

**PETER
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Glory Girl

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*This is a novel blending fact and fiction.
My sincere thanks to Paul Davies
who introduced me to this remarkable story.*

PROLOGUE

1 9 3 2

The cable sent by Sarah was like an echo from the past: the first time I'd heard from her in eighteen months, and almost four years since our last meeting in the Barossa Valley in 1928. It was waiting when I reached the office in Fleet Street; a very brief message, and because of its lack of detail, disturbing.

IN BIG TROUBLE. CAN YOU HELP? was all it said.

There was a problem with that; there were, in fact, a number of problems. The origin of the cable placed her in Miami, Florida; I was in London and lacking an address, had no way to respond. I was also due to fly to Berlin to interview Adolf Hitler, the new political figure who'd stood for president in the German elections and had come a close second. The man once dismissed as a beer-hall orator was now reputedly mobilising his followers to help him overturn the vote. While few people in Britain took him seriously, our newspaper, along with politicians like Winston Churchill, believed this former house painter was a threat, and we kept a watch on his activities.

But the real problem with the cable was its brevity. All day the unexpected appeal for help lay on my desk, puzzling me. Big trouble? What trouble, I wondered. Even after so long, I decided it was somehow typical that Sarah had assumed a request for assistance would bring me running. But then I began to feel concerned, because when I thought about that objectively, it was not typical of her at all. She had never taken anything for granted, and had always been self-reliant.

By the following day I'd found out what the cryptic cable meant. The first inkling appeared on our teleprinter at the *Daily Express*, with an overnight report from Reuters of a murder in Florida. AMERICAN SLAIN. AVIATORS QUESTIONED. This was followed by a report on the BBC's midday news that two people were being interviewed, and while police had not yet released the names, it was known one was a British flier and the other an Australian.

'Both suspects,' the radio announcer said in his meticulously polished BBC accent, 'are described as being temporary residents in the United States.'

I spent most of that afternoon on the phone trying vainly to make a trans-Atlantic call to authorities in Miami. After frustrating hours coping with the many different telephone exchanges, as well as confusing reiteration and unrelenting static, I found it easier to send an urgent cable to the *New York Times*. The reply verified my fears, and the next morning the first report of the story was on our front page, and had soon spread to street placards and the other London dailies.

BRITISH WAR HERO AND COMPANION ARRESTED was the staid heading in *The Times*; another, bannered across the *Evening Standard* FLIER WHO BEAT AMELIA EARHART HELD IN MURDER QUIZ, far outsold other newspapers. Homeward-bound in the tube or suburban trains, readers were absorbed in the onset of a major scandal. It was all the more riveting because the participants were well known, their photographs instantly recognisable. Former heroes, but both, as Sarah's cable had said, now in big trouble. They were either detained or under arrest in Dade County, Florida, being interrogated by the Miami police, and there was nothing I could do except send a telegraph message, hoping it would reach her, saying I'd do my best to be there as soon as possible.

But for the rest of that week, unable to avoid the assignment, I

was in Berlin with a bunch of other European foreign correspondents, interviewing and trying to conceal my dislike of Herr Hitler. His evasive eyes and threatening references to the insidious influence of Jews and gypsies, an underclass to be dealt with, made me hope he'd never achieve power. But everywhere in the city I kept seeing his face on huge posters, and the streets were packed with his squads of brownshirts and party members with their alarming swastika armbands.

It was a relief to return to London; an even greater one to be on a De Havilland flight to New York, with fuelling stops in Ireland and Newfoundland. There were just four passengers and almost as many crew, consisting of a pilot, co-pilot and a duty nurse. Despite the amount of travelling I did in my job, this was my first Atlantic crossing, a prolonged journey reaching America forty-eight hours later with a bumpy landing on a grassy runway at Roosevelt Field, Long Island.

Early the next day I joined a bunch of holidaying sun-seekers at Brooklyn Bay, where we boarded a floatplane for the thousand-mile flight south to Florida.