes, shorts, and shirt had been blown off him or burned away, I didn’t know. Slimy black oil covered him from head to foot.

“Stanley! Frank! Hurry!” Mrs. Summers said. She ignored how ugly the man looked and wrapped her arms around his swaying body. “He must have oil in his throat!”

Stanley dashed toward his mother, and I followed. Together we helped the wounded sailor through the entrance of the Dungeon. This time, Arthur

and Johnny stood back and let us go by without challenging us.

Most of our Ford Island neighbors were packed inside the shelter, and I immediately picked Mom and Ginny out of the crowd. I felt a swell of relief. They were alive, and safe!

Ginny was sitting with the Dawson twins, who she used to babysit. She smiled and started to wave to me, but her look turned to horror when she saw the creature Stanley and I were helping support. Mrs. Harding from three doors down paled and wobbled like she might faint, and Arthur's sister, Maxine, who I suspected had a crush on me, started screaming. So did Charlie Moore, and the Dawson twins, and soon all the kids were freaking out, young and old. And some of the adults too.

"*That's enough,*" my mom said, her voice cutting through the hullabaloo. She marched toward us, and I felt the urge to stand up straight like a soldier at attention. "This man could be your husband. Your father. Your brother," she told the other people in the Dungeon. "He needs our help, not our bawling."

Some of the little kids kept crying, and Ginny went to comfort them. But Mom's words shut everybody else up. Commodore McCoy had taken charge.

Mom gave me a quick hug as she swept by. "I'm so glad you're safe. We'll talk more in a minute," she told me, and I nodded. The sailor needed help first.

"Let's get that area by the door clear and lay out some blankets," Mom ordered. "If one sailor's found us here, more are sure to follow. Charlotte, Elizabeth, come with me to get some water."

The Navy wives and moms immediately got to work. Like the men who'd swarmed the deck of the *Utah* after the attack started, the women were in various states of dress and appearance. Some wore jeans and sweatshirts. Others had on dresses or skirts and short-sleeved shirts. A few had taken a moment to wrap up their hair in scarves or throw on a baseball cap. Mrs. Harding still had metal curlers in her hair, while Charlie's mom was entirely made up and wearing her Sunday best.

Ginny was still wearing her pajamas. She looked at me again from across the room and nodded, relieved I was okay, but she didn't come over.

She had her hands full with the kids. Which was good, because she for sure would have asked me about Brooks, and I didn't know what to say.

Stanley and I helped lower the sailor onto the pile of blankets the women had thrown together, and then we stepped back to give the women room to work.

"*The battleships ...*" the sailor rasped when my mom had gotten a little water down his throat. He clutched at her arm. "*They're all on fire.*"

I shivered, remembering the inferno the *Arizona* had become. How many other ships had gone up in flames? How many other sailors had been burned like this?

"It's all right. You're safe now," Mom told the sailor, and she backed away as a woman with first aid training took over.

"Those dirty Germans!" cried a younger boy named Henry.

"Hush," his mother told him. "It's the Japanese."

I glanced at Stanley. He looked grim-faced and sullen. I noticed other people looking at him suspiciously. Him and his mom. I huffed. The other people in the Dungeon were afraid. I knew that. But fear was no excuse for them to be distrustful. I wanted to yell at them all, to tell them that Stanley was as American as the rest of them, but Stanley's mom pulled him away.

I was going to follow them, make sure Stanley was okay, but suddenly my mom was back, wrapping me up in a desperate hug.

"Frank! I was so worried about you," she said. She held me at arm's length to examine my cuts and bruises. "Were you on the *Utah* when the attack started?" she asked.

"Yeah," I said. "The *Utah* capsized, and we jumped off and swam to Ford."

Mom's eyes went wide, but she quickly shook off all the terrible things she had to be imagining and put on a brave smile. "All that swimming practice paid off, I guess," she said, and hugged me again.

I told her about running into Dad on the airfield and how he and the ground crew had gone against orders to fight back. She paled a bit at that, but she nodded. She understood. That was Dad's job. It was always dangerous when Dad went up in a plane, just more so now.

A bomb hit outside, shaking the reinforced concrete walls of the bunker and making dust rain down from the ceiling. A baby wailed, and his ashen-faced mother hugged him tight, making him cry even harder. The roar from the battle outside was muted, but we all still knew it was going on.

“This place is really old. What if the ceiling falls in?” I said to my mom. I didn’t want to go there, didn’t want to get sucked into a whirlpool of fear again, but I could feel it pulling me in. “What if the entrance gets blocked and we’re trapped? What if the Japanese really are invading, and we get captured? What if—”

Mom put a hand to my chest. “I know, sweetheart,” she said. “I know. But you’re safe now. Safer,” she said, acknowledging my usual comeback with a knowing smile. “And you and Stanley did the right thing, helping get this sailor inside.”

I looked around for Stanley and saw him huddled in a corner with his mom. They were talking quietly, Stanley frowning and his mom sadly shaking her head. Even though the Dungeon was small, none of the other people stood near them, and I saw a teenage girl named Margaret glancing nervously their way. I felt the heat rise in my face, and my fists clenched again. Nobody had treated Stanley and his mom like this *before* the attack, so why were they treating them any differently now?

“I’m just thankful that Brooks was there to look out for you on the *Utah*,” Mom said, and I jumped.

Brooks! Mom didn’t know. My heart climbed into my throat at the thought of him back there, floating in the water. His dead eyes staring at me. Reproaching me.

“Mom,” I said, my voice cracking, “Brooks is—”

A little kid screamed. There was another burned, oil-covered sailor in the doorway, this time held up by Arthur and Johnny.

Mom broke away from me and hurried to the wounded man. “Help me set him against the wall,” she told another Navy wife. “Here, let’s tear up that bathrobe to make towels to clean him off.”

And Mom was off again, taking charge.

I looked over to where Ginny was sitting. Our eyes met, and she handed off one of the crying kids to another girl and started to cross the

room. Toward me.

Oh no. She was coming to ask me about Brooks. I was sure of it. How was I going to tell her that Brooks was dead? What was I going to say? *It's my fault your boyfriend got killed?* I couldn't do it. Not here. Not now. My heart hammered in my chest, and I looked around for some way to escape. But there was nowhere to go. Nowhere to hide.

What was I going to do?



“Ginny!” Mom called. “Can you bring over some more water, please?”

Another wounded sailor had staggered into the dungeon, and Ginny peeled away to help. I sagged with relief, but I wouldn’t be able to avoid my sister forever.

More oil-covered sailors found the Dungeon, and very quickly the First World War bunker became a makeshift hospital for refugees from what was shaping up to be the Second World War. Some of the sailors lurched in on their own, but others were carried up the hill from the harbor by their crewmates.

I was tearing bedsheets into bandages when Arthur’s sister, Maxine, came over.

“Hey, Frank,” she said. “Need some help?”

“Um, sure,” I said.

Maxine sat down close beside me. “I worried when you weren’t here with your mom and your sister,” she told me.

“Oh,” I said. “Yeah. I was on the *Utah* when the attack started. We got hit by torpedoes and the ship turned all the way over.”

Maxine’s eyes went wide. “Oh my gosh. You must have been so scared,” she said, and put her hand on mine.

I felt my cheeks warm up. “Hey!” I said, jumping to my feet. “I see Stanley doing something over there. We should go help.”

Maxine glanced at Stanley, then back at me. The moony look in her eyes had faded, replaced by something else. Disappointment? Disgust?

Fear?

“I think I’ll stay here,” she said coolly, and suddenly any interest I might have had in Maxine disappeared forever.

“Right. Okay,” I said, and I crossed the room to Stanley. To make room for new patients, he was clearing out empty crates that had been stored in the Dungeon.

“Need help?” I asked.

Stanley didn’t say anything back. He kept his eyes on the crates.

“Hey, are you still upset about what Arthur and Johnny said?” I asked quietly. I glanced across the room at Maxine, who was purposefully *not* looking in my direction anymore. “Ignore them. They’re idiots.”

“It’s not just that. It’s everything,” Stanley said at last. “Arthur and Johnny, my mom burying our stuff, the looks everybody’s giving me in here.” He shook his head. “It’s like the Sandman hit me with sleeping gas, and I’m trapped in a nightmare.”

“You gotta be more like Plastic Man,” I said. “You know, I’m rubber and you’re glue. Whatever you say bounces off me and sticks to you.”

“That’s easy for you to say,” Stanley muttered, and started dragging a crate toward the front door.

I hurried to pick up the other side. “Hey, did I do something wrong?” I asked.

Stanley sighed. “I don’t know,” he said. He finally looked up at me. “I just—I don’t need you to fight my battles for me, okay?”

I pulled back and frowned. “What do you mean?”

“Outside, with Arthur and Johnny. You just started throwing punches.”

I was dumbfounded. “I thought that’s what you wanted me to do,” I told him. “Yesterday you were mad when I *didn’t* fight.”

“That’s because you stood there while I was getting beat up,” Stanley said.

“So this time I jumped in first! You said it yourself—a real hero steps in when other people are getting hurt!”

“This was different,” said Stanley. “I— Let me choose my own battles, okay? Then when I do, you back me up.”

“Okay. Fine.” I threw up my hands. “I was just trying to help,” I said peevishly.

“Help means help,” said Stanley. “It doesn’t mean fight *for* me. It means fight *with* me.”

I still didn’t understand the difference, but now wasn’t the time to figure it out.

We got to the front door with the crate, and I stopped. “We’re not taking this all the way outside, are we?”

“We gotta make room for more wounded,” Stanley told me.

“But they’re still dropping bombs out there,” I argued. I could hear the booms and pops, even in here.

“We’ll just be a second,” Stanley said.

You’re braver than you think. You’re braver than you think, I told myself, and I took a deep breath and followed Stanley outside.

There was a small stack of boxes and things people had moved out of the Dungeon already, and Stanley and I hurried to throw our crate on the pile. Down the hill, thick black clouds of smoke roiled from the wrecks of battleships, blocking our view of the harbor. Japanese planes still zoomed by overhead, strafing everything—including the bloody, oil-covered sailors dragging themselves up to the Dungeon.

“Let’s get back inside!” I cried, turning for the door.

Stanley put an arm to my chest and pushed me back behind the pile of crates. He put a finger to his lips, and I shut up and listened. There were voices from the other side of the crates. Arthur and Johnny had been replaced at the entrance of the Dungeon by an actual Marine guard, and we could hear Charlie’s mom talking to him.

“I see that you have a pistol,” Mrs. Moore said.

“Yes, ma’am,” the Marine said.

“When the Japanese invade this island, which I’m sure they will, I want you to save three bullets in your gun,” Mrs. Moore said to the Marine.

Stanley and I looked at each other. What was she talking about?

“Ma’am?” the Marine said, clearly as confused as we were.

“I don’t want those Japanese monsters to take us alive,” Charlie’s mom said, her voice low and serious. “When you have killed my two children, you will then shoot me.”

I reared back in horror. *Kill* her? And Charlie? And Charlie’s little sister? Just so they wouldn’t be taken prisoner by Japanese soldiers?

Beside me, Stanley looked shell-shocked. As horrified as I was, he had to be doubly so. Triple.

Because Mrs. Moore would think he was a monster too.

“Uh ... yes, ma’am,” the Marine said.

As soon as Charlie’s mom went back inside, I grabbed Stanley by the sleeve and dragged him toward the entrance. We acted like we hadn’t heard anything, but I saw the Marine giving Stanley a suspicious glance as we passed him.

“Stanley—” I said, trying to think of something I could say to make him feel better, but the crestfallen look on his face told me there was nothing I could do.

“Frank! I’ve been looking all over for you,” Ginny said, appearing right in front of me and giving me a hug. “Where’s Brooks? Is he all right?”



I blinked and pulled away from Ginny. She'd caught me off guard. *No no no*. I still didn't know what to say. I wasn't ready! I didn't know how to tell Ginny that Brooks was dead.

I looked at Stanley, and he quickly looked away.

"Um, I don't—" I started.

"You were with him on the *Utah*, weren't you?" Ginny cut in. "One of the sailors said the *Utah* was hit. What happened?"

"It's hard to say," I told her. "I mean, it all happened so quick."

Stanley looked at me and frowned.

What? I thought. If it was so easy to say, why didn't he tell her?

"But he was okay when you left him, right?" Ginny asked.

I so wanted to say yes. To lie to her, and pretend that Brooks had been alive the last time we'd seen him. Ginny would just find out later that he was dead. After the battle. From somebody else. The sooner she knew, the

longer she'd have to miss him, right? Lying to her now would actually be doing her a favor. I would be saving her extra anguish.

That was nonsense, and I knew it. Besides, I could never lie like that to Ginny. Not after so many moves where we were each other's only friend. We'd learned to always be honest with each other. Even if the truth hurt.

"Ginny, the *Utah* got hit with torpedoes and capsized," I told her. "Brooks helped us get off the ship, but then ... Ginny, Brooks is dead."

Ginny froze.

"What? No," she said. "He can't be dead. Mom would have told me before now. *You* would have told me before now," she said, her voice taking on a desperate edge as her eyes welled up.

"Mom doesn't know," I said. "And I was scared to tell you. I didn't know how. I'm sorry, Ginny." She didn't know *how* sorry.

"No, it was somebody else," Ginny decided, sniffing back tears. "It was chaos, just like here. Everybody in uniform. Covered in oil. It would be an easy mistake to make."

I looked at Stanley, silently pleading with him to back me up.

"We saw his face," Stanley said quietly. "It was him."

Ginny was suddenly frantic. She turned for the door. "Are you sure he was dead? Maybe he was just hurt. He might need our help!"

I held her back. "Ginny, no," I said. I didn't know what else to say that I hadn't already. Stanley and I knew what we saw. Brooks was dead.

Ginny could see the grief in my eyes, and we were all quiet as the truth of it finally sank in.

Ginny sat down right where she was and put her hands to her mouth and sobbed. It was almost like she had already known something bad had happened. Or guessed. It was hard to see the wounded sailors around us and imagine anyone making it out all right.

Stanley and I sat down with her. Japanese planes continued to drone outside. Across the harbor, something detonated with a deep, bone-shaking *POOM*, and the smaller kids ran to one of the bunker's old gun slits to see what was happening on Battleship Row. Navy wives cleaned black oil from sailors who moaned and worried and wept. Me, I sat mesmerized in the middle of it all, Ginny crying softly beside me, and wondered if Stanley

hadn't been right. That maybe we were *all* living in one of the Sandman's nightmares.

"Did he suffer?" my sister finally asked, surprising me.

"No. No, I don't think so," I said truthfully. It had happened so fast, I couldn't imagine it had taken long for him to die. But I didn't say that to Ginny.

She nodded through her tears.

My heart broke for her. Ginny had loved Brooks. I knew that. And now he was gone. Because of me.

"Ginny, I'm so sorry," I said, tears running down my face. "It's my fault Brooks is dead."

"*What?*" Ginny said to me, looking appalled.

"It's not," said Stanley.

"It is!" I said. "I froze up, and Brooks had to go back to get me. He would have been somewhere else when that bullet came. *Should* have been somewhere else."

"*Might* have been somewhere else," said Stanley. "If Brooks *hadn't* gone back for you, he might have been hit by shrapnel from the *Raleigh*. Or killed by tracer rounds. Or been shot when he jumped in the water," he went on, sounding like me all of a sudden. "If we hadn't come to visit the ship in the first place, he might have been trapped inside the *Utah* when it flipped."

"Stop. Stop," Ginny said, and Stanley looked sick when he realized he'd been listing all the ways Brooks could have died with Ginny sitting right there.

"We don't have time for this," Ginny told us, lifting her chin. "We have to get out there and help more sailors make it up here to the Dungeon."

"We have to *what?*" I said.

"Think about all those sailors out there, trying to stay alive," Ginny said. "Hurt. Burned. Lost. Choking on oil. Drowning. We can save them!"

I shook my head. Now that we were safely tucked away in the Dungeon, I planned to stay for a long, long time. "Ginny, we've been out there," I told her. "It's bad. Really bad. We go out there again, we're gonna get killed."

Ginny grabbed my arm. “But they *need* us, Frank,” she said. “The people who love those sailors need us. To make sure they come home.”

I suddenly understood. This wasn’t just about saving sailors. It was about Brooks. Ginny couldn’t be there for him when he needed her, and now she was determined to be there for somebody else. Anybody else.

“Just *one sailor*, Frank,” Ginny said, tears streaming down her face again. “If we could save just one sailor, that would be enough.”

“Ginny, I get it,” I said. “But we can’t—”

“Wait, listen!” Stanley said.

We all looked up at the concrete ceiling, like that would help us hear better. I shook my head. I didn’t hear anything. Then my eyes went wide.

I didn’t hear anything.

Not the dull thuds of Japanese bombs. Not the drone of Japanese planes. Not the *fwip-fwip-fwip* of Japanese tracer rounds.

“The attack is over!” Ginny cried.

“I don’t believe it,” I said. “Unless—the air raid is over because the ground invasion has started?”

“No, no—listen. There’s barely any shooting!” Ginny said. All we could hear now was the occasional pop and poom of an antiaircraft shell.

“*Barely* any shooting is still *some* shooting,” I protested.

Ginny dragged her arm across her eyes and stood. “Come on,” she told us. “Let’s go help the sailors in the water.”

Stanley got to his feet. “I’m in,” he said. “I’m ready to get out of here.”

He shot a glance at Mrs. Moore across the room. She’d been staring heat vision eyes at Stanley, and she quickly looked away.

Stanley and Ginny headed for the door.

Argh! Why wouldn’t anybody listen to me? Yes, I was usually the boy who cried wolf. But this time there really *was* a wolf out there. Or might be, at least.

I closed my eyes and tried to breathe, but all I could see were Brooks’s dead eyes, staring back at me.

With a heavy sigh I got up and followed Ginny and Stanley outside.



Down the hill from the Dungeon, the edge of the water looked like the end of the world.

Burned bodies were piled up on the rocky shore. Sailors lay dead in the grass. Bloody men moaned and writhed and called out for a medic, for a buddy, for their mother. It was so horrible it was almost unbelievable.

My eyes watered and I coughed. I covered my nose and mouth with my arm to try to keep out the smoke, but it didn't help. There was fire *everywhere*. Houses burned, the grass burned, boats burned. Even the water was on fire, the top of it coated with a thick layer of black oil. The popping and crackling of the flames kept up a steady background buzz.

But the attack at least *did* seem to be over. There were no more torpedoes. No more Zeros in the sky. No more towering geysers of water.

"Over here!" Ginny called.

I ran to where she was helping an oily figure crawl out of the water. He had burns and blisters all over the right side of his body, but otherwise he

could walk and talk.

“What ship are you from?” Stanley asked as we helped him ashore.

“*West Virginia*,” the sailor said, gasping.

I reeled at that. The *West Virginia* was one of the biggest, newest battleships in the fleet.

“Is she sunk?” I asked.

“Don’t know,” he said. “Jap planes came right at us over the water and dropped torpedoes. They waited so long to pull up that they were lower than the crow’s nest when they flew past.”

From his accent, I guessed the man was Filipino, but it was impossible to tell with all the oil covering him. Ginny tried to clean the ooze off his face with a rag.

“We got hit five, six times,” the sailor went on. “I was trapped by fire. Thought I was going to burn alive. Then the *Arizona* went up, and it blew me and everybody else right off the deck and into the water. Put out the fire on the *West Virginia* too.”

“There are people who can help you just up the hill,” Ginny told him. “In the bunker underneath Admiral Bellinger’s house. Do you know it?”

The sailor nodded and thanked us before lurching unsteadily up the hill.

I looked around to see a dozen more people, some sailors, some civilians, also helping to pull men from the water. The survivors who were covered in oil, or were only slightly wounded, were sent up the hill to the Navy mess in the Dungeon. The sailors who were badly injured were loaded into launches bound for the medical ship *Solace* or to the hospital on the mainland.

The dead were dragged aside, to be buried later.

Ginny and Stanley and I worked alongside the others, grim-faced and silent. Ginny was trying to bury her grief over Brooks, I guessed. Stanley was probably trying to bury his misery over how things had changed for him. Me, I stayed numb on purpose. Otherwise, if I let myself really think about what I was doing, I’d run screaming for the hills.

A sailor I helped out of the water grabbed hold of my arm and wouldn’t let go.

“Have they got the Panama Canal yet?” he asked.

“I—I don’t know. I haven’t heard anything about that,” I said.

“I heard Washington’s been bombed,” the sailor told me. “They said the Japs invaded San Francisco and are halfway to Sacramento.”

“Who said that?” I asked.

The sailor didn’t answer. He couldn’t. I sent him on his way up to the Dungeon and turned back to the water, where another sailor floated upside down.

A sailor wearing a white baseball uniform.

I shook my head and blinked.

“*Brooks?*” I said.



Ginny heard me, and her head whipped around. “*Brooks? Where?*”

“No, Ginny—” I said, immediately realizing my mistake. It *couldn't* be Brooks. Brooks was dead, and there was no way his body could have floated all the way around Ford Island and ended up here. “Wait!” I cried. But it was too late. Ginny was already crashing through the smoke and the oily water toward the sailor.

Stanley and I hurried after her. Ginny got to the man first and flipped him over.

It wasn't Brooks. I knew it couldn't be. It was another young white sailor in a white baseball uniform, this one with the words SUBMARINE SQUADRON FOUR sewn onto the chest. The other team the Utahs were going to play. He had horrible cuts all over his face and arms.

“Help me get him to shore!” Ginny cried.

Together we dragged the man out of the harbor and laid him on his back in the mud. I thought for sure the sailor was dead, but Ginny cleaned

his nose and mouth with the hem of her shirt, and a moment later he was gasping for breath.

We turned the man on his side, and he vomited up a stomachful of seawater and oil. Stanley and I cringed. But Ginny was locked in like a submarine captain with a periscope.

“He’s not burned, but he’s got shrapnel wounds from head to foot,” Ginny said, giving him a cursory examination. “He’s bleeding. A *lot*. This isn’t something they can clean and bandage up in the Dungeon. He needs to get to a hospital.”

A boat full of wounded sailors was pulling away from Ford Island, and I ran out into the water after it, waving my arms. “Wait! Stop! We’ve got one more!” I cried, but they waved me off. They were already full.

I looked around for another boat but couldn’t see one in the smoke. Another could come along any minute—or another twenty minutes. There was no telling.

“If this man doesn’t get to a hospital soon, he’s going to *die*,” Ginny said. She looked up at me with tears in her eyes. “We have to help him, Frank.”

“Ginny,” I said as gently as I could. “He’s not Brooks.”

“I know,” she said. “But he could have been.”

I nodded. “I get it,” I told her. “I just don’t know what to do.”

“Our boat!” Stanley cried. “We could take him to the *Solace* ourselves!”

I blinked in surprise. Of course—the little boat Stanley and I took back and forth to the mainland was tied up nearby.

“Not the *Solace*,” Ginny said. “That’s where everybody’s going. They’ve got to be overwhelmed. If they’re not sunk. You have to take him to the base hospital on the mainland.” She nodded decisively.

Stanley stood up and nodded too. “Ginny, can you tell our moms where we went? They’ll be upset, but they’ll understand.”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa,” I said. “Ships are still sinking and exploding out there! The water between here and the hospital is *on fire*.”

“*Just one*,” Ginny told me. “Frank, we have to save just one.”

“We’ve saved *more* than one,” I told her.

“This one,” Ginny told me.

Stanley waited. I closed my eyes and bowed my head. There were so many ways to get hurt out there on Pearl Harbor that there was no use listing them.

But then there was Ginny. And Stanley. And Brooks. And this sailor, who would die if we didn't get him to a hospital.

“Okay,” I told Stanley at last. “Go get the boat.”



I gripped the sides of the boat and took a deep breath as we pulled away from Ford Island. Stanley was at the tiller, and he steered us southwest. He had to go slow to avoid the patches of burning oil and the dead bodies that floated on the harbor.

The wounded sailor in the bottom of our boat stirred and groaned. I fished his dog tags out from under his baseball jersey and read his name: KOWALCZYK, JOSEPH H. His dog tags said he had type A blood, and that he'd had his tetanus shot earlier that year. Which was good, because with all the metal that was sticking out of him, he was going to need it. That and a lot of type A blood.

"Hey, this guy's a *real* sub-mariner," Stanley said, pointing to the SUBMARINE SQUADRON FOUR on his chest. "You know, like Namor."

I nodded, though I could barely think about comics right now. Through the roiling smoke clouds to our left, I could see the submarine base, where Kowalczyk, Joseph H. must have come from. Up above it, on the mainland,

were the base's oil storage tanks. Both the sub base and the oil tanks were miraculously intact.

To our right was Battleship Row. Or what was left of it.

Every ship had taken at least one bomb or torpedo, and most of them looked like they'd been hit multiple times. The *Arizona* burned like a giant bonfire, the flames so hot that even at this distance Stanley and I had to duck low in our boat to not get burned. The *West Virginia* had sunk straight down, like the *Raleigh*, and had pinned the battleship that was berthed alongside it against its moorings. The repair ship *Vestal* was listing, and threatening to sink, and little tugs and garbage scows were everywhere, spraying water hoses in futile attempts to put out the bigger ships' fires.

But it was the *Oklahoma* that made me and Stanley truly gasp. The huge battleship had gone belly-up, just like the *Utah*. But the *Oklahoma* was no retired ship used for target practice. The *Oklahoma* was part of the backbone of the US Pacific Fleet.

"Everybody's going to hate me now," Stanley said quietly as we watched sailors trying to cut their crewmates out of the *Oklahoma* with acetylene torches. "Me and my mom. Because we look like the people who did this."

"It's not your fault. Or your mom's. Or any other Japanese American on these islands," I told him.

Stanley shook his head. "It doesn't matter," he said.

I knew there was nothing I could say that would make Stanley feel any better, because he was right. All that would matter was that he looked Japanese.

Stanley kept steering us slowly and carefully around the widening oil fires, through a maze of broken whaleboats, deck timbers, empty life vests, and dark shapes that might have been bodies. It was best not to look too closely at any of it, just in case.

A bunch of little white fabric things floated on the surface of the water like paper boats, and I snatched one from the water to see what it was.

It was a hat. A round, white sailor cap. There were hundreds of them, all with their owners' names stenciled on them in stark black ink.

DAVENPORT. GOGGIN. WILCOX. JONES. TALBERT. TEMPLE. CASTRO. FINNEGAN. PRIBBLE. RICE. There were more and more hats, and more and more names.

After a while I had to stop reading. It was too much.

The drone of an approaching plane made Stanley and me exchange a frightened look. We searched the sky but couldn't see for all the smoke. Was it one of our planes, or one of theirs? It had to be one of ours. The attack on Pearl Harbor was over.

Wasn't it?

A Japanese plane burst out of the smoke, flying low and slow across the water, and my stomach lurched. *No!* Not again!

Stanley and I ducked, but the pilot wasn't shooting bullets. He was shooting *pictures*. He had a boxy camera in his hands, and I saw him point it this way and that.

"Taking pictures of his visit to Hawaii like a tourist," Stanley said sourly.

Poom!

I jumped as an American ship on the mainland side of the harbor opened fire on the plane, and then suddenly every ship on both sides of the harbor was shooting at it. Stanley and I ducked again as bullets and artillery shells flew right overhead.

"If those papayas aren't careful, they're going to shoot each other!" Stanley cried.

"Or us!" I yelled.

Certainly none of them hit the Zero. The plane slid slowly by, completely unbothered by all the gunfire.

Stanley picked up the canteen of water I kept in the boat for emergencies and chucked it at the passing plane. The Zero had looked close enough for him to hit it, but the plane was long gone before the canteen splashed harmlessly into the harbor.

I turned my palms up and gave Stanley a look that said, *What are you doing?*

"Sorry," Stanley said, chagrined. "I was just kind of mad."

I had to nod. I felt the same way. Mad, and helpless.

But we were doing *something*, weren't we? We were taking Kowalczyk, Joseph H. to the base hospital. I checked to make sure he was still breathing, and he was. Barely. We needed to be faster.

Over the chug of the boat's motor, I heard a high-pitched whine. Stanley and I looked up at the same time. High in the sky, something that looked like a swarm of black mosquitoes was buzzing down toward us. As they got closer, the mosquitoes became little black buzzards. Then little khaki planes.

"*No no no no no*," I said. I sank as low into the bottom of the boat as I could go, the weight of despair pinning me down.

"Holy cats!" Stanley cried, and he dropped down beside me.

It was more Japanese planes with bright red meatballs on the underside of their wings. Dozens of them. *Hundreds*.

I stared up, frozen with horror, as little egg-shaped things detached from the planes and whistled down toward the mainland and Ford Island. *More bombs*. I cowered as explosions ripped through 1010 Dock and Battleship Row, and the Japanese planes swooped level and started shooting again.

The attack on Pearl Harbor *wasn't* over. It was only the first wave that had ended.

The second wave had just begun.



DEAD IN THE WATER

BOOM! THOOM!

Bombs fell. Torpedoes slammed into hulls. Bullets chewed up the water. High above, a flock of Japanese planes circled like birds of prey.

And Stanley and I were in a little open boat, smack-dab in the middle of Pearl Harbor.

“We’re gonna die!” I cried. I curled up into a ball next to Kowalczyk, Joseph H. “We’re gonna die. We’re gonna die,” I muttered, again and again, like the guy saying *three hots and a cot* over and over on the *Utah*. I couldn’t think. Couldn’t move.

Stanley and I made ourselves as small as we could and put our arms over our heads, as though that would protect us from bombs and bullets.

Something big hit the water close by—*FWOOSH*—making Stanley and me flinch, and then—*POH-POOM!*—a bomb exploded in a towering pillar of seawater and burning oil. Our little motorboat turned sideways and almost flipped, but somehow it stayed level enough to still be floating when

—*KOOSH!*—a swimming pool’s worth of water came slamming down on top of us.

Completely drenched, I pulled myself up to sit in our floating bathtub. I coughed. Spat. Coughed some more. I felt like a cat that had been caught out in the rain.

Stanley had been thrown to the front of the boat, and was squirming to right himself. Kowalczyk, Joseph H. lay over the side, half in, half overboard, and still unconscious. I grabbed his jersey and pulled him back in, propping him up against the wall to keep his head out of the bloody water sloshing around at our feet.

“The engine’s swamped!” Stanley yelled, examining the motor. “We’re dead in the water!”

Dead was right. We had a set of oars in the boat, for emergencies. But it would take forever to row anywhere, and we didn’t have forever. We didn’t have five minutes.

“We have to turn around!” I yelled. “We have to get out of here!”

“No! We have to save this sailor!” Stanley said. He yanked on the cord to try to restart the engine. It didn’t start.

“Stanley, *forget* the sailor!” I cried.

“He’ll die if we don’t get him to the hospital!” Stanley yelled, giving the cord another pull.

KABOOM! Something exploded to our left, and Stanley ducked down again.

“There’s a hundred Japanese planes dropping bombs on us,” I said, shaking. “We’re *all* gonna die if we stay out here a minute longer!”

“Then we might as well die trying to do the right thing!” Stanley told me.

There was a time when I would have been hurt by his words. Felt ashamed. Maybe Stanley was taking a shot at me, and maybe he wasn’t. I didn’t care. Right now, I was just afraid. Frantic, stinking, full-on afraid.

“Stanley, we are *thirteen years old*,” I told him. “We shouldn’t be anywhere near this battle. I want to go home!”

“I do too,” he said. He tried to start the engine again. “But you don’t have a home anymore. And neither do I.”

He was right. And there was a lot more in what he was saying. Everything that Hawaii had been, for both of us, was gone.

But that didn't mean I wanted to die.

"The Dungeon, then! We can hide there until the battle is over," I told him. "Maybe there are medics there now who can help this guy."

Stanley gave me a look. We both knew that Kowalczyk, Joseph H. needed more than a field medic. Going back to the Dungeon was a death sentence for our passenger.

"We're more than halfway to the hospital," Stanley said. "If we turn back now, we'll be on the water even *longer* than if we keep going forward. You're Mister Risk Assessment. You tell *me* which way makes more sense."

"I don't know," I told Stanley, covering my head with my arms. "I don't know, I don't know, I don't know ..."

Stanley yanked on the engine's starter rope, and—*VROOM!*—the outboard motor roared to life.

"Then we're going to Hospital Point," Stanley decided for us. He revved the engine, and we were moving again.

Thick, oil-black smoke was everywhere, making it hard for Stanley to see where he was going. Me, I couldn't see where we were going because I had my eyes closed.

"Frank, get to the front of the boat and tell me if I'm about to hit anything!" Stanley shouted.

I didn't want to move, but I didn't want to die either. Heart in my throat, my arms and legs shaking, I crawled past the barely breathing Kowalczyk, Joseph H. to the front of the motorboat, where I could keep my eyes on the water.

I glanced back at Stanley, but he looked right past me. I knew he was focused on steering, but he had to be mad too. He'd been understanding before about my cowardice, but his patience had to have run out. And I couldn't blame him.

THOOM. A new explosion rocked the Navy Yard to our left, and I flinched as yellow-gray smoke clouds mushroomed from the *Cassin*, the *Shaw*, and the *Downes*, all in dry dock for repairs.

What did me being brave matter when it was the end of the world?

I turned to tell Stanley about a piece of debris in the water ahead, and I gasped.

A giant steel-gray battleship was right behind us, and about to run us over!



“Stanley! Look out!” I yelled.

Stanley yelped and swung the tiller so hard we both went tumbling. But our little boat swerved out of the way just in time.

As the big battleship slid past us, I looked up at the name painted on its prow.

“It’s the *Nevada*!” I cried. The same battleship we’d almost run into when Stanley had handed me the tiller on our way back to Ford Island. I reeled. Had that really just been yesterday afternoon?

I stared at the USS *Nevada* now. Somehow the ship had gotten underway during the battle, even with a house-sized hole in her port bow. How in the world had she not sunk? Her guns were still roaring too, hurling artillery into the sky in every direction.

Ha! I thought. *Maybe the US Pacific Fleet isn’t such a pushover after all.*

I wasn't the only one feeling inspired. Sailors all across the harbor cheered as the *Nevada* chugged by, and Stanley stood up in our launch and saluted.

"Pull in close to her," I told Stanley. "She'll give us cover from the airplanes."

It was a good idea—until it wasn't. The Japanese planes noticed the *Nevada* too, and suddenly every bomb and bullet and torpedo was headed the battleship's way. And ours. Stanley put some distance between us again, and we watched as the *Nevada* took the brunt of the Japanese second wave.

Over on the docks, a trio of sailors wearing nothing but white underwear and flat metal helmets fired old bolt-action rifles at the Japanese planes, but they weren't hitting anything. As we watched, the sailors threw down their rifles and tossed away their helmets, then dove into the oily water of the harbor.

"Holy cats!" Stanley cried. "What are those papayas doing?"

"I don't know," I said, "but they're swimming right for us!"



Stanley steered the launch to pick the sailors up from the water, but when we got close they waved us away.

“We’re headed for the *Nevada*,” one of them said, swimming hard. “At least there we can do something useful!”

A few moments later, we watched as a sailor on the *Nevada* threw them a line. The three sailors climbed on board and immediately ran to help with the portable hand pumps on deck.

I shook my head in disbelief. The three sailors were bonkers, or else they were heroes. Maybe they were both.

High above us, a Japanese plane released a whistling bomb that looked like it was headed straight for me and Stanley. We cried out and fell to the bottom of the boat, but the bomb kept carrying, missing us *and* the *Nevada*, and flying all the way across the harbor, where it crashed down through the deck of the already-burning *Shaw*.

There was a breath of a moment where nothing happened. And then suddenly—*KATHOOM*—the *Shaw* erupted in the most spectacular fireworks show I'd ever seen.

Stanley and I stayed low as flaming chunks of dock and twisted pieces of shrapnel flew through the air. *POOM! POOM-POOM-POOM! POOM! KABOOM!*

The *Shaw* kept exploding, just like the *Arizona* had. The brilliant yellow eruption lit up the dark clouds and silhouetted the palm trees that still stood on the shore. It looked like something out of a war movie. It was unreal.

The shock wave blew dozens more sailors off the docks. They fell all around us, most of them already dead. Some of them were alive enough to scream though, and I screamed with them as the human fireballs hit the water.

All those sailors—dead, I thought. All those sons and dads and friends and boyfriends who'll never come home again. Like Brooks.

Like Stanley and me if we didn't get off the water. Fast.

Stanley crawled over to turn the tiller, and the boat swerved. Then, to my surprise, he cut the engine.

"What are you doing?" I cried.

"Look!" yelled Stanley, pointing.

I peeked my head up just far enough to see. The water between us and the *Shaw* was covered with burning oil, the fire so bright and so hot I had to raise an arm in front of my face.

Finally I saw what Stanley was pointing at. One of the sailors thrown from the *Shaw* was still alive. Incredible! But he was trapped, treading water inside a huge ring of burning oil.

A ring that was getting smaller and smaller by the second.



The trapped sailor was white, fair-haired, and frightened out of his wits. He waved to us frantically and called out for help, his words swallowed by the roar of the fire.

“I can’t get any closer to him,” Stanley told me. “That oil’s burning so hot it’ll cook our boat.”

“You have to swim under the fire!” I yelled to the stranded sailor.

“I can’t!” the sailor yelled back. “I think my arm is broken!”

I stood in the boat and threw him our life preserver. It sailed through the flames and landed in the open water where the sailor could reach it.

“Yes! Nice!” said Stanley, and we slapped hands. Our celebration was short-lived, though. The life preserver would save the sailor from drowning, but it wasn’t going to do anything about the fire that was slowly creeping up on him. He was going to burn to death before he drowned. But what else could we do?

“We have to leave him,” said Stanley.

“What? No!” I said.

“Frank, if we go over there, our motorboat will catch on fire.”

“I know,” I said. “But he’s *right there*. We can see him.”

The sailor couldn’t understand what we were saying to each other. He looked back and forth between us, his eyes full of desperate hope that we would find a way to save him.

“There’s nothing we can do,” said Stanley. “We have to accept that and save the one guy we know we can save,” he said, pointing to the still-unconscious Kowalczyk, Joseph H. “And save ourselves.”

I sagged. The thing was, I *could* think of a way to save the trapped sailor. A chance, at least. But it meant I might get hurt. Or even die.

“I’m sorry!” Stanley yelled to the sailor.

“No! Please!” the sailor yelled back, but Stanley shook his head and turned to start the engine. Like he’d said, there was nothing he could do to help.

But there was something *I* could do that Stanley couldn’t.

I took a deep breath.

“Wait,” I told Stanley. “I can swim under the fire and pull him out.”



THE REAL MCCOY

“Swim under the fire and pull him out?” Stanley cried. “Are you nuts? Frank, the water *is on fire!*”

“I know!” I yelled. I could feel the waves of heat, taste the burning oil in the air. “But we have to help!”

“*Just one,*” Stanley said, pointing at Kowalczyk, Joseph H. “That’s what your sister said. If we could save just one, that would be enough. He’s the one, Frank!”

“But is one *really* enough, Stanley? A true hero steps in when they see somebody getting hurt, and that guy’s about to get hurt. Bad! And you said yourself that holding my breath underwater is my superpower.”

“Frank, I was *kidding,*” Stanley told me. “You’re good at holding your breath, but you’re not Namor. Nobody is!”

I looked again at the distance between the boat and the sailor. It was maybe, *possibly,* just close enough for me to swim the entire way underwater while I held my breath.

“Frank, there are a hundred ways you could die trying to save that guy,” Stanley told me. “A thousand!”

“Oh, I know,” I told Stanley. I’d gone through them all in my head already. “I could run out of air and have to come up in the fire. Or the fire could close in on the sailor while I’m underwater. There could be Japanese subs down there. Or sharks. Or giant eels. Nobody ever thinks about the giant eels.”

“If you know all that, then why do it?” asked Stanley, looking at me like he didn’t recognize me.

I blinked. He was right. Who was this Frank McCoy who wanted to jump into burning water to try and rescue some man he’d never met before?

I remembered Web Edwards’s words from the radio in Stanley’s house: *Folks, this is the real McCoy.*

Who was the real McCoy? Was I the Frank McCoy who froze up when the going got tough? Or was I the Frank McCoy who could be brave in the face of danger? Who stood up for his friends in a fight? Who helped people when they were in trouble?

I was still afraid. Of pretty much everything. And this right here—*swimming under fire* to maybe rescue a trapped sailor—this was the scariest, most dangerous thing I’d even *thought* about doing in my *entire life*.

But of all the things in the world I was afraid of, I suddenly realized that my greatest fear was being too scared to do the right thing.

That’s who I wanted to be. That’s who I was.

“Because this is the real McCoy,” I told Stanley.

I stood up and pulled off my shirt and pants, stripping down to my underwear like Namor. Then I dove headfirst into Pearl Harbor.



I timed my dive so my momentum would take me straight under the burning oil, giving me a little burst of speed like a racer off the starting blocks.

I'd braced myself for the water to be cold, but it was hot under the flames. Not as hot as the oil would be if I came up through it, of course. But hot enough to remind me not to waste a second getting to the sailor.

But wait—where was he? The water of Pearl Harbor was usually clear, but now it was dark and murky, the only light coming from the wobbly, eerie ceiling of fire right above me.

A seizing panic rose up from my stomach to my lungs and then my throat, and I struggled to hold my breath. What if I got turned around in the darkness and couldn't find the edge of the fire? What if I ended up like those burned, oil-covered sailors we'd been seeing all day?

I closed my eyes to clear my thoughts. *The only thing we have to fear is fear itself*, I told myself. I couldn't freeze up. Not here. Not now. I had to

move. I had been pointed in the right direction when I'd dived in. I had to trust in that.

I swam forward as hard and fast as I could. After a few moments, a body loomed up at me out of the darkness. The sailor? Already? No, this man was dead. Unless the sailor I was after had already drowned? Was I too late after all?

I swam closer. No—this sailor was Black. His dead eyes stared not at me, but down into the depths, as though he could see something at the bottom of the harbor. Something no living person could see, or would ever want to.

I swam on.

The attack was still going on up above, but it was muffled like before, when I'd swum from the *Utah* to Ford Island. The booms of bombs sounded like somebody banging a big bass drum in the distance, and I thought I could hear someone tapping on the hull of a ship. Or maybe that was my imagination.

I jerked back in surprise as a long, thin torpedo with fins ticked by, bound for some bigger target. Where was it going? What if it hit the motorboat? And ... was that a shark's tail I'd just seen flicking away at the edge of my vision?

I gulped down my fear and swam faster.

There was still a little air left in my lungs when at last I saw the churning legs of the trapped sailor. I kicked hard and came up right beside him in his little circle of clear water, gasping for breath.

The sailor jumped in surprise, almost swimming into the burning oil. I grabbed hold of his life preserver to pull him back. The flames were so close and so hot I felt like I was getting a sunburn. Sweat beads immediately popped out on my forehead and ran down my face.

"Are you—are you one of those kids from the boat?" the sailor asked. "How did you swim that far without coming up for air?"

"It's kinda my superpower," I said. "Like Namor."

In the motorboat, Stanley was jumping up and down and pumping his fists in the air, no doubt thinking the same thing.

"I don't suppose you can *fly* like Namor," the sailor said.

I blinked, surprised he knew the comic book.

“No,” I told him, my throat raspy from the thick smoke. “We’re gonna have to swim for it.”



“I can’t swim that far underwater!” the sailor said, his voice pitched high with panic.

Up close, I could see now that he was really young—just a few years older than me and Stanley, with not a hint of stubble. Probably right out of high school, like Ginny. He was shivering, and his frightened eyes never stayed in one place. There were scorch marks on his face from when the *Shaw* had blown up, but he didn’t look too badly injured.

Except for the broken right arm he held sideways against his stomach. That was going to be a problem.

“What’s your name?” I asked the sailor.

“What?” he said, like that was the strangest question he’d ever heard.

“Your name,” I said. “What’s your name?”

“Patrick.”

“Okay, Patrick. I’m Frank. I swam here underneath the water, which means we can both swim back.”

He shook his head frantically. "I can't," he said.

"You have to try," I told him.

"We'll die," he told me. "We'll come up in the fire and we'll burn to death!"

"Frank!" Stanley yelled from the boat, urging me to hurry.

I waved an arm at him to tell him I understood but kept my eyes on Patrick.

"I know you're scared," I told Patrick. "I am too. I'm *really* scared. And there are *a lot* of ways we don't make it out of this. Trust me, I've imagined every single one of them. But if you freeze up now, the one way you die for sure is being here when the fire closes in on you. Right?"

Patrick's eyes flitted all around us, confirming, again, that we were surrounded by fire. And that it was getting closer. He nodded.

I peeled his good hand away from the life preserver. "Okay. So we're letting go now," I said.

"*No no no no*," he said.

I nodded, looking him straight in the eyes.

"Yes, Patrick. We can do this," I said.

I turned and looked at the distance we had to swim back to the boat, and all the calm I'd been showing for Patrick's sake burned away like smoke. What had I been thinking? The distance was too far. The fire was too hot. Patrick was too heavy. We were never going to survive this!

"Take a deep breath," I whispered to myself.

Patrick thought I was talking to him, and he started trying to take deep breaths. The fact that he was listening to me, that he trusted me, scared me a little. I was just a kid, and he was a sailor in the US Navy! But it also gave me confidence. Made me feel like we were in this together. I nodded and breathed deeply with him. The heat was almost unbearable now, and the oily smoke burned my throat.

"All right," I told Patrick. "We go on three. Just swim as hard and fast as you can until you can't swim anymore."

"And then what?" he said, panic rising in his voice again.

"Then I'll be there to help you," I said. "Ready? One ... two ... *three* —"

We both took the biggest gulps of air we could and slipped under the water.



Patrick was not a great swimmer, and his broken arm made him worse. We'd only gone a few yards when he gave up trying to drag himself along and hooked his good arm around my shoulders, like when I was a little kid and rode my dad's back in the pool.

I kicked my legs with all my strength. Bullets streaked slantwise through the water ahead of us, and I suddenly thought about Stanley, a sitting duck up top while we swam here below. I'd forgotten how dangerous it still was *above* the water too.

Please be okay, Stanley, I thought.

I swam through the darkness for what seemed like forever, and there was still no end to the flames above us. The fire must have been spreading. The swim from my boat to Patrick hadn't taken nearly so long, I was sure of it.

I was certainly going slower with Patrick hanging on to me. And now he wasn't even kicking anymore! My frustration turned to panic as his arm

around my shoulders went slack. *No no no no!* I turned in horror to see Patrick burping air bubbles, his eyes half-closed. Patrick wasn't kicking anymore because he was drowning!

But I couldn't take him up for air. Not yet. We were still underneath the burning oil.

There was nothing I could do but swim for both of us.

I grabbed Patrick's hand and towed him through the water, going even slower than before. My arms ached, and my lungs began to burn. I was reaching my limit, and I *still* couldn't see the end of the flames.

I had been wrong when I imagined there were a hundred ways to die on Pearl Harbor. There were a hundred and *one* ways to die, and I was sure I had just found the last one.

And then one of the other hundred managed to find *me*, as up from the depths in front of us swam a giant moray eel.



EVERYBODY FORGETS THE EELS

A giant eel.

I felt a mixture of horror and vindication.

I had *told* everybody that Pearl Harbor was full of super dangerous giant eels, and now I had proof!

Not that I *wanted* proof now. Or ever.

Dark and spotted, the snakelike moray twisted its head first this way, then that way, taking me in with its cartoonish black-and-white eyes. It was an absolute monster, at least twice as long as me. It could never swallow me whole, but I knew that moray eels had a secret weapon—a second set of jaws set deeper inside their mouths. First the eel would clamp on to me with its razor-sharp outside teeth, kind of like the dog that bit me in Pensacola. Then it would take a bite out of me *again* with its interior teeth.

And if I opened my mouth to scream—*when* I opened my mouth to scream—I would swallow water and drown, and the eel could dine on me at its leisure.

The big fin on top of the eel wiggled expectantly. The beast bared its sharp, jagged teeth in what I swore was a wicked smile, and my heart stopped in my chest.

This was how I was going to die in Pearl Harbor.

And then, like a flash, a whitetip reef shark came streaking out of the murky water. Its powerful jaws snapped tight on the giant eel's neck, and it dragged the moray off into the darkness, the two creatures biting and squirming and thrashing.

I hiccuped an air bubble, and I am not ashamed to say that I left the waters of Pearl Harbor a little yellower than I found them that day.

I didn't wait around to see who won the fight. I kicked and pulled Patrick forward frantically, my lungs about to burst. And still there was fire above us.

My stomach folded in on itself. My throat throbbed. My brain went fuzzy. I wasn't going to make it. I had to come up for air or I was going to drown. But if I came up for air, I was going to burn ...

Suddenly an oar crashed down into the water from above, making me flinch. The oar came down again, and again, splashing and swishing, until it made a small, clear circle in the scorching oil. It was an opening in the flames!

I darted up and took a desperate gulp of air—and almost got whacked in the head.

“Sorry!” Stanley cried. He was holding one of our oars, stretching out so far he was about to fall out of the motorboat. The oar looked more like a torch now, covered with burning oil.

I sucked in another deep lungful of air and dove back underwater before the flames could rejoin on the surface. I came up gasping on the other side of the boat, away from the fire, and Stanley reached out to drag Patrick's limp body on board. The sailor was as white as a beluga whale, and he wasn't breathing.

I hung on to the side of the boat, too exhausted to climb in, and watched as Stanley pumped Patrick's chest.

“Come on, come on,” Stanley said.

Patrick suddenly jerked to life, coughing up dirty harbor water and retching in the bottom of the boat.

It was the most beautiful sound I'd heard all day.

"Yes!" cried Stanley. He turned to me and clasped my hand in congratulations. "I never doubted you for a second. Prince Namor lives!"

I laughed wearily and rested my head against the side of the boat. I hoped Patrick was the last person we had to save today, because I didn't have much energy left for anybody else.

"Hey, did you see a shark?" Stanley asked me. "I thought I saw a shark fin."

"I saw a shark," I said, still panting.

"You know, the Hawaiians say the shark gods in Pearl are protectors, not man-eaters. Maybe a shark god was looking after you," Stanley told me.

"Maybe she was," I said. "But could you please pull me into the boat just in case?"



I put my wet clothes back on as Stanley steered us through the smoke and flames. I was exhausted, but I felt exhilarated too. Alive in a way that I'd rarely felt before. Like I'd found the real McCoy.

It was nice to finally meet him.

"I thought I was a goner for sure," Patrick said from where he lay beside me. "All I could think was how I was never going to see my parents and my brothers and sisters again. And then you two showed up out of nowhere."

"Right place, right time," Stanley said, and I smiled.

I could afford to smile and relax now, because the second Japanese attack was over. It had ended a few minutes after Stanley pulled me back in the boat. American ships still occasionally fired their antiaircraft guns, but they were shooting at ghosts. The fighters and bombers were gone.

Would there be a third wave? I didn't know. But if there was, we wouldn't be on the water for it. Stanley ran the boat up on the beach at

Hospital Point, and we were on the mainland at last. I hauled myself up and helped Stanley drag the boat out of the surf.

“Bedraggled, weary, and half-drowned, our heroes gratefully set foot on the solid earth of terra firma,” Stanley said.

“I think ‘terra firma’ *means* ‘solid earth,’ ” I told Stanley. It didn’t matter. He was right—I was so happy to have survived our trip that I could have gotten down on my hands and knees and kissed the ground. But we still had the two wounded sailors to take care of.

Stanley and I helped Patrick out of our boat. He was able to walk, but we were going to need a hand getting Kowalczyk, Joseph H. up the hill to the hospital.

Another gig packed full of injured sailors pulled up right beside us, and I ran to its pilot. “Hey, can you help us? We have an unconscious sailor,” I said.

“Sorry, kid,” said the pilot. “I got my own guys to worry about.”

A group of Marines dragging burned and bleeding sailors directly out of the water gave me the same story. Farther down the beach, a line of sailors waited to stretcher the wounded off the USS *Nevada*, which had run aground here on Hospital Point.

“Hey! Help! Here!” Stanley cried, flagging down four civilian men who were passing by. Two were Japanese American, one was Chinese American, and the other was Native Hawaiian. Maybe they were contractors who worked for the base or locals who’d come to help. Whoever they were, for some strange reason they were carrying a door they’d taken off its hinges.

The four men set the door down by our boat, moved our unconscious passenger onto it, and then lifted the door by its four corners. They were using it as a makeshift stretcher!

“His name is Kowalczyk, Joseph H.,” I told them.

“He’s a sub-mariner!” Stanley explained.

“It’s really important that he lives,” I said, feeling kind of stupid as I said it. It was really important that *everybody* lived. But there was no way to explain to these guys how much we’d gone through to get him here. How much he meant to us, and to Ginny.

“Well, he’s still alive,” the Chinese American man said, putting a finger to Kowalczyk’s neck to feel his pulse. “We’ll get him up to the hospital ASAP.”

“Every doctor and nurse on the island is there, yeah? Even the dentists,” the Native Hawaiian man said.

We thanked the four men as they carried Kowalczyk, Joseph H. up the hill. I hoped he’d be okay, but he was out of our hands now.

We were just starting for the hospital ourselves when a couple of sailors who’d been hauling wounded men out of the water came running up to us.

“Hey, can we use your boat?” one of the sailors asked.

Stanley and I looked at each other. Technically it was Stanley’s boat, so I waited for him to say yes or no.

“Yeah, sure,” said Stanley.

The sailors wasted no time getting the motorboat turned around, and two more sailors jumped in with them before they sped off into the smoke. I suddenly wondered if we’d ever see that boat again, and just as quickly wondered if it mattered. In a place where every day had always seemed as identically perfect as the day before, I couldn’t begin to imagine what tomorrow would be like.

“Come on,” I told Patrick. “Let’s get you to the hospital.”

The hill from the shoreline up to the hospital looked like a bomb had exploded in the middle of a picnic. Sailors were laid out everywhere on the grass. Dozens of them. Hundreds. Some of them moaned and writhed. Others lay still underneath bloody sheets that covered their heads. One man, who was somehow still awake and talking, was burned black from head to foot. I looked away, but the stench of charred flesh was so powerful it felt like an attack.

I heard a wounded sailor cursing the Japanese, and I glanced at Stanley. I worried about how he was taking all this. Worried about how other people would see him now. How he would see himself.

Stanley kept his eyes on the ground, guiding Patrick steadily through the minefield of bodies.

The hillside had become a sort of overflow emergency room, full of doctors, nurses, and orderlies. The nurses—some of them white, some Filipino, some Native Hawaiian—wore smart gray dresses and white aprons. I watched as one nurse gave a wounded Marine a shot of painkiller, and I was surprised to see her then take out a tube of lipstick and mark the man's forehead with the letter *M*. The *M* was for *morphine*, I guessed, to let the next nurse know the man had already gotten a dose.

The doctors, who were all white men, wore white pants and white jackets stained red with blood. Some of them administered medicine or applied tourniquets and bandages. A medic close to us wasn't treating patients. Instead he was giving them a quick once-over before marking their foreheads. A sailor he marked with a *C* was immediately picked up by a stretcher crew and taken into the hospital. Maybe *C* meant "critical"? Another victim had a gaping hole in his chest, and the medic waved the stretcher crew away and marked the man with an *F*. Whatever *F* stood for, it meant the man was unsavable.

The medic worked quickly and efficiently but was grim-faced and ashen. It must have been an awful burden, I thought, deciding which men would live and which would die.

An orderly zipped a dead sailor into a canvas seabag, and he and another orderly picked it up and carried the body up the hill. As we got closer to the front door of the hospital, I saw a pile of canvas bags just like that one, stacked up like cordwood. I stopped. I'd seen a lot of awful things that day, but something about that mountain of corpses made me weak in the knees.

"Hey, what's that Jap doing here?" someone demanded.

I looked up to see a nervous young soldier in a khaki uniform blocking us from the door to the hospital. The soldier was young and white, and had on a white helmet with the letters *MP* on it. Military police.

And he was pointing a rifle straight at Stanley.

Stanley's eyes went wide as he looked into the barrel of the gun, and he took a frightened step back. My first instinct was to jump to his defense and tell the MP where he could stick his rifle. But I remembered what Stanley had said about picking his own fights. So I stood and waited. And watched.

Something of the old Stanley raised his chin and looked the soldier right in the eyes.

“I’m a *US citizen*,” Stanley said.

I stepped up beside Stanley. “Not every American looks like you,” I told the soldier.

The MP scowled and gripped his rifle tighter. It was scary having a gun pointed anywhere close to me, but I knew it had to be even more frightening for Stanley. I just had to hope that me standing firm next to him meant something. To Stanley, and to the soldier.

The MP shifted his weight and looked back and forth between us, but he kept his rifle aimed at Stanley.

Then Patrick stepped up beside us, still cradling his broken arm. “Buddy, this kid just saved my life, and the life of another sailor,” Patrick said, nodding toward Stanley. “He’s a hero. They both are.”

A hero? Me? I thought. Frank McCoy, the scaredy-cat?

All day I’d seen regular, everyday people—sailors and civilians—be heroes as they risked their lives to help people in need. But now that I stopped to think about it, hadn’t Stanley and I done the same thing? When we’d seen people in trouble, we’d had the courage to help, even when it was hard. Even if it meant we might get hurt.

I looked at Stanley, who stood a little straighter beside me. Patrick was right, and Stanley knew it too.

We *were* heroes.

I looked straight into the MP’s eyes and dared him to suggest otherwise.

The MP studied all three of us, then slowly lowered his weapon and stepped aside.

“Did you hear that?” I asked Stanley once we’d made it inside and handed Patrick off to a nurse. “He called us heroes!” I felt a warm glow of pride that was better than any smile my dad had ever given me.

But one look at Stanley’s downcast face made me swallow my joy. Stanley might have convinced one distrustful American soldier to give him a pass, but we both knew he wasn’t always going to have Patrick there to speak up for him. Or me, for what that was worth.

Heroes or not, everything had changed for Stanley.

“Yeah,” he said quietly. “Listen, you should wait here for your mom and sister. I’m going to head into Honolulu, make sure my grandparents are okay.”

“Okay. I can come with you,” I offered, but Stanley clearly wanted to be alone.

I stared after him as he left. Of all the things I would remember about the attack on Pearl Harbor—all the horrible images that had been burned into my brain that day—I already knew that Stanley walking away from me was the one I would never forget.

*Dear Lord,
Lest I continue
My complacent way
Help me remember
Somehow out there
A man died for me today.
As long as there
be war,
I then must
Ask and answer
Am I worth dying for?*

A poem First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt kept in her wallet during World War II
Author unknown

— PART THREE —

AFTER



I gripped the side walls of the Navy launch with my old nervousness as we motored across Pearl Harbor. There were four of us in the boat—me, the pilot, and two Navy guys headed for Honolulu.

It was almost a week after the attack, but it felt like a lifetime ago that Stanley and I had crossed this same stretch of water on our way back from baseball practice.

Pearl Harbor was completely different now.

The air smelled of hot metal and black smoke and charred skin. Oil oozed from dozens of damaged ships, and burning slicks of the stuff moved down the water with the tide, ghostly and dangerous. Half the Pacific Fleet was hull down or belly-up. The *Arizona* had only stopped burning a few days ago, and rescue crews were still working night and day to cut people out of the *Oklahoma*. Tugboats and repair ships hovered around the other ships in the harbor, helping them stay afloat.

And everywhere there were bodies. Still. It was unbelievable. I averted my eyes from the captains' gigs and divers who trolled the water all around us, afraid I'd watch them pull another dead sailor from the deep.

America's "indomitable fortress" had turned out to be anything but.

An airplane droned overhead, and all of us in the launch ducked. The ships that were still afloat had sailors on round-the-clock guard duty, and I watched now as every one of those sailors aimed their rifles at the sky. It was just an American plane though, and they let it fly by. The night after the attack, American pilots hadn't been so lucky. Frightened, itchy-fingered sailors had shot down a half dozen of our own planes, thinking it was another air assault.

My dad's plane hadn't been one of them, thankfully. Not that we knew that night. Mom and Ginny and I had no idea if Dad was alive or dead until forty-eight hours later, when he came staggering into our temporary quarters on the mainland, grimy and miserable and ready to pass out. He told us that he'd shot down two Zeros during the attack, and then spent the next two days flying nonstop patrols to look for the retreating Japanese planes, without any luck.

Except for a few random strikes on the way out, the attack on Pearl Harbor had ended for good after the second wave. And we didn't understand why, but the invasion everybody expected never happened. The Japanese army had just wrecked the US Pacific Fleet and run.

But that had done plenty enough damage. And it had officially dragged the United States into the war.

As the boat sailed on across the harbor, I thought back to the day after the attack. It had been lunchtime in Hawaii and nighttime in Washington, DC. Mom, Ginny, and I, along with all the other relocated families, had huddled around a radio—just like every other person in the whole country—to hear President Roosevelt's address to Congress. He called December 7, 1941, "a date which will live in infamy," and asked Congress to formally declare war on Japan. They did. A few days later, Germany declared war on the US, and Italy had followed.

Now everybody in America was all in on the war. Web Edwards said on the radio that people were lined up at Army and Navy recruiting stations

across the country. Even people who'd been against the war before agreed: We had to fight.

And I was with them. I hadn't wanted to fight. Hadn't wanted it to come to this. But Mr. Summers was right. You couldn't get punched in the face and not do *something*.

There was more to it, though. On the night after the attack, as I huddled sleepless with Mom and Ginny, listening to overzealous air-raid sirens, I'd remembered something Stanley had said on our way to the *Utah* early that morning. How real heroes step up when they see other people getting hurt.

I was starting to think that maybe the United States shouldn't have had to get punched in the face to fight in the war. That maybe seeing our allies attacked should have been enough.

"Check it out," one of the sailors in the launch said, startling me out of my thoughts. He slapped his buddy on the shoulder and pointed to a barge being towed by a tug in the opposite direction.

The flat barge was packed full of Japanese Americans—mostly men but some women—sitting on row after row of simple wooden benches. They all looked tired and dejected, and to a person they kept their heads down and their eyes on their feet.

Probably because standing over them were guards with guns. The soldiers were white, and thin in their new, oversized uniforms, each of them nearly as young as I was. The guards looked scared and angry, and pointed their rifles and bayonets and submachine guns right at the heads of their prisoners. I sucked in a quick, frightened breath. It looked like the young guards were itching for any excuse to shoot, as payback for the destruction all around us.

"The Sand Island Express," said the sailor who'd pointed, and suddenly I understood.

Right after the attack, the Army started rounding up recent Japanese immigrants to Hawaii to "intern" them on Sand Island, at the entrance to Honolulu Harbor. Then, three days ago, the Army began arresting Japanese Americans who were teachers, newspaper editors, businesspeople, and community leaders, regardless of how long their families had been here. Stanley's grandmother had even been arrested, because she taught at

Japanese school. The military government called the people they arrested “prisoners of war,” but as far as I knew they hadn’t done anything but have Japanese ancestors.

“God, I don’t think I could do that,” said the sailor’s friend, and I felt a spark of gratitude for him speaking up in defense of the prisoners. “Me, I’d just want to shoot every Jap on sight,” he added, and that spark was quickly snuffed out.

“Oughta round ’em all up and kick ’em out of Hawaii,” said the first sailor. “Send ’em back where they came from.”

“This *is* where they come from,” I said, startling the sailors. “And if you kicked every Japanese American out of Hawaii, there wouldn’t be enough people left to keep things running.”

The sailors shifted in their seats and frowned at me like I was a traitor. I didn’t care. Stanley said he wanted to pick his own fights, but he wasn’t here. Which meant it was up to me to speak up and say something.

That’s where I was heading now—to see Stanley. It felt like an ocean had opened up between us since the attack. Part of it was that we simply never saw each other anymore. School had been canceled, maybe forever. So had baseball, and everything else that didn’t have to do with the war. Mom and Ginny and I still lived on the base, but not on Ford Island. We were in temporary quarters near the hospital, where Mom and Ginny now volunteered as nurses. Stanley and his mom, meanwhile, had moved in with relatives in Honolulu. They never visited the base even though Mr. Summers practically lived at the airfield, just like my dad did.

The other part of it, of course, was how differently Stanley and his mom and all the other Japanese Americans in Hawaii were being treated after the attack.

The sailors glared at me as I climbed out of the launch in Honolulu, and I did my best to ignore them. I didn’t have time for more nonsense. Mom and Ginny and I were leaving Hawaii any day now. I’d just been to the airfield on Ford Island to see my dad, in case we had to leave in the night.

Now I had to find Stanley, before I missed my chance to tell him goodbye.



I found Stanley right where his mother told me he'd be—shoveling dirt on a hillside. And he wasn't alone. A small group of young Japanese American men were working right alongside him.

They were all members of the VVV—the Varsity Victory Volunteers. A few of the VVV had been sailors before the attack, but almost the next day the Navy had kicked them out because they were Japanese. Those sailors and a bunch of Japanese American college kids started the VVV to do their part. The government wouldn't let the volunteer Japanese American unit have guns or uniforms, so they kept busy building temporary shelters, patching roads, and clearing debris.

And digging graves.

The VVV at the cemetery had shed their shirts, their backs glistening in the hot Hawaiian sun. Stanley was among the youngest of them, but he was working twice as hard, shoveling dirt down at the bottom of a grave like he was digging for buried treasure.

A shovelful of soil hit my canvas shoes, and I pretended to complain. “Hey. I’m walking here.”

Stanley looked up at me, and for a second I saw happiness fill his face. His smile shrank back to a thin line a second later. “Hey,” he said. “What are you doing here?”

“Came to see you,” I told him. “Can you take a break?”

One of the older boys nodded at Stanley, and I gave him a hand crawling out of the grave. We walked a little way off to a pile of canteens, and I looked out at the view while Stanley took a long, thirsty drink. Down the hill, I could see the famous green Punchbowl Crater, and beneath that the city of Honolulu, Sand Island, and the crystal-blue ocean.

I looked away from Sand Island, and everything it had come to stand for, toward Pearl Harbor to the west. I realized with a start that this was the first time I’d been off the base since before the attack.

“I think I can see my house from here,” I said. “My temporary one, at least. They put us up near the base hospital.”

Stanley nodded, still trying to catch his breath.

We watched together as an American fighter plane flew along the coastline, bound for Pearl Harbor’s airfields.

“With the piercing screech of a raptor, the P-40 Warhawk hurtles across the harbor in furious pursuit of its pitiless prey!” I said, mimicking Stanley’s comic book voice.

“Heh. Yeah,” Stanley chuckled, but I could tell his heart wasn’t in it. He spoke again without looking at me. “Thought you might be gone to California already.”

The day after the attack, Admiral Nimitz had announced that the families of American servicemen at Pearl Harbor would be shipped back to California, where we would be safe. Or safer. We couldn’t leave right away, though. With half their fleet at the bottom of the harbor, the Navy had to figure out how they were going to evacuate hundreds of women and children. And even then, they couldn’t tell us *when* we’d be leaving. Otherwise, Japanese spies could find out and have a hundred submarines waiting to torpedo us the second we left Hawaii.

But not all of us were leaving.

“I’m sorry I’m going,” I told Stanley. “And I’m sorry you’re not coming with us.”

“Me too,” said Stanley. “But you know we can’t. They took my grandmother to Sand Island, but my cousin in California, they took his house and his dad’s grocery store and sent his whole family to a detention center in Arizona. If we go to the States, Mom and I will end up in one of those camps with them. Even with Dad in the Navy.”

I couldn’t imagine things being worse than they were here. Besides the detentions on Sand Island, the military had taken away Japanese Americans’ cars and boats, removed the short-wave receivers from their radios, and closed down all the Japanese schools, clubs, and societies. Japanese-language newspapers had been censored, and Japanese Americans were told that if they spoke Japanese on the phone, their calls would be disconnected by the operator.

Stanley and I turned away from the view and walked down a row of fresh graves. Each one was decorated with a white cross and a pot of red poinsettias. It looked like they were decorated for Christmas, which was a few days away. It was hard to remember it was the holiday season—or to care.

“Have you heard some of the things people have been saying?” Stanley asked. “There’s a stupid rumor that one of the Japanese pilots who got shot down was wearing a McKinley High School class ring. And somebody else said that AJAs had carved arrows into their fields, pointing the way to Pearl Harbor for the planes.”

“AJAs?” I asked.

“Americans of Japanese Ancestry,” Stanley explained. “Some of the older guys in the VVV, they’re saying that now instead of ‘Japanese American.’ To remind everybody that we’re Americans first, Japanese second.” He paused. “Which feels ridiculous that we have to do that at all. Off the base, there’s more of us in Hawaii than there are of you. More Japanese people, more Chinese people, more Pacific Islanders. And we’re all *Americans*. *Real* Americans. Whether we were born here or moved here.”

“I know,” I said.

Stanley sighed. "Sorry. It's just ... I never had to think about how 'American' I was," he said sadly. "Not until now."

We were both quiet for a little while as we walked on. The air smelled like ferns and salt water and flower blossoms. Like Pearl Harbor before the attack.

"You ever think about our comic book? About the Arsenal?" I asked Stanley.

Stanley shook his head. "Not really," he said. "How about you?"

"I haven't been able to write since the attack," I told him. "And I lost all my old stories when my house was destroyed. Were you able to save any drawings from your house?"

"Some," said Stanley. "But stuff like that doesn't seem to matter anymore."

"Yeah," I said quietly. "And it used to mean everything. To me, at least."

Stanley nodded without looking at me.

"It used to for me too," he said. "Working on stories with you was the best. And I really believed it, you know? That we could publish our own comic one day."

"We still can!" I told him. I sounded desperate, and I was. I wanted this. I *needed* it. I had never felt more alive than when Stanley and I were making comics together. Now I just felt numb inside.

Stanley stared into the distance. "When I was in first grade, my art teacher told me I was good at drawing," he said. "Told me I could grow up to be an artist. That one little comment planted a seed in me, and ever since then I practiced. And practiced. And I got pretty good."

"Really good!" I told him. "You *can* be a professional artist, Stanley. A great one."

Stanley shook his head. "I thought I could. For a long time. But I see now that I've been living in this bubble, like Mom said. Like Namor in Atlantis. Everybody under the ocean, they were good with him being half Atlantean. But when he went to the surface world, they saw him as an enemy. Just like me, living in this perfect Hawaiian bubble where nobody

cared what I looked like. I didn't realize until the attack that most of America doesn't see me as American."

Stanley kicked the head of his shovel with his toes. "Now I get why Namor is always so angry all the time and wants to tear everything down. Nobody is going to let somebody who looks like me draw comic books in America. Not now. Not ever."

"That's not true," I told Stanley. "The world's at war with Germany too, and nobody seems to feel that way about German Americans. I mean, Admiral Nimitz's family is from Germany!"

Stanley scoffed. "It's different for people who look like you," he said. "It's different for haoles."

Haoles. The Hawaiian word for non-natives. Outsiders.

White people.

Stanley was right, I realized. German and Japanese bad guys had been all over comic books long before we were at war with either country. Captain America had been punching out Hitler on the covers of his comics for more than a year now. The German bad guys in comics were buffoons. They talked *like ziss*, and had ridiculously cartoonish bodies. But that was nothing compared to how Japanese villains were drawn. Japanese characters spoke in childlike, broken English, and had ugly faces and fangs for teeth. They were more monster than human.

Now that I saw it, I couldn't *unsee* it. How had I read all those comics and been fine with them? I couldn't imagine the way Stanley must have felt all those times he'd read the same comics, seeing people who were supposed to look like him drawn like ogres.

Maybe Stanley was right. Maybe people who accepted human beings drawn to look like monsters would never accept somebody like him drawing superheroes.

Stanley gasped quietly, and I stopped.

"What is it?" I asked, and then I saw where we were.



Without meaning to, we had ended up at Brooks Leonard's freshly dug grave.

There was no stone yet, but Ginny had picked out a good spot for him under a willow tree. His baseball bat was laid out lengthwise on the dirt.

Stanley and I stood wordlessly by the grave. In my head, I told Brooks that I was sorry. And that I missed him.

After a moment, Stanley turned away.

"You don't have to do this," I told Stanley. "Dig graves with the VVV like you're trying to atone for the attack or something. It's not your fault."

"Just like it's not your fault that Brooks died?"

"That's different," I said. I still blamed myself for Brooks's death. I always would. But Stanley was right. Brooks might have been killed a hundred different ways that day. Even if I *had* acted differently. And that was the one thing the attack on Pearl Harbor had taught me for sure: that the only thing I could control was my own actions.

Stanley gave me a playful frown, and I relented. “Okay. Fine. It’s *neither* of our faults.”

Stanley smirked. “I know. And I’m not trying to make up for anything. It’s that way for some of the guys here, but that’s not why I’m doing it,” he said. “I’m digging graves to honor all these American sailors who died. Americans like me. I mean, one of them could have been my dad. Or yours,” Stanley added. “I’m burying heroes.”

I nodded. I knew Stanley well enough to know what he was saying was true. And to still worry that wasn’t the only reason. But I’d said my piece.

I stood beside Stanley as he looked back out over Honolulu, and Pearl Harbor, and across the sea. As if he was looking all the way to Japan.

“Frank, are you still scared?” Stanley asked.

I laughed softly. “Yes,” I said. “All the time.”

“I am too,” said Stanley. “I didn’t used to be. But I am now. I’m scared about the future.”

“Well,” I said. “Take it from somebody with a lot of experience with fear. It’s not the *being* scared that matters. That’s only human. It’s what you *do* when you’re scared that counts.”

Stanley’s eyes finally broke away from the horizon.

“I should get back to it,” he said.

“And I should get home. In case they call and say it’s time to go. I hope I see you again before we leave,” I told him.

“Yeah. I may not know until you’re gone though,” said Stanley. “Japanese spies and all that.”

“Yeah,” I said.

Stanley held out a dirty, blistered hand, and we shook on it. It felt formal. And final.



After seeing Stanley, I went back to the cinder-block barracks on the base where my family and I lived now. The barracks felt a little like the Dungeon under Admiral Bellinger's house, I thought as I stepped inside. Or a prison. But it didn't matter. None of it mattered. My family wasn't going to be here very long. Our suitcases were already packed and standing by the door, ready for when we got the call to evacuate.

The room that Ginny and I shared had two beds, an electric clock that buzzed on the wall, and a small desk with a metal lamp and a phone. The walls were painted white on the top and military green on the bottom, and a grimy window with hexagonal wires in the glass let in fuzzy brown light.

Mom and Ginny were still busy volunteering at the hospital, so I was the only one there. I stood in my room and looked at the line on the wall where the green and white paint came together. The line was perfectly horizontal, except for one tiny spot in the middle of it, right above my bed.

For some reason the painters had left a little divot in the green there. A tiny notch of white that dipped down and broke the otherwise flawless line.

All that hard work, and that one little mistake had ruined it.

I blinked and shook my head. What was I doing? How long had I been standing there staring at the wall? I pinched the bridge of my nose and closed my eyes. This waiting, this limbo, was making me loopy.

I should write, I told myself. That always grounded me. Made me feel like I was doing something good. Something useful.

I went to my suitcase and pulled out my notebook and a pencil. Took them to the desk. Sat down. Turned on the light. Turned it off again. Opened up the notebook.

At the top of the first empty page, I wrote, *The Arsenal— Issue #1*.

Underneath that, I wrote, *Page 1. Panel 1. The Arsenal*

The Arsenal does what? Sits? Stands? Runs? Is trapped? Is punched? Is laughing? Is crying?

What was the Arsenal doing? Who was he? What was he afraid of? What were his powers? Why did he fight?

What was his origin story?

I sat ready, pencil poised over the line in my notebook, and waited for the story to come to me.

And waited.

And waited.

But nothing came. No ideas for powers. No dialogue. No origin story.

Maybe it was the war. Maybe it was the waiting to leave. Maybe it was not having Stanley there to talk through ideas.

A lot of it was not having Stanley there. That was when the real magic had happened.

But what was the point anyway? Who cared about comics anymore? Or books? Or music? Or sports? Or movies? Or Christmas? And even if I did write something, who was going to draw it? Not Stanley. He was too busy digging graves.

We all had bigger things to worry about now.

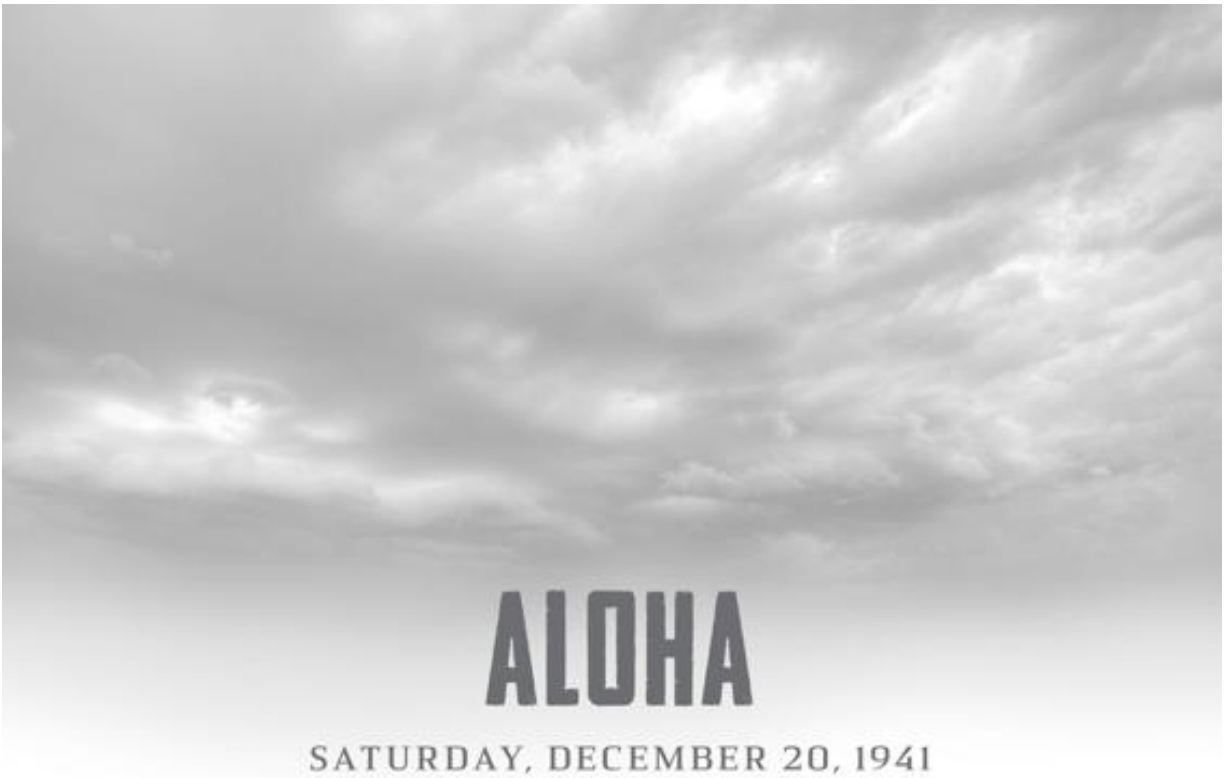
As I closed my notebook, I thought about the shape of stories. How right toward the end there was always a moment when it felt like the heroes

couldn't win, no matter what they did. In a comic book, that was the moment when the heroes dug down deep inside and found that extra little something that put them over the top against the big bad guy and let them save the day.

On the day of the attack, getting Kowalczyk, Joseph H. and Patrick to the hospital had felt like a victory. Like Stanley and I were heroes. But now, I couldn't help but feel that Stanley and I, we'd never had a chance to win. Like we'd lost more than we'd gained. Stanley had lost the belief that he was just like everybody else. That he could grow up and do anything, *be* anything he wanted.

Me, I'd lost that giddy, joyful feeling of creating something. Of writing words and seeing them come to life as drawings and sharing them with other people.

And most of all, I'd lost my best friend.



They came for us in the night. American servicemen knocking quietly on our door at four a.m. and telling me and Mom and Ginny that it was time to leave Hawaii.

It was just before sunrise now and still dark out as I stood on the dock, bleary-eyed and wobbly, in line to board our ship. Hundreds of women and children waited with us, carrying everything they owned. I saw Arthur and Maxine standing with their mom. Mrs. Harding with her ukulele case. The Dawsons. Charlie Moore and his little sister and their mom. I looked away.

Mom and Ginny and I carried small suitcases with borrowed clothes, and not much else. Except for Brooks's baseball glove, which Ginny carried under her arm. I saw her touch it gently when she thought no one was looking. She was leaving him behind now for good. We both were.

I thought back to the start of the attack, when Stanley and I had been sliding down the hull of the *Utah* on our behinds. I'd wanted to be somewhere else then. Somewhere safe, like California. But now that we

were actually heading to California, I didn't want to go. I didn't want to leave my dad. I didn't want to leave Hawaii, where I'd been so happy.

I didn't want to leave Stanley.

Maybe, I was realizing, there were some things that were worth sacrificing a little safety for.

A nervous restlessness buzzed through the crowd. Of the hundred ways we could die on the five-day ocean voyage to California, an attack by a Japanese sub was number one on the list. The Pacific Ocean was crawling with them now that we were officially at war. So while everyone was anxious, we were quiet too.

We were military families, after all. We'd been trained as well as our servicemen.

I stood on my tiptoes, looking for Stanley. I could see a long way in crowds, thanks to how tall I was. But I didn't see him.

We hadn't talked since I'd gone to the cemetery a week ago, and I didn't want that handshake to be our final goodbye. I'd planned to call Stanley from the barracks and tell him we were leaving, but the soldier who'd woken us had stood watch over us as we gathered our things. A phone call—let alone one to an American of Japanese Ancestry—was most definitely not allowed. But Honolulu was a small place, and I hoped the island grapevine would get word to him that we were leaving.

Ginny saw me searching the crowd. "He'll come," she told me quietly. "They always come. Because they know this is goodbye forever."

I wasn't sure whether to find that reassuring or depressing. Of course Ginny would think that Stanley and I would never talk again. That's what had happened with her and the girl back in Florida she'd thought had been *her* forever best friend.

Things were going to be different for me and Stanley. I had decided. And I had a plan to make it happen. But it was only going to work if Stanley showed up.

A line of ambulances appeared, their lights and sirens off so as not to alert any spies. Inside, we all knew, were the soldiers and sailors too injured to stay in Hawaii. They would be accompanying us back to California for better care and recovery. The waiting passengers parted silently and

respectfully as stretcher crews carried the wounded men up the ramp to the ship.

“*Wait wait wait,*” one of the wounded men said as his stretcher was passing me, and the orderlies came to a stop. The sailor on the stretcher reached out and grabbed my arm, and I jumped. Then I saw who it was, and I smiled with relief.

“Joe!” I said softly. It was Kowalczyk, Joseph H. The sailor Stanley and I had ferried from Ford Island to Hospital Point.

“Hey, kid! You coming along on this pleasure cruise too?” Joe asked, and I nodded. “That’s great,” he said. “Come visit me in sick bay in between watching out for subs.”

“I will,” I told him.

Every day after the attack, I had gone to the hospital to check on our wounded sailor. He’d been in a coma at first, and there were some days I couldn’t see him because he was in surgery. But after five days, he was awake and talking in his hospital bed. That’s when I’d found out he liked for people to call him Joe.

“Hey, maybe now I’ll get to meet your buddy. Tell him to come by too,” Joe said, not realizing that Stanley wasn’t coming with us. I would have to explain it to him later.

“I owe you guys my life!” Joe said as the orderlies got underway again. “I mean it!”

“Thanks, Joe,” I said, enjoying the glow of being a hero again, if only for a moment. “I’ll see you on the ship.”

My mom hugged me. She knew the whole story of me and Stanley on the motorboat now. “I’m proud of you, Frank,” she whispered. “But don’t ever do anything like that again.”

I smiled. I was pleased that she was proud of me. And that she thought I might actually do something dangerous again.

When the last of the wounded sailors was taken aboard, it was our turn to climb the ramp up to the ship. But Stanley still hadn’t shown. He had to have heard we were leaving!

Unless he didn’t care anymore. But even as I thought it, I couldn’t believe it. Despite everything that was pulling us apart, we both knew what

we were about to lose.

Mom and Ginny and I moved slowly up the ramp. I used my increasingly higher vantage point to search the docks for Stanley, stopping every couple of feet to stand up on my toes. The lady behind me grouched for me to get a move on, but I didn't care.

I was halfway to the ship when— Wait, was that ... ? Yes! It was Stanley, running to the end of the line and searching frantically for me.

“Stanley! Up here!” I yelled, immediately getting shushed by a dozen moms. I waved until he saw me, and he hopped up and down and waved back.

I signaled for him to wait there and started to push my way back down the ramp.

“*Sorry. Pardon me. Sorry,*” I whispered as I went against the tide. The other passengers scowled and grumbled, but they let me by.

I pushed through the crowd and hurried to where I'd seen Stanley. When I finally spotted him up close, he looked like he'd just climbed out of bed and thrown on the first clothes he'd found on the floor. Which was probably exactly what he'd done.

I dropped my suitcase on the ground, and we stood awkwardly for a second, trying to figure out how to greet each other. A handshake? We'd already done that. A hug? Too embarrassing. We settled for just smiling and raising our chins at each other instead.

“Hey!” I said. “I didn't think you were gonna make it.”

“I couldn't leave the house until after curfew ended,” Stanley said, slightly out of breath.

Right. I should have remembered. With the US military now in control of all of Hawaii, there were strict punishments for leaving your house at night, especially for AJAs.

I glanced back over my shoulder. Mom and Ginny were already on board the ship, and the line was moving. I didn't have long.

“I hate that I'm leaving,” I said. And I meant it. As dangerous as it was to stay in Hawaii, the possibility of never talking to Stanley again was worse.

“You’ll write, won’t you?” we both asked at the same time, which made us laugh.

“Of course I’ll write,” I told Stanley. “But you have to write too. In fact, I know what your first letter to me can be.”

I pulled a small stack of folded-up papers from my back pocket. I held on to them for a second, still not sure, but finally decided to go for it.

“Here,” I said, thrusting the papers into Stanley’s hands.

Stanley opened the pages and read the title aloud. “ ‘The Sleeping Giant Awakens’? Wait, is this—”

I nodded. “The script for the first issue of our Arsenal of Democracy comic,” I told him. “I mean, it’s still rough, and it needs a lot of work, but —”

“Is this his origin story?” Stanley asked, turning the pages.

“Yeah. And I figured out the perfect power for him to have,” I said. “You’ll see when you read it.”

“Hang on,” said Stanley. “The way you’ve described the Arsenal here—you kept him Japanese American.”

“An American of Japanese Ancestry,” I said.

Stanley frowned. “Frank, we can’t do this,” he told me, pushing the script back into my hands. “Nobody wants this. Nobody will publish this. The main character looks like the enemy.”

Even now, I could feel people’s eyes on me and Stanley. Him because he looked Japanese, and me because I was talking to him.

“No,” I said. “The Arsenal looks like *you*. He looks like an American.”

Stanley shook his head.

“Will you at least *try* to draw it?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” said Stanley. “I thought you said you couldn’t write anymore.”

“I couldn’t for a while,” I said. “But a friend told me a real hero always fights for what’s right.”

Stanley raised his eyebrows. “So making comics makes us heroes now?”

“Maybe,” I said. I huffed. The line to the boat was moving, and I didn’t know exactly how to say what I was feeling. “Maybe ... when it feels like

the world is ending and nobody cares, somebody who makes comics—who makes *anything* creative—is a kind of hero. Because we *need* stories and pictures and stuff.”

Stanley still looked doubtful, but I could see that he was thinking about it.

A crewman blew a handheld whistle, and I jumped. I guessed it was a stand-in for the ship’s whistle, which would have been loud enough that Emperor Hirohito himself back in Japan would know our ship was ready to leave Pearl Harbor.

“I have to go,” I told Stanley. I pushed the script back at him. “Draw the comic, will you?” I asked. “Draw it and send it to me when you’re done. And then, when the war’s over, we can start our own comic book company, with me writing and you drawing the pictures.”

Stanley laughed reluctantly. “Maybe,” he said. “I don’t know. We’ll see.”

The whistle blew again.

I raised a hand. “Aloha, Stanley,” I said.

Hawaiians used the word *aloha* like “hello” or “goodbye,” but it actually meant something like love and friendship. And peace. I meant all those things when I said it to Stanley. He was my best friend, and I loved him like a brother. And I hoped he found peace.

“Aloha, Frank,” Stanley said, returning the wave as I ran for the ship.

I was the last one on board as the sailor shut the gate. Ginny and Mom were waiting for me along the crowded rail, and I let Ginny give me a long hug. She understood what I was leaving behind more than most. She’d done it before, and she was doing it again.

As the ship slipped its moorings and pulled away from the dock, I thought again about origin stories. Here in Hawaii, I’d rewritten mine. Become the *real* McCoy. The one who was still nervous and scared, but not so much that I wouldn’t stand up for what was right. But I didn’t want the attack on Pearl Harbor to be Stanley’s origin story. I didn’t want it to be the event that defined his life. I hoped Stanley’s origin story was still that moment when a teacher told a young American of Japanese Ancestry that he could grow up to be an artist.

I found Stanley in the crowd of people still on the dock, and we waved to each other one last time. We'd been a dynamic duo, I realized. And the war, like some comic book supervillain, was threatening to destroy the creative world we'd built together.

But maybe, just maybe, the Arsenal of Democracy was the superhero who would save it.

7 DECEMBER, 1961

TIMELESS COMICS
PRESENTS

12¢

THE ARSENAL OF DEMOCRACY



"THE SLEEPING GIANT
AWAKENS!"

ON THE ISLAND OF PACIFICA, BROOKS YAMASHIRO AND HIS BEST FRIEND, RYOSHI MORI, ARE EXPLORING A REMOTE BEACH WHEN . . .



. . . THEY HEAR THE PLAINITIVE CRY OF A TRAPPED ANIMAL!



SUDDENLY, BROOKS CAN REACH THE CAT—BY GROWING TWICE HIS OWN SIZE! BUT HOW? THERE'S NO TIME TO SOLVE THE RIDDLE—



—AS THE CAVE COLLAPSES BEHIND OUR HERO, BURYING THE CRYSTALS FOREVER!

THE STRANGE POWER OF THE CRYSTALS STAYS WITH BROOKS IN THE YEARS TO COME . . .



. . . LETTING HIM GROW AS BIG AND STRONG AS THE JOB REQUIRES!

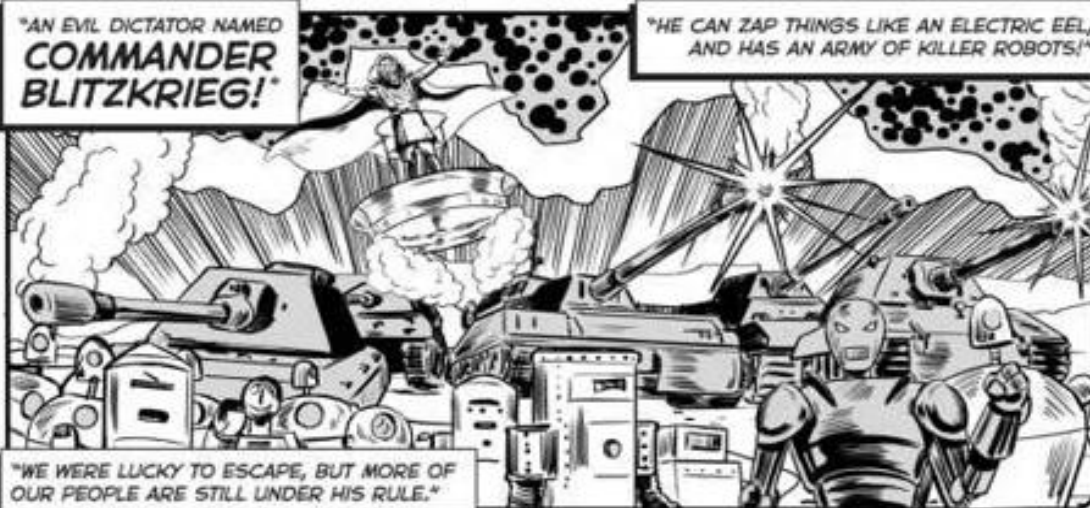


LIFE ON PACIFICA IS PEACEFUL—UNTIL A SHIP OF DESPERATE REFUGEES ARRIVES.



"AN EVIL DICTATOR NAMED
**COMMANDER
BLITZKRIEG!**"

"HE CAN ZAP THINGS LIKE AN ELECTRIC EEL,
AND HAS AN ARMY OF KILLER ROBOTS!"



"WE WERE LUCKY TO ESCAPE, BUT MORE OF
OUR PEOPLE ARE STILL UNDER HIS RULE."

THE PEOPLE OF
PACIFICA MAKE NEW
HOMES FOR THE
BRAVE REFUGEES
ON THEIR ISLAND.



HEY, BROOKS. WAKE
UP. WE NEED TO HELP
THESE PEOPLE.



HUH? WE DID,
DIDN'T WE?

I MEAN GO
AND FIGHT THIS
BLITZKRIEG GUY.
YOU AND ME.

FIGHT? ME?
HOW?

ARE YOU
KIDDING? YOU CAN
BECOME A GIANT!
YOU'RE A ONE-MAN
ARSENAL.



I HAD TO LEAVE MY
KITTY BEHIND WHEN WE
RAN AWAY. I HOPE I
GET TO SEE HER
AGAIN SOMEDAY.

YOU'RE RIGHT.
WE HAVE TO TRY.

GREAT. AND
I KNOW JUST
HOW WE'LL GET
THERE...











WITH A MIGHTY PUNCH, BROOKS SMASHES THE ROBOT!



... BUT LOSES TRACK OF COMMANDER BLITZKRIEG.





BROOKS YAMASHIRO GROWS BIGGER, BIGGER—BIGGER THAN HE HAS EVER GROWN BEFORE, AND—

WITH COMMANDER BLITZKRIEG AND HIS MINIONS DRIVEN OUT, THE ISLAND'S GRATEFUL INHABITANTS ARE LIBERATED.



RYOSHI!! YOU'RE ALL RIGHT!



THANKS TO YOU. IS BLITZKRIEG DONE?

I DOUBT IT. WE HIT HIM HARD, BUT WE'VE GOT MORE WORK TO DO.



AFTER WE BOTH TAKE A LITTLE NAP...

THERE ARE MORE COLOSSAL CLASHES TO COME, BUT FOR TODAY, BROOKS YAMASHIRO HAS WON THE BATTLE—AND EARNED THE NICKNAME
THE ARSENAL OF DEMOCRACY!

LOOK FOR MORE ADVENTURES OF THE ARSENAL OF DEMOCRACY, COMING SOON!

ABOUT THE CREATORS

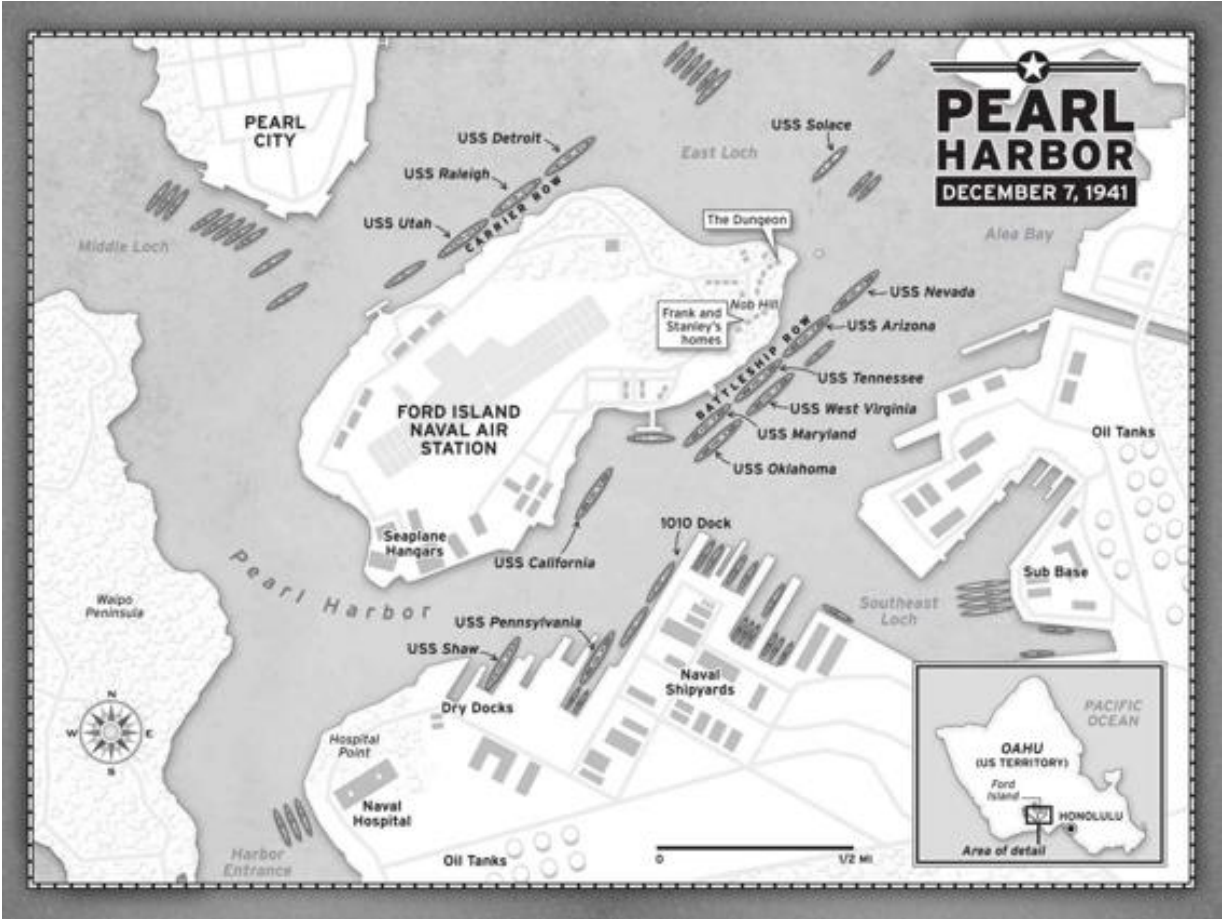


AUTHOR FRANK McCOY WAS A NAVY BRAT, GROWING UP WHEREVER HIS NAVY PILOT FATHER HAPPENED TO BE STATIONED. AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR, FRANK AND HIS FAMILY SETTLED ON THE WEST COAST, WHERE HE GRADUATED FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA WITH A DEGREE IN CREATIVE WRITING. UNTIL NOW, HIS BIGGEST CLAIM TO FAME WAS BEING THE BROTHER OF GINNY McCOY, STAR SHORTSTOP FOR THE KENOSHA COMETS OF THE ALL-AMERICAN GIRLS PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL LEAGUE. *THE ARSENAL OF DEMOCRACY* IS HIS FIRST PUBLISHED COMIC BOOK.

ILLUSTRATOR STANLEY SUMMERS WAS BORN AND RAISED IN HAWAII. AFTER TAKING TIME OFF TO SERVE IN THE KOREAN WAR, STANLEY GRADUATED FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII AT MANOA WITH A MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN ILLUSTRATION. AS A COMMERCIAL ILLUSTRATOR, HIS CLIENTS HAVE INCLUDED LEVI STRAUSS & CO., PAN AMERICAN WORLD AIRWAYS, AND SCHOLASTIC. HE AND HIS BEST FRIEND, FRANK McCOY, CO-CREATED *THE ARSENAL OF DEMOCRACY AS BOYS*, WRITING AND DRAWING HIS MANY ADVENTURES BY MAIL UNTIL THEY WERE REUNITED AS ADULTS. LIKE FRANK, THIS IS STANLEY'S FIRST PUBLISHED COMIC BOOK.



**KEEP READING TO FIND OUT MORE
ABOUT *HEROES*.**



AUTHOR'S NOTE

Before Imperial Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, Americans were fiercely divided on how—or even *if*—the United States should be involved in World War II, which had begun in 1939. Many remembered with anger and regret how hundreds of thousands of American soldiers had been wounded and killed in World War I, which had ended just two decades earlier and seemed to accomplish very little.

Isolationists like aviator Charles Lindbergh argued that the United States should remain neutral and let the foreign powers fight among themselves. Interventionists believed that Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan would inevitably threaten American interests, and wanted the United States to provide desperately needed assistance to their allies. The debate was contentious. American Jews were well aware that Nazi Germany was openly attacking, robbing, and imprisoning European Jews, but many were afraid to speak up due to widespread anti-Jewish sentiment in America. When Jewish American comic book creators Jack Kirby and Joe Simon drew their new superhero, Captain America, punching out Adolf Hitler and fighting Nazis month after month on the covers of their comic books, the creators got stacks of threatening letters and hate mail. When menacing mobs started hanging out in the street near Timely Comics, the publisher of *Captain America*, New York City mayor Fiorello La Guardia had to post police at the company's door for the comic creators' protection.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who generally sided with the interventionists, had to settle for sending ships, planes, tanks, and food to the Allied countries, including England, Russia, France, and China. Calling America the Arsenal of Democracy, Roosevelt encouraged American factories to shift their focuses to war production. All the new jobs created by more manufacturing made US involvement in the war more popular, but

many people were still against sending American men and women overseas to join the war effort.

All that changed when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.

By the summer of 1941, the growing Japanese empire had taken over large parts of China and was threatening American, British, and French territories in the Pacific and the Far East. The United States and England used economic pressure to try to get Japan to stop, which led to Imperial Japan forming a pact with the Axis powers—Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy—for trade and defense. When President Roosevelt sent the US Pacific Fleet to Hawaii as a show of force, Japanese leaders took the move as a threat and began planning a preemptive strike of their own.

Early on the morning of Sunday, December 7, 1941, the Imperial Japanese Navy attacked the US naval base at Pearl Harbor with more than three hundred fifty planes launched from six aircraft carriers. Wave after wave of Japanese Zeros shot up American airplanes parked on the runways at Ford Island Naval Air Station, Wheeler Field, Hickam Field, and Kaneohe Naval Air Station. Japanese torpedo bombers and dive-bombers targeted American ships all around the harbor, focusing their attacks on the big ships parked on Battleship Row and under repair at the US Navy shipyards. The sneak attack came as a total surprise to American sailors, many of whom were still asleep or enjoying a day off. US ships and planes were eventually able to return fire but did little damage to the Japanese force.

The attack on Pearl Harbor lasted just under two hours, which seemed like an eternity for the American service members and civilians who survived it. By the time the battle was over, the Japanese had sunk, damaged, or destroyed twenty American ships, and wrecked or damaged nearly three hundred fifty American planes. Over 2,400 US soldiers and Marines and sailors died in the attack—more than half of them crewmen who were killed when the USS *Arizona* exploded—and another 1,177 Americans were injured. The Imperial Japanese Navy, meanwhile, lost only twenty-nine planes, five submarines, and sixty-four men. As a result of “friendly fire”—shots accidentally fired at someone by their own side—the US Navy killed more American civilians during the battle than enemy

airmen and sailors, many from shells that overshot their targets and landed in downtown Honolulu.

The Imperial Japanese Navy never intended to invade, as many people in Hawaii feared. Instead, the attack was meant to be a knockout blow that would keep the United States out of the war in the Pacific for many years. But that's not what happened. Thanks to the surprise attack, nearly all Americans—even those who had opposed a foreign war—were united in calling for revenge. The United States Congress declared war on Japan the next day with almost unanimous approval. Germany and Italy declared war on the United States soon afterward, and the debate was over. America was now officially in World War II.

The United States immediately began fighting Germany at sea in the Atlantic, on the ground in North Africa, and in the skies over Europe. In the Pacific, the US struck back at Japan with bombers but struggled to keep up with Japan's naval advances due to the damage done to the fleet at Pearl Harbor. The United States was forced to lean on its surviving aircraft carriers and fighter planes, which turned out to be a blessing in disguise. The new naval fighting techniques the US developed were so effective that by June of 1942, just six months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the US was able to score a devastating and decisive victory at the Battle of Midway that changed the course of the war against Japan.

Back home, meanwhile, the “Arsenal of Democracy” went into overdrive. The year after Pearl Harbor, the United States produced an astonishing 47,836 airplanes—a number that would *double* by 1944. Practically every nonessential American industry turned its factories over to war production. At a Ford plant that once produced cars, a new bomber came off the assembly line every sixty-three minutes. General Motors made tanks and guns. Even the Lionel toy train company got involved, making compasses for battleships.

All that production revitalized the Allied war effort. In 1944, the United States and its allies invaded Nazi-occupied France at Normandy—an event known as D-Day—ultimately helping bring about Germany's surrender on May 8, 1945. A few months after the end of the war in Europe, the United States dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of

Hiroshima and Nagasaki, becoming the first, and as yet *only*, nation in the world to use nuclear weapons in war. Japan surrendered a week later, marking the end of the war in the Pacific and the end of World War II.

Admiral Hara Tadaichi of the Imperial Japanese Navy later said of the surprise attack on Hawaii, “We won a great tactical victory at Pearl Harbor, and thereby lost the war.” He and others the world over knew that a sleeping giant had awakened.

ABOUT THE STORY

Pearl Harbor experts will note that certain historical events happen at slightly different times in my story than they did in real life. Contemporary accounts of the battle say the USS *Utah* capsized at roughly the same time that the USS *Arizona* exploded, if not a couple of minutes later. There would certainly not be enough time for Frank and Stanley to realistically swim from the USS *Utah* to Ford Island, cross the naval air station, and be at home in time for the explosion of the *Arizona*. The fact that both significant events occurred more or less simultaneously speaks to how much was happening all over Pearl Harbor, and I took a little artistic license here and there to allow readers to see as many of those real-life incidents as possible.

The Black sailors Frank sees helping fight back on both the *Utah* and the *Raleigh* are inspired by the real-life story of Doris Miller, a Black man who served as a cook on the USS *West Virginia*. After carrying his ship’s wounded captain to safety, Miller manned one of the ship’s anti-aircraft guns—which he’d never fired before—and shot down two enemy planes. He later saved the lives of more of his fellow sailors before abandoning ship with the rest of the crew as the *West Virginia* sank to the harbor floor. For his heroism that day, Doris Miller earned the first Navy Cross ever presented to a Black sailor.

Very few American pilots were able to get planes in the air to fight back like Frank’s father did. Only eight American pilots took to the skies during the battle, and of those, only six were officially credited with

shooting down Japanese aircraft. Famously, two pilots named George Welch and Kenneth Taylor were coming home from an all-night poker game at the Wheeler Officer's Club on base when the attack began. The two raced to Haleiwa Field, where they convinced the ground crew to prep two P-40 Warhawks rather than hide them away as ordered. Taking off and landing twice during the battle to refuel and reload ammunition, the two pilots are thought to have shot down at least seven enemy planes at Pearl Harbor—one-quarter of all Japanese losses. For their actions on December 7, Taylor and Welch were named the first two American heroes of World War II by the US War Department.

The vicious surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, combined with preexisting and long-standing racism against Asians and Pacific Islanders, sparked a wave of anti-Japanese sentiment across the United States during World War II and beyond. Many Japanese Americans who had proudly displayed photos and heirlooms of their Japanese heritage, like Stanley's family, hurried to literally bury their keepsakes, for fear of anti-Japanese backlash. In Hawaii, some Japanese Americans were so afraid that they risked burying their family treasures *during* the attack, just like Stanley's mom.

US counterintelligence agencies, politicians, and regular citizens alike believed—without any proof whatsoever—that any and every Japanese American could be spying for Imperial Japan. On the West Coast and in Hawaii, local authorities immediately began to restrict the rights of Japanese Americans. Then, in February of 1942, just two months after Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt issued an executive order stripping all Americans of Japanese Ancestry of their civil rights. Despite never being charged with a crime, 120,000 Japanese Americans—two-thirds of whom had been born in the United States—were forcibly removed from their homes and communities and imprisoned in concentration camps in California, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, and Utah. In the process, the US government took Japanese Americans' homes, businesses, property, savings, and, perhaps most importantly, their liberty. Notably, the US government did not take such extreme measures against German Americans or Italian Americans.

During the four years the United States was at war, only ten people were ever convicted of spying for Japan, and all of them were white people of European descent. Not until almost fifty years later, in 1988, did the US government officially apologize and offer modest compensation to the people who had been imprisoned in the camps. Today the United States and Japan are staunch allies, and more than one and a half million people of Japanese ancestry call America home.

ASIAN AMERICANS IN COMICS

Stanley's concern over how a Japanese American superhero would be received in the United States in 1941 was a realistic one, as almost every superhero of the 1930s and 1940s was white. The first Asian superhero in mainstream American comics might be a Chinese American character named Wing, who was introduced in 1938 as the sidekick and personal valet to a masked white superhero called the Crimson Avenger. They both appeared in *Detective Comics #20*, seven issues before the character of Batman would first appear in the same comic book series. Early versions of Wing were unfortunately not flattering, depicting him with the same buck teeth, broken English, and inhuman appearance as the Chinese villains in the same comics.

American cartoonist Gene Luen Yang and others have made the case for the Green Turtle as the first Asian American superhero, as he was the first to headline his own comic book. In 1944, Hawaiian-born artist Chu F. Hing, who was an American of Chinese ancestry, created the masked superhero the Green Turtle, who flew around mainland Asia protecting the local citizens from the invading Imperial Japanese Army. Hing wanted his new superhero to be Asian American, but his publishers said no. So Hing just never showed the Green Turtle's face! Every time the Green Turtle took off his mask, he was either turned around backward or his face was conveniently hidden from the reader by a piece of furniture. That way, the Green Turtle *could* be Asian American. There was just no way to say for sure.

While the discussion about *who* the first Asian American superhero really was continues, one fact remains: There have been far too few.

THE LEGACY OF PEARL HARBOR

Japan officially surrendered to United States General Douglas MacArthur and Admiral Chester W. Nimitz on board the USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay in 1945. Now a museum ship, the USS *Missouri* is part of the Pearl Harbor National Memorial, and is anchored just behind the sunken wreck of the USS *Arizona*, which is a grave for 1,102 sailors and Marines killed on that ship during the attack. Nearby is a plaque with the poem Eleanor Roosevelt famously carried with her all during the war, quoted here in *Heroes*.

Together, the *Arizona* and *Missouri* are fitting bookends to America's involvement in World War II, which began on that infamous day in 1941.

In the same way that comic book superheroes have origin stories, the attack on Pearl Harbor—and the American response to it—can be seen as the origin story for the United States we know today. It took a punch in the face to drag America into the fight, but from the forge of World War II the United States emerged as an undisputed global *superpower*. In the decades that followed, the United States got involved with conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Lebanon, Cuba, Cambodia, Libya, Panama, Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia, Haiti, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Yemen, Pakistan, Uganda, Niger, and Syria, to name just a few.

Like Frank and the comic book character he and Stanley created together, what the United States has done with that newfound strength, and what we continue to do now and in the future, will decide if we are heroes.

Alan Gratz
Asheville, NC, USA
2024

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There are so many superheroes in the making of a single book. First and foremost is my editor, Aimee Friedman, whose X-ray vision always sees right to the heart of the story I'm trying to tell. Publisher David Levithan lifts *all* my books to even greater heights, and the laser vision of copyeditor Jessica White and proofreaders Shari Joffe, Jody Corbett, and Priscilla Eakeley cleaned up my villainous prose. And while Stanley is credited with illustrating the Arsenal of Democracy comic at the end, the artwork was actually done by the very real and very talented Judit Tondora.

A veritable league of superheroes at Scholastic used their superpowers for good on this book, including Ellie Berger, president of Trade Publishing; Seale Ballenger, Erin Berger, Rachel Feld, Katie Dutton, and everyone in Publicity and Marketing; Lizette Serrano, Emily Heddleson, Michael Strouse, Matthew Poulter, Sabrina Montenigro, Maisha Johnson, Meredith Wardell, and everyone in School and Library Marketing and Conventions; editorial assistants Arianna Arroyo and Cianna Sanford; Janell Harris, Elizabeth Krych, Erin O'Connor, Leslie Garych, JoAnne Mojica, and everyone in Production; Christopher Stengel for the terrific cover and interior layout; Jazan Higgins, Rachel Schwartz, Mona Tavangar, Jana Haussmann, Mariclaire Jastremsky, Kristin Standley, and everyone with Clubs and Fairs; Jennifer Powell and her team in Rights and Co-editions; Elizabeth Whiting, Jackie Rubin, Savannah D'Amico, Dan Moser, Nikki Mutch, Chris Satterlund, Roz Hilden, Terribeth Smith, Sarah Sullivan, Jarad Waxman, Jody Stigliano, Betsy Politi, and everyone in Sales; Lori Benton, John Pels, Paul Gagne, and the rest of the Scholastic Audio team for their audacious work on the *Heroes* audiobook; and all the sales reps and Fairs and Clubs reps who crisscross the country like superspeedsters to tell people about my books.

Special thanks to Karen Aka for her invaluable notes on Japanese Americans and Hawaii in World War II, and to Chloe Freeman for her help researching the attack on Pearl Harbor. Any mistakes that remain are my own.

My literary agent, Holly Root at Root Literary, and her assistant, Alyssa Maltese, are wonder women, as are Lauren Harr, Caroline Green Christopoulos, Aya Phillips, and Grace Chastain at Gold Leaf Literary. The superheroic work they do allows me to do the work I do! Thanks to my friend Bob, the invisible superhero who was fighting alongside me long before I got my own superpowers. And thanks as always to all the amazing teachers, incredible librarians, and uncanny booksellers out there who continue to share my books with young readers. You're super awesome.

And last but never least, much love and thanks to the real superheroes in my life: my wife, Wendi, and my daughter, Jo. Remember—with Gratz power comes Gratz responsibility.

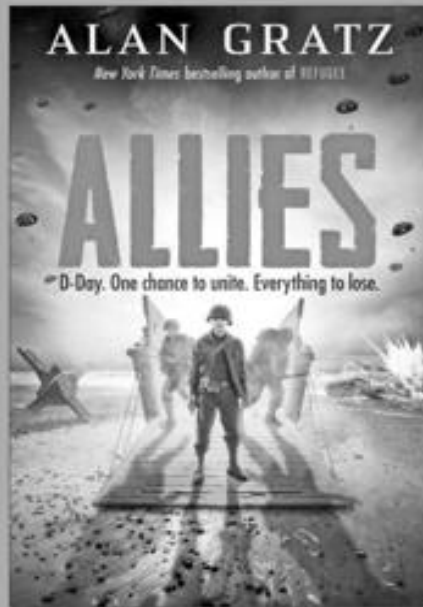
ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Alan Gratz is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of several acclaimed and award-winning books for young readers, including *Two Degrees*, *Ground Zero*, *Refugee*, *Allies*, *Grenade*, *Ban This Book*, and more, as well as the original graphic novel *Captain America: The Ghost Army*, with art by Brent Schoonover. Alan lives in North Carolina with his wife and daughter. Look for him online at alangratz.com.

**TURN THE PAGE FOR MORE ALAN GRATZ
BOOKS TO READ IF YOU ENJOYED *HERDES!***

**TO DISCOVER MORE ABOUT WWII
IN EUROPE, READ *ALLIES*.**

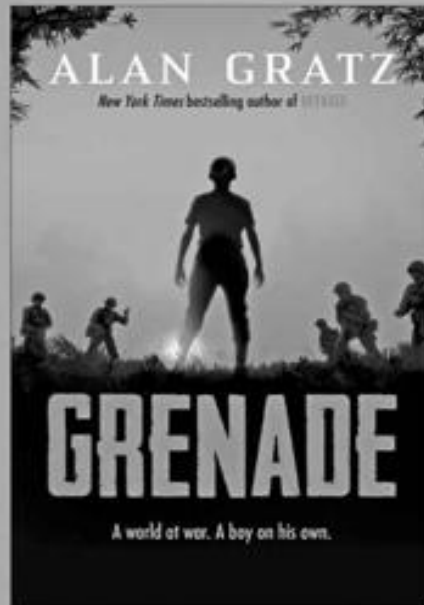


June 6, 1944: The Nazis are terrorizing Europe. The only way to stop them? The biggest, most top-secret operation ever, with the Allied nations coming together to storm Nazi-occupied France.

Welcome to D-Day.

But with betrayals and deadly risks at every turn, can the Allies do what it takes to win?

AND TO DISCOVER MORE ABOUT WWII IN
THE PACIFIC, READ *GRENADE*.

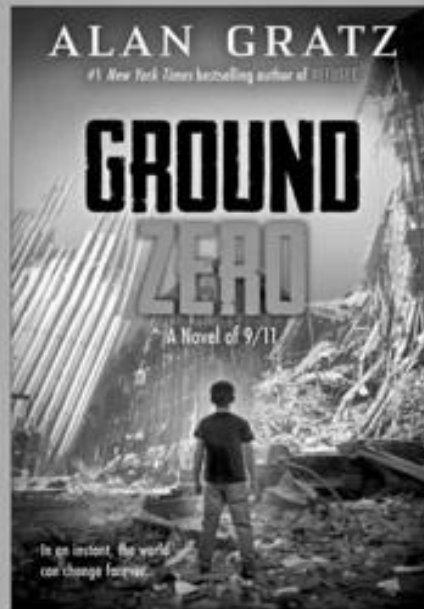


Hideki lives on the island of Okinawa, near Japan. When World War II crashes onto his shores, Hideki is drafted into the Blood and Iron Student Corps to fight for the Japanese army. He is handed a grenade and a set of instructions: Don't come back until you've killed an American soldier.

Ray, a young American Marine, has just landed on Okinawa. He doesn't know what to expect—or if he'll make it out alive.

When Hideki and Ray collide during the battle, the choices they make will change *everything*.

TO DISCOVER MORE ABOUT HOW THE US
HAS USED ITS SUPERPOWERS AFTER
WWII, READ *GROUND ZERO*.

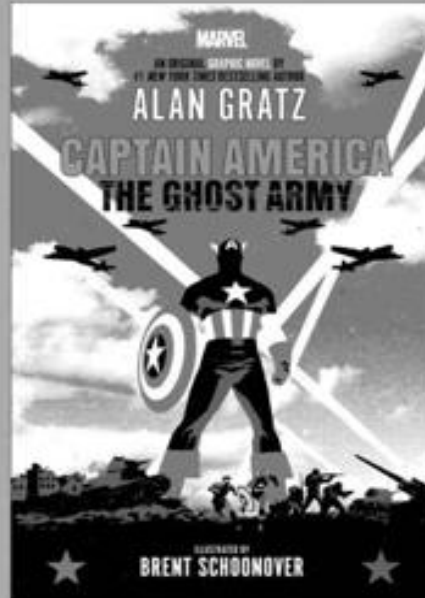


September 11, 2001, New York City: Brandon is visiting his dad at work, on the 107th floor of the World Trade Center. Out of nowhere, an airplane slams into the tower, creating a fiery nightmare of terror and confusion. And Brandon is in the middle of it all. Can he survive—and escape?

September 11, 2019, Afghanistan: Reshmina has grown up in the shadow of war, but she dreams of peace and progress. When a battle erupts in her village, Reshmina stumbles upon a wounded American soldier named Taz. Should she help Taz—and put herself and her family in mortal danger?

Two kids. One devastating day. Nothing will ever be the same.

**AND TO READ ABOUT A WWII SUPERHERO,
DON'T MISS *CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE GHOST ARMY*,
AN ORIGINAL GRAPHIC NOVEL!**



In this thrilling historical adventure set during World War II, Steve Rogers (aka Captain America) and his young sidekick, Bucky Barnes, encounter a threat like none they've ever seen—a Ghost Army. The dead of this war and wars past are coming back to life, impervious to bullets, flames, or anything else the Allies can throw at them.

How can Cap and Buck fight something that's already dead? And just what does the mysterious Baron Mordo—sitting in his castle atop nearby Wundagore Mountain—have to do with this?

**HEART-POUNGING ADVENTURE. HIGH-STAKES
DANGER. DON'T MISS THESE OTHER BOOKS FROM
BESTSELLING AUTHOR ALAN GRATZ!**



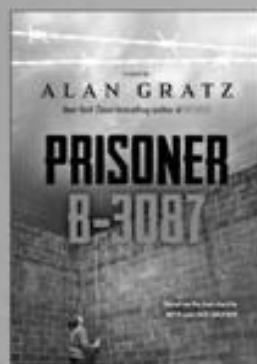
Three different kids. Three different time periods. One mission in common: escape.



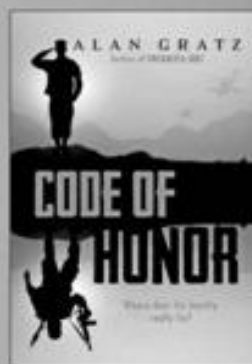
Fire. Ice. Flood. Three climate disasters. Four kids fighting for their lives.



In Nazi Germany, a boy joins the Hitler Youth . . . as a spy.



Ten concentration camps. It's something no one could imagine surviving. But it is what Yanek Gruener has to face. Based on an incredible true story.



With his life on the line, can Kamran clear his brother's name by unlocking a series of secret codes?

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