

Family Lore and Believability in Historical Fiction

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For G-ma, who lived the story.

Abstract

This thesis began with a story of family lore about life at the Manhattan Project plant site at Oak Ridge, Tennessee. The artist's statement tells the story of lore passed down from grandmother to granddaughter during a road trip. As the family lore was written down on the page, the question of how to write believable historical fiction arose. Limitations in the research showed gaps in the narrative that the author needed to fill in. The critical theory paper evaluates how those research gaps can be used as opportunities for the craft of writing to bring this family story to life. Finally, the application of the research and family lore meet in the creative manuscript, *Oak Ridge*.

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Artist Statement

INTRODUCTION TO THE MANUSCRIPT

Oak Ridge is a World War II Historical Fiction novel based on the family lore of my great-grandfather. It follows the main character, Dawn Denton, who is a fictitious representation of my grandmother. Dawn's stubbornness to accept the news that her father is guilty of treason leads her to discover a greater spy plot to retrieve the plans to purify the ingredients of the deadly atomic bomb. She wrestles to establish her own identity in society, and she will learn that she needs the help of her community of friends to accomplish her goal to clear her father's name.

While this manuscript is based on the family stories of my great-grandfather, it most certainly leaves that tale as soon as Dawn leaves her hometown of Butler, Pennsylvania, for Oak Ridge. The rest of the story is based on my research and the tales of those individuals who called Oak Ridge, Tennessee, home during the years of its material production. *Oak Ridge* represents an accumulation of what-if questions that popped to the surface while listening to my great-grandfather's story, and I couldn't help but put them onto the page to see what would happen if my great-grandfather had been involved somehow in this secretive plot. While his connection to spies or treason of any kind is a complete creation of fiction, I hope to introduce a novel into the vast World War II historical fiction market that gives the perspective of life within the Manhattan Project's lesser-discussed plant.

PROCESS FOR THE WORK

The process for my work began on a road trip to visit my grandmother's hometown of Butler, Pennsylvania. Along the ride, my grandmother casually mentioned that her father worked at Oak Ridge. I assumed this was another one of the steel factories that supported many of the residents of Butler. However, she informed me it was actually "some government thing."

She didn't often talk about my great-grandfather because he died when she was young, which brought a lot of difficult circumstances into her childhood. Her nonchalance about a government operation piqued my interest and that night as we stayed on the outskirts of Butler, Pennsylvania, I typed my first Google inquiry into Oak Ridge, Tennessee. The second Google entry took me to the Manhattan Project's National Park Service page and described the formation of a processing facility for the raw materials needed to make the atomic bomb. The materials created at Oak Ridge were transferred to the Los Alamos facility where they were used in the testing and creation of the atomic bomb. While I had heard of Los Alamos, and even toured a museum in New Mexico while visiting years before my trip to Butler, Pennsylvania, I had never heard of Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

Oak Ridge was one of the raw material processing plants used during the Manhattan Project. According to the Manhattan Project National Historic Park article, "Manhattan Project Science at Oak Ridge," the plants created on site were used for "the development of enriched uranium for atomic weapons" ("Manhattan Project Science"). While there were many workers across the various plants, because of the strict secrecy rules of Oak Ridge no one spoke about what their job actually was. The National Park Service article titled, "Manhattan Project Science at Oak Ridge" explains the electromagnetic isotope separation plant known as Y-12 on the Oak Ridge site. The Y-12 Plant used a "mass spectrometer cyclotron, or calutron" ("Manhattan Project Science at Oak Ridge") to separate the uranium isotopes that were used in the construction of the atomic bomb, Little Boy. The explosion of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima, Japan, finally released many workers to communicate what they had known all along: they were part of the process that created the atomic bomb.

When I brought up the plant and the process for purifying materials of the atomic bomb the next day to my grandma on our walk through Butler, she confirmed that was the plant he worked for. She told me my great-grandfather worked as a chemist at the plant. A million questions filtered to the surface, and I wanted to know what the process was, how he was hired, what life was like at Oak Ridge, and whether he felt responsible for all the activities of the plant. She got quiet and told me that she never heard the whole story.

When my grandfather lived at Oak Ridge, he disappeared from the U.S. census records posted on our family's genealogy tree on Ancestry.com. He returned home to Butler in 1944. With his return home, he reappeared on the U.S. census records. Before his return to Butler, he had a lobotomy. He would never have the mental capacity to speak about his work at Oak Ridge. My grandmother said he died not long after returning home from complications with the surgery. Our family was never told why he had to undergo such a procedure before returning home.

After learning about his story from my grandmother, I became fascinated with the history of this processing plant tucked into the hills of Tennessee. Not only did Oak Ridge represent a sort of social experiment to create a plant in the hillside and then populate it with workers who were not privy to what they were actually creating, but I felt it held the secrets to my own grandmother's painful childhood after her father's death.

After returning home from our trip together, I found Denise Kiernan's novel, *The Girls of Atomic City*. I absorbed the pages hoping to catch a glimpse of my great-grandfather in the pictures posted in the center of her book. No pictures of my family, nor mentions of his name are in the book. But, reading the account of five women who worked at different parts of the plant provided me with a structure that would become Dawn's own entrance into Oak Ridge. Kiernan's account of a secretary and her urgent memos of cryptic scientific facts became the

basis for Dawn's position as a secretary at Oak Ridge. The camaraderie that Kiernan acknowledges between the women who lived within this unintended social experiment provided the impetus for Dawn's own foray into friendship and trust that she develops to reach her goals. It is Kiernan's research and tales from Oak Ridge that help create the historical background in which I placed my fictional characters. I pulled details from her novel to create the layout and to know the details of particular jobs at Oak Ridge; however, the responses, feelings, and characters are all fictionalized in my manuscript. While I didn't find the specific answers to my family's history or any answers to relieve the pain, I saw my grandma's experience recounting the story nearly sixty-five years later, reading this first true account fueled the creation of my manuscript.

As I researched the plant further on my own, I learned that Oak Ridge was infiltrated by a Russian spy, George Koval, who successfully stole the chemical purification process from the plant ("George Koval"). This unexpected connection to Russia years before the Cold War left me wondering what other secrets were hidden in the history of these hills. This historical figure of Koval was the inspiration behind Elizabeth's infiltration into a spy ring. There is no historical tie between Koval and any known American women of Butler, Pennsylvania, but once again his life brought the initial interest of what would happen if that spy had become entangled with an American family.

The beginning of writing this manuscript brought a pause to more historical research and a turn toward the narrative elements that make a page-turning historical fiction novel, but the backbone of this process began in a rental car on the road between Landsdale, Pennsylvania, and this story's true beginning, Butler, Pennsylvania.

VISION FOR THE WORK

The vision for *Oak Ridge* begins with the historical aim to give a voice to the many men and women who worked at Oak Ridge. Their stories seem lost amidst bigger tales during the World War II time period, but their impact on the history of the atomic bomb is undeniable. However, my vision runs deeper than just a historical narrative. I also want to address the issues of identity for women during World War II. Dawn represents the women during this time who balked against some of the cultural norms and expectations of women. World War II offered women a place in the workforce, but the expectation after the war was for women to return to the domestic sphere. Dawn represents a voice that demands attention outside of the domestic sphere. Her passion to make a difference in society represents the strength of character needed to question expected status quos.

Through Dawn's story, I also want to reflect on the importance of community. Dawn is an independent and vivacious character, but I want to show how we can't always just pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. We all need community. Dawn's reluctant acceptance of community portrays the challenges and risks of opening up to a community. But, the positive outcome of her community's help in reaching her goals inspires readers to look at who is in our support system. Like Dawn, we might be surprised to find loyalty and friendship in unexpected places.

Even the antagonist in my manuscript will have room for growth. I have often found flat antagonists in historical fiction who are purely motivated by hatred or greed, but in my Holocaust Educator studies through Facing History and Ourselves, I have learned about various roles that people played during the time of the Holocaust and how these were not the same of their core identity. Considering this, I want to give voice to the complexities of another woman's role during this time, Dawn's mother Elizabeth. Dawn represents the allure, purity, and invincibility of youth, and I want to contrast that with Elizabeth's quieter strength reflecting her

age and disillusionment with her choices. By interspersing chapters from Elizabeth's point of view I want to present her as a round character who faced choices along her path to goodness and the slippery slope that led to her sharing her husband's secrets. I think it's important to present her flaws as a character, but also show her personal reflection on the choices she made for her family's survival. I want the reader to develop the same empathy for Elizabeth that Dawn develops over the course of the novel, and to be able to connect to her imperfections in the decisions she makes. I often learn from the mistakes of a character in a book, and I envision this same learning opportunity for readers as they learn more about the lives of both Dawn and Elizabeth.

Personally, writing about this novel is a means to process a long history of silence about these events from my grandmother. I was twenty-six before my grandmother shared a few details of her story and the story of her father. As I read about the silence about their professions that was required of the citizens of Oak Ridge, it felt familiar. Government security was the reason behind protecting the secrets of the plant in Tennessee, but what was the reason for the silence held so long by my own family? In the process of answering these questions about my own family, my grandmother was diagnosed with dementia. Her memories were becoming skewed perceptions that were often frustrating to articulate or correct in our conversations. When she became non-ambulatory, I sat next to her bed while we would listen to audiobooks. She loved stories and would often recommend my next favorite novel. Now it was my turn to reciprocate with audiobook downloads that I thought might distract her from her discomfort even for an hour. While we had discussed and connected over so many stories, we never returned to the one that ate away at her own contentment. It seems she held the secrets of her father's work and his death as a shameful moment of her past. Knowing those secrets were kept locked inside her

brought me to the page. The last months of her life, I wrote out a fast and sloppy copy of what is evolving to become *Oak Ridge*. My vision to write this manuscript was a way to entangle my life with the secrets she kept locked away. It was my way to have a tie to a foundation of who she was after she was gone. Revision and research have brought other dimensions, such as Koval's infiltration at Oak Ridge and Calutron Girls in the Y-12 plant, that I had not initially written in my first iteration. While they deepen the historical relevance of the work, I still connect the ties of my grandmother to the initial vision of this work.

LITERARY CONTEXT FOR THE WORK

World War II is a popular historical fiction frame filled with tantalizing titles that span perspectives across Europe and the United States during that time period. However, there is a hole within that literature as far as the Manhattan Project. There are texts like Kiernan's *The Girls of Atomic City* that share real-life stories from women who experienced Oak Ridge firsthand. However, I have not yet found a historical fiction text that places its characters in the setting of Oak Ridge. This gap leaves the perfect market for my manuscript, *Oak Ridge*, to enter the potentially cramped stage of World War II historical fiction.

Despite the content gap in the fiction world, there are valuable elements within the historical fiction genre that will help place *Oak Ridge* with other popular titles of its genre. Goodreads tracks real readers' reviews of novels offering a snapshot of current readers' preferences and trends for a particular genre. The top three World War II historical fiction, according to Goodreads ("Best WWII Historical Fiction"), are, *The Nightingale*, *All the Light We Cannot See*, and *The Book Thief*. Each one of these novels contain elements that helped me place *Oak Ridge* within the literary context of current historical fiction. Using the Goodreads lists as

my historical fiction context also provides the reader interest that can help in my craft analysis of what makes these the top historical fiction picks for readers.

The number one readers' pick for WWII Historical Fiction on Goodreads is *The Nightingale* by Kristin Hannah. This novel reflects World War II from a woman's perspective and shows what life was like to be left behind when the men went to the front. The characterization that Hannah is able to display draws the reader into the story of difficult life circumstances. Hannah's ability to portray character choices and family dynamics add believability for me to engage with the motives behind each of the characters' actions. In my manuscript, my two main characters are also women. Likewise, Dawn and Elizabeth are left behind when Earl is murdered. Hannah shows the courage of women in her novel with their participation with spy rings just as *Oak Ridge* will show Dawn's courage to face the obstacles at Oak Ridge and eventually to turn in the spy ring that cast blame on her father.

Where Hannah is able to articulate characters that connect to the reader, the second Goodreads readers' pick articulates his settings with exquisite word pictures. *All the Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr is also written from a dual perspective point of view. Doerr shows how people care for one another during difficult circumstances, and his novel begins to look at the motivations of his characters to maintain goodness. But, it is not Doerr's characterization that really sings. His fluid descriptions of the settings leave the reader with a visual experience on the page. In my manuscript, I want to present the motivations for how a good intention went wrong by showing Elizabeth's story and the consequences of her decision to share Earl's secrets. But Doerr's work reminds me of the importance of establishing a setting for the reader to fully experience what life was like at Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

The third novel on the Goodreads Best WWII Historical Fiction list is *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak. Where Doerr's work brings life to the page through setting, Zusak presents Nazi Germany from the perspective of death as the narrator. Death tells the story of Liesel, a book thief who attempts to rescue books from the malicious Nazi book burnings. While initially written for adult audiences, this book has additionally captured the attention and interests of young adult readers perhaps because of this creative narration. This interesting hook inspired me to provide a mysterious element to *Oak Ridge* as well. Beginning the novel with Earl's suspicious death gives the reader something to root for with Dawn's quest. I also use Earl's death as an element of suspicion as the reader hears from Elizabeth's perspective in selected chapters throughout the manuscript just as Zusak keeps the reader guessing how his narrator is connected to Liesel's story. While my third-person narration will not be along the same creative lines as Zusak's, his work reminds me of the need for readers to have a connection to engage with the plot of the story through the narrator.

Overall, the base of literary fiction is vast for World War II historical fiction. There are many titles that tell stories of justice and identity in a time of war. With an eye at particular reader favorites through the Goodreads list "Best WWII Historical Fiction"), *Oak Ridge* utilizes the elements of characterization, setting, and narration that can connect with readers while also providing a historical background for possible further personal investigation about the plants at Oak Ridge and the Manhattan Project in general.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TOPIC AS A CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR

The significance of this manuscript to me as a Christian scholar comes from the themes of identity and justice. In Micah 6:8 it says, "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with

your God.” I want to see this verse articulated in the characters in this manuscript. Specifically, Dawn’s passion for justice for her father will demonstrate what it looks like to do justice. She ventures to Oak Ridge to clear his name at great risk to herself. Along that journey, she learns the values of kindness within the developing community in her dorm apartment. Dawn comes to accept humility in her reliance on that community around her when she is fired and realizes that she cannot accomplish her goal to clear her father’s name on her own. In her journey at Oak Ridge, Dawn lives out Micah 6:8 with some stumbles and trials along the way. While *Oak Ridge* is not considered Christian fiction, the basis of these qualities of justice, kindness, and humility are the essential components that transform Dawn’s character over the course of the novel. They shape her development into the woman she is becoming. This verse and these traits have personally been a life verse for me. Like Dawn, I have struggled to surrender to their transformational potential, but I am grateful for the continued compassion of God as I learn how to live each of these out through His strength, not my own force.

In addition to justice, the topic of identity is a personally significant topic that arises in *Oak Ridge*. I have wrestled with identity and fully seeing my identity in Christ before other earthly containers. It is easy to identify as a teacher, wife, gardener, or reader. These are categories that are always relatable in the world with expressions of success that can be seen by others. Dawn’s own wrestling with her identity in the midst of her cultural expectations mirrors a lot of my own struggle to fit into Christian culture and coming to terms with what that means for me as a woman as well. The final decision to have Dawn step back at the end of this novel and seek greater justice while letting her father’s case go unquestioned reflects my own stepping back from more success-oriented identities. Dawn’s own choice is in some ways my reflection that our life choices and work is for God alone, not for the praise of others. While Dawn does not

specifically ever mention that her choice is made to honor God over her own desires, the root of her decision shows this stepping away from the need for an identity that is favorable or praise-worthy from the outside world. I want this intention to reflect my own stepping away from cultural expectations and stepping toward a life that is honoring and pleasing to God before any other label. Therefore, *Oak Ridge* reflects the deepest motivations of my heart as a believer in Christ to work for God alone and reflect His qualities of justice, kindness, and humility.

Establishing Believability in Historical Fiction

Reading fiction can offer an escape and an adventure into a new world. Historical fiction faces additional challenges for the writer to imagine events and characters that reflect the reality of a setting and characters present in their time period. Historical accuracy is a standard to evaluate the quality of a piece of historical fiction, but is accuracy or authenticity enough of a container to critique the skills of establishing historical believability in the midst of fictional craft? The challenge of combining the facts of history with the creative craft of a writer establishes an expectation of ethical responsibility to establish the reader in the time period through setting, character, and plot. Rather than relying on historical accuracy as the credential of quality historical fiction, the genre should be evaluated based on an author's ability to establish believability.

SETTING BELIEVABILITY

Believability is created by establishing a historically accurate setting inspired by real-life locations. Anthony Doerr's novel *All the Light We Cannot See* is placed in multiple settings across Europe, and it is the setting that initially gave him the idea for his novel. It was the Penn Station underground train that initiated Doerr's interest in the problem of communication underground ("Anthony Doerr on All The Light We Cannot See"). He saw a frustrated gentleman who could no longer use his cell phone to communicate, and this spurred Doerr's intrigue in creating situations where communication is both a connecting force and a limitation in his novel. In addition to his underground communication experience, Doerr's visit to Saint Malo places him within a historical town that was bombed by U.S. forces during World War II. These two details, communication and location, converged to create not only the setting of Doerr's novel but the problems and the driving force within *All the Light We Cannot See*. Doerr's short

and poignant chapter, “Leaflets,” reveals this convergence of problem and setting that establishes the context of his novel for readers. Speaking of leaflets, he writes, “At dusk, they pour from the sky. They blow across the ramparts, turn cartwheels over rooftops, flutter into the ravines between houses. Entire streets swirl with them, flashing white against the cobbles. *Urgent message to the inhabitants of this town, they say. Depart immediately to open country*” (Doerr 5). Doerr’s visit to Saint Malo gave him the outline and the frame for the houses, the ravines, and the cobblestones of this passage. It was a known historical event to include the bomb messages. These details establish the context of historical fiction and allow the reader to gain a context to enter the time period.

What Doerr created is a fictionalized world of characters placed within the confines of a realistic setting. Giving a setting that establishes the reader in the time period is a challenge for the historical fiction author. The evaluation of the success of historical fiction often relies on words like accuracy or authenticity to define how well an author is able to accomplish this task, but are these the only terms of consideration for historical fiction? Saxton, a researcher and lecturer at Australian Catholic University, identifies in her article titled, “A True Story: Defining Accuracy and Authenticity in Historical Fiction,” that, “it is impossible to measure the accuracy of every aspect of a text’s depiction of the past. The cumulative effect of seemingly accurate details is thus a sense of realism and, in turn, believability” (par. 6), so it is not just the accuracy of the facts in a narrative that matter, but rather the culmination of these facts with the author’s craft that creates the believability of a historical fiction text. It is this combination that Doerr is able to create, as an author, by combining a real town with the imagination of what it must have looked like to see bombing leaflets spread through the town that leads the reader to the believability of his novel.

However, there are times when the answers to questions of the setting are not available no matter how extensive the research. Bryony Stocker, Creative Writing Ph.D and a historical fiction author herself, evaluates the question of truth in researching historical fiction. In her article, “Don’t Lie: A Methodology for Historical Fiction?,” she offers the suggestion that, “a gap in the records can result in a sense of a lack in the story which could ultimately be passed from the writer to the reader, so it is the writer's job to fill in any such breaks that might be noticeable within the narrative” (par. 24). This gap that Stocker references is exactly what Doerr does for the reader in *All the Light We Cannot See*. There was not a primary source for Doerr that described a young boy’s account of being trapped in a bombed-out building with his radio as his only form of communication. However, this gap in his research is surrounded by the opportunity Stocker references. Doerr could fill in this narrative while maintaining details of the physical location of his setting thus keeping the believability of the story intact. In one scene, Doerr takes the blind main character Marie and surrounds her with the sounds of the city. He writes, “She feels the great granite fist, sunk deep into the earth’s crust, on which Saint-Malo sits, and the ocean teething at it from all four sides, and the outer islands holding steady against the swirling tides” (391). Doerr notes no sound recording or primary source that provided the details for Marie’s experience here. It was the gap in his research that gave his enigmatic writing style the flexibility to imagine. Doerr represents the responsibility of the historical fiction writer to provide a believable background to place the character to establish the reader’s trust, but he includes his own creative interpretation of that setting. This conjunction between creativity and fact supports Saxton’s argument that, “neither accuracy nor authenticity relate to the translation of absolute truth onto the page” (par. 33). As Doerr demonstrated, it is the conjunction and the

combination of the elements of truth with the writer's craft of filling in the gaps that keep the reader invested and believing the story being told.

This juncture is also considered in my creative work set primarily in the plants of Oak Ridge, Tennessee. I began with reading about life at Oak Ridge through texts like Denise Kiernan's, *The Girls of Atomic City*. Kiernan gives five previously untold accounts from women who worked in various positions at Oak Ridge. It is Kiernan's recollection that shows not only the conditions of living at this newly created plant but the reactions of the women who called Oak Ridge home. One woman in Kiernan's text recalls, "Many of the construction workers were living in one-room hutments, each with three other men. And where were the sidewalks and proper streets? Colleen stared in disbelief as she watched women in dresses walk barefoot through the gunk that covered everything within sight, their shoes hoisted high over their heads" (Kiernan 13). This description shows the setting as it existed at the origination of Oak Ridge's plants and provides the historical framework to place the characters of my creative piece. While Kiernan's work offers five different perspectives on the physical location and experience of Oak Ridge, there are many gaps in the story because of the secrecy of the site. A sign at Oak Ridge warned workers of the responsibility of their secrecy stating, "What you see here, what you do here, what you hear here, when you leave here, let it stay here" ("Manhattan Project Science at Oak Ridge"). This sign set up the expectation that this location was made for secrets and left many stories untold. However, these gaps are where the creative influence can inject the craft of fiction to create the believability of this time period.

ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF CHARACTERIZATION IN HISTORICAL FICTION

This juncture between the writer's craft and historical fact must be navigated with extra attention to characters as they represent the lives of people who lived through the experiences

and in the places that create the setting of historical fiction. Specifically, the main character guides the reader through the story, and it is the reader's connection to the main character that can create powerful responses to events that happen to them. Historical fiction once again has the added complexity of representing real people.

Character becomes more complex to assess because it digs beneath the mere appearance and details of dress or home. Characterization delves into motives that can be misunderstood by inaccurate firsthand accounts in journals or even absent at all. The gap that Stocker mentions that provides space for the writer's craft exists in characterization, but there is an additional responsibility for the author in filling those gaps with creative details to maintain believability without incurring second-hand trauma for readers and without misrepresenting the real lives of those involved.

Looking at historical fiction examples of characterization provides a few clues to the ethical obligations of characterization in this genre. Kristin Hannah, a historical fiction author, has risen in popularity despite the challenging historical settings and problems she places her characters within. Could it perhaps be the connection the reader feels established in her strong characterization that encourages the reader to enter the spaces she creates, no matter the struggle ahead? For example, in Hannah's novel *The Nightingale*, the two main characters are sisters. They are fictionalized women that Hannah based on "a young Belgian woman who had created an escape route out of Nazi-occupied France...Her story—one of heroism and danger and unbridled courage—inspired me to imagine the women in that world" ("The Nightingale"). This inspiration once again shows the power of filling in the gap. The impetus for Hannah's writing came from the historical existence of a woman of great courage, and it is that same courage that radiates in two very different lives of the characters in her novel. However, that theme is not

reflected in the single details of only one woman's story. Hannah used the facts to influence her characters, just as believability is maintained by the culmination of facts and craft together.

Saxton argues that, "in taking the viewpoint of an historic individual, for instance, historical fictions must imagine that person's thoughts, motives, emotions, and the minutiae of their lives. The truth of such details is often lost from the historical record and thus we are unable to assess whether the writer's interpretation is accurate" (par. 6). Once again historical accuracy is not able to fully define a successful historical fiction character. Hannah presented readers with an example of this in her novel with two women who demonstrate the courage of a broader category of women in the world of Nazi-occupied territories. The details of the historical record gave her a starting point, and she filled in those details with believable craft.

While characters can reflect a broad category or even a conglomerate of individual stories strung together into the life of a single individual, there is the ethical concern for how those characters might influence readers. Laura Saxton explores the intersection of biography and historical fiction with her research. Saxton explains in her article, "A True Story: Defining Accuracy and Authenticity in Historical Fiction," that, "there is an inherent tension between representation and truth in historical fiction and we must consider how the explicitly fictional context impacts the representation of the past in these texts, just as we have considered how historian's craft representations in their nonfiction narratives" (par. 31). Here is where the craft of the historical fiction author deviates from the craft of other fictional genres. Saxton explains that authors must consider the impact of the representation of these facts and characters just as a historian must consider bias in their perspective of how they explain an ethical concern. Merely establishing a historical background is not enough with historical fiction. The characters represented must also be believable. What are the rights of that character at the time? How might

the presentation of that character influence a reader's understanding of that time period? Kristin Hannah evaluates these questions for a character and a greater people group in the fictional character Ari in her novel, *The Nightingale*. Ari's mother asks her friend, Vianne, to hide him when Jews were taken from their city to a concentration camp. At the end of the war, Vianne is faced with a heartbreaking situation of giving Ari to a family who will raise him in the context of his Jewish tradition. While Vianne loves and cares for Ari's physical needs throughout the course of the war, Hannah has considered even the religious needs and ramifications for characters placed in the time period contexts of her novel. Phillippe, Ari's relative in the novel, explains to Vianne and also to us as readers what the experience of rebuilding was like post World War II for Jewish families:

‘You look at the heartbreak of one boy. I am here because of the heartbreak of my people. You understand?’ His face sagged, his mouth curved into a small frown. ‘Millions of Jews were killed in this war, Madame, *Millions*.’ He let that sink in. ‘An entire generation is gone. We need to band together now, those few of us who are left, we need to rebuild. One boy with no memory of who he was may seem a small thing to lose, but to us, he is the future. We cannot let you raise him in a religion that is not yours and take him to synagogue when you remember. Ari needs to be who he is, and to be with his people’ (Hannah 533).

The character Phillippe speaks of the pain and trauma of an entire generation in his plea to Vianne to raise Ari. The reader mourns the loss for Vianne, for Ari, for Phillippe, and also for the millions of Jews that experienced this same heartbreak. The risk for authors of historical fiction is

potentially villainizing or heroizing a character, and potentially an entire people group, that isn't historically accurate. Hannah navigated this challenge in *The Nightingale* by relying on the creativity of the craft of creating a compelling narrative where the reader wrestles with the choices facing Vianne in raising Ari. These fictional characters stay true to the historical impetus of courage that Hannah was inspired by when writing her novel. There is no specific transcript that inspired this conversation, but the believability for the reader is maintained when history is handled with an eye for potential biases when researching the facts.

Occasionally, the facts of a novel become emotionally traumatizing for the reader. For example, after reading several historical fiction novels where the main characters struggled with food rations and a lack of supplies, I experienced a general pallor when I visited the grocery store. How can we explain this need for so much excess? There was a "book hangover," a moment where the work of fiction impacted me as the reader leaving me changed because of the characters, setting, and plot of a novel. My "book hangover" was connected to the deeper ethical dilemmas that are present in many historical fiction novels and time periods represented. Essentially, my brain has received the traumas present in the text and was attempting to process them through the context of my current world. I have not had to endure any trauma connected to rationing or food stamps; however, my connection with the character brought this trauma into my own experience. This possibility of secondary trauma, trauma not experienced firsthand, is not a reason to avoid teaching specific events or time periods. In fact, the proper handling of the trauma of that time period could help readers form empathy to prevent such atrocities from occurring again. The challenge for the historical fiction author remains to develop the craft tools to help readers process events they witness in literature as well as give writers the tools to maintain ethical responsibility for managing these events with integrity and respect.

The writer Dominick LaCapra has worked to answer the questions of ethical responsibility when managing trauma and history. Debarti Senyal reviews LaCapra's writings explaining that, "rather than seeking a compromise between 'writing history' and 'writing trauma,' LaCapra rethinks these terms in order to envision a hybrid historical practice attuned to the affective, literary and experiential dimensions of history" (par. 1). LaCapra, though not speaking directly to historical fiction writers, shows a connection between writing history and writing trauma. Therefore, when writing about traumatic events, there is a possibility of translating that historical trauma to the reader. One way traumatic events can cause secondary trauma is because of the reader's identification with the main character. Great novels provide readers with a main character they can connect to. We root for the underdog and we desire the fall of the evil antagonist. The risk is when identification with the main character brings about secondary trauma to the reader.

LaCapra's solution to this potential trauma is writing in the middle voice (Sanyal). The middle voice is a distancing agent to separate the main character and the reader. "To counteract this excessive identification with trauma and victimization, LaCapra proposes the "middle voice,' whose 'modulations of proximity and distance, empathy and irony with respect to different objects of identification' would communicate trauma's troubling effective charge while maintaining the distinction between victims and proxy-witnesses" (par. 5). The middle voice is writing where the subject both performs and receives the action of the sentence and according to LaCapra, this helps to distance the reader from the main character connection. Neither Hannah nor Doerr wrote their powerful novels through this type of narration. Doerr's novel in third-person presented the narration from multiple character perspectives. An older Vianne was the narrator of *The Nightingale* in the introduction and at the conclusion of the novel, written in

first-person to connect the reader closely and deeply to the main character. However, in the midst of the novel's most traumatic events and decisions, the narration changed to the third-person. Perhaps there is a connection here between LaCapra's suggestion of the power of voice and the distance created by a third-person narrator. The proximity of a first-person narrator could intensify the possibility of a secondhand trauma response. Third-person narration may establish an important distinction between maintaining empathy for the victim and identifying with the victim. Sanyal describes this distinction by explaining how "LaCapra further proffers the concept of "empathic unsettlement," an affective response he considers most appropriate to the reception of another's traumatic past ... which recognizes the affective impact of another's traumatic history, yet respects its irreducible specificity, and thus avoids conflating empathy with identification" (par. 5). The creation of empathy in response to a traumatic history does not, therefore, need to rely on identification with the main character, but it can be established even with the distancing of a third-person narrator.

Looking at Hannah's novel, *The Nightingale*, both main characters represented the courageous women of World War II, but there were also the traumatic events that occurred to those women because of their historical context. This empathic unsettlement that LaCapra describes returns to Hannah's main purpose for writing the novel. Hannah wanted to evaluate the expression of love in the context of war ("The Nightingale"). Vianne, the novel's narrator, questions the existence of love after the events she has seen, just as the reader might question goodness after reading about the horrors of history. The third-person narration explains Vianne's revelation at the end of the novel saying, "Love. It was the beginning and the end of everything, the foundation, and the ceiling and the air in between. It didn't matter that she was broken and ugly and sick. He loved her and she loved him. All her life she had waited - longed for - people

to love her, but now she saw what really mattered. She had known love, been blessed by it” (Hannah 551). This response shows a response to the trauma of history. Hannah combines writing history and writing trauma that LaCapra connects. By using a third-person narrator, readers are still left with enough distance to establish an empathic unsettlement that might lead to their own considerations of the events portrayed. At the end of *The Nightingale*, readers are left with the unsettled reality of the difficult decisions that the characters make and the courage demonstrated by the women, but the distance established in using a third-person narrator creates the space for the empathic unsettlement that LaCapra explains. Here is the culmination of creating believability in characterization. Hannah connects the research of real women who made difficult decisions about life and love and family in the midst of World War II with the fictional craft to fill in the research gap to see their possible motivations for life and love in the midst of war. Hannah shows that writing believable characters is not merely an evaluation of what is historically accurate, but that believability is what creates an empathic unsettlement that allows the reader to explore their own thoughts about those events.

In writing my own manuscript, the main character is participating in events that have not historically happened. The setting and context of these events make them possible, but the creative gap has given me room as the writer to establish a character’s story that brings the tales of the many workers of Oak Ridge’s plants. Placing women at Oak Ridge was itself a unique experience. The Manhattan Project National Historical Park website offers this description of women joining the facility:

“While the facility at Berkeley had only been operated by scientists, a wartime labor shortage meant that young women, many of whom had just graduated high school, were assigned the

task of operating the calutrons, mass spectrometers used to separate particles of uranium, at Oak Ridge, Tennessee. These women, who earned the nickname “Calutron Girls”, were vital to the development of enriched uranium, a key component of the Little Boy atomic bomb” (“Manhattan Project Science at Oak Ridge”).

Because of the rules about silence at Oak Ridge, these women became part of an unintended psychological experiment of creating a new working town and placing so many workers within its walls. What unintended traumas must have evolved from the restriction to never speak of the work you’re responsible for? The importance of work in defining our identity was removed from these women. That role of identity as a woman and as an employee are both concepts that I want to give voice to in my creative piece. I want to engage the reader in their own questions of identity. How do they fit into the world in the context they are placed in? By presenting Dawn’s story, I hope to give voice and justice to the voices at Oak Ridge that couldn’t tell their stories. Crafting a narrative to give voice to the historical figures of Oak Ridge must combine historical evidence presented from biographies like Kiernan’s text and research presented from the National Historic Park resources with the craft of writing the feelings and motivations of those characters to help establish characterization believability.

In creating a basis for the main character’s story in my creative work, I returned again to Denise Keirnan’s work, *The Girls of Atomic City*, which told the real-life account of women at Oak Ridge. However, the potential fallibility of those accounts should be acknowledged. Michael Bernard-Donals, a professor of rhetoric and culture with a specific focus on Jewish rhetoric, at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, considers the challenge of researching historical traumas.

He explains that, “testimonial narratives do not disclose history; instead they disclose--where the narrative most clearly shows its seams--the effect of events upon witnesses” (Bernard-Donals par. 40). Therefore, even a primary source doesn’t guarantee historical accuracy. Once again, the historical fiction novelist is faced with the dilemma of accuracy. Accuracy continues to fall short of the requirements of the craft because in reading primary sources, such as testimonial narratives, according to Bernard-Donals, the author is conveying the effect of events more than the veracity of the actual event. Furthermore, “Each encounter with the memory of the event repeats the initial trauma, but by other means--narrative means--that are constantly interrupted by a "gap" of both memory and of experience” (Bernard-Donals par. 40). The previous gap discussed by Stocker leaves a unique opening for the historical fiction author to fill in the historical holes of the setting, the context of the novel. However, here Bernard-Donals establishes a gap that the author must fill from evaluating the memory and experience in comparison to the events of history. Narrative biases must be considered before potentially creating a character that will break the believability of the narrative. This same bias had to be considered in my own work as the basis of this story came from family narratives which left large and emotional gaps that were filled with more potentially fallible first-hand accounts from Kiernan’s novel. Returning to the historical setting and including the cultural norms for women at the time helped me evaluate the possible gaps in Kiernan’s accounts as well as my own familiar accounts.

HANDLING HISTORICAL PLOT STRUCTURES

A return to cultural norms also calls for a return to the timeline of historical events. These events come together for a third craft element of historical fiction, the plot. The plot of the historical fiction novel returns to similar questions posed by the setting. Is the plot historically

accurate? The historical fiction writer faces the challenge of balancing the events of history with the narrative elements of craft. The events of history are clearer to evaluate than the motivations of a character. They can easily be placed on a chronological timeline and evaluated for their veracity. How then, does an author take those elements and place them within the creative craft of fictional pacing and suspense? Does it maintain ethical considerations for a historical fiction novel to deviate from that truth? Again the measure of accuracy alone will fall short for a historical fiction novel. One suggested solution comes from the field of education. Theorists use the term playframe “to describe how small children safely process the interactions with and knowledge of the world around them” (Addey par. 61). If we apply this same term to literary writing, a playframe might encourage authors to address difficult historical events in a manner that allows readers to process them without risk of secondary trauma. Perhaps establishing a playframe as a model to write a historical fiction story might just help authors to bridge the hard edge of facts with the softer tools of fictional craft.

Hilary Mantel, a historical fiction writer, addresses these concerns in her BBC podcast series, “The Reith Lectures.” She argues that “detail matters. But there are other things that matter more: pace, grip, shape” (Mantel). Clearly Mantel finds herself on the side of the story, arguing that plot and pacing outweigh the harsh delineations created on a timeline. Both Stocker and Saxton agree with Mantel that there is more to a historical fiction novel than a retelling of the timeline of events. Stocker argues that “alteration is justified by the needs of the narrative. The war is ‘what the novel is about,’ so extending the timeline just to fit in the full scope of the relationship would arguably impact the centrality of the war experience. There is an implied cause and effect, that may not be so neat in reality, but which the novel seeks to elevate and refine” (par. 15). Here the author is challenged to fill in the gaps to, in Stocker’s words, elevate

and refine history for the sake of the novel. With this in mind, perhaps the guidelines for potentially harsh criticism of a novel's inauthenticity with a historical timeline need to be readjusted. Is a historical fiction novel to be judged based on its veracity or its fictional craft? For this genre, judgment seems to vacillate between both historical accuracy and fictional craft leaving authors in the middle to receive criticism from both sides. Returning to Saxton's idea of maintaining believability might be the juncture that connects the failings of historical veracity with the importance of fictional craft.

Instead, perhaps, historical fiction needs an evaluative standard unique to its genre. Melissa Addey, a historical fiction writer and a writer in residence at the British Library, moves beyond the questions of accuracy in historical fiction, calling historical fiction plot structures a playframe by which to construct the narrative. Perhaps, evaluating historical fiction through the lens of Addey's three playframes, or roles the writer might take to craft historical fiction might give language to the unique craft of historical fiction. Addey's three playframes include: the ventriloquist, the mosaic-maker, and the magician.

The first possible role of the ventriloquist insists on historical accuracy, even going so far as "excluding everything except the statements made by real historical characters" (Addey). Only including historically accurate statements seems to negate some of the evidence previously presented about the role of the author to fill in the gaps in history with the craft. The Ventriloquist might create a novel sounding more like a historical documentary than a Kristin Hannah novel. Novels like Philip Gibson's *#Berlin45* follow this playframe of the Ventriloquist because of Gibson's determination to maintain absolute reliance on historical statements. Gibson places the actual statements of Hitler, Churchill, Truman, Zhokov, Goebbels, and more in the context of an imaginary social media post. Addey explains, "this approach, relying heavily on

fact and minimizing fiction, could effectively remove ‘anxiety of authenticity, as regards historical accuracy’ (par. 10). However, Gibson’s book or others that follow a Ventriloquist format aren’t found on the bestseller lists, nor on reader choice lists like Goodreads. Perhaps maintaining historical accuracy is not the only value found in creating impactful historical fiction. Saxton argues for a move “beyond the identification of error and anachronism - an approach that limits the potential of the form - and instead leads us to consider the conditions that shape conceptualisations of the past in the present” (par. 33). Does the Ventriloquist form create the craft conditions that Saxton argues are essential to establish the conceptualizations of the past? In Gibson’s stark reliance solely on the words of the characters he included as a ventriloquist playframe, he limited the potential conceptualizations of the past. Therefore, the reader potentially loses the development of empathy because the ventriloquist playframe as a form hasn’t given room for empathic unsettlement.

While the ventriloquist relies heavily on the past for the plot, the next role of mosaic-maker established believability by combining history with craft. Addey describes how “the Mosaic-Maker takes the fragments of an incomplete history and adds their own fictional elements to complete the story” (par. 19). This role identifies the gaps in the historical record and begins to fill them in with the creativity of the writer. Both Kristin Hannah and Anthony Doerr are mosaic-makers. They establish believable historical settings to place their characters. They used historical research to discover the motivations of the characters they created. But the gaps that they filled in with their own words rely on the fictional craft that established them as not only effective mosaic-makers, but writers of believable historical fiction. Doerr’s words create the picture of Saint-Malo for the reader in *All the Light You Cannot See*: “Streets sucked empty one by one. Each time she steps outside, she becomes aware of all the windows above her. The

quiet is fretful, unnatural. It's what a mouse must feel, she thinks, as it steps from its hole into the open blades of a meadow, never knowing what shadow might come cruising above" (274). Here Doerr describes the experience of the city streets as imagined by Marie, but he also is filling in the gaps of what the town might have felt like during this time period, something that is left to the creative ponderings of an author more than a historical record. Thoughts, feelings, and motivations are all potential gaps that the writer gets to establish that bring a story to life for the reader.

The final role Addey offers is that of the magician: "The Magician relies on the reader's 'willing suspension of disbelief' to more deeply explore an issue or topic placed within a historical setting" (par. 50). Here Addey discusses the use of magical realism to help the reader address the issues present in the text. Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* brought death into its story as a narrator. Zusak's introduction to the novel includes this passage narrated by death itself, "[T]he subject I am telling you about tonight, or today, or whatever the hour and color. It's the story of one of those perpetual survivors - an expert in being left behind" (Zusak 5). It is not until later in the story that the reader discovers this curious narrator is Death. The reader is left at the end of the novel with this final revelation, "A LAST NOTE FROM YOUR NARRATOR: I am haunted by humans" (Zusak 550). Here is an example of Addey's magician in full form reminiscent of a narrator found on the pages of a magical realism novel. Death guides us through the story and perhaps maintains an even better distance than LaCapra's middle voice recommendation to help a reader form real empathy for the events of the past. Addey explains that the Magician gives more room for a deeper exploration of a topic showing the possibility of a narrative in helping to process the trauma of a past historic event. Addey describes the use of playframes as a tool for children to process the challenges of their world.

Traumatic eras or settings seem to prompt the use of childlike literary forms, such as magic realism and fairytale/fable/folklore-style tropes. Perhaps this device better prepares the reader to engage with the reality contained within the text, which may change over time and with greater understanding” (Addey par. 59).

Here Addey explains that the use of the Magician as the playframe to articulate historically difficult events will actually help the reader to process them. Addey also alludes to the possibility of this playframe to engage the reader with the reality found in the text, perhaps creating the empathic unsettlement that LaCapra describes. By using the playframe of the magician, the outcome of a greater understanding of an event is possible. This greater understanding could lead to a greater empathy for traumatic events from the past as the reader engages with the characters and events through this creative playframe.

Despite its powerful potential, this playframe is not measured in its validity nor its accuracy, but rather in the craft of the writing. Zusak’s reliance on death as a narrator has invited many readers into death as a theme and the challenging implications for survivors of the Holocaust. Perhaps these implications return to Hilary Mantel’s assumption that the historical fiction narrative is still very much a narrative, with the importance of plot, pacing, and suspense preceding the importance of the specific timeline of events. Even with keeping an eye toward the plot over a historical timeline, Zusak’s novel showed that the magician playframe still engages the reader to consider the historical events and choices presented in the novel.

The playframe for my manuscript, *Oak Ridge*, falls more closely to Addey's description of the mosaic maker. As a mosaic maker, I am tying together the threads from family lore and the

research at Oak Ridge surrounding the spy, George Koval, who successfully shared the plans for the atomic bomb with Russian intelligence. Koval, codename Delmar, was born in the United States but left for Moscow with his family during the Great Depression (“George Koval”). When in Moscow he was recruited by the GRU and sent back to the United States where he completed training in electrical engineering. With this degree, Koval was hired at Oak Ridge’s facility as a health physics officer, a position that offered him top-secret clearance. “Over the next several months, Koval passed secret information about Oak Ridge’s nuclear facilities to a Soviet contact known only by his code-name, ‘Farraday’” (“George Koval”). My research of Koval’s story has joined together with my own great-grandfather’s experience of working at Oak Ridge. I have had to rely on the testimony of others in order to piece together the mosaic of being at Oak Ridge. The plot of my creative work is inspired by Koval’s treason but takes creative liberties to place another man who is falsely convicted of the crime into the mix. Koval’s conviction does not come until years after his employment at Oak Ridge, but in my novel, the main character is seeking justice over her father’s conviction and uncovers Koval’s connections. In order to prevent unnecessary criticism about the historical inaccuracy of such a timeline, as a mosaic maker, I have decided to change Koval’s name. The newly fictionalized spy of my novel is similar to Hannah’s own character-inspired events in *The Nightingale*; the real-life existence of Koval has inspired the spy ring that will engage readers on the pages of my manuscript. While the mosaic maker might not offer the same powerful processing possibilities of the magician playframe, it still brings the reader into the creative possibilities of historical fiction and can create the empathic unsettlement of how they would address the issues of spying and national allegiance during the historical setting of life at Oak Ridge.

All three playframes extend beyond the rigid boundaries of a historical timeline demonstrating that historical accuracy alone cannot create a historical fiction novel. As seen in the research above, the setting holds most closely to a definition of historical accuracy to establish the believability that brings the reader into the world of the characters. However, it is the gap in the historical records that allows the craft of the author to enter into the story to establish a setting that extends beyond what a diary or picture might portray.

This created setting is then extended to the characters. As shown through Hannah's novel, *The Nightingale*, characters are oftentimes based on real-life people. The responsibility lies with the author to navigate the reliability of first-hand accounts to create believable characters, not villainizing nor heroizing the wrong characters. By handling real-life accounts with intentional integrity, the author has the potential to create space for the reader to develop empathy for the events of the past, called empathic unsettlement. This power to change perspectives must be handled with caution to prevent any potential second-hand trauma which might occur when addressing challenging events of the past.

The characters and the setting combine to form the plot within a historical fiction playframe, such as the ventriloquist, mosaic-maker, or magician, to connect the reader to the events of the past. These playframes move beyond the question of accuracy to set a standard for historical fiction that combines the art of the craft of writing with the historical responsibility of the time period.

My creative work establishes believability through the setting of Oak Ridge, Tennessee, through characters that expose the trauma of life in a newly formed plant through a mosaic maker playframe that weaves multiple threads of history together. The creative work will guide readers through the topics of identity and justice through the lens of this time period. The aim of

this creative work is not solely historical accuracy because of the inadequacy of accuracy to describe the entirety of a historical fiction novel. Rather, *Oak Ridge* demonstrates the challenge to mind the gap between history and the craft of fiction to establish empathy for the stories of those who lived at the Manhattan Project site, Oak Ridge.

Establishing believability in historical fiction can lead to a greater understanding of a historical event or even help to develop a reader's empathy toward the events of the past. Both of these outcomes are beyond the criticism of historical accuracy which falls short of qualifying historical fiction. The authors, Hannah, Doerr, and Zusak all demonstrated with their work that it is believability, a conjunction of historical facts with fictional craft that truly establish quality historical fiction.

Oak Ridge

By: Amy Cimino

Prologue

*May 11, 1945**Oak Ridge, Tennessee*

Papers fell to the tiled floor as Earl Denton pulled files from a tall metal filing cabinet. He spread them across the top of the wooden desk, scattering them over the scratches on the desk surface to survey them quickly. The threat of treason made his pulse pump and sweat drip, smearing ink across the pages. His hand shook as he froze and glanced up at the door. *Was that the sound of the elevator door in the hallway or just the air conditioning circulating through the building?* Earl was never in Y-12 at night, and every sound was unfamiliar. Returning his focus to the documents in front of him, he never heard the door open.

“Put down the file, Earl.” The voice echoed off the office wall. He didn’t need to look up to recognize it. His fears were confirmed as soon as they spoke.

“Why are you here?” Earl’s voice quavered and he didn’t look up to make eye contact. He feared he would see the answer clearly displayed in the eyes looking at him. His eyes kept scanning the documents that would prove his fears weren’t valid.

“I’m here for us. I have to protect both of us. Do you know the punishment for treason?”

“Us? Don’t you mean to protect yourself?” Earl kept flipping page after page. It had to be here. He needed the page that would prove his innocence, her innocence. He could hear the steady clack, clack cadence of footsteps nearing closer across the tiled floor of his office as he spread another stack of files across his desk.

“I only did what you were too afraid to do.” His heart sank. The words confirmed his suspicions and his arms fell limp by his side. There was no reason to search for a document that wasn’t there.

“You always were willing to risk your queen for the chance of a checkmate.”

“It was never a chance.”

Earl finally looked up. Instead of the eyes he expected to meet, he was looking down the barrel of the revolver he purchased just six months ago.

The shot rang down the empty hallway followed by the clack, clack cadence as one pair of footsteps left building Y-12.

Chapter One

*May 12, 1945**Butler, Pennsylvania*

Dawn Denton knew every car in Butler, Pennsylvania, and the metallic bumper of the black Ford did not belong on Vero Street. From her weekend reading nook, she pushed the window blind back a little further to catch a glimpse of the two men in the front seats. The car pulled to the curb and both men got out adjusting the pristine gold buttons of their Army uniforms before starting up the driveway. Dawn caught a glimpse of the side holsters on their belts and her pulse accelerated. Despite her father teaching her to shoot on her grandparent's farm, guns still made her nervous.

“Mother?” she called up the stairs. Dawn hadn't seen her mother yet that morning. None of the Denton children would wake their mother, known as Sleeping Bear, on a Saturday. They all feared the wrath of interrupting her slumber. Her first appearance was not uncommonly at the family lunch. But Dawn knew her mother's drive for perfect appearances, especially for guests. She called upstairs again, hoping to rouse her a least a few seconds before they arrived, but there was no movement upstairs.

At the knock on the door, Dawn took a moment to straighten her navy skirt, tucking each pleat back into place as her mother taught her. With one more glance upstairs and a deep breath, she opened the door.

“Hello, may I help you?”

“We're looking for Mrs. Denton.”

“I'm her daughter. Can I help you with something?”

“I’m Mrs. Denton.” Elizabeth Denton put her hand on Dawn’s shoulder gently pushing her to the side of the entryway. There was not a hair out of place, but Dawn noticed a few wrinkles in her mother’s normally pristine wardrobe. “How can I help you, gentlemen?”

“Ma’am, my name is Officer Darden, and this is my colleague, Officer Seymour. We have some information about your husband, Mr. Denton. May we come in?” Elizabeth paused, her eyes widening before opening the door to let in the two men.

“Of course,” she said, waving them into the Denton’s orderly sitting room. “Dawn, why don’t you go boil water for these gentlemen. I’m sure they’d like a cup of tea.”

Dawn smiled but felt the bristle in being forced from the room like a child. *I’m nearly eighteen in just two more weeks.* She grumbled under her breath as she went into the kitchen. After placing the kettle on the stove, she returned to the swinging door that led into the living room gently pushing it inward to eavesdrop. She pictured the two couches facing one another with the wooden coffee table in between. If she closed her eyes, it helped her to focus on the voices coming from the couch closest to the front windows where the officers were seated.

“Mrs. Denton, we’re sorry to inform you that your husband was killed last night.” The agent who identified himself as Darden announced.

Dawn nearly fell into the living room as her weight shifted into the swinging door. *Her father was dead?* Her cheeks turned pink as they did with every emotion. She instinctually covered them even though she was behind the door. Her mother had not said a word. No sound came from her side of the living room. Dawn held her breath but only heard the steady grandfather clock counting the silent seconds.

“Mrs. Denton, we’re sorry to ask you questions immediately after this news, but it’s imperative that we know if your husband brought any paperwork home during his last furlough two weeks ago.”

“Paperwork?” Her mother’s voice sounded small, contrary to her normal commanding demeanor.

“Yes, ma’am. Chemists at Oak Ridge protect confidential data and it would be so helpful for us to gather any information he might have left behind.”

“Umm...I don’t know. Perhaps. He kept everything in his desk upstairs, but he never talked about his job. I thought he was just working in the lab. How did he die? Did he get sick? He was fine just two weeks ago. Was there an accident?” Dawn pushed the door forward just enough to catch a glimpse of her mother’s hands gripping and releasing the edge of the deep green sofa. She wasn’t used to seeing these emotions from her mother. Elizabeth Denton was a provider for her children. There was always dinner on the table, but there was not always a hug or comfort available during difficulty. Dawn was used to a stoic face, and this emotion surprised her.

The two officers glanced at one another, and Dawn noticed a slight nod from the silent Officer Seymour as Officer Darden said, “Ma’am, Mr. Denton, your husband was not involved in an accident at the plant.” He paused, looking once again at Officer Seymour. “Mr. Denton was shot last night.”

“Shot? As in murdered?”

Undeterred by social conventions or revealing that she had been eavesdropping, Dawn rushed from the kitchen to her mother’s side as her normally perfect posture collapsed. Dawn went to offer a hug of comfort, but Elizabeth pushed her away.

“We’re sorry to deliver this news to you. We presume Earl committed suicide,” Officer Darden announced as the tea kettle started to sing in the kitchen. “We’ll just need to see the desk you mentioned. Take a glance to see if any of the paperwork came from Oak Ridge.”

“Of course. Yes, I’m sure you’ll just find bills and correspondence. It may be a bit messy. I haven’t had a chance to organize it yet this week.” Dawn recognized the regular pandering her mother did to excuse anything out of place. “It’s just at the top of the stairs to your left. You can’t miss it.” Elizabeth gestured up the stairs and the two men began the climb.

Left alone, Dawn and Elizabeth sat silent on the couch. The relationship between mother and daughter could never be described as close, but this stiff formality left Dawn feeling the loss of her father more deeply. Her mother ran her fingers over her dress replicating the pressed seams trying to strengthen their appearance.

“I can’t believe he’s gone. He was just here, and now...” Dawn said.

“Now he’s not.” Elizabeth’s voice was short, her gaze never leaving the pleats.

Chapter Two

May 19, 1945

Dawn walked down Main Street past Woolworth's clothing display of the same two mannequins they had been using since she was a little girl. The Saturday morning brought family groups moving like tiny herd down the narrow sidewalk. Dawn sidestepped them all reflecting on the past week which had passed in a blur of flowers and casseroles. She needed an escape from the stifling living room; she needed to find solace in some familiar place.

As she walked down the sidewalk, her navy loafers squawked as each left heel hit the sidewalk. Her mother would be appalled at her outfit: navy slacks and a pink collared shirt. Dawn twirled the end of her braided hair in her hand like she always did when she was deep in thought. She was replaying her last conversations with her father trying to find some evidence that he was unhappy. War times were hard on everyone and his job at Clinton Engineer Works had taken him away from the family for months at a time. His furloughs came every six months, but that meant six months without her father at home. What had gone so wrong at work that he would have committed suicide? The thought still didn't sit right with Dawn. She shook her head to try out any other possible explanation when she heard her name.

"Dawn!" Sara Levine rushed out of the Main Street Soda Parlour, the bell clanging wildly against the glass door. "Dawn! Dawn Denton!" she yelled across the street as she ran toward Dawn with her arm raised and waving frantically. Sara's short brown bob bounced with each footstep. Her pink dress had the same scalloped edge that Sara had worn since she first met Dawn in elementary school.

“Dawn, I’m so sorry to hear about your dad,” Sara said as she reached Dawn on the other side of the street. Without warning, Dawn was overtaken in the kind of hug that makes you question whether your lungs will ever work again.

“Release. Release,” Dawn squeaked from within the folds of Sara’s linen dress collar.

“Sorry.” A sheepish grin flashed across Sara’s face. She was always embarrassed by her strength. “How are you...really?”

It was the question Dawn had been avoiding all morning and one of the reasons she almost didn’t come downtown, but she needed to get away from her mother who was going about business as if Earl would return next week home for his planned three month furlough. Dawn just couldn’t bring herself to complete one more household chore, which is how she ended up on Main Street.

Instead of an answer, Dawn just shrugged. The edge of her chin wrinkled as she tried to hold back tears.

“This is so hard, Dawn.” Sara placed a hand on Dawn’s shoulder, and it released a torrent of feelings that Dawn had held back all week.

“This just isn’t...isn’t like him. We had our trip planned to Philadelphia. Visit the Liberty Bell. Walk through Independence Hall. He wouldn’t have...well, you know...just three weeks before our trip. Not before he saw me go to school...become a writer.” Dawn couldn’t contain her anxiety anymore. The thought of starting college without her dad who was the biggest supporter of her dream was incomprehensible. She started to pace in front of the Woolworth’s window front. A small group of women had started to form inside pointing at Dawn. Knowing the vicious gossip wheel of Butler, Sara took Dawn’s elbow in the crook of her own and made their way

down the street. Dawn's breathing came in short bursts at the thought of starting her future without her father.

Arm in arm with Sara and farther away from the eyes of Woolworth's, Dawn finally took a deep breath. The two girls walked together down the sidewalk, almost reaching the local pastry shop. Dawn abruptly stopped in front of the newspaper stand almost making Sara trip.

"What is it?" Sara asked.

Dawn didn't respond, she just moved toward the newest edition of *The Butler Eagle* stacked in the stand. She dug in her pocket to find a few coins depositing them into the receptacle. Sara bent her neck to see the front page that had caught Dawn's attention, but she couldn't see what it was.

"Dawn, what's wrong?"

Dawn grabbed the newspaper from the top of the stack. Her hands shook. The headline read: "Local, Earl Denton's, Treasonous Suicide." Dawn inhaled sharply. There it was in print for the entire town to read. Suicide. But what did the article mean that it was a treasonous suicide?

"Sara, this says that Clinton Engineer Works was going to convict my father of treason. The officers didn't say anything about that. They sat in my living room and didn't say one word about treason!"

"Treason? That's what Mr. Waters was always talking about in our government class last year. I thought that was saved for the redcoats and the patriots." Sara pumped her arm in a fist like she was ready for a revolution.

"Apparently not," Dawn said, her gaze lost in the text of the article.

"Does it say why or what they think he did to earn...that sentence?"

“They say he was selling state secrets. That he was working as a spy.” Dawn scanned the article to get as much information as quickly as possible.

“A spy? Your father?” Sara raised her eyebrows. “Who was he selling this information to?”

“Whom,” Dawn corrected Sara absentmindedly. Her autopilot brought an eye roll from Sara. “And the article doesn’t say. It just says that he was selling secrets to an enemy of the State.”

Sara’s eyes widened at the term, “enemy of the State.” Every cinema showing they saw started with the inspiring propaganda of a caricatured Hitler. Sara’s hand moved to the Star of David necklace she wore nonstop. Seeing the expression on Sara’s face, Dawn brought a hand to her shoulder for comfort.

“I’m sure it’s not what you think, Sara. You’re safe here.”

“Enemy of the State, Dawn. Do you think there will be another attack like Pearl Harbor? Do you think the enemy is here on our soil? That there are real spies here?”

Dawn pointed to the quiet thoroughfare through town. “Here?” She gestured to a flustered woman who dropped her grocery bag on the side of the walk, to two children fighting over a giant circular lollipop, to the couple who cooed secrets in each others’ ears. “Who would be the enemy here in Butler?”

“You never know where someone is hiding, Dawn. And all I’m doing here is planting my Victory Garden and collecting metal scraps at the school.” Sara’s voice rose at the end making it sound like the question she was asking was about her own worth.

“I’m sorry this war has placed us all under stress. Your victory garden is pristine,” Dawn whispered coming alongside Sara as she marched back toward the soda parlour. “And you’ve

collected more metal cans than any other student at Butler High. You have that to be proud of.”

Dawn nudged her and wiped a tear that escaped down her cheek. A smile hinted at the edges of Sara’s lips which she tried to turn back into her serious grimace.

“It was the reminder flyers I passed out in my homeroom for our canned drive collection. A little enthusiasm makes all the difference!” Sara made a rectangle outline of her flyer with her fingers between sniffled smiles.

“That’s the spirit.” Dawn nodded as Sara proceeded to explain the upcoming tin can drive, but her thoughts kept returning to the words about her father in the newspaper tucked under her arm.

Chapter Three

May 21, 1945

Dawn flipped through her father's old work folders laid across her blue plaid bedspread. The officers had searched the desk, but her father never kept the folders there. They were always in the kitchen cabinet where he could spread them out across the table. Dawn thought it odd that her mother hadn't mentioned it since she knew that too. It must have been the stress of the visit that made her forget.

Dawn looked at her father's scribbled letters in the margins of the machine plans. Notes reminding him of memos to send and updates to make to the plans. The plans brought back the shared moments with her father over blueprints and lab reports. As she got older, he listened to her ideas for how to make the machines more efficient. The mechanisms look like a maze to her, and she was an expert at finding the quickest way out of the maze. How could this same man give away those secrets? He always told her they were top-secret plans and she was sworn to secrecy after every meeting. Those moments always made her feel special.

"What if he was telling someone else those same messages?" Dawn asked aloud.

"Are you talking to yourself?" Joe, Dawn's little brother, stood in her doorway. His brown hair was tousled after his bath and his pajamas were stretched up at least an inch above his ankle.

"Joe! You almost made me fall off the bed," Dawn chided with a mock look of anger.

"So... are ya?" He put his hand on his hip making Dawn cringe at the mimicked action of their mother.

"Am I what?"

"Talking to yourself?"

“Oh..I guess. I didn’t realize I was.” Dawn folded the paper and turned it over. A picture of their father was across the front page. She didn’t want to upset Joe right before bedtime, so she covered the photo before he could see it.

“I think that’s worse you know...if you don’t realize you’re talking to yourself.” He climbed up next to her and snuggled into the crook of her side which barely fit his growing frame. Dawn pulled him in close and kissed the top of his head.

“You ready for tonight’s bedtime story, Starfish?”

Joe looked up at her and wrinkled his nose. “I hate that nickname. It’s too little for me. I’m eight and deserve a respectable nickname now.” His voice came out squeaky revealing the two-year-old still present within the eight-year-old’s body.

“And why do you hate that nickname?” Dawn asked, guiding Joe down the hallway on the worn pathway of the hardwood floor between their rooms. Pictures of her father smiled back at her from the wall, and Dawn caught the reflection of her tears in the glass before Joe could see them.

“I don’t like it because you and Dad don’t know for a fact that I sleep like a starfish *every* night.”

“That’s true. Maybe tonight you’ll sleep like a snail. Should we start calling you Snail? I - Should I start calling you Snail?”

Joe crawled into bed under his green patchwork quilt their grandmother made when he was born. He pulled the blanket grunting as the tight military tuck at the end refused to give. Dawn released the fabric covering Joe beneath a sudden tidal wave of quilt. Taking her typical spot, Dawn reached for *The Hardy Boys* from the nightstand to continue their chapter, but she stopped when she heard a muffled voice beneath the layers of quilt.

“What did you say...” She was about to call him snail or starfish, but let it drop.

“Bobby McKnight says that Daddy’s a criminal.” Not even a single strand of Joe’s hair popped from the top of the cover. This was covert sharing, and Dawn was grateful he didn’t see her face respond.

“Does he now?” She tried to keep her voice even.

“And during recess, they were all singing t-r-a-i-t-o-r as loud as they could. And I’m a fast runner but they kept chasing me. And I just tried to pretend I didn’t care...because it’s not true. Is it?” At the last question, Joe’s blue eyes peeked over the edge of the blanket for a moment before he returned to his hiding place. Dawn took a deep breath seeing her father’s eyes in Joe’s. She pulled the blanket down to find Joe curled in a snail shell-like swirl.

“At least they can spell,” Dawn said, evoking a scowl from Joe. “Sorry, Starfish. That sounds like a bad recess.” He shrugged. “There was an article in the paper today about Daddy. Some people, like Bobby McKnight, might believe what it says.”

“Do you, Dawn?” The eagerness in his eyes revealed the answer he desperately wanted to hear from Dawn. It made her answer all the harder to give.

“I don’t know.” She looked down, not wanting to see his disappointment.

“Oh. Well, I’m tired, Dawn. I don’t think we should do any reading tonight.”

“But last night you couldn’t wait to hear what was going to happen next.” Dawn opened the chapter ready to distract him.

“No, thanks. I just want to go to sleep and forget about today.” Joe twisted his snail form away from her into the farthest corner of his twin bed.

“Me too, Starfish. Good night.” Kissing his forehead she left his bedroom turning the light out-all without making eye contact.

*Chapter Four**May 22, 1945*

The yellow Senior Career Day banner spread across the entire brick facade of Butler High. Dawn read the hand-painted letters and rolled her eyes. Inside the main hallway, Dawn funneled with the rest of the Seniors toward the school auditorium where Mrs. Westover waited for them on the stage. Her creased pastel yellow cardigan matched the frown creases around her mouth. Dawn searched across the wood-paneled auditorium for Sara and found her on the left side sitting perfectly straight in her chair. Weaving through the uneven wooden fold-up chairs strewn about, Dawn made her way to Sara avoiding any unwanted eye contact.

“Good morning, Sunshine!” Dawn plopped into the seat next to her, not bothering to check her posture which stood out against Sara’s straight-backed pose.

“Sunshine?” Sara asked. Dawn pointed to Sara’s pastel yellow cardigan sweater and then pointed up toward the stage and Mrs. Westover’s cardigan.

“You’re twins.”

The bell rang and Dawn rolled her eyes again, settling into the wooden folding chair hoping not to get any splinters.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the annual Butler High School Career Day!” Mrs. Westover paused for applause, but the auditorium echoed with only a few claps. Every young man in the room knew the reality of the draft for the past three years. Regardless, career day still pressed on. “Young men, you will head to a classroom of your choice based on your career interest. Please see the flyer posted at the back of the auditorium and in the hallway to choose a classroom. Young ladies, you’ll be joining me in the typing room to work on resumes. You’re released,” she said after no one had moved.

Dawn and Sara started toward the typing room and passed a classroom with a paper sign on the doorway that read “Journalism.” Dawn paused, looked at Sara, and nodded with a mischievous smile.

“No, Dawn, no. Don’t make a scene...” Before she could say anything else, Dawn popped into the classroom and took a seat at the back of the room. Two boys whose names she hadn’t bothered to learn were seated at the front of the classroom. Both their heads swirled like owls to look at the foreign invader.

“Dawn Denton. This is not the time or place.” Mr. Oliver, Butler’s oldest English teacher stood up from his desk at the front of the room, his wide-rimmed glasses fogged over for a moment with his quick exhale of humid surprise. *The Butler Gazette* had sent a visiting lecturer. As Dawn took in the young man with his pristine suit and tie, she recognized him immediately, Michael Ainsley was the author of her father’s article. He had named the treasonous suicide.

“Actually, sir, I believe this is the exact time and place. See, I would like to go into the field of journalism and this is the journalism room, is it not?” Dawn adjusted her posture the way Sara always told her to.

“Yes, it is. But, this classroom is for...well, it’s for future journalists...”

“Then I’m in the right place.” Dawn pulled a notebook and pen from her backpack. She smiled at Mr. Oliver’s blustering huffs coming from the front of the room.

“This is unheard of at Butler High, sir. It truly is,” Mr. Oliver said to the visiting journalist.

“It’s quite all right Mr. Olive,” he squinted at Dawn, but all she saw was amusement, not the frustration coming from Mr. Oliver.

“It’s uh...Mr. Oliver...common mistake.”

“You are the infamous Dawn Denton are you not?”

“Yes, sir. Dawn Denton, future journalist.”

“Michael Ainsley.”

He bowed slightly at the formal introduction, but he never broke eye contact. Dawn was never interviewed before the article came out. As she had read the article just the day before she had wondered where Ainsley had gotten so much of his information about her father. He knew that he worked at Clinton Engineer Works, and he knew about their furlough policy which gave her father six months of work followed by three months off to spend at home. Who had shared those details with him?

“Ainsley,” Dawn growled in response.

“Yes. I’m the visiting mentor from The Gazette.”

“And the author of...”

“Are you talking about my most popular new article? I’ve had so much press over that crazy nut case.” He laughed and shared a glance with Mr. Oliver to support his inflating ego.

“That’s my father that you falsely accused.”

The two boys from Dawn’s class looked back and forth between her and Mr. Ainsley.

“Falsely?” Ainsley’s whisper echoed in the silent classroom. “Falsely assumes the information is without evidence.” He moved down the aisle until he was standing beside Dawn’s desk. He towered over her.

“That’s...” Dawn cleared her throat and started again looking straight ahead. “That’s what I said. Falsely accused.”

“I won’t have you in my class,” Ainsley stated matter-of-factly.

“Excuse me?” Dawn asked, finally turning to look at Ainsley.

“Get. Out. Of. This. Class.” Dawn just sat in the chair. Ainsley’s voice rose with his final command. “Now.”

“Fine. I wouldn’t want to learn journalism from someone who can’t even manage to tell the truth about a decent man,” Dawn said as she shoved the notebook back into her backpack.

“Can’t manage. Oh, I manage, Miss. Denton. I have sources to back up every article I write.” Ainsley puffed his chest forward to maintain his position, posturing for power. He couldn’t let her leave with this accusation left hanging behind her. They were similar in that way.

“What source would possibly feed you such lies?”

The laugh rose from Ainsley placing the final match point in his favor. He had won.

“Lies, well you should be very familiar with those,” he chuckled to himself under his breath. Dawn looked back over her shoulder as she walked out of the room wondering what lies she would be familiar with. Who was lying to her?

Sara was pacing in front of the door and jumped out of the way when Dawn burst through.

“Did they kick you out?” She asked trailing behind Dawn’s sprint toward the typing room.

“Yes. No. I left. I don’t have anything to learn from that...that...weasel,” Dawn spat out. Her face was red from her flared up rosacea that already made her cheeks an unruly pink. “It was Ainsley, Sara. The guest lecturer for journalism was Ainsley, the author of the article about my father.” Dawn’s anger barely veiled her pain as her voice cracked.

“Definitely a weasel. Nothing to learn from him,” Sara agreed. She looked at her watch and adjusted her cardigan. Dawn just sighed.

“I can see you’re worried about time, so let’s go make a pointless resume. Half the girls in our class are probably writing a resume for the quarterback to date them. Then they’ll get married. Then have babies.” Dawn’s tone conveyed the disdain she felt for the fractured structure in her own family.

“Not everyone has prospects outside of Butler, Dawn,” Sara said quietly. “There’s nothing wrong with wanting to get married, even if it is to Thomas Nost.”

“Who’s Thomas Nost?”

“The quarterback.” Dawn heard the snip in Sara’s response.

Both girls were raised in Butler. They had seen the values of the steel mill town. Both of their mothers married straight after graduation from Butler High. But, Dawn had Earl Denton as her father. Earl filled her head with engineering schematics, encouraged her inquisitive mind, and laughed at her sharp tongue. One day ten years ago Sara’s father hadn’t returned home after leaving for work at the Butler steel mill. The loss of her father made her crave the stability she thought she saw in other nuclear families.

“Right. Let’s start plotting our futures,” Dawn said, trying to amp up her enthusiasm with a thumbs up in Sara’s direction, “whatever those futures might be.”

“Who knows...maybe you’ll decide to apply to Clinton Engineer Works instead of pursuing journalism.” Sara held up the flyer from her father’s prior employer. They were hiring and a call was out to submit a resume. Dawn was about to roll her eyes; instead, she stopped in the middle of the hallway. “What now? You can still be a journalist. I was just kidding. Come on...” Sara cajoled.

“No, Sara. That’s it. Ainsley said he had sources that proved my father is guilty. Who do you think those sources were?”

“Probably some chatty co-worker at Clinton Engineer Works, don’t you think?” Sara asked.

“I absolutely think so.” Dawn nearly skipped down the hallway toward the resume room.

“Why are you suddenly so excited to write a resume?”

“Because I’m going to find Ainsley’s source. Find out why they lied. Stop Joe from getting bullied and prove this all to be the big farce it is.”

“How do you plan to do that?”

“I’m going to create a resume that Clinton Engineer Works can’t refuse.” Dawn’s smile made Sara shiver. That was the same smile she had in third grade before she exploded all the school volcanoes in the science room because she thought the class needed to experience the reality of unexpected timing. Sara knew the danger in that smile.

“There’s no possible universe that Oak Ridge will hire the daughter of a dead employee convicted of treason. Sorry Dawn, but this one is too big even for you to fix.”

This didn’t even fracture Dawn’s smile.

“I’m not applying as Dawn Denton.” Her smile broadened. Sara had seen the same look just before Dawn poured the whole bottle of vinegar into the waiting baking soda volcanoes.

“I’m applying as you.” She poked her finger at Sara and walked into the typing room.

Chapter Five

June 15, 1945

Elizabeth Denton sat at their circular kitchen table, making sure to position her skirt to match the pleats as she sat down on the fabric seat. Dawn's diploma sat on the table next to her bright blue tassel. The graduation had just finished and both Dawn and Sara were giddy with relief. Elizabeth could hear them giggling and rustling around the house in their matching blue graduation gowns. She noted that she needed to talk to Dawn about packing for college in Philadelphia before the summer sloth took over her daughter. It always astounded her how easily Dawn would slip into her own world of books just days after the summer break began. Now that Dawn was a young woman, slipping away into books just wouldn't be acceptable.

Elizabeth felt her blood pressure starting to pulse. Heat flushed her face and chest at the daunting task of teaching such a headstrong girl to follow the rules. To distract herself, she picked up the mail sitting on the Lazy Susan in the center of their kitchen table. *At least Dawn finished one of her chores* she thought, flipping through each envelope. Three letters in, Elizabeth dropped the rest of the stack and pulled the letter close to her face. The name on that envelope did not belong to this address. The envelope was addressed to Sara Levine. Perhaps the girls had signed up for a newsletter together and the secretary mailing them out simply flipped the girls' names and addresses. There were plenty of explanations for the mistake. What she couldn't place was why the return label was listed as Oak Ridge, Tennessee. The circular date stamp confirmed that the letter had traveled from the same city as Clinton Engineer Works, the same city where Earl had worked.

Elizabeth turned the letter over, looking at every inch to discern what was inside. Why would Sara be receiving mail from Oak Ridge, Tennessee? And why was it being sent here? She

held the letter up to the pendant lamp hanging above the table, but the bulbs were too high and too dim to reveal any secrets inside the envelope. She stood to bring the envelope closer to the light when the kitchen door swung open bringing the full sound of the girls' laughter into the kitchen.

"That's not true at all," Dawn defended, then stopped when she saw Elizabeth standing with the letter to the light. "What are you doing, Mother?"

Elizabeth plastered a smile on her face and brought the envelope away from the light. "Just making sure this was correctly addressed. Sara, it seems you've received a letter here, at our house." She held the letter out to Sara who was looking at Dawn. The pause with the letter held in midair almost made Elizabeth pull the letter back and stuff it in her own pocket for safekeeping until she could open it herself, but she resisted.

"Oh did I?" Sara asked, her voice squeaking on I.

"Yes, dear. A letter from..." Elizabeth made a point of looking at the return label. "From Oak Ridge. Who do you know there in Tennessee?"

Sara froze. Both her hand and Elizabeth's hand held the envelope.

"No one, actually. It's probably from the job fair at school." Sara took the envelope, pulling it slightly to release it from Elizabeth's grip. Elizabeth fought the burn in her cheeks from the smile that was still plastered on her face.

"We had to practice sending out applications, Mother. Thanks for delivering the letter. Come on, Sara. Let's go find out if you got in." Dawn crossed both fingers in exaggerated hope of a potential acceptance letter.

Elizabeth placed her now empty hand on the back of the kitchen chair to stabilize herself as the girls grabbed a few snacks from the cupboard. She watched them stack the box of cookies

and bag of chips placing the letter on top, smiling the whole time. When she heard the slam of Dawn's door closed upstairs, she rushed to the phone on the side table in the living room.

Her fingers shook as she pulled the circular dial around and around. It took her three tries to get the number right. Finally, the ring blasted through the headpiece into her ear. His familiar voice hummed, "Hello?"

"She knows," she whispered, looking up the stairs for any sign of the girls or Joe.

"Lizzy?"

"Of course it's me. Who else would it be?"

"I thought it was your daughter's graduation day. I didn't expect to hear from you today."

"None of that matters, now. It's Dawn. She knows."

"How could she?"

"She received a letter today from Oak Ridge, Tennessee."

"When can we meet?"

"I'll be there as soon as I can. Meet at our spot."

Elizabeth hung up the phone and grabbed a sweater. She never knew how cold he would have the art studio to keep the summer humidity outside.

Chapter Six

July 1, 1945

Just over a week later, Dawn stood at the Butler bus station ready to board the overnight bus to Knoxville, Tennessee. The interview invitation said a transportation car would be waiting at seven A.M. on July 2nd to transport her from Knoxville to Oak Ridge. The interviews would begin promptly at eight. Dawn checked the watch on her wrist and adjusted the weight of her father's old suitcase. His plans from the plant were tucked safely between her skirts and her blouses. She touched the pocket of her navy blazer where the copy of her father's picture from her nightstand was folded into quarters.

As the bus pulled out of the station, Dawn looked out the window at a final glimpse of Butler, Pennsylvania. She saw the mist still settling against the hills of the steel mill. Would the sunrises still shimmer in a cool mist in Tennessee or would the humidity overtake their pleasure? She thought of Joe and his teary goodbye the night before. The lies had flown through her lips faster than she knew possible. She was going away to college early. There was a summer journalism lecture. She hated to leave him. The last statement wasn't a lie. She couldn't imagine a night without Joe's bedtime story, but this day would have come eventually when she left for college. Her goodbye to Joe was in stark contrast to the goodbye to her mother. There was one final offer to drive her to Philadelphia, which Dawn refused because it would be taking her in the opposite direction of her destination.

"I always thought we'd be taking an adventure together, Dad," Dawn whispered toward the window. This adventure had a timeline, and Dawn held the deadline in her hand. Two bus tickets. One for today. One for exactly one month from today when she would take a bus to

Philadelphia to start school. She always worked well under pressure; she would just need to focus.

After the bus ride and a subsequent connection with a silent driver, Dawn arrived at the front gate of Oak Ridge, Tennessee. This new government town had popped up quickly and construction constantly seemed behind the need. Roads were punctuated with mud sections that would stop a car dead in its tracks. Her driver seemed to navigate the potholes and mud sections with familiarity. Dawn passed a billboard with the bold white text slogan of Oak Ridge, “What You See Here, What You Do Here, What You Say Here, When You Leave Here, Let It Stay Here.” The capitalized letter beginning each word punctuated the seriousness of work and life here at Clinton Engineer Works in this new town of Oak Ridge. Dawn’s heart pumped with the anticipation of working at Clinton Engineer Works. She knew it was here within this city that she would discover the truth of her father’s innocence. This drive was all she could focus on. There was no time for friendships. The job was all that mattered.

“Y-12,” the driver said, stopping the car in front of a large concrete structure with glass entrance doors on the first floor and no windows on any floor above.

“Y-12,” she repeated. Dawn gazed up at the front of the building she had heard her father speak about but had never seen in person. She tugged her suitcase from the trunk of the car as the driver absentmindedly styled his mustache in the rearview mirror. After shutting the trunk of the car, she walked into the entrance of her future, a job with Clinton Engineer Works.

“Name please?” A screechy voice accustomed to respect came from behind a group of at least fifteen other women.

“Excuse me?” Dawn asked, searching for the face to the voice.

“Name. You are here for the interviews, right?” A woman in her mid-thirties marched toward Dawn, her heels clicked voraciously across the tile flooring.

“Yes. Are all of these other women here for the interviews as well?” Dawn looked around seeing women who looked to be her age all the way into their early twenties. Their interview suits were cut to the newest fashions and she saw several smiles on perfectly pink lips.

“What’s your name?”

“Da...Sara Levine,” Dawn corrected and smiled. “And what’s yours?”

The woman looked up at Dawn over her glasses, eyebrows raised. “Da’ Sara?”

“You can just call me Sara. I didn’t catch your name yet.” Dawn never let her smile fall, not in front of this formidable foe.

“Sara...Sara...” The woman scanned a list on her clipboard. When Dawn tried to peek over the top she pulled the clipboard closer to her body and scowled in Dawn’s direction. “Sara Levine?”

“Yes, that’s me. Ready to start today.”

The woman smirked.

“You’re all checked in.” The woman started to make her way back down the hall toward the other end of the foyer.

“I still didn’t get your name,” Dawn called after her. The woman never even turned.

“She doesn’t seem very friendly. The name’s Millie. You’re Sara, right?” Dawn just looked at Millie. Her blond curls were perfectly coiffed, her cheeks colored with circular dollops of pink powder pristinely positioned, her hand outstretched in greeting. *This girl won’t last a minute here*, Dawn thought, shaking her head, *she’s too friendly*.

“Silence, ladies. Welcome to the interviews for the secretary position here in Y-12 at Clinton Engineer Works. Our policy here is simple: don’t communicate about your position or what you hear and see during your stay. That expectation begins now and will remain for the duration of today’s interviews. Any questions before we proceed?”

Dawn spoke up, her voice echoing around the foyer. “What shall we call you Ma’am?”

“I won’t bother with that detail. All but one of you won’t need to remember my name by tonight anyway. Your luggage can go to the room behind you. No need to unpack. Our interview process will follow three stages. The first is our dictation typewriting down the hall. Move your things. It’s time to begin.”

Dawn tossed her bag into the room, touched the picture in her pocket, and made her way to the front of the pack.

Chapter Seven

July 2, 1945

The group of fifteen young women squished two by two to funnel down the white tiled hallway of Y-12. Wooden doors lined the hallway. Dawn noticed how some of the doorknobs were shiny polished bronze while others were scuffed and clearly well used. She started counting the number of doors. It was a game her father had played with her since she was little. Distracted, she nearly ran into the back of the blond woman named Millie when the whole group stopped to enter one of the conference rooms.

“Watch your step y’all,” Millie said as the group filtered into the room.

There were exactly sixteen desks set up with a single typewriter placed atop each desk. A manilla folder sat next to the typewriters. Each desk was labeled with their names and Dawn rolled her eyes when the friendly blond took her seat directly next to her behind the card labeled Millicent. The girl smiled again at Dawn and whispered something in her direction. Dawn looked the other way. She had to be focused on this interview if she was going to succeed. She didn’t have time for the other women who wouldn’t even matter by the end of today. At the front of the room, a large window covered with a mirror glaze reflected their faces back to them. Dawn knew behind that window there was a face, perhaps faces, that were watching her this very moment. She pitied the girl next to her. This was no time to seem soft and friendly. An employee at Clinton Engineer Works needed a certain strength of character to get the job done well.

A man in a brown tweed suit much too old in style for his boyish face walked into the room holding a folder matching the one on their desks. *He couldn’t be much older than herself*, Dawn thought. When his eyes met Dawn’s, she didn’t look away. She held his gaze until he looked down, his cheeks slightly pinker than they were a minute before.

When he reached the front of the room, he cleared his throat. “Greetings, Ladies. My name is Peter Wallace. I am one of the managers on this floor and I will be helping Mrs. Heroux conduct the interviews today. We’ll begin today’s interview with a dictation lesson. Your job as a secretary here at Y-12 will frequently bring you into contact with sensitive information that you will need to translate through memos, letters, and reports. Because of the nature of this content, you will need to maintain accuracy and speed. That’s what we will be assessing here. Let your skills shine.”

Peter looked up, meeting Dawn’s gaze again. She smiled and Peter dropped his folder to the floor. He shuffled his feet and collected the folder, apologizing to the group of young women with a sheepish smile.

Dawn was the fastest typist at Butler High School; would that be fast enough here? Peter pulled a document from the folder and started to read. Mrs. Heroux walked down the aisles, her gaze lingering over each girl’s typewriter and fingers as they scribed the message. Dawn didn’t look up once when Mrs. Heroux stood above her desk watching her fingers expertly shift around the keys. As Mrs. Heroux moved to Millie’s desk Dawn caught a slight nod of approval. Dawn glanced right to see the coiffed blond curls bouncing to the rhythm of Millie’s typing. This girl was not what Dawn had initially expected. Distracted by looking to her right, Dawn hit the wrong key, her first mistake on the page. She returned her focus to her own typing and tried to ignore the cadence from Millie’s typewriter and the approval of Mrs. Heroux.

The dictation ended as quickly as it began. Dawn pulled her completed transcription from the top of her typewriter. She blew lightly on the black ink to let it set, and her eyes kept drifting to the single typing mistake in the center of the page. Before she could dwell on it too long, Mrs. Heroux pulled the paper from her hands to bring to the front with the rest.

“Thank you for your focus and effort. We will be calling you in to the next phase of the interview process if you have passed dictation,” Peter said as Mrs. Heroux started laying out the dictation papers on the table in the front of the room. Peter turned his back to the women to evaluate their reports. Dawn started to pick at her nails beneath her individual table. She tried to extend her spine stretching up in her seat enough to see which report was hers and see what their impression of it was, but their muffled evaluations weren’t audible at her seat in the back.

“I used to be a nail picker too.” Millie, nodding toward Dawn's hands.

“What?” Dawn reluctantly broke her gaze from the reports to meet Millie’s chipper smile. Millie just pointed down toward Dawn’s nails and Dawn felt her cheeks bloom in embarrassment. She deliberately placed her hands on each knee and turned back to the front of the room now without any means to keep the anxiety at bay.

“It’s nothing to be embarrassed about. Working here is an excellent opportunity, and to think that one slip of the keys could bring it all to a close is...well, it’s intimidating,” Millie chatted on.

“We’re not friends.” Dawn was even surprised by how blunt the words sounded coming from her mouth. She saw Millie's surprise take over her features which made her feel even worse. “I’m sorry. That’s not what I mean. It’s just...”

“You’re right. We don’t know one another. I just thought it might be helpful if we were at least friendly. Maybe it would take some of the stress off of this event.”

“Of course, I just...”

“Millicent Matthews,” Mrs. Heroux called from the front of the room holding a single paper in her hand.

“That’s me.” Millie stood.

“Congratulations, you can follow Mr. Wallace into the next room for the following phase of the interviews.”

As Millie made her way to the front of the room quiet congratulations were voiced from various tables. Dawn watched as Millie full-tooth smiled at each congratulations. Dawn wasn't used to seeing such genuine acceptance of appreciation. She hoped that wasn't a requirement to move forward in the interviews.

Dawn sat as several more women were called to the front and then escorted to the next conference room. With each name, her palms moistened and she kept wiping them on her pants. The silence in the room made her ears ring, waiting for the sound of the door as it opened and closed to escort another candidate down a hallway they never returned from. Dawn thought everyone in front of her could hear the jagged intakes of her breath as she wrestled to control her nerves under the watchful eye of Ms. Heroux who sat perched at the table in the front as Peter Wallace entered the room again. Dawn held her breath.

“This will be our final candidate to move forward. We appreciate your time in coming to the interviews. If you are not moving forward, Ms. Heroux will guide you back to pick up your bags and give you your departure information.” Every woman leaned forward in her seat. They all wanted this position, but Dawn more than most. “Sara Levine.” Peter's voice was clear in the quiet room, but Dawn didn't move. Her heart sank until she saw several women turn around in their desks to encourage her to the front of the room. She had already forgotten her new identity.

Dawn turned to rise from the desk and her skirt caught in the screws of the desk leg forcing her to make an awkward swivel back toward the seat as she started up the aisle. All eyes were on her now as she tugged her skirt free. The aisle up to the front of the room felt like it continued to grow as she walked down it.

“Sara?” Peter asked, catching quick glances up at her.

“Yes, sir.”

“Let’s begin.” She followed him out of the room without another glance toward the women behind her.

Chapter Eight

The new interview room was smaller than the previous conference room. There was a single table in the center, and the light gleamed off the polish on its wood surface. Peter gestured toward the seat to the left and Dawn edged around the table to sit in the cold metal chair.

“Alright, Miss. Levine. This portion of the interview is to review your dictation skills.” He opened the folder in front of him and Dawn saw a typed report that must be hers. “You only made one mistake as far as I can see. You’re a skilled typist.” Recognizing his praise and preference for Dawn, he quickly added, “As are many other young women in the group.”

“I’m the fastest at Butler High, sir.” She blushed as the words left her lips. In all her attempts to seem controlled and put together, here she was referencing her high school days.

“Butler is a long way from Tennessee. Why do you want to work here? Why not find something closer? Philadelphia perhaps?”

At the mention of Philadelphia Dawn felt the loss of the dreams she had placed in that city for so long. Would she ever make it back to Philadelphia and the writing she wanted to pursue? “I wanted to find something closer to home and my little brother,” she said. Her tone had shifted when speaking about Joe. The hardened, brave facade she put on in front of the other women to earn this position melted away. “But, I have to finish this first.”

“What do you need to finish?” Peter asked.

When she looked into his eyes, Dawn wanted to reveal all the secrets she held. She wanted to know what happened to her father here in these buildings. Why had he been accused of treason? She needed this job to get the answers. She needed to protect her little brother, Joe. Each thought flashed across her eyes, and she could see Peter squint trying to read the myriad of responses too risky for words. Instead, she plastered a smile on her face and said, “I feel I’m

making a real difference here, Mr. Wallace. There's an opportunity for me to fight back. This is my front line." Her words sounded fake even to her, but she held the smile.

Instead of the nod of approval she expected, she saw Peter's eyes fall. Apparently, her answer didn't match any of the possibilities he imagined. He looked down at the paper in front of him and closed the folder.

Dawn's pulse picked up. What had she done wrong? She thought she had provided him with the answer that Clinton Engineer Works would want from their candidates.

"Thank you for your time, Miss. Levine."

Dawn felt her opportunity closing like the folder in Peter's lap. This couldn't be the end of the line. She would never find the answers she was looking for back in Butler. This had to be the next step for her.

"I'll escort you to the waiting room. Mrs. Heroux and I will be in to inform the candidates of the final decision soon." He stood up, pushing in his metal chair. Dawn couldn't bring herself to move. "Miss. Levine?"

"I have a brother," Dawn said, looking at the table and not at Peter.

"Excuse me?"

"He's only eight years old."

"It's nice that you have a family to encourage you. I'm sure they're proud of your efforts to come all the way down here to Oak Ridge."

"I can't tell him I've failed Mr. Wallace." Dawn finally looked up at Peter standing in the door frame, the door partially open behind him. He adjusted his tie and smoothed the wrinkles in his white shirt. When Dawn finally caught his eyes, he didn't look away. His eyebrows raised ever so slightly, and she thought she saw compassion there.

“The waiting room is this way.” He broke his gaze, and Dawn’s hope at compassion ended. She felt the tears on the edge of her eyes but squinted them away. She re-folded the pleats in her skirt the way her mom taught her, creating a presentable exterior image no matter what was going on inside and stood up to follow Peter down the hallway.

In the waiting room, the other three women who had been called before her were sitting around an oblong wooden table. Dawn noticed Millie’s bright smile toward the girl next to her. They were giggling about some shared confidence, and she felt a surge of heat at how fast their confidence had formed. When Peter and Dawn walked in, all conversation stopped. He gestured to a chair for Dawn and she sat with the other candidates. Mrs. Heroux entered a moment later and handed Peter the other three folders representing each of the women in the room. Like a card trick, she watched as her folder was slipped to the bottom and not touched again. The four folders were jostled in his hand, but it was the second folder that Peter pulled to the top.

“Millicent Matthews?” He read the name from the new top folder as Dawn saw her own still at the bottom of the stack.

“Millie. Call me Millie,” She smiled.

“We’d like you to follow Mr. Wallace to the consulting office. Welcome to the team at Clinton Engineer Works,” Mrs. Heroux said.

“Thank you,” Millie said something to the woman sitting next to her, but Dawn couldn’t hear. The failure of her interview and how she would ever answer Joe’s questions was almost too much to bear.

After Millie had left, Mrs. Heroux addressed the remaining candidates. “Thank you for your time today. I’ll escort you back to pick up your luggage. You will be taking the first train out in the morning. You will stay in our dormitory hall tonight.”

Dawn retrieved her luggage without much acknowledgment. She didn't listen to the other two women's stories as they picked bunk beds in the small room they would share for the night. She pushed her luggage under the bed and lay down, closing her eyes.

Chapter Nine

July 3, 1945

The next morning, Dawn zipped her bag shut ready for the car to take her back to the train station and back to Butler. She wasn't ready yet to think about what awaited her back at home, she would figure that out on the train ride home. The other two women who had bunked in the same room with Dawn came twittering into the room. They didn't even look up toward Dawn when they walked in. She hadn't bothered to learn their names. She preferred to be alone to sulk.

At exactly 9:00 a.m., all three women walked out to the front of the dorm building to meet their car. Dawn looked up the dirt road, watching the lucky women who called Oak Ridge home walk up to work. Their dresses were pulled up to avoid any overspray from the mud roads. This newly formed city was still in transition. She knew what that felt like.

As the car pulled up to the dorm building, the driver called out two names, "Patricia...Linda." The other two women nodded and started to load their luggage. Dawn followed suit but stopped when the driver placed a hand on her elbow. "Miss. You're not on this ride."

"Excuse me?" Dawn looked at him, trying to assess whether he was joking. His red curly hair made him look like a young child who had lost the war with their hairbrush.

"Your name isn't on the list for this pick-up," he said a little slower to help her understand. He pointed to the schedule of names listed next to the time and destination for their pick-up.

"It's Sara Levine. I'm supposed to be going to the train station to go back to Butler, Pennsylvania." Dawn felt her heartbeat pick up as she explained the situation to the young driver.

“I’ve always wanted to go to Pennsylvania.” The driver’s cheeks bulged out when he smiled making him appear even more childlike.

“If I’m not on this pick-up, which one am I on?”

The man looked over his list, repeating her name as he searched over each one.

“Sara...Sara...Sara...”

Dawn struggled to read the names faster upside down on the clipboard, but she didn’t see her name posted anywhere.

“Nope. Not transferred out today. Looks like you’re staying at Oak Ridge, Ms. Levine. I have to get these ladies over to the station on time. Have a nice day.” He tipped his head, putting his hand to his forehead like he was saluting her with a cowboy hat. She could picture a cowboy hat plopped on top of his curls, but her confusion left her standing motionless on the only sidewalk in front of the dormitory building. The car drove away and she looked up and down the street in front of her. The women she had watched were already at their jobs and the muddy street front was empty.

She picked up her suitcase and set it back down again. She ran a hand through her hair that she hadn’t bothered to curl or fix since there was no interview today. She felt the familiar Denton cowlick rear up at the back of her part and licked her fingers to try to push it back down again.

The sound of mud suctioning and popping loose followed by a harsh word drew her attention. Dawn saw Peter Wallace, the engineer from yesterday’s interviews, making his way down the street, none too pleased with the state of the road.

“Ms. Levine.” His breathing was winded from the exertion. *He must not leave the office often to experience the streets*, Dawn thought.

“Mr. Wallace. There seems to be a mistake. The young man just came to pick us up for the transport that Mrs. Heroux said was coming this morning, but my name was not on the list.” Dawn slowed as she was talking because Peter was nodding with her every word, clearly anxious to interrupt but had been taught enough manners to let her finish.

“Yes, my sincerest apologies about that. I tried to get the information to you before the pick-up occurred, but I was delayed.” His cheeks flushed pink as they did in the interview room yesterday. He could barely hold her gaze for more than a few seconds.

“What information?” Dawn said, bringing his attention back to the conversation.

“Of course. Of course. You’re not going home today as you probably already have guessed.”

“Why not? I wasn’t selected.”

“You weren’t selected for the secretary position. That is true. But, we have an opening for a calutron girl. I figured it would be easier to pull someone we’ve already interviewed instead of creating a whole new pool.” He looked down again, avoiding her gaze. Something in their interview yesterday must have connected with him to prompt him to offer this position and Dawn wasn’t going to turn him down.

* * *

Dawn followed Peter back to the Y-12 building from yesterday’s interviews. The tall stone facade rose in front of them, and Dawn didn’t feel the same confidence she exuded in yesterday’s interview. Today the building felt imposing, and she felt small.

“Welcome to Y-12,” he said as he flashed a badge at the security guide seated at the front of the building. “I’ll introduce you to the head of the calutron girls and she’ll get you acquainted with the job.”

“And that job is what again?” Dawn had never heard the term.

“Calutron girl.”

“What do you do as a calutron girl?” Dawn asked.

“You’ll see. Gladys here will explain everything.” Peter nodded toward a woman nearly passing them with her brisk gait. She was not much older than Dawn and nearly rolled her bright blue eyes when Peter stepped into her path. Gladys stopped and looked Dawn over from head to toe. Dawn felt her cheeks flush because she hadn’t put any effort into her appearance today compared to her precise preparation for the interview. “Gladys, I found you a new calutron girl!” Peter moved his arm to show Dawn like the prize in a game show.

“By holding interviews without my knowledge.” Gladys set her gaze back on Peter without an ounce of his enthusiasm. He smiled, but his charm wasn’t working on her.

“A minor detail for a qualified candidate.”

“What makes you qualified as a calutron girl?” Gladys turned to Dawn and Dawn felt herself freeze under the intensity of her stare.

“Mr. Wallace was just working on explaining the specific details of the position.” Dawn’s voice was smaller, Gladys reminded her of a young version of her mother. Gladys turned to Peter. No words were needed. Her hands went to her hips as her weight shifted to the right. Her eyebrows rose significantly above her thick-framed lenses. Peter chuckled nervously.

“I’ll leave you to it, Gladys. I know you’re an expert at training the new girls.” Peter turned and his footsteps were much quicker retreating down the hallway. Gladys and Dawn both watched Peter until he turned the corner at the end of the hall. When he was out of sight, Gladys sighed and finally turned to face Dawn. Dawn smiled, but the expression wasn’t reciprocated.

“What’s your name?” Gladys finally broke the silence.

“Umm...Sara...Sara Levine.” Dawn was getting more familiar with saying Sara’s name when asked for her own.

“Well, Umm Sara. I can only train you for what’s needed, but I cannot tell you what you are doing. All I can tell you is that if our enemies beat us to it, God have mercy on us. Follow me; you’re already late.” Gladys started down the hallway going deeper into the building known as Y-12. She didn’t look back at Dawn once to see if she was following behind.

At the end of the hall, Gladys pushed open a large steel door using all her body weight to heave it open. The room in front of them was narrow like a hallway. Women were seated on tall stools on either side of the room. In front of them was a panel of knobs and meters. Each woman focused on dial readings on the metal panel, turning and adjusting the knobs as the dials swirled in circles. Dawn watched as one woman quickly started twisting the knob to her right while watching a single dial. Her hands moved across the knobs like a choreographed dance.

“Wait for it to adjust, Margery.” Gladys cooed over her head and reached toward the woman’s hand as she went to move another knob. Both women looked at a single dial, their breath waiting for it to move. Dawn saw a large bold font letter R on the dial. The dial was reading beneath the R and clearly, they wanted it to return within that range. Dawn switched her gaze between the knob and the reading. Not ten seconds later, the dial hand popped into the center of the letter R. All three women exhaled. The woman Gladys had called Margery finally broke her gaze with the machine and turned to look at Dawn and Gladys.

“Thanks, Gladys.”

“We call get antsy fingers, sometimes.” The woman who had glared so harshly at Peter softened to the woman in front of her.

“Who’s this?” Margery nodded her head toward Dawn with protectiveness in her tone. It was apparent that this unit was close. They looked out for one another.

“New girl. Supposed to train her today.” Dawn looked back and forth between the two women, expecting an introduction. When she didn’t get it, she made the opportunity herself.

“Sara Levine.” She pushed her hand out to Margery, forcing acknowledgement in the conversation.

“Welcome to Y-12,” Margery said flatly. She didn’t take Dawn’s hand. She just turned back to the dials in front of her and kept twisting knobs and flicking switches all while watching the readings with the letter R and the final dial reading a large E. Only once the E was illuminated did she look away and stretch. Dawn was intrigued by this network of intensity.

It looked like playing some sort of complex cooking game. If the dials went the wrong way, then the food would burn. This made Dawn even more nervous as she had been kicked out of her home economics course. Cooking was not a skill she had, nor was she working to achieve it. Dawn looked down the room and saw at least twenty women all playing this same knob and dial game perched on their stools. Some leaned in close to the machine, leaning back when they must have reached the successful letter E, while others evaluated the challenge from a laid-back position on their stool as if plotting their next chess move.

“As you can probably assume, your objective is to maintain the dial position in the R range. R is good. You’ll know your product has been created when the E is illuminated. At that point, the machine will reset for you to begin again.”

“What product are they creating?”

Gladys turned to look at Dawn. “I already told you. All I can do is train you for what’s needed. What is needed is a dial range in R and an output of E. Clear?”

“So no one here knows what they’re creating, they’re just checking the dials all day?”

Gladys sighed. “Is that a problem with you?”

Dawn looked down the row of women and watched their hands twist and turn the knobs; she saw the dials adjust to their actions. Their movements were like a well-oiled machine. Could she create without knowing what was behind the floor-to-ceiling steel wall in front of each bench?

“Well?” Gladys asked.

“No, ma’am. Not a problem.”

“Then I’ll take you to your bench and we’ll learn the system.”

The rest of the morning Gladys walked Dawn through which knobs controlled which dials. The cause and effect systems were not as complicated as she anticipated if she resisted her inquisitive urge to know what was being produced. Instead, Gladys taught her to only care about the dials. At noon, the women finished their current product creation before filtering out the metal door to a lunch room. Gladys patted Dawn on the shoulder; she was one of the team now.

“Well done this morning. You’re a fast learner. Soon you’ll be up to speed with the others.” She lowered her voice and whispered, “We’re even better than the physicists that visit to try their hand at the dials.”

“Physicists?”

Gladys smiled with the pride of a parent watching their child’s success. “They overthink it. I teach all the girls on my team to concentrate on the dials and let all the other details fall away. The equations and processes get stuck in the physicist’s minds and they can’t let it go long enough to be as fast as we are.”

“Hmm..” Dawn thought back to her father’s plans, still sitting in her suitcase she had left at the front desk of the building until she had a permanent place to be in Oak Ridge. He had seen them laid out across the dining room table after her mother and brother went to bed. His red scribbles across the sheets notated where a particular step needed to be updated or adjusted. It was possible she was sitting in front of the machine that he was working on. She reached in front of her and touched the cool metal. Her father’s plans behind this sheet.

“It protects us,” Gladys said.

“What does?”

“The metal siding. It blocks the radiation. Before you move into your assigned housing today, you’ll be checked for radiation to make sure you’re safe.”

Radiation. She knew about the risks of radiation from her overzealous history teacher and from conversations with her dad.

“The exposure shouldn’t be harmful in small doses,” Gladys said, seeing Dawn’s eyes widen as she removed her hand from the metal wall. The wall no longer felt like a connection to her father. It was too small, too thin, not enough to protect her from whatever was being created behind it.

“Let’s stop for lunch before we miss our entire break. Follow the hallway straight down and take the third right. You’ll hear the lunch chatter.”

Gladys walked away, but Dawn just sat on the stool. This felt like too much. How was she ever going to get information about her father when she was under Gladys’ watchful supervision during her whole shift? Not only was she at risk of radiation exposure, but she would be checked before leaving the building. So much for her great plan of smuggling out evidence and records. Her whole plan felt impossible, just the daydreams of a high school girl. Now she

was in the midst of real-life with real risk. There was no space for her daydreaming here. She trudged down the hallway, questioning whether she could even stay here at Oak Ridge.

Chapter Ten

Dawn pushed the fork through the lettuce dripping in dressing. When a piece of the lettuce touched her fork, it went limp laying across the prongs the same way Dawn felt at her current position.

“This seat taken?” A voice asked across the lunchroom table.

Dawn looked up to find the perky blond from interviews; Marnee or something like that.

“No, please.” Dawn remembered her flair of arrogance during the interviews and felt her cheeks flush sitting across from the candidate awarded the position she thought she was so perfect for. “About the interviews...”

“Nothing needs to be said. Competition doesn’t always bring out the best in us.” The woman smiled and started to unpack her lunch. Dawn felt relief flood through her, the same compassion and warmth her friend Sara would have shown back home. Sara, and now this woman, felt like her antithesis. She hoped some of their goodness might wear off on her. “So, you’re still here, Miss. Sara Levine. I’m not surprised by that,” she said.

Dawn couldn’t help but smile. “Yes, Mr. Wallace found another position for me. I’m the newest calutron girl.” She put her arms to her hips and tilted her head to the side to match the hiring posters she had seen for the calutron girls.

Her lunch companion’s smile widened and she had to cover her mouth to keep her water inside. “And their newest poster girl apparently.”

“That’s not my style,” Dawn said.

“What do you do as a calutron girl?” Millie asked, making small talk conversation the way her mother had raised her to do. Dawn stopped eating and waited for Millie to make eye contact with her. The silence finally brought her attention up to Dawn and both women realized

the mistake. They were not allowed to talk about what they did here. There were strict rules for that. Millie's face brightened a deep shade of red and she started adjusting her carefully positioned hairpins and a silver locket around her neck. "I'm so sorry. I forgot. I didn't mean to." Millie looked around her seeing the faces of the women in the lunchroom. She waited to see if anyone was listening in to their conversation if they were going to report her for breaking the rules on her first day of work.

"What happens anyway?" Dawn asked.

"What happens with what?" Millie pulled the heart-shaped necklace left and then right over the delicate chain.

"If you talk." Dawn lowered her voice when she said it, feeling the tension transfer from Millie to herself. "There's a sign in the middle of my workroom that says..."

"Sara. Don't." Millie's voice was forceful. Dawn had not seen this side of her. Back home, Dawn teased her dear friend Sara about her particularity with rule-following, but here she didn't find the same enjoyment in teasing Millie. "There is security. There are consequences," Millie said. She didn't look at Dawn when she said it; she was too focused on the other women in the room. Instead, Millie smiled at a tall brunette that Dawn recognized from a few stools down her row.

Security, Dawn thought, *consequences*. Just these two details gave her a problem. Her father always said she was good at solving problems. "You have a thinker's brain, Dawn. Use it," he would tell her when she was little, tapping his finger to her temple. *I'm trying Dad*, she thought, returning her attention to the table where Millie swished the necklace left then right, left then right.

"Tell me about your necklace." Dawn couldn't stand watching Millie squirm any longer.

Millie noticed the subconscious habit and she found herself appreciative of the distraction from her mistake. She pulled the necklace forward looking down so she could just barely see it. “This is from my father.” Her voice changed and Dawn could hear the love she had for her father. It brought a lump to her throat.

Dawn’s voice croaked when she asked, “Are you close? To your father.”

“Everyone says my father could light up a room just by entering. They say he could be in a room of strangers and leave with them all as friends. But, I don’t really know, Sara. I was two when he died.”

“I’m sorry for your loss,” Dawn whispered her sympathies across the table. “From what I’ve seen of you, you sound a lot like your dad.”

When Millie’s eyes met Dawn’s there was a glint of tears. “Thank you.”

The women sat together neither one looking at the other. Dawn wasn’t ready to share about her own father. It was enough, for now, to know that the connection existed between them. Where Millie trusted Dawn right away, Dawn was still building that ability.

A shrill bell rang through the hall and all the women started to pack up their lunch supplies. Dawn paused at the door to the lunchroom, “Until tomorrow?”

The question was not one Dawn normally asked. She only liked to ask questions she knew the answers to.

“I’ll see you here, Sara Levine.”

Dawn returned to the hall for the calutron girls and the stool that was now her job home. The interaction with Millie had brightened her day. As quickly as Dawn’s pleasure with this new connection was made, she remembered the name Millie called her, the name Dawn was known

by here at Oak Ridge, Sara Levine. Millie could never know the truth of Dawn's real identity.

Dawn was sure that her deception would be a betrayal she couldn't repair.

Chapter Eleven

At five o'clock sharp the same bell that ended lunch rang again. Dawn attempted to move off her high-top stool, but her muscles ached in protest. After hours of perching on the stool listening to Gladys drone on and on about the dials and the knobs in front of her, she had started to mimic Gladys' posture as if posture would guarantee her the results Gladys was looking for. Unfortunately, that posture included a slight tilt toward the metal mechanical wall that made Dawn's back ache from the constant hold. The thought of sitting on the same stool tomorrow sent a shiver down her spine and emphasized the pain from a crick in her neck.

Just as Dawn suspected, working at the Y-12 as a calutron girl under Gladys meant constant supervision. Gladys never turned her back on the women for more than a second. While she was stuck at a single station today training Dawn, she had a woman take over her patrols marching up and down the aisle; occasionally she looked over the shoulder of one of the women to see them respond with their calculated adjustments. Dawn sighed as she rotated her head in a full circle trying to bring relief to the pain which was now occupying more of her attention since she wasn't trying to take in the intricacies of her new job.

The metal door at the end of the calutron room felt heavier than it did this morning, and she trudged down the hall a little slower than she had entered. The nightly check-out happened at the front desk of Y-12 where badges were checked and employees were tracked.

"Miss. Levine!" a voice yelled just as the metal door slammed shut. Tired from her day's work Dawn didn't flinch or even turn at the sound of her new name. "Miss. Levine." This time, the name came with a sharp finger jab to Dawn's shoulder.

"Ouch," Dawn said, jumping back from the gesture. "Why did you do that?" Gladys stood holding out a card to Dawn.

“You didn’t hear me, Miss. Levine. I’ve been calling your name.” Gladys looked directly into Dawn’s eyes. She was the type of person that felt like she was reading into your soul when she made eye contact. That was the last type of infringement Dawn needed. She broke her gaze and looked down at the clean tile flooring.

“I..I was too...”

“Preoccupied. I know. You need this to get out of the building.” Gladys shoved the card at Dawn. “Go directly to human resources. You’ll find a desk for housing assignments. Cody will handle your housing arrangement for tonight.”

“Okay.” Dawn looked at the card with Gladys’ crisp slanted lines and perfectly shaped circles that formed the name “Sara Levine” below the Y-12 Employee label at the top. There was no indication as to what job she did at the plant, but the card would gain her access through the front doors of the facility every day.

“You need to sign it and then it’s official.” Gladys held out a blue pen to Dawn.

Dawn just stared at the card in front of her. She thought of Sara’s perfect script back home and knew she would cringe as Dawn took the pen and scribbled Sara’s name. Signing the card made her an employee, but more than that it made Sara’s name become Dawn’s. Being employed as her best friend, the name Sara Levine was changing as Dawn passed back the pen and pocketed the card. “Second floor. Hurry along or you’ll be sleeping another night without your curlers,” Gladys said as she turned away marching back up the center aisle. She adjusted a stool on her left with a micro-movement to the right until she was satisfied it rested precisely in the center of the workstation. Dawn put her hand to her now especially flat hair and headed to the second floor.

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After two wrong turns, Dawn found the housing assignments desk empty except for a thin man wearing glasses so thick he had to keep pushing them up on his nose. She removed the card Gladys had given her and handed it across the table. “I’m Sara Levine. Gladys from the calu...”

“Shhh...Just stop!” For a little man, his shrill voice projected clear across the counter toward Dawn. Startled, she took a step back.

“Stop what?”

“I don’t need to know any of that information. It’s all on the card.” He made an exaggerated pointing motion with his lean index finger tapping the card with each punctuated word. “It’s. All. On. The. Card.”

Dawn looked at the card. It was still the same card Gladys had given her just a few minutes ago. She wondered what she was missing. Was there more information on the back of the card? All she saw was the Building Y-12 title, her name scripted in Gladys’ handwriting, and then her signature beneath. What was she missing? She raised her eyebrows after examining the card and looked at the man whose finger had finally stopped tapping the card.

“Housing?” His tone shifted and a smile rose to his face at Dawn’s silence. The rules of this place would certainly take getting used to after being indoctrinated for so long about polite ways of communication. The quick shift in his mood left Dawn uncertain about what to do next. Should she answer out loud? Nod her head silently? She decided it was safest to stay quiet, so she nodded once only.

Pleased, the house assignment man, whose name tag read Cody, opened a binder behind his desk. He flipped to the page, humming quietly to fill the silence between them. After what felt like an hour, he finally tapped the current page. “Yes, there is one more opening in the

dormitories. It is ten dollars a month, and we can pull it from your paycheck for you if you wish.”

Dawn just nodded again. He was nearly exuberant as he copied her name into the book next to the room number, seven. “There is another occupant, but she probably won’t last here long. Here you are. Enjoy your stay in Oak Ridge, Tennessee.” He handed her back her card and Dawn turned to leave before she would say another word that might bring more unnecessary tapping.

Chapter Twelve

She walked toward the row of dormitory housing. Rectangular gray buildings lined up like mirrored copies of each other on repeat down the street. There were no trees to counteract their mechanical color and steel frames. Oak Ridge was changing the natural scenery around it quickly. With the flood of young women fresh out of high school like Dawn, there would need to be another women's dormitory soon. Dawn saw the start of the building just two rectangles past her assigned housing.

There were only a few stragglers from the five o'clock exodus, but Dawn found herself mostly alone on the walk. She looked around the city that was forming in front of her. Where had her dad stayed when he lived at Oak Ridge? Every time she asked him about his living arrangements when he was away, he always told her nothing was better than being at home with her and her brother. But now that the day's sun had dried out the street's muddy sludge to a manageable hardpack, she found she enjoyed the hum of the cicadas whose homes had given way to make this new city in a holler of Tennessee.

The suitcase she had stowed at the front office all day was getting heavy as she rounded a corner. She set it down to double check that the bold font name above the Dormitory matched the one posted on her card. East Wing. *Not the creative types are they?* Dawn thought. She marched into the dorm and found room seven on the first floor. The housing assignment attendant, Cody, had said there was already an occupant in that room, so Dawn prepared herself to maintain her facade a little while longer. She needed to find some location on campus where she could release the ruse and be herself for just a moment.

Dawn opened the door and saw familiar blond curls bent over a large crimson hard case suitcase. Millie Matthews turned to face the opened door and smiled.

“Sara!”

“Is this your room...Min...,” Dawn tried to remember the woman’s name.

“Millie, and yes, this is my room! Just getting a little more settled. Last night I only unpacked the essentials.” Dawn looked to the vanity shelf beneath the mirror and saw a lengthy array of essentials. “Are you my new roommate?”

Dawn looked at the residence card once more. “This is room seven, right?”

“That it is! Oh goody! I was hoping I would get a roommate I get along with. Where’s the rest of your luggage? I’ll help you carry it in.”

“This is it.” Dawn lifted the family case. Its army green exterior scuffed from all the trips her father had taken to Oak Ridge seemed a stark contrast to Millie’s shiny new case.

“Oh...well that’s okay. I hope you don’t mind that I took the twin on the right.” Dawn looked around the room; it was at least half the size of her bedroom at home. Two twin beds lined either side of the room with just enough space for a shared nightstand between them. A simple lamp sat in the middle of the nightstand, and a lean rectangular window that barely tilted open framed the lamp. The communal restroom was down the hall, but a single mirror with a vanity shelf beneath hung on the wall next to the twin bed Millie had claimed. The walls were painted a stark white. The only warmth in the room came from the oak furniture. It was simple and that fit Dawn just fine.

“I don’t have a preference,” Dawn said.

The women spent the next hour assigning new homes for their belongings. Dawn found herself moving slowly to place her few items and to avoid a conversation with Millie about how few belongings she was pulling from her case. Dawn’s family wasn’t poor, but she had learned the value of treasuring the things that she had. They took care of the few things they owned.

Dawn gently laid the two straps of the suitcase back into the case and let her hands drift toward the center across its soft lining thinking of her father's fingers doing the same thing so many times. She touched the envelope with the plans she had brought with her. She would find a time to look at them to see if she spotted any similarities with her machine at work.

As she traced the frame of the case, her fingers felt a ridge. She returned them to the start and began to trace a rectangular shape beneath the suitcase lining. Checking behind her that Millie was still busy unpacking her belongings and not looking at her, Dawn traced what was clearly an envelope shape beneath the lining. Her fingers moved to the edge of the suitcase looking for some sort of opening or zipper. She moved around the entire perimeter of the base of the case, but the seal on the lining seemed intact. She closed the case and flipped it over on her bed, looking at the exterior to see any signs of a breach where her father could have stuck the letter into the case. She was running her hand slowly against the metal feet at the bottoms of the case when Millie interrupted her focus.

“What are you doing?” Millie asked.

Dawn pulled her attention away from the case in front of her. Her tongue was just sticking out from the edge of her lips, a Denton trait, unfortunately. Her father did the same thing when he wanted to focus on a task. It didn't matter if it was an advanced math problem or just cutting the wrapping paper for a birthday present; if it was a task in front of him, he did it with attention, dedication, and his tongue sticking out just so slightly. Dawn pulled her tongue in and smiled.

“Just making sure the feet are still secure. It's an old family heirloom.” She nodded toward the suitcase and locked the front latches, the envelope securely inside, and slipped it

beneath her cot. “The feet still seem fine.” She flopped onto the bed hoping her casual posture would clear away any suspicion from Millie.

“It’s just the worst when the feet are loose. This one time when mother and I were...” Millie started in on a story that Dawn was not at all paying attention to. Her thoughts raced back to the letter inside the suitcase. What did it say? Who did it belong to? And most importantly, how and when would she figure out how to get it out of the suitcase?

After Millie finished unpacking her things and Dawn kept the stories flowing with occasional nods or “Mmmhm’s” of encouragement, it was only seven o’clock. Both women lay on their beds staring up at the white ceiling.

“What do people do in the evenings here?” Dawn asked, angling her head to look out the window. It was still light and would be for another couple of hours with the late summer sun.

“I heard from Peggy that there’s a cinema. We could go see what’s playing,” Millie suggested.

Dawn wasn’t a frequent visitor to the cinema house in Butler, but there wasn’t much she could do now until she had time to be alone with the suitcase. The cinema was located back toward the Y-12 building, but the walk was filled with more of Millie’s family stories and a sort of bounce as she walked. Dawn bought a ticket to the show without even looking at the title. Millie saw women she recognized from work and chose seats next to them. Dawn waved hello but stayed quiet as the women chatted. It wasn’t until she heard the word spy that her attention returned back to the women’s conversation.

“Wait. What did you say?” Dawn asked.

The woman with fiery red hair looked around her before she answered in a whisper. “There’s a rumor there’s a spy at Clinton Engineer Works, or rather there *was* a spy.”

Dawn's mouth went dry. "Was?"

The woman leaned in closer to Dawn. "Was because apparently, he killed himself a few weeks ago." Heat flooded through Dawn's body. The air conditioning in the cinema building only amplified her heat as it hit the sweat that formed over her. "I guess he was wracked with guilt over his decision to betray his country." She shook her head and let her voice rise above a whisper to display her nationalism. The existence of security around Oak Ridge was no secret. They were clearly established to make sure that lips didn't let any details slip. But, you never knew when a listening ear might lean in and share what you had said. Millie sat between Dawn and the redhead. She was pushed back as far as she could possibly go in the seat as if willing herself to be removed from this conversation. Millie was clearly uncomfortable, but Dawn could only think of these lies about her father.

"I'm sure it was complicated." Dawn stared intently toward the other woman who continued to look around her smiling at several young men who smiled back.

"Complicated?" she huffed back. "What's complicated about betraying your country. You just don't."

"Maybe he didn't betray his country," Dawn said, low enough for only their group to hear. Hearing Dawn's tone, Millie turned toward her. Dawn turned her face away not wanting Millie to see the loss and the pain in her eyes for fear that she would see the truth. After their lunch conversation, Dawn knew that Millie understood the pain and loss of a parent. She would certainly be able to identify it in Dawn's eyes as well.

"Well when you share secrets about Oak Ridge, there are consequences. Remember, I cannot tell you what you are doing. All I can tell you is that if our enemies beat us to it, God have mercy on us," the woman parroted loudly what Gladys had just told Dawn earlier that day.

The phrase was clearly repeated often here at Oak Ridge, and Dawn was already tired of it. Secrets were exactly what she needed people to share.

“What secrets could have possibly made him...” Dawn paused before she could bring herself to say it, “kill himself.”

At this Millie couldn't contain her concern any longer. “Sara Levine. You know the rules of this place. We don't share those secrets. The poor tortured soul shared those secrets and look what it got him,” she whisper-yelled to both women.

“Dead.” The word sat between all three women. Dawn was grateful when the lights dimmed and the patriotic war propaganda filled the screen. The light lit up the faces of the citizens and co-workers of Oak Ridge. Dawn looked at the faces around her and considered what each face held beneath it. She knew her father as a man of integrity. Why would he so blatantly break the rules of this place? There had to be a reason. As the movie began, Dawn's thoughts returned to the suitcase on her bed. What was underneath the suitcase liner? Maybe she didn't need secrets shared audibly when they were written on the page.

Chapter Thirteen

Lying in bed awake, Dawn listened to Millie's breathing, waiting for it to be regular and consistent. She needed privacy to figure out how to get the letter out of the suitcase and then time to herself to read the letter. Dawn started at the ceiling and finally dared to edge herself off the bed as gently as possible to avoid any squeaks in the mattress. She pulled the suitcase from underneath her bed, lifting it off the ground and holding it gently just an inch above the floor to avoid any scratching or scraping sounds as she perched it gently on the bed. Dawn climbed back into the bed and turned the suitcase so it sat before her like a child with a much anticipated birthday present. However, mixed with her excitement was the anxiety of not knowing exactly what she would find in the letter itself.

She opened the case and cringed when the old hinges groaned upon opening. A quick glance at Millie told her it hadn't awoken her new roommate. A moment of personal space before her, Dawn gently placed her father's plans on the bed and began to trace the outline of the suitcase again. There had to be some zipper or opening that her father would have used to get the letter into the suitcase. Despite her efforts, Dawn found nothing. She went to her make-up bag and grabbed the pocket knife she kept stashed in the outside pocket. Her early days as a Girl Scout had prepared her for every situation, and a utility knife was a must. Returning to the bed on tiptoe, she cut a small hole on the right side of the lining as close as she could possibly get to the edge of the suitcase. Each thread torn by the knife made Dawn cringe that Millie would wake up. Finally, the cut was large enough to snake the envelope out. Dawn pushed the envelope inch by inch down the suitcase until she could just feel the edge of it with her fingertips. Feeling the paper for the first time unencumbered by the lining of the suitcase made her heart beat faster. She pinched the envelope and gently pulled it from the suitcase.

With her treasure in hand, Dawn tiptoed down the hall to the bathroom. The bright light made her blink as her eyes adjusted from the bedroom. She didn't bother entering a stall for further privacy. The excitement of discovering a lead toward her father's innocence rushed her to her exploration of the envelope. The back of the envelope was blank, not a marking on the package. She flipped the envelope over. It was a perfect square, not more than four inches in width or length. Dawn was surprised to see the off-white envelope addressed to her mother. Why was this in her father's suitcase? The handwriting didn't belong to her father. His short script was always precise and angular. This hand had scrolled the letters looping them together. Her anticipation at a clue toward her father's innocence was thwarted. She sighed at the missed opportunity, but her curiosity as to what was in this letter to her mother remained.

Before she opened the letter, Dawn paused. She knew it was not polite to open someone else's mail. She shouldn't open it. But, if it was in the suitcase it must have been an old letter. And old news wasn't likely to harm anyone if she knew it. And maybe this was information her mother needed to know. Dawn could read it and then transfer whatever information in her phone call to Joe on Saturday.

Reading the letter isn't nosy, she decided and opened the envelope.

Elizabeth,

The art supplies we discussed have arrived early. Let's meet soon to review the contents.

XO

XO? Dawn re-read the letter. Was there another meaning for XO besides hugs and kisses? Could they be initials? And who was writing this letter to her mother? She looked closer at the handwriting to see if she could find any similarities to her dad's script, but the scrolled letters weren't like her father's articulate lines at all.

She turned the letter over looking for more. Perhaps an address or a signature. But, the back of the letter was blank. There was no address posted on the front, so the letter was intended to be delivered by hand, or by suitcase. Dawn still wasn't clear why her father had this letter stashed in his suitcase. Why wouldn't they send the letter by mail?

Dawn remembered her mother's newest passion, art class. She started just a few months before at a local studio. That could explain the supplies in the letter. But, why would someone in her art class leave a letter hidden in this suitcase?

Dawn jumped when the bathroom door pushed open. A sleepy young woman entered still yawning, which gave Dawn time to push the letter back into the envelope and behind her back. She pretended to match the woman's lingering slumber and gave her a slight nod as she exited to return to her room.

The first rays of sunlight were starting to enter the small window as Dawn pushed the letter back into the lining of the case. She pulled the fabric together hoping it wouldn't look torn or cut, and carefully latched the case. With gentle care, she replaced the suitcase under the bed and rolled under the covers just as she heard Millie yawn and stretch awake. The case, the letter, and her questions would have to wait.

Chapter Fourteen

July 3, 1945

Dawn and Millie walked with the hundreds of other women to the Y-12 Building the next morning. The security patrols were intermixed between them, changing course and listening in to conversations for a few moments before swerving to interfere with a different conversation. But, Dawn and Millie's conversation wouldn't have awarded a second step of a security patrol. Millie was including every detail of her mother's cooking legacy from back home.

"Twenty-seven times she's won the state award for best pie," Millie said, her twang coming out stronger when she talked about her family.

"What kind of pie?" Dawn thought of her own mother's cooking. She was sure Elizabeth Denton had and would never win an award for her cooking.

"Why...chess pie of course."

"Chess? Like the game?" Dawn had never heard of such a dish.

"Yes, it's only the sweetest concoction to grace the plate of a judge. And my mama knows exactly how to bring a hint of saltiness to cut through that sweetness that coats your mouth." The pride in Millie's voice was evident. Family was important to her. Dawn considered that this connection between the two women was something else they shared. Millie would do anything to protect her family. Dawn was doing everything she could to defend her family's name. The mystery of the letter entered her mind and she wondered if there was more she didn't know about her family. What other secrets had her parents kept from her?

"Lunch again?" Millie's voice broke through Dawn's pondering as they reached the Y-12 front doors.

"Certainly. See you then."

The two separated, and Dawn made her way to her individual stool in front of the panel of knobs and dials. She looked at the displays in front of her, reminding herself what each one did. As she was reviewing yesterday's directions from Gladys, the rest of the calutron girls filtered into their respective stools.

"Before anyone begins, we have a security meeting to attend, ladies. Let's get a move on before they think we're doddling." Gladys shooed the women off their stools like a mother hen getting her ducklings to all walk in a row. "Conference room C, Cherise. Lead us there, please."

A woman, who must have been Cherise, started out the door with purpose. Dawn turned to the woman next to her and asked, "Is this typical to be herded to a security meeting?"

"I've never been to one," the woman replied.

Dawn's heartbeat picked up just a bit and her hands dampened as she walked down the hallway herded between the rest of the women. She tried to focus on the polished white tile floors or the wooden doors along the side of the narrow hallway. Occasionally a metal door, like the one she entered for her room, would appear on the walk. She wondered if there were other teams of calutron girls like hers. Were they all creating the same content? Did they have the same dials she did?

The herd of calutron girls finally turned into a paneled room that must be Conference Room C. The room contained a centered, long oval table that would seat at least twenty. The team of women circled around the table, first taking the chairs and then standing behind to make room for their whole team. Peter Wallace, the young man from the interview panel, stood at the head of the table with two other men at least double his age. Their bulky forms made Peter's lean physique stand out even more. Dawn thought he looked like a child playing dress-up with his father's friends. The thought made her smile which she quickly tried to stifle. There was no

mirrored window in this room, but seeing the two hulking agents was more intimidating than hiding them behind a mirrored wall.

Once every woman was in the room one of the older suits cleared his throat. “Everyone here, Gladys?”

“Yes, sir. Everyone is present today.” Her tone resonated in the room, and Dawn felt a swell of pride to work for this woman who expressed her voice to be heard in a room full of men in their powerful suits. She hoped to have that same tenacity and strength when she was that age.

“Alright, then, let’s begin. Peter.” The man looked at Peter and he stepped forward adjusting his tie. He looked uncomfortable as both men watched him from nearly a foot above him. Before he began his eyes found Dawn in the room. He shuffled his papers, cleared his throat, and began.

“Thank you all for being prompt. Gladys, I expect nothing else from your team.” Gladys nodded her approval which seemed to give Peter a boost of the confidence he needed. He started his next sentence with his voice clearer and stronger than his first. “Unfortunately, we have to discuss a difficult matter with you all today, security. This is your reminder about the security and safety of working here at Clinton Engineer Works. Perhaps you have heard the rumors of a breach of our security recently.”

Dawn’s entire body stilled. Had they discovered her lie? Was she to be an outcast here in front of Gladys?

“There was an employee here at Oak Ridge,” Peter continued, “who decided that the rules of secrecy were not important enough to be upheld. He revealed secrets that should have remained here on campus. In doing so, he has risked the safety of the entire facility, all those who work here, even the success of our troops who are fighting overseas.”

As he continued, Dawn knew he was not speaking of her, but she also feared that she knew who he was speaking of. This was a security meeting about her own father. She felt her cheeks flair red and moved her gaze down to her hands in her lap. She began to move her thumbs in a circle like her father taught her to bide the time if she was bored. She hoped the gesture also helped still the nerves that were coursing through her body.

“Because of this breach, we are reviewing everyone’s personnel information and we are returning to our basic silence contract. In just a moment, you’ll receive your personnel page for review. Beneath your basic home information, you’ll find a list of questions that will greatly help us find the roots of the rumors and this... this cancer of treason. We appreciate your continued support and your strict adherence to the policies.” At that, Peter opened an envelope containing each of their contracts. He called each woman one by one to the front. When Dawn walked up to receive her contract she worried everyone in the room would be able to see her knees shaking in her navy trousers. She briefly looked up to make eye contact with Peter who smiled and gave her a nod as he extended the page to her. Dawn didn’t respond to his welcome; she was too nervous she would give something away in her look, so she took the paper quickly and returned to her seat before her knees gave way.

Back at her seat, she reviewed the paper in front of her. Sara Levine was typed at a slight angle across the line for First and Last Name. *The typist must have entered the paper slightly crooked*, Dawn thought. This tiny detail reminded her that the employees at Oak Ridge were human too. They were not a machine, but as she read the security rules she felt like they were being asked to respond like machines. Each line started with a Do Not and was followed by a rule to follow. It was not the rules that bothered Dawn. It was the second section that made her skin cold and a tingle trickle down her neck across her spine. Underneath all of Sara’s personal

information, her home address, name, and birthdate, was a list of questions that each employee must answer. Dawn looked at the questions. Question four asked: Has anyone asked you directly or indirectly about the details of your position? Following each question was a capitalized Yes and a capitalized No with the direction, Circle One. The line beneath each question contained a line with the direction, If yes, explain.

Dawn looked around the table to watch as each woman took a pen from the metal container passed around the room. Dawn took one as it reached her. Unlike the women before her who bent their heads to finish the task before them quickly and efficiently, Dawn found herself frozen. The pen sat above the page and she couldn't circle a single word. The ten questions all focused on whether she had been propositioned to share or whether she had shared any information about her position. It was the final question that haunted her.

Question ten: Do you certify under penalty of perjury that all the above information is correct and true? YES, NO. If no, explain. Explain. How could Dawn explain what she did? Looking back, it all felt so irrational. How would she ever be able to track down the truth about her father under all the watchful eyes of the security, or even Gladys? There was no explaining what Dawn did. Her eyes looked at the top of the page where Sara's personal information was. This was not Dawn's identity on the line. What would happen to Sara if she failed? There was a real possibility that Dawn's actions would put Sara in danger or get her into trouble.

This was exactly what Sara was always warning Dawn about. "Think your plan through all the way, Dawn," she always said. Even when Dawn had first filled out the application to work at Clinton Engineer Works with Sara's name, Sara had given her the be cautious look.

"You sure you know what you're doing?" Sara had asked as they sat in Butler High's typing room.

“Of course. What could go wrong? With your Jewish heritage, it will be a clear reason why I want to do my part in the war effort. They won’t even ask any questions about my background,” Dawn had answered so confidently.

Now sitting in the conference room, looking at this security contract, Dawn saw exactly what could go wrong. Her best friend throughout her entire school life at Oak Ridge could be imprisoned right along with Dawn in this chase for justice. She suddenly felt warm. The heat filled her up as the guilt of consequences to Sara finally hit her. Consequences were not something that Dawn frequently thought of, but they had always been something she could talk her way out of before this.

She looked up at Peter and the two men in suits watching the women at the table. They would not understand. They would not be lenient on the daughter of a traitor. All Dawn wanted to do was rush from the room and run away from the decision she had made to come here. What was cool air conditioning against her skin moments ago was no longer able to keep the heat at bay. Dawn felt her stomach turn and the moisture on her hands increase. She was going to throw up. She turned around, looking for a trash can or some sort of receptacle that could catch her fear and guilt. There was no trash can, no basket in the room. Dawn’s search became more frantic, drawing the attention of Peter and the other two men.

“Is something wrong Ms. Levine?” Peter asked. Now all the women around the table looked up which just made Dawn’s face grow redder. The man to Peter’s left squinted his eyes and his suspicion in her reaction was clear. *You should be suspicious*, Dawn yelled inside her head. *I’m not who I say I am*. She made one final sweep of the room with her eyes, and not finding any trash can, she folded her paper just in time to catch her upturned breakfast.

Chapter Fifteen

Dawn opened her eyes to an unfamiliar ceiling. The tiles were intermixed with bright fluorescent panels. She blinked and reopened, but the room was still unfamiliar.

“Sara?”

Dawn blinked. Sara? Was Sara here? She sat up looking around a small office space. She was laying on a blue velvet couch that had been pushed up against one wall. A small desk was positioned in the center of the room with folders and papers scattered across the surface. Behind the desk, two floor-to-ceiling bookshelves were packed full of titles Dawn had read herself. She had always felt an instant kindred connection to anyone she saw in public who was reading the same book she was or even reading a favorite of hers. Several titles caught her attention. Then there were the stacks of science textbooks, chemistry, and physics haphazardly shoved into the stacks. Clearly they were frequently referenced. As Dawn surveyed the room looking for Sara, she found Peter Wallace standing near the corner of his bookshelf. He was biting his nails and his eyes were wide as he looked at her.

“Sara?” he asked again. This time Dawn gathered enough information to know that it was her he was referencing. She took a deep breath and her scheme to enter the workforce at Clinton Engineer Works came flooding back, as did the interview room with the security contract. Her cheeks flushed at the memory and she turned her head to the back of the couch to block Peter’s view. “How are you feeling?” he clearly wanted to clear this whole issue up.

“Where am I?” Dawn asked into the soft cushion.

“My office. It was the closest couch to the conference room where you...well, it was the closest couch. We thought you might need to lie down.” His voice was faster than normal and there was a slight shake to his tenor.

“We?” Dawn still wasn’t ready to converse with him face to face, but she was remembering two hulking suits that towered over Peter’s lean frame. Where were they now?

“Me and the other two...I mean...you saw them in the security meeting. They’re here to...to help with the situation.”

“Situation?” Dawn wanted to hear it replayed for her once more while she pondered this fear that was stealing Peter’s confidence.

“The security breach.”

“Mmmm...” Dawn remembered his speech clearly now. Even though she was awake, she kept her head tilted away. She was afraid she wasn’t strong enough yet to maintain her facade as Sara Levine.

After a few moments of silence, Peter spoke quietly. “It happened on my team. The breach, that is. That’s why they’re watching my every move.”

Dawn’s entire body stilled to listen to him without any distraction. The rules of working anywhere at Oak Ridge would certainly prohibit Peter from sharing that information with her, but here he was babbling about the breach to her.

“He was one of my employees so everyone under my supervision is suspect. Even I’m a suspect.” He let out a gasp of exasperation. “Which is...ridiculous. But ridiculous isn’t an argument for the FBI.” His words were coming faster and a little louder now.

She rolled over to see him pacing in a tight circle only going a foot's length in either direction before making a swift turn to repeat his direction. The realization of what he shared left her shocked. If she understood him correctly, her father was one of his employees and now Peter was under investigation by the FBI because of her father’s death. The thrill of being so close to her investigation was quickly minimized when she realized the risk.

“And now in my first security meeting, an employee pukes and then faints from the presentation. This can’t look positive for me. There’s another employee little Peter Wallace can’t control.” Peter was speaking out loud, but Dawn felt intrusive into the workings of his mind. She realized his image was at stake.

“Low blood sugar runs in my family,” Dawn spoke into his soliloquy. Peter stopped pacing and finally looked at Dawn.

“What?”

She sat up and brushed her hair to adjust it back into place. “Low blood sugar. We faint. My mother, my grandmother, and me. We all have low blood sugar.”

“So...you didn’t faint because of the briefing? It was just low blood sugar?” The hope in his tone made her heartache for him. She was offering him a solution.

“Of course,” she said.

“But the...you know.” He made a gesture to mimic her throwing up. Her cheeks flushed at that memory and she couldn’t bring herself to ask who had cleaned up the mess in the conference room.

“Probably something I ate for breakfast.” The terror of discovery and the implications of signing her security contract was too much for her. The grief of what she might lose was overwhelming to think about, so she let it pass. She let herself believe the lie she was feeding to Peter. Her family did have a history of low blood sugar, but she knew that was not the reason she had fainted.

“And the form...” Peter asked.

Of course, he needs the form, Dawn thought. “I’ll sign it now.”

Peter laughed in relief at her response. “I’ll go and get another copy. The last one...well, it’s just not usable.” He almost bounced out the doorway leaving Dawn in stark contrast on the couch. She took a deep breath knowing that as soon as she signed that document, there would be added consequences to her employment and whatever secrets she uncovered while here. The security contract put into clear words what she only assumed. There would be no deniability on her part that she didn’t know what she was doing or the consequences of those actions. This was the line in the sand that marked her as fully culpable for her actions. The door opened and Peter entered with one of the suited agents. A clean contract fluttered in one hand and a pen in the other. He kept trying to tamp down the childlike smile that threatened to reveal his full happiness in her signing the document.

“Here we are.” His voice was high-pitched and cheery. He placed the document on the desk and held the pen out toward Dawn who was still seated on the couch. The hulking agent stared at her. She wasn’t sure she’d ever seen his eyes blink once. She pushed herself off the couch and felt like she was walking to her own execution as she made her way from the tiled floor onto the plush carpet where Peter’s desk held the paper that sealed her fate here at Oak Ridge. She quickly took the pen and circled the appropriate No’s and Yes’s. Her pen paused at the signature line at the bottom of the page.

“Just your final John Hancock there.” Peter pointed toward the line. The agent’s eyes squinted slightly at her pause. Signing that line meant Dawn’s entire future would change. There was no going back from this moment. She brought the tip of the pen to the paper. A slight black inkblot developed at the beginning of her S. Everyone in the room seemed to hold their breath until she let the pen scroll across the page. Sara Levine agreed to the security contract of Oak

Ridge, Tennessee. She placed the pen on the desk and walked out knowing if she was ever discovered, her fate was sealed with that signature.

Chapter Sixteen

After signing the contract, Dawn was escorted by the two agents back to her station with the other calutron girls. The rest of her workday passed in a blur of dials and knobs. There was never much conversation in the room, just the hum of concentration, but today Dawn wished for some chatty small talk to distract her from the torrent swirling through her mind. Several times, Gladys had to come over and clear her dials back into range. With each adjustment, Dawn felt her shoulders droop further down. Gladys's encouragement was kind, but Dawn couldn't accept that she would get better at this. Dawn knew Gladys meant better with dials and accuracy, but she hoped she would never get better at the lies and the forgery she had just committed. That, she never wanted to improve upon.

By the end of the day, Dawn was spent. She slogged her way back to her dormitory through thicker mud than she had experienced yet. The whole city smelled damp from the humidity and Dawn found it fitting for her own moodiness.

When she opened the door to her dormitory, she found Millie applying some face cream or lotion from her vast repertoire. Dawn could not figure out where these new creams kept coming from, but the small ledge beneath the mirror was now full of products.

"Hello, Sara!" Millie sang brightly as Dawn trudged into the room and collapsed onto her twin bed.

"Mmmhmm..." Dawn's reply was muffled through the pillow she was smashing her face into.

"Rough day?"

“You could say that.” The women were already developing the Oak Ridge acknowledgment of feelings without acknowledging the job details which created the context for the feelings.

“You should join me tonight. The Recreation and Welfare Organization has coordinated a bowling night for singles.” She winked at Dawn. Only one of Dawn’s eyes were visible above the mass of pillows she was seeking refuge in.

“No.” Dawn’s reply was firm, but not to Millie.

“Come on, Sara. We’re here in this town and there are more eligible young people here than back home in my town by far. My only option there was Ronald Falton.” At the name, Millie’s lip rose in disgust.

Dawn didn’t respond; she just gave Millie a one-eyed gaze.

“Did you hear me? Ronald Fal-ton,” Millie said louder this time, accentuating each syllable of Ronald’s last name. Dawn was glad she had Millie’s sparkly demeanor as her roommate. Feeling Millie’s lightheartedness made Dawn realize how much she missed that when her dad was gone. Her father, like Millie, always viewed life as a glass-half-full mentality. Without him, that positivity had been missing from Dawn’s life. A new wave of grief for her dad swept over her, and she was grateful for Millie’s Ronald Falton to distract her from the pain of missing her father.

“I don’t know what you mean, Millie. Even his name sounds dreamy.” Dawn extended the word dreamy letting her lips accentuate every syllable. In response, Millie’s eyes rolled back.

“He was anything but dreamy. But, if there are some young men here who look half as dreamy as Peter Wallace then I think there’s potential.” The mention of Peter brought back Dawn’s morning and she felt her cheeks heat.

Millie saw the response too but interpreted it in a completely different way.

“I see those pink cheeks, Sara Levine. Do you think that Peter Wallace is dreamy, Sara?”

Millie’s singsong question left Dawn’s face pinker than it was a few moments ago.

“No. That’s not why...never mind.” Dawn pushed herself back into the pillow. “I’m not going with you tonight, Millie. We just went out to the cinema last night.”

“Which is why we’re going bowling tonight, silly.” Millie was applying a new lipstick in the perfect pale pink tone. She tossed it over to Dawn on the bed. “Put this on. You’ll feel like a whole new lady.”

Dawn picked up the lipstick. She never wore lipstick. She was strictly a lip balm girl. She wasn’t sure she wanted to be a whole new lady. All she really wanted to do this evening was spend time with the mysterious letter from her mother and think about the potential consequences Sara would face because of her actions. She wanted to sit in the mire of her misery. But, the mirrored tube of lipstick was appealing with its distorted view of her face that it portrayed back to her. This could be the new side to Dawn, the side that went out and had adventures. The side that had fun. Plus, what good could she really accomplish just sitting on the bed without more information about who Andrew really was? Dawn rotated the lipstick in her fingers and let the option gain potential energy.

“Stop thinking so much and just come out.” Millie had her left hand on her hip. The pink lipstick brightened her whole face and made her look fresh and ready for the night even after her day at work. Dawn opened the tube in front of her, wondering if it would have the same magical properties for her.

* * *

“This was a mistake,” Dawn whispered in Millie’s ear with perfectly pink lips outlining every word she said.

“Smile anyways,” Millie gritted back, not releasing the smile plastered on her face.

At least one hundred people were all waiting for their lanes to open. Some were milling around the pinball machine, and the ping of the ball hitting the metal pieces started to make Dawn flinch with each hit. The snack bar looped around nearly half of the building and was pumping out hot dogs for a long line of hungry customers. The smell of the compacted meat mixed with the sweaty foot odor nearly gagged Dawn. *How can Millie enjoy this?* Dawn thought watching Millie smile at a group of young men carrying their food spoils back to a lane on the other side of the alley.

A yell came from the lane closest to them, and Dawn saw a young woman jumping up and down as the machine at the end of her lane swept a clear floor devoid of any pins. Back home in Butler, there was a bowling alley. Dawn didn’t go there. She hated the odd smells. The idea of placing her fingers into the same sockets as someone else on the bowling ball was not on her list of top activities either. Sara was always telling her it was the spot to hang out on Saturday night, but Dawn preferred to spend her Saturdays with a novel, or studying articles in the New York Times.

With another jump at a cacophony of pings from the pinball machine, Dawn was sure she had made the wrong decision.

“There’s Sherry!” Millie waved at a woman who just entered the alley. She wore bright red lipstick that begged to be seen. Dawn couldn’t even bring herself to smile as the woman made her way over to them.

“Millie...that color on you!” the woman said. Millie blushed at the complement of her new lipstick.

“Sherry, this is my roommate, Sara. Sara Levine.”

Dawn stuck out her hand to greet the enthusiastic Sherry. After the obligatory greeting, Sherry angled her body toward Millie just slightly cutting off Dawn from the conversation. Dawn didn't mind the exclusion as the discussion of movie stars and lipstick colors wasn't exactly what intrigued her. Instead, she let the mindless chatter numb her brain to think about the contract she signed today.

After her father's murder, it seemed security at Oak Ridge had intensified. There were more eyes on the employees and less time for her to access any potential details about her father. There was clearly a breach in information, so she didn't need to wonder if that was all a false allegation. But, that left her with the question of who breached the information. If it wasn't her father, then who was responsible?

She needed to know who else was on Peter's team. Peter must have known her father, and there was a small part of her that hoped that he might carry the same questions about the allegations as she did. Wouldn't her father's boss have known his integrity, and wouldn't he have known that her father never would have released secrets knowingly?

She needed a way to know who else was working on her father's team, and then she would need to start a subtle investigation of each party until she cleared their name. Where would that information be?

An image of Peter's desk cluttered with paperwork filled her mind. *There had to be additional information about his team somewhere in his office*, she thought. Dawn looked around the room, seeing how many people from Oak Ridge were right here in the bowling alley. There

was also the cinema and other entertainment options for the singles who lived here. The family men were probably at home with their wives and children. That left a small contingency of people who would still be at the plant.

Her plan formed quickly as all her best plans do. Take the idea and execute it, she used to tell the real Sara Levine. She didn't see a reason to delay a plan any more than the length of time it took to plot out a plan's beginning.

"Sara!" Millie's voice cut into her planning gears.

"What?"

"You're chewing your nails relentlessly. It's smudging your new shade." Sherry's eyebrows raised as if questioning where Dawn would have learned such manners. Little did Sherry know that Dawn's mother would be beside herself knowing that Dawn was chewing her nails in public. That was certainly not something she had taught her to do.

"I think I forgot something. I have to go back and look for it." Dawn turned to start toward the door of the bowling alley.

"What did you forget?" This was the first time Sherry had spoken directly to Dawn after their brief introduction. The question of the reality of her statement bristled Dawn's feelings.

"My nail file...obviously." Dawn held up the nails that she had been biting and made for the exit before either girl could further question her departure.

The bus system that wove through the streets of Oak Ridge felt too traceable for Dawn tonight. There would be witnesses on the bus that could link her back to Y-12, and she didn't need anyone to attach her to that tonight. She would have to walk back to the Y-12 building on her own. But there was one stop that Dawn had to make first.

The East Wing dormitory had a single lightbulb above the entrance. Dawn slipped in quietly closing the door behind her. Even though she had perfectly good reasons for entering her own dormitory, the excitement of her stealth plan was too enticing not to begin now. She slipped her key into the lock for room seven and shut the door behind her. Her eyes scanned the room until she spotted Millie's ID card sitting on her make-up shelf. Dawn needed a card to pass through the security, and she couldn't leave a trail with her own identification. No matter the reasoning, it still made her stomach twist with guilt that she was going to leave a trail incriminating Millie.

She looked at the picture on the front. Millie's bright smile and her blond curls. Dawn touched her own brown locks and looked around the room for a way to conceal her hair. A blue floral scarf hung off a hook on Millie's side of the closet. Dawn touched the billowy fabric and pulled it from the hook. *She could tie this around her head*, she thought. Millie would never wear such a fashion, but a nighttime security guard wouldn't know that.

With her hair tied back in the scarf, Dawn started the twenty-minute walk to Y-12. At the entrance, she took a deep breath, remembering the plot she had created and rehearsed on her walk over. "I've lost an earring." She said out loud to the air mimicking the ditzy personalities that annoyed her so much. Sure that she had the tone and accent just right, she entered the building. The rush of air-conditioned air smelled stale without the movement of people in and out of the building.

Chapter Seventeen

Dawn traced her way through the building making her way to Peter's office, still amazed that the security guard barely took a second glance to confirm her ID card. Perhaps the batting of her eyelashes really had helped. She passed the conference room and couldn't help but wonder who had been responsible for cleaning up her mess after she had fainted earlier that morning. The door to Peter's office had no name placards designating the room as his, and the door was closed. Dawn stopped in front of the door and paused before placing her hand on the handle. She gently applied pressure wondering if it would be locked. The handle started to move, and then stopped firm. Locked, of course. She looked up the hallway in both directions and pulled a bobby pin Millie had shoved into her hair.

"Fashionable and useful. Thanks, Millie," she said as she pushed the pin into the tiny keyhole. She twisted and pushed the bobby pin just like her brother Joe had taught her. Even though she was doing the same motions he was, she felt the bobby pin bending and moving from the solid lock inside the door. She gripped the bobby pin as close to the handle of the door as possible, offering as much tension support as she could, and then she restarted the same sequence of movements. This time the movements brought a click and a pop. She froze, amazed that her younger brother's afternoon mischief had just successfully unlocked a door.

The bobby pin wouldn't return to her hair with its new mangled shape, but she popped it in the pocket of her skirt just in case she needed it again. The moment of truth came as her hand pushed the knob again. This time there was no resistance, and it popped right open. Without any surrounding noise, the door opening sounded like an ancient tomb being uncovered for the first time. The wood creaked as the door swung on its hinges and a cold rush of air from the room

pushed into Dawn's face. Dawn scrunched her eyes together looking down both hallways sure that every security officer in the building had heard her and was now rushing to stop her.

When no one appeared, she took her first step into the office. Instead of going to the couch where her imaginary missing earring might exist, Dawn moved quickly across the carpet to the filing cabinet behind his desk. She tried the drawer, but it was locked. The desk behind her had several drawers, and Dawn started opening each one to find the key to the cabinet. After searching all the desk drawers, there was still no key to be found. Dawn was about to try Joe's bobby pin trick when she saw the picture on Peter's desk. A younger version of Peter dressed in what must be his college graduation robes. He's surrounded by a group of people who all looked alike. The same slim frame and a younger boy with a smile that matches Peter's. He must be close to his family, Dawn thought. She picked up the picture to get a closer look and felt a bulge on the back of the frame. Turning the frame over, she saw a key. Could this be the key she was looking for?

Dawn took the key off the tiny hook that Peter must have attached to the back of the frame. She pushed it into the file cabinet without any resistance. The pop of the lock behind the thin metal echoed into the quiet room, and Dawn saw the papers that were strewn across Peter's desk now stacked in piles inside the cabinet. No file folders, just stacks of papers. Dawn grabbed the first stack and splayed it out over the desk. She started flipping through the papers, squinting to read their contents by the outside light filtering in through the office window. She dared not turn on the light to let anyone walking by see the office window lit up at night. That was too risky. She wished she had a flashlight or something to help illuminate the pages in front of her, but the exterior light would have to do for now. She tilted each page toward the window to take full advantage of the light.

The first several pages were memos. Dawn scanned their contents, not really sure what additional information might be useful. She saw something called tuballoy mentioned in the contents. Productivity was definitely a keyword she saw often, but there weren't any additional names besides Peter's at the beginning of the memo. She flipped the paper upside down to keep an orderly stack so she'd be able to flip all the pages back over and leave without anyone knowing she'd been there.

"Thank goodness you're a bit of a slob, Mr. Peter," Dawn said as she stacked another paper on top of the pile.

"Well, thank you, Miss. Levine." Peter's voice was clear in the silence of the room.

Chapter Eighteen

Butler, Pennsylvania

Elizabeth stood in front of the glass doors. The neon Art Studio sign cast an orange glow over the sidewalk, but the only light in the studio was filtering in from the backroom. Her bag of art supplies felt heavier in her hand as she tried the door again. Andrew had never stood her up like this. The studio had always been lit before, him waiting inside with a bottle of wine while they talked and worked on their art together. His listening ear had been her refuge while Earl was away so much at work.

Andrew's interest in Oak Ridge had irritated her at first. She didn't want to talk about her husband's job with him; she had to do enough of that when Earl came home. But Andrew was inquisitive, always asking questions about the world to improve himself. He had wanted to become a chemist when he was young, he had told her. His interest in the workings of a chemist was to live vicariously through her husband. Andrew was so different from Earl, and that difference had intrigued Elizabeth. His intentions were never questioned as she chatted about Earl's job as a means to establish their friendship. The information highway that had been established between them was not one she had expected. She remembered the first time the questions led to a demand for something greater.

"This will really help my studies," he said, his lip slightly pouted out like Dawn's used to do when she wanted to get her way. It didn't suit a grown man.

"I don't think it's a good idea, Andrew." Elizabeth bit her lip at the thought of bringing him files from Earl's work.

"He won't even have to know. I'll look at them over night and give them back to you the very next morning. I'm a fast reader, and I'm so intrigued to know what a current chemist is

working on in the field,” his eyes looked up at her as his head fell downcast just an inch. She felt the tug to give in to this new friendship giving him the information he wanted. Who would it really hurt? Her conscience tugged at her, and the words Top Secret marked in red on the files she had seen at home. What he was asking was wrong, and she knew it.

Their friendship had started during her first painting class at the studio, and she was afraid she might lose it if she denied him the files. There had never been a physical affair between them, but Elizabeth had let herself fall for his charm emotionally. She relied on him to listen to her struggles. Now, he was asking for something from her. Something she feared to give. She broke eye contact with him.

“You don’t have to,” he said. “I know I’m putting you in an odd position. I just thought we were...close. Friends.” He reached out his hand toward her. The same hand had held hers many nights when she had cried over feeling so alone with Earl gone on all his work trips and her frustration about raising her kids on her own. She knew the calluses on the palm outstretched toward her. “We are friends, aren’t we, Elizabeth?”

His smile was shy, quieter than his normal full-toothed grin. She felt in control of the information then, like it was really her choice to give it. Their interactions over more information became harsher as his demands grew, and her choice was soon not an option at all.

Now, standing in front of the closed art studio, Elizabeth’s cheeks flushed at her ignorance.

“We’re not friends, Andrew.” She said to the darkness. “We never were.” She took the art supplies and set them at the door of the studio. She hoped he would find them there and know what they meant. She was done sharing information with him, but she feared the damage was

already done. The realization of his schemes had come too late. Earl was dead. And she feared the secrets she had shared had long since left the four walls of the studio.

Chapter Nineteen

Oak Ridge, Tennessee

Dawn froze with the next memo in her handheld midair about to flip it onto the stack. She slowly looked up from the papers, and she hoped that the adrenaline of her plan had manufactured Peter's voice into the building. Unfortunately, when she lifted her head, Peter Wallace was leaning against the office door that she had foolishly left wide open.

"What exactly are you doing, Miss. Levine?"

That was the second time he had used her last name. His tone was formal, not his usual friendly self. Then again, she was in his office, on a Tuesday evening, without any light, sifting through the papers on his desk.

"I know this doesn't look good," she said.

"No, no it doesn't Miss. Levine."

"I can explain."

"You need to."

He hadn't moved a muscle, but she could hear the slightest wiggle of anger shifting the register of his voice.

"This morning...when I was in your office...you remember?" She set down the paper and moved toward the couch where she was earlier. She hoped seeing the couch would make him remember the fumbling words of this morning, not the suspicion growing on his face.

"Yes."

"Well, I think I lost my earring."

She touched her ear and tried to giggle her best superficial laugh. She held the laugh too long. She broke his steady stare.

“An earring?”

“Yes, silly me. And I just wanted to wear it to the bowling alley tonight. With the girls. It’s my favorite earring.” The word earring came out just an octave higher than the rest of her sentence ending it like a question instead of the ditzy sentence she wanted it to sound like.

“Your favorite earring?”

“Yes, my favorite.” Dawn thought she just might have him convinced.

“In the files on my desk?” She looked over toward the desk.

“The files?”

“Yes, the ones you were looking through when I came into the office.”

“Oh...those files.” Dawn looked down at the carpet. He had picked a formal pattern with a deep red that contrasted with his blue velvet couch. It seemed like a mixture between his mother’s style and his own.

“Miss. Levine?” He prompted her back to the conversation when she hadn’t responded.

“You see...I was missing my earring...,” she said slowly, trying to convince herself of the story, but losing steam. Peter still hadn’t moved from the doorway, and while he was lean, his frame felt intimidating blocking her exit from the room. This was not the quivering and fearful Peter from this morning. But neither was she the fearful Dawn from this morning.

“You have both earrings on right now,” Peter said.

Dawn felt her earlobes and the two posts that had been in her ears since she left Butler three days ago. She didn’t even have a favorite pair of earrings at home; she had this pair or plain ears.

“I didn’t lose my earring, Mr. Wallace.” Dawn remembered her interview and the way Peter had succumbed to her honesty then. She would try a version of that today.

“That’s clear.”

“But I was worried about this morning.” Dawn pivoted in the middle of her plan. She was great with on-the-fly adjustments, and this was going to have to be a winner to keep her out of the hands of the harsh FBI agents. She was sure they would not be as calm as Peter was now.

“This morning?” Dawn saw the surprise flash across his eyes. Surprise was better than anger. *Keep going with this argument*, Dawn told herself.

“Yes, with the incident during the meeting. And then signing the paper. Well, I paused, and that made me panic. I thought...well...” she reached for an answer in her mind, “well, I thought you might have written me up for it.” *Fear of managerial retribution. That made sense for a young girl out of high school in her first working position*, Dawn thought.

“Written you up?”

“Yes, you see, I really want to do well in this job, and those two agents were looking over your shoulder...and they seemed so...scary. And I just thought they would have thought it looked suspicious. And then they would want to question me more. And I would have to lose my job all over a bad breakfast burrito. And I can’t lose this job.” The words poured from her mouth. Dawn was ashamed at the number of Ands that left her lips. If she was evaluating her own speech, she would not pass. She used to think there was never a moment when a writer’s speech should sound like that.

Except now she needed to look vulnerable and so scared that she would break into her boss’s office after dark and start looking through his files. She looked up at his face checking for validation and believability. Looking into his eyes, she searched for the anger, the questioning, but found...empathy. She had him. She exhaled and the relief nearly brought tears to her eyes,

which would have perfectly added to her current role. Thank goodness for that one semester of theater arts with Mr. Cooper.

“Miss. Levine, I’m sorry you’re so distraught, but this really is inappropriate. If you had concerns over your employment, that needs to be handled formally. In a meeting. During the daytime. Not this nighttime swindling through papers. There are confidential memos in these files.” Dawn snorted on the inside. Files were neatly organized and placed into containers like cabinets or folders. These were merely stacks of paper that he couldn’t possibly argue were categorized into stacks. Even with just a few minutes to glance through the pages, she knew there was no organizational theory to how these pages were stacked.

“Of course. I...I see that now.” She held up her hands and gestured around herself to the office. She raised her hands to her cheeks in fake embarrassment. “Oh my! And now what will you think of me? I’m sure the FBI agents will want to talk to me now.”

“They are a bit...intimidating even to us senior employees,” Peter said. Dawn let him continue. “I guess they don’t need to know about this little incident as long as you can promise me this will never happen again, Miss. Levine.” Dawn was surprised at his leniency. She looked closer and thought there was a hint of pink on his cheeks. Did Peter Wallace have a crush on her?

“Never sir, I promise you.” No, she would be much smarter next time. Later at night. Close the door after she entered. There were many lessons she had learned tonight, the most valuable being that pink-tinged cheek.

“I know what it’s like to be young and new and trying to make your way in the world. We stumble. This was your stumble, Miss. Levine. Let’s make it the last one.” He couldn’t be much older than twenty-five, but she saw him bolster up his chest feeling proud of his opportunity to build into the next generation.

Meanwhile, Dawn registered the changes she would make when she broke in again. Because there was too much potential sitting freely in his cabinet to let this opportunity pass her by. She would definitely break in again. It was just a matter of when.

Chapter Twenty

July 4, 1945

The next night, Independence Day festivities raged across Oak Ridge. Dawn crept from her dormitory and jogged down the main pathway toward Y-12. She rolled her feet heel-toe, heel-toe, across the soft mud, hoping to reduce the sucking sound as it clung to her feet. Her brown leather carrier bag that her father bought for her just a few months before for her birthday was perched on her back. He had told her it was a journalist's bag, ready to hold the stories she would write. Tonight, she was ready to collect files from Peter's desk that would show who else potentially could leak the information her father was responsible for.

This time she was prepared for her break-in. There were three bobby pins in her hair for opening the door. She had her carrier bag to bring the files with her instead of reading them in the office. And she would close and lock the door to give herself a few second's notice before someone came barging in.

The plan was set and she repeated it to herself several times along the run to the entrance. She didn't pause at the door to Y-12 this time, but she still felt guilty flashing Millie's badge to the security guard.

The endorphins from making it past the guard and into the building a second time were spilling through her veins. She was excited to discover the other members of Peter's team. This could be the start of the information she needed to prove her father innocent. The possibility made her heart beat faster.

Turning the familiar corners, she was at Peter's door in a matter of minutes. Her hand gently twisted the knob to see if it was open. She pulled the first bobby pin from her hair and pushed it into the keyhole on the door. The shine from the brass knob reflected the overhead hall

light. Nighttime lighting was reduced to every third light down the hallway to save energy, but Dawn didn't feel she needed any more light than that.

She completed the same twists and pushes with the bobby pin that had released the lock just two nights ago. But this time, there was no click, no release. Dawn tried the gleaming handle after her bobby pin maneuvers, but it still wouldn't budge. Undeterred, she pulled a fresh bobby pin from her hair. She held it firmly, her fingers pushing against the handle to offer the most support. She followed the same patterns, push, pull, twist. But again, the door held firm. Her heart rate picked up and a flash of damp sweat moistened her hands.

"Just try again. No panic," she said to calm herself out loud in the hallway.

For good measure, she pulled the third bobby pin from her hair and stuck it into the lock. She left it poking out while she wiped her hands against her black pants, then she returned to the lock with renewed energy. After going through her routine, she twisted the handle with expectation. No movement. The handle wouldn't budge. She looked down the hall; her fear of discovery growing the longer she stood exposed in the hallway.

Dawn exhaled loudly, feeling all the adrenaline and endorphins leave her body with the air. The exhaustion of the day pushed in and she deflated in front of the door. *They must have changed the lock*, she mused looking at the closed door. She was just feet away from the files she knew would send her down a path to find who was truly guilty of treason, but the gleam of the new door handle blocked her path.

She touched the doorknob one last time with a silent promise that she would unlock it.

Annotated Bibliography

Addey, Melissa. "Beyond 'Is It True?': The 'Playframe' in Historical Fiction", *New Writing*, vol. 18, no. 4, 2021, pp. 421-433.

Addey's text reflects upon the current standard to evaluate historical fiction through the lens of historical accuracy. She challenges this notion to reflect beyond historical accuracy to the craft of fiction writing and then relies on three playframes, structures created to allow the historical fiction author room to creatively present their writing. The term playframe describes the ability of an author to establish a fictional world where the reader can interact with the themes of the past. The three playframes Addey describes include: the ventriloquist, the mosaic maker, and the magician.

Through her description of the three playframes, Addey provides examples from a range of historical fiction texts that show the power of each of the playframes in their application. This text is indispensable in describing the different craft approaches to writing historical fiction. The evidence provided establishes a challenging argument to revise the current trends to evaluate historical fiction through the lens of accuracy.

This article reflects my own research to propose a solution for how to evaluate historical fiction novels outside of a more traditional look at historical accuracy.

"Anthony Doerr on *All the Light We Cannot See*" *YouTube*, uploaded by Simon & Schuster Books, 10 March 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYBK3Lsx7aI&t=58s>.

Doerr's video is uploaded by his publishing company for his novel *All the Light We Cannot See*. It describes his first thoughts about the novel and how he received his idea from a communication challenge in a New York subway. He also describes his travels to Saint-Malo which became the setting of the novel.

This video beautifully articulates the author's process of translating a real-life observation into a writing opportunity. Doerr also describes how questions about a setting location became the very concerns of the characters in his novel.

This video provides my thesis with the connection of a writer's process of research with the final product of creation. I was also able to use this video to understand more about Doerr's motivations in crafting his novel.

Bernard-Donals, Michael. "History and Disaster: Witness, Trauma, and the Problem of Writing the Holocaust." *Clio*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2001, pp. 143-168.

Bernard-Donals's article evaluates the connection between history and memory. He takes a close look at survivor accounts of living through the Holocaust. He identifies the challenge of memory for providing an accurate historical account explaining that survivors may be an unreliable narrator because they are remembering the memory of an event instead of the factual event details. Bernard-Donals article looks specifically at the events of the Holocaust and explains that survivors' narratives are not always reliable because their memory is impacted because of the trauma.

This article is essential to consider as a writer, especially in the genre of World War II fiction because it articulates a definite situation that will be encountered along the process of research. While primary sources are essential and considered factual, Bernard-Donals reminds readers that we have to consider how trauma might be impacting that recollection. No solution is recommended and the article seems to take a more cautionary advice tone.

This is connected to my own research to consider the effects of trauma on the research process for the author. It also addresses the ethical responsibilities of the author to consider how they represent traumatic events in their narrative.

“Best WWII Historical Fiction.” *Goodreads*,

https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/77422.Best_WWII_Historical_Fiction.

Goodreads is a reading tracking website and app. This particular page references readers' votes for the best World War II Historical Fiction. The original list was created on August 11, 2014 by Mill City Press, but the current list is updated every five minutes according to the ratings posted by readers using the website or app.

While this does not signify a definition of best, this website reflects the opinions of that definition from real readers. Novel sales do not hinder the effects of this list and therefore can provide a single perspective of reader preferences in a historical fiction text.

These preferences were of particular interest to my research to evaluate what makes a successful historical fiction novel. I was able to use this list to choose novels to evaluate for their craft elements that might be the reason for their reader preference.

Doerr, Anthony. *All the Light We Cannot See*. Simon & Schuster, Inc, 2014.

Doerr's novel takes readers on a journey across France during World War II. He This novel became an easy pick for my historical fiction research for two reasons. First, it is listed as a top favorite on Goodreads which is picked by readers' votes. Second, it is an exemplary text with his wistful setting descriptions. Doerr's text has the unique ability to transport readers to his setting through his prose and this is what stayed with me after reading his novel.

This text was also chosen because of its ranking on the Goodreads “Best WWII Historical Fiction” list. Doerr’s exemplary setting descriptions are a direct connection to my research on the importance of establishing a setting to create the believability of a historical setting.

“George Koval.” *Atomic Heritage Foundation*, 2019,

<https://www.atomicheritage.org/profile/george-koval>.

The Atomic Heritage Foundation profile on George Koval provides an outline of Koval’s life and how he was able to infiltrate into work at Oak Ridge’s plant. The details presented to begin with Koval’s life born in Iowa and then moving to U.S.S.R. during the Dust Bowl. This move to Russia is the time Koval became connected with Soviet Intelligence, the GRU. When he returned to the U.S. Koval completed his education in engineering and began working at Oak Ridge.

This profile outlines the opportune time that brought Koval into the spotlight of Russian intelligence. This adds to my research by providing an example of how a historical fiction writer can engage with history. I explain how details of Koval’s life are adjusted and changed to present a fictionalized story that was inspired by the events of his life.

Gibson, Philip. *#Berlin45: The Final Days of Hitler’s Third Reich*. Philip Gibson, 29 August 2013.

Gibson’s novel makes historical accuracy in dialogue the priority by only using published quotes from historical figures. These quotes are translated into historical fiction by placing them as modern social media posts.

This novel connects to my own research because of how well it fits Addey’s playframe example for the Ventriloquist, showing a true form example of how to rely so heavily on

historical accuracy. It shows a historical fiction alternative to remaining historically accurate creation of a documentary or nonfiction work.

Grant, Kay. "Oak Ridge, the Town the Atomic Bomb Built." *HistoryNet*,

<https://www.historynet.com/oak-ridge-the-town-the-atomic-bomb-built.htm>.

Grant writes about the history of Oak Ridge. She begins her article by addressing the opening of the plants and specifically focuses on the lasting remnant of the original architecture at the facility. Her research proceeds to explain how the plants look today and how they are currently being used.

This article connects to my research by supporting the findings in Kiernan's novel. Grant adds the extension of seeing how the plant buildings and housing progressed after the end of its war-time use.

Hannah, Kristin. *The Nightingale*. St. Martin's Griffin, 2015.

Hannah's novel, *The Nightingale*, follows the lives of two sisters that lived during the Nazi occupation. Both sisters handle the traumatic events of the occupation through very different decisions. One joins with the resistance to help funnel people over the Alps, and the other lives a quieter resistance when a Nazi soldier forces himself as a live in guest in her home.

Hannah has an exemplary talent to write the characterization and connections between family members that bring the events to life. Her novel was selected similarly to Doerr's because of its high ranking popularity on the Goodreads novel list for "Best WWII Historical Fiction" as well as for Hannah's characterization ability. Her characterization shows how to handle the traumatic events of the past by creating space for the reader to process how those events impacted the real-life individuals.

Kiernan, Denise. *The Girls of Atomic City*. New York, Atria Books, 2013.

Kiernan's novel tells the story of five women who worked at various positions across the Oak Ridge, Tennessee Manhattan Project site. She tells the story of each woman moving to Oak Ridge and their day-to-day experiences on the job. The women were not allowed to speak about their positions and their accounts share the psychological side effects of that experience. The biography of these women's lives concludes on the day the atomic bomb drops in Japan. They are finally able to share the knowledge of their position and speak about the role they played on the project.

This text is powerful because of Kiernan's connectable writing style. The lives of the women weave seamlessly throughout the novel and provide a descriptive backdrop of life on site at Oak Ridge. This novel is indispensable in my own research because it provided the impetus for Dawn's position at Oak Ridge as well as a historical record of what daily life was like on site.

Mantel, Hilary. "Resurrection: The Art & Craft: Silence Grips the Town" *BBC*, 1 August 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08vkm52>.

Mantel is an acclaimed historical fiction writer and produced a series of broadcasts in conjunction with the BBC. Her series articulated the importance of historical research, but also the craft requirements of writing. Mantel often walks the boundary between historical fact and craft but seems to side with craft and story to articulate history.

While I don't find Mantel's particular novel time periods of interest for my World War II historical fiction research, her advice on writing craft is essential. She is able to vocalize the challenge of maintaining the storyline while also considering the pace and suspense

of the novel. Her podcast is of great use to my research in articulating how the question of historical significance falls short of the expected craft of writing historical fiction.

“Manhattan Project Science at Oak Ridge,” *Manhattan Project National Historical Park*, n.d., <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/manhattan-project-science-at-oak-ridge.htm>.

This source explains the basic details of life living at the Oak Ridge Plant. A breakdown of each plant on the property describes what jobs and what products were created in each plant.

It is interesting to see these descriptions presented so plainly when they were of top-secret value during the time of actual production. This source is helpful in creating the historical basis for the Oak Ridge plant. It is not filled with narratives that might be influenced by any trauma of working at the plant. Instead, it’s a factual example of how the plant looked and operated.

The application to my own research from this source supports the need for understanding the setting to establish believability in the context of the novel.

“The Nightingale.” *Kristin Hannah*, 2022,

<https://kristinhannah.com/books/the-nightingale/behind-the-book/>.

This website offers Kristin Hannah’s brief notes on writing *The Nightingale*. She identifies the background of learning about individual narratives from the lives of women during World War II and specifically their courage during the Nazi occupation. This inspiration shows the impetus to the final product of her novel.

Using this source helps identify the author’s inspiration and how that translated to the characters she created on the page. It is a connection to the evidence presented in my research linking historical accuracy and the creation of a historical fiction novel,

specifically linking Hannah's use of real-life stories to influence the creation of her characters.

Sanyal, Debarati. "Writing History, Writing Trauma (Review)." *Substance*, vol. 31, no. 2-3, 2002, pp. 301-306.

This article reviews LaCapra's book, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Sanyal identifies the need to combine the distinction between writing history and writing trauma. Instead, she suggests we begin to look at how trauma is managed in historical writing. This consideration should be included in the evaluation of historical writing because of the potential secondary trauma that could be caused by writing about historical trauma. The review is unbiased and provides an outline of LaCapra's ideas about historical trauma and writing.

My research uses this source as a connection about the responsibility of the author to consider the impact of writing about traumatic historical events.

Saxton, Laura. A True Story: Defining Accuracy and Authenticity in Historical Fiction, *Rethinking History*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2020, pp. 127-144.

Saxton's article defines the distinction between historical accuracy and historical authenticity. She argues that historical accuracy is the concern for the veracity of events, while historical authenticity is the impression of historical truth. Saxton uses examples from Hilary Mantel's work on the Tudors as well as popular television shows like *The Crown* to identify the conditions that must exist for historical believability to be achieved. She concludes that neither accuracy nor authenticity represent truth in writing, but she does suggest that evaluations of historical work move beyond veracity to include some understanding of how the text establishes a concept of the past.

This definition distinction became a clear concern in my paper regarding how to evaluate the success of a historical fiction author in maintaining accountability to the historical events, but also considering how those events translate to the craft of writing. I extended Saxton's work to establish additional questions of accountability and responsibility for the historical fiction writer.

Stocker, Bryony D.. Don't Lie – A Methodology for Historical Fiction?, *New Writing*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2019, pp. 322-335.

Stocker's article is a practical text written to test Hilary Mantel's simplistic advice to "not lie" when writing historical fiction. Stocker identifies that writing historical fiction is more complicated than simply not lying about history. She questions historiography and whether certain facts are more important than others in writing historical fiction. The conclusion of the article is that writers of historical fiction can change the "minor matters" of historical fact as long as the outcome of the events is not impacted.

This article is full of interview quotations and examples from other historical fiction authors which adds validity to the claims that the methodology for writing historical fiction is not a single process. Each author must come to their own engagement with history and how it will be presented in their novel.

This article adds light to my research because it addresses the question of accuracy in historical fiction. It addresses all three aspects of my thesis, including setting, characterization, and plot.

Zusak, Markus. *The Book Thief*. United States, Alfred A. Knopf, 2005.

Zusak's novel, *The Book Thief*, follows the narrator, Death, through the streets of Germany during the Nazi reign. The narrator describes Liesel's story of trying to save books from Nazi destruction.

This novel was chosen because of its unique narration which follows the lines of Addey's magician playframe. Its continued existence on the top World War II historical fiction list on Goodreads also explains the powerful appeal of this structure to engage the reader in the traumatic events of World War II. This novel is useful in my research to support the appeal of a Magician-style narrator and how that engages the reader in the events of the past.