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Earhart County: The Making Of A World War Two Wondertale

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Earhart County The Novel.

Earhart County: The Making of A World War Two Wondertale.

By Nicola Russell Johnson

ABSTRACT

The aim of Earhart County was to create a book which would bring the world of World War Two aviation to a mainstream audience, utilising the magic and durability of folklore to mythologize the incredible feats of Churchill's finest generation. Whilst entertaining its audience, it aims at giving them a glimpse at the many lives and aircraft that flew during the war.

Research was conducted mainly through the study of autobiographical and biographical accounts of both famous and unknown aircrew, as well as post-war and contemporary fiction, aircraft manuals and books detailing the various aeroplanes flown throughout the war. Research was also made into the Russian wondertale and Vladimir Propp's morphology.

The result was the novel Earhart County, a novel which was planned using the structures and devices of the wondertale whilst constantly referencing the world of aviation.

List of Contents

Earhart County The Novel.

Earhart County: The Making Of A World War Two Wondertale.

Introduction.

1. The Legacy of the Second World War.

2. Structuring Earhart County as a Folktale.

2.1. An English Novel, a Russian Morphology.

2.2 The Wondertale and War Fiction.

3. Women and War in Contemporary Fiction.

Conclusion.

Bibliography.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award.

This study was self financed and for the most part has been based on a personal long distance research programme, utilising both Plymouth library and the British library as well as personally owned aircraft manuals and documents.

Relevant air shows and signing events were attended as well as seminars where possible and I consulted and met with my tutorship team regularly.

I presented my work in a short seminar on the 10th October 2007.

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N S Russell Johnson

Date: 22/008/2012

EARHART COUNTY

CHAPTER ONE

A couple of months ago we got this new guy in accounts. He got Larry Nowakowski's job. Larry was that old guy who wore the scotch guarded pants and got fired for calling up those sex hotlines on his department's extension. You know the ones, where they say they're taking their clothes off when actually they're sitting in some big ass call centre in New Jersey alternating between what kind of panties they're wearing and cold calling insurance sales.

Anyhow this new guy was from California like me and that kind of means something when you're living in the ass end of Canada in Newfoundland. So I went and said hi and stuff and found out that we actually went to the same high school.

Jimmy Perdusa.

Of course I didn't remember him. He's not really a stand out sort of guy but his brother, I remember him. Stevie. Stevie Perdusa. Jeez everyone in school must remember Stevie Perdusa. He got expelled for driving his car right into the principal's office and ordering a cheeseburger with his ass out the window. Yeah, everyone knew who Stevie Perdusa was.

Whole town knew. Whole of the police department knew too. I mean he was the coolest kid in school but just between you and me? Jimmy Perdusa's brother was kind of a dick.

So anyhow I invited Jimmy over for a few poker nights. The guys liked him because I swear he lost every hand. I mean it. I bet you Jimmy's

never NOT lost a damn game of cards in his life. Yeah he went down a storm.

One day I asked him what he was doing living in the ass end of Canada and he said that in his final couple of years of high school his daddy moved the family down to Newfoundland. Some kind of military thing. Jimmy's daddy was a pilot. He was a big shot in World War Two.

Robin Perdusa.

In our town back in California he used to open galas for senior citizens and stuff when they couldn't get someone off the TV to do it.

Well Jimmy had only been working for us for like a couple of months when his daddy, Robin Perdusa died. I mean it wasn't out of the blue or anything. Jimmy's daddy was *old*. His mom was a whole lot younger than him. She was a small time actress who used to do commercials for a local car dealers. In fact it was in the paper when he died. About how he was an ace in the second world war and then went on to fly Phantoms in Vietnam. They got a photo too of him standing in front of his Phantom in Da Nang 35 years ago with a big handlebar moustache. Something about how he got called an ace after downing 39 planes in WWII. How if he'd downed one more, he'd have been the joint number one US pilot in the whole goddamnn war.

Jimmy still actually came into work that day. He really didn't look too bad because it turns out Jimmy, who's lost every damn poker game he's ever played, had lost his daddy already for quite some time. In fact Jimmy lost his daddy 35 years ago while he was standing in front of that

Phantom. Vietnam can do that to a guy you know. It did it to my uncle Frank.

Jimmy has got to be the only guy who loses his daddy twice. Turns out, after Vietnam, old man Robin was so switched off, Jimmy hardly ever even got spoken to.

It wasn't all bad for Jimmy though because his mom was *hot*. There was this one commercial where she sat on the bonnet of a 1967 Shelby Cobra in a little red bikini and man that taught me more than any kind of biology class in school ever did.

I actually went down to accounting that day, you know, to say stuff like I'm sorry and anything I can do...and is he still coming to poker tonight because I'm saving up for a new car stereo. He was sitting in Larry's old desk, which still smelt like cheese and he was trying to write an obituary. But really now, what can you write about a guy you don't know?

So he writes something like: Robin Perdusa. Fighter ace. 40 kills. Died August 10th. And he's all, "I don't know if I'm gonna make it to poker tonight. You know, funeral stuff to do."

Well he told me all about the arranging and everything but that's not so interesting. What's interesting is the stuff he told me that happened actually at the funeral.

At the funeral, Jimmy stands up and says some stuff and the place is pretty full and they all go to a function room after and Jimmy's having a beer and this old guy comes up to him and says, "Hi."

And Jimmy is all, “Hey. You knew my father?”

And he’s, “Hell yeah.”

“You a pilot too?”

“Nah, pilot stuff’s too easy. You know what I am? Go on have a guess.”

“An engineer?”

“Hahaha that’s a terrible guess. Here son, I’ll give you a clue.

CORKSCREW LEFT.”

“You worked in the mess hall?”

“No no no. You *are* Robin Perdusa’s son right? Didn’t he tell you anything about planes and stuff?”

“Not really.”

“Oh. Well then. I’m Rear Gunner Goober McFarlane.”

“Your mom called you Goober?”

“No, you gotta have a nickname you know? When you fly, you gotta have a nickname.”

“Oh.”

“Boy I can see we’re gonna have a job on our hands with you.”

Now Jimmy isn’t particularly impressed with this because he’s met a few ex-military air force types before. But you see he’s got it all wrong because I did a bit of research and you know something about Rear Gunners? They’re kind of like those rare birds, like those yellow bellied sapsucker birds. If you see one there really ought to be a phone hotline to call in to report it because there’s not so many around. It turns out, in WWII the average life span of a Rear Gunner was two weeks.

Two weeks.

I've had leftover meatloaf that's lasted longer than that.

57,143 men lost in Bomber Command and a life span of two weeks.

He really ought to be impressed but instead, Jimmy he doesn't know so much, so he just says, "Oh."

And Rear Gunner Goober McFarlane says, "Boy, I can see we're gonna have a job on our hands with you."

So Jimmy says, more to be polite than out of interest, "So you were my daddy's Rear Gunner?"

And Goober looks him up and down and goes, "Yeah. I can't believe he never mentioned me. He never told you much about his flying?"

"Not much no." Now Jimmy's lying here because his daddy in fact never told him anything. I mean it, he'd never told him anything *at all*.

"Robin Perdusa's son and he don't know about old Goober. Well."

At this point Goober catches a passing tray and shoves three crab hors d'oeuvres into his mouth in one go. Jimmy's looking about the room for someone else to talk to. Preferably someone who can call him by his first name and not just call him Robin Perdusa's son. That's going to be pretty tough though you see because when your daddy's such a big shot, it's not so easy to notice the son. Stevie, now Stevie was so bad I don't think anybody mentioned his daddy in the same sentence. Stevie got his whole name to himself.

So Jimmy's looking about and finally someone finds him. It's the family lawyer. He walks right on up and ignores Rear Gunner Goober McFarlane and his fight with the hors d'oeuvres and hands Jimmy an envelope.

“Your daddy wanted me to give this to you and Stevie but since he didn’t come, I’ll just give it to you.” The lawyer looks down at Jimmy’s jacket where pieces of crab have been sprayed by Goober.

“Whatcha got there? Some kinda will?”

“Yes, with a twist but still legally binding. ”

So Jimmy opens up the envelope and there’s a letter in it and a page ripped out of some book and the letter, it says:

Dear Sons

There is one more thing I want you to have. Something I left behind on the moors in England when I was stationed there. Something that always brought me luck. Miss. Litvak should be able to help you find it.

Yours,

Robin Perdusa

I swear that’s exactly what it said because Jimmy brought it into work and I saw it and everything.

So Jimmy’s reading this letter in the function room and Goober’s getting a good eyeful as well and he says, “So. You’re going to England?”

And Jimmy, he doesn’t really want to go you know. He’s really only just started at our company, he doesn’t want to be asking for time off already in case he loses his job. So he pulls out his cell phone and he calls his brother Stevie.

And Stevie’s all, “Wassup?”

And Jimmy tells him about the letter and Stevie says, “You go, I can’t be assed to go. Who wants to go to England? You know you can’t flush the toilet paper down the john there? You gotta put it in a separate bin. How gross is that? You go, you do it.”

And Jimmy says, “Well I just got this new job and you’re not doing anything right now.”

Then Stevie says something. Because Stevie may be a dick but he’s not stupid. Stevie says, “You got a quarter?”

And Jimmy says, “Yes.”

And then Stevie says, “Get out the quarter and we’ll toss for it. Ok? You can throw it so you know there’s no cheatin. You call it first. You want heads or tails?”

And let me tell you, Stevie’s on to a sure thing. I mean I told you Jimmy’s never won a game of poker in his life. Hell I don’t know if there’s anything out there Jimmy hasn’t lost. So Stevie, well he’s on to about as sure a thing as you can get.”

So Jimmy says, “Heads.”

“Ok then Jimmy,” says Stevie. “Ok then, you throw it and if it comes down heads I’ll go to England Jimmy, I swear it.”

Jimmy throws the coin and that’s it done. Jimmy’s going to England.

And Stevie says, “Good luck there man, I heard they make bacon out of goat meat.”

Jimmy sighs, he looks at Goober who’s finished eating. There are a couple of pieces of onion that got stuck so he’s hauled his top set of dentures out and is picking at them.

“This is the pits.”

“Awww, don be like thash. Your daddy washa besht. We should do thish for him. Thirty nine planesh ish a lot. Beshidesh, I ain’t been a England shinshe 1945. Be nishta see it again. They do the besht bacon there you ever tashted.”

“40,” says Jimmy. “He shot down 40.”

“All the more reashon to go then.”

Now to be honest, despite the gross denture thing, England is pretty far away and Jimmy wouldn’t mind not having to go it alone. So he tells Goober that he can come too and help find whatever it is his daddy left behind.

And that’s how Jimmy *and* Rear Gunner Goober McFarlane end up going to England.

CHAPTER TWO

Now Jimmy and Goober are headed right to the place where Jimmy's daddy was stationed for most of his time in the war. That place is called Earhart County. It's right down in the south and Jimmy said it got named Earhart County in 1932 when Amelia Earhart did her solo flight across the Atlantic. He told me she was supposed to land there, or at least the town thought so, so they changed their name special like. Amelia though, she went and did what she's pretty much famous for doing. She got lost. She ended up landing in some field in France. So Earhart County never did get to meet her. I guess they just figured you win some and you lose some and Earhart County lost that day.

Jimmy, he's sitting on some nasty ass Boeing 747. You know the ones. Every two years they add on an extra row of seats and think nobody will notice. The emergency cards though, they haven't got round to changing those. They still have that whole head on your lap emergency landing position even though there's not enough space to do that anymore.

Jimmy, he's sitting there with his chicken dinner and he's flying the exact same journey across the Atlantic that Amelia did and Lindberg did too. Course no one on the plane is thinking that, they're all just watching fuzzy out of synch movies and buying cartons of duty free cigarettes.

Goober McFarlane is sitting on Jimmy's right. He got the window seat. He got it because he said you can't put a Rear Gunner not in a window seat. He said it went against nature. The guy in front of Goober had his seat reclined right flat out for the first hour of the journey til Goober

started very slowly to spit on the top of his head. Jimmy said it worked a treat I'm telling you.

Now Jimmy's not got much to go on. He's got his daddy's letter and he's been told about how there was this one time in Earhart County when old man Robin crashed up on the moor. He said he walked about for days on that moor til he got so lost he honestly thought he'd never be found again. Well it turns out old man Robin Perdusa had some kind of lucky charm he never flew without. At this point of wandering he tucked it away somewhere. Seems no matter how lost Jimmy's daddy thought he was back then, it wasn't nothing compared to how lost he got when he found his way home after the Vietnam war.

So Jimmy knows he's looking for a lucky charm up on the moor. Like I said, it's not much to go on. He turns to Goober at some point too and he says, "You saw my daddy's lucky charm ever?"

And Goober says, "Well no, it's kind of personal like, private, a person's lucky charm. Something you keep to yourself. Don't necessarily share it about."

"You had a lucky charm too?"

"Hell everyone had something. I didn't have a charm as much as I had a lucky ritual."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah, I used to pee on the tail wheel."

"Oh." Jimmy looks grossed out. "Well I can see how that's private.

That's not sharing it about at all."

“Talk as much as you want. It always worked. I'm telling you I woulda peed on this plane if they'd let me. Nothing better at stopping your plane from going down. You gonna eat that?” Goober points generally at Jimmy's tray.

Jimmy pushes it over.

“Course pilots these days, it's all computers. Not real flying. Not really. You know they don't even land these things? Computer does it. And you know how you can tell if the pilot decides to actually land it themselves?”
No reply.

“Cos it's a crappy landing. You wait and see, when we fly into London. If we land nice and smooth, it's the computer. We land crappy, it'll be the guy up front in the pretty uniform.”

Now Jimmy said Goober went on like that all journey and I still haven't told you about the other page in the envelope that Jimmy's daddy left him. See in the envelope was the letter and a page that had been torn out of a book. The book was some kind of Russian folktale thing. I know this because on the very top of the page it said it. It said Russian folktales. Right at the top. It was page 85 on one side and 86 on the other and it had Russian folktale stuff on it. You know what? Jimmy's read it, Jimmy's mom read it, Goober read it, hell even I read it cos Jimmy brought it into work, so this is what I'm going to do. I'm just going to put the page right on in so you can see it word for word. It's no good trying to play the game when you don't have all the information right?

So here's the deal:

RUSSIAN FOLKTALES

And then Vassily took out the firebird feather and it shone more brilliantly than the sun and was finer than the purest embroidered silk. Then the false prince became known. So the King tied the false prince to the tail of a horse and let it run through the streets. And Vassily and the fair princess were married in a ceremony so wonderful that tales will be told just about the wedding alone. And they lived in happiness and prosperity until the Soviets came into power.

PRINCE IVAN AND THE DRAGON

In a land so far away it cannot be marked on any map, there was a kingdom so rich, even the peasants ate pork and so splendid even the sun would linger before setting. This land had a King with a son who was strong and brave called Ivan. Prince Ivan was the fastest and the surest in all the Kingdom and all who saw him admired his speed and his agility and his tumble of golden curls. Until one day news came that dragons, awoken in the East and wanting to devour the riches of the land, were coming to make the kingdom theirs.

Prince Ivan decided to leave, for he had heard of a fabled sword that could kill a dragon in one swing and though the King's heart wept to let him go, let him go he did. But before he left, the King gave him a knife and said, "When the knife is silver and shines, you will know we are well but when the knife is dark and rusting, you will know that we are in danger.

So Ivan leaves the kingdom with the knife and soon finds himself walking lost in the wilderness. He walks for days and nights. Much time these things take but a story is told quickly. When Ivan was about to give up, he comes across a little hut on chicken legs and out comes Baba Yaga.

"Why do you look so sad?" Asks Baba Yaga.

"Because I'm lost and have been lost for days. I'm looking for the fabled sword to kill the dragons that have been awoken in the East." Says Prince Ivan.

"Many people get lost in this part of the wilderness." Says Baba Yaga. "But you are on a noble quest so I will help you. I have a horse which can fly faster than any dragon and it can take you to the sword."

RUSSIAN FOLKTALES

So Prince Ivan climbs onto the horse and flies to a big castle in which lived a beautiful golden princess with stars on her forehead.

“I have been lost here for many years. You are the first to find me. How can I thank you?”

And Ivan tells her of the dragons and she gives him the sword and he takes it and says to himself, “Now I can go home and when the dragons come I will be ready to kill them in one swing.”

“Before you go.” Says the princess. “Outside there are two wells. One is the well with the water of death and one is the well with the water of life. Take water from each then be on your way and do not forget me.”

So Prince Ivan takes some of the water and sets to leave the castle but when he looks at the knife his father gave him, it is dark and rusting, so he climbs back onto the horse and soars back to his Kingdom.

In his kingdom a dragon sits outside his father’s castle. He had turned half the people of the land into stones but Ivan swings the sword and cuts off its head. Then he takes the water of the death and the water of life and sprinkles it onto the stones and all the people spring back to life.

And when the other dragons saw, they fled back to the East and such a wedding and celebration the Kingdom had that it was remembered for years to come. Everyday they drank wine and mead but I spilt mine into my beard and did not drink a drop.

THE TURNIP AND THE HONEY

One day a turnip said to some honey, “Ah think how delicious we would be if you smeared yourself on me.”

“That’s true.” Said the honey. “But I taste good without you.”

THE FOX AND THE PEASANT

A peasant was walking down the road when a fox called out, “Help me, help me and I will reward you with anything you ask.”

So the peasant stops and looks to where the voice is coming from and finds a fox lying in a trap.

And there we have it.

That's what it said.

So Jimmy and Rear Gunner Goober McFarlane's plane touches down in London after an eight-hour trip. Amelia Earhart did it in fifteen.

Actually, Amelia did it in fifteen single handed because she had to use one hand to hold down the broken cockpit hatch. Jimmy looks pretty rough when he steps off the plane. His neck is all out of line from sleeping wonky and his shoes won't go on right because his feet swole up so bad when he took them off in flight. Goober's not looking too bad but he's a little bloodshot. His neck isn't out of line though because Goober didn't sleep. He didn't even sleep wonky like. I swear he just stared out of the window the whole time, watching the sky in a figure of eight. I know, I know how it sounds but Jimmy said, Jimmy said so. Figure of eight Jimmy said.

Now you don't think of England as having much of anything that's a good size but it turns out London airport is pretty big and Jimmy and Goober, they have two and a half hours to get on their connecting flight to Earhart County. Well they stop and ask a whole lot of people where their gate is and about seventy percent of them haven't even heard of it and to be honest it's not until they ask the guy who cleans the toilets in Departure Gate 17C that they find someone who can take them there.

They walk right through, I swear, right through the entire airport. They walk past the businessmen, the holidaymakers, and the lost luggage, hell

they even walk past the damn Air Traffic Controllers until they reach a fire door that takes them out onto the runway. The guy who cleans the toilets in Departure Gate 17C walks them across the runways, past a couple of taxiing 757s and over a neatly cut field until they come across a filthy little ex-military Fokker. There's a guy standing in front of it eating a ham sandwich. When he sees them he hides the rest of his sandwich and tries to look professional. "Let me see your tickets."

Goober hands them over. Jimmy is already not allowed to carry anything important he might lose.

The guy reads the tickets. He reads the name on the tickets and he looks up. "J. Perdusa? Are you Robin Perdusa's son?"

"Yes."

"HOLY CRAP."

Wait. Hold it. That didn't sound very British. I can do better than that.

"Are you Robin Perdusa's son?"

"Yes."

"WELL BUGGER ME."

The guy starts shaking at Jimmy's hand. "Wait til they hear this back home. They're going to go crazy." He opens up the Fokker. "Get in, get in. I'll be your pilot. Ahahahah, I'm flying Robin Perdusa's son. I, I'll be your pilot. I'm Jeremy but you can call me Skip. Ahahahahah, Robin Perdusa's son can call me Skip."

And it's at this point that things start to get really weird for Jimmy.

Goober leans over. "See what I mean about the flying and the nickname thing?"

Jimmy and Goober fly that Fokker right out of London and down past Stonehenge that Skip goes over special, just so Jimmy and Goober can see it. Then finally they start flying over the moors where Jimmy's father got himself all lost in 1944. To be honest, it starts getting pretty misty and Jimmy can't see Earhart County town until they're pretty much right on top of it. What Jimmy can see though is that Earhart County has been built around a circular park that's right dead centre of it all. There's a street circling the park and then another one circling that and it sort of grows out until the tippy tip of the edge touches the sea. Surrounding the rest of it is moor and I don't know how weather works but somehow the sea is clear as anything. It's the moor where all the mist is coming from.

The runway is real close to town, just outside the outside circle road. I'm calling it a runway but it's just a strip of well kept lawn with a control tower at the end all convenient like, just for if your brakes don't work so good or if you overshoot. Skip brings that plane down and I have no idea how many flying hours he's got clocked but he bounces that Fokker a good few times before they hit the ground and stay there. Goober elbows Jimmy and says, "I never met a Skip that doesn't do that."

Jimmy gets off the plane with his wheelie suitcase that doesn't wheelie so good on grass and he's not so sure what to do now because Skip leaps out of the plane and runs off. Goober though starts getting all excited because you see, he's noticed that behind the control tower there are a couple of old planes and a hangar which promises more inside. He'd put money on

that being the wing of an Heinkel 111 he can see just showing behind the tower. Did I tell you that Rear Gunners have particularly good eyesight? I should really get on and tell you that.

Rear Gunners, the ones who made it? They got particularly good eyesight.

Skip comes running back with a guy. This guy is Martin Rosebeck. He works in the airfield. His job is Air Traffic Controller and museum guide, only as people hardly ever fly into Earhart County and as everybody went already to the museum in 1974 when it opened, there's not really much for him to do except read books about Lancasters and Hurricanes and try to fart the entire National Anthem. Martin is one of those guys who can make the most exciting stuff the dullest crap you ever heard. Jimmy said not only was he boring but in the bar, he'd do that thing where he'd start the conversation in his head and then expect you to pick up halfway. Stuff like: "What in a dogfight? Spitfire Mk 5 will only give you forty five minutes, I can't believe you'd take that over the Mustang."

I met a guy last week in a bar like that only he was talking about the pros and cons of men's pectoral breast implants while scratching his crotch with a half eaten chicken wing.

Anyhow Skip comes running over with Martin Rosebeck and Martin is all, "Oh my God, oh my God, I can't believe it's Robin Perdusa's son. I mean it's him. He kind of looks the same. You know, if he had a handlebar moustache."

Goober eyes Martin up warily. “You gonna shake his hand or are you trying to get a mental picture stuck? ‘Cos if it’s a mental picture you’re after I got a good one for you. Coupla days ago I climbed out of the shower and found a rash on my...”

“Goober?”

“Yeah?”

“That’s picture enough.”

Martin extends a hand, “I’m sorry, I’m just so excited to meet Perdusa’s son. I’m Martin Rosebeck. I run the airfield.” He grabs the wheelie bag and starts heading to the tower.

On the way to the tower, Jimmy mentions that him and Goober need a place to stay and Martin all but just about begs him to stay with him but Jimmy politely refuses and Goober says there’s no way in hell, so finally Martin drives them to a bar. No, not a bar. A *pub*. A British *pub*. Jimmy said there was old plane stuff and old bottles and all authentic Britishy stuff on the walls inside. The pub wasn’t called The Lion or the Kings Head or anything like that though. On its sign was the worst kind of amateur painting of Amelia Earhart standing in front of her plane and underneath the pub’s name. Earhart’s Vega.

Martin, he goes on in ahead and books two rooms and there’s a whole lot of murmuring and the landlord keeps looking up at Jimmy and finally he hands Martin two keys. He says, “I’m giving you the Lindberg room and the Bader room. The Amy Johnson is nicer but the sink’s blocked and it leaked through the ceiling into Wally Funk.”

Goober heaves a sigh. "I call the Bader."

So Martin shows them upstairs, past badly framed prints of airplanes and maps and aviation type regalia until they get to the floor with the Lindberg and Bader rooms. Now Jimmy told me that the room had some dingy old bed from 1956, a cupboard that smelt so bad of mould he could lick it if he got an infection, a sink and some picture of Lindberg in his goggles hanging over the bed. No bathroom. I mean it. If he needed the can, he actually had to walk down the hall to use a communal one.

Well it takes about three minutes for Goober and Jimmy to put their bags down and step back out. It's about twenty after five British time and Jimmy told me they didn't want to sleep until later so they wouldn't get jet lag. So they decided that after seeing the big circular park in the centre of Earhart County, that they'd go on over and try to kill a little time before dinner.

Jimmy and Goober walk back down the stairs. Goober's complaining about his room.

"I just don't think I'm gonna be able to sleep with Douglas grinning at me from over my bed you know? It's off putting."

"You've been traveling for over fourteen hours. I'm sure you're not going to have a problem sleeping."

"I don't know you know? His legs keep looking at me."

Jimmy doesn't answer because see, Jimmy doesn't know anything about Douglas Bader or how he lost his legs stunt flying a Bristol Bulldog in 1931. Jimmy instead has noticed how the whole pub has gone quiet as he steps in. This kind of thing doesn't usually happen to Jimmy. Usually

when Jimmy steps into a room nobody notices. He wonders if maybe Earhart County isn't so used to Americans or maybe just any kind of new people. Either way, Goober shuts up about getting looked at funny by Douglas Bader's legs and they both creep out the front door.

It's not such a nice day in Earhart County. The mist is rolling in and there's a kind of drizzle that gets you pretty much soaked in minutes. Jimmy and Goober find their pub is just one street away from the park. They walk for a bit around some yellowy golden flowerbeds that are hanging on to life by their teeth. I really have no idea why the whole of Britain doesn't just up and move to California. I know, I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, move to California? Look who's talking? Look who's stuck in Newfoundland. Well let me tell you that was a transfer. I got transferred. No choice. Especially after the whole Klugman file thing. No choice. And anyway this isn't the point. The point is, Jimmy and Goober walk through the park and past the yellow flowers and they go right into the centre where they see there's some kind of statue and they get on up close and there it is.

An eight-foot statue of Amelia Earhart.

But that's not what makes Jimmy go, "Ohhh."

What makes Jimmy go, "Ohhh." Is that standing right next to Amelia, all done up in uniform, is his daddy. Eight foot in stone with a parachute in one hand. It's his daddy. Robin Perdusa.

A whole statue.

CHAPTER THREE

How freaked out would you be if you went to some place in the middle ass of nowhere and they got a statue of your daddy? I mean opening a gala for old folks is one thing. A whole statue in the middle of town is another. Hell even Goober looks surprised or maybe slightly pissed.

Jimmy said Goober always got mad that everyone peed their pants over a pilot and never gave much of a damn over a Rear Gunner. Whatever Goober was thinking as he was looking at that statue, he was there next to Jimmy for quite some time until finally Jimmy says, “Did you know they got a statue of my daddy?”

“No.”

“Is this...is this a normal thing to do?”

“Is it normal to rename your town after a celebrity pilot who may be thinking of flying in?”

“No.”

“Well then I think maybe Earhart County ways are a little different.”

“Oh.” Jimmy reads the plaque on the front of the statue.

“Robin Perdusa. Fighter ace. Downed 39 planes and a U-boat.”

“We sank a few U-boats,” says Goober.

“39? Where did they get that from?”

“Nobody gave me a statue.”

“Mom told me 40.”

“Your daddy told her 40?”

“I guess so.”

“HmMMM.”

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“What?”

“HmMMM, are you ready to eat yet?”

“Ok ok sure.”

It takes about fifteen minutes to walk on back to the pub and when they get there they go on and walk straight past the windows without looking in. I'm saying this because if they'd went and looked in they'd have noticed what was going on before they opened the door. As it is, it was a surprize.

You know how I know it was a surprize?

Because everybody jumped up and yelled 'SURPRIZE'.

That's always a dead giveaway.

Now when I say everybody I mean that there were a whole lot more people in there than when Jimmy and Goober had left. The place is now packed. There are quite a few old people as well which you don't see a lot anymore. There ought to be a hotline to call in that too.

Someone has made a banner with a red marker which ran out halfway and got finished off with blue. The banner says: WELCOME ROBIN PERDUSA'S SON.

There are balloons too and small thin egg and meat paste sandwiches.

Right in the centre of it all are Martin and Skip looking very pleased with themselves.

Then it goes real quiet. They all stare at Jimmy and Jimmy opens his mouth. Somewhere someone's got a video camera. They wait silently all wanting to hear what Robin Perdusa's son is going to say.

And Robin Perdusa's son says: "Well ah...look at this."

Therefore leaving it to Goober to say: "Holy crap what the hell is this?"

It's not the response they wanted but it's a party so they all cheer anyway and bundle Jimmy to the bar to buy him weird ass British beer that's all flat and warm and called something like Lincolnshire Piddle.

They all want to meet Jimmy. He gets so many pints of Lincolnshire Piddle that they're lined up on the bar and when they find out Goober flew in Bomber Command they get in a few for him too. In fact one lady who's a good ten years younger than Goober and kind of a looker if you like them old with a purple rinse, comes up to Goober and says thank you. She says she was in London in the blitz so that's enough said. Because it was Bomber Command who stopped all that. They're the reason it lasted months instead of years after they bombed the V1 and V2 rocket factories over in Peenemunde. They lost a hell of a lot of airmen on that raid so it's nice to be thanked for it.

What with all the Piddle and stuff, Goober and Jimmy actually start having a good time. Then somebody starts talking about old man Robin.

They say: "Remember the time..."

And it all goes quiet and somebody yells for Mr. Omagh.

Mr. Omagh is a thin little old dude. We're going to see a lot of Mr.

Omagh. I'm telling you now so you can keep a eye on him because when

Jimmy told me all this I didn't pay much attention to Mr. Omagh and then when he came up later I couldn't remember which one he was.

So I'm telling you now.

Mr. Omagh is the thin little old dude.

Anyway they call for him and he brings out this big notebook and the guy

who said 'Remember the time...' tells Mr. Omagh, "The one where

Robin overshot the runway and landed in Mrs. Chilton's back garden.

"Ah." Mr. Omagh flips through his notebook and stops at a page where it

says: 'The one where Robin Perdusa overshoots the runway and lands in

Mrs. Chilton's back garden.'

"Ah," says Mr. Omagh. "this is a nice little one. $\uparrow H^6 F^3 W^2 \rightarrow G^{10} gy^2$

$W^{11} \downarrow bb^2 jL^2 H^5 ae^6 X^1$ "

"That's it?"

"Yes."

"Well I can see that's a really great story," says Goober. "It's gotta be the way you tell it."

"No no," says Martin. "Mr. Omagh's got this system for collecting stories. Tell them Mr. Omagh."

"Well you see, this story starts with Robin Perdusa getting sent to escort some bombers over to France = $\uparrow H^6 F^3$. Completes the bombing run fine = W^2 . He flies back across the channel = \rightarrow . But on the way back he spots a 109 = G^{10} ."

"Yeah your daddy had the best eyesight in the air force. Talk about 20/20. Your daddy had 50/50."

“So Robin Perdusa takes off after the 109 = g. violating orders = y^2 . He gets into a dogfight, gets shot at quite a bit but then downs the 109 = W^{11} . Then he returns back to Earhart County = \downarrow . The problem is, is because of the damage from the dogfight, the wheels jam = bb^2j . He crash lands, skidding along on the belly of the plane and overshooting the runway = L^2 . He goes right into Mrs. Chilton’s back garden and gets into trouble with the Commander = H^5ae^6 . Then he was made to rebuild her wall and plant a whole border full of geraniums = X^1 . See? Easy. $\uparrow H^6 F^3 W^2 \rightarrow G^{10} gy^2$
 $W^{11} \downarrow bb^2 j L^2 H^5 ae^6 X^1$.”

Jimmy and Goober just stare at him.

“I have a whole book full.”

“I’ve no doubt you have,” says Goober.

“There are a couple of tricky ones too. For example D^{14} is having eight foot of the nose of the plane shot off and still bringing it in home. You don’t hear that very often but Mr. Greenwood’s got a great Robin Perdusa tale using a D^{14} .”

“Hows about we let Mr. Greenwood tell it though huh?”

“Oh, alright.” Mr. Omagh starts looking about for Mr. Greenwood but the pub aren’t going to stop there. One old guy sidles up and yells,

“REMEMBER THE TIME ROBIN PERDUSA TOOK BETTY KIRKSON OUT FOR A DATE?”

Everybody start cheering.

“He took her up in the Mustang and did some stunts. You’ve never seen anyone roll a plane like he did that day. He was so sure he’d impressed

her, he thought he was going to get lucky and then she was sick all over him.”

Do British people call it ‘getting lucky’? Did I get that right? Or do they say something like ‘bedroom courting’?

Mr. Omagh starts flipping through his book. “Good story,” He says.

“Good story. ↑πu¹ae⁶X³.”

“You got a letter for ‘think he’s going to get lucky’?”

“Mr. Omagh’s got a letter for everything. Go on, on tell a story and he’ll tell you the formula.”

Mr. Omagh pulls out a pencil and looks poised.

“Go ahead,” says Jimmy. “Tell them something about your time with my father.”

“Well, ok ok,” says Goober. “Where I was stationed with him, before he came here, there was this old barn right at the end of the runway and it was a pretty serious threat, you know, if you couldn’t get your plane off the ground in time. Especially after being fuelled up for a big one over to France. And we’d heard of similar stuff in other airfields where whole bombers had been lost crashing into buildings at the end of their runways. So Robin he goes to the Commander like everyday and asks him to get rid of it and they won’t and they won’t. So finally Robin goes out and gets a bottle of whisky and he drags me out of bed and a couple of other guys and I’m telling you we pull down that old barn pretty much with our bare hands. So when we’re done we go back to our bunks to get what sleep we can but Robin stays out. He doesn’t come back at all that night and the next day we find out that he’d rebuilt that goddamnn barn right around the

Commander's hut. You shoulda heard him yelling to get out. He couldn't be sure it was Robin but he's got a good idea so all that week Robin had to fly double shifts. I swear though, two days later a Lancaster doesn't get off the ground in time and goes straight through where that barn had been. Robin saved that crew's lives. All seven of them."

"HERE'S TO ROBIN." Someone yells and the pub start downing drinks.

"I've got it," says Mr. Omagh scribbling like a madman. " $G^1\lambda^2\beta^2\Phi h^5X^1W^3$."

"Your daddy always did have a great sense of humor," says an old guy with a moustache and a pork pie. "He used to have us laughing so hard." Jimmy smiles and pretends to remember his daddy doing anything other than locking himself up in his study.

"He was the only guy to paint his kills on the nose of his plane with his backside. You remember that? Haaaaah. Everyone else they had tallies or swastikas or bombs. Your daddy had two cheek marks for every kill. And then, and then cos the WAAFs all liked your daddy, he was getting more and more eggs for breakfast and those arse cheek marks started getting bigger. Haaah. And...and your daddy said, he said see that one? And he'd point to a smaller one, that one's a Messerschmitt. And you see that one? And he'd point to a big fat arse print, that one was a Ju-88. Haaaaah."

The pub goes nuts.

You like the way I said arse? Good and authentic British like.

Then Jimmy said he was just wondering what letter Mr. Omagh would use for ass printing when everyone turned to him.

Somebody says, “Your daddy must have told you some great bedtime stories.”

And everybody start that whole cheering thing again.

“I’ll bet he got up to some crazy stuff in Vietnam.”

Jimmy nods. “Oh yeah.”

“TELL US.” One person yells it and everyone else take up the cue.

“TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT VIETNAM.”

“WHERE DID HE FLY?”

“I BET HE DID SOME COOL STUFF.”

And you see, Jimmy looks about at a whole pub load of people who all know a hundred times more stuff about his daddy than he does. He’d never heard that his daddy could be funny or had dates and stuff before.

And I don’t know, I guess he gets real jealous or something. Jealous that his daddy had spoken to these guys more than he’d spoken to Jimmy. So he thinks about all the Nam movies he’s ever seen and he starts to make up a story.

“Uh well, there was this one time he was flying and…”

“What was his mission?”

“Uh…he was a bird-dog.” Jimmy doesn’t know what this means exactly but it seems to do the trick. “And he gets shot down.”

“How’d he get shot down?”

“I can’t believe Robin Perdusa got shot down.”

“You know the problem?”

“American made planes. No good.”

“Exactly.”

“Nuff said.”

“Was it a ground fire or a dogfight?”

“Robin Perdusa losing a dogfight? Wash your mouth out.”

“Oh you shouldn’t underestimate a commie though.”

And Jimmy says, “Uh well...you shoulda seen the other guy.”

The right thing to say. The pub cheers again.

“So my daddy is wandering through the jungle.”

“How did he land it?”

“Did he eject?”

“Robin Perdusa eject? Tell me you didn’t just say that. There wasn’t a plane Robin Perdusa couldn’t land. Take both engines offline, bust the wheel undercarriage and D¹⁴ the nose off that plane and he’d still land it.”

“D¹⁴ the nose off an F-4. Is that possible? I didn’t think there’s eight foot to lose on an F-4.”

“Uh...he landed it. That’s what he did.”

“In the jungle? How did he land with all the trees?”

“Uh...that part had been napalmed?”

“Ohhhhh.” That’s the sound the pub make. Napalm. A whole different ballgame. In fact most people don’t even know it got used in WWII.

Albeit right at the end.

“So my daddy lands and gets out and he’s stuck in the jungle. He wanders about for a couple of days and then he starts hearing voices. Lots of voices.”

“American or Vietnamese?”

“Viet **Cong.**”

“Ohhhhhh.” Another whole different ballgame.

“And he sneaks up real quiet and peeks through the undergrowth. It’s a Viet Cong base. A big one. There’s a runway and planes.”

“Soviet MiGs I’ll bet. Good stuff Soviet MiGs.”

“Uh yes. Soviet MiGs.”

“What did I say about underestimating a commie?”

“So my daddy waited there in the bush for the whole day. Viet Cong so close they even trod on his hand at one point. Then finally it got dark. At about 3am , my daddy sneaked onto the runway and climbed onto one of the planes. Takes him ages to work out all those switches and stuff but...”

“BUT AIN’T NOTHING YOUR DADDY COULDN’T FLY.”

“...yeah. Ain’t nothing my daddy couldn’t fly. So he flies the plane back to Saigon only the radio doesn’t work and his own men start firing at him. The bullets hit the fuel and he just brings it in and lands anyway. He screeches that thing to a halt, leaps out of it as the whole thing blows and gets thrown halfway across the runway. He’s out for a second, face down on the ground and he hears guns being cocked inches from his head by his own men and slowly he rolls over grinning and says “Ar pivo xia xia.”

“What does that mean?”

“Yeah what did he say?”

And Jimmy translates for them, “Two beers, thank you.”

It's not even Vietnamese. It's what his Chinese roommate taught him to say back in college.

It doesn't matter though.

A roar goes up in the pub.

Jimmy passed the test. He downs the rest of his Piddle and exhales.

Goober sidles up. He puts a hand on Jimmy's shoulder and says real low,

“Why did they point guns at him if he was in US uniform?”

“Uh...I dunno. They thought a Viet Cong had swapped it?”

“Your daddy was blond.”

“He'd gotten dirty?”

Goober smiles. “Ah. That must have been it.”

CHAPTER FOUR

Now that night while Jimmy and Goober are sleeping, something quite special is going to happen in Earhart County. It's something that happens every six years. Now many people have theories about how the allies won the war. Or should I say, many people have theories about how the allies didn't *lose* the war. That's for all the smart ass wise guys out there. You know the ones. Somebody told them that 'no one wins a war' and they just thought it the smartest thing they ever heard. You know they've been desperate to repeat it ever since. Well they can just button it. I'm talking about *not losing* here. I know no one *wins*.

Anyhow, some people say Bomber Command did it. They said Bomber Command *not lost* the war for the allies. I think Goebbels said it too but then Goebbels said a whole lot of crap. Other people say it was the Soviets. I don't know you know? It really depends what's fashionable. People are all behind stuff at the time and then they deny any part of it when it seems beneficial. You ask anyone who flew onboard a Lancaster. Ask them if any big name comes to mind when they think about people denying their support when it gets unfashionable. Tell them they can give you any name, any name they can think of as long as it rhymes with Churchill.

So people will tell you all kinds of theories. Although you notice I only mentioned those two. That's because I like planes a whole lot and my Grandma was a Russian. But let me tell you right here and now how it came about that the allies *not lost* the war.

Magic.

Ok, ok, I know you're laughing. I'm losing you. I'm losing you aren't I but I swear to God this part's true. You look it up. You can look it up and it'll be there. In the 1940s a coven of 20th-century witches cast a spell to *not lose* the war. It had to be cast out of doors and in the small hours but you see here's the catch. It needed a human sacrifice. This wasn't any love potion we're talking about here. This was the real deal. This was a doozy. So this is what they did. Being 20th-century witches and all, sacrificing people was a little too much. What they did instead was cast the spell out of doors and in the small hours of the morning but they did it with kind of an alteration. They did it in the nude. Not cos the spell needed it but so that one of them might catch hypothermia and buy it. Therefore they'd have their sacrifice, just in a gentle 20th-century kind of way.

What actually happened was that two of them died of hypothermia and the allies well and truly *not lost* the war. This is the part that's all been documented. What's not so readily available is the information that comes next.

The ritual needs to be repeated every six years and, it all happened in Earhart County.

That's twelve witches every six years, with two buying it that first go and on a particularly cold, wet one in the 80s, three of them got it. So you know what that means? That means there's only one left. Tonight is

going to be the last one. So while Jimmy and Goober are sleeping off the jetlag and the Piddle, Mrs. Gladys Stewart-Packard, eighty four with rheumatoid arthritis and a bionic hip, makes her way to the spot to complete the ritual.

Now Mrs. Stewart-Packard finds the right spot the same way they've done it every time, using dowsing rods. They use them just to make sure they're in the spot with the absolute maximum energy or aura or whatever it is they call it. To be honest, there's no real reason to dowse for it every time because it's always been the same location. A sacred bog up on the moors, a little out of the way. This used to be pretty tough to get to but not anymore. You see in 1982 the cheap bog land got bought up, filled in with concrete, because concrete in fact sets beautifully underwater, and finally it got a factory built on it. A flat tarmac road was built leading to it so the factory workers can get there easy and Mrs. Gladys Stewart-Packard gets there nice and easy too in some small ass little British automobile.

So Mrs. Stewart-Packard drives all the way out there, past cereal fields and heather and all that moor stuff. Then she parks outside the factory. Now as Mrs. Gladys Stewart-Packard is eighty four with rheumatoid arthritis and a bionic hip, I'm going to spare you the details on the whole getting all nudey and dancing about part. I will tell you however that young Patrick Loomis was on guard duty that night and well I don't reckon he's been the same since. I mean Mrs. Stewart-Packard was not a small lady and that was a whole lot of eighty four year old to take in.

Let's just leave it at this. Mrs. Stewart-Packard finishes up the ritual. She ties it all up. She makes sure once and for all that this is the end to it. The war will stay over and it all will be good and *not lost* forever. And Mrs. Stewart-Packard goes on back home in the hope that she'd gotten herself hypothermia good and proper.

Now the next morning Jimmy and Goober wake up good and early and so sick from Lancashire Piddle that Jimmy actually has to go downstairs into the bar in his pajamas to use the restrooms there, rather than wait for Goober to get out. I'm telling you, I'd hate to have seen those special bins you got to put the toilet paper in *that* day.

The landlord, who knows full well what the Piddle will do to you, cooks them up a good English breakfast. Eggs, toast, goat meat bacon, the works. And when Goober finally gets out of the bathroom, he hands them over the plates and tells them they'll feel a whole lot better after they'd eaten it.

Jimmy cuts into the egg and the yolk's not been cooked and all this gross runny yellow stuff comes oozing out and gets all over the rest of his food. He's got his daddy's envelope on the table so he can start trying to sort out where the lucky charm is. He looks up at Goober.

"Did you sleep ok?"

"No." Lies Goober. I swear though he was probably unconscious before he even got lying down thanks to the Piddle.

"Was it the legs?"

"You try and sleep with that."

“I was thinking maybe we could look up Miss. Litvak in the phone directory.”

“Ok. What if she got married since your daddy knew her in '45?”

“Then we'll formulate a plan B and do that instead.”

“Hmph.”

“We've got the story to go on too. I think it's some kind of map. You know with the dragons from the East being the Nazis. Maybe.”

At this point the landlord butts in. “If you're trying to work out a story, you should probably get Mr. Omagh to help. He's spent his life studying them.”

“I'm sure we don't have to see Mr. Omagh right?” Goober looks pleadingly at Jimmy as he says it.

“We've got some stuff to do today first, maybe later.”

“Alright but he's the best. I mean it.”

And Jimmy shovels a fork load of goat in and hopes to God it's going to stay down.

Now after mentioning Mr. Omagh, I thought it'd be nice to take a quick look at what he's doing. At this moment in time, Mr. Omagh is at work. Mr. Omagh is a very hardworking man. I honestly don't think there's been a day of Mr. Omagh's life where he hasn't been working too hard to do something fun. Except that for Mr. Omagh, work *is* fun.

Right now Mr. Omagh is sitting on a stool in a little room on the third floor of the factory out on the moor. The one Mrs. Stewart-Packard was dancing around last night. Mr. Omagh probably should have retired

fifteen years ago but he loves his job and he's cheap to pay so he stays on, on the third floor in that little room. The little room is full of shelves and is the Lost and Found office for the factory. Only they don't call it Lost and Found in Britain, they call it the Lost Property office. Mr. Omagh works in the Lost Property office on the third floor. It doesn't get so busy in the Lost Property office but Mr. Omagh always finds stuff to do. Some people are like that. Me, I couldn't look busy if my life depended on it but Mr. Omagh can actually *make* work. Mr. Omagh *makes* work to do. Now in a drawer in the office is a big book. A real big book with leather binding. It's the Lost Property record book and it's kind of an antique. You see, the factory may have only been around since 1982 but there's been a Lost Property office around these parts since 1863. Not right on the bog exactly. In fact it was a good mile or so away. It was part of a moorland's help station, where you put lost items or people who got found on the moor. The record book shows a cub scout in 1918 who was in there for six days before being claimed.

Well when the factory opened, the moorland's help station wasn't needed so bad so they pretty much passed it on to Mr. Omagh in the factory. There's some cool stuff in there too, you know, amongst all the modern umbrellas, odd shoes, wallets and the occasional pair of panties. For example, they've got two genuine bronze age arrowheads, found on the moor in 1911. I mean I guess someone lost them and someone found them and so it's pretty logical for them to be in Lost and Found. From 1987-1992 there was a cat in the record book and in 1872, a bottle of good

whisky that for God knows what reason, hasn't been opened but would probably be worth a sweet fortune now.

And then there's the thing that drives Mr. Omagh crazy.

Something else that hasn't been opened.

In 1952, in the record book, someone had handed in a box. That's it.

That's all it says because like the guy who didn't open the whisky, Mr.

Omagh takes his job very seriously. His job is not to go snooping about.

Especially when the box has a lock on it. Mr. Omagh once told Jimmy

that opening locked boxes was one step away from drinking the whisky,

using the umbrellas when he forgot his own or eating mints from pockets

in lost purses. And really it'd only be one step away from opening up

wallets and borrowing credit cards. A locked box, Mr. Omagh said,

should be safe in the hands of a Lost Property officer.

And it is.

But I'm telling you it's just about killing Mr. Omagh. He's sitting with it

right now. It's real big and real heavy too. It's on his mind so much he's

even made a letter for it.

N = Closed box with unknown contents.

Mr. Omagh is living for the day he can add on:

N^2 = Closed box is opened and contents become known.

Oh yeah, that's what Mr. Omagh is living for alright. That's what gets

him out of bed in the morning. Well that and all the work he's going to

make to do that day.

CHAPTER FIVE

Jimmy and Goober finish breakfast and I'm not going to say they feel great but they feel good enough to start looking for Miss. Litvak. The landlord hands them over a phone directory.

"Here, give it to me, I'll do it," says Goober.

"No, I can do it."

"You'll never find it."

"I can do this. It's not hard. I can do it."

"You'll never find her. Listen I got real good eyes son. I should do it."

"I don't need real good eyes. I just need to look in the L section."

"You'll miss it."

"I'm being careful."

"Don't matter how careful you are, you won't be able to find it. You couldn't find your ass with both hands. No offence like."

"Well look who's wrong. Here it is."

"You found her?"

"No. I found my ass."

"Give me the book."

"I'm not giving it you."

"Fine, then I'll read it upside down."

"Do what you want. You know maybe my ass wants to take a look too."

"You're in the M section."

"What?"

“You’re not even in the right section. Jeez what, you want us to be looking in this thing all day? Give it.”

Goober grabs it.

“Lincoln, Lister, Lively. She’s not here.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah I’m sure.”

“Take another look.”

“It’s not going to make her appear.”

“Let me see.”

“Fine, fine I’ll check.”

“Ok.”

Goober looks. “Look at that, still not here.”

Now you see, if she had been in that book, there’s no doubt in my mind that Goober would find it. If responsibility for not losing the war can be given in percentages, Rear Gunners wouldn’t come out looking like they spent the war twiddling their thumbs. When a bomber hit combat, the longest a Rear Gunner could expect to stay alive was seventeen seconds. So what I’m saying is, there’s a good chance, if Miss. Litvak were in the book, there’s a chance Goober could close his eyes, flip the pages and point and he’d land right on it. And you’d say, ‘Yeah right. The odds of that happening are pretty slim’. See then I’d answer, ‘So were the odds of a Rear Gunner making it out in one piece’. And I mean *alive* in one piece. Don’t count if they’re dead.

So Miss. Litvak is not there.

She’s not in the book.

So Jimmy has to formulate a plan B, and he may think finding his ass with both hands is an achievement but his plan is not half bad. His plan is to go to the town hall and see if there are any records of Miss. Litvak's voting address or tax zones or housing records or even a marriage license with a change of name. Not bad is it? It did take him two hands to find his ass though. I'm not so sure he could have done it with just the one.

The town hall is on the other side of the park. It's not a bad looking building. It's built with granite from the moor though which means it's a little radioactive right? Inside there's a function room and the records office and about two doors down from the records office is the Mayor's office. Mr. O'Casey. Or should I say Mayor O'Casey. Mayor O'Casey has been mayor of Earhart County for over twenty five years. He just keeps winning and winning that election and the Earhart County mayoral elections are not easy ones to win. We'll come to that later though. You've got enough on your plate for now.

Mayor O'Casey has a new secretary. The last one got fired for being too old. She was twenty eight. That is way too old to be Mayor O'Casey's secretary.

Now what Mayor O'Casey is doing today is sorting out the Earhart County monthly raffle. The prize is something different every month. This month it's thirty pounds of prime rib and a box of selected vegetables. There are also a couple of jars of pickles and a promissory note of free yoghurt to be delivered everyday with the milk. Not to be sniffed at.

Most of the residents of Earhart County enter this raffle every month but not many of them stand much chance of winning. This is because there's a knack to winning the Earhart County raffle. You see every month, Mayor O'Casey gathers all the tickets up into a big bin and throws them away. Then he takes all the tickets that have been stapled to a nudey picture of their wives and chooses the best one. Mr. Sturrock has won it six months in a row after marrying some stripper from Huddersfield. In fact when Jimmy and Goober step into the town hall, Mayor O'Casey's secretary is trying to deal with a lady who's complaining that she's done the raffle for fifteen years and never won it once, while Mr. Sturrock who lives over the road has been winning it for just about ever. Now this lady and the secretary are not in the know about the photos but both of them are starting to suspect. The secretary steps back into Mayor O'Casey's room and tells him the situation.

This is what Mayor O'Casey says. "Now listen Sylvia, I want you to tell her, tell her that this raffle is like a field of wheat. A big golden field of wheat. And when the harvesters come and harvest, there's always one stalk it misses. That stalk for the last six months just happens to be Mr. Sturrock."

The secretary looks at him. She's giving him the fish eye. She's not nearly as dumb as he wishes she was. She says, "Isn't that an old WW1 speech? Isn't that what they told the survivors of the Somme? I'm sure I've seen that on TV."

Mayor O'casey sighs. "Tell it her anyway."

The lady in the records office is nice. She's a little excited about meeting Robin Perdusa's son but she'd be equal helpful to the next guy who walked in. She's a nice lady. It's particularly fortunate that she's a nice lady because turns out she's got her work cut out for her looking for Miss. Litvak. Births, marriages and deaths records turn up a big fat zero. Taxes and voting records turn up an ever bigger fatter zero and Jimmy and Goober are really thinking about giving up when the nice lady gets an idea.

She pulls out a smaller book. One that doesn't get opened much. One that's tucked away in the back with rubber bands tied round it. Jimmy can just make out the pages as she flicks through. At the top there are small black and white photos with writing underneath each. The lady flips through a good thirty odd pages and then she stops.

"Miss. Litvak."

Jimmy gets excited. "Great. Do you have an address? Is she still alive?"

"What's that book mean?" asks Goober.

"Well," says the nice lady. "I do have an address I can give you."

"What's that book mean?"

"I have a pen," says Jimmy.

"What's that book mean?"

"Leave it Goober."

"Was she a spy? Is that a spy book?"

"Oh no." The nice lady looks shocked. "We don't have any spy books."

"Can I see it?"

"Goober."

“I wanta see it.”

“Well I'm afraid I'm not allowed to just...”

Mayor O'Casey walks in. He's been listening. “You can't see that book. It's classified.”

“Why? What's in it?”

Jimmy watches Mayor O'Casey get real close to Goober. “We have a whole stack of other records in there. You needn't concern yourself with that one.”

“Well,” says Goober, he wipes his nose on the back of his hand and sniffs.

“I'm already concerned so it's too bad.”

“Are these people bothering you?” Mayor O'Casey starts trying to be all gentlemanly, which is fine but the problem with getting all gentlemanly is that it pretty much forces a woman to be all gentle ladyish.

The nice lady in the office is a little too tired to have put on the whole gentle lady act. Besides, her shoes aren't really right for the part, so she says, “No. We're doing fine.”

“What's in the book?”

“Listen,” says Mayor O'Casey. “That office is like a field of wheat. After it's been harvested there's always a stalk left behind. The book you want is that stalk.”

“Wow. Yeah,” says Goober. “I can see exactly how working in this place is like the Somme.”

Mayor O'Casey looks mad as hell.

“How about I escort them out.”

“Oh no. I’ll show them. There are a couple of nice places to eat I can point. One café your daddy used to eat at. This young man is Robin Perdusa’s son you know Mr. O’Casey.”

Mayor O’Casey looks blank.

“Robin Perdusa. The one who blew up the U-boat.”

“Oh.”

“You two should go and take a look at that. We dragged the boat out of the harbour in the 50s. They’ve got it opened up so you can walk around it and everything. It’s very interesting. There’s a big plaque on the front too dedicated to your daddy.”

“Well if we have the time.” Jimmy’s not so keen. He takes a paper with the address off the nice lady and Mayor O’Casey storms back into his office to look at his nudey pictures.

Jimmy and Goober get pointed in the right direction to find Miss. Litvak. They have to head towards the harbour. They’ll pass a couple of farms on the way. One in which, very soon, the Earhart County mayoral elections will be held next to the one with the U-boat. We’ll get to both of them later. We’ll get to the fields later. Right now, Jimmy and Goober are off to see Miss. Litvak.

The nice lady smiles at them as they go. She says, “Good luck.”

And there’s just something about the way she says it that doesn’t sound real promising. Not real promising at all.

CHAPTER SIX

It takes about thirty minutes before Jimmy and Goober reach the farms the lady in the records office told them about. The first one is just fields of yellow cereal crops whereas the second one doesn't smell real good. It's full of cows except from the dead centre of the field where a well cared for German U-boat sits. It's huge. Goober even gets a little excited about it.

"When we're done with Miss. Litvak, we gotta go inside that thing."

"Pretty weird looking boat."

"They all looked like that."

"Looks more like some kind of submarine."

Goober smacks his own forehead. "You don't know what a U-boat is do you."

"Well I know that's one right there."

"When you get home you gotta turn on a documentary channel and sit in front of that TV until you're not so dumb anymore."

"Just cos I don't know all that war stuff. I know other stuff."

"Yeah? Like what?"

"I know accounting stuff."

"Oh well then. You got the keys to the kingdom then. Yeah I remember that front line accounting happening in Monte Casino. Those guys got real tough with the numbers."

“Listen, at my high school careers fair they had an accounting table, a police table, an education table. Don’t remember there being a Rear Gunner table or a U-boat specialist table.”

Goober sighs. “A U-boat is a submarine.”

“Then why didn’t they just call it a submarine?”

“Cos they were Jerries. Who knows why they did anything?”

“Keep your eyes open for this place. It should be real close now.”

“Ok, ok.”

The address says Sea View, so it looks like Jimmy and Goober are headed in the right direction as they can see the sea getting real near.

Goober takes a big whiff. “Ahhh smell that.”

“The sea air?”

“No I’ve just farted, of course the sea air. What else it gonna be?”

And then they turn the corner. There it is.

SEAVIEW.

“Oh no,” says Goober.

SEAVIEW

OLD FOLK’S HOME.

“I’m not going in there.”

“What?”

“I’m not going in there.”

“Scared they won’t let you out?”

“You never know in these places. They sit you down with a hot drink and a blanket and you never get up again. I’ve seen it, I’ve seen it happen.”

“Shut up and come on.”

Goober gets halfway up the driveway and stops.

“I can wait here. It’s nice outside. You go. You don’t need me.”

“Will you quit this and come on.”

“Why? You need someone to hold your hand?”

“Why? You need to stay here cos your frail old bones won’t make it up the drive?”

Goober glares at him.

“I’m sure they’ll have a wheelchair we can borrow.”

“That was below the belt.”

“Below the belt? Is that where my ass would be? The one you think I can’t find?”

“Ok ok, I’ll go in but only quick.”

“Fine.”

“And if it smells of pee, I’m outa there.”

“It’s an old folk’s home, of course it’s going to smell like pee. In fact you smell a little like pee yourself you know.”

“That’s from standing so close to you.”

“Yeah, yeah shut it grandpa.”

Now SeaView Old Folk’s Home is actually one of those homes set up by that Pathfinder guy. Leonard something. What was his name again? Leonard...Leonard Thingy. Leonard Equability UK, you know him. Well it turns out the home is split into three different parts. There are some one bedroom flats at the front, for old folks who are not so old they have to be supervised. There are rooms in a large house, for old folks

who need to have a closer eye kept on them. And then there's the east wing.

The east wing is something else again.

Jimmy and Goober walk past a couple of old guys sitting in the sun outside their flats. They both look up and wave. One of them is reading a newspaper and the other has some old style headphones on and is listening to a giant ass ancient stereo looking thing.

All round someone's tried real hard to make the garden look nice and the closer they get to the main building, the more people have been wheeled out, given a cup of tea and left there.

Goober looks over to Jimmy and starts hissing, "I can smell it. I can smell the pee already."

"Be nice," says Jimmy and he goes to open the front door. Now Jimmy told me the front door was all locked up. He said there was one of those code number boxes on the wall and that he stood about not quite knowing what to do til one of the old ladies with the tea and the blanket yells, "ONE SIX FOUR SIX. DON'T TELL THEM I TOLD YOU, WE'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO KNOW"

"What?" says Jimmy.

"ONE SIX FOUR SIX. IT'S THE CODE," yells the old lady.

"Oh. Oh ok. Ah thanks."

Jimmy types the code in. There's a buzzing and the door opens. On the other side is a reception desk. A woman in her late twenties sits behind it with a cup of tea. Jimmy said they really do drink a lot of it over there. Her clothes look suspiciously wipe clean but she's got the figure to pull

them off. In fact there's a chance she could be Mayor O'Casey's former secretary.

"Hi," says Jimmy. "Uh, we're here to see Miss. Litvak."

"Really?"

"Yeah."

"No, I mean really?"

"Yeeeah."

"Hang on. HEY, SHIRLEY."

A voice calls back. "YES?"

"THERE ARE TWO MEN HERE WANTING TO SEE LILY."

Shirley comes racing out to the desk. Her mouth is open real wide.

"Are they family?"

"I don't think so. They're yanks."

"We could be family," says Goober. "Do we need to be family?"

"No."

"Ok we're not family."

"You want to see Lily?"

"Yeah," says Goober. "Are we allowed to see the inmates?"

"They're not inmates. This isn't a prison," says Shirley

"Then why you got a code number to get in?"

"Well ok it's a little like prison but it's...how did you get in?"

"Mary knows the number," says Mayor O'Casey's former secretary. "We really need to get it changed."

So they sign a guest book and Shirley steps round the desk. “Where do you know Lily from?”

“His daddy knew her. His daddy’s Robin Perdusa.”

“No. Really? Connie get these two a cup of tea.”

“Yeah. And a blanket for the old guy,” says Jimmy.

“So Robin knew Lily? Well they say he liked the ladies and she was a looker when she came in. We have pictures of her. A blond bombshell.”

“When did she come in?”

“1945. That’s when they all came in. Don’t you know about them?”

“No.”

Goober looks nervous. “What do you mean ‘they all came in’? How many came in?”

“About fifty or so. The war was over so I suppose your daddy would have gone home by then. Maybe he didn’t know. He never told you anything about it?”

“His daddy never told him nothing.”

“Hey.”

So Shirley tells them. She tells them how just before the war ended one morning, a guy walked on in off the moors. Mist rolling behind him. No idea where he was or what was happening.

He was in uniform so everyone figured it was shellshock. You know, WWII kind of shellshock. The sort you fix with a slug of whisky and a good stern talking to.

And then the rest came.

One by one. More and more. With no idea, nothing. I mean it. Give them a sandwich and it'd take them a half hour to work out what to do with it. Mind you I've always felt that way about Spam.

Finally there were about fifty of them. They all got taken to the town hall. Complete strangers. Nobody had ever seen any of them before. All of them in uniform even though Earhart County's RAF base had closed months ago. There were no active soldiers left to recognise them.

And Earhart County tried. Tried real hard to find out who they were. But records claimed they didn't exist. Their dogtags weren't real registered ones. All they had was a vague idea of their names. That was it. So Earhart County had to look after them. All fifty odd of them. Course there's not fifty of them now. There's only eleven of them left. Still as lost as the day they came in off the moor.

Jimmy and Goober listen with their hopes sinking.

"Did you find out what it was. Why they were like that?"

"Well I...no. Some kind of Alzheimer's? We were wondering if it was a type of sheep dip that got into the water."

"Alzheimer's? I hate that. That's the worst, that's my biggest fear," says Goober.

"I wouldn't worry about it," says Jimmy. "It only happens to smart people."

"I am smart people."

"You couldn't find smart people with both hands."

"I could find smart people with my ass."

"Well so could I if my ass was the size of yours grandpa."

“You callin me a fat ass?”

“Yeah.”

“Better to be a fat ass than a fat head.”

“Do you two want to meet Lily?”

“I don’t know if there’s a point if she’s got Alzheimer’s,” says Goober.

“Well it’s not exactly Alzheimer’s. See Alzheimer’s deteriorates. These people are the same as when they came in. Plus they’re not deteriorating physically. Well except from just being plain old.”

“Huh.”

Shirley walks them through the home, past old folks watching TV and sleeping. She walks them right on beyond rooms and nurses wheeling tea trolleys. And then she gets to the East Wing. There’s another code lock.

“Are they dangerous?” Goober’s getting himself a little worked up.

“No, no. They just sometimes go walkabout. Especially Mr. Purcell.

The door shuts behind them.

“You know a lot of people in Earhart County think it’s some kind of witchcraft. There are stories of a witch on the moor with a pet dragon who can turn people into stone.” She opens the door to a big lounge.

Jimmy and Goober walk in. Ten old people are just sitting around.

There’s a couple of nurses drinking tea amongst them and the TV is showing some British pool contest. Shirley takes them over to a lady wearing blue pajamas with a cardigan over the top.

“Lily?” says Shirley. “These two have come to see you.”

“Uh, hi.” says Jimmy.

“Yeah.” says Goober.

Lily glances at them all confused. She looks back at Shirley and then she says, “Have you seen my yak?”

Only she doesn’t say it like that. Jimmy said she had an accent, a real strong one and I’m not so good at accents but I’ll do my best. She said, “Haff you seen yak?”

And Shirley says, “Did you leave it in your room again?”

Lily looks blank.

“I’ll get it for you while you speak to these nice men.” She turns to Jimmy before heading off. “She likes yaks. We got her a stuffed toy.”

“So,” says Jimmy. “Uh, hi Lily.”

No answer.

“My daddy told me to come see you.”

No answer.

“My daddy was Robin Perdusa.”

Lily looks at him. “Rrrrrobin Perrrdooza.”

“Yeah. Yeah, you remember him?”

Lily thinks real hard. “He haff yak?”

“No. No the nurse is getting your yak.”

“Oh.”

Goober looks uncomfortable. He grabs a chair and inspects the seat real hard for pee before sitting down.

“Rrrrrobin Perrrdoosa,” says Lily again.

“Yeah. That’s right.”

“Izz your father.”

“Yeah. You used to know him.”

“Yoozed to know him.”

“He was a pilot.”

“And my yak?”

“Uh, I don’t think your yak can fly planes.”

Shirley comes back into the room with the stuffed toy. “Here’s your yak Lily.”

“Here yak.” Lily looks confused again.

“Your yak plays music doesn’t it Lily. Why don’t you show these nice men.”

“Yak sing music.” Lily screws her forehead up real tight. “Where yak?”

“Your yak’s right there Lily. You’re holding it.”

“Oh. Am holding yak.”

“Jeez,” says Goober. “Ain’t this going well.”

Turns out, the yak does sing. When the nurse showed Lily how, it sang a music box version of As Time Goes By. I once heard a stuffed beaver sing the same.

Shirley waits until it finishes then says, “Why don’t you take Lily for a walk around the gardens. She’s very fit.”

“Yeah.” Goober wants to get out. “Yeah the garden is great. Say that is a nice yak, let’s take it out for a walk.”

“Yak not can walk.”

“Huh?”

“Can’t not walk yak. Ees stupid. You rride yak. Not walk.”

“Let’s just go honey.”

Goober starts hustling Lily out when another nurse runs in. “Mr. Purcell’s not in his room.”

Shirley does a head count. Then she does a head count that doesn’t include Goober. “Go take a look for him. If you can’t see him in the grounds, call back.”

“Right.”

“Mr. Purcell?” Asks Jimmy.

“Yes. He’s the one we got the codes for. Don’t let that worry you though.”

“Wherre yak?”

“Don’t you have it?”

“We going to see yak?”

Shirley grabs it. “You left it in your chair.” She stuffs in Lily’s cardigan pocket and shoves them out the door.

“Man she loves that yak,” says Goober.

CHAPTER SEVEN

So Goober and Jimmy they walk Lily around those gardens, past the two old guys sitting in front of the flats and stop at a bench nearby.

“Listen Lily,” says Goober. “We need your help.”

“Help.”

“Yeah. Jimmy here needs to find something on the moor. Robin left it behind.”

“Rrrrobin pilot.”

“Yeah. Yeah Robin was a pilot. Robin was the best. Robin was the best pilot ever.”

“Best.”

“Yeah.”

“Rrrrobin Perrrdooza best?”

“Yeah.”

“Rrrrobin Perrrdooza not best.”

“What?”

“Yak morre betterr.”

Goober sighs. He turns to Jimmy. “She’s a nutjob. We got no chance.”

“Lily?” asks Jimmy. “You remember my daddy?”

“Rrrrobin?”

“Yeah.”

“Did he tell you how he got lost on the moor?”

“Oh ya, lost on moorrr.”

“He shot down those planes and crashed on the moor.”

“Crrashed. Bad pilot.”

“Yeah I know, your yak is better.”

“Oh much morre betterr.”

“But my daddy got lost. After he shot down his last plane and he left something.”

Lily looks like she’s trying, she really does.

“Lefft yak.”

“Let’s just take her back in,” says Goober.

Jimmy sighs. “Ok. Ok.”

The three of them walk back past the old dudes and into the house.

Shirley looks pleased to see them. “Did you have a nice walk Lily?

Fancy getting celebrity visitors. Robin Perdusa’s son. There’s a cup of tea in your room and I’ve put that yak animal documentary video on for you.”

“Yak.”

Jimmy and Goober watch her shuffle out.

“What you wanta do now?”

“I don’t know.”

“Because there’s a U-boat to look around.”

Jimmy sighs. He calls out, “Bye Lily.”

Lily turns round. “Rrrobin shoot plane.”

“That’s right. Well, see you.”

“Ya ya. forrty plane.”

“Yeah, yeah,” yells Jimmy getting his hopes up a little. “He shot down forty planes. You remember?”

“Forry.”

“Yeah.”

“Yak morre better.”

“If she mentions that yak one more time I'm gonna do my nut,” says
Goober.

Lily grins, “Yak.”

The sound of a large buffalo type animal moos out from her room and she
shuffles in.

“I think we got somewhere,” says Jimmy.

“Where? NutsVille? You know she’s a cartridge starter short of a
Spitfire.”

“Ok, ok so she’s not all there but I think she’s remembering my daddy.”

“I don’t know you know? She just seemed to be repeating you.”

“We’ll try again tomorrow.”

“We gotta come back? Can’t we just start looking on the moor”

“No we should come back”

“To this pee hole?”

“It’s a nice place.”

“Yeah if you like pee.”

“Listen , you said, you said we oughta do this for my daddy.”

“Ok, ok fine. But I’ll only come back if we go take a look at the U-boat.”

“Deal.”

“And we gotta eat lunch before we come tomorrow. I got that pee smell
right up my nose. I can still smell it I swear.”

“That’s cause we haven’t left the building.”

“It’s gonna stay with me. I know it.”

Now you're going to want to see inside that boat aren't you. I know it, you want a looksee and we are going to have a little problem here because if it doesn't fly, really I couldn't give a good goddamnn about it. But you know what I did? You know what I did for you? I went out and rented that famous U-boat movie. I went and did that just for you. Big long assed thing that movie too with hardly any planes in it. Hell the planes that were in it went past so crazy fast I'm not even sure what they were. T-6 Texans I reckon is probably your best bet. Nice planes those Harvard Texans. Flew real nice and there's a lot of them still out there operational but I'm not entirely convinced they were the right plane for the scene. Don't get me wrong, those T-6's are pretty and all but judging by where that U-Boat was, I'm not so sure it shouldn't have been a Swordfish. Yeah I'll go out on a limb here and say even if the movie was set after those carriers went down, it still should have been a Swordfish. Amazing little biplanes those stringbags. Absolutely nothing like a T-6 Texan though. Really, about as different as two planes can be. Not that I'm putting down the Swordfish because they're real beauties, carry just about anything but see a lot of people out there reckon there's only one allied plane that could take on a T-6 Texan. Only one WW2 plane that is. I'm not talking about Robin Perdusa taking on one in his F-4 Phantom. Although that would be interesting. No there's only one allied plane some people say that can take on a T-6. But we'll get to that later. I promise.

I promise I'll get to it that is, if you promise not to look it up.

I hope to God we've got ourselves a deal here because it's going to be worth the wait.

Totally worth that wait.

Right, back to the U-Boat then. I paid good money to rent that movie out and had to listen to Jimmy yakking on about it too. Don't want all that time and money going to waste. So this is what it amounts to. Goober and Jimmy climb up these steps that someone's fixed up on it and there's this conning tower thing with AA guns. I remember the AA guns from when Jimmy told me about it. I can understand about AA guns. Down inside it's all gauges and little wheels. And then there are like bunks right in next to the torpedoes. Those guys actually slept right next to the damn things. And the U-boat had this artificial floor but in the war, that part was just all more torpedoes. They must have just about stuffed them all of everywhere. Yeah they went nuts for those torpedoes, although that U-boat was missing a good couple of them. One of them is about twenty five miles outside Earhart County harbour lying on the seabed and the other one it fired that day before old man Robin sank it, is half way up Earhart County's sewage system. In fact it's about thirty foot away from Mayor O'Casey's rude photo collection.

It's also got this thing, I think it's for speed. It's got German stuff written on it. Something about kleine fahrt, langsamer fahrt and grosse fahrt.

And when Goober took that opportunity to grosse fahrt down the captain's communication tube Jimmy decided he'd seen enough. And good for him I say. Why would anyone want to travel in a nasty ass sardine tin two

hundred odd foot down when you got the whole entire goddamnn sky to fly in? Really, some people are so weird. Why anyone would travel by sea is beyond me. I mean why cruise in some salt soaked retirement home when you can cruise at thirty two thousand feet? Where's the fun if your ears don't pop?

When Jimmy and Goober step out of the U-boat, one of the guys from SeaView is waiting for them . It's the old dude with the headphones that was sitting outside the flats. He's standing about trying not to look uncomfortable with how close one of the cows is. He says:

“Hallo ja?”

And Goober says: “Aw man, one of the crazies got loose.”

“Oh, ha ha ja. Not crazy, ha ha.”

“Oh well then, as long as you're sure.” Goober starts hissing at Jimmy.

“I thought they got codes to stop the nuts getting out?”

“Nut. Ha ha, ja not nut.”

“Riiight. Riiight.”

You're worrying now aren't you. You're worrying because here comes another accent. It's the last one I promise. Jimmy did it better than me.

When I do them they all sound kinda the same but Jimmy had them sounding a world of different when he told me all of this.

Anyhow, Goober puts on a big phoney smile. “How about we get you back indoors? There's a lady there with a real nice stuffed yak. You'd like it, trust me.”

“Oh ja. Lily. I saw you talk mit Lily.”

“Sir?” says Jimmy. “I think we should get you back. I don’t think you’re allowed to wander.”

“Oh no, is ok. I not in East Ving. I haff mine own appartement.”

“Riiight yes. Room, appartement whatever nutbag let’s get you back.”

“Ha ha. Not nutbag. Just...ah just old. I rent flat. Outside house, I rent flat.”

“Ohhhh.” Jimmy realizes now that this is the guy with the headphones.

“I vant speak mit you. I’m thinking maybe I can to help.”

“How do you mean?”

“Mit Lily. Is possible I can to help.”

“How?”

“Oh ha ja, I forget to introduce. I am Dr. Zippermeyer.”

“Doesn’t help me understand any,” says Goober.

“Vell I vork on new technique.”

“You mean you're gonna do some sorta lobotomy?”

“Oh ha ha no, I am not that kind of doctor. I vork mit soundvaves.”

“Soundwaves? And you can help her?”

“I think I could surprize you.”

“Oh jeez here it comes. He’s gonna start takin his clothes off isn’t he.

He’s one of the nuts isn’t he. You keep it in your pants Dr. Frankenstein.”

“Ha ha, not Dr. Frankenstein. Dr. Zippermeyer. Soundvaves wery clever thinks. Is possible they can to help Lily.”

“Yeah, I’m not so sure,” says Jimmy.

“You vant information from her ja? Your papa vas pilot ja?”

“Yeah.”

“Vell tomorrow you come to me and ve go see Lily together. Maybe I can to help.”

“Don’t trust him,” says Goober. “He’s a jerry and a flasher. He’s just tryin to lull us into a false sense of security so he’s got enough time to get his pants off.”

“Not takink off pants.”

“Shut it fruitloop. I say we spend tomorrow on the moors. I mean how big can they be?”

“Ja, wery big.”

“I don’t know. Maybe we should let him help.”

“What?”

“Well, in the story my daddy left me, in the story the people are turned to stone and the princess shows Ivan how to bring them back. Maybe we got to follow the story.”

“You’re telling me Frankenstein is the princess?”

“Yeah, or maybe Baba Yaga, and Lily is the princess?”

“Ja. I’m Baba Yaga.”

“He comes out of the wilderness to help. Shows the way to the princess and then Lily shows us to the sword. Yeah, yeah that’s it.”

“Ja, that’s it. I’m Baba Yaga.”

“Baba Yaga was a chick. You know that fruitloop?”

“A chick? Like mit eggs? I got eggs in flat. I can to make lunch ja?”

Now while Jimmy is sorting out a meeting with Dr. Zippermeyer, I’m going to get back to someone that I think you think I’ve forgotten about.

Mr. Purcell.

You thought I'd forgotten didn't you. You really thought that. I don't forget stuff you know. I remember everything. And I've remembered Mr. Purcell.

Now there are a couple of nurses out looking for Mr. Purcell but they haven't found him yet. You see Mr. Purcell has made it all the way down to the sea. He's got himself right the way down to the harbour and he's found a rowing boat.

It's lucky he found the boat because you see the Earhart County shoreline is a little dangerous. Let me tell you why it's trouble. The beach part is at an angle. It slopes up real sharp and that has an effect on the waves.

What happens is this. The first wave in, we'll call it the alpha wave, laps onto shore and then because of the slope, rolls back at quite a pace.

Meanwhile the next wave behind it, we'll call it the beta wave, smacks right into the alpha wave on its way back. What happens is a big clash of water when they hit. I'm not so good with the sea, I'm better in the air, Aquarians are like that but anyhow I think this is called a wedge wave.

They can reach a pretty height in the right conditions too.

Well Mr. Purcell is in that boat he found. He's past the beta waves and the alpha waves and he's heading right through the delta waves behind them. He'll be out in the flat delta waves before you know it.

Not that he has any idea where he's at.

Mr. Purcell hasn't known where he's been at since 1945.

We know though. We know he's out there.

We know he's in the delta waves.

CHAPTER EIGHT

In Mr. Omagh's lunch break he makes a note in his big spiral bound pad of Jimmy and Goober's Robin Perdusa stories. He adds a little extra note of the frequency of letters used. ϕ , over consumption of alcohol, is still number one.

When Mr. Omagh finishes he gets out his sandwiches from a box that he *is* allowed to open and eats at the counter of his lost and found office. Mr. Omagh doesn't use the factory canteen because there are people there who work with the goods the factory produces.

Mr. Omagh doesn't really approve of the things the factory produces. He likes to keep a good distance from it. It's the reason he cycles to work instead of using the little factory bus. You see what the factory makes, is rude things for men. Honest to God. I wouldn't be telling you if it wasn't true. Mayor O'Casey's factory makes rude things for men.

Now I'm not over familiar with the things myself, never had to be but I guess there's enough lonely men out there to make Mayor O'Casey's factory one of the most successful businesses in the south. They ship all over Jimmy said. He even brought in one to show me. A plastic thing shaped like a little woman with a pump. The plastic looked a kind of sharp around the join but Mayor O'Casey had really cornered the market with what he called: Mr. O'Casey's Flangeomatic. Jimmy said everyone in Earhart County reckoned the little woman was modelled on his ex-wife. Must have had a real small wife that guy. A real small ass, red, plastic wife.

Mr. Omagh doesn't like to think too hard about it. He tells people he works in the Lost and Found office. He doesn't mention the little plastic women but just about everyone in Earhart County know where he works all the same. It's not like there's anywhere else to work in Earhart County. Although Mr. Omagh isn't the only person who doesn't spend all day making and wrapping flangeomatics. On the third floor of the factory, Mayor O'Casey runs a separate business. Mayor O'Casey runs one of those insurance claim companies. He's got a commercial on the local radio station and everything. It says: *Mayor O'Casey never loses a case.* And it's true. He hasn't. I mean it. Mayor O'Casey has not once lost a case. His insurance claiming makes him about the same amount as his flangeomatics do, that's how successful he is. That's how much Mayor O'Casey not loses.

Jimmy and Goober are learning all about Mayor O'Casey's insurance claims company. They're sitting back at the Earhart's Vega having lunch. They're eating these real fat French fries and some kind of pie. British people like pies a whole lot. Anyhow they're learning about Mayor O'Casey's insurance claims company because the pub has got the local radio station on and there's a commercial for it playing. It's something like "Do you have a claim to make? Think really hard, I mean really really think. We can get you money for accidents up to three years ago. So maybe you're not hurting anymore but just have a really good think about it and call us at Mayor O'Casey's Insurance Claims. No win, no fee. But we never not win.

I'm telling you, it might not have had women in bikinis in it but it was a good commercial. Jimmy said he actually tried thinking of something. He said he wondered if he could get money for how rough he felt after all those pints of Piddle.

After eating, Goober's all geared up for taking a look up on the moor and the landlord who's keeping a good close eye on it all tells them there are all kinds of dangers up there and that they really ought to go on up prepared. He sends them back over to the airfield because they've got the best maps and aerial photo's and there's a possibility they could get someone to take them up for a flight over it all for a looksee from the air. So Jimmy and Goober walk over to the airfield. They cut across the park in the middle of Earhart County with the statue of Amelia and the one of Jimmy's daddy and Goober tells his Earhart and Douglas Bader joke. He says, "Ok, ok I got this joke. Douglas Bader and Amelia Earhart are on a date in this bar."

"Ok."

"And they're drinkin right?"

"Ok."

"Who drives home?"

"I don't know."

"Amelia. Cos Douglas is legless."

There's a silence.

"That's funny," says Goober. "That's a funny joke."

"I don't get it."

“It’s funny.”

“I don’t get it.”

“Ya well trust me. It’s funny ok.”

When they get to the airfield Skip is hanging about next to the Air Traffic Control tower having a cigarette. He stubs it out real fast when he sees them.

“Good to see you. You here for the museum?”

“Yes,” says Goober.

“No,” says Jimmy.

“We have some nice planes.”

“I think we really should take a look. Be rude not to.”

“No, we’re here for maybe a map or a flight over the moor.”

“Oh well we can do some of that. Martin is up there doing the radio show but he knows where all the maps are.”

“Martin does the radio show?”

“Yes.”

“From the ATC tower?”

“Best place to broadcast.”

“Really?”

“Well, only place to broadcast. Not like the airfield gets busy either. We got a gliding club every Thursday but they just got the one glider and it’s only got one wing. Mr. Friedman had a real nasty landing a few weeks ago. You know every landing’s a forced landing in one of those.”

“Try a forced landing in a Lanc sometime, still have a scar on my ass.”

“Everything is on the ass for you, what is it with that?”

“I guess it’s a good ass, things are drawn to it.”

“That’s only a good thing if it’s women. Rashes don’t count.”

“Say did I see a Heinkel the other day?” Goober starts walking out towards the hangar.

“Um, I’ll get Martin to come down with some maps and stuff. You can go ahead into the museum. No charge.”

Now I can’t tell you exactly what Jimmy saw in there because Jimmy knows diddly about airplanes. He said there were a load of smallish ones so I’m guessing they probably had, amongst some other stuff we’ll get to later; a Hurricane and probably a Bulldog or two, there’s plenty of them still flying. They’d also surely have had an out of action Spitfire and that Heinkel 111 that Goober had pointed out. Jimmy said he sort of was just wandering about waiting for Goober to stop running from plane to plane. He said he didn’t really have any chance to know what they were because there weren’t any kind of plaques or stuff to tell you. Guess in Earhart County folk don’t need all that. Guess in Earhart County, planes are in the blood and hell it’s not like you could get a Bulldog and a P-38 confused in a hurry.

Anyhow Jimmy starts to wander over to the far end of the hangar when Goober comes shooting out from behind a squat bubble shaped little plane and starts pulling him over to a glass case with some papers in.

“These here look like something. How about you take a good look at them.”

Jimmy peers in. Inside the case are papers of transcripts. In fact he said they had that one, that famous one of the radio log of the day Bader went down. Written down nice and simple, it kind of reads like this:

- **Get into formation or they'll shoot the f***ing lot of you down.**
- **PRT I'll follow you.**
- **Above or below this cloud?**
- **Throttle back.**
- **Withdraw now.**
- **2 buggers just above now.**
- **Get on to my PRT other side of YQR.**
- **Can you see it?**
- **Reform.**
- **Who the f***ing hell is...tracer bullets.**

Actually I cheated here a bit. Doug has been downed out of the picture by this point. But it's like the best bit. No, no wait, the best bit's this:

- **Go into this cloud and seek refuge Spitfire. Go under the cloud with me.**
- **Everyone with us?**
- **One short.**

That's the best bit because we know who's the one short. We all know it's Doug who's gone down. In fact as they were saying this, there's a good chance Doug was already making his way to that French farmhouse for a cigarette.

Always kind of surprises me how much they used the F word back then because old folks today will have you think they've never heard of it. Anyhow, that wasn't the only thing. They also had the transcripts of Robin Perdusa's flights. Jimmy said that was weird. A bunch of papers with your daddy's voice on them. Specially because Jimmy had never known his daddy to talk a whole lot. They had Robin Perdusa's most famous Earhart County moments there all transcribed. They had the time he sank that U-boat and the time he took Betty Kirkson up and she barfed all over him and they've also got the one where he gets lost, the one where he got shot down over the moor. Jimmy brought them home, I can show you them. I swear, they're like poetry to me. Every goddamnn line is poetry.

RADIO LOG, EARHART COUNTY, 12.05PM

B - Permission to take-off Robin. Runway's clear.

R - OK. Lets see what this beauty can do.

A - Keep V.270, we should have some new Lancs flown in today.

R - Look forward to meeting them. This thing could dodge anything.

L - Stop talk and concentrate to drag nose up off runway.

R - You don't drag a Mustang. It's a precision instrument.

L - XMT unintelligible.

B - Stay under the clouds. Visibility is low.

L - Think you can to lift trash plane go far high enough to reach Cloud?

A - Ha ha Lily.

A – All right, we got people watching down here.

L – People watching.

R – This baby's going to give them a real show.

L – What kind show? Bad comedy?

R – Just watch her sister.

L – XMT unintelligible.

A – That's great.

R – Not bad for a piece of trash huh Lily?

A – There's some people here who'd like to see a snap roll.

R – Happy to oblige.

L – unintelligible.

R – That good enough for you?

A – That's nice Robin. Real nice.

L – Real nice? It amaze me how you still got two legs.

R – OK, OK, so my Scout would have done it better.

L – Bad worker say tool fault.

R – Yeah, yeah. Shut it Lily. I'm heading out on the moor now.

You guys seen enough?

A – OK Robin. Good show.

B – Take it easy.

R – Taking her up higher. She's flying real nice. Tell Margaret

she patched her up good.

A – She's right here, she can hear you.

R – Patched her up real nice Margaret, thanks.

L – Ya. Patches best part of plane.

13.20 PM

R – XMT unintelligible.

R – There's something...(interference)

B – What?

R – Goddamnn there's something...a/c at 2 o'clock.

B – Is it the delivery of Lancs?

R – Doesn't look like a goddamnn Lanc.

B – Identify plane.

R – It's a Spit? Someone's flying a goddamnn Spit?

B – What's your pos?

R – I don't got a fix. (unintelligible)

B – What's your pos?

R – Goddamnn it's a 109. Son of a bitch.

B – Do you need assistance?

R – (interference)

B – Do you need assistance?

R – What the hell? I'm taking it into cloud.

B – Give me your pos. I'll send assistance.

R – I don't know my goddamnn pos. Listen, there's two of them.

B – Two? There are Schmitts over the moor?

R – Yeah?

L – First U-Boat, now 109s?

R – Vis too low. I can't (interference).

B – Change transmission.

R – Hear me now?

B – Yes. I hear you.

R – Hear this. Those bastards are escorting something. I can't see
so ... it's a Ju-88. I'd bet my life on it.

B – Have they seen you?

R – Don't know, they're far off.

B – Return to B. We'll send a squadron out.

R – Negative.

B – What?

R – They're here for a reason. First the U-boat now they send a
Ju-88.

B – OK. Give me your pos.

R – I'm going to bag those sons of bitches.

L – Going after 109s in an old Mustang trainer bad idea.

R – Hell I could out fly em in a goddamnn Blackburn Botha.

L – Unintelligible.

R – I'm going to take out the bomber at any rate.

B – They must be off course.

R – They don't look it.

A – Report back.

A – Report back.

A – Robin. Report back.

R- Goddamnn.

A - We've got planes ready. Give us your pos.

A - Give us your pos.

R - I got one of the bastards. One coming up astern now. Son of a

L - Watch out.

R - I'm going after the 88.

Guns jammed.

I'm going to nudge him.

Goddamnn it. Son of a bitch Schmitt.

L - XMT unintelligible.

A - We sent a squadron up. Bearing NE. Vis right down.

PF- Banking left. Stay in formation.

Eyes peeled.

W - I can't see you. Are you up ahead?

PF- r/o that's me. Stay close. It's pea souper.

CR- I'm on your wing.

R - I got him. Goddamnn (interference) I got him.

PF- r/o give us your pos now please.

R - 109 still on my tail.

PF- We're bearing NE. Will we see you?

CR- No chance.

B - Mist really blowing in here.

W- Bugger...(unintelligible)

B - Robin are you OK?

PF- I can't see a thing. Flying blind.

B - Robin are you OK?

PF- Wilson pull up, you're going to hit me damn it.

B – Robin please respond.

B – There's no reply from Robin. Can you see him yet?

PF – No.

W – Wait, I see something.

B – You can see him?

W – Damn this weather. Yeah I see a plane.

CR- That's not a Mustang.

PF- Ah hell it's a 109.

W – Goddamnn.

PF- Stay on my wing.

PF- Stay on my wing.

W – He's coming.

PF- Wilson stay on my goddamnn wing or he won't have to shoot
we'll run right into each other.

W – OK, OK. I won't Bader you.

CR- I think I can get him.

B- OK

PF- Stay on my wing.

W – What was that? I think I heard something.

CR- I heard it too.

PF- Stay on my wing goddamnn it Wilson.

B – Robin are you OK?

CR – He's on fire.

B – Who?

CR- The Schmitt. We got him.

B – OK. Then back to B, vis is too low.

PF- OK.

Interesting stuff huh? I photocopied it and got it framed. I mean it. I got it hanging up in four separate lightweight plastic frames in my cubicle at work.

When Goober and Jimmy finish reading it, Martin's sorted out a way to talk to them. He's playing a John Denver special so he's got time.

Goober and Jimmy and Skip go on up to where he's broadcasting.

"Robin Perdusa's son. Good to see you, how are you enjoying your stay in Earhart County. Have you been round the U-Boat yet?"

"Yeah, uh we saw the U-boat."

"My father used to tell me the story of your daddy sinking that to get me to sleep every night."

Goober starts muttering.

"So what can I do for you?"

"We need to go out onto the moor."

"OK."

"We need to go out where my daddy got shot down."

"Hahaha, we'd all like that right?"

"Um yes? So could you perhaps tell us where to go and maybe lend us a map?"

“We...” Martin looks at Skip suddenly nervous. “You know we don’t know right? You know that right? Your daddy was *lost*.”

“What, you’re saying you don’t know where he went down?”

“Um yeah.”

“You just left that Mustang out on the moor?” says Goober.

“Uh well people looked.”

“You mean there’s a whole Mustang out there? Just sitting there, out there?”

“Yes.”

“Who would own that then? If it was found, who would it belong to? Would it be finders keepers?”

“Goober we’re not taking some piece of junk home.”

“You got no idea what that’s worth son. We restore that thing, we could get a couple million dollars for it.”

“Really? Two million? It was my daddy’s plane right?”

“Well I don’t know if you could say he owned it exactly.”

“But if it’s just sitting there, nobody wants it, it’s there for the taking. We could see to giving you boys a cut.”

“That depends on where it is.”

“Well hell Skip son, take us up and fly over real low. I’m sure we’ll find it.”

“That’s not what I meant. What I meant is, a lot of moor land is being bought up. It’s private land.”

“The moor?” asks Jimmy. “Isn’t it like a national park?”

“Well yes but you can buy parts of it.”

“Mayor O’Casey’s been buying it,” finishes Skip.

“Why?”

“I don’t know. We thought maybe for building?”

“Maybe he wants that Mustang.”

“I doubt it. Mayor O’Casey doesn’t really care for airplanes.”

Now at this point you’re thinking: What kind of sicko doesn’t really care for airplanes, right?

Am I right?

At the very least you’ve got to be thinking, how could a guy who doesn’t care for airplanes get elected Mayor in a place like Earhart County?

Well there’s a reason for that.

See Earhart County has its own very special kind of elections. It’s a real big deal. Everyone turn out for it and there are bands and cotton candy, only someone told me British people call it flossing candy. Anyhow, it’s a big deal but it’s not like any election you ever saw. You see Earhart County is not a democracy. I mean it. They got no time for it there.

They got their own way.

What they do is this:

In a field near to where Robin Perdusa’s U-boat is and nearish the SeaView Old Folks Home, is a beautiful crop of shining cereal. It’s grown real special. Good and high and every year around this time, the farmer cuts through it to make a kind of maze. You’ve seen them before right? I’ve seen them all over. They make them out of all sorts of crops and charge people to stagger about in them. Last one I did took me close

to three hours to get out. Quit being fun after 20 minutes too I can tell you.

Well the Earhart County elections maze is a real doozy. There's only one way in and one way out and a person could get lost in there for days.

Anyway, all those people wanting to be Mayor get put in the centre of it and the first one out wins.

Honest to God.

The whole place go out to watch and once it starts the bands stop playing and everyone hush up and wait. Jimmy didn't mention corndogs but I expect they were probably all sitting out there on checked rugs with straw hats, silently chowing down on corndogs and waiting to see who's going to be Mayor this year.

The only problem is:

Mayor O'Casey has made it out first every time for the last twenty five years.

That man. He never loses. Nothing. Not even his way.

Jimmy finds out about the Earhart County election method about now too. Not because he can't believe a guy who doesn't really care for airplanes could get voted in, in a place like Earhart County but because this is the second problem with looking for Robin's Mustang he's encountered. You see, during the time nearing the elections, all aircraft in Earhart County are grounded to make sure no one fly over the maze and take notes.

Which Jimmy said was crazy because he didn't want to be Mayor of Earhart County. But rules are rules. No one flies til after the election.

CHAPTER NINE

Well Goober and Jimmy aren't going to stop there. If they were going to stop there then there'd be no point in half the stuff I'd told you about. No, Jimmy may be a loser but he's not a quitter. He gets Martin to dig out those maps while Mr. Denver sings about the kind of transportation he's planning on leaving in and with Skip and the radio log's help, they mark out a radius on the map where Robin could have gone down. Martin doesn't have a compass but his cereal bowl is about the right size.

"I figure what with the amount of time he'd been flying and the kind of speeds that Mustang could have gone, he's got to be within this circle."

"OK," says Jimmy. "And we know he didn't land in Earhart County so that's all this area out the picture." He takes a pencil and colours over the village part of the cereal bowl circumference. "And we know he was in the middle of nowhere so I guess we can scratch all the moor next to the village for a good couple of miles."

"Well, maybe not," says Skip. "He could have crashed right on the tippy edge of the moor and started walking in the opposite direction of the town. The mist was very thick. You really can't see anything at all when it comes down."

"But he would have been able to see the road or some houses."

"There's a chance he wouldn't have been able to see his own feet."

"I dated a girl once who couldn't see her own feet. Real nice figure she had," says Goober.

"So," says Jimmy, "this means we have to check out all of this area."

“I checked her area out good.”

“Will you shut it? You're going to be tramping this moor with me you know.”

“Fine, fine.”

“How long do you think it'll take to walk round this area? Three days or so?”

“Three days?”

“Too long?”

“You could spend a week up there and still not find your way back.”

“You're kidding.” Jimmy looks back at the map. “It doesn't look so big on here.”

“It's over thirty square miles.”

“That's not so much. I drive thirty miles to work everyday.”

“When it comes to the moors it's a lot.”

“Really? You know I go running, I'm pretty fit.”

“And there's a lot of sand bogs.”

“Aw crap,” says Goober.

“Well where are they? Mark them on the map.”

“I don't know where they are,” says Martin. “He points to near Mayor O'Casey's factory. I think there used to be a few round here.”

“Did your daddy ever say anything about sand bogs?”

“Um no. There aren't any in the story right? It doesn't mention them in the story. Dragons and stone people. No bogs.”

“Story?” asks Skip.

“Never mind. I don’t think he was near the bogs. That means we only look round the factory if we don’t find his plane anywhere else.”

“Fine by me if we don’t go near the sand bogs.”

“Listen,” says Skip, “you should only go out there if you know what you’re doing with a map.”

“I did a team building orientation race weekend once,” says Jimmy. “I’m sure we can do this.”

“I want to do this too Jimmy but well, did you finish within the first five on this weekend thing?”

“Uh no.”

“In the first ten?”

“No.”

“Where you in the first twenty? Thirty?”

“Ah no.”

Goober looks at him a long time. “You didn’t finish did you?”

“Well I know I could have done. It wasn’t that hard.”

“Then why didn’t you?”

“Well they sent Search and Rescue out to pick me up but otherwise I would have done it. I was heading in the right direction.”

“The right direction for what? The picture on the side of a milk carton?”

“It’s not really as easy as orienteering up there on the moor.” Skip makes an ‘ahem’ noise. “Your compass might go a little funny.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well in certain areas, in the west, your compass will work fine and then in certain points of the east, the needle will point south east or maybe north east and not to the north at all.”

“That’s nuts,” says Jimmy, even though the guy has no real good idea how to use a compass anyway.

“No, no it’s true. There are quite a few places like it. There's a place in Wales and a place in California and one near Fuji in Japan. Don’t know why it happens but some places just don’t like compasses.”

“So you think that could be why his daddy got lost?”

“No, no I think it only started happening since the war. My grandfather used to go up with a compass when he was a scout, he said it only started after the war.”

“What caused it?”

“I don’t know. There's a lot of granite up there that might have become exposed. It gives off a very low level of radiation. Maybe it puts the needle off.”

Ok, ok I got to stop here a second because you're thinking that whole Fuji forest compass thing is an urban legend. I can’t tell you for sure, I honestly can’t. I don’t know if it’s real or an urban legend in Japan but I can tell you one hundred percent that they don’t work in Earhart County moor. Jimmy took one up, he said he had actual proof so I'm saying that it’s totally true for Earhart County. You honestly can’t always rely on your compass there. In fact I know why it happens too I reckon, but I’ll get to that later. Right now you just have to trust me on it. Sometimes on

Earhart County moor, the compass doesn't always point north.

Sometimes it points to something else. Something real big.

So Goober and Jimmy figure they're going to head on out to the moor after they revisit Lily and Dr. Zippermeyer anyway. Goober's made Jimmy promise to let him hold the map and see, maybe it is easy to get lost on the moor but then it was also easy to get yourself dead in the rear gun turret of a Lancaster during the war. A Rear Gunner who can make it out of 1945 alive is a man who can surely find his way to not falling in some sand bog and to making it back home before sunset. And I did tell you Goober's a lucky guy. Not in a Vegas kind of way but in a not losing kind of way. I figure there isn't anyone I'd rather be stuck with out on some misty compass screwing moor with. Well except maybe Jimmy's mom, the way she looked in the days when she posed in bikinis on second hand motors.

There's a small clothes shop in Earhart County and Jimmy and Goober go there to buy one of those waterproof jackets that roll up into a bag and some heavy duty walking socks. They also stop at the grocery store and buy a load of Hershey bars and Oreo cookies and that kind of stuff that'll give you energy on a big walk. They then head back to the Vega for a shower and some kind of pie for dinner.

The pub is pretty full when they sit down. It's a real popular place and they're all pretty interested in what Jimmy and Goober are doing. They tell the landlord about their plan to tramp up and down and around the cereal bowl area because they can't fly and he doesn't seem too

optimistic. He says he's not so sure because four years ago his brother got so lost up there that he was missing for two days. The coast guard couldn't find him the first night because the mist was so bad and when it finally found him the second night he was about twenty foot from walking right off a cliff.

"You should really wait until after the elections and get Skip to fly you up. He sometimes flies with the coast guard."

"See," says Jimmy in a rare burst of intelligence, "if Skip has flown all over the moor and still not found the plane, then maybe you just can't see it from the air."

And he's got a point hasn't he, because they had to dig real deep to find Douglas Bader's Spit in that field in France. That is, they had to dig real deep to find that Spit. No one's real sure if it actually was Bader's or not.

"So you're really going to go up there?"

"Yes."

"Ok, ok then. But you know my brother?"

"No, we don't know your brother."

"Well he's a real down-to-earth guy my brother but that second night he was up there, he said he saw some weird stuff."

"What kinda weird stuff?"

The landlord moves in closer. "Well he says he thought he saw a bunch of men like. All in uniform."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, he said they were in World War Two uniforms."

"Re-enactments?"

“No.”

“Aw jeez, you sayin he saw ghosts?”

“No, no not really.”

“What then?”

“Well he said he could have sworn one of them was Mr. Purcell. The old guy from the home who gets lost a lot. He came here once.”

“So Mr. Purcell puts on his old uniform and got lost on the moors. Could happen. Sounds like the kinda thing he would do. He went missing today.”

And the landlord leaned even closer and I swear Jimmy said he said this:

“No, that’s not it. He said the soldiers were only about eighteen years old. And they were running through gas.”

“The ghost of Mr. Purcell is running through gas on the moor?”

“That’s what he said. Real down-to-earth my brother. He’s a plumber but he swears to what he saw up there. He said they were running and running and there was a guy with a clipboard and after they ran they went and talked to him. And he says Mr. Purcell when he was a young lad was there. His eyes and face all red and tears streaming down his face and he was coughing and the guy with the clipboard asked him something and then Mr. Purcell said: “HOW THE BLEEDING SWEET DAMN F**KING HELL YOU BUGGERING SON OF A F**KING GOD DAMN B*TCH DO YOU THINK I FEEL?”

I mean it. That landlord was deadly serious. Mr. Purcell, who right now is alive and well. Mr. Purcell who at this point is still floating about in that little wood boat in the delta waves, lost in the warm evening air,

actually haunts the moor with a bunch of other men at night. Part of him. The part that will forever be in the war, no matter how screwed up with dementia he is, part of him runs through that gas every night and yells

HOW THE BLEEDING SWEET DAMN F**KING HELL YOU
BUGGERING SON OF A F**KING GOD DAMN B*TCH DO YOU
THINK I FEEL?

I personally trust the landlord's brother on this. You'll see why. You'll totally see why. In fact this sounds like the craziest part of everything Jimmy told me but goddamnn if it's not the most serious. You think about it and if I'm not alive for much longer, if something happens to me, even if it's something like getting run over by a bus, you'll know it was because of this. You'll know it's because of Mr. Purcell and the fact that part of him is still running, still choking and still screaming: HOW THE BLEEDING SWEET DAMN F**KING HELL YOU BUGGERING SON OF A F**KING GOD DAMN B*ITCH DO YOU THINK I FEEL?

CHAPTER TEN

The next morning Jimmy and Goober get up good and early. Jimmy said the pub had radio alarm clocks in the rooms. He said they even put it in the advertising.

'EARHART'S VEGA. COMFY ROOMS WITH TEA AND COFFEE MAKING FACILITIES, BISCUIT SELECTION AND RADIO ALARM CLOCKS IN EVERY ROOM.'

Jimmy said the part about the tea and coffee making facilities was really just a thermos that you could ask for at the bar before you went to bed. I'm telling you this see because it was the radio alarm that woke Jimmy up. It was set to the local Earhart County radio station. You remember that right? That's Martin Rosebeck from the Air Traffic Control Tower. He's reading the Earhart County news, straight out of the Earhart County Gazette. He starts with the events page because Earhart County is getting very excited about the upcoming winkle fayre. Even the monthly Earhart County raffle is going to come with winkles instead of meat. Here's hoping that stripper from Huddersfield isn't counting on that ham this month.

The front cover of the Earhart County gazette is about Mrs. Stewart-Packard. Martin reads it all out carefully. The title was 'NUDIST BREACH'.

"An unidentified nudist lady of increased age breached security at Mayor O'Casey's flangeomatic factory a couple of nights ago, echoing the two elderly naked dancers seen there six years ago. Earhart County police think it may be some kind of harvest ritual. The unidentified woman had

a port wine birthmark in the shape of Arthur Harris on her upper thigh. If anyone knows who this is, please call in.

The police would like to ask them to kindly refrain from the nudist dancing as the last few Earhart County harvests were shrivelled enough”

She probably didn't have a port wine birthmark in the shape of Arthur Harris though, I added that myself. I like to make things a little more interesting.

Jimmy turns the dial. He turns it all the way up and all the way back down again and I swear there are no more stations. This bit is true. One hundred percent. There are *no more stations*. Martin's Air Traffic Control tower is the only one. There's not even an interference style fuzz on the other channels, there's just silence and a kind of knocking sound. Like a dull low rap. Not fast, not an insane fast type knocking but a kind of fourteen beats a minute style knocking.

Mayor O'Casey is waking up to a rapping noise too. There is a woodpecker outside his bedroom and it is making a nest in the telephone pole next to his house. It's knocking that wood out at a crazy pace. Way more than fourteen beats per minute. Mayor O'Casey calls it Vlad because if he ever catches it he's going to impale it. He turns the radio on to Martin's show. Mayor O'Casey can't stand Martin Rosebeck but he's had to listen to him for the last nine months. In fact the whole of Earhart County has had to listen to Martin Rosebeck for the last nine months. Every other frequency has been jammed by that fourteen beats a minute

thing. Jimmy said they'd had a bunch of radio guys travel down to Earhart County but nobody knew what was causing it. I mean *I* know what's causing it but at the time, Jimmy didn't have a clue.

So nice and early Jimmy and Goober eat breakfast and they put on their best walking boots. Well Jimmy puts on his best walking boots, you know the kind, the ones that keep rain out but let sweat through. They come with a free compass and a whistle but never come in a color you'd actually want to wear. Goober didn't have those kind of fancy boots Jimmy said. Jimmy said Goober had these weird old leather things that were all furry inside and had a knife in the top. Reckon those boots'd be worth some money today. You know, that is if Goober hadn't actually worn them. Goober wearing them has to cause some fierce depreciation. The landlord of Earhart's Vega gives them ham sandwiches and rum and Goober pulls out the biggest looking pair of binoculars Jimmy ever saw. He described them to me like they were two telescopes and while I don't reckon they were anything of the sort, I'm thinking they were probably something else to look at. I saw a pair of binoculars used by the ROC once. Those beauties could spot an He 111 from miles away.

So anyhow the pair of them walk past the cereal fields and the U-boat and take a stop in SeaView. Dr. Zippermeyer is building something in the bit of yard in front of his apartment. His old headphones and stereo thing that he was listening to last time they saw him are still on a table next to a deckchair but now there's a machine being put together on every other available space.

“Ahh gutt ja. You two not are wastink any time.”

“Holy crap. You building a Sherman tank?” asks Goober.

“Ha ha. No.”

“Is it um almost ready?” Jimmy doesn’t like the look of it much.

“Difficult to say ja?”

“Is this, ah, is this machine going to hurt Lily?”

“Ha ha. No.”

“You sure it don’t sting any? She could do with a little hurtin.”

“Goober.”

“Well she could.”

“You goink to somevhere?”

“Um yeah. We thought we’d take a look up on the moor.”

“Oh ja? Beink careful ja? It can to be dangerous.”

“Yeah we know. Uh, Goober’s got a knife.”

“Ah, ok, ok then. Make sure you back for vinkles.”

“You ever eaten a winkle?”

“Nein.”

“They’re great,” says Goober. “You’re gonna love them.”

Jimmy doesn’t look convinced. He turns to Dr. Zippermeyer and asks:

“So how long til this thing is ready?”

“Oh ja, hard to say. I am busy man. But part of it vork already. Look.”

Dr. Zippermeyer flicks a switch.

He looks at them expectantly.

“Vell?”

“Well what?”

“What you think?”

“What’s supposed to have happened?”

“It’s makink sound. Wery special sound.”

“I can’t hear anything.”

“Oh ja, that’s because it’s ultrasound. It’s too low for your hearink.”

“So what we’re listening to, it’s something we can’t hear?”

“Ja. Good no?”

“Great. Just great. And will Lily be able to hear this? Is that the plan?”

“Nobody can listen this. Lily von’t be able to listen. It’s ultrasound.”

“If you can’t hear it then how do you know it’s making a sound?”

“I have vays.”

“That doesn’t surprize me any.” mutters Goober.

Mayor O’Casey hasn’t had a relaxing time this morning. With the woodpecker and the news about the lady dancing outside his factory coming out and all. He probably looked like he was in a pretty bad mood by the time he got into work. Jimmy told me he had a snarl like a Kittyhawk when he got mad too. Well now no, Jimmy didn’t say that exactly because Jimmy wouldn’t know a ‘hawk from a Hellcat, don’t matter which way the wind’s blowing. Anyhow when he told me how Mayor O’Casey looked when he got mad, he kind of turned his lips up like a P-40 and said, that’s how Mayor O’Casey used to go.

Mr. O’Casey’s Flangeomatic sales were doing well though, despite the fact he’s mad. In fact they’re still in the shops now. I saw one the other day in the window of an adult store. In the window see, I didn’t go inside,

it was right there in the window. I don't need to go in those kind of places like.

On his way up to his office, Mayor O'Casey will have taken a quick look at his factory floor, maybe even talked to a couple of his workers in a benevolent kind of way. Not that he needs to keep people on his side. Not the way Earhart County does its elections. He gets into his office and begins looking for a letter. It's a very special letter. Not because it contains nudey pictures from some guy desperate to win this month's raffle winkles but because it's going to have a contract in it for Mayor O'Casey's next business scheme.

Mayor O'Casey never loses out when it comes to money making.

Well he looks about for that letter and it hasn't come yet but he's just so impatient he even runs over to Mr. Omagh just in case it came and then got lost and found.

Mr. Omagh is cleaning off his box. He's cleaning off his 'N' box. I'm thinking he knows what a Kittyhawk is. He was probably thinking how much Mayor O'Casey looked like a Kittyhawk. He could have even added a new formulae: $X^2 = \text{Snarling like a Kittyhawk}$.

Mr. Omagh doesn't have the letter though. The letter's going to come tomorrow. It's going to come tomorrow and Mayor O'Casey will put it safe in a drawer with the other letters. A special drawer, not the nudey photo drawer.

So by about eleven o'clock Jimmy and Goober are up on the moor. It's not really that bad. It's all springy moss and low lying bushes and granite.

I've seen picture of moors before but Jimmy said Earhart County moor didn't have any ponies or sheep. He said it was pretty much just hill and moss and bushes.

By twenty after eleven Goober has finished all the rum and is working on the ham sandwiches.

A lot more moss and bush later and Jimmy starts to give up. All he can see are two hill things, only they're not called hills, they're called tours or something. It's pretty and all but he begins to understand just how his daddy could have got so lost up there. Especially if the mist seeps in.

"Can you see anything?"

Goober stops chewing. "No."

"Can I have a go on your binoculars?"

"No."

"But you're not using them."

"I know."

"So can I have a go?"

"No."

Jimmy looks about. "Ok, ok how about we climb that tour thing and look down from it?"

Goober peers up at it, looks down at his sandwich, looks back up at the tour. "How about you climb it and tell me how it goes."

"Ok, ok then Grandpa. Lend me your binoculars and I'll go."

"Haah. You're not having them."

"Ok, you climb up there and use them."

"You're the youngster. Climb it yourself."

“You know this might do you some good.”

“Yeah right, because I always wanted a pacemaker for my next birthday.”

“What’s the point of me climbing up there if I can’t see anything?”

“You tell me, it’s your idea.”

“Just give me the goggles.”

“Noo, no. You’ll lose them.”

“I’ll just be going up that hill and back down. How can I lose them?”

“You’ll find a way.”

It’s true by the way. Goober’s totally got a point.

“Don’t make me come over there and get them Grandpa.”

“Go ahead and try.”

Jimmy considers it. “I thought you wanted me to find this plane.”

Goober doesn’t answer.

“I thought you said it was worth two million.”

Goober glares at him. “Those binoculars are worth good money too.”

Jimmy waits.

“Fine, fine but if you spot the plane and we sell it, I get 70%.”

“Ok.”

Jimmy grabs the binoculars out of his hands.

“And if you lose these...”Goober gives Jimmy the fish eye, “well we both know you gonna lose em.”

“Huh.”

So Jimmy climbs to the top of the tower and he said the walk was tougher than he’d like to admit and when he gets to the top he has a good hard looksee with the binoculars. Now what Jimmy thinks he sees is a good fat

load of nothing. What he actually sees however is a bit more interesting because although it looks like all he's looking at is a bunch of moss and bushes, what in fact is out there is a very special bunch of moss and bushes. You see from the south side of the tour, what he's looking at is all of Mayor O'Casey's bunch of moss and bushes. Remember how I told you about Martin Rosebeck saying Mayor O'Casey was buying up moorland? Well that's what Jimmy sees from up there. Not that Jimmy knew it back then. He had no idea. Which accounts for him climbing back down the hill and saying, when Goober asks if he saw anything: "Nope, just a bunch of moss and bushes."

That's what he says and then Goober asks, "Have you got my binoculars?"

And Jimmy says, "Nope."

Now while Jimmy and Goober tramp on. I went and reminded myself about Mr. Omagh. I went and reminded myself of Mr. Omagh because of what Goober said about not wanting a pacemaker. See, Mr. Omagh doesn't want a pacemaker either, not at all but he's got one. He's got a real doozy. It's one of those real serious little hunks of metal from the 70s. You know anything about them? My uncle has one. Those things are powered by plutonium. I mean it. They're powered by the tiniest fleck of flyshit sized plutonium and I'm telling you they'll outlast any one of us. Amazing little things, they don't make em anymore but I guess they're not about to cut Mr. Omagh up and change it over, so we got ourselves a real life nuclear powered Mr.Omagh.

Anyhow, Mr. Omagh's pacemaker is working real hard at the moment because he's dusting off his box. He thinks he must find a different place to put it as it feels like it's been catching the sun a little. He doesn't know if the sun is good for what is in the box or not but he's not wanting to risk it entirely.

Mayor O'Casey had interrupted him this morning while he was dusting. Mr. Omagh doesn't like Mayor O'Casey too much. He's grateful for his job and all but he thinks Mayor O'Casey is the kind of guy who'd open stuff that wasn't his. Also Mayor O'Casey coming down and asking him if he had his letter is kind of like calling Mr. Omagh incompetent. If he had a letter addressed to Mayor O'Casey he would take it to him. Just like how he would return this box if it had a name on it. He might just however, stay to see it opened. He'd have to stay and watch. After all this time, they'd have to let him watch right?

While they are walking, Goober is telling Jimmy about this one time when he joined the goldfish club. He's saying, "Yeah I know Chan Chandler was in the drink for nine days so two ain't nuthin to get worked up about but I ain't never overly enjoyed the water so much. Always preferred the air to the ocean and two days in a dingy with six other men was enough for me. I swear man, nuthin but a crappy Horlicks tablet, a piece of chocolate and a mouthful of water."

"I see you're making up for it now."

"I'd like to say it was a lucky shot but a goddamnn B-17 fell on us. What do you call that? It was a lucky shot that got the B-17 and then a what

that got us? A lucky fall? A lucky wing clip? Did I ever tell you how much I like Mae West?"

"Who?"

"Course we woulda been picked up earlier only they were waiting for us to float our way out of a whole goddamnn minefield."

"Ah the good old days."

"You never know ya know. Whole lotta crap still down there."

"I'll take care next time I go for a paddle."

"You never know."

And he's right, Goober, he's right. We know that because a couple of years ago they found a damn great mine in some British harbour. All left over from WW2. Had to evacuate the whole bay. And there's another reason he's right. Remember the acoustic torpedo in Earhart County's sewage pipes? Whole lot of crap waiting to go off I'm telling you.

"I had a week off just for the sunburn alone. Yeah, ya don't wanta come down over sea."

And before I go on, let me have a go at it, let me see what I can do. Plane brought down by allied aircraft, two days in the drink, float through minefield in a dingy, eventual rescue.

[h(ae⁵L⁴oE⁴)]

See. How about that? Who needs Mr. Omagh?

So Jimmy and Goober walk on until the moor gets less moorish and a bit more greyish and by about three o'clock they're standing looking out to

sea. They're about four hours walk from SeaView. Or at least they would be if they knew where SeaView was.

Goober takes in one of those deep sea air breaths that people do. Jimmy sits down on a rock.

“We’re gonna have to get some kinda system.”

“Uhuh?”

“And a metal detector.”

“Why?”

“Well half the time these things are buried,” says Goober. “Don’t ask me how, I figure fifty years is long enough to have stuff growing over.”

“I was meaning to talk to you about that.”

“Shut it. You can pay for it all on accountin you lost my binoculars.”

Jimmy sighs.

And then Goober with his Rear Gunner eyes sees something no one else in Earhart County has noticed. Right out far in the sea is a dark spot.

Some kind of ship. It’s a pretty big ship too and Goober notes it because he’s imagining Jimmy’s daddy flying in from the sea after having single handedly sunk that U-boat. Sunk in a bad way like, with holes in it, not the good kind of going under that U-boats were made to do.

But you see here’s where I tell you about Mayor O’Casey’s letter, the one that he’s going to get tomorrow. Because Mayor O’Casey, like I told you has been buying up moor land and that’s kind of expensive no matter how many men pump on his flangeomatics. And see the ship out in Earhart County waters is kind of Mayor O’Casey’s cash cow. And it’s a little embarrassing to say it but it’s one of ours. It’s an American ship. It’s an

American ship that pays Mayor O'Casey enough money every month for Mayor O'Casey to buy more and more moor.

So anyhow, here's how it works. The American ship and the company behind it, pay Mayor O'Casey every month to be allowed to dump something called tritium into the sea. I don't know if you guys know what tritium is. I hardly know myself. It's like the crap left behind after you make nuclear power or something. I don't know. When they make a movie about it, I'll rent it and tell you more.

All I know is, that ship is pumping some sort of nuclear residue crap into Earhart County waters. Happens all the time I heard. And it's happening in Earhart County.

Reckon Britain needs an Ed Begley Jr.

Jimmy and Goober don't know what the ship is yet though. They don't think it's anything much to get hot and bothered about. Well Goober doesn't at any rate. Jimmy can't see it. He hasn't Rear Gunner vision. He just has normal crappy vision.

Normal crappy vision that's going to get a little crappier tomorrow afternoon. Then you'll see why I mentioned the tritium ship so early on.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Now a couple of things happen while Goober and Jimmy are on the moor. I'll start with the old naked lady first. Mrs. Stewart-Packard has finally got sick. She finally got sick after dancing up outside Mayor O'Casey's flangeomatic factory. Around about lunchtime, the lady who comes in to clean Mrs. Stewart-Packard's house found her sitting in bed as sick as a goddamn dog with a real triumphant look about her. She's succeeded pretty nicely in getting some kind of pneumonia too. She gets taken to a small Earhart County hospital and they pump her full of whatever stuff they pump into you when you look the kind of sick Mrs. Stewart-Packard looks. Incidentally, the guy in the bed next to hers is an old dude too. In a few days time he's going to get checked out of the hospital and meet Jimmy and tell him this great story about his daddy.

$[\text{h}(\lambda \uparrow \text{F}^2 / \text{P} - 51 / \text{G}^{10} \text{M}^6 \text{bb}^3 \text{jZ}^1 \text{bb}^2 \text{L}^4 \text{oE} \downarrow \text{C}\phi)]$

Isn't that a doozy? That's one of the best ones yet.

Now for the other thing that's going to happen.

It's going to happen about a few hours after Goober and Jimmy get to the coast and start talking about getting hold of metal detectors. You see Mr. Purcell is going to get picked up. You remember Mr. Purcell? The last time I told you about him he had escaped out of SeaView and was in a small boat floating on the nice flat delta waves. Well Mr. Purcell has spent all night out there. Underneath a big tarpaulin. I swear that dude will have had no idea where he was. He could have thought he was sitting in a comfy chair in SeaView. Or maybe that part of him the landlord's

brother saw running through the gas, maybe that's the only part left of Mr. Purcell. Certainly it's the only functioning part of Mr. Purcell because while Goober's thinking about old man Robin sinking that U-boat, Mr. Purcell's boat bumps up alongside the tritium ship.

I have no idea how long Mr. Purcell spends with his boat gently smacking into the side of that ship. I have no idea if Mr. Purcell knew he'd hit anything. He could have been there a long time to be honest but by the time that he's actually seen, by the time the people working on the ship spot him, it's about twenty after six and almost time for them to get fed. Mr. Purcell gets given a coffee with whiskey in it. He's wrapped up in a blanket and given a coffee and he sits, no trouble like, in a comfy chair in the mess.

He's fine by the way.

Aside from his brain, there's nothing wrong with the guy. Spends all night at sea in a dingy and he's fine. Whereas Mrs. Stewart-Packard who's all there, or pretty much all there for a crazy lady that dances about in the nude outside Mayor O'Casey's flangeomatic factory every six years, Mrs. Stewart-Packard spends a couple of hours outside at night and she gets sick. It really does work that way doesn't it. You get to keep your mind or your health but never both.

Yeah there's no hurting Mr. Purcell. You could probably D¹⁴ a Lanc with him in the bomb aimer's tube and he'd be fine. He probably wouldn't notice either like but there wouldn't be a scratch on him.

Mayor O'Casey probably wouldn't have a scratch on him if he got D¹⁴ed either. Not because his mind isn't all there but because Mayor O'Casey is

just one of those guys that never seems to lose. He's one of those guys that can always spot the lady even when the guy with the cards is pulling a scam. Mayor O'Casey would get out of a D¹⁴ing probably because instead of being in the bomb aiming tube at the time, he'd be out sitting on the Elsan reading a letter from some other guy's wife. You know what I mean? That's the kind of not losing Mayor O'Casey does. Mayor O'Casey does the kind of not losing where some other poor bastard has to pay.

Anyway, I'm talking about Mayor O'Casey because he has more than nudey picture judging to do today. He's up there in his office at the flangeomatic factory working on a speech. It's his annual speech for the winkle fayre tomorrow.

You ever eaten a winkle? They don't taste so bad but it's a nasty assed affair to dig a worm out of a shell and eat it. Just give me canned meat any day.

Well Mayor O'Casey is going to open up the winkle fayre. He's going to be the first to stab that little worm through the head and drag it out the shell and eat it in front of everyone and make yummy faces. And then the fayre is open. That's when everyone start digging those critters out and try not to think about what they're putting in their mouths.

Folks in Earhart County sure do know how to have a good time.

I reckon Mayor O'Casey thinks his speech is going to be a doozy. He's going to talk about how the people of Earhart County have never had it so good. How other small towns are having problems with unemployment and despondency but how Earhart County is doing good. Mainly due to

his flangeomatic factory. He's going to say that the south is like a field of wheat, how when it's harvested, a few stalks are still standing. He's going to say Earhart County is the wheat that's standing.

It's the speech he used last year to be honest but I'm not sure Mayor O'Casey really notices. It's not as if being Mayor of Earhart County is a popularity contest, not being a democracy and all. Mayor O'Casey could go out, fart the tune to The Great Escape and as long as he's always the first person out that maze, he's going to be Mayor forever. And frankly, there are probably a lot of people in Earhart County who would much prefer him farting The Great Escape than him giving his field of wheat at harvest time story one more time.

Jimmy and Goober take the easy way home by walking along the coastline. They're not about to go back the way they came, the mist is seeping in and the landlord was right when he said compasses didn't work up there. Jimmy's compass spent half the time pointing up to Mayor O'Casey's flangeomatic factory and the other half pointing out to sea. Besides, the walk back along the coast is a nice one. Jimmy said while he was there, someone actually sighted a Greenland shark off Earhart County's coastline.

They're something else those sharks.

I know, I know, you're thinking what would I know about any shark that ain't an F-20 right? But I know a little about Greenland sharks. They got this parasite thing in their eyes. It kind of dangles out. Makes them blind. Totally blind like, yet every so often they find themselves all the way across the Atlantic. They spend most of the time up here, round

Newfoundland. The bar I go play pool in has a stuffed one on the wall.
Big ass thing.

I'd like to know how long it'd take one to swim from Newfoundland across the Atlantic. I'd like to know if a Greenland shark can swim it blind, faster than Amelia could fly it one handed.

So anyhow, as Jimmy and Goober walk back they start to notice a few small boats out and people paddling about on the shore and it's because they're getting ready for the winkle fayre, just like the Mayor. They're actually out there picking the damn things specially. Earhart County people are very proud of their winkles. It's the speciality food of Earhart County. In fact, I believe they had winkles waiting for Amelia that day she was supposed to land.

Guess she had a lucky near miss there then.

Lucky near miss. That reminds me of the story Jimmy's daddy once told at a gala he opened when we were kids. You'll like this one. It's got Tuskegees in it.

It goes like this. Robin was fighting over in Italy. He goes up with a few other Stangs. Not as good as him though, the other pilots weren't a patch on Perdusa like. And they're just delivering planes to another airfield when they come across a couple of 190s. Damn good planes those 190s. One of the only planes out there that'd make a Stang nervous. Be one hell of a dogfight though.

I got this great little book actually. You'd love it. It's a thin little British thing from 1943. It's an aircraft recognition book, so that the people in Britain could identify whether the plane overhead was going to bomb

them or save them. And this little book, it has a whole two page spread on 190s. It has the specs, pictures from a load of different angles and a couple of silhouettes and then it has a write up. It's got this whole bit about how the 190s were good but could get beaten down real easy by a Spit.

Sure, real easy. I laughed hard at that. God knows I love those Spits but a 190 ain't never going to be easy.

Ya funny stuff.

Right, but back to Robin. So his group they come under attack and Robin he's yelling orders and ain't nobody listening because they've got the ringing of BMW engines in their ears and Robin spots one from his cloud cover. He has the sun behind him, I mean it is going to be a beauty of an attack. Really. Text book.

Until one of his own guys gets excited. He jettisons his fuel tanks all ready for a dogfight and even though Perdusa told him to stay back, turns out he's right overhead and WHAMMO. Robin's plane gets hit with the tank. I mean that guy lands it right on him. Just about takes his port wing off and Robin goes spinning out.

I swear though man, he manages to clip that 190 on his way down. Takes him out. It counted official too like. His 26th kill.

So Robin goes down and he ejects out and lands about two metres away from his burning plane. Actually sets fire to his parachute he's that close. But he ditches that thing and runs like all hell away from his Stang, which is blazing away amongst the watermelons.

And the truth is, he could have been in a whole lot of trouble out there, because see he landed in the wrong place and personally I'd have given him about an hour before the Nazis got to his burning plane and took him. But get this.

Turns out the Tuskegees are flying past. Goddamnn Tuskegees in the flesh. And they see him, they can spot a downed Stang a mile away and one of them actually lands down in that field and him and Robin squeeze themselves in all manner of ways into that nuthugging cockpit and I swear that Tuskegee actually takes off in a goddamnn field of watermelons.

Whole thing takes no more than twenty minutes.

Now that's lucky right? Because those Tuskegees just happened to be finished escorting. If they'd been escorting there's no way they'd have stopped for Robin. I mean it. You get a Tuskegee escorting your bomber and he's going to stick like glue. Ain't nothing can tear a Tuskegee away from his bomber. They were the best man.

But old man Robin, he was a lucky guy that day.

Don't reckon that guy's ever had to eat a winkle in his life.

Wonder if Mr. Omagh has that one in his book?

)][h($\lambda^2 \uparrow F^3 / P51 / G^{10} [A^3 G^{10}] M^6 ae^{10} ZW^1 L^5 aeE$)]

Well wherever you stand on the winkle front. The fayre turns out to be a whole lot more interesting than you'd think. I'll tell you why shall I?

CHAPTER TWELVE

The next morning it's the winkle fayre. Jimmy gets woken up by the fourteen beats a minute rapping on the radio. Mayor O'Casey gets woken by his woodpecker and Goober gets woken by the painting of Bader's legs. It's a big day in Earhart County. I mean it, Jimmy said the whole place went nutso. Nobody goes to work, brass bands march about, everyone's all dressed up real nice. The only time Earhart County goes more insane is election time and frankly Jimmy told me that ever since Mayor O'Casey started winning every year, the celebrations have been kind of reserved.

Yeah the winkle fayre is the hottest day to be in Earhart County. My guess is, it's even better if you actually like the damn winkles.

The landlord at Earhart's Vega only gives them a half portion of goat bacon for breakfast so they'll be good and ready for the winkles.

"We even got a stall there," says the landlord.

"You're doing winkles?"

"No. No we got an Earhart's Vega beer tent."

Goober perks up. "Ah see, son. We really oughta go then. People are gonna wanta see Perdusa's son right?"

The landlord agrees.

"People will wanta see Perdusa's son bad I reckon. And I reckon they might even appreciate his appearance there enough to give a guy a couple beers on the house."

Jimmy looks at Goober, looks at the landlord and looks at the Lancashire

Piddle. He's felt pretty rough his whole time in Earhart County. He's been wondering if they put formaldehyde in the beer like my uncle Frank told me they did in China. But he says ok, he'll go to the winkle fayre. Now I don't want to get you all thinking like Jimmy's got all year and stuff to find this thing his daddy left behind. Just because he hasn't got so far, just because he's not got any further in decoding the Russian tale, it doesn't mean he's got an unlimited time here. He's got a ticket that's good for two weeks. Not that he has a job to go back to. He totally lost that see but there's another reason why his time is getting shorter. It's got something to do with Mayor O'Casey and his plans for all the moor land he's bought up.

He's got big plans. After the elections, he's got big, big plans.

His plans right this moment though are winkles. They're all about those winkles. At about ten before eleven he's at the fayre. All the stands are full of winkles or beers. They got a couple of small raffle stands where all you win are winkles. There are still a couple of carloads of winkles to come from the small coastline too. I swear I got no idea if a fresh winkle actually tastes better than an imported on ice winkle. Somehow I imagine they both taste like licking an Elsan after a four and a half hour flight to Peenemunde.

Ok, ok, so I went too far there,.

Let's not say an Elsan after a four and a half hour flight to Peenemunde.

Let's just say like licking an Elsan after a spam run to Waalhaven.

That's a little better right?

So aside from the damn winkles and Mayor O'Casey, the fayre is all about ready. There's a band warming up. They probably play like It's A Long Way To Tipperary or something just as British. Jimmy, I think he said they were playing something he knew when he showed.

At eleven thirty the band play, jeez I think they actually played Rocky or that Anthem for the Common Man or some kind of thing and Mayor O'Casey stood up on a podium with a big red ribbon all set up behind him to cut and declare the fayre open.

He says stuff like: "My pleasure to do this for the fourteenth time since I've been Mayor. Bla bla bla finest winkles Earhart County has to offer. Bla bla bla booming Earhart County economy thanks to his factory bla bla bla field of wheat bla bla bla Earhart County is the wheat that stands."

And I swear he gets like this far away from cutting the ribbon with the scissors when somebody, Jimmy said he didn't know who but it was probably Goober, shouted: "LET'S HEAR FROM ROBIN PERDUSA'S SON."

And Jimmy, Jimmy Perdusa actually has to get up onto the podium and talk to pretty much all of Earhart County.

I know, I know, who would want to listen to Jimmy but I swear those guys did. At least, they wanted to listen to Jimmy talk about his father.

And Jimmy he isn't real sure to start but he thinks a little about a time when he saw his daddy open a gala.

He says, "It's real good to see so many people. I sure have been looking forward to this. Winkles. Yummy."

I reckon his daddy would have been more convincing on this part.

“So I guess you guys uh, I guess you wanta hear a little something about my daddy?”

The audience cheer. It’s the first amount of noise they’ve made all morning. Mayor O’Casey sure was pissed. He was Kittyhawking it good style.

And Jimmy says, “Well let me tell you about this one time he was in the Nam.”

He totally said it like that too.

“The Nam.”

Just like he knew something about it.

“Well.” Jimmy’s been thinking see, since that time in the pub, he’s been thinking. “Well my daddy once told me about this one time in The Nam. He was flying choppers. One of those big ones that carry all the men.”

Goober hisses, “A Huey.”

“Ya he was flying a Huey and he was supposed to drop all these guys in the middle of the bush right? And he always had this thing see, where he’d have a coffee in his hand the whole time because my daddy he could fly so good he only needed one hand.”

Someone yells: “*Your daddy’s the only pilot who could do it with NO hands.*”

And then someone else yells, “*Yeah, Bader him and take away his arms and Perdusa could still fly better than half the pilots today.*”

I know the guy yelled that Bader comment because when Jimmy was telling me, he had to ask me what he meant by Badering someone.

And Jimmy he's all, "Yeah, my daddy was the best and so he got his coffee in one hand and he's also got this puppy see, and he keeps it in his shirt. And so there's this time and he's flying these men out into the bush and he's got his coffee and he's got his puppy and he lands his chopper down and the men run out and there's this one guy who doesn't want to go but he gets pulled out.

And then, when my daddy takes off he notices Charlie's set up an ambush. His men are in trouble and there's shooting and stuff and my daddy starts yelling into his radio that he's gotta pick them up, he's gotta get them back out. And there are choppers leaving men all over and my daddy's still yelling he's going back for them, he wants his men out.

And the base says no, he's gotta leave them, he doesn't have permission to go back, they want him to fly back immediately. But my daddy, he's not about to leave his men see, so he flies down and his men have scattered all over but they come running when they see his chopper cos they know, if anyone is going to get them out it's going to be my daddy. And they all pile in, there's a guy who's hurt a little and while they're hauling him in, this young girl runs up to the plane and throws something in.

Well my daddy didn't notice, he was going to take off but the puppy in his shirt starts to go crazy. It's barking and barking and when my daddy looks at it, it's trying to get in his coffee and you know what? There's a goddamn grenade in his coffee cup. So my daddy he smashes in the window and throws the coffee out and takes off fast and it all explodes but my daddy got them all out safe.

Then he starts flying them out and one of them in the back is yelling. They've spotted one of the guys. They thought he was dead but he's not. He's running like crazy out of the bush and the VC are chasing him and nobody knew what to do but my daddy did. He circled round and then he swooped his chopper down so low he almost touches the ground and the VC start shooting and my daddy sticks his arm through the glass window he broke with his coffee mug and grabs the G.I. He grabs him good and tight and takes that chopper up and the hell out of there, G.I. hanging onto the side."

That's what Jimmy tells them.

And you know what?

Earhart County go nuts.

They go nuts for this story. Now I have no idea why, when half of it couldn't have happened and the other half was lifted wholesale from the movies but I guess they just didn't care. They didn't care how real it was just as long as someone, somewhere was talking about the man who single handedly saved Earhart County from a U-boat.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

So finally it all calms down and people remember there are a bunch of winkles that need to get eaten. There are like eight different stalls, pretty much doing the same kind of winkles. At least Jimmy said they were all the same. Is it possible to do winkles in different ways? Goober's having a good time. He's saying stuff like, "See the trick is son, the trick to this, to eating winkles is, beer. I'm telling ya, it's the best way to get em down. Speshly a cherry like you. You gotta make sure you drink plenty of beer." Turns out beer *is* the best thing Jimmy can have. See a winkle it takes two hands right? One to hold the dumb thing and another to pin it out the shell. Therefore, simply by holding a beer, Jimmy is making one tray of winkles last a good long time.

"Ah hell," says Goober.

"What?"

"The asylum's been let out."

Jimmy looks behind him. Dr. Zippermeyer is there. He's got a good few empty winkle trays in his hand. He's looking like he's having a pretty good day.

"Don't look, don't look. He'll see us."

Jimmy turns back. "Maybe we ought to say hi."

"Aw come on. It was supposed to be a nice day."

"Considering he's helping us out, maybe we should be nice."

"Helping us out? We're lucky if he ain't creating some Bride of Zippermeyer out of her. Besides there's something about him I don't

trust.”

“Like what?”

Goober pulls another winkle out of its shell. “Son, ain’t no such thing as a free lunch. You heard that one?”

“Everyone’s heard that one.”

“Well, why’s he helping us?”

“You think he’s going to bill us?”

“I think we gotta watch him.”

“You told me not to look at him.”

“We gotta watch him without looking.”

Goober slinks off to another stall furtively. Jimmy walks after him.

“What could he get out of this?” asks Jimmy. “I think he’s a nice guy.”

“Yeah? Ever thought how old he is? Ever wondered what he’d been doing in 1944?”

“That’s all over now though Grandpa.”

“Sure it is son but I’m the same guy I was when I was firin them brownings.”

“What’s a browning?”

Goober sighs, “Shut up and eat more winkles.”

And Jimmy does what he’s told. He really does a good job of it and you’re not going to hear me say that about Jimmy so often so you should appreciate it see. Jimmy really did make a good job of eating those goddamn winkles.

So turns out they're at the raffle stand. The raffle stand is pretty much the same as the winkle stands except instead of just buying the winkles, you've got to draw for them out of a bin. Jimmy bought like five tickets and didn't win one winkle. I mean he said the damn thing was rigged up so you couldn't lose but the guy before him must have thrown his old tickets in the draw box and Jimmy managed to pick every one. Not that this time losing was a bad thing. Sometimes losing can be ok if it means you don't have to eat winkles.

Goober buys just one ticket and there's actually a moment where it looks like he's lost. They look at the ticket on every damn winkle tray on the table and nothing and then Jimmy sees the ticket. It's managed somehow to come off a tray of winkles and get stuck to the ass of Mayor O'Casey's current secretary. Best goddamn raffle prize I ever heard of.

I'll tell you who else is at the winkle fayre. Mr. Purcell. Mr. Purcell is there with his new friends from the tritium ship. I say *friends* see but what I mean is, guys who stand round him with a blanket and talk real loud.

“Sooo, it's been good weather, the ships been real calm, no waves to speak of.”

“Yeah, it has been calm, it's amazing really because Earhart County is usually so windy.”

“Yes wind, can get real choppy in Earhart County .”

“Yes good and choppy out there. Good job we're used to it.”

“Chop, chop, choppy.”

You know I guess it's real nice of those guys to care. I mean they've been dumping that stuff into Earhart County waters for a good year and a half and they never bothered to go to the winkle fayre before. They all just did it for Mr. Purcell. Real nice see. They're all eating winkles and they're digging them out for Mr. Purcell because they're not too sure he's allowed to use a sharp object. They've got him a beer too.

Mr. Purcell sure did well for liquor out of those guys.

I'll tell you who else is there. She's in her pajamas with a stuffed toy in her pocket. She's not with the tritium guys but she's with some of the nurses from SeaView. She's talking to one of the nurses and I swear man, you can guess how the conversation's going.

"How about some winkles Lily? Would you like some winkles?"

"Vant yak."

"You got that Lily. You got that right there in your pocket. You want a beer, are you thirsty? You can have a beer, it's a special day."

"Ok, then haff yak."

"You got your yak Lily. It's right here."

"Oh."

"You want some winkles with your beer?"

"Yak?"

"Just drink your beer Lily."

Now there's a reason I'm telling you about the winkle fayre. There's a good reason. I don't go about describing small town galas if I don't have a reason see.

My reason is to make what happens next bigger. You got to have build up. That's how you do it. You build up. And this winkle fayre is build up. Because what happens after is one of the grossest things I heard, aside from a story I got told about a Tail End Charlie who had to fly out with this different crew because they lost their Rear Gunner over Duisburg. He said he had to watch them suck out the last guy before he could get into the turret and even then there were pieces of skin and crap stuck to stuff. He said when they dropped their cookies and the plane jerked up, a piece of flesh fell off the ceiling onto his face.

What happens after the winkle fayre is not as gross as that. I'm not so sure I'll hear much else is as gross as that. But what happens next? It's still pretty bad.

After the winkles have been eaten and all of the stuff finished, like the winkle queen crowned, the bands all played out, maybe there was a soccer game with a winkle cup. After all that and everyone's gone home, that's when it happens.

Jimmy makes it home with three baskets of winkles that he didn't eat. Not that he didn't do us all proud. I mean he must have eaten good and plenty but he said he had a bunch of winkles that he couldn't face on his dresser. And he said he was lying in bed looking at those damn winkles when he felt the first tingling of a problem. He got that feeling in your belly like you're excited about something but he didn't have anything to be excited about. Then the more he concentrated on it, the more he started to feel like he was wingwalking on a F/A-18 Hornet or sitting in economy class on a spinning 757.

I saw a stunt 757 once. I mean it. Unbelievable. You should have seen it. Took off on a knife edge. Made the crowd hoot harder than any Harrier bow or MiG loop. They said they'd taken out the passenger seats so it was just for stunt stuff only but when I think how bad Jimmy felt that night I think about how it might be to be sitting in the rear of that 757. That'd be worth six barf bags full though.

The winkles weren't worth six barf bags but Jimmy hurled anyway. He really puked it good too. And not just puke. He said when he got to the can, he didn't know whether to sit down or lean over. He was that sick. A real double ender. And not just him. He said he could hear toilets flushing all over the pub. And they were flushing all right. Every damn house in Earhart County, every ensuite in SeaView, Mr. Omagh, Mayor O'Casey, Mayor O'Casey's secretary and ex-secretary, the nice lady in the town hall records office. The whole of goddamnn Earhart County barfed and pooped their guts up that night.

Even the guys onboard the tritium ship flushed those winkles out of their systems all night. Every poor soul got sick. Even in hospital with Mrs. Stewart- Packard and that old guy next to her even they got sick on a load of winkles the nurses brought in.

Every mothers goddamn son.

Except one.

One person slept all night no problem. Not even indigestion. A little trapped wind maybe but that's normal for a guy his age. You know where this is going don't you. One person managed to find the only bunch of untainted winkles. The odds. The odds of that. But it's true. Honest to

god it's true. If I were Mayor O'Casey I'd start talking about fields of wheat after a harvest.

The odds of eating the only bunch of winkles that had been collected just outside the radius of the bad ones.

Pretty outrageous odds.

Kind of like surviving an average life span of seventeen seconds.

Not quite like.

Close but no Sikorsky.

After barfing for just about ever, Jimmy half crawls back to his room. It's three in the morning or something and Jimmy he gets a good ten minute break when he thinks maybe it's over and he can sleep now. Not true, he's going to be puking good style again in a minute but right now he goes back to his room and opens the door and he does that thing where you stop dead and stare. Not that he was going fast enough for this to be impressive at all but like I said, you got to build up.

What he sees, what he sees before he turns the light on, are the winkles on his dresser. He doesn't need to turn the light on because they're providing enough light all by themselves. I mean, no doubt they'd be quite beautiful if you hadn't just eaten them. No doubt they'd be like some kind of shellfish electric lightbulb parade. They'd be like a Kowloon landing strip for sturgeon. They'd be a mini goddamn marisco mardi gras.

Unless you'd eaten them.

Jimmy gets to look at them for a further seven minutes and then he goes barfing again.

Now I know there are some shellfish that glow in the dark and it's all fine and good but these Earhart County winkles have a special reason why they're so pretty. It's got nothing to do with natural stuff and everything to do with the tritium ship.

Those winkles have been soaked, I swear, in so much goddamn tritium that they look like Christmas Eve in Times Square. The tritium ship has saturated Earhart County waters so bad I bet you could see Earhart County bay from passing 747s.

Maybe Jimmy's barf glowed up too. I'd be interested to know that.

If it makes you feel any better, the crew onboard the ship are puking up too. Every inch as much as Earhart County. Ok, ok you're thinking you got the picture right? You're thinking you got the picture a while ago and now I'm just wasting your time with the puke.

It's more build up though see.

I'm still building up.

I'm building up to what happened in Earhart County at exactly twenty five after three am.

You're going to love this.

You're going to love this way more than the puke.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Next morning Jimmy gets woken up by the radio alarm again. Only get this. Martin Rosebeck was so sick last night that he's not doing his radio show. So Jimmy in fact gets woken up by the click, because there's no sound at all from the Air Traffic Control Tower and then, when Jimmy turns the dial, there's an actual radio show. A real life radio show broadcast from a normal radio station outside of Earhart County. And there's not just one. There's a whole load of them. With not one rapping noise. Not unless you count the rapping sound of Jimmy's ass hitting the floor when he tries to crawl out of bed.

That's big news see but it's not the thing you were going to love way more than the puke. Although the thing you're going to love way more than the puke *was* reported on the normal radio shows from the real radio station broadcasts. In fact the news of it was so big it made it all the way out here in Newfoundland.

I remember hearing it. I was working that day and I couldn't get home to record it otherwise I would have done. I love this kind of shit.

I also remember when I heard it thinking: I'll bet Jimmy had something to do with it. You see because something got lost.

The whole goddamn tritium ship got lost that night. The whole thing sunk like a badly aimed highball.

The crew got out ok. They were just fine. A little shocked, not too happy to spend the night in Mr. Purcell's dingy but they didn't have much of a scratch on them. I'm telling you this not because I'll be telling you

something exciting about them later but because people can get real upset about bystanders. Especially when I get so excited about accidents like this.

You see what makes this so cool, what makes it something for me to be interested in, even though it doesn't fly, is that that tritium ship wasn't just sunk, it was blown up.

It got blown up by the acoustic torpedo dropped by the U-boat Robin Perdusa sank. The one that got lodged in Earhart County's sewer system. Yeah that whole-lot-of-crap-waiting-to-go-off acoustic torpedo. I'd call it Chekov's whole-lot-of-crap-waiting-to-go-off acoustic torpedo but I just couldn't wait til the final act to tell you about it.

See with everyone puking up and flushing and crapping and flushing, turns out the sewage system got all clogged up and the barf and the crap started to build up until one last person flushed and it shot the torpedo out just as neatly as if it had been fired out of a U-boat torpedo tube. A torpedo tube full of crap mind. And you know, I'd like to think that the person who's final flush did the trick was Jimmy. That'd be nice wouldn't it? Next time I tell this I'm going to make it Jimmy who did that. They won't know it wouldn't be possible to tell.

So this acoustic torpedo gets shot down the sewage pipe, triggered, blasted out to sea and then...well do you know much about acoustic torpedoes? I mean the name gives you a clue. They work on sound and stuff. Like a sound homing device. They built them to get the engines of ships see. Amazing things. I bet back in 1944 there were a few fighter pilots who wished they could have a bomb that aimed itself at their bogey.

Well this acoustic torpedo was well made. Even though it was covered in crap, it aimed itself right at the engines of the tritium ship and

WHAMMO!

Hold it, hold it. That's the sound I made for the fuel tank landing on Perdusa's Mustang. How about BOOM?

BOOM! The acoustic torpedo hits the engine and the ship goes down leaving six Yanks in a dingy and let me tell you also, a whole huge bunch of tritium in the sea. A massive amount all at once. Not poured steadily so it can disperse but all just dumped in one go.

See now, wasn't that better than a load of people hurling chunks?

Not only did the ship go down though but that BOOM rattled the whole foundations of Earhart County. It made the windows shake and the furniture sway. It actually did a fair old amount of damage. Nothing too serious but stuff that cost money. Roof tiles stuff and smashed crockery stuff.

One big piece of damage was done however and you'll probably be pleased about this because the person who was inflicted with the worst damage was Mayor O'Casey.

Not actual bodily damage unfortunately but financial property type damage. Mayor O'Casey got it good. His flangeomatic factory was thrown all over. Machinery broken and messed up. Windows smashed in and a deep long crack in the car park concrete. The same spot in fact that Mrs. Stewart-Packard had been dancing on just a couple of nights before. Speaking of car parks, I read something really cool the other day. Turns out there used to be a sandpit in a place in Britain. I wrote down where

somewhere. I think it was near London. Anyhow there used to be this kid's sandpit only in the war a Messerschmitt Bf 110 crashed down into it. I don't think there were any kids playing in it like. So you don't have to get caught up in worrying about the bystanders.

Anyhow a bunch of people from that place say that they've actually seen the Schmitt crashing into that sandpit like years after the event. I swear, an honest to God ghost plane in a kid's sandpit.

That really does happen you know. Ghost planes. They really are out there. I've collected a whole bunch of reports of them over the years. A whole lot of ghost Lancs and Polish airmen stuff. The haunted sandpit one, it's not got too much else to it but the reason I thought of it is because that haunted sandpit became, a couple of years ago, a haunted car park. They concreted right over that sandpit. And now, every full moon or whenever it is that it happens, that Schmitt can be seen hurtling down into that car park.

It makes you think though doesn't it. Whether it's the soul of the crew that makes the ghost or the soul of the plane. Because see, if it's the soul of the crew, if it's the human soul that's making that ghost plane, then goddamn it, I'm coming back as a P-47 Thunderbolt. Yes siree.

Anyway, after puking all night it doesn't much matter if half the machines at Mayor O'Casey's are inoperable or if a good part of the car park can't be car parked on. It doesn't much matter because there's no chance anyone will be turning up, unless they're coming to use the bathroom after blocking their own car up.

But by about four pm people are starting to be up and about. A little shaky and eating dry toast with boiled water maybe but at least away from the john. And while Jimmy watches Goober chowing down on just about everything he could find and know how to cook in the kitchen of Earhart's Vega, the rest of Earhart County are thinking the same three questions.

1. What happened this year to make the winkles bad?
2. Who's to blame?

And

3. What the hell was that explosion?

Well numbers one and three, they're going to need a while longer to work out but number two? They all know what they can do about number two.

Everyone in Earhart County have been told good and proper what they can do. Several times everyday on Earhart County's local Air Traffic Control Tower radio station they have been told good and proper to think really hard, I mean really really think. Maybe you're not hurting anymore but just have a really good think about it and call Mayor O'Casey's insurance claims. No win, no fee. But it's not like we ever not win.

I'm telling you, Mayor O'Casey's insurance claims company telephones start ringing off the hook. Or should I say, Chekov's Mayor O'Casey's insurance claims company telephones start ringing off the hook. While Mayor O'Casey is eating dry toast with a blanket round his shoulders in the room furthest away from Vlad and the telephone pole, he's actually doing amazing business. Although to be honest, it's all going to take some wangling, seeing as how the entire tritium ship, winkle poisoning thing was his fault. But I'm telling you, if anyone can wangle it, it's

going to be Mayor O'Casey. It's part of that whole way of not losing where some other poor bastard has to pay thing that he does.

Speaking of paying, Jimmy has to pay for two day's board in Earhart County that have been wasted at a winkle fayre and barfing when he should have been out looking for his daddy's plane or trying to work out the folk tale clues. That's a lot of time doing stuff he really didn't want to be doing.

The rest of the world isn't losing time though. A number of different reporters have made it down to Earhart County. Some of them even flew in despite the fact that it's not allowed near election time. Martin Rosebeck wasn't well enough to man the tower and tell them so they've landed three different choppers wherever the hell they wanted. One of them flew around over the top of where the tritium ship went down while the cameraman hung out filming the few parts of ship that were floating above the wreck.

Some of the reporters are from big news shows and their live broadcasts are going out on TV where everyone can watch. Even me in Newfoundland, if I hadn't had to get the Zuckerman report in. The point is, the reporters start digging. At nine am they knew an explosion had happened to a big ship with no casualties. By ten thirty am they'd spoken to some of the crew of the ship and knew it had been pumping tritium into Earhart County water. In time for the lunchtime news they'd found some people who were a little green looking but who were desperate to get on TV and were giving interviews about how they had thought it was some

kind of earthquake and how the winkle poisoning was now starting to make sense.

It's talk like that, that gets Mayor O'Casey's claims company phones ringing off the hook. Because they don't know it's his fault. They won't know until tomorrow morning when a real super reporter reports that they've had the explosion traced to an acoustic torpedo and they've called up the company the tritium ship was sent by and discovered it was invited into Earhart County waters by Mayor O'Casey himself.

That will be when the insurance claims company phones stop ringing.

Not that it matters. It just means Mayor O'Casey will make more money in the long run. But it does lead to the whole town writing up a petition.

It's a pretty big petition and it's going to be presented at about lunchtime about three hours after that super reporter's news report lets them know exactly what's been happening.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Nothing too exciting happens for the rest of that day because everyone is too damn sick but the day after, Martin Rosebeck calls the Earhart's Vega and tells the landlord to ask Jimmy to come to the Air Traffic Control Tower. Oh wait, wait, I also should tell you that whole radio rapping is back. Martin's radio show is back to being the only thing on air. He's doing that Earhart County Gazette news thing, which is mainly about the winkles and the ship and the torpedo and there's also some upcoming election stuff.

Anyway Jimmy and Goober go on over to the Air Traffic Control and Martin runs down to meet them. He's still excited to be talking to Robin Perdusa's son.

"You know you should grow a moustache like your father. That'd be so cool."

"Yeah. Ok. Did you have something else to tell us?"

"Yes, yes, so I've been studying the transcript of when your father went down."

"Yeah?"

"And I think I made a discovery. Come and take a look."

He pulls them into the big hangar with all the planes.

"Son, don't you have a radio show to do?"

"That's ok, I put on an album of Gene Pitney greats. That should keep them for a while."

He edges them through

‘...two planes with like double wings instead of just one...’

That’s what they were in Jimmy’s words.

Two Bristol bulldogs in mine.

‘...a big tall green pointy thing...’

i.e. an inactive doodlebug and:

‘...a plane that kind of had two tails that were stuck together...’

Which can only be, if we’re talking props, it really has to be a P-38.

Unless, oh boy, unless it’s a de Havilland Vampire. I should have asked him if it was a prop. I can’t tell you how much I’d like to see in that hangar.

Martin stops them at the display case with the transcript of the radio log of Robin Perdusa’s accident in. He says, “Look at that.”

“Son, we’ve seen this.”

“I know, I know but take a look at this part.” Martin points to the place where Lily is talking. It’s the part where Lily says:

L: Going after 109s in an old Mustang trainer bad idea.

Jimmy and Goober read the transcript then look back up at Martin.

“Well?”

“Well what?” says Jimmy.

Goober chuckles. “Blackburn Botha haaaaah. Your daddy was full of it.

Martin glares at him, “No see, here she says it’s a trainer. You know what that means?”

Goober gets it, “Oh, oh it means she was onboard.”

“Yes,” says Martin.

“Why does it mean she was onboard?”

“Well because...”

“Save your breath,” says Goober. “He doesn’t know the first thing about planes. It just does Jimmy. That’s all you need to know.”

“It’s obvious really, you just get a set of ideas in your head. I mean, why should she be unintelligible if she was in the tower? And when she shouts watch out, it’s because she’s looking at the 109s herself. I mean Robin used to take the ladies up all the time. It’s just that...there were no records of Lily. When Robin made it back to base, there wasn’t any news about a woman being with him so I just assumed she was in the Tower.”

“So Lily will know where he went down because she was with him?”

“Yes.”

“Lily doesn’t know what day of the week it is son. Ain’t no way she’s gonna remember where the plane went down.”

“She might if Dr. Zippermeyer’s machine works.”

“The thing is,” says Martin “the thing is, take a look at this,” he opens up a different display cabinet and carefully hands Goober a report and Jimmy an old newspaper.

Now Jimmy said it was a front page. He said it was the Earhart County Gazette from the war and on the front page was a picture of his daddy in uniform with a cup of tea and a big grin, looking about twenty one years old. The headline was ‘ROBIN’S MADE IT BACK TO THE NEST’.

The whole article was about how Robin came walking in off the moor where he was found by two kids and taken back to their house for tea and cake. He was in good shape after spending ten days out on the moor. In

good spirits, ready to fly again and still looking smart in this uniform. It'd take more than Earhart County moor to ruffle Perdusa who comments:

'I'm just sorry I lost out on ten days of shooting down jerries. I'll have to fly extra to catch up.'

"Well?" says Martin.

Goober looks up at him, "Lily went out but she didn't come back?"

"Exactly."

And Goober steps back and leans back on the nose of that P-38 Lightning or de Havilland Vampire and says, "There's more out there than we thought. Goddamn it, Dr. Zippermeyer better know what he's doing."

Dr. Zippermeyer it turns out does. He's been working hard since early this morning. He's out in his yard with his big old headphones on and a bunch of wires and other machinery type stuff. He's lost good time getting sick on those winkles but he's speeding like a souped up Bell X-1 to make up for it. He's close to finishing too I'm telling you. So close that when one of the nurses comes round with tea and cookies, he doesn't even notice.

When Martin leads them back out the hangar there's a person waiting for them with a folder. It's actually the guy who ran the raffle where Goober won Mayor O'Casey's ex-secretary's ass. He looks a little nervous but thrusts the folder into Jimmy's hands.

"I've got almost every person in Earhart County to sign."

"Sign what?" says Jimmy.

"I was hoping I could go on your radio show Martin."

“Great,” says Martin. “What for?”

“Well, we’ve had a petition. It’s about the whole ship polluting the water thing. And how if it wasn’t for that mine we never would have found out.”

“Ahh serious stuff.”

“Yes, yes and you see, well all these people, almost all of Earhart County. They’re not so sure they want Mayor O’Casey as Mayor after this because the news said it was his fault see.”

“Oh yes.” Martin knows all about it because he read the news this morning.

“So we got a petition going and everyone we asked supported it.”

Jimmy’s looking at the raffle guy. He’s having winkle flashbacks.

“But well we think it’s time Earhart County had a different Mayor.”

“Wow,” says Martin, “this would make a great radio show. Come on up.”

So they all climb up in the Air Traffic Control Tower and Martin tells Earhart County after Gene Pitney finishes getting to Tulsa that there’s been some momentous event.

“Most of you listening will know of what’s been going down here today because it seems most of you have signed this petition. We have it right here,” says Martin.

“Yes Martin, we have the petition. It’s been a great success.”

“Tell me a little about it.”

“Ok Martin. You see Earhart County is starting to wonder if we couldn’t do with a new Mayor.”

“I see.”

“Yes Martin. So I made sure everyone felt the same way and now...”

“Yes?”

“Well Martin, I have hundreds of signatures and they all want one thing.”

“What’s that?”

Now I’m not sure I know if you’re thinking what I had thought and what Jimmy had thought. That Earhart County was going to make itself a democracy. That the people were going to actually choose their leaders. That’s not quite it.

There are a lot of people out there who just don’t get democracy.

Plato.

I did Plato in high school. Idiot killed himself though instead of move house. You know there’s a place near his end of the world called Lesbos? Hell I would have moved there in a shot. Poison or hot chicks getting it on?

Tough one Plato.

Reckon Nietzsche would have chosen the hot chicks.

Anyhow, Earhart County didn’t petition for a democracy. Even though with a petition they’re practically halfway there. Get this, they petitioned because:

“We want Robin Perdusa’s son to run the election maze.”

“I’m sorry what?” says Jimmy.

“There are all the signatures. Right there.”

Jimmy looks down at the folder. Goober is making a noise that sounds like, “Hoooooouooo.” He says, “Son, Jimmy had a problem finding his way outa the bathroom this morning. Ain’t no way he’ll ever make it out

of that maze. I'm not even talking about him coming last. I'm saying he'll just get lost in there for good."

"Ha ha," says Jimmy, "that's not true."

"So how about it? Do you fancy running for Mayor? Perdusa for Mayor. It's got a nice ring to it."

"Well, ha ha. It's very nice of you but I'm going to be going back to Newfoundland. Wouldn't it be better to have a Mayor that's around?"

"You could stay."

"Ha ha."

"We have all these signatures."

"Yes and it's real nice of you but..."

Martin cuts in, "The phone is ringing. We have our first ever radio phone in," he's getting excited. "Hello caller this is Martin Rosebeck, you're on air, what would you like to say?"

"Yes I'd like to say that I've had the pleasure of meeting Robin Perdusa's son and I think he'd make an excellent Mayor. Nobody ever got poisoned by a winkle when Robin Perdusa was here."

It's the landlord of Earhart's Vega trying to disguise his voice.

"That's great thank you. And you make a good point. Nobody did get sick when Robin Perdusa was here."

"Except Betty Kirkson." smirks the guy who ran the raffle.

"I bet she enjoyed it though." says Martin. "So Jimmy, shall we put your name down to run the maze?"

"Listen, I'm flattered and all but it's not really why I'm here."

“Ahhh you may as well go ahead son.” says Goober. “Guys, you’re onto a sure thing with Jimmy here, you know, if instead of finding his way out the maze you made it finding his own ass and as long as you let him use both hands and give him extra time. He’d win like a shot.”

“I think we’ve made a decision then.” says Martin. “Perdusa’s son is going to run the maze for Mayor.”

“Great,” says the raffle guy. “Because I’ve already put his name down.”
At this point the phone rings again.

“Let’s go to line two shall we?” says Martin, even though it’s the same phone.

“Hello.” says line two. It’s just one word but you can hear the Kittyhawk behind it.

“Hello. Uh you’re on air.”

“This is Mayor O’Casey.”

“Ah, hello, welcome to the Earhart County radio show.”

“I saw your sister today Rosebeck. In our packing department. She sure does a good job.”

“Uh, thank you Mayor O’Casey.”

“Of course since the torpedo explosion damaged some of my stock you know I may have to lay off staff.”

“Oh.”

“Still,” says Mayor O’Casey, “she’s a hard worker. It’d be a shame.”

“Yes Mayor O’Casey.”

“Is Perdusa’s son with you still?”

“Yes Mayor O’Casey.”

“Hello there Perdusa’s son.”

“Uh hello there,” says Jimmy.

“So you're thinking of running for Mayor?”

“Um not really.”

“I see. Well you know I like a bit of sportsmanship.”

“Really?”

“Of course. There’s no point in harvesting a field if there’s only one stalk of wheat in it. Ha ha.”

“Need to get some new material son,” says Goober.

“Ha ha,” says Mayor O’Casey, “well I can’t wait until election day. Make sure Perdusa’s son has good use of both hands and brings his ass. How about we give him a head start too?”

Jimmy sighs and covers his face with a hand.

“As fun as this has been,” says Mayor O’Casey, “I’ve called for a different reason. I thought this might be the best way to speak to my customers. I’ve been working on behalf of everyone who called my insurance claim company yesterday. I’ve made some calls to the tritium company and as they had previously assured me it was a harmless substance, they have agreed that they are in the wrong. They’ve paid up a very nice sum of money which I shall be distributing amongst those who called my company. I’d like to thank those people who thought of my company first.”

He says this even though Mayor O’Casey’s is the only insurance claims company in Earhart County.

“And I’d just like to remind everyone that Mayor O’Casey never not wins.”

Mayor O’Casey hangs up. There’s a silence and Martin Rosebeck puts Gene Ptiney back on. The raffle guy is looking sheepish.

“Son?” says Goober. “You are running that maze.”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Now the mail comes real late the day Jimmy's asked to run the maze because while no one's really puking up any more, people are still feeling a little shaky. Jimmy said he didn't feel totally right again for forty eight hours. So while Earhart County was up and running, it was running very slowly and carefully, with half a mind on the location of the nearest bathroom. The mailman was making his way round nice and gently and screwing up a fair amount too. One of the things he screws up is a special letter up at Mayor O'Casey's flangeomatic factory. See rather than deliver the mail to the separate floors of the factory like he should, he just dumps the lot round the front door on the counter of one of the flangeomatic machines.

What happens next I only know about vaguely because it was Mr. Omagh who told Jimmy and he wasn't so sure himself. It was something about the machinery all being broken or wonky and the factory workers were trying real hard to fix it and get it making flangeomatics again when something fell off something else and hit a couple of things and the end result was a bunch of hot rubber got poured onto the mail that didn't get delivered properly and just got thrown on the counter.

Luckily someone noticed. Lucky they saw what happened or that mail might just have got itself recycled into a little lady with a pump. Instead, once it had cooled down, it got taken up to Mr. Omagh in lost and found. So they told Mr. Omagh what was in the depths of the rubber and after cataloguing it in his big book, he starts to try and get at what's inside. See

as long as he just cleans off the envelopes, then that's not unnecessarily snooping. So Mr. Omagh gets a knife from the canteen and starts. Now I'm not going to tell you about every cut and pull Mr. Omagh does, what I'll just say is that somehow by the end, Mr. Omagh is left with a shoe catalogue and an envelope addressed to the occupant with the promise on the back of saving you money on your car insurance. He's also got two envelopes that are addressed to Mrs. Lacey in accounting and a letter with no envelope.

All of this Mr. Omagh dutifully notes in his cataloguing book.

He then decides that seeing as how Mrs. Lacey in accounting is on a different floor to the little rubber lady pumps that it might be pleasant to go and deliver her mail in person. He remembers Mrs. Lacey being quite nice after she lost her purse and a pair of shoes a couple of months ago. So Mr. Omagh scoops up the envelopes and picks up that letter and he thinks, it has to belong to someone in the building. If he just takes the fastest look at the top. He won't even unfold it the whole way, then he could deliver it too.

So Mr. Omagh opens the letter ever so slightly.

He sees the words 'waterboard' and 'new reservoir' and 'Mayor O'Casey' and then he shuts it nice and quick. Then he takes the shoe catalogue and car insurance letter, just in case Mrs. Lacey needs either and walks on over to accounting.

Mrs. Lacey is very nice to Mr. Omagh. She tries to give him her sandwich. Jimmy said he was a small skinny kind of guy. She makes 'ooh' noises over the shoe catalogue even though it's only got men's

shoes in it. And then Mayor O'Casey walks in. He must have pretty much just come out of his office after having called the radio. He's looking dangerous but pleased with himself because the amount of money he's suing the tritium power company for is a small fortune and while he's planning on keeping most of it himself and telling the public of Earhart County that he'll be sharing it all out, it was a nice ace to have had up his sleeve. He'd like to see Perdusa handing out free money.

Mr. Omagh isn't too keen on the expression on Mayor O'Casey's face but he has a job to do so he stops him and says: "Ah um Mayor O'Casey, a letter came for you."

"Great," says Mayor O'Casey. He thinks it'll be the one he's been waiting for. He thinks his day is only getting better.

"Yes ahuem there's been a slight accident but I succeeded in rescuing it. I hope you don't mind."

"As long as it's readable."

"Oh yes quite readable. Just without the envelope." Mr. Omagh hands it over.

Mayor O'Casey's face freezes. He takes the letter and opens it up. It is the one he's been waiting for.

"Did you read this?" Mayor O'Casey's face is starting to change color.

He says, "wait," then he grabs Mr. Omagh and drags him to his office and slams the door. "Did you read this?"

Mr. Omagh's little pacemaker starts to work overtime. It's beating so fast the plutonium is needing to work like crazy, "I um I just opened it to see who it was addressed to."

“How much did you read?”

“No...nothing.”

“Listen here,” the Kittyhawk is back, “I didn’t hire you to go about snooping into my mail. Terrible things happen to people who snoop into my mail.”

“I didn’t.”

“Right, right,” Mayor O’Casey leans back in his chair. His Kittyhawk gets replaced by something a little more contemplative. “How long have you worked here ah...”

“Mr. Omagh.”

“Yes. Mr. Omagh. From Lost and Found. How long have you worked here?”

“Over fifty em fifty years.”

“My factory’s not been here that long.”

“Yes ah em but there was a lost and found here already. For things that got lost on the moor. You remember Mr. Snoogles?”

Mr. Snoogles was the cat I told you about.

“No,” says Mayor O’Casey.

“Oh.”

“Well I’ve been thinking Mr. Omagh. Things aren’t so busy down in Lost and Found are they.”

“I wouldn’t say that em. Mrs. Lacey lost her purse and a pair of shoes just two months ago.”

“Ahhh high drama. Such a fast pace department,” Mayor O’Casey smirks, “and you’re not getting any younger.”

Mr. Omagh doesn't have a reply to this because nobody gets younger. It doesn't matter how much you soup up that Bell- X1, Chuck Yeager is never going to be able to fly it fast enough to make time go back.

"So I'm changing your position to part-time."

"What?" Mr. Omagh is horrified.

"Yes I figure it's not a job that needs a person full-time so I'm cutting your hours."

"What?"

"Yes," says Mayor O'Casey and he leans over his desk, good and close to Mr. Omagh, "and if you tell anyone about that letter you'll lose your job altogether."

"But I didn't read it."

"Good, good. Well now you're our part-time Lost and Found officer who didn't read it."

Mr. Omagh opens his mouth but nothing comes out.

"Think of it," says Mayor O'Casey. "As a field of wheat at harvest time. And you are the wheat that..."

"Yes?"

"You are the wheat that has to work part-time now."

Now Mr. Omagh and his pacemaker are no slackers and so by the time Jimmy and Goober have finished talking with Martin and that raffle guy, Mr. Omagh has pedalled back into the village to the Earhart's Vega and he's downed three glasses of ginger wine.

Mr. Omagh is on the hard stuff.

What this means is, when Jimmy and Goober arrive at the Vega for lunch, Mr. Omagh is smashed. He's spent his first part-time off work afternoon getting more drunk than he's been since Christmas 1974. I know this because when Jimmy and Goober walk through the door, Mr. Omagh is ordering another ginger wine and he says: "You know wash? I haven't been thish drunk shinshe 19sheventy4."

He waves at Jimmy.

"ae⁸φ."

"What?"

"ae⁸. ae⁸ ish loshing your job. φ ish getting drunk."

"Oh. Sorry. You lost your job?"

"Nope," says Mr. Omagh.

"Riiight then."

"Got any more of those ham sandwiches?" says Goober.

"Coming right up," says the landlord.

"Oh no," says Mr. Omagh, "wheresh my pen? Wheresh my pen? Theresh no letter for being made par-time. I have to create a number for Mayor O'Cashey making you par-time."

"Ahh well..." says Jimmy. "That's not so bad. You'll have lots of time to do other things then."

Mr. Omagh glares at him. He hunches his shoulders down low around his ginger wine and glares as hard as he can manage. It's no Kittyhawk though. Mr. Omagh just doesn't have it in him.

Goober doesn't look at Mr. Omagh. He's got his eyes firmly on the plate of ham sandwiches coming towards him but he says, "No need to worry

about Mayor O'Casey for long. Jimmy's running against him in the elections."

Mr. Omagh unhunches, "Really? Perdoosha'sh shon? Mayor Perdoosha? I like that. I like that lotsh. I hope you W³. I hope you H⁴ O'Cashey good and proper and then W³."

"Uh thank you," Jimmy is hoping H⁴ing and W³ing are things he'd like to do but he still glares at Goober. He really isn't keen on being Mayor of Earhart County. He wants to come back home, even to Newfoundland. He wants to live in a country where you can flush toilet paper down the can and where people don't eat winkles.

"Heck," says Mr. Omagh. "You can D¹⁴ him for all I care."

"Well we'll do our best," says Jimmy.

"Whatcha get fired for?" asks Goober, "was it for being old?"

"No," Mr. Omagh shlurps his ginger wine. "It'sh cosh I shaw something Mishter O'Cashey din want me to shee."

"What was that?"

"I don know. I din shee it."

"Wait, wait," Goober takes a bite of ham sandwich. "So you're telling me you got fired for not seeing something Mayor O'Casey didn't want you to see?"

"Yesh," says Mr. Omagh miserably, "an now, an now I'm the wheat thatsh gotta work par-time."

"Well what do ya think it was?"

"What what wash?"

"What you didn't see?"

“I don know. I don know. Shomethin about a reshervoir an an water.”

“Huh,” says Goober. He chews slowly. “You ever hear anything about a reservoir?”

The landlord thinks about it, “No.”

“Huh. Interesting.”

“Show him your story,” says the landlord. “Go on. Robin Perdusa left his son a story.”

Mr. Omagh perks up, “Really?”

“Yes. Go on, show it to him.”

“Ok, ok,” Jimmy sighs, pulls the folded up page out of his back pocket and slaps it in front of Mr. Omagh. “I’ll have a sandwich too please.”

“Ham?”

“No, no.” Jimmy’s not ready to risk the ham. “Uh cheese?”

“Right with you.” says the landlord.

“Verry verrry interesting.” says Mr. Omagh.

“THEY THINK IT’S A CODED MAP,” shouts the landlord from the kitchen.

“Ohh thatsh nicshe.”

“So?” says Jimmy, “Where do you think it is?”

“What ish?”

“The thing my daddy wants me to find. The thing he left behind the day he went down on the moor.”

“Thish shtory will lead you there?”

“Why else would he leave it?”

“Well itsh a nicshe shtory. Maybe he liked a nicshe shtory.”

“Ok right ok.”

“Well you know, I’d shay...the dragonsh would be the Luftwaffe.”

“That’s what we thought.”

“An an if the dragonsh were the Luftwaffe then, then the resht of it would have to fit in...hmmm,” Mr. Omagh shakes out his little triangular bike bag. Out falls his packed lunch, a thermos and his formulae book.

“Letsh shee now. Your daddysh

[h[v(↓)]aeM²EF³M² bb^{3j}G⁶Z¹aeoW⁹C)]

And thish shtory goes like thish:

[h[v(↓)]bb³AaeM²AEF³M²AG⁶H⁸W¹C)]

“Wait, what do you know about my daddy getting shot down?”

“I know itsh formula.”

“Ok, ok where did you get the story?”

“Ohh, well I met your father shee. I met him the day he came off the moor. Me an, an Nigel Crichley.”

“You were the kids in the newspaper?”

“I wash in the newshpaper?”

“Kind of. It said two children found Robin Perdusa walking off the moor.”

“Oh yesh. That was me. We gave, we gave him cake too. He liked cake.”

“Ya ya we all like cake, so did he tell you where he’d been?”

“He shaid, he shaid he been walking round tha moor for ten daysh. He shaid hish plane wen down an he walked an he walked and he thought tha

wash it, he wash never going to shee shivilisation again an then he walked more and walked more an then we found him.”

“That’s it?”

“Yesh. But, but you know wha? I don think tha wash sho true you know.”

“Why?”

“Well he din look sho bad. An, an he din shmell bad an, an he wash clean shaven.”

“Really?”

“Oh yesh. He wash lookin like a movie shtar an, an I shaid, he doeshn’t look like he’sh been walking on the moor for a week an Nigel shaid, you think Robin Perdoosha would ever not look good? He’sh a hero Robin Perdoosha. It’sh like in the moviesh. The hero alwaysh looksh good.”

“For real?”

“Yesh. Nigel Crichley washn’t sho shmart.”

“Goddamn,” says Goober. “There is definitely something out there.”

“Really? It’sh out there? You think it’sh losht because I only work part-time now. Maybe shomeone will bring it in an an I won’t be there to catalogue it. Mayor O’Cashey didn’t think of that did he. He din think people might bring losht shtuff in and it won’t get catalogued. I hope someone M⁶s tha man.”

Jimmy slides Mr. Omagh’s book over so he can read it. It’s on the page with his daddy’s story and you know it really does look like the Russian folktale. With the threat coming from the east and the flying horse and

the accident that brings him down. If Jimmy could just work out the significance of the part after he comes down.

Then it happens.

The phone rings, the landlord answers. He says: "Yes, yes ok they're right here. I'll tell them."

He hangs up and looks at Jimmy and Goober.

"That was Dr. Zippermeyer. He said the machine is ready."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The machine is ready. Dr. Zippermeyer has actually finished it.

So the landlord takes away Goober's empty plate and puts Jimmy's sandwich in some saran wrap and they walk on down to SeaView. They walk past the fields and past that U-boat that old man Robin sank and up the driveway to Dr. Zippermeyer's apartment. He's got this machine all ready in this front piece of yard.

It's all wired up and connected to some kind of power source with a dining chair in the centre of it. The chair's got an old bike helmet with 'junior safety monitor' written on the side and it's slung over the back with a hundred wires coming out of it.

"Holy crap," says Goober.

Dr. Zippermeyer is bent over, flicking switches and stuff. He stands up and waves at them when they get near.

"What the hell did you make?"

"Ach, just a little dewice."

"Little? It looks like you're going to reprogram her."

"Vell in a vay maybe ve are."

"I'm not so sure about this," says Jimmy.

"It is perfectly safe ja. Just sound vawes. Here, you vant to try?"

"No."

"I doesn't hurt," Dr. Zippermeyer looks at Goober. "You vant a try?"

"Fella, if you touch me you'll be sucking your food through a straw for weeks."

“Oh ja ha ha. I suck my food through straw anyways. Bad dentures.”

“So what now?” asks Jimmy. “Does Lily have to put that thing on?”

“Ja.”

“And then what?”

“We flick switch.”

“*You* flick the switch.”

“Ja. I flick switch and it done.”

“Whaddya mean done? Done like cooked meat?”

“Ha ha no. Lily wakes up.”

“You mean it’s like some kind of twisted alarm clock?”

“No, it’s like the Lily now, her mind is stone. This machine make it vork proper again.”

“Stone,” says Jimmy. Because see we know about people being turned to stone. It’s in the story. You remember. Where the people get turned to stone by the Luftwaffe dragons and then the prince uses the water of life and the water of death and they all wake up. And that’s the reason why Jimmy goes out on a limb. That’s why he goes along with this guy. He goes right on ahead, looks at Goober and the machine and Dr.

Zippermeyer then says: “I’ll go get Lily.”

Mayor O’Casey’s ex-secretary and her wive clean outfit are on duty again. She looks happy to see Jimmy but then they always do, people who work in Old Folks Homes. They’re always pleased to have people visit. One time I busted into an Old Folk’s home in San Diego where I knew there was a guy who flew with the Eighth. Staff there looked pleased to see me

too even though I wasn't related. Got me a signature on my Eighth squadron print and two pudding cups. Had that print framed and everything.

Great guy he was. Told me he'd totalled a P-38 and four P-51s before the war finished. Not in combat like but by landing them real bad and taking their noses off. One Stang he bounced so hard he almost killed himself. Yeah, the air force didn't have him back test flying after the war. And I told him about this Buick I crashed into a parking metre one time and he said how if they'd had parking metres on the airfields he reckoned he'd have hit every damn one of them.

We had ourselves a ball and the nurses let me stay the whole afternoon and when I left they even said 'Thanks for visiting Skip. He's had a great time'.

I'm telling you, wouldn't you just love to have seen old Skip bounce one of those Stangs. Just the once. Man I'd have liked to have seen him do that. I've got a collection of aircraft magazines from 1938. I might just give half of them to have been around to have seen that.

Anyways, Jimmy goes into SeaView and Lily is in the main communal room. Mr. Purcell is back in there with a couple of other people who came off the moor confused like Lily. There's a lot of tea and the TV is showing some golf tournament. Lily is facing the screen.

"Hey there Lily."

She looks at Jimmy.

"It's me Robin Perdusa's son."

Lily sizes him up. She looks like she's about to say something then she gets handed a cup of tea and a cookie.

"Um I was wondering if you wanted to come for another little walk with me."

And Jimmy told me he felt pretty damn awful I can tell you, tricking Lily out of the building so they could strap her in to Dr. Zippermeyer's machine.

"Ooh doesn't that sound nice Lily. A walk in the fresh air," says the lady who gave her the tea.

"Outside?"

"Yes Lily. Outside."

"Vant go outside?"

"Um yeah. Goober's outside too. You remember him?"

"Gooberrr."

"Yeah."

"Outside."

"Yeah."

"Gooberrr."

"You remember him?"

"Shorrrt."

"Haha Lily, yeah, the short guy. That's the one. Smells funny."

Lily looks back at the TV.

"So um, what do you say, you want to come out?"

"Come where?"

"Outside. For a walk."

“Outside?”

“Yeah.”

“Yak outside?”

“Uh, no but you can bring it. We can take your yak Lily.”

“Vant take yak.”

“OK then Lily. OK then we’ll take your yak Lily. Where is it?”

“Where yak?”

The nurse looks about the room and finds Lily’s stuffed toy. “Here’s your yak Lily. Now you go have a nice walk and when you get back you can have another cup of tea.”

Jimmy smiles at her and hopes to God that by the time they're finished with her she’ll still be ok to have that cup of tea. He hauls Lily out the chair and holds onto her arm as he walks her out the building.

“Goober’s outside with Dr. Zippermeyer. We’ll go see them shall we?”

says Jimmy as he steps outside feeling a whole lot like some kind of Vincent Price type character.

“Where yak?”

Jimmy looks at her. She’s empty handed. He sighs, walks her back inside where the stuffed toy has been left on her chair, picks it up and stuffs it into his back pocket.

“Lets go Lily.”

“Ya outside.”

“That’s right.”

“Yak outside.”

“It’s right here Lily. I got it right here.”

“You got yak.”

“That’s right Lily. I got it.”

Now when Jimmy gets down to Dr. Zippermeyer’s front yard he said that Goober and Dr. Zippermeyer weren’t speaking. He said that Dr. Zippermeyer had made cups of tea but that Goober was flat out refusing to drink it and was glaring at Dr. Zippermeyer.

“I’ve got Lily,” says Jimmy. “Is everything ok?”

“He made tea,” says Goober.

“Right.”

“Well I’m not drinking it.”

“No, well ok then.”

“Don’t know what he’s put in it.”

“Tea perhaps? Maybe a little milk?”

“Ja, I says. It’s gute tea.”

“Yeah right. I bet you put something in it. Zyklon-B or something”

“He’s thinkink I vant to kill him haha.”

“Goober?”

“Only gas around here is comink from his behind ha ha.”

“I got plenty more where that came from too pal.”

“Not in front of ladies I’m thinkink.”

“Stop this and let’s just get it done shall we? Before I change my mind.”

“Ok, ok. Sit her down.”

“Lily?” Jimmy sits her down into the chair. He’s starting to sweat a little and he’s wishing they weren’t so out in the open.

Lily sits down. She opens her mouth and Jimmy pulls the yak out his pants and hands it over. Goober rolls his eyes when he sees it so Jimmy says he did that whole I-swear-to-god look and Goober kept shtum.

“Ok ja. Ve just needink to put this on her,” Dr. Zippermeyer lowers the junior safety monitor helmet down onto Lily. She’s giving him the fish eye but she lets him do it. Jimmy said he was half expecting leg and arm restraints to come out like but actually all Dr. Zippermeyer does is plug some different wires in, fiddle about with some kind of dial then stand back.

“Ok ja, ve are ready.”

“To flick the switch?”

“Ja. Ve flick svitch.”

“*You* flick the switch. I’m not flicking it.”

Goober glares at Dr. Zippermeyer again, “I ain’t flicking it. I don’t got no travel insurance.”

“What?” says Jimmy. “You came over here uninsured?”

“Hell I didn’t have insurance the first time round. Ain’t about to buy it now.”

“I’m flickink svitch ya?”

“Yeah, ok, ok. Just do it ok,” says Jimmy. He kneels next to Lily and says, “Listen, if you feel bad you just tell us right?”

“Don’t feel bad.”

“I mean in a minute. If you feel bad when he flicks that switch, you tell me and we’ll stop.”

“Ok.”

“Ok Lily, ok. You’re ok.”

“Ya ok. Ve haff yak now?”

“You got it right there Lily. In your hand. Right, Dr. Zippermeyer is going to flick the switch.”

“Flick svitch.”

And then Jimmy stands well back from the machine because no matter how bad he feels about the whole deal, he’s not about to stand anywhere near where he might get taken out by it.

And then Dr. Zippermeyer does it.

He actually does it.

He flicks that switch.

Jimmy and Goober watch. A couple of lights go on. There’s a fan whumping inside the machine somewhere and a small buzzing noise.

They look at Dr. Zippermeyer.

“Well?”

“That’s it. That’s all.”

“It’s working?”

“Ja. I think.”

“How do we know?”

“Go talkink to her.”

So Jimmy steps a little closer to Lily. She’s turning her stuffed toy over and over in her hands.

“Lily?”

She looks up so sharp her junior safety monitor helmet goes 'bink' on the back of the chair.

"Lily?"

"Ya?"

"How do you feel?"

Lily stares at him for a long time.

And then she says:

Honest to god this is what she says:

She says: "Where-is-yak?"

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

“Alright, alright. Turn it off,” says Jimmy.

Dr. Zippermeyer flicks the switch to off.

“Looks like your machine doesn’t work sonny Jim,” says Goober all smug like.

“Ha ha, but my theory is fine.”

“What was your theory. Fry her brain into working? Heat it like a maggot to get it moving faster?”

“Nein, nein. Not heat them up but ja get them moving faster. See?”

And Dr. Zippermeyer opens up this big ass sheet of paper with some kind of diagram that Jimmy had no chance of understanding.

And Dr. Zippermeyer tells Jimmy what his theory was. Now I got no doubt that what Dr. Zippermeyer told Jimmy was good and accurate science but by the time it got to me it was dumbed down a whole lot.

What Dr. Zippermeyer was doing see, was working with soundwaves.

Now the human brain works roughly within 14 - 30 Hz. Jimmy didn’t tell me that. I had to look it up. 14 - 30 Hz is when you’re good and smart and thinking about something complicated. Like when you think about how the hydraulic constantinesco synchronization gear on a Gloster Gladiator works. 8 - 14 Hz is when your brain isn’t really thinking so good. It’s almost like being a little hypnotised. If you got someone whose brain is running at 8 Hz, it’s a good time to ask them if you can borrow their car. 4 - 8 Hz, well 4 - 8 Hz is when you’re not thinking

much at all. You're in a real deep sleep. Like a real deep dreamless sleep.

Now Dr. Zippermeyer was building on this experiment that got done on kids and TVs. Jimmy told me this one. This is a doozy. Turns out a TV runs at around 8-14 Hz and when you watch it, your brain, which may have just been thinking about the hydraulic constantinesco synchronization gear on a Gloster Gladiator, latches onto the slower frequency and slows down too.

It's true. They did this thing where they strapped a bunch of kids to TV sets and computers. The computer was programmed to shut down the TV the second their brains hit 8-14 Hz. They told the kids to keep the TVs on, they had to keep actively thinking. And then they stuck a load of cartoons on.

Let's see if you can guess the longest any of them managed to keep their TV on for?

You'll never guess.

Forty five seconds.

That's how long it took before their brains got zapped.

Forty five seconds.

Still, it's a hell of a lot longer than a Rear Gunner in combat gets before *he* gets zapped. 2.6470588235294117 recurring times longer than a Rear Gunner gets.

Shows how fast those cartoons worked though.

When Jimmy told me, I said they should have shown the kids footage of those two MiGs crashing into each other that one time at an air show.

That'd keep them awake, although Jimmy said it wasn't really the show that did it. It was the TV or something. It didn't matter too much what show.

Maybe.

That maybe the way but I'd like to try it. Strap me up and put on those MiGs. I reckon I could go longer than forty five seconds.

Anyhow what Jimmy said Dr. Zippermeyer was doing was some kind of twist on this whole brain latching on to slower waves thing only the other way round. He said Dr. Zippermeyer had actually devised a way of speeding up brainwaves. That's what the helmet did. It did something with soundwaves and brainwaves. So when Dr. Zippermeyer said that his theory was fine, it's because he really had put a whole lot of thought into it.

And while Lily saying 'Where is yak?' wasn't much of a surprise to Jimmy and Goober, Dr. Zippermeyer was genuinely confused.

He fiddles about with some of the wires again to check nothing's come loose and he says, "Let's try this again. It should be vorkink fine."

"Go ahead," says Goober. "It's been a while since I had a good laugh."

And Dr. Zippermeyer walks back to the switch and Jimmy steps back again just in case and he switches it on. The lights go on and the fan warms up.

"Uh Lily?"

"Is there anyone there?" says Goober. "Knock once for yes."

Lily turns to look up at Goober, her helmet goes 'bink' on the back of the chair again. "I'm sorry vhat you say? You say you vant me to keeck your ass?"

Dr. Zippermeyer grins at Goober. "Vell her brain seemink to vork now."

"Lily?" says Jimmy. "I'm Jimmy, Jimmy Perdusa. Robin's son. You remember Robin?"

"Ya, off course I remember Robin. You not as good looking as yourr father."

"Thanks." says Jimmy.

"Where ees Robin?"

"Uh he passed away."

"Passed away? Vhat ees passed away? Like fainting? I always said your daddy couldn't stay avake past six gees."

"Um no, passed away as in died. A month ago."

"Oh," Lily looks down at her stuffed toy.

"Jimmy needs your help lady," Goober nods at Jimmy.

"Yes, uh I need a little help."

Lily's helmet turns to Goober.

"This is Goober McFarlane. He knew my daddy. He used to fly with my daddy."

"Vith Robin?"

"Yeah."

"Your fatherr fly Mustangs."

"Yeah, that's right, my daddy flew Mustangs."

"And P-38s."

“Uh yeah,” says Jimmy. He’s not so sure what a P-38 is.

“He told you he fly vith yourr fatherr on Mustangs and P-38s?”

“Yeah.”

Dr. Zippermeyer starts coughing.

“You everr see a Mustang Perdoosa’s son?”

“Uh.”

“You neverr see a Mustang no?”

“Uh no.”

“Or a P-38?”

“P-38, no.”

“They both solo planes Perdoosa’s son.”

“What?”

“Only taking vone man.”

“What do you mean?”

“I am meaning this man can’t to fly vith yourr daddy unless he sitting on ving ya? I know vone guy in Mustang who take off vith mechanic on ving. Verry funny, funny mistake.”

Jimmy looks over at Goober.

“You’re listening to this crap? She’s a nutjob. Course I flew with your daddy. What does she know about planes?”

“I know about plane.”

“Shut it Lily.”

“Vhat? Vhat? You say shut it or you say you vant to keess my ass?”

“Ha ha she’s right,” says Dr. Zippermeyer, “Mustangs are solo planes.

Did he say he flew mitt your papa?”

“Don’t listen to him, he’s a jerry. The machine’s not working. Let’s go.”

“You didn’t fly with my daddy?”

“Course I flew with your daddy, how else would I know him? He was the best your daddy.”

Lily snorts.

“He flew all kindsa stuff. Mosquitoes, Kittyhawks.”

“Ya no he didn’t.”

“He could fly anything your daddy.”

“Ya no he couldn’t.”

“Shut it Lily.”

“I’d like to seeing yourr fatherr land a B-17 the vay he used to land Mustang.”

“He started off in Mosquitoes, I flew with him in the Mosquitoes.”

“Rrobin Perdoosa vouldn’t touch Mosquito. He started in P-38s.”

“Yeah? You spent the whole war with him did you?”

Lily glares at him.

“Ok. You know Rrobin Perdoosa so vell, vhat color his eyes?”

“Ah hell guys don’t notice that kinda thing.”

“Ok then, vhat vas his lucky charm?”

“He kept it private like.”

“No he didn’t. I give it to him. He always had it vith him.”

“Uh it was a pair of stockings?”

Lily rolls her eyes, “You think I got time forr stocking?”

“Well honey what else you coverin those varicose veins with?”

“Vhen I find vhat meaning varicose vein you in trouble.”

“You wanna find out, take a look at your calves honey.”

“What ees calf? Ees a baby cow no? You saying I am like baby cow?”

“Sure ok. Sure I’m saying that. Like a heifer.”

“Wait, wait,” says Jimmy, “you said you know what my daddy’s lucky charm was?”

“Ya.”

“Well what was it?”

“Vhy you vant to know?”

“Well it’s mine. He left it to me.”

“It not on moorr?”

“Yes, yes it’s on the moor. He wants me to find it.”

“Oh vell good luck. Moorr is beeg place.”

“That’s why we need your help.”

“Ve? You mean you and thees man?”

“Yeah.”

“The vone who say he fly vith Rrobin?”

“Uh yeah.”

“I not telling *him*.”

“Aw what? 1943, March. I flew with Robin on a photo-recon mission in a Mosquito over France.”

“Rrobin sign up in June.”

“Ok, ok maybe it was a cold June. Maybe I got it wrong.”

“And Rrobin only fly a Mosquito vonce. He say never again. He say fuel gauge on plane vas broke and he wouldn’t touch Mosquito again. He say verry good pilot can to be take out by bad fuel guage Mosquito vone day.”

“Yeah, I know that, that was me, that was me he was with, I was navigating. Goddamn fuel gauge was broken and he said, one day that’s gonna take out some poor damn pilot. Don’t matter how good he is.”

“That was you with him?”

“Yeah.”

“When he crashing land sixty miles north of Earhart County in middle of mine field?”

“Yeah, mines all over the damn place.”

“And I went out and pick you up in ambulance.”

“Yeah. Jeez was that you?”

“Ya. Well you changed.”

“Sure I have honey, everything looks different when you get old.”

“Ya very different. Different accent too.”

“Well you know, I travelled about a lot.”

“Ya, used to be Jamaican too.”

“Oh.”

Well now there we have it. You knew though didn’t you. You knew from the start that something was going on with Goober when he said he was old man Perdusa’s Rear Gunner. Because obviously Mustangs don’t got Rear Gunners. Jimmy didn’t know though. Jimmy had no idea like. He honestly thought Goober was his daddy’s Rear Gunner all those years back on one of those nuthugger Mustangs. And when Jimmy told me all this, I picked him up straight off you know? Right back when he was

telling me how this old dude came up to him at the funeral? When he said: 'so you were my daddy's Rear Gunner?'

And Goober said: 'Yeah, I can't believe your daddy never told you about me.'

I said, 'Hold it Jimmy, hold it there Jimmy. You know Mustang's don't have Rear Gunners?'

And he said: 'Sure,' he said, 'well sure. *Now* I know Mustangs don't have Rear Gunners.'

And I said: 'So what was he up to?'

And Jimmy said: 'Well I didn't find that out til later.'

I would have found out though. I would have found out right there at the funeral what Rear Gunner Goober McFarlane was up to, pretending to have flown with my daddy. Except my daddy didn't fly Mustangs. My daddy used to work for a Xerox company. He's about thirty years too young to have flown Mustangs anyway. Thirty years too young for Mustangs and just the right number of years to manufacture Xerox machines.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

So they're all outside Dr. Zippermeyer's flat and Lily's yelling at Goober and Goober's yelling at Lily and Dr. Zippermeyer is trying to follow it all and Jimmy's given up when suddenly Lily stands up and yells: "STOP THEES. WHERE IS YAK?"

And everyone go quiet until Jimmy, poor damn idiot Jimmy says, "It's right there in your hands Lily."

Lily looks down at her stuffed toy, makes two steps towards Jimmy in a way that Jimmy said made it good and clear she was going to ram it somewhere uncomfortable when three of the wires on her junior safety monitor helmet went plip and popped out their sockets. And I swear, Jimmy said Lily just stopped. Plip and everything stopped. Like when I was twelve and dropped the remote for my radio control model of the Spirit of St. Louis complete with a tiny model pilot that looked more like Jimmy Stewart than Lindberg. Not that that was a bad thing. Pretty good pilot Jimmy Stewart. You go look, you go look on the list of world war two aces and you'll see him there. I'm telling you, James S Stewart 9 kills. So Lindberg, well Lindberg was a pioneer but Jimmy see, Jimmy could probably have flown the Atlantic in that strut braced monoplane and shot a couple of Schmitts down on the way. Ok, ok maybe Schmitts in Lindberg's souped up Ryan M-2 is pushing it. Let's say he could have shot down a couple of Fokker D.VIIs

So anyway, when I was twelve I had a model Spirit of St. Louis and I dropped the remote and:

Plip, then everything stopped.

“Lily?” says Jimmy.

Lily looks up real slow. She looks confused again.

“Lily you got to stay still, the wires have come out.”

“Where yak?”

“Sit down Lily and we’ll plug you in again.”

Lily stares.

“Sit down Lily,” Jimmy has to gently push her back into the chair.

“Hell I vote for not plugging her in. She’s an even bigger loonbag when she’s wired up.”

Dr. Zippermeyer’s not even listening. He’s rewiring and fixing up the machine.

“We’re hooking her up,” says Jimmy, “whether you like it or not.”

“Fine then,” says Goober, “fine. Lets get this done fast then.”

Dr. Zippermeyer flicks the switch again.

“I said where is yak?”

“Listen lady,” says Goober, “we gotta know where Robin Perdusa went down on the moor and pick up that lucky charm. So either you tell us or you won’t get no more time on the machine.”

“I think I am not mindink, she can use my machine any time,” says Dr. Zippermeyer .

“Shut it Jerry. You wanna be at the mercy of a Jerry Lily? You want that?”

“Uh, I am doctor ja? I can give her machine. Is gift ja?”

“Is gift ja,” says Lily. “He say, is gift ja. You hearr that?”

“Yeah I hear that but I reckon if it came down to it, I reckon I could take Dr. Frankenmeyer here and I don’t reckon Jimmy would do so much to stop me cos he’s got a charm to find out on that moor and he’s been told you’re the one to ask.”

“Um I don’t think we need to fight any,” says Jimmy.

“Who telling you to ask me where charm?”

“My daddy.”

“Oh,” Lily thinks about it, “ok,” she says. “Firrst I get yak, then I help you.”

“Um right,” says Jimmy, “so first we get your yak.”

“Ya.”

“No problem. Ahh where is it?”

Lily sighs and starts to stand up.

“No, no, don’t stand up. The wires come out when you stand up.”

“What vires?” Lily looks at Jimmy then feels the helmet. “What these?”

“It’s a machine Lily. It helps you think.”

Lily squints and continues to feel around. Dr. Zippermeyer nervously hovers about in case she pulls a wire.

“Need hat ya?”

“Yeah Lily, you need the hat Lily.”

Goober mutters something. Something about what Lily needs.

“Huh. Need hat. Can’t to stand?”

“No Lily, you can’t stand up Lily, or the wires come out.”

“Huh,”

Lily thinks.

“Can you carry machine next to? So I walk ok?”

Jimmy eyes up the machine.

“Sure he can honey,” says Goober. “Ya know, if he wanted a hernia for thanksgiving. Say, ya know what I’d like? A nice big hernia, sure makes a stylish accompaniment to any waistband.”

“You know what make stylish accompany to your vaistband? I am thinking maybe my knee in yourr landing gearr.”

“Anytime you feel like standing up and coming over and getting me, you just go right on ahead sweetheart.”

Only Jimmy said he didn’t quite say it like sweetheart. He made it sound more like sweet tart.

“You go on ahead sweet tart,” he said.

“You call me cake?” says Lily. “You know what ve do in Soviet Union when some persons call us cake?”

“What?”

“Ve poison, then ve shoot, then ve put in bag and throw in riverr.”

“Honey, are you telling me Rasputin got done over because he called someone a flan?”

“I’m saying *you* going get done overr for call me flan.”

“Ok, ok,” says Jimmy. “So you can’t stand up. How about you tell me where the charm is and we bring the yak to you.”

“DON’T YOU TOUCH MY YAK,” Lily almost stands up, “DON’T YOU TOUCH,” she looks around desperately for someone she can trust. She looks at Zippermeyer then Goober then Jimmy then just generally shouts, “DON’T LET TOUCH MY YAK.”

“I’ll bring it straight here,” says Jimmy, “I don’t want it.”

“DON’T-TOUCH-MY-YAK.”

“Well how do I bring it here without touching it?”

“YOU DON’T, YOU GET STAND NEARR YAK I HURRT YOU BAD.
DON’T TOUCH YAK. IT MY YAK. YOU NOT TOUCHING MY
YAK.”

“Ok, ok. I won’t touch your yak. But how do you propose you get it
when you can’t stand up and you won’t let me touch it.”

“That yourr problem. You not touching my yak,” Lily crosses her arms
and shuts her mouth.

“Vell,” says Dr. Zippermeyer. “I could try make it so ve can valk mit
machine.”

“Really?”

“Maybe, maybe puttink on vheels?”

Lily starts looking hopeful.

“I vill need some thinks.”

“Like what?”

Dr. Zippermeyer thinks real hard, “A shoppink cart.”

So Jimmy and Goober walk back into Earhart County to find a
supermarket that has shopping carts and while they're doing this Mayor
O'Casey is busy preparing for the election. See the election is getting real
near. It is actually going to be the day after tomorrow so Mayor O'Casey
has to get busy. He’s got a very special way to prepare for the Earhart
County electoral maze. In fact in a sense you could say he’s been

preparing all year. See Mayor O'Casey doesn't work out. He doesn't have any kind of fitness regime to get him ready for running the maze because in reality Mayor O'Casey won't have to run at all when he's in the maze. Mayor O'Casey can just stroll through it no problem. For the last twenty five years Mayor O'Casey has strolled out the maze looking as fresh and smart as Robin Perdusa looked when Mr. Omagh and Nigel Crichtley found him coming off the moor.

You see Mayor O'Casey is doing that not losing thing he does so well.

The kind of not losing where some other poor bastard has to pay.

Not because he physically hurts anyone like. But because Mayor O'Casey cheats like that thing people call 'all get out'.

He cheats all right.

This is what he does. This is what he's doing in fact right now.

Mayor O'Casey is opening his special drawer. The one with all the Earhart County raffle entries in. The good raffle entries. The ones that stand a chance of winning. He has an entire drawer load of them all piled up nice and high because we're talking a whole year. A whole year of people trying their most nudey hardest to win that monthly ham. That's a lot of nudey pictures. That's got to be a couple years of Penthouses worth. And while some people can have very high moral values when it comes to being bribed with money, that many nudey pictures is hard refuse.

So that's what Mayor O'Casey is doing. He's putting all the raffle entry photos into a nice neat parcel and he's addressing the parcel to the farmer who farms all the land round SeaView. Because this is where the

elections are going to be held. In a big field of cereal crop next to the U-boat Jimmy's daddy sank. Then, the day before the election, which is going to be tomorrow see, the day before the election, the farmer is going to send Mayor O'Casey a map of how he's cut the maze. Just like he does every year. And like he does every year, he's going to draw a red line from the centre, along the route that gets you out the fastest. Just in case Mayor O'Casey can't find it for himself.

So you see, for the last twenty five years, Mayor O'Casey's been on to a sure thing. Even if he were up against the best maze runner in the world, Mayor O'Casey is always going to not lose. Jimmy's chances then, which were low to begin with are nose diving faster than an Airacobra with a clipped wing. An Airacobra with a clipped wing, flown by a non- Soviet. They're diving faster than a P-51 with its original Allison carrying out a strafing run on a rail station. That's fast. That's good and fast. I'm not saying the P-51 didn't fly beautiful like with a Rolls Royce engine but if you're strafing, if you're coming in below 3,000 ft, you couldn't do much better than that Allison. Which incidentally was the name of the lady in the picture that won the ham in March.

Allison.

I bet she was something too.

Now while Mayor O'Casey is making good and sure that he'll be the first out the maze, Jimmy and Goober are using Robin Perdusa's good name to get themselves a shopping cart. They're at a small supermarket just before you get to the ATC tower and the lady who runs the place, her mom went

out on a date once with Robin. Not Betty Kirkson, she wasn't Betty Kirkson, it was after the whole Betty Kirkson date. The supermarket lady told Jimmy her mom said the plane still smelt a little sour but that Robin had worn extra cologne to help disguise it. That's how you can tell a real gentleman, she pointed out. Not many young men would do that now. Although she's sure Robin's son would and any time he needed anything he should come back and was one cart going to be enough and was there any chance Jimmy would go and have a cup of tea with her mom one day because being Robin's son was a big deal and probably worth being left the family home in inheritance, especially as her brother didn't really need a house since taking up with that younger woman and winning all that ham in the raffle.

Jimmy smiles and nods while Goober eyes up the deli counter when he realizes something and says, "What kind of plane did my daddy take your mom up in?"

And the supermarket lady says, "A Mustang of course. Your daddy flew Mustangs." She looks confused that Jimmy is even asking.

"I thought Mustangs were solo planes."

"They are. He used to take his dates up in the trainer."

"Ah," says Jimmy. "The trainer."

"Yes."

"And do trainers have Rear Gunners?"

The woman opens her mouth and then shuts it and then opens it, "Did your daddy not show you any pictures of the planes he flew?"

“Oh,” says Jimmy, “those, uh yes he showed me pictures, uh just not one of the trainer.”

The woman looks suspicious. She’s squinting hard at him and I reckon she was trying to imagine Jimmy with a moustache, you know, to check if he really was Robin’s son. “A trainer is what they practise on. There are two seats in a Mustang trainer so an instructor can sit in. Robin used to borrow it.”

“Oh,” says Jimmy and because he can see the look on the woman’s face, “*those*, I know *those* kind of trainers. I was thinking of something else.”

Then he looks around, spots Goober and yells, “GOOBER? WE GOT SOME TALKING TO DO.”

And Goober, he has the decency to look a little ashamed of himself. Not so ashamed that he doesn’t grab half the deli counter samples off their little trays and fill his pants up but enough ashamed about the other stuff. About the pretending to be a P-51 Mustang Rear Gunner stuff.

Who was it who said that whole, ‘if you’re going to tell a lie, it’s best to make it a whopper’, deal?

A Rear Gunner on a P-51 Mustang.

That’s a big one alright. That’s a doozy.

CHAPTER TWENTY

“You said it,” says Goober. “You said it first, you said, were you my daddy’s Rear Gunner? It was you that said it.”

“That doesn’t mean anything. I said it as a question. I said, were you my daddy’s Rear Gunner? And you said, yeah.”

“Oh,” says Goober, he pulls another cocktail wienie out his pants and eats it.

“Why’d you say it?”

“Well,” says Goober, “I’m getting old now and I need some help when I go away and I hadn’t had a vacation for a while.”

“You told me you were his Rear Gunner before you heard about this trip and judging by how you skipped your way across half of Earhart County moor the other day, you don’t need help.”

Jimmy gets the fish eye.

“Don’t look at me like that. What are you up to?”

Goober sighs and makes a few gestures.

“Quit stalling so you can think of the next lie and just tell me. Did you even know my daddy?”

Goober looks at his feet, “No.”

“No? No? Did you ever even meet him?”

“No.”

“No? Oh this is just swell. Were you even in the war?”

“Sure I was,” says Goober, “everyone going on about your daddy. I shot down 6 planes. Right out on the back in the dark on my own with a pilot

diving and twisting like all hell too. And with four half assed guns that'd jam up and couldn't do much damage even when they didn't. 6 planes I shot down. And I've gone down in a Lancaster 4 times. You know what it's like to fall out the sky in a goddamn AVRO?"

"No."

"No, see? I've cut more donuts out of seat parachutes than you've had hot dinners son."

"I've had a lot of hot dinners."

"Ya, well I've cut a lot of donuts."

"You had donuts on the plane?"

Goober looks at him, "I want you to picture this. I want you to picture it good and hard, you're that far back in that plane you can't see a soul. In a turret so small you can't fit a parachute on your back and so you found yourself a special one you can sit on. Now you think about what your ass would do sitting out there with a goddamn 190 on your tail. Think about just how bad your ass'd pucker. That's cutting donuts son."

"That is so gross," says Jimmy.

"Yeah well, you just think about that next time you have a hot dinner."

"Great," says Jimmy, "just swell."

Another cocktail wienie gets pulled out.

"But it doesn't tell me why you're here."

"Fine, fine."

And then Goober tells him. Rear Gunner Goober Mcfarlane 6 kills ace tells Jimmy about the only time he went for something and lost. Now you might be thinking falling out the sky in a Lancaster four times is losing

but it's not. Not if you make it out. Not when you're the only one to make it out. When the rest of the crew have bailed over Germany and you getting stuck in the turret go down with the plane and are still the only one to make it out, in a potato field in France.

But Goober, Goober *has* lost something. Just the one thing. This is what he tells Jimmy, he tells Jimmy about the Ju-88.

He tells him about how he was on his way back to the airfield and the sun was just coming up and he got these fleck of flyshit sized dots in his sights and he yelled to corkscrew and the pilot's shouting goddamn because they're flying over Dover and it's been a long time since the Luftwaffe have come this far but he's corkscrewing anyhow. And they're flying tail end Charlie see, they're well behind and so there's just Goober, there's just Goober who can stop those flyshit planes from their bombing run. And there's a good chance he would have gotten them too. A real good chance because Goober's got those 17 second life span odds thing. He's got 6 kills and 4 serious crash landings behind him but turns out the planes aren't interested in him. Those two 109s and the Ju-88. They fly right on past with Goober's brownings not even breaking their formation. They head south and Goober's pilot lands and thanks God they didn't get shot down so close to home.

And Goober,

Goober has spent the rest of his life looking for that Ju-88.

"You're kidding me."

“No,” says Goober, “I’ve been all over,” says Goober, “and I haven’t found it. There are no records of it but I know what I saw.”

“So what’s this got to do with my daddy’s lucky charm?”

“Your daddy is down in the official records as downing 39 planes,” says Goober. “But you said he shot down 40. And now we’re here, Earhart County says 40 too.”

“And you think that extra plane is the one you lost?”

“I’ve done this a long time, I’ve visited hundreds of sites of *maybe* downings and discrepancies in kill numbers,” says Goober, “but in the radio log, he says it, your daddy says, it’s a Ju-88. Son I’m so close this time I can smell it.”

“So what now? You find where my daddy went down and the plane will be near?”

“That’s the plan.”

“How will you know it’s *your* plane?” says Jimmy. “How will you know it isn’t some other plane?”

“Oh I’ll know,” says Goober. “I’ll know alright. I’ll be good and sure.”

Now there are other things going on in Earhart County that I haven’t forgotten about. One of those things is Mrs. Stewart-Packard. The old lady who was dancing around Mayor O’Casey’s flangeomatic factory in her pink, wrinkled, illfitting, size-too-big birthday suit to make sure the allies not lose the war. To make sure everything stays not lost. The one who got herself good and sick and is in Earhart County hospital.

Well Mrs. Stewart-Packard is getting worse. She's really quite pleased with herself. She's gotten good and worse and it is going to have all gone to plan. Now I say she's gotten good and worse but the old guy next to her told Jimmy she hadn't gotten herself so good and worse that she didn't finish her pudding cup and then his too when he wasn't fast enough on it. So she's having a pretty good time of it all things said. Although they do have her wired up to a lot of machines and she has to ring the bell to be unhooked to visit the bathroom. She *is* getting worse. Out of sheer will power probably like but she'll get there in the end.

Jimmy's hands are going kind of numb by the time he passes the field with the U-boat because Earhart County roads aren't the smoothest and the cart is rattling about like crazy. He's thinking hard about Goober's lost Ju-88. Except because it's Jimmy he's probably just thinking hard about Goober's lost 'plane'. I doubt so much he would be thinking specifically about a Ju-88. I doubt Jimmy would be able to tell a Ju-88 from a B-24 but then he was never real good at telling things even when it came to his ass or that hole in the ground that people go on about so much.

A B-24 Liberator incidentally was what Jimmy Stewart was flying when he racked up those 9 kills. Not bad 9. Not to be sniffed at. It's funny though because after seeing him in 'It's A Wonderful Life' I was sure he couldn't have gotten more than 5. Course he might have gotten some of those when they were grounded. I'll have to check, because we count the

ones on the ground too, which is fair enough in my eyes. It's still a plane that won't see any more action.

The Luftwaffe didn't count them though. They didn't count the ones on the ground. So when you think about, I don't know, lets say Gunther Rall. When you think about Gunther Rall's 275 downed, we're talking downed right out the sky. We're talking about an amazing pilot and Gunther Rall's not even the Luftwaffe's number one. He's not even Erik Hartman. Fantastic pilots the Luftwaffe, really something else which is why, when I say Jimmy Stewart's 9 is not to be sniffed at, I mean it. I honest to God mean it.

I saw a flying coffin on film once at an air show this time. They'd gotten hold of an old piece of footage from a Luftwaffe gun cam. Old black and white jumpy kind of film. It had a little introduction thing before each plane, like you really needed it, saying what the plane was and what the gun cam was being flown on and stuff. Then it pretty much showed the allied plane and them shooting it down. There were a couple of Liberators getting downed pretty easy. Nice attempt made by a P-47 and the P-38 almost makes it but you know the plane it couldn't get a clear shot on? I swear to God, I know I'm biased but I swear to God only one plane in that footage not only escapes but also manages to kick ass. Yeah you know it. Goddamn Nuthugger. You should have seen it, it was beautiful, that Stang was on screen for just seconds as it whistled past. Because they do you know. Mustangs whistle. Obviously you couldn't hear it on the old film but when you see them fly at air shows they always make sure they bring them good and low so you can hear them whistle.

But boy that Stang played merry hell in that film. It whistles past and then the gun cam plane it's banking and spinning and it can't find that Stang for love nor Pratt and Whitney and then whammy. It comes flying out of the sun, cannons blazing. Ok, ok six .5 machine guns blazing. Beautiful. I'd give the other half of my 1938 Airplane magazine collection to know who was flying that Stang. I really would.

When Goober and Jimmy pull into the drive of SeaView, they can hear music. It's Dr. Zippermeyer. He has a radio out there and while Jimmy doesn't notice it right away, it's tuned into an actual radio station again. Dr. Zippermeyer has it turned to an old timer's station where they play Vera Lynn type stuff. He's probably trying to get on the good side of Lily. Or maybe he's just trying to *find* a good side to Lily. Either way when Jimmy spots them outside in the yard ahead, Dr. Zippermeyer is jiggling and stripping wires and lalaing. Lily is sitting in the same position they left her in. She's been waiting patiently and for a moment Jimmy wonders if Dr. Zippermeyer hasn't switched her off when Lily catches sight of them and unfolds her arms and Goober turns to Jimmy and says, "So er son, just before we go on over, this whole Ju-88 business. Lets just keep it between us shall we?"

Jimmy thinks it over a little and says, "Why?"

And Goober says, "Well it's a little embarrassing you know? Missing such an easy shot and all and there's just no need to tell anyone see."

Well by now, Jimmy's learned not to be quite so dumb. He knows there's something more. He knows there's something Goober isn't telling him,

he just doesn't know what. And part of him, he said, was kind of thinking how much of a big deal could it really be? All of that stuff that happened way back. How important was any of it now? So he says, "Ok grandpa, I'll keep it to myself," and he figures whatever it is, it'll come out sooner or later.

He's right too. He's going to be right. Everything will come out sooner or later but he's not so right about it not being much of a big deal.

Because as deals go? This one's up there with introducing the Spitfire bubble cockpit onto the P-51 and well, other deals just as big.

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

Dr. Zippermeyer looks pleased to see them when they get there. He gets Jimmy to hoik all the machinery into the shopping cart, apologises to Lily and unplugs the mains out from a long extension cord that leads into his apartment through the mail box. Then he starts attaching the cord to a car battery which he puts in the back part of the shopping cart. You know, the place where you can put little kids.

“Where did you get that? Just have it lying around?” Jimmy’s suspicious at the overly innocent look on Dr. Zippermeyer’s face.

“Ah lyink round, ja more or less ja.”

Jimmy squints a little further up the driveway of SeaView. There’s a small blue car parked half on the sidewalk half off with the bonnet up.

“You didn’t get this from that car did you?”

“Vell they not usink just now.”

“You’re kidding me. You stole it? Tell me that’s your car.”

“You vant me to tell you only if true? Or it’s ok to say if not true?”

“You can’t just take other people’s stuff.”

“Typical,” says Goober.

“YOU CAN’T TALK,” says Jimmy. “YOU’RE WALKING AROUND WITH HALF THE DELI COUNTER IN YOUR PANTS.”

“They not usink car right now.”

“How do you know? Are you sure? Are they on vacation?”

“No but it’s Mr. Emery’s son wisitink his father. And he talks so on and on and on. He not usink car for vwhile.”

Jimmy wipes his mouth with the back of his hand, looks about and then says, "Fine, fine, hook her back up and lets get out of here."

He wonders how far they'll get. Three senior citizens with a shopping cart and a helmet wired up to look like the chick in that Fritz Lang movie. Frankly he's doubtful they'll make it out the drive.

Now I always like to think of how those guys looked from an outside perspective. I mean obviously I only have Jimmy's point of view but I like to think about how they looked from Mayor O'Casey's side of things. I mean here we got Mayor O'Casey, he's wrapped all his nudey photos up nice and tight and he's walked out of his office and past nice Mrs. Lacey who tried to give Mr. Omagh her sandwiches that time. And he's taken the elevator down to the ground floor because like I said he's got no reason to get fit

He's walked past the guys in the factory who are doing a pretty good job of getting the flangeomatic making equipment up and running and he's gone out the door. He's stepped over that crack in the car park that the resonating tremor of the acoustic torpedo made and climbed into his car. I'd like to think he was whistling a tune or maybe taking advantage of the radio working on his way to the farmhouse, just past the field with the U-boat. He'd be all pleased with himself in his BMW thinking how he's going to win those elections. Thinking up what he's going to compare the field of wheat to in his speech and all that post electoral celebration crap when he turns a corner and he sees them.

An old lady sitting in the front of a shopping cart wearing an electric bicycle helmet with wires coming out all over, pointing onwards while being pushed by a guy and some old dude with another ancient guy walking alongside fiddling with dials on the enormous piece of machinery behind her.

And not just that but they're doing this chicken run thing with constant checks over their shoulders.

Mayor O'Casey actually pulls over and lets them pass. He rolls down his window because laughing at people is so much more enjoyable when they can see you doing it. And the old guy helping to push, the old American one, the short one that smells funny, the one who hangs out with that guy whose father was some famous person, he goes and salutes Mayor O'Casey through the window and says, "Afternoon son,"

Not Jimmy's finest moment but then not his worst either. Not nearly as bad as that one time in kindergarten when he peed himself during show and tell. I still remember, I still remember he was show and telling about a clay ashtray he'd made at summer camp and how it was shaped like poison oak to remind you that poison oak and smoking were both bad for you. He peed so much it just about filled that thing up and the teacher had to empty it out in the class sink. Still makes me laugh, only problem was, after that, the class were laughing so hard no one took much notice of my talk and I had this amazing model too of a Hawker Hurricane that me and my father had spent most the weekend making. I'd even painted the little

pilot to look as close to Wing Commander Ken Mackenzie that one time in the Battle of Britain as possible.

It was a real beauty that Hurricane. It's a shame it got upstaged so bad by Jimmy's pee.

Now Jimmy said that Lily was real small looking but sitting in the cart with all of Dr. Zippermeyer's creations behind her, she weighed a ton. He said she sat in the front of that cart yelling directions like a little Soviet Boudica. Jimmy even tied her stuffed yak onto the bars at the prow just in case.

Lily would shout stuff like, "Left here. Seexty five degrees."

And Jimmy would shout, "There's no street there."

And Lily would yell to Goober, "He always thees useless?"

And Goober would say, "Ass with two hands sweet tart."

And Lily would say, "Ya, I am thinking thees, I am thinking he need two hand."

And Jimmy would get all mad and start raving, "What do you want me to do? What do you want me to do? You want me to push her right through someone's house? Is that what you want me to do?"

"What I vant is go seexty five degrees left."

"Have you got a couple of wires coming unplugged? I can't go left."

"Oh no, all vires workink gute ja."

"Ok, ok listen, I can go right here and then follow the road round and then get to the town hall, is that any good?"

"Town hall? Ya, town hall, thees is good. Let's go town hall."

“Is your yak in the town hall?”

Lily snorts. “Why would have yak in town hall? You a leetle slow Perdoosa.”

“I am not slow.”

“Son, I’ve been meaning to talk to ya about that.”

“I went to university.”

“Lot of good that did ya.”

“It did me good. I can, I can...I know stuff.”

“Like what?”

“Uh, accounting stuff, I know stuff.”

“I am always needink help mit tax returns,” Dr. Zippermeyer tries to help.

“Yeah? Well I kick ass at tax returns.”

And Jimmy pushes that cart round those funny circular streets of Earhart County until they get to the town hall. The nice lady who works there is drinking a cup of tea and looking out the window. She waves at them as they go past. She’s that nice that she just waves at them like they’re the most normal thing in the world. She also points at the cart and mouths,

“Is that Lily?”

And Jimmy smiles and nods and waves back like it’s some happy day outing and not the secure ward breakout that it is. And Mayor O’Casey’s new hot secretary comes over to look too.

I’d like to think that at that moment, Jimmy was remembering how he peed himself and spoilt my Hurricane model show and tell moment. I’d like to think Jimmy was thinking, ‘Well as bad as it is being seen by a woman as hot as that, wheeling an old lady about in a shopping cart, it’s

still not as bad as that day in kindergarten'. And I'd also like to think he was thinking, 'and how interesting that talk was about Hurricanes and how they flew so good in the Battle of Britain and what a good job had been made of that pilot to make him look like Wing Commander Ken Mackenzie complete with minor facial injuries that he got after knocking that 109 out the sky with his own wing'. You know, despite the wet pants and all. It'd be nice to think that was going through his head. Not that he has much time to think about anything too hard because Lily is getting excited.

"Ve getting close. It not farr."

Jimmy heaves the cart up the curb of the sidewalk, "How close?"

"Close. On otherr side of town."

"And your yak is *there*?"

"Ya. Yak therre."

"You're sure?"

"Ya."

"Because I'm not going to push you around all day."

"Am surre. You not touched it right?"

"I haven't touched your yak Lily."

"Good, then it therre."

And Goober looks at where they're heading and looks at Lily and his mouth drops open and he says slowly: "Ho-ly-crap."

"What? What?"

"I know where she's going."

"Where?"

“Goddamn.”

“What?”

“Goddamn!”

“What?”

“Left seexy five degrees, herre.”

“No,” says Goober, “no, we gotta go right here first, there’s a supermarket on the left, we need to go round it on the right first.”

Lily looks back at him, “You know where yak?”

“Yeah, yeah Lily. I know where your yak is.”

“What? How do you know? I don’t remember a zoo.”

“Goddamn!” says Goober. He slaps Dr. Zippermeyer on the shoulder,

“Goddamn, she’s a goddamn Nightwitch.”

Dr. Zippermeyer screws up his face a little then turns sharply,

“Nachthexen, she is nachthexen?”

Lily beams at the pair of them.

“What’s that mean? What’s a Nightwitch?”

“She is vorst nightmare,” says Dr. Zippermeyer slowly. “It means she is *vorst* nightmare.”

“Well I knew *that* already.”

And Goober, he just has to, he just has to say it one last time: “Goddamn.”

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

And now you know where they're going don't you. Maybe you've known for a while. Jimmy he still doesn't have a clue but when they pull up at their destination, he realizes why he didn't have a clue. Because Lily has directed them to the airfield.

Martin Rosebeck comes running down from his ATC tower when he sees them, "Hello, back already?"

"Where yak?" Lily glares at him good and hard.

"The Yak 7? It's in the hangar, near the back on the left."

"It's a plane? What kind of name is Yak? Yaks aren't aerodynamic, they're not even attractive. Who names a plane Yak?"

"Um well, Yaklov did?"

"Oh."

"I shoulda seen this comin," says Goober. "I mean she was clearly a big enough pain in the ass. I shoulda known she was a fighter pilot."

"You mean," says Martin, "that that is *your* yak in there? It belonged to you?"

"Ya. My yak. Let's go."

Jimmy stands about with his mouth open.

"Let's go ya," Lily rocks back and forth in the cart, trying to make it go.

"Will it still fly?"

"Sure," says Martin, "we have the Earhart County air show every summer. You should watch it next year. One guy took an MiG 3 apart on landing. It was great."

“Let’s *go*.”

“You want to fly it?” says Jimmy.

“Ya.”

“Your World War Two Yak?”

“Ya.”

“You realize you wouldn’t even get your driving license renewed if you applied but you want to fly?”

“Ya.”

Jimmy looks at Goober who shrugs.

“You think she could still fly?”

“I dunno son, I don’t see why not, as long as Frankenmeyer’s wires don’t fall out.”

“I can fly good, *let’s go*.”

“Nachthexen excellent pilots ja. Maybe she be ok.”

And Dr. Zippermeyer’s right. In fact he’s making an understatement because the Nightwitches were amazing. They had to be, in the same way the Tuskegees had to be. If all they flew was equal to the other guys, there’s no way they’d have been allowed in the air force. They had to be better. And they were. You all know how good the Tuskegees were.

Well the Soviet women had a whole load of crap to overcome too.

You ever heard of the Nightwitches? They got called that because they started off doing night bombing runs. And you’re thinking, well that’s swell but so did our boys right? Right but these girls did it in P-102s.

There’s a chance you’ve never seen a P-102 so let me tell you what one is.

It’s an old WW1 biplane. A rickety old, open cockpit, WW1 biplane.

You could probably run faster than that thing could fly but those girls took them up and into combat anyhow.

Sometimes I wonder if God didn't save his biggest balls for those little girls.

You know how they navigated those things? They looked over the side.

One girl had a map on her knees and a watch and she looked over the side.

And they did some stunts. They used to hide by flying below the hedgerows, they'd cut their engines and glide in so you couldn't hear them coming. Then half the time they'd go in threes and get the first one coned on purpose so the other two could bomb while Jerry was concentrating on shooting down the first plane.

Big balls.

And not just that, they were also flying 8, 9 sorties a night. We sent our boys out on 30 or 36 then they could stop. With 30 being plenty. Plenty. More than plenty in a Flying Fortress or a Lanc or a Superfortress. But those girls racked sorties up like nobody's business. In those beaten old biplanes. Two girls a plane. They didn't have Rear Gunners on P-102s but if they had, each pilot would have lost an average of 2.25 Rear Gunners per night. Does that help put stuff into perspective?

And then there were those girls with balls who handled those P-102s so good they got put on the Yaks. Beautiful plane the Yak. One of the most graceful aircraft I ever saw fly. They painted them snow white in the winter. Fantastic little fighters. And that's the plane I was talking about, you know before when I was telling you about that U-boat movie and how they should have had a Swordfish but instead they used a T-6 Texan and

how I read somewhere that there's only one plane that could take on a T-6 Texan.

That was it.

They were talking about the Yak.

Course I've never seen a T-6 Texan take on a Yak. Spit fans will tell you the right Spit could do the job. A bunch of people will talk about those 190s too and no doubt they've got a point but I liked that whole thing about the Yak and the Harvard. It has a nice symmetry to it. And then you up the odds by putting a Nightwitch in it and you got yourself a real dogfight on your hands.

So when Dr. Zippermeyer says, "Nachthexen excellent pilots ja. Maybe she be ok."

Well now you know where that comes from. It comes from those girls and them having their big ass balls and their giving hell when they get in a cockpit.

Jimmy looks at Lily rocking the cart forward inch by inch.

"You're kidding though right? You're not *really* thinking of letting her fly us?"

"Son, I don't like her much but she's a *Nightwitch*."

"She's in her *pajamas*."

"They *clean* pajama and I have, how you say thees?"

"A cardigan."

"I have cardigan."

“That’s not, that’s not really my biggest fear. My biggest fear is not that you’re underdressed.”

“What your fearr?”

Goober stands behind her grinning, “Go on son. Tell the nice lady. Tell the nice lady in the pajamas why you don’t want to fly with her.”

“Well I don’t want to use the ‘O’ word in front of her.”

“Vhat ‘O’ vord? Vhat you mean?”

“How about the ‘S’ word? You wanta try the ‘S’ word?”

“Vhat you *mean*?”

“I think ja they are sayink you are old and senile ja?”

“Vhat? Why you say? Thees something to do vith pajama?”

“And the hat sweet tart.”

“Last time man thinking I can’t to fly good he end up dead.”

“You killed him?”

“No, but he still dead.”

“Jimmy, I think she can do it.”

“Oh boy.”

“I mean it. I know plenty old folks who still fly.”

“She’s in her *pajamas*.”

“You vant me take off pajama?”

“NOooo.”

“We have a choice son. Find the charm or not. This is it.”

“Ya I am only choice.”

“Oh boy.”

“They nice pajama.”

Jimmy breathes in deeply. He looks at the plane and at Lily and at the plane. He can't believe, to be honest, what he is about to say.

"Fine, fine Lily, how about you fly us out to where you and my daddy crash landed that time on the moor."

"Ya ok Perdoosa. Put me into cockpit and I fly to moorr."

"Ok then, let's go get your damn Yak and God help us." Jimmy goes to grab the cart handles and gets stopped by Goober.

"Son, Yaks are solo fighters."

"GODDAMN IT," says Jimmy, "PEOPLE NEED TO START TELLING ME THIS STUFF."

Goober manages to look sheepish.

"It ok Perdoosa, you can sit on ving. I see it done. I see it done on Mustang."

"You said that was an accident by a bad pilot."

"Ya but mechanic ok. Mechanic land vith plane ok."

"I'm not sitting on the wing."

Goober interrupts, "You real sure you can get us to Perdusa's Stang? I mean real sure?"

"Ya."

Goober looks about and then to Martin, "Then we're gonna need a three seater."

"Yak have two ving. Vone person a ving. Balance good ya."

"What planes you got that can fly that can sit three?"

"Four," says Dr. Zippermeyer, "ja ve needink four. I am needink to vork machine."

“What’s to do?” says Goober. “We turn the switch to on. We can do that without you.”

“Ahh there are dials. I am needink to turn dials. Air pressure changink dials.”

“Huh,” Goober glares at Dr. Zippermeyer, “ok fine, what you got that can fly and can sit four?”

Martin points to the plane that Skip brought them over from London on.

“We’ve got the Fokker that’ll take you all.”

“Son? This lady’s what, seventy something? She’s wired up to Dr. Nutjobsteinberg’s machine, with a battery from a real crappy lookin car. She flew props way back when she was a kid and she’s been sittin in her pajamas with a stuffed toy for the last fifty odd years. Now I know the Nightwitches were good but do you really want her to get ahold of anything with a jet engine?”

“Jet? Ees jet? I vant fly jet.”

“You ain’t goin near that jet sweet tart. What have you got in the line of props son? Something easy to handle in case she pops a wire.”

“Well...” Martin’s eyes fix on a plane outside the hangar. Goober follows his line of vision.

“You’re kiddin me.”

“I not fly thees. I NOT FLY VITH THEES.”

“Is gute plane ja. Nicely paintvork.”

“You’re kiddin me.”

“What?” says Jimmy.

“He wants us to go up in the Heinkel.”

That made me hoot when Jimmy told me that. An honest to God Heinkel.

Lily wasn't so pleased though.

"But Heinkel not Yak."

"It'll take four people though."

"Heinkel gute little plane."

"It not Yak."

"Ah hell," says Goober, "you sure you ain't got nothin a little less...a little less Luftwaffe?"

"Not that's a prop."

"Aw man."

"Heinkel too slow. Vant Yak."

"Gute paintvork."

"Oh boy, ok son, we'll take your damn Heinkel. Get her in it and let's just go."

Dr. Zippermeyer gets ahold of Lily and helps her into the plane. She's protesting pretty good with Jimmy bringing up the rear with the machine.

"Heinkel fly gute Lily. It nice plane ja."

"Put yourr Heinkel into yourr ass. Stoopid idea to fly Heinkel. Stoopid."

Goober walks around the back of the plane as Jimmy crashes about inside.

Lily and Dr. Zippermeyer sort her and the machine out in that round plexiglass cockpit Heinkels have. He said Lily started pushing stuff on the dashboard then she snorts and says something to Dr. Zippermeyer.

"Ja, Lily too short for fly this."

"Oh dear God," says Jimmy, "are you telling me she needs a cushion?"

“Ja. Cushion.”

“GOOBER?”

“YEAH?” Goober yells back from outside.

“LILY NEEDS A CUSHION. SHE’S TOO SHORT.”

“Swell.”

“WHAT ARE YOU DOING?”

“Just makin sure we get there in one piece,” Goober zips up his fly and walks back from the tail wheel. “Kid you got a cushion?”

“”Yes sir,” Martin starts to run back into the ATC tower.

“And don’t make it too big or her feet won’t touch the rudder.”

“Yes sir.”

Then Goober climbs in, looks around, sighs and says, “Well at least let me sit in the ventral gunner seat.”

Martin appears out the tower, “Here,” he passes Jimmy a cushion, “and you’ll need these,” he hands over four headsets. “She’ll get real noisy.”

He starts to back away and then he remembers, “Wait, wait, the elections.

You can’t fly, you won’t be allowed to run. It’s in case you see the maze.

You’re not supposed to fly around election time.”

“You mean I won’t be able to run?”

“No.”

“That is a shame. Ah well. Can’t be helped Martin, can’t be helped. Ok

Lily, let’s go.”

Everyone put the headsets on. Dr. Zippermeyer even puts Lily’s on over her safety monitor helmet.

“TAKE CHOCK AVAY.”

Martin hesitates, then he pulls them out from the wheels and Lily fires up the engines bringing them over to the head of the runway. Jimmy said he could see Martin's nervous face in the ATC tower where he'd run up to get a better view.

And then he said, Lily made that Heinkel *sing*. He said even with the headset the closest thing to that much noise he'd ever heard was when the acoustic torpedo went off. He said that baby was loud. He didn't know it but that will have been the throttles. That'll be Lily starting the throttles forward. Then they began on their way down the runway at a snails pace compared to the Fokker but he could actually feel that tail wanting to lift. And she did it beautiful, she pulled that machine off the ground straight as you like.

And I know the Heinkel 111 isn't the most difficult plane to fly but credit where it's due, Lily flew that thing good style. I bet that machine hadn't been flown so nice since it had the Luftwaffe in that weird ass plexiglass cockpit.

Of course Jimmy didn't know just how good a pilot she was. He just told me, yeah she took off, he said it was real loud and she took off.

And well I'd like to tell you about that flight for hours. Just imagine, just imagine you're walking down the road, you're minding your own business when you hear those engines and you look up. And there you see it and you know, you know the minute you see it that it's a Heinkel 111. It's as clear as anything it's a Heinkel 111, it's real easy because of the way that cockpit looks and because it seems like someone's come along and taken a bite out of each wing. That'd be something else to see wouldn't it?

That'd really be something else. Yeah I'd like to tell you what it was like for Jimmy but he didn't say so much about the way it actually flew, except it was real loud. Nice one Jimmy. I could win the big one in Vegas and still not get myself onboard a Heinkel and all Jimmy tells me about being up there was she was real loud.

Oh and that Lily flew them over the sea. She took them out over where Robin shot down that U-boat. The place where the tritium ship went down. And there's still all that tritium. All in one lump because the wind has dropped and the waves are flat and it's just not dispersing.

Lily flies them right over that tritium and banks round until she's over the moor and she starts checking her dials and stuff and shuffling forward on her cushion and looking through all that plexiglass and then she starts to bring them down.

Right on the moor.

Right onto the green mossy moor land.

And Jimmy told me he was getting nervous about landing and Goober didn't look too happy and God knows it's difficult to land an old prop on a standard runway but she brought that Heinkel down so soft it was hard to pinpoint when they actually touched down.

Beautiful. Just beautiful. Because I've seen some real sucky landings at airshows. I've seen Stangs almost get their tails taken off, I've seen them bounce those things and almost tip onto their noses. But not Lily, not Lily in that Heinkel.

Then Jimmy said they managed to get Lily and the machine out of the plane despite accidentally unhooking her a couple of times. And Goober started mooching about when he turns to Lily and says, “This is a runway. This is a runway isn’t it. I can feel the concrete underneath. This used to be an honest to God runway.”

Lily looks back at him and says, “Ya, runway. Bad shape.”

You see, Lily’s taken them somewhere real special. Real, real special. Somewhere out there on the moor with its own goddamn runway. When suddenly Goober, even though Jimmy said they hadn’t been anywhere near that place, Goober falls over something and shouts:

“HEY, HEY, I FOUND MY BINOCULARS. THESE ARE MY BINOCULARS. I FOUND EM.”

And then Lily, who knows how big the moor is and the odds of finding anything, then Lily says, honest to God, she says:

“Oh. You a *Rear Gunner*.”

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

I can't tell you how much this made me sit up and listen when Jimmy told me about that runway. Because you hear about stuff don't you. Secret British war stuff. I swear I love this kind of shit, I really do. A real life runway built right out there on the moor where nobody knows and nobody can find it.

Jimmy yanks the shopping cart out and gets the machine in it again, only this time Lily wants to walk. She looks up the runway and down and makes a decision. Jimmy rattles alongside her with the cart as she makes her way to one end of the runway and turns left. Dr. Zippermeyer and Goober are wandering all over, they don't come running until Lily finds it. This is what she finds. She finds a large flat slab of granite that lies next to some kind of bush and she kneels down, admittedly with some creaking and she runs her fingers around the edge. Then she sighs and snaps at Jimmy, "Vell? You going to help orr you going to catch fly?"

"Ok, ok," Jimmy kneels down, "what do you want me to do?"

"Push here. Using feet, it better using feet."

So Jimmy sits back on his ass and digs his heels into the granite and pushes and goddamn if it doesn't move. It actually moves. And once it gets going it moves like it's supposed to and underneath are steps. See and it'd be just like something out of the movies except it's not ancient looking or Aztec or covered in dirt. It's nice inside, with nice white steps in a caved hallway that's all painted up real clean.

"What the hell?"

“Herre ve arre,” sings Lily.

“Where?”

“HQ.”

And Goober and Dr. Zippermeyer come running as fast as their granddad legs can take them. Because Lily’s taken them to an honest to God secret underground HQ. And hell I got all worked up when I heard that but I guess they got them all over in Britain right? The ROC had loads of underground bunkers and then there are places like Portland Down and that other one in Exmoor. I mean this is the sort of thing you can’t walk a mile without falling over in Britain but to a yank like me, stuck out in Newfoundland, I swear this is as good as it gets.

Well now no, as good as it gets would be a secret underground aircraft hangar, with a bunch of Mosquitoes that have secret recon film still in them or even better, Earhart’s Electra with secret recon film in it.

There weren’t any airplanes in Earhart County moor secret HQ but there was a bunch of other stuff, almost as good. It’s all been sitting there for nearly fifty years. All sitting there secret.

Lily feels about and flicks a switch and the damn lights come on. They actually work. And Jimmy said it kind of looked like a hospital. It was all sterile looking and stuff.

“Ladies first,” Lily gently lowers her legs in.

Goober snorts then grabs hold of the cart as it starts to roll after her.

Well Jimmy follows them down with Dr. Zippermeyer and they walk along this hallway and make a left turn and suddenly the whole place

opens up. Rooms and rooms. There are hooches all set up and I don't know if Jimmy's guesstimations can be trusted but he said you could keep over fifty, sixty people in there. Well Lily walks them through and she stops at one door with a postcard of a white rose tacked to it and she says, "Thees my room," and she goes on in.

Not much in there Jimmy said. A bunch of flying gear, goggles and stuff. Probably worth a fortune now, especially if you got a real life Nightwitch to autograph them. Even a Nightwitch in a junior safety monitor helmet. Then she walks them through a canteen and goddamn if it's not the Mary Celeste of all canteens. Plates on tables with cups and knives and forks, some of them on the floor. No food about any more but jackets still on the benches.

All been left on the go. Everyone had just upped and left and nobody knows why or where they've gone. Except this time there is someone. There's Lily.

"What happened here?"

Lily looks confused, "I don't know."

"I mean where did everyone go?"

"I don't know."

So there we have it. A whole lot of help there. A nice big light shone on the subject.

"Well we know around about *when* it happened," says Goober. "When all those people started walking off the moor in 1945. I figure they all musta come from here."

"Did my daddy come here?"

“Rrobin, Rrobin vas here. Just for shorrt time. He vent back, I stay here.

I help here.”

“Help doing what?”

“Lots things. I help to fly but lots of vork here.”

She walks them into a room full of filing cabinets and desks. There are a bunch of yellow papers on the floor.

“Here,” says Lily, “details of crash vill be here.”

She starts looking through the files. Goober pulls out a drawer in another cabinet and Dr. Zippermeyer goes over to help.

“Not you,” says Lily, “secrets here. You not looking at secrets.”

“Oh,” says Dr. Zippermeyer, “ha ha. Ok ja. But se var is ower now. Ha ha. But I'm not lookink it's ok ja.”

“Ya var ees over,” Lily sidles up to Goober and whispers, “Ve still von var ya?”

“We sure did sweet tart.”

“Ya, ok.”

So they carry on rifling though and Jimmy opens a couple of files but he's not so sure what he's looking for and even if he was, there's not much chance of him finding it when Lily slaps a file down on the desk in the centre of the room and looks about.

“Where he go?”

“Huh?”

Goober looks round too, “Where did Dr. Frankennutjob go?”

Lily throws her file into the cart and wheels it herself out the door, “He not allow, it secret. Many secret.”

“Like what?” shouts Jimmy and runs after her.

“I DON’T KNOW. THEY SECRET.”

So they run through a load more halls and rooms and stuff and they find Dr. Zippermeyer because they hear a crash and when they get there he’s in some kind of engineering room. He’s looking a little ashamed of himself and there’s a bunch of metal and wires on the floor that he’s knocked over.”

“Why you here? You not allow here.”

“Sorry ja? Ha ha. I like ze machines, I am doctor, I like machines. Just lookink, no more.”

Goober eyes him up, “Getting a good bellyful of ideas from here?”

“Nein, nein, this all wery primitiwe thinks. Old stuff only here. They all collectables.”

“Oh yeah? Well I’m still not so sure you should be looking at it.”

Dr. Zippermeyer sighs, “See this? This is a dewice to distribute poison gas. It is nothink new. Nothink needed now.”

“Just keep your hands off it pal.”

Dr. Zippermeyer nods enthusiastically, “Ok then, ok then ja. I’m not touchink ja,” he looks around the room.

“And quit eyeballing them too.”

“Ok, ok,” Dr. Zippermeyer’s eyes land on something in the far corner.

“Hey buddy. Eyes to the front.”

“Ok, ok, eyes front.”

Lily mutters a bunch of something Slavic and opens up the folder, “Ok, ok here, report on crash.”

Jimmy looks over her shoulder. It's written in his daddy's handwriting and it's all there. The 109s, the Ju-88, the crash. Three days of walking on the moor until they come across the HQ base."

"Wait, so he was only on the moor for three days?"

"Three days five nights. It long time Perdoosa."

"And then he came here?"

"Ya, I choose stay, I choose stay and Rrobin say no and afterr veek ve drive Rrobin back."

"That's why he looked like a goddamn movie star when Mr. Omagh found him."

"Movie starr? Rrobin? Pfffft."

"Wait," Goober spots something in the file, "here. It's the coordinates. It's the coordinates of the crash here's where he went down. We got it." He pulls a pencil out his pants and licks the nib and looks for something to write on.

"Here, use this," Dr. Zippermeyer holds out a small notebook.

Goober looks suspiciously at it then takes it. He copies the longitude and latitude out with one hand over the top so Dr. Zippermeyer can't see it.

"And I'm takin the first five sheets too so you can't read the indentation."

"Vhy vant to read? Ha ha."

"So all we have to do it get to this spot?" It's starting to seem easy to Jimmy now. "This is great. We can go get it tomorrow. This is how the story goes. We fly to the big castle and Baba Yaga helps and the princess is Lily who gives us the sword, in that she gives us the coordinates to get it. It's all working out," says Jimmy, "just like the story said it would."

“Yeah,” says Goober, “and when we fly back to Earhart County, everyone will be turned into stone. D’ya think we’ll notice?”

“What story?” asks Lily. “There ees story?”

“Yeah. My daddy left me a story, about Prince Ivan and how he needed a sword to help kill the dragons from the East.”

“Ohhh, *that* story. I tell him thees. I tell him thees story.”

“Really?”

“Ya. When ve crash ve walk three days on moorr. I tell Rrobin lot of story. I tell him thees story. He like it.”

“You did?”

“Ya.”

“So he liked this story so much he found it in a book and left it to me?”

“Ya? I tell him lot of story. Rrobin like story. Hees favourite story about time I find rat in room and all girls run scream out of room in no clothes and only undervearr. And there men pilots from nearr base visiting to talk recon film and they all standing outside vaiting for talk with all girls running no clothes.”

“Ya I can see why Rrobin liked that one.”

“Lots of story I tell vone time it cold and all girls needing get varm.”

“Yeah? How’s that one go?”

Even Dr. Zippermeyer quits looking about to listen.

“And ve move bed togetherr.”

“Yeah?”

“And ve take off blanket.”

“Uhuh?”

“And ve burn bed to make fire. Nice and varrm. Ve get nice and varrm vith fire.”

“Oh.”

“Rrobin like rat story morre betterr.”

“No kiddin.”

When Jimmy told me this, I liked the story about the rat better too.

[h(DX³E⁴n¹)]

Long live that rat.

So Lily snaps closed the card folder and throws it back into the cart and Jimmy said it was getting on late by then and while Jimmy hadn't thought much of it at the time, I was wondering when he told me, just how Lily was going to take off in that Heinkel off the moor runway in the dark. Lily had it covered though. She told Jimmy to grab a couple of cans of gasoline from a store cupboard in the room with all the weird machinery and she threw one in her cart and got Goober and Dr. Zippermeyer to carry one and marched them back through the HQ and up the steps. With Jimmy pushing that cart up for all he was worth.

In fact when they got outside, the mist had rolled in but not so bad they couldn't see up on ahead. A bomber's moon. Shining off that Heinkel. That'd make a nice picture wouldn't it?

Of course Jimmy just said it was a big moon like but I know a bomber's moon when I hear it.

Then Lily showed them two kind of long thin troughs running either side of the runway. Ones that you fill up with gasoline so you can set fire to

them and outline the path. So they all set about pouring that stuff in and Jimmy said they were heading back down into the HQ to get a couple more cans when they heard it.

A piercing yell echoing under that bomber moon. Vibrating through the wings of the Heinkel. In the wilds of the moor, resonating off the granite, a howl of fury.

I swear it. Jimmy said it was the singularly most terrifying moment in his life, hearing that wrenching scream of anger.

And then he realised there were words. The sound was twisting into words and those words were:

“HOW THE BLEEDING SWEET DAMN F**KING HELL YOU
BUGGERING SON OF A F**KING GOD DAMN B*TCH DO YOU
THINK I FEEL?”

Then a man came running out of the mist across the runway and back out into the moor. A young man in uniform.

“Ho-ly-crap.”

“Huh,” says Lily a little surprised, “ees Billy Purcell.”

They all look at her.

“From SeaView?”

“What ees SeaView? I mean from testing department,” she leads them back down the steps.

“Wow, that guy can really cuss.”

“Ya. Ees the nerve gas.”

“What?”

“They make him run through nerve gas and ask how he feel. Ees testing.

Lot of men must do it. Forr testing.”

“They test on people?”

“Therre war on. Ees important.”

“Couldn’t they have tested on like, prisoners or something?”

Silence.

“No offence Dr. Zippermeyer.”

“No problem ja.”

“Son, there’s the Geneva Convetion. You couldn’t test on POWs.”

“Doesn’t sound right though.”

“Nope,” says Goober, “specially because ain’t nobody much usin gas in WW2.”

“I don’t like,” says Lily, “some man die testing. I don’t like but they say important.”

“Important my ass. I guess that’s why they got a machine to distribute gas though.”

“Has nobody noticed,” says Jimmy slowly, “that whatever we just saw though isn’t really Mr. Purcell, seeing as how Mr. Purcell is in his nineties and sitting on a comfy chair in SeaView?”

And Goober and Lily and Dr. Zippermeyer all look at each other and they *know* see. They’ve all seen this kind of thing before. They’ve all slept in a hut full of empty beds because a plane’s gone down with all the crew and yet heard them creeping into the room and lying down on those bunks one by one. They’ve heard the Polish voices talking in the Nissen next door even though they blew on landing. Even Dr. Zippermeyer, even Dr.

Zippermeyer has watched the depression of the mattress next to him as one of his team makes it home despite being dragged so far down into the sea in a Blohm Und Vass Bv 138 that the bubbles won't make it to the surface.

Yeah they've seen it all.

So Mr. Purcell, Mr. Purcell and his nightly run through the poison gas is nothing new to them. To Jimmy now it's a different story. It made him freak. He was almost panting with nerves and so he said, when he made it back into the room with the machine and the cans of gasoline, when he got there and the howling started again, ringing through the underground halls, and out of sheer panic he grabbed hold of some piece of junk machine, and Dr. Zippermeyer dropped his empty gas can and shrieked 'DON'T TOUCH THAT'.

Well Jimmy just about wet himself.

Just like that time in kindergarten with my Hawker Hurricane model.

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

That look of horror on Dr. Zippermeyer's face Jimmy said he'll never forget it. And Dr. Zippermeyer keeps on yelling too, "DON'T TOUCH THAT, MOVE AWAY, MOVE AWAY, PLEASE DON'T TOUCH."

"What the hell?" says Goober.

Jimmy backs away against the wall, well away from the machine.

Dr. Zippermeyer puts his face in his hands. He's saying something in German.

Jimmy looks at Lily, "What is it?"

Lily shrugs.

"Dr. Zippermeyer?"

Dr. Zippermeyer keeps on muttering.

"Hey. Dr. Nutjob. What's going on?"

He looks up, "Don't touch that."

"Ok fine, why not."

"Ahh, uh it is veapon. Wery dangerous veapon."

They all look over at it. It doesn't look much like a weapon. Jimmy said even that it looked a little like a larger version of what Lily had in her cart only with more dials and switches and wires and stuff.

"What kind of weapon?"

"It use soundvawes ja."

"So, like what? It's going to deafen us?"

"Nein. It uses soundvawes you can't to hear. Special soundvawes."

They all stare at him.

“I am doctor of soundvawes. It’s my special area. I am good with soundvawes.”

And it’s true, Dr. Zippermeyer *does* know what he’s doing when it comes to soundwaves. Or at least, he’s famous for *not* knowing what he’s doing with soundwaves but, not knowing what he’s doing with soundwaves on *purpose* and that’s the important part. Because Dr. Zippermeyer spent most of the war making weapons out of soundwaves. You knew you recognised his name right? You just knew it. Well, this is him, honest to God, Jimmy met *the* Dr. Zippermeyer, inventor of the goddamn sound cannon. The one that was supposed to be able to shoot planes out of the sky, shatter them into a hundred thousand pieces by using just the right frequency to blast them.

Damn machine worked too. Worked a charm. So long as the plane was less than eight foot away. Anything further than that and it was useless because see, soundwaves disperse. They get less and less over distance like a stone rippling a pond. It’s high school science really. It’s high school science and yet Dr. Zippermeyer managed to talk Hitler into paying out a wad for its design and construction.

They found it all didn’t they. After the war. A whole yard full of Dr. Zippermeyer’s junk weapons that cost a sweet fortune. Not one of them actually working. Not one of them that could really be used. I’d have liked to have been there when the allies found them. Trying to figure out what oddball device each one was. What hare-brained scheme Dr. Zippermeyer had taken Hitler’s money to create. Money that could have

gone on real weapons and planes and ammunition. On actual stuff that could really kill people.

And there's no way Dr. Zippermeyer could have ever actually thought they could work. No way. Jimmy never asked, he never asked because although he said Dr. Zippermeyer was real smart and seemed like a decent enough guy, he hadn't ever heard of the sound cannon. He'd never even heard of Dr. Zippermeyer's junkyard of soundwave weapons. But you know what? Jimmy didn't need to ask. I just know it. I just know Dr. Zippermeyer couldn't have been dumb enough not to realize soundwaves disperse. And I'm pretty sure he knew Hitler was just syphilitic enough to believe it could work.

I know it doesn't make him Schindler or anything.

I know if he'd been a real hero he'd have used the sundkanone to shatter Hitler's *insides* into a hundred thousand tiny little pieces. From under eight feet away mind.

But I like to think of Dr. Zippermeyer, happily bleeding the Fuehrer dry on promise after promise of the most ridiculous pile of ingenious crap around.

Now round the time Mr. Purcell is shouting HOW THE BLEEDING SWEET DAMN F**KING HELL YOU BUGGERING SON OF A F**KING GOD DAMN B*TCH DO YOU THINK I FEEL and Dr. Zippermeyer is yelling DON'T TOUCH THAT, MOVE AVAY, MOVE AVAY, PLEASE DON'T TOUCH, Mr. Omagh and the landlord are working hard. They're trying to figure out just why Mayor O'Casey would

get so mad about Mr. Omagh seeing his mail. With the landlord doing most of the work seeing as how much ginger wine Mr. Omagh's had. They have a large map of Earhart County out on the bar counter with a bunch of crayons and the nice lady from the town hall who finished work a half hour ago and who lives next to the landlord's brother, the one who saw Mr. Purcell on the moor that time, she's there too because the landlord called up his brother and had him go next door and ask her to come on over to the Earhart's Vega. She's getting sherry, as much as she can drink, on the house, for being there. I reckon she's too nice to take real advantage though. I reckon she'd only have a few and maybe some pretzels or something.

Well they've colored in all the area of land on the map in different colors and the nice town hall lady has made a few notes of people she's going to call in the morning. Between them they're doing a real neat job of it. They think they have a good idea of what Mayor O'Casey is up to. And get this. It's big. It's real big.

Meanwhile down underground in Earhart County secret HQ, Dr. Zippermeyer is nervously fingering the machine. It actually has a name this device. Dr. Zippermeyer calls it a calcium efflux machine. You can look it up. It's all there. It uses soundwaves to cause an efflux of calcium ions from brain tissue. You've got to get the frequency just right. It has to be spot on. And when you've got it slap bang in the dead eye center, you get, well you get something that looks a little like Alzheimer's.

“Hold it,” says Jimmy, “does that mean Lily’s dementia is because of this?”

“Ja, I am thinkink so. This is vhy I fix it usink soundvawes.”

“And you knew this all along?”

“Nein. I knew Britain had calcium efflux veapon. I am not knowing they use it on people. Doesn’t look like vay to aim it.”

“Wait. You knew about this machine?”

“Ja.”

“When did you find out about it?”

“Near end of var. They sendink U-boat and aircraft to destroy.”

“No kidding,” says Goober, “that’s why there was a goddamn U-boat in Earhart County waters. That’s where that Ju-88 was heading.”

“Vhat Ju-88?”

“Uh, nothing.”

“You saw Ju-88?”

“Maybe.”

“Ve sendink out Ju-88 to stop machine.”

“Ya don’t say.”

“You saw this plane?”

“Possibly.”

“Vhat happen to plane?”

“I dunno. Why’re you so interested?”

“Not interestink, just vonderink. I, I like planes ja. Ju-88 nice plane.”

“No it vasn’t.”

Dr. Zippermeyer looks at Lily.

“Ya, Ju-88 vas piece of junk-er.”

“Ha ha,” says Dr. Zippermeyer, “I see vhat you did there.”

There’s a silence. Goober’s eyeballing Zippermeyer and Zippermeyer’s eyeballing Goober and Jimmy’s eyeballing the pair of them and then there’s a crash.

“What?”

Lily’s taken a chair and she’s using it to smash up the calcium efflux machine. She looks about mid swing, spots a fire axe and wheels her cart over to it. Dr. Zippermeyer hands her one of the chair legs to break the glass.

“Are you sure you should be doing this?” says Jimmy. “I mean maybe we need this. I mean it’s got to be like the world’s only uh, Alzheimer’s gun.”

“You needing thees Gooberr? I'm not needing thees. Drr. Zipperrmeyer?”

You needing thees?”

Lily turns to face them with the fire axe.

“No.”

“No. Not needink.”

“Good ya,” Lily smashes up the machine some more, “nobody needing it Perdoosa.”

She drops the axe and wipes her hands on her cardigan, “Ok. All ready forr to go?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Ja ready.”

“Anythin you say sweet tart.”

Then the four of them head out to the Heinkel and the mist and Mr. Purcell's spirit with Dr. Zippermeyer just saying the once, "Sooo, how close you see Ju-88? You get close? Where vere you?"

And Goober saying, "None of your business Dr. Fruitloop."

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

Well they set fire to the gasoline and fight to get the shopping cart and Dr. Zippermeyer's machine back into the Heinkel. They make sure Lily's cushion is good and in place and Jimmy probably mumbles his way through a prayer then Lily takes off that moor runway like it was a walk in the park. She banks left and circles Martin Rosebeck in his ATC tower a good three times and he's got all the runway lights blazing for her landing which she does smooth as anything. She taxis it right into its spot outside the aircraft hangar and they climb down to find Martin waiting. He's put a Barry Manilow album on and he's saying, "I told Earhart County that it was Skip flying. I told them on the radio show but if Mayor O'Casey finds out, there's no way you can run for elections Jimmy."

And it's all very well Martin telling Earhart County it was Skip. It's just fine and dandy but there's a good chance, with the radios actually working again that nobody in Earhart County will have been listening. There's a good chance they will have taken the opportunity to listen to a real radio station with a professional, instead of Rosebeck and his daily Earhart County gazette readings.

"I guess we'll have to just see Martin," says Jimmy, "there's a good chance I'll not be able to run."

Martin sighs, then he perks up a little, "How did the Heinkel fly?"

Lily scowls at him, "Like pile of crrap. Where Yak?"

So Martin takes them to the hangar and it's right there, at the back where he said it would be. A real beauty. With white roses painted on the cowl

to show how many kills she'd gotten. Jimmy said there were a fair few too. Over 20 at least. And that was what they called Lily wasn't it. The White Rose of Stalingrad, even though her name was Lily like, they called her The Rose. She was something else. Really something else.

And while Lily wanted to get in that Yak 7 cockpit real bad, Jimmy and Goober wheeled her off back to SeaView with Dr. Zippermeyer. They're all pretty exhausted. Even Jimmy, despite being a good forty five, fifty years younger, even Jimmy was real tired. So tired that when he got them back he almost didn't help Dr. Zippermeyer get the car battery back into Mr. Emery's crappy blue car.

Then they wheel the cart behind Lily back towards the secure ward with Dr. Zippermeyer shouting from his yard, "Is gift ja. Is belongink to Lily now."

Mayor O'Casey's ex-secretary has been waiting for them, "Well that was a long walk."

"Ah, yes, we uh took her up onto the moor."

"Oh that sounds nice. Was that nice Lily?"

But Lily's not plugged in, the calcium in her brain is all run amok so she just stares in a confused way at Mayor O'Casey's nice ex-secretary and continues to shuffle next to Jimmy.

"What's in that shopping cart?"

"Oh it's a gift. She uh seems to like it."

Jimmy and Goober hurry on past through the electric doors, past Mr. Purcell in a comfy chair and into Lily's room.

Jimmy looks about. There are yak posters all over the walls. There are a couple of china yaks on a shelf next to yak picture books and yak nature videos. I mean just about everywhere Jimmy looked in that room there was some kind of buffalo type creature on it. The staff at SeaView really had done their best.

“Lily’s gonna do her nut,” says Jimmy unwinding the cable and plugging the machine in.

Lily’s head snaps up.

“Hey sweet tart, we got you back to your room ok. You’re all plugged in.”

“Vhy smell of pee?”

“I know,” says Goober. “Maybe we can get you some air freshner.”

“It doesn’t smell of pee,” says Jimmy. “This is a nice place, they keep it real nice.”

“Yeah whatever son. Don’t see you wantin to live here.”

Lily peers through the doorway, “Oh. Ees Billy Purcell.”

“Yeah, you might just recognise a bunch of people round here.”

“Huh,” Lily thinks about it, then looks about the room, “Vhy have mooses on vall? Vhy have moose everywhere? Vhy the mooses?”

And Goober and Jimmy get good and halfway out the door until Jimmy says, “Uh, that’s not a moose Lily, that’s uh, that’s a yak.”

And they both run like all hell before they catch any kind of response.

Now the pub has all shut up by the time Jimmy and Goober make it back to the Earhart’s Vega. Mr. Omagh and the nice lady have gone home and

the big map thing they had out has been folded up real neat and stashed under the bar.

Goober helps himself to a whiskey to help him sleep under the close scrutiny of Bader's legs and they pretty much head straight off to their rooms. Jimmy told me the Lindberg picture in his room didn't look much like Jimmy Stewart so I reckon it must have been a painting of the real guy, not like the dude in my radio control model Spirit of St. Louis. He also told me he slept pretty good that night, knowing that they'd come closer to finding his daddy's plane and so finding that charm too.

I asked him when he was telling me about it if he felt good about solving the whole secret HQ place and that calcium efflux machine dealio. And Jimmy said, 'Oh yeah, that was good too.' You know in a way that made me think he had no real idea how many people out there would have loved to have come across something so cool as that. People like me. I would have loved that.

Now the next morning Mr. Omagh is hungover a doozy. I know this because when he comes back into the pub, Jimmy saw him and said he looked like he had a real doozy of a hangover. And so I guess it wasn't so bad a thing that his newly appointed status as the part-time wheat meant he didn't have to go into work that day. He really wasn't in any kind of good shape for cataloguing lost stuff. He was in the sort of shape that needs to stay in bed with a crappy movie on TV and a good couple of gallons of kool aid. That's not what he got though, I mean he might have started the morning off with a crappy movie and kool aid but he got made

to get up at about ten a.m. He got made to get up by a phone call from the nice lady at the town hall and told to get his sorry drunken ass back to the Earhart's Vega. Except because it was the nice town hall lady she probably said it in a much nicer way.

Anyhows by the time Goober and Jimmy are finishing off their breakfast and talking over how they get to the coordinates Lily gave them, especially seeing as how compasses did that whole spinny Mount Fuji thing on the moor, the nice lady comes walking into the bar. She's on her midmorning coffee break from her job at the town hall. And she has a coffee too see, just to show she's not screwing anyone over.

About ten minutes after she walks in. Jimmy sees Mr. Omagh chaining his bike up outside the window of the Earhart's Vega and shuffling in good and slow like you do when you're trying not to hurl chunks.

The nice lady is saying stuff like, "I know exactly what he's up to. I called up the board this morning, they told me everything."

She's been waiting for Mr. Omagh and she's pulling the map out from the bar and spreading it open.

"What's going on?" says Goober.

"I've just found out why Mr. Omagh got fired," says the nice lady.

"Got part-timed," says Mr. Omagh real soft. He's not looking such a good color.

"You want some bacon and eggs?"

"No, no thank you," says Mr. Omagh.

"You should have some," says Goober. "Nuthin better for a hangover.

That and katsup on toast."

“No, no I’m fine,” says Mr. Omagh, “I’m F¹² thank you.”

“Ok then but food’ll help I’m telling ya.”

“Maybe some coffee.”

The landlord places a coffee onto the counter, “Ok, so what did you find out?”

By this time Goober’s standing right in amongst them like it’s totally his business.

“Mayor O’Casey’s been planning something,” says the nice lady.

“Something he thought Mr. Omagh had found out when he saw that letter.”

“What?” says Goober.

The nice lady points to the map. There’s the large area of Earhart County and a load of the moor all coloured in yellow by crayon that they’d done yesterday.

“You see everything that’s yellow?”

“Yup.”

“That’s all land that Mayor O’Casey owns.”

“Holy crap. That guys owns a lot.”

“Yes. He’s been buying it up. He’s been buying it piece by piece for the last twenty five years.”

“But there are houses on this land.”

“Yes, he bought the leaseholds. People have bought the houses but everything is still his.”

“Jeez.”

“And it’s all just sitting around, not making any money.”

Even Jimmy stands up and peers over now.

“But Mayor O’Casey’s found a way to make it pay.”

“How?”

“He’s going to turn Earhart County into a reservoir.”

Can you believe it? I mean I know villages have been flooded lots of times before to make reservoirs when the villagers were dead set against it. I guess this kind of stuff just happens in Britain but it breaks my heart to think of such an aviation loving community getting it. Ending up like all those other villages, where all that’s left of them is a sign pointing to the sunken town. I’ve read about it. I knew a guy once who had a cousin living in a place in Wales that got turned into a reservoir. Man he was pissed. He had just had a new kitchen fitted too.

So here it is, Mayor O’Casey is going to let the water take a town that loves the air.

What did I say before? About some other poor bastard paying? That poor damn bastard being Earhart County. With Mayor O’Casey being the only stalk of wheat to come out if it standing.

“Goddamn,” says Goober. “I knew I didn’t like that guy.”

“I don’t like him either,” says Mr. Omagh.

“Well um,” says Jimmy against his better judgement, not that he’s ever had particularly good judgement, “can’t someone stop him?”

And then there’s this whole movie moment where everyone turn and look at Jimmy and they’ve got this real thoughtful look on their faces. And the landlord says slowly, “Well, there *is* something.”

The town hall lady takes a slurp of her coffee pats Jimmy nicely on the hand. “Yes,” she says, “There *is* something. You really do have to run the election maze.”

“Oh man.”

“And win,” says Mr. Omagh.

“Oh yes,” says the nice lady. “You’d have to *win*.”

“I said it,” says Goober, “I said you gotta run that maze.”

“Huh?” Jimmy starts to panic. “But Martin said. He said I couldn’t run because we flew and it was against the election rules.”

“You flew yesterday?”

“Yeah, Lily took us up in some old plane.”

“What old plane?”

“The Heinkel,” says Goober, “we went up in the Heinkel.”

“You’re kidding I thought I heard something,” says the landlord. “How did she fly?”

“Real smooth,” says Goober.

“Yeah? Man I wish I’d known it was the Heinkel. I’d have liked to have seen that. I missed it fly last air show. I was working the beer tent.”

“I’m tellin ya son, I ain’t never thought I’d go up in one of them.”

“I’ll bet, I’ll bet. I remember when they brought her in for restoration?

You wouldn’t believe what they did, they did her up so good. We all collected money for it too. I brewed my own beer and all the profits went to it. Remember the Vega beer?”

Mr. Omagh nods.

“I sold it cheaper than the piddle. Not because it tasted bad but because your headache kicked in before you managed to see the bottom of the glass.”

“There was a lot of ae⁷ing.”

“That’s nice. All of that is nice,” says the town hall lady, “but it doesn’t allow Jimmy to run for Mayor.”

“Oh.”

“Oh.”

“Did anyone see you fly?”

“I don’t know.”

“Yeah, maybe nobody was out lookin on purpose but that Heinkel made enough noise.”

“Yes,” says Jimmy, “lots of noise. It’s a real shame. I just can’t run.”

“Well did you *see* the maze?”

“Why?” asks Goober. “Because if he did he won’t be able to run the maze and if he didn’t there’s no chance he’ll win?”

“Hey.”

“Maybe we can get away with this, maybe nobody will find out it was you.”

“You think?” Jimmy’s heart sinks.

“We’ll have to see.”

“Swell,” says Jimmy.

And it’s then that Earhart’s Vega’s door opens and in walks Dr. Zippermeyer. He looks around red eyed, spots Goober and grimaces, “I vant talk mit you. I vant talk priwate. It about ze Ju-88.”

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

Goober looks at Dr. Zippermeyer for a long time. He glances round at everyone and finds them watching real expectant.

“Is that right?” says Goober. “Private?”

“Ja I vant talk priwate.”

“We won’t listen in,” says the nice lady. “Just carry on like we’re not here.”

“Just like we’re not here,” says the landlord.

“Like the wheat that doesn’t listen,” says Mr. Omagh.

“You mean it has no ears?” says the nice lady.

“Can I get you anything to drink?”

Dr. Zippermeyer puts a bag down on a table top, “Ok, ok ja. You got hot honey? Mit lemon? My eyes hurtink like allergy ja. I have small allergy.”

“Poor you,” says the nice lady, “I have a terrible allergy to cats. Make me sneeze something awful. It’s their saliva you know. People think it’s the hair but it’s the saliva and they lick themselves and it gets on the hair. Makes me sneeze real bad. Absolutely worth it though, you should see my cat. He’s a great, hairy, big thing, all stripy and gray. He really could be in a commercial.”

“My brother is allergic to strawberries,” says the landlord who’s fixing Dr. Zippermeyer’s drink. “Something not fair about that. Everybody likes strawberries. Somehow it’s not right to be allergic to them.”

“I think there’s a possibility I may be allergic to ginger wine,” says Mr. Omagh.

“Sure,” says the landlord, “you tell yourself that.”

“I have the hayfever ja? Fever mit hay. This is my allergy.”

“Oh you poor thing and it’s not even spring anymore.”

“Ja, normally I am ok but field near SeaView is beink cut.”

There’s a silence.

“Which field would that be?”

“Behind U-boat is a field. It is this field ja.”

“Huh,” says the landlord, “now that *is* interesting.”

“I’m on it,” says the nice lady, “or even better, I’ll get Sylvia on it.” She gets up and walks out the door.

“Who’s Sylvia?.”

“Mayor O’Casey’s secretary.”

“The hot one?”

“Oh yes.”

“She’s very nice,” says Mr. Omagh. “One time she lost a shopping bag with three oranges and a bottle of sink cleaner in it and it got handed in and she was so pleased she gave me one of the oranges.”

“Yup. A real looker too. You know her grandma dated your daddy one time?”

“Alice Walker. She was lovely in her day. He took her up flying a few times. And one time he φed her at a dance and ended up F¹λ³ing her.”

“φ?”

“Got her drunk.”

“Really? The old dog. What’s F¹↓λ³?” asks Goober getting interested.

“Walking her home and apologising to her parents.”

“Oh.”

“Ja? I heard he B³ed and she M⁶ed him.”

Mr. Omagh coughs up some coffee, “Well ah, that is one version yes.”

“Ja.”

“What’s in the bag?” Jimmy points on over to the bag on the table and Dr. Zippermeyer slurps some more of his hot honey and lemon and wipes his nose on his sleeve and picks up the bag.

“Is for Goober.”

“About the Ju-88?”

“Ja.”

“Ok, ok take a seat.” Goober walks him over to a table a little way from the bar. Jimmy follows.

“What’s this about?”

“It’s just that Ju-88 son. It’s nothing serious.”

“I want to hear what he’s got to say.”

“It’s just a little plane. You don’t got no interest in planes.”

“They’re growing on me.”

“Ok,” Goober looks at Dr. Zippermeyer, “what about his Ju-88? What do you want to talk about? It’s just an ordinary plane.”

“Oh, ja, ja nothink special but it nice to find ja. I vant to find nice plane. Nice Ju-88.”

“Goober wants to find it too, he told me.”

“Yeah son, I want to find that Ju-88. So you any idea where it is?”

“Vell I been lookink. I been lookink hard.”

“Yeah? Where you been looking?”

“Vell see, I been lookink in special vay.”

“Ya don’t say.”

“Ja.”

Jimmy looks over at the landlord and Mr. Omagh. They're straining real hard to listen in.

“I am usink,” Dr. Zippermeyer shrinks down and whispers,

“*soundvaves.*”

“Oh boy.”

“*Usink soundvaves,*” whispers Dr. Zippermeyer again for good measure.

“Ok, ok fine. What ya find out?”

“Vell I markink map,” Dr. Zippermeyer opens the bags and pulls out an identical map as the nice lady had. Only instead of having a big round area coloured in yellow, it’s got three areas ringed in red.

“See red circle?”

“Yeah.”

“They're three place have strange soundvawe.”

And Jimmy looks at the map and at those three red circles that have the strange soundwaves and he told me they were ringing Mayor O'Casey’s flangeomatic factory, a good part of the moor and the area of the sea where the tritium ship used to be.

Dr. Zippermeyer smacks the circle in the sea, “Ja tritium effect my machine so I am not knowink if Ju-88 is undervater or not. It effect soundvawe machine.”

“Really.”

“Ja and also granite on moor can maybe effect soundvawes. It wery big area to look but there is good probability it here now ve have Lily, now Lily give us coordinates.”

“Gave *me* the coordinates.”

“Ja you have coordinates.”

“And what about his place?”

“This, Mayor O'Casey's factory. I vent here and look. It not here.”

“Yeah? You looked real hard?”

“Ja. I look, it not here.”

“Huh,” says Goober, “well *you* may have looked. But I haven't.”

He stands up purposefully.

“You want to take my car?” asks the landlord.

“I thought you weren't listening.”

“I wasn't but Mayor O'Casey's factory will take you a while to get to.”

“Oh yes,” says Mr. Omagh, “it takes me half an hour to bike.”

Goober sighs, “Fine, fine, give me the keys. But keep this to yourself would you?”

“Of course yes. Hush hush.”

“I'll be the wheat that keeps its mouth shut.”

“Good.”

Jimmy stands up too.

“You can stay here son. We won't be long.”

“No I think I ought to go. I ought to drive,” Jimmy turns to the landlord,

“he's got no insurance.”

“I can drive just fine.”

The landlord looks between them, “No insurance at all?”

“Said he didn’t have it the first time he came over. So he doesn’t need it now.”

“This bad ja, I have gute insurance, wery cheap for senior citizens, special price.”

“Fine then you drive.”

“Ach I never learn to driwe car.”

“What?”

“Ja, always doink more important thinks.”

Jimmy takes the keys off the landlord, “So? Shall we go?”

So Goober gets his coat and his binoculars and they all climb into the landlord’s car and even though the steering wheel is on the wrong side and it’s been a real long time since Jimmy drove a stick shift, they still manage to get themselves to Mayor O’Casey’s flangeomatic factory.

It is a little way out, not crazy far but far enough so as not to bother the people of Earhart County. You know in case there’s any sudden increase in demand for flangeomatics and production needs to continue through the night.

Jimmy turns the radio on in the car too and Martin is talking about a yard sale. It’s pretty dull stuff so Jimmy flicks about and gets more stations.

The rapping sound has gone again. Martin’s monopoly of Earhart County listeners has been stopped again. Probably to the relief of Martin too, there’s only so much you can say about a yard sale.

Jimmy glances at Goober in the rear view mirror and at Dr. Zippermeyer next to him. Dr. Zippermeyer was perfectly happy not to sit in the front but Goober said a Rear Gunner's idea of calling shotgun was to get the back seat. There's something going on. Jimmy said he just knew it. He just didn't know what.

"You think maybe Lily would want to come help us look for this plane?"

"Yup."

"Shall I go pick her up?"

"Nope."

Dr. Zippermeyer snuffles a little in the seat next to him.

"So what's a yunk 88 thing look like?"

"*Junkers* 88."

"Ya whatever. What's it look like. You know, so I'll know it when I see it."

"It looks like a plane."

"Aaand."

"Like a real old plane."

The car goes silent.

"Oh, ok I see. Like that old Heinkel thing."

"Not anything like a Heinkel. Nothing at all like a Heinkel. I mean for a start, it's not a Heinkel."

"Oh I see then."

"Second, a Ju-88 is faster and can go higher."

"Right, I'll have no problem identifying it then. If I see it."

"It doesn't have bites out the wings."

“No bites.”

“It’s got a raised cockpit, it doesn’t have an elliptical tailplane and it looks kind of the same shape as a Bristol Beaufort.”

“Really? Like the Bristol Beaufort? Well now.”

“So if you see anything like that and it’s a plane and it’s old, then you found it ok?”

“Ok.” Jimmy steers the car real careful up the factory’s drive. All up both sides of the road is moor land. Brush and heather and stuff. Plus kind of marshy looking patches too. Then up ahead right in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of Earhart County moor nowhere, is the factory. It’d be nice right now if the factory loomed wouldn’t it? If it was all gothic and looming and foreboding and that kind of shit but Jimmy said it wasn’t anything special. Just some big square place built specially to put a flangeomatic factory in at as low cost as possible.

The car park is pretty much empty, while lots is being done to get the flangematic making machinery up and running again, things still aren’t ready for production. About half the staff aren’t needed yet. And then also you got extra empty space where Mr. Omagh’s bike would be. If he weren’t part-time.

Jimmy parks the car in a spot good and far away from the entrance and Mayor O’Casey’s BMW. He’s not so sure they’re not trespassing.

“Ok then Goober. Do you see it?”

Goober scowls at him in the rear view mirror and climbs out of the car. He looks around him at the car park then pulls his binoculars from round his neck and has a good eyeball.

Dr. Zippermeyer climbs out the car too and walks round it to stand next to him. He wipes his nose on the sleeve of the hand that's not holding the bag.

"You see anything?"

"Not yet."

"I did look here."

Goober takes his binoculars away from his eyes, "Maybe it's in the marsh."

"Ja, is possibly."

Jimmy gets out of the car, "I don't really want to wade into that stuff.

What if it's deep?"

"How about we prod it, with a stick or something."

"A stick."

"Yeah. Lot of planes lost in bogs about."

I've heard plenty of stories about old planes in bogs too. Usually there's a Polish airman involved. Still in uniform and standing nearby. You know what I'm talking about. Some dude in the 70s drives past all the time and every time there's the ghost of some Polish airman standing there and when they dredge the bog they find a bomber with the pilot still in it.

There's a lot of that about. Lots of bogs and Polish airmen. And why not I say. The Polish airmen were just short of insane but they made goddamn amazing pilots. Brilliant gunners. Really amazing airmen. And damn if I didn't hear someone talking about how there's a photo that got taken of the ghost of Guy Gibson's dog. It got run over good style and then turns up in a photo two weeks after it bought the farm. So frankly if

Guy Gibson's dog can get itself a haunting then all the Polish airmen who've crash landed in bogs deserve them too.

Well Goober is thinking what I was thinking when Jimmy told me there were marshes around Mayor O'Casey's factory. He's thinking Robin Perdusa downed that Ju-88 into a bog and over thirty years later Mayor O'Casey came along and built himself a place to manufacture devices for lonely men on top.

Dr. Zippermeyer and Jimmy follow behind Goober obediently as he strides across the car park. They're not concentrating so much on where they're going and that's why, Jimmy told me, when Goober stops suddenly at the big crack, the one in the spot where Mrs. Stewart-Packard did her nudey dancing, the one caused by the acoustic torpedo blowing up the tritium ship, when Goober stops at the crack, Jimmy slams into the back of him and Goober lets go of his binoculars.

"Goddamn."

"Sorry."

"You really got the kiss of death for those binoculars dontcha son."

"Sorry."

Goober sighs, kneels next to the crack and peers down.

"Can you see them?"

"Nope."

Dr. Zippermeyer reaches into his bag, pulls out a torch and hands it to Goober.

"Can you see them now?"

"Huh."

“What?”

“Well now...”

“Yes?”

“I found the Ju-88.”

CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

Just like that.

“I found the Ju-88.”

And Dr. Zippermeyer kneels himself down next to Goober and peers down the crack and then turns and says, “You really are Rear Gunner.”

So Jimmy has a good look down there and it doesn't look like too much to him but he can tell there is something big down there.

“So what now?”

“We get it out.”

“How?”

Goober sits back on his heels, “I don't know son. I guess we'll need some kind of drill or something to get through the concrete.”

“Needink to be careful ja. Don't vant to hurt plane.”

“Yeah, maybe we could drill through just the top part.”

“Where do we get a drill?”

“I don't know son.”

“I think, I am thinkink ve need help.”

“Yeah? You know someone?”

They all stare back down the crack.

“It'll have to be someone who really knows what they're doing and who isn't afraid to do it to Mayor O'Casey's car park,” says Jimmy.

“What if ve got many people?”

“How many? Are you talking about your friends in Seaview? Because half of them need help getting to the bathroom. I can’t see them bein much use here.”

“Nein, nein, I’m talkink about *everybody*. The whole Earhart County.”

“You think Earhart County would help us?”

“I think Earhart County vould help Robin Perdusa.”

“Goddamn you're right. Jimmy, you get your ass on over to the ATC tower. Get on air and tell em, tell em here’s the chance they’ve always wanted of getting your daddy in the number one ace slot. Tell em we need their help to dig up Robin Perdusa’s unrecorded 40th kill. They’ll go crazy for it. We’ll have the whole town out here.”

“The whole town? With the radio working properly again we’ll be lucky if anyone is listening to hear it. Really, I can’t imagine anyone staying tuned in after that whole yard sale thing he was doing.”

Dr. Zippermeyer looks at him and coughs politely, “I can go and svitch soundvawe scanning machine back on.”

“Huh?”

“Ja, this is vhat blockink radio stations.”

“That was you?”

“Ja.”

“Mighta known.”

“Sorry ja. I vas lookink for Ju-88. I turn it off vhen ve find Lily.”

“Ok, ok so if I drop you back off at SeaView, you turn the machine back on so when I go on radio everyone will be listening?”

“Ja, unless they like tappink sound.”

“I’ll stay here. I’ll stay here and guard the plane,” volunteers Goober.

“Right. You make sure it doesn’t go anywhere.”

“Ha ha wiseass. Listen, when you come back bring somethin to eat.”

Jimmy and Dr. Zippermeyer walk back over to the car and climb in

leaving Goober standing around in the car park trying not to look

suspicious. They drive back down past the moorland and into town.

“You think we can really get that plane out?”

“Ja, I have hopeful ve can do it ja,” says Dr. Zippermeyer. “You are

knowink ve should have turned left back there ja?”

Now on his way to SeaView, Jimmy actually drives past Earhart County

hospital. In fact he drives past a lot of places because he gets kind of lost

and Dr. Zippermeyer is too polite to point out where he’s going wrong.

Jimmy really could do with a navigator and a Rear Gunner to give him

directions but I mention Earhart County hospital because Mrs. Stewart-

Packard is in there trying good and hard to get dead. It’s taking an awful

lot of concentration and she keeps forgetting and starting new jigsaw

puzzles and stuff. On top of that she has a TV in her room and there's a

particularly interesting plot line happening in her favourite soap.

Jigsaws and soap operas really can get in the way of important stuff. I had

a five thousand piece jigsaw of Joseph Frantisek once. It was of him

flying his Hurricane and blasting all hell out of the skies. Czech guy

really but awarded the Polish VM 5th class. 17 kills. Took down

Messerschmitts galore. Totally insane like but one of the best damn pilots

in the war. Got the DFM and a bunch of other stuff too. In fact even

though he's not Polish there could be a bog out there with his name on it. He's probably throwing a stick for Guy Gibson's dog as we speak. Anyhow I'll be damned if I got much of anything done until I got that final 109 in a nose dive finished. Took me a week and cost me my Spanish high school final too. That mad Czech was worth it though. And it's not like I'm needing to use much Spanish in Newfoundland anyhow. I'm telling you about Jimmy driving past the hospital see not because I like to point out just how crappy Jimmy's sense of direction is, although boy is it crappy. I'm telling you because I don't want you to forget about old Mrs. Stewart-Packard. Mind you God knows why you might forget about her. I still can't shake the mental image of her dancing in the nude that Jimmy put in my head. I just haven't been able to look at an orange in the same way either.

Anyway she's important Mrs. Stewart-Packard. She's important Chekov style.

So Jimmy stops the landlord's car outside Dr. Zippermeyer's yard and the old guy runs inside and is gone for a couple of minutes then waves at Jimmy through the front room window, giving him the thumbs up sign. Jimmy turns the radio on and the rapping sound is back. Fourteen beats a minute. This whole time it'd been Dr. Zippermeyer's soundwave machine scanning for that damn Ju-88.

He turns the dial to Martin..

“...and there were a couple of nice lampshades and a toaster that you could probably fix nice and easy. And those of you out there needing pans, I saw plenty of pans, they were going cheap.”

Jimmy sighs. Real exciting stuff Earhart County radio.

He drives back out of Seaview leaving Dr. Zippermeyer to get his stuff together and fix sandwiches and heads on over to the airfield. He parks on the grass next to the Heinkel. He even says it out loud, “Heinkell 111,” he says and I reckon he’d know another one if he saw it too. I reckon he’d learnt enough to tell a Heinkell 111 if one flew over.

He climbs up the ATC tower and boy is Martin ever pleased to see him. He’s all, “...and there were some lovely knitting patterns with only a few pages missing which I’m sure you could...PERDUSAAAA. Ladies and gentlemen we have Robin Perdusa’s son here again. welcome to the show, welcome to the show. What brings you here?”

And Jimmy leans into the microphone and says, “Well ah Martin, I have kind of a favour to ask the people of Earhart County.”

“Ooh a favour. Perdusa needs a favour. What is it?”

“Well Martin,” says Jimmy, “here goes. Everyone out there know how the official records state my daddy shot down 39 planes?”

“Yes.”

“When really...”

“When really he shot down 40,” says Martin butting in real excited like,

“He shot down 40.”

“Well we’ve found plane number 40 and we need Earhart County’s help to dig it up.”

“You're kidding.”

“No.”

“You found Perdusa's 40th?”

“Yeah.”

“Just say when and where and Earhart County will be there to help.”

“Well as soon as possible would be great and um well you're going to need some kind of digging tools.”

“No problem, I got a spade.”

“Well we might need more than spades. We might need uh pickaxes.”

“Pickaxes? Where is it?”

“It's ah, it's under Mayor O'Casey's flangeomatic factory car park.”

The phone rings almost immediately.

“Oh, we have a caller. You really do get the people calling in Perdusa.”

Jimmy smiles thinly even though you can't see it over the radio as Martin picks up the phone.

“Hello Rosebeck.”

Martine coughs, “Hello Mayor O'Casey.”

“Planning on digging up my car park?”

“Uh I'm sure it'll just be a small part of it Mayor O'Casey.”

“Cost me a small fortune to concrete that car park.”

“It did?”

“And where *will* the workers park if you dig it up?”

“Uh, down the road a little maybe?”

“Maybe, maybe but there'll probably only be space for a very reduced number of them. Oh well, if that's what you want...”

“But it’s Robin Perdusa’s 40th, it’s really very important.”

“I’m sure it is Rosebeck, I’m sure it is. How is your sister? I hear her rent has gone up.”

“No it hasn’t.”

“Really? She mustn’t have got the letter then.”

One of the radios used to talk to aircraft starts crackling. Martin jumps a mile.

“Hello ja? Testink, testink...”

“Hello?” says Martin.

“Are ve on air?”

“Uh...” Martin fiddles about with some dials, “yes caller, you’re on air.”

“Just vone moment please ja.”

There’s a muffled fumbling noise and then a female voice comes on the line.

“Meester O’Casey?”

“*Mayor* O’Casey.”

“Ya, whatever. I hearr bad things about you. You owe Robin, you need let us get Robin’s 40 plane.”

“I’m sorry, I had no idea I owed anybody anything.”

“Robin vas a son of a beetch but at least he vasn’t a asshole Meester O’Casey.”

“You do realise I have an awful lot of lawyers don’t you.”

“I’m sorry, what you say? You say you vant us to dig up yourr car park?”

“If you touch that car park I will sue.”

“Who ees Sue? Is she yourr mama? What ees thees?”

There's a mumbling sound in the background.

"I don't know, he talking about a voman."

Mumble.

"She called Sue."

Mumble.

"Oh? Oh. He can to keess my ass. Keess it Meester O'Casey."

"If you're quite finished lady, I have a busy day ahead."

"I not feenished. Rrobin save thees town twice. Twice he save Earhart County. He save eet vonce in a crappy Mustang trainer too. You owe heem Meester O'Casey, everybody who live in Earhart County owe Rrobin. And...and Beelly Purcell, you owe heem too. He vork hard."

"You really are quite delusional."

"Vhat ees deloosional?"

Mumble.

"I don't know, you theenk?"

Mumble.

"You're mama ees deloosional Meester O'Casey."

Mumble.

"Ya I got heem."

"I'm terminating this conversation but before I go I am expressly telling you, no-digging-up-my-car-park."

Mumble.

"Vhy? Vhy not? You vant it to be good forr..."

Mumble.

"Forr reservoir?"

Mumble.

“Vhat ees reservoir?”

Mumble.

“You don’t got eenough vater to drink Meester O’Casey? You build reservoir?”

“What?”

“Ve know Meester O’Casey, ve know about reservoir.”

“Are you one of the people from SeaView?”

“Vhat ees SeaView?”

Mumble.

“Oh ya, am from SeaView. Vhat about SeaView?”

“Rosebeck are you really so desperate for material that you put half senile old folks on air?”

“Don’t need no material Meester O’Casey, ve got plenty from yourr pants because yourr ass so beeg.”

“Enough said,” says Mayor O’Casey. “I thank Earhart County to leave my car park be and I will see you all at the elections tomorrow.

Goodbye.”

“Vhat you say? You say you vant me to bust yourr ass?”

Silence.

“Um, he’s gone Lily,” says Jimmy, “I think he hung up.”

“Ya,” says Lily. “Cheecken. He cheecken.”

CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

When Jimmy drives back to SeaView, he's not real surprised to see both Dr. Zippermeyer and Lily standing out on the yard waiting for him. They're looking particularly pleased with themselves and Jimmy doesn't even want to know this time where Dr. Zippermeyer got the car battery from.

When he stops the car Lily opens the passenger door.

"You want me to drive?"

"Uh no, I'm fine thank you."

"Because I can driving. I can driving good."

"That's nice but I'll stay where I am."

"Ok Perdoosa, ok," she climbs into the passenger seat happily and Jimmy has to get out and find a way to put her machine into the back seat.

"I don't think we're going to get the shopping cart in."

Dr. Zippermeyer eyes up the trunk, "Nein. Vell maybe she can stay vith the car."

"Alright, ok."

And Jimmy gets into the driver's seat and to be honest he's thinking that all that's going to happen today is he'll drive on over to Mayor O'Casey's and wait a half hour then drive Goober back. He's thinking that Mayor O'Casey's threats of litigation would keep everyone at home.

It doesn't.

I mean this *is* Earhart County.

And Robin Perdusa *did* save it twice. Lily was perfectly right when she said it.

And see to be frank, I'm not so sure Earhart County wouldn't have turned out even if it wasn't Robin's 40th. I'm not so sure Earhart County wouldn't have turned out if all Jimmy had said was, there's a possibility we spotted a Wellington bomber's nose sticking out the town hall's bathroom. They love planes that much in Earhart County. Hell they'd even turn out for a Blackburn Botha in a sewage plant. Well now, maybe I'd turn out for a Blackburn Botha in a sewage plant too, no matter how crappy.

So when Jimmy rolls on up to Mayor O'Casey's there's over fifty people there, with axes and buckets and stuff and Goober is giving out directions. "Parrk close Perdoosa. I vant see what happen."

Jimmy drives right on close and stops the car and I swear everybody stop for a moment watching and when Jimmy climbs out they honest to God give him a round of applause.

They're all: "LET'S HEAR IT FOR PERDUSA."

"LET'S HEAR IT FOR ROBIN."

And at least two voices somewhere in the crowd yell: "PERDUSA FOR MAYOR."

"Um thank you, thank you," Jimmy waves like he's in a cartoon mouse suit on a float in Disneyland and Goober hands him a pickaxe."

"Go ahead son."

So Jimmy swings the first blow, there's a load more cheering then everybody get to work.

After about fifteen minutes a couple of trucks pull up and a bunch of guys, one of which happens to be the landlord's brother, climb out with heavy duty drills.

I mean Earhart County is *serious*.

They really are.

They're so serious that they don't even notice Mayor O'Casey approach and the when they do, they don't bother to stop. Jimmy does though.

Jimmy stops and sidles over to Goober and Dr. Zippermeyer.

"Perdusa."

"Um hello Mayor O'Casey."

"I see you went on ahead withough my permission."

"I'm sure it won't take long."

"Really."

"And we'll try to leave it how we found it."

"Yeah, with a big ass crack in it," says Goober.

Mayor O'Casey and Goober face each other.

Kittyhawk to Kittyhawk.

"You *do* know I own the land SeaView stands on."

"I'm not from SeaView."

"No? But your friends are." Mayor O'Casey looks over his shoulder at Dr. Zippermeyer and Lily. "You really don't want to mess with me Mr..."

"Goober."

"Mr. Goober, because I never lose. And things could go way beyond litigation."

“YOURR MAMA VAS A LITIGATION.”

Mayor O'Casey sighs. “I’d just watch it if I were you Mr. Goober .”

“WHAT YOU SAY? WHAT YOU SAY? YOU SAY YOU VANT ME TO PULL A STICK FROM OUT YOURR ASS?”

“Mayor O'Casey?” says Goober, “I can’t wait. I really can’t. It’s been a pleasure son, now we got work to do, so if you could give us some room here? Why don’t you go back and make some more plastic ladies. There you go now. Go do your bit for all the lonely men out there. That’s it. Careful as you go now.”

“Just watch it.”

“Well now that’s what I do best.”

“YOU VANT ME TO PULL OUT STICK? I CAN TO PULL OUT STICK MEESTER O’CASEY. YOU JUST ASK ME AND I PULL GOOD MEESTER O’CASEY.”

So Mayor O'Casey turns away and probably starts plotting his case with his Insurance Claims company lawyers who can’t have been in a real litigious mood because they were after all, Earhart County citizens. They will have been just as excited as everyone else to get ahold of that Ju-88. Jimmy and everyone who showed up in the car park are drilling and axing away. Every fifteen, twenty minutes more folks show up so that there are more people than space to dig up.

Earhart County were getting to work on that car park good style.

I'm not so sure of the details of concrete digging. I don’t know much about concrete full stop. I just know it can set underwater something

beautiful. I know this because I knew a guy once who loved concrete. I mean *really* loved the stuff. He had a real high up job in a company that made concrete, saw it everyday but he still loved it like I love things that fly.

He wasn't a bad guy either, kind of interesting at times, even when he was talking concrete. I guess sometimes it doesn't matter what you're crazy about, if you love it enough, you can make it entertaining. Just never ever ask to see his vacation pictures. He had albums full, I mean it, albums full of concrete from around the world.

I mean for the love of Gibson.

A whole stack of albums.

The ones he made me sit through were from a vacation in Europe. It was full of shots of train station walls and stuff. He'd get real excited if there was like a crack or something and be all, "See this, this crack, this'd never happen with our concrete. They haven't used the right mix. It's a cheap mix. I saw a sidewalk once in Ohio that had this same type of crack.

Cheap concrete. It's just awful, real awful what some companies out there are peddling."

He was a great guy though. Hot wife, two kids, successful. Just stay the hell away from those vacation snaps.

Anyways, he could probably give you a good idea of what Earhart County had to do to that car park. He could probably tell you the exact ratios of all the ingredients that made the concrete and comment on the crack the torpedo tremor made and how he's seen a similar problem in Norway outside a dime store or something.

Of course if he were here, you'd get such an earful of concrete talk, you'd never get round to hearing about that Ju-88 and I know you want to hear about it. I mean it must have been a real beauty.

When a good top portion of the plane starts to get freed a whoop goes up. Goober is running up and down the length of the crack giving more directions.

“You gotta go real careful now. Don't hurt her. You guys are gonna want something left of her to put in that museum of yours.”

The landlord of the Earhart's Vega rolls up with cold beers for everyone helping to dig. Hell if the whole town hadn't gotten so sick earlier on in the week, there'd probably be winkles getting bandied about to.

A couple of people are videoing it all, even though it's taking hours and hours. There are cameras coming out all over. One guy who turned out to be a relation of Martin Rosebeck's, has a real big ass camcorder on a tripod and asks Jimmy if he can interview him some with the plane digging in the background.

“So Robin Perdusa's son. It's quite an honour to have a father like Robin?”

“Uh, yeah.”

“I mean you must be real proud of him.”

“Yeah.”

“Would you say you're anything like your father? In any way?”

“Uh, well, I don't have a moustache.”

“Haah. Do you fly?”

“No.”

“Oh I thought maybe the son of Robin Perdusa would have spent his life in the air.”

“Well I passed my driving test first time.”

“That’s good, that’s good too. Do you have your father’s touch with the ladies?”

“Uh, um well I dated Lara Whalin one time.”

“Oh yes? Who’s Lara Whalin? Is she hot?”

“She was um a cheerleader in high school.”

“A cheerleader? He dated a cheerleader.”

“Uh one time.”

“That’s the Perdusa blood we know and love.”

“Ha ha.”

“Who’s the old lady in your car?”

“Oh, she knew my daddy. She was a pilot in the war. A Russian pilot.”

“A Russian pilot? She flew in the war?”

“Yeah.”

“She’s a Nightwitch?”

“Yeah, that’s what they called her.”

“Oh man, a real Nightwitch in Earhart County. Do you think she’ll let me interview her on camera?”

“Yes. You might not want to though.”

“Why?”

“She’s a little uh, she's kind of a fighter you know? She’s not always so friendly.”

“Oh man that is so cool. I can’t believe I’m gonna meet a nightwitch. I hope she cuts me a new asshole good style.”

“Oh she’s good at that. I’m sure you won’t be disappointed.”

Now I’m mentioning this interview because later, when he gets to see it on a big screen that night at the Earhart’s Vega, he spots Dr. Zippermeyer and Goober in the background. He notices Goober freaking out at three guys with pickaxes and Dr. Zippermeyer comes running over and the three guys put down the big axes and get small chisel type things instead and start working real careful with them.

Then Dr. Zippermeyer walks off screen and Goober’s dancing about the crack and when Dr. Zippermeyer returns he’s got his bag with him. He’s got the bag with the sandwiches in and Jimmy said he could plainly see him pull some kind of device out. One more Dr. Zippermeyer machine. And he puts it down the crack for a while with Goober standing behind him.

He holds it down there for a good minute too and then he pulls it out and him and Goober look at it. Then they look at each other and Dr.

Zippermeyer shakes his head and Jimmy said Goober looked *pissed*.

Jimmy said Goober looked mad as all get out. And then see, the camera cuts and Lily is standing next to the car and she’s saying, “I’m sorry what? What you say? You want me to take off head and speet down yourr neck?”

So Jimmy knew, he knew there was something going on with that Ju-88.

He wasn't so dumb he didn't notice. He just wasn't smart enough to know what it was.

I'd also like to add, Jimmy never actually *dated* Lara Whalin. He lent her his math homework one time and had to go round her house to get it back.

It wasn't an actual date. There's no way Lara Whalin would have dated Jimmy. I mean she was hot.

I wonder what she's doing now?

Probably something that doesn't need math.

CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

Well after spending all day digging up Mayor O'Casey's car park, Earhart County are good and tired. There's a small celebration in the Earhart's Vega, with that whole big screen show of their efforts I told you about, and then a bunch of people had a debate over who to call to get the record straightened out. You know so that Robin Perdusa can get put good and proper at the top the list. To make him officially the USA's joint number one fighter ace. Not to take anything away from Dick Bong. Not to take anything away from McGuire either. If you can go the whole war in a P-38 you've got my respect.

Anyway, after all that hard work, Earhart County turn in for the night and Goober's so tired he forgets to gripe about Dogsbody's legs looking at him. Jimmy falls asleep knowing he won't be able to run in the elections and with the confidence he'll find what his daddy left him on the moor with Lily's coordinates. In short, a peace descends over Earhart County. Even Mayor O'Casey will be comfortably resting in the knowledge that first thing in the morning the farmer who owns the cereal field will deliver the map with the red line pen markings to get him out easy.

And it's in this silent tranquillity, this small town quiet, in the hush of the Heinkel, in the whisper of the warbirds, in the calm of the Curtiss that Mrs. Stewart-Packard buys the farm and snuffs it. I'd like to think even Billy Purcell kept his trap full of obscenities shut as his spirit ran through the memory of long settled gas that night. Or I'd like to think he at least refrained from using the F-word. Because Mrs. Stewart-Packard did her

bit for the war. On top of the farming and a stint in an ammunitions factory. The spell she wove back then with those eleven other people could just have helped give Guy Gibson the stones to use his own Lancaster as a shield so as to get the rest of the dambusters safe to their mark. It could have been what stopped the Luftwaffe from hitting Britain's number one ace Johnnie Johnson's Spit more than once in the whole war. It could have helped urge the Tuskegees to fight to be able to fight for their country and gave the Suicide Jockey Glider Regiment their sheer insanity to have the courage to climb into those things.

Well now I know, I know I'm getting a little excited here because most of this all happened before they actually danced about naked but you get the idea right? You get the picture.

She put everything she had into that spell and finally, with a great deal of satisfaction she shuffles off the old mortal coil thing and completes the spell. She ties up all the loose ends good and proper by being the very last one out of those twelve people who started it, who started the whole, not losing spell, who started the whole, not losing the war spell.

And Jimmy said she bought it at around four am. He said he knew this because Martin read out the obituaries on the radio the next morning and he mentioned the time and Jimmy remembered it see because for what it's worth, at five after four am, Jimmy woke up. Jimmy woke up and felt real strange. Not the kind of strange he could put his finger on any, as I asked him when he told me, like what sort of strange did he mean? He just said he felt weird, like something important, as if he was supposed to remember something important.

It was probably nothing. It was probably just Jimmy being full of it but I don't know for sure. That Patrick Loomis, the guy who does the night watch guard duty at Mayor O'Casey's flangeomatic factory, the poor kid who got an eyeful of Mrs. Stewart-Packard's nudey dancing that night, he reported a sort of eclectic crackling about the place and lights in the sky. Like maybe one of those freak electrical storms you hear so much about. Either that or Patrick Loomis was suffering from some kind of Post Traumatic Stress from seeing so much naked old lady.

Could be, could be.

It could even have been, seeing as how Mayor O'Casey's flangematic factory was built on marsh land, it could even have been a bunch of Polish airmen horsing around. You never know, I'm open to it. I'm open to all kinds of suggestions.

Except for the fact that I know what it was.

Out there in the four am darkness.

I know exactly what it was.

That's not to say a Polish airman or two didn't get in on the act just for good measure.

Well the next morning the people of Earhart County start work early. They're all preparing for the first Earhart County elections that any of them have given a damn about for a good twenty years. A bunch of them have successfully moved the Ju-88, still mostly covered in concrete, over to the field with the U-boat. The field next to the one with the election

maze. And someone's made a sign saying Robin Perdusa's 40th on it. It's not anything very professional but the feeling is there.

The reservoir scam that Mayor O'Casey is pulling is all over the radio too. Martin Rosebeck has let the town hall lady phone in and she's explained what Lily was talking about before when she told Mayor O'Casey she was going to bust his ass. So now Earhart County really is desperate for a new Mayor. They're desperate for Jimmy to be Mayor and stop the reservoir and make sure next year's winkles won't make them barf and just generally bring the good name of Perdusa back to Earhart County.

The landlord at the Earhart's Vega has gone all in. He has PERDUSA FOR MAYOR written in red paint on a kingsize bedsheet and is flying it from the windows of Wally Funk and M T Pattle. He also has a bunch of smaller posters up all over the bar. They've got stuff on them saying things like, STOP THE WATER and GO PERDUSA GO and NO FLOODING EARHART COUNTRY and PERDUSA IS RUNNING FOR EARHART COUNTY.

It actually makes Jimmy feel bad. It makes him feel bad because he can't run. He doesn't want to get the landlord's hopes up.

"You know I'll be disqualified because I flew the day before yesterday?"

"I know. You want tea or coffee?"

"So I can't run the maze."

"Coffee," says Goober.

"The lady from the town hall said she'd sort it."

"Oh."

"Bacon and eggs?"

“Yup.”

“No, ah, just toast please.”

“The elections start at three pm.”

“Ok,” Jimmy sighs.

“You are so going to win. I can feel it in my water.”

There’s a strange coughing sound from Goober and Jimmy turns in time to see coffee coming out his nose.

“Sure,” gurgles Goober, “I can feel it too, maybe it’s something to do with my prostrate.”

They sit down at one of the tables and Jimmy unfolds his map again and pulls out the paper Goober wrote the coordinates of his daddy’s crash on.

“Alright son,” Goober moves his finger along the map and puts a big X, pirate style on a spot in the moor. “If Lily’s right, that’s where the plane went down. It’d be best if you started there.”

“Fine, only how do I get there if a compass won’t work.”

And then Goober remembers about the Nightwitches and how good they were at navigating.

“I bet Lily could take you, I bet she could get you right there without a compass.”

“Really?”

“Yup. All she’d need is a watch and a map. She could fly you right over it.”

“Great. Great, lets go get her back in the Heinkel then,” says Jimmy, “in the Heinkel 111.”

“Ahh well son, how about you get her into something smaller and I’ll stay here. I want to go check up a Mayor O’Casey’s factory. Check we didn’t leave any Ju-88 behind.”

“You’re kidding. You think I’ll actually be able to find it alone?”

“Lily will be there. You’ll do just fine.”

“Oh that’s real nice. You got your Ju-88 so now I’m out on my own.”

“You won’t be alone, you’ll be with Lily.”

“That doesn’t make me feel any better.”

So that’s the whole way it went. That’s how Jimmy ended up going on over to SeaView so early. He goes over real early but it’s not stopping the people of Earhart County. He actually sees a bunch of people in the field with the U-boat and now with the Ju-88 too. He sees them all setting up for the elections run. There’s a dirty white marquee being pegged into the ground and the people are so busy they don’t even notice Jimmy sneaking past.

When Jimmy gets there he finds Lily eating breakfast on a tray in her room. She seems pretty happy to see him too and the nurses have been working their butts off for her. There is not one yak in the room.

Somewhere they’ve found a poster of a plane and put it on the wall.

Jimmy said it was Concorde. He said it had Concorde written across the bottom too. There was also a model plane hanging from the ceiling. Lily looks up at it.

“You like thees? I making eet. I making eet me.”

“It’s very good.”

“Ya, tomorrow I paint.”

“Well done.”

“Ya, ees a Spitfire but neverr mind. I have Hurricane needing to do too.”

“Lovely.”

“And Dr. Zippermeyer said when he got free time he making morre machine. So Beelly Purcell can have also vone.”

“That’s great.”

“Ya, only he busy today. Today he going back up to Meester O’Casey factory.”

“Really? That’s where Goober’s going.”

“Huh, ya? They up to something ya?”

“Yeah.”

“So vhy you herre? Vhy you not at Meester O’Casey factory?”

“Uh, Goober said you could probably fly me to where my daddy crashlanded.”

“Oh, ya I like to fly. Vhy don’t you just valk though?”

“I’d get lost.”

“Ohh you vone of them.”

“Yeah.”

“But take compass, you be ok.”

“Compasses don’t work on the moor.”

“Vhat? When they stop vorking?”

“I thought they never worked. Something to do with the granite.”

“Oh. Granite new thing on moorr?”

“No, no it’s always been there.”

“Vell compass vork ok on moorr when I fly.”

“Really?”

“Ya. Ya only vhen Robin crashland ve break compass. Ve valk in circles before ve see Beelly Purcell. Before ve hearr Beelly Purcell cussing. Then ve find secret HQ.”

“Huh.”

“I have movie on the TV. You vant vatch? Eet about Battle of Britain. I vas in Soviet Union in 1940 but movie is good. Nice bit vith Polish. You vant vatch vith me?”

“Uh maybe later, I was hoping we could fly out now and pick up that lucky charm.”

“Ok, ya, I can fly now. Let’s go.”

“Ok good.”

“Ve can take Yak.”

“Uh, I’d like to sit inside the plane please.”

Lily sighs, “Fine, fine I vill fly different plane.” Suddenly she brightens up.

“Not the jet.”

Lily scowls, “Ok, ok ya. But I’m not taking Heinkel. Vhat about Mosquito?”

“I thought you didn’t like Mosquitoes?”

“Yourr father not like Mosquito. I like Mosquito. It a plane vith...how do you say...”

“A Rear Gunner?”

“No, no, Mosquito not have Rear Gunner.”

“Jeez do *any* planes actually have Rear Gunners?”

“Mosquito is a plane vith...”

“Lots of seating?”

“No, how you say, on the front of yourr ass?”

Jimmy looks at her for a long, long time. Then he realises what she wants. “Balls. I think you need the word balls.”

“Ya, ya that’s it ya. Mosquito have balls. No armour, Mosquito so fast it not need armour. They think nobody can hit it. Ya Mosquito have balls.”

Green with envy. That’s what Goering said the Mosquito made him. He liked those Mosquitoes. That’s like one of his most famous quotes. He may have been an evil fatass bastard but he knew a good plane when saw one.

So Lily and Jimmy and the shopping cart holding the machine walk on out of SeaView and as they walk back past the election hooah a couple of people look up and wave excitedly.

On the way to the airfield Lily spots a hardware store and makes Jimmy go in and buy a load of cans of paint and a spanner.

“What are you planning to do with this. Is this to paint your model plane? Because this is wall paint. It’s for painting walls and what kind of plane is yellow?”

“T-6 Texan is yellow.”

“I thought your model was a Spitfire.”

“Ya, it not for model.”

“And what’s the spanner for? You’re not going to hotwire the plane or something are you?”

“What is hotvire?”

“When you don’t have a key so you start the car with the wires.”

“But ve going to fly plane not car.”

“You don’t hotwire planes?”

“Spanner is to take lid off paint can.”

“Oh.”

“Maybe you need a machine vith helmet too Perdoosa. I can ask Dr. Zippermeyer forr you.”

They rattle their way to the airfield.

Now Jimmy was expecting Martin Rosebeck to come on running out the ATC tower like he always has done when he sees them but this time it’s all quiet. It’s all quiet because Martin Rosebeck has a mobile radio set and he’s gone out to the field with the U-boat in so as to be on location for the elections. He’s all set up in the marquee, the one that Jimmy saw them hammering good style into the ground next to the Ju-88. Martin is ready alright. His sister is out of a job like but he’s interviewing people who’ve come to help set up for the election run and is getting them to talk about all the bad stuff that didn’t happen when Perdusa was in Earhart County. In fact it’s going to be a hell of a day. Martin Rosebeck is going to say later that Earhart County hasn’t come together like this since that day in 1932 when Amelia flew the Atlantic one handed and was supposed to have landed at the Earhart County airfield instead of flying the Atlantic

one handed and getting lost. I'll bet she looked cuter in the flying goggles than O'Casey would have too.

At about the same time as Jimmy and Lily are climbing into that Mosquito, the one Goebbels said he liked so much, the nice town hall lady is opening the door of the Earhart's Vega and running in.

"Where's Perdusa?"

Goober looks at the landlord, "He's gone."

"Gone where?"

"Why?"

"Sylvia's been to see the farmer, the one who cuts the election maze."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yes. She wore a low cut shirt and he told her he'd got so sick with the winkles and then after that he'd been busy so he didn't cut the maze until yesterday. That's why that German man had hayfever. He was cutting the maze."

That's pretty much what she said and we know what he's been busy with too right? Because that was an awful lot of nudey pictures Mayor O'Casey sent.

"It means it doesn't matter if he flew," she says, "he won't have been able to see the maze. It hadn't been cut. He can still run in the elections and he can stop Mayor O'Casey flooding the town to make the reservoir."

"Wow," says Goober, "that must have been some shirt that girl wore."

"So where's Perdusa?"

"Jimmy? Uh well now..."

And at that point those Rolls Royce engines that made those Mosquitoes so fast they could catch doodle bugs over the channel, the ones made out of wood to make them light enough to reach real high speeds, well those Rolls Royce engines just thunder beautifully over the roof of the Earhart's Vega.

“That’ll be him now.”

CHAPTER THIRTY

Well Lily flies that Mosquito as low as only a Nightwitch dares. Jimmy can see the PERDUSA FOR MAYOR bed sheets flapping about out the Earhart's Vega's window. He can see every car on its way to the election celebrations. Some of them stop even to wave at the Mosquito as it goes overhead. One kid half climbs out the sunroof of a car and did that action that you do when you want a plane to waggle. And Lily did. Jimmy said Lily waggled for every kid she saw doing that waggle signal.

They flew right on over the marsh land and over Mayor O'Casey's ruined car park and over the factory itself and that is when Jimmy saw the weirdest thing. The strangest stuff was happening round Mayor O'Casey's flangeomatic factory. You could only see it round three of its sides because the fourth side was all concrete car park but the three sides that were surrounded by moor had done something real odd.

You remember back in high school science class? When you got that paper loaded with iron filings and the teacher puts a magnet under? Did you do that in class? And the iron filings kind of circle round the magnetic poles. Sort of loops. Iron filing hoop things.

Well I swear Jimmy said it looked like Mayor O'Casey's flangeomatic factory was like one big science class magnet and the moor land marsh plants were all lying flat in beautiful iron filing style loops. All polarised to the corners of the factory.

Even Lily said she never saw anything like that before. In the whole war, she never flew over anything like Mayor O'Casey's flangeomatic factory that day.

And I'll tell you now. I'll put money on it having something to do with Mrs. Stewart-Packard. I'll put my 1938 airplane magazine collection on it too.

Now back at the Earhart County, the nice town hall lady is crestfallen. She's ordered a sherry before even her eleven o'clock break and she's saying stuff like, 'Maybe nobody will notice'.

"The very deaf ones," says the landlord, "possibly the very deaf ones won't notice. Everyone else will have probably said, 'What's that earsplitting noise, it sounds like a Rolls Royce going overhead, oh yes, there goes Perdusa in a Mosquito'."

"Maybe we can tell them it was McFarlane. We can keep him hidden and say Perdusa wasn't in it, McFarlane was."

At that point they will have looked about and Goober will have gone. Goober will have gone out the door with the landlords car keys and is on his way to Mayor O'Casey's factory.

Up at the factory I'm not too sure exactly how Mayor O'Casey's morning went but I'll tell you what lines it ran along. Mayor O'Casey, he's in a good mood although he probably still gets woken up by that woodpecker. He makes his way to his flangeomatic factory. Up to the floor with his insurance claims company and into his office.

At some point the mail arrives and the lady who tries to feed Mr. Omagh her sandwiches takes it in and Mayor O'Casey opens it up and gets a hold of the map. The one the farmer has drawn. It's a good maze this year despite the hold ups. It's in the shape of the tritium ship being acoustic torpedoed. It even has winkle shell pictures in the corners. This makes it harder see. The mazes based on a picture are a hundred times more difficult to get out because there's no psychology gone into them. It's not as easy as always taking the path that seems to lead away from where you're going. There's none of that. It's totally random for the people in it. It'd only make sense if you had the picture, like Mayor O'Casey, or if you happened to fly over it in a, oh now, let's say a 1942 de Havilland Mosquito for instance.

Speaking of Mosquitoes, at some point this morning Mayor O'Casey is going to look out of the window and see Jimmy's surprised face flying past, looking at the pattern of the shrubs and reeds in the land around the factory. And probably the first thing he's going to think is, 'What the hell is he looking at?' but surely after a very short amount of time he's going to think, 'That's against Earhart County election law'.

Jimmy's broken Earhart County law.

Mayor O'Casey's got him. Not that he ever thought Jimmy could really win, but disqualification for disrespecting Earhart County law is that little bit sweeter.

So Mayor O'Casey he must get a morale boost, he must be feeling great. He has his map of the maze, he's going to stop Jimmy from contending and Earhart County is going to be all his.

Again.

Then he turns on the radio and hears Martin Rosebeck's pre-election radio show and finds out that the whole of Earhart County know about the reservoir. Every mother's son. Well except maybe from Mr. Purcell and the rest of the calcium efflux dementia ward at SeaView. But they're about the only ones. They're the only ones who don't. You'd have to have had your head up your ass not to know about the Earhart County reservoir by that time.

Calcium efflux or your head up your ass.

I don't know which would be worse.

I guess it'd depend on what you'd been eating.

Well Goober is making his way on up to Mayor O'Casey's factory in the landlord's car good style. He's driving so bad it's a good job he was never expected to fly those Lancasters. There's a lot of cars on the road but he's the only one travelling towards Mayor O'Casey's. Everyone else are on their way to the U-boat field. One car actually has a bunch of majorettes squashed on the back seat.

He's about halfway there when he finds he's not the only person heading in the opposite direction because up ahead at the side of the road is Dr. Zippermeyer with a heavy looking shopping bag making slow progress. And I'll bet Goober didn't give in too easy. I'll bet he muttered a good few goddamns before he finally stopped the car and yelled at Dr. Zippermeyer, "GET IN THEN, GODDAMN. YOU MAY AS WELL GET IN."

And Dr. Zippermeyer will have peered through the passenger window and smiled and said, “Ja, two heads, ja, can to do thinks better than one.”

“Sure, whatever. Just get in.”

And Dr. Zippermeyer climbs in and Goober drives them the rest of the way.

Now I'm not real sure how Lily does it exactly up there in that de Hav Mosquito. I don't know if she has a map and a stopwatch or if she's using some kind of Nightwitch superpowers but she flies a certain way over the moor and then opens up the bomb bay doors and tells Jimmy to take the lids off the paint and dump it and to keep dumping it good style til she lands them out on the secret HQ runway.

And Jimmy hurls the paint cans down there and says he actually sees a weird hunk of granite shaped kind of like a triangle with a perfect triangle bite taken out of it right on top of a tower. They're really flying that low. But then Nightwitches are famous for being able to take their planes right down, right down low below the hedgerow lines.

About twelve paint cans later, Lily takes them down. Bounces it twice but it's not a bad landing for an old lady in a junior safety monitor helmet.

She turns round to Jimmy and points away from the underground bunkers.

“Valk that vay and follow paint ya. Even you can to do thees? I vait, I vait in plane.”

“That's it?”

“Ya.”

“But what about the sword and Baba Yaga and the castle and the dragon?”

“What you talking about Perdoosa?”

“The story,” he digs the page out of his pocket and hands it over to Lily who reads over it.

“I tell your daddy all of thees. I tell heem.”

“I know.”

“I tell heem as ve valking on moor. He remember story. Huh.”

“Yes, he said I needed it.”

“Oh ya. You need. Ees important.”

“In what way?”

“You vill see.”

“Great.”

“You know thees story?” Lily points to the last story on the paper, the one that only has the first couple of lines.

“No.”

“No? vell, the fox say to peasant, you get me out trap and I geeve you three vishes. And peasant get heem out and fox say, ok, what vish? And peasant say, I vant most beautiful voman in land for be my vife. And PING, there King vife. There queen because she most beautiful voman. And peasant run away in forest because king vill be very angry. Then fox say what second vish? So peasant say, lots and lots of gold and PING, lots of gold on floor of forest. Beeg lots of gold. And peasant can't not to carry gold so he valk to find house so to ask to buy bag but after long time he can't find house and he vorry and he say fox, my vish three is for beeg bag forr to put gold. And PING, he get nice beeg leather bag. So he run back to beeg lot of gold and find the foresters they have come and

taken all gold when peasant looking forr bag. So peasant take fox and say, I vant vone morre vish. And fox say, only three, I say only three. So peasant keell fox and eat heem and it verry taste good.

And peasant eat fox and drink vodka with fox dinner and I drink vodka with peasant but it spill down my beard and I not get drink vodka.”

Jimmy stares blankly.

“You don’t have a beard.”

“No but you got say it. You got say it spill down beard. It how stories end.”

“Why?”

“Because story man saying he not have vodka, he spill vodka and now maybe if you like story you geeve heem vodka because he not have and he thirsty.”

“And all your stories end like this?”

“Ya mostly. Many things in Soviet Union end vith vodka.”

“So wait, what’s the moral of the story?”

“What mean moral?”

“What’s the meaning? The message?”

“Uh fox bad? Eat fox?”

“You mean there’s no message?”

“I don’t know.”

“Then why did you tell me it?”

“I think maybe you vant know. You have paper, I think you vant know what I tell your daddy.”

“Right, I see. Well then if I see a fox, I’ll do my best to eat it.”

“Ok.”

“I’ll go then.”

“Ya.”

“Follow the yellow paint.”

“Ya.”

“Will I know it when I see it?”

“It in mess tin. It in your daddy mess tin. He put mess tin in hole in side of stone. Ve valk three days and ve pass same place nearr plane crash. When your father seeing it same place so many times he geeve up. He put mess tin in side of stone.”

“Ok.” And Jimmy, only half knowing what a mess tin is, climbs out the Mosquito and starts to walk.

“THAT VAAAY.”

Jimmy can’t see Lily in the cockpit because she’s too short but he can see her hand reaching up and pointing in the opposite direction to the way he’s walking. He changes direction and suddenly worries about not having any provisions.

You’ve started to expect it now haven’t you. I’m not so sure Mr. Omagh’s formula works so good for stuff that doesn’t fly but let me see. Let me see what I can do for you.

[h(G¹M⁸R³Ψ⁵β²E¹Ψ⁵bb⁸G⁹X³Ψ⁵ae¹W³[ae¹bb⁹G⁶])

Not bad. That includes Jimmy climbing out a Mosquito just because there's a number for it. I know it’s not a part of the actual story.

CHAPTER THIRTY ONE

Well now, much time these things take right? But a story is told real quick. Well kind of much time. Jimmy said it took him a couple of hours to follow the paint trail. I mean I'm not going to tell you about every bush he walks past or anything, so count yourself lucky because Jimmy went into more detail and I was all, 'Oh how interesting, another bush, really, hurry up and get to the good part, did you find the plane? Did you find the Mustang trainer'.

And he said well first I found a load of moss and then there were these small tree things with berries on that I think you make gin out of.

And I said, 'That's great Jimmy. That's just great, now what about the goddamn plane?'

And he said, 'and I saw a couple of rabbits that were the size of something big you know? Like, the size of hares or something.'

'You mean you saw two hares?'

'Yeah, yeah and there was like granite everywhere and one part was bogland.'

And I got to say I did perk up a little at hearing about the bogland because you just never know right? You just never know what might be in there.

So I said, 'You didn't happen to see any Polish airmen did you?'

And he said, 'No, no,' but after a good two hours he came across what looked like it could be that triangular hunk of granite that he saw from the Mosquito and the paint trail finishes so he knows he's there. He's actually there, where Lily says they went down. Not that he can see any plane.

It's just more bush and moss and stuff but he did notice some parts weren't so soft, like maybe the plane was under there somewhere. Probably not worth that two and a half million dollars so much while it's under all that moor crap but still worth digging up one of these days surely.

Anyhow so Jimmy climbs up to the granite which is tall enough to give shelter. Shelter enough for his daddy and Lily to have spent a good couple of nights without knowing there was a secret bunker just a short hike away. That poor Billy Purcell was running through that gas so close, if the wind blew right they could have heard his cussing. That just two hours away some white coat dudes were rigging up a calcium efflux machine so deadly it turned the whole HQ to stone. Coral is made out of calcium right? It turned their brains to coral. Not the good squishy type but the dead hard stuff you can buy for fifty cents in beach souvenir stores.

So Jimmy prowls around that whole granite wall. He looks into every crevice, he even sees what looks like a flower scratched into the granite wall and Litvak scratched below it. After fifty years, it's still there which gives me hope for all the stuff I wrote while sitting on the can in high school.

And then, right there, to the left of Lily's scrawl, a crack big enough to fit two hands in with scrubs of moss growing on the outside. Jimmy reaches inside and feels it. A cold square metal box. It's wedged in there real tight by someone who had thought their luck was out. By someone who has no idea they're actually going to make it off the moor alive.

Jimmy reaches in with his other hand and slides his fingertips round each side then he pulls and jiggles it and scrapes up the left corner of the tin real bad but he gets it out. It's rusting up something lovely but he can still make out the Robin Perdusa that's been drawn on in white paint. And the damn thing after fifty years won't open without being smacked about with a rock. Which Jimmy does, he gets about it good style and wrenches it open and there it is.

What it is, now that's something else. Because Jimmy has like no idea. It's kind of brown and soft and it has a loop of string coming out the top. It's like the grossest car air freshner Jimmy ever saw. And Jimmy's daddy sent him all the way over the Atlantic, on Amelia Earhart's Atlantic path, just to get it. To get this soft, brown, nasty ass, car freshner piece of crap.

Weird huh?

You got to be wondering whether Robin didn't get maybe just a little zapped by that calcium efflux machine too right? Even though he was long gone by then.

Well while Jimmy is poking about inside that mess tin, Goober and Dr. Zippermeyer are picking about Mayor O'Casey's carpark. Dr. Zippermeyer has a bunch of machines that he's been digging out his shopping bag and they've been mooching all over with them.

They're playing nice together but they're not looking so happy. Not real happy at all but I'm thinking it's probably nothing to how Mayor O'Casey is looking. He probably looked a whole lot worse than a P-40 by this

time. He is madder than all get out about the reservoir secret being bandied about Earhart County like wild fire. Like wild fire that doesn't have any C-12s flying overhead dumping water.

He gets the nice Mrs. Lacey to call up Mr. Omagh on the factory's internal phone system as he eyes up the old men in his car park.

Mrs. Lacey calls him up fast and she's real sweet to him. She says,

"Morning Mr. Omagh. How's Lost and Found today?"

"Overrun Mrs. Lacey. It's all go. I've had two plastic combs, a ham sandwich and one left brown sandal brought in today that I've had to catalogue. I'm a little worried about finding the owner of the ham sandwich because it'll be past it's sell by date come tomorrow."

"Busy, busy, busy."

"Terribly yes. You see it has tomato in it."

"Well I can see you have your work cut out for you today."

"I really do. It builds up when I'm not here full-time see."

"I bet it does. Listen Mr. Omagh, I know you're overloaded over there but Mayor O'Casey wants to see you."

"Oh?"

"He looks kind of mad Mr. Omagh."

"Do you think it might be his ham sandwich?"

"I think it couldn't hurt to bring it Mr. Omagh."

"Ok, right, well then. Does he want to see me right now?"

"Yes Mr. Omagh."

"I uh, better finish up and come over then."

"I think maybe you should come on over and finish up later."

“Right, right, with the ham sandwich.”

“That’s it Mr. Omagh and I’ll let him know you’re on your way ok?”

“Ok Mrs. Lacey. I’m on my way.”

And Mr. Omagh hangs up with a real nasty feeling in his belly. Like maybe there were still a couple of winkles hanging about in there.

Mr. Omagh walks into the nice lady’s office about four minutes later and she looks up and smiles at him in a worried way. “Thank you for coming so quickly. I’ll just tell him you’re here,” she presses the intercom button,

“Mr. Omagh is here Mayor O’Casey.”

“Send him in.”

She looks up at Mr. Omagh’s nervous little face, “Good luck Mr. Omagh,” she holds up both hands with crossed fingers and watches him walk into Mayor O’Casey’s office.

Mayor O’Casey is standing facing the window with his back to Mr. Omagh when he walks in. Mr. Omagh coughs quietly.

“Ahh Mr. Omagh. How are things.” Mayor O’Casey doesn’t turn.

“Busy, busy, busy.”

“So I’ve noticed.”

“Yes sir. Two combs and a ham sandwich and a brown sandal sir. The left one.”

“That *is* a busy day.”

“Yes sir. I brought you the sandwich sir, in case it was yours.”

“I find you’ve also been busy trying to ruin me on the radio Mr. Omagh.

Busy, busy, busy. After I told you that letter was confidential, you

decided to tell the whole of Earhart County. You decided to be the wheat that tries to ruin me Mr. Omagh but you won't succeed because I will always be the wheat that stands. Do you understand?"

"It has tomato in it."

"I don't think your sandwich is going to get you out of this one Mr. Omagh. In fact I will be speaking to my insurance claims company just after I let you know something."

"Let me know what sir?"

Mayor O'Casey finally turns round, "YOU'RE FIRED OMAGH, NOW GET THE HELL OUT OF MY GODDAMN FACTORY AND TAKE ALL YOUR LOST CRAP WITH YOU."

Mr. Omagh freezes up. His mouth is the shape of a front landing gear wheel.

"GET OUT, GET OUT, GET OUT AND IF I SEE YOU ANYWHERE NEAR HERE OR ME AGAIN I'LL HAVE YOU BANGED UP FOR EVERYTHING I CAN MAKE STICK AND I AM *GOOD* AT MAKING THINGS STICK OMAGH."

Mr. Omagh jumps out of his chair and scrambles for the door.

"LEAVE THE HAM SANDWICH."

Mr. Omagh scuttles back and puts it on the desk and runs out the office with Mayor O'Casey yelling behind him.

"YOU'RE THE STALK OF WHEAT THAT'S GOING TO GET CRAPPED ON FROM A GREAT HEIGHT OMAGH. DON'T EXPECT TO COLLECT ON YOUR PENSION EITHER. YOUR ACCOUNT JUST GOT CANCELLED."

Lily was right wasn't she? About Mayor O'Casey being an asshole.

They're real astute Nightwitches. You just can't fool them.

When Jimmy makes the two hour trek back to the plane, she's waiting for him.

"You follow breadcrumb ya?"

"What?"

"Like Hansil and Gritil."

"Oh...I see, uh yes."

"You get mess tin?"

"Yes."

"You open mess tin?"

"Yes."

"And?"

"Uh, there's something brown and gross in it," he opens the tin and climbs over to where she sits in the cockpit.

"That's it. That's his lucky charm. I make eet. I give eet heem."

"I see. I see. And what is it?"

"What you mean? You can see vhat ees."

"It's brown and squishy with a loop."

"Ya. I make using old stocking."

"Oh. Nice."

"I vash old stocking first."

"Oh thank God."

“You being rude Perdoosa. You know how many mens in var wait in line for my old stocking not wash?”

“They waited in line for them?”

“No but I bet many mens in var would if they think I really geeve them. I good looking when young Perdoosa.”

“I’m sure you were Lily but I’m still grossed out.”

“Hah. Go seet down, let’s go. Elections in vone hour Perdoosa.”

“Wait. Hold it. So what is it?”

“Really you don’t know?”

“I guess you can fly a whole lot better than you can sew because this really doesn’t look like anything I can identify.”

Lily looks at him in disbelief.. “Really you don’t know? Eet obvious Perdoosa. I make thees good.”

“Ok, ok you made it good. It’s a real great piece of craftsmanship, a work of art. Now what the hell is it?”

And Lily looks at him good and hard and she says:

“Eet a turnip Perdoosa.”

CHAPTER THIRTY TWO

Jimmy stares back into the mess tin, "I'm sorry, a what?"

"Eet a turnip."

"My daddy sent me halfway across the world to get his crappy old turnip made out of an old pair of stockings?"

"Just vone stocking."

"Oh well that makes it ok then."

"Vhat yourr problem?"

"I'm sorry, I know you think you did a real nice job on this turnip but I was hoping for something a little more..."

"Vhat?"

"A little less crappy."

"You a leetle slow Perdoosa. You said you read page of story your papa geeve you."

"Yeah and?"

"You remember story about turnip and honey?"

"Yeah sure, and the honey tasted good without the turnip."

"Ya vell I tell Rrobin thees, I say I am honey Rrobin, you are turnip, because I am better pilot."

"Oh."

"And I make heem turnip so he can remember I am honey."

"Yeah, you haven't changed much have you."

"You don't understand vhy yourr papa vant you to find thees? You need to try a go with thees machine hat?"

“Why?”

“Vell Perdoosa there many people who are thinking you not so much. Thinking you not much at all Perdoosa. I don’t see vhat so good about you but yourr daddy vant to show you his turnip, he turnip. He say he thinking you special Perdoosa. He saying he think you the honey.”

And there you have it. WW2 and Vietnam war ace Robin Perdusa, ladies man Robin, Robin who saved Earhart County twice, whose statue is in the centre of town. Robin, *the* Robin Perdusa has thought all along that his average low achieving mediocre loser son was more special than himself. Goddamn there's no accounting for taste.

Well Jimmy he suddenly didn’t mind so much how crappy that stocking turnip looked, in fact he had it on him when I saw him and I can say, I can honestly say that, that thing was so gross I wanted to Lysol everything in the area just looking it. Goddamn if Lily couldn’t fly way better than she could sew.

So now you’re thinking I’m done right? I’m done because Jimmy’s got his daddy’s turnip and his daddy loved him after all and what more is there? But there is more. Because there’s the whole Earhart County elections that I got to tell you about. The big Earhart County electoral maze run.

Lily she flies back in good time. She lands that Mosquito real nice on Earhart County’s airfield runway and Jimmy helps get her and the machine out and into the shopping cart while Martin Rosebeck is off out broadcasting from the election maze. Skip has stayed behind.

“Hey Perdusa.”

“Skip.”

“I gotta get you to the elections.”

Jimmy sighs, “Fine, fine,” but secretly he’s feeling pretty good about himself. He didn’t tell me that but I reckon he was anyhow, what with his turmip and all.

“I have a car. I’ll drive. I can drive us. We have time.”

“Great.”

And they get Lily in and her shopping cart is sticking halfway out the trunk and Skip, who drives as bad as he flies, takes them on down to the field with the maze and the U-boat and the Ju-88.

Up at Mayor O’Casey’s factory, Goober and Dr. Zippermeyer don’t know anything at all about what’s going on between Mayor O’Casey and Mr.

Omagh. If they had, things may have turned out different. What happened wouldn’t have been nearly the doozy that it really was.

Because what happens is, up at Mayor O’Casey’s factory, Goober and Dr. Zippermeyer give up. They’ve looked all over and they give up. Then they drive themselves on over to the election maze, stopping for a bathroom break on the way though because they *are* old and that’s kind of what old guys do.

At about the same time, Mr. Omagh is trudging back to the office wondering just what he’s going to do with his life now he’s the wheat that doesn’t have a job anymore. He opens the door of his neatly kept office and looks about. He’s probably thinking stuff like: ‘What if someone

comes for that sandal, or one of those plastic combs and he's not there? There's a bicycle tyre that's been there for three years. What if someone finally comes looking for it? What about that bottle of whiskey? What if another cat like Mr. Snoogles gets lost, who'll look after it?' Mr. Omagh liked Mr. Snoogles. I mean Mr. Omagh is just getting himself worked up good and proper. He doesn't know whether to leave the cataloguing book and all the lost and found stuff in the office and to leave a note asking people to sign in any stuff they bring and to retrieve their lost stuff themselves or take it all home and leave a note with his contact details. Chaos, it'd be chaos. What if people brought stuff in and didn't catalogue it proper or if people just came in and mooched whatever they felt like? I swear Mr. Omagh's little heart was just breaking, pacemaker and all. That flyshit plutonium must have been doing overtime again.

Mayor O'Casey leaves for the elections real soon after Goober and Dr. Zippermeyer. In fact he parks at the field a moment before Jimmy and Skip and Lily do. He laughs out loud at the cart sticking out the trunk and leaves Jimmy and Skip to wrestle with it. There are a lot of other cars about. In fact the entire town has pretty much turned out. Jimmy could hear them all gathered about and as he pushes Lily's cart closer a band starts up playing swing numbers.

Jimmy said Earhart County had kicked up the biggest hoohah you ever saw. The field was jam packed with people and marquees. The majorettes Goober passed earlier were attempting to do a routine to the swing band. The landlord was selling so much piddle his brother had

brought in three portapotty cabins from his latest building site. Someone had baked enough bundt to cover two whole tables and everywhere he looked people were decked out in homemade Perdusa for Mayor regalia. Kids had it painted on their faces like they were going to the superbowl or something. People had billboards, a couple of old ladies had straw hats with Perdusa written on ribbons. It really was the most ridiculous thing. And I was thinking when he told me, jeez, all this for the biggest loser in high school. Except that Jimmy wasn't even memorable enough to win that title. But then it wasn't really for Jimmy was it? It was for his daddy. I'll bet almost nobody could have told you his first name or anything. And no doubt Jimmy would have been kind of pissed about it if he didn't have that turnip and that whole special feeling inside.

He walks through all those people and hell they don't even recognise him until Martin Rosebeck spots him and yells, "IT'S PERDUSA."

Earhart County kicks up even more of a hoohah. Jimmy looks up. Martin is standing next to a podium full of microphones in front of the maze alongside Mayor O'Casey and the town hall lady and a couple of official looking people.

Everyone start cheering and wanting to shake his hand so Jimmy passes Lily's cart over to Skip and nervously makes his way over to the stand. He leans into a microphone, "Ah, hello Earhart County."

More cheering.

An official shakes his hand as he climbs up onto the podium. "Welcome everyone to the most exciting Earhart County elections in history."

Even more cheering.

“I’d like the candidates running for Mayor to please step forward now.”

Jimmy and Mayor O’Casey move forward.

“The maze will commence in twenty minutes, if you’d like to sign the legal papers gentlemen?”

Jimmy takes a pen.

“Hold it there Perudsa,” Mayor O’Casey is grinning at him, “I’d like nothing more than to have some competition but ladies and gentlemen I don’t see how it’s going to be a fair competition after Perdusa here hasn’t obeyed the flying ban.”

There’s a startled murmur although it has to be faked, the whole town heard that Heinkel 111 going overhead.

The town hall lady moves forward.

“Yes Mayor O’Casey, you do have a point but as I discovered, the winkle sickness prevented the maze from being cut until after Perdusa flew. And as he is a stranger round here and not sure of the rules I think that while cheating could not really have occurred that he...”

“What about the flying this morning?”

“Ahh, the Mosquito?”

“Whatever he flew.”

“That wasn’t actually Jimmy?”

“I saw his goddamn face.”

“Oh.”

Even the official looks upset. “Oh...oh, you flew this morning. Well I...um we *do* have rules.”

Earhart County is silent. They’re all in shock.

“I mean the Heinkel was *one* thing.”

“I didn’t fly over the actual maze.”

The official perks up.

“Don’t even think about it,” snaps Mayor O’Casey. “He flew, there’s no way to be sure he didn’t circle this maze a hundred times drawing a map up.”

The nice town hall lady throws her hands up in the air. She had come so close. She has sorted out the damn Heinkel and everything and then that God forsaken loser Perdusa had screwed the whole thing up and now he can’t run for Mayor and O’Casey will win and Earhart County will get flooded and turned into a reservoir before the year’s out.

The official stutters a little. “So, so, it ah it it looks like it’s just Mayor O’Casey running ah running ah again this year.”

There’s still silence.

Jimmy mutters, “Sorry folks.” But then what does he care. He has a flight back to Newfoundland in a couple of days and a turnip and everything.

Someone in the swing band drops a trombone and the slide falls off.

“So ah Mayor O’Casey, if you could ah, ah si, sign the ah official official forms then uh...uh sir.”

And then Jimmy hears a commotion somewhere near the back. He spots a head. It’s Lily, she’s standing up on her shopping cart.

“VAIT, STOP, VAIT MEESTER O’CASEY. VONE MINUTE MEESTER O’CASEY. VE GOT SOMEVONE.”

“What? You’re going to push your cart through the maze?” Mayor O’Casey sighs. Lily really does get his hackles up.

“WHAT YOU SAY MEESTER O’CASEY? WHAT YOU SAY? YOU SAY YOU WANT SEET ON STEECK AND ROTATE?”

She looks down for a moment. There’s some muttering.

“SVIVEL. AND SVIVEL MEESTER O’CASEY?”

“Can we not put her in a secure ward?”

“ANYVONE CAN TO BORROW ME STEECK FOR MEESTER O’CASEY ASS? VE CAN RETURN IT AFTER THE SVIVEL.”

Earhart County start laughing. A couple of people hold up walking sticks.

They're world is coming apart but they're not going under the water graciously.

But there’s more movement. Someone’s making their way to the front.

“OH YA SIR, YOU HAVE NICE BEEG STEECK.” Lily points at one of the walking sticks, “THEES GOOD STEECK. PASS IT TO MEESTER O’CASEY AND LET’S GET SVIVEL YA?”

There’s a jostling in the front row then Goober steps out. “Mayor O’Casey, always a pleasure.”

Jimmy grabs hold of a microphone and he gets it just right. He gets it spot on. He gets Earhart County so fired up the band starts, the cheering starts afresh and three or four sticks are thrown and clatter onto the podium because he says:

“Ladies and gentlemen, we have a new candidate taking my place. Six kills ace, Rear Gunner Goober McFarlane.”

And then exactly as I told you. The place go wild.

CHAPTER THIRTY THREE

Goober is just loving it. He's waving and grinning like a maniac and the band are playing a swing version of The Dambusters. It doesn't even matter that Goober wasn't in the 617th. He still flew in Lancasters right? That was good enough. Jimmy didn't know what they were playing. When he told me about it he said that Earhart County sure did love this one song and I said, how did it go Jimmy? And he started to do that whole naaahnannah and hell I knew it before he got the first three notes out. Got to love those Dambusters. I met a bunch of them at an airshow one time. They had accents you could cut glass with. They'd been drinking champagne all morning and were in real good spirits too. Shook hands with every goddamn one of them. Cost me 751 dollars though, to get to the airshow and buy the tickes and to pay for a motel. 751 dollars. 766 if you count all the hotdogs I ate. I even told those old guys. Hell this is the best 766 bucks I ever spent. They were smiling and shaking my hand but damn if they weren't all so deaf from those Merlins all those years back I don't reckon they heard a word of it. Real polite anyhow though.

When the electoral candidates step down off the podium to sign the papers, Goober turns his grinning face to Mayor O'Casey. "Seems they like me."

"Not that it matters," says Mayor O'Casey, "I'm still going to win."

"Well now son, I don't know about me winning," says Goober, says Rear Gunner Goober McFarlane, 17 seconds life span Goober, Peenemunde

flak Goober, bonafide card carrying member of the goldfish club, 57,143 men lost Goober McFarlane, “I don’t know about me winning,” he says, “but the odds are, I’m not going to lose.”

Mayor O’Casey smirks. He puts his hands in his pockets and feels to make sure the map is still in there. “We’ll see McFarlane. You’d better run as fast as those grandpa legs can take you because I’ve been doing this for twenty five years and I am *good*.”

“Don’t you be aworryin about my grandpa legs any. They’ll be carrying me out that maze fast enough. You can get a good view of them from where you’ll be behind. Now, what’s a body have to do around here to get some beer and lunch?” He finishes signing the papers and mooches over to the marquee with the piddle. Jimmy follows.

“Did you find it?” asks Jimmy. Not that he knows what *it* is.

“Nope,” Goober downs half a pint in one mouthful. “Did you?”

“Yeah. Yeah I got it.”

“Really? What did it turn out to be?”

“A turnip.”

Goober swallows the rest of the beer and pats Jimmy on the shoulder, “Ah well, never mind. Maybe you’ll do well out the insurance.” He turns round to find Martin Rosebeck behind him with a microphone.

“And now for a few words from our new candidate. Rear Gunner Goober McFarlane do you have anything to say?”

“Yup.”

“What’s that?”

“Well if anyone has any sandwiches they don’t need, I didn’t have lunch today.”

He has three in his hands before he finishes the sentence. They're not even all ham.

The official elections guy starts yammering on the podium. They’ve got five minutes until the run starts. So the landlord, he has one of those cool bags. It’s sort of soft and rectangular with a handle on one of the shorter sides. He puts in a bottle of beer and an opener and the sandwiches and he hands it to Goober and slaps him on the back, “You give Mayor O’Casey hell.”

“Will do, will do. Say it’s awful close today. I might be needing one more bottle.”

Jimmy watches the landlord throw another in.

“If you lose this because you got to stop and pee it’s your own fault.”

“Hell at my age, I’m gonna be stopping to pee every ten minutes whatever.”

“Thanks for that,” says Jimmy, “you better go on up.”

“Yeah,” says the landlord, “go save Earhart County.”

And so the Earhart County elections begin.

Jimmy joins Dr. Zippermeyer and Lily and the nice town hall lady where they’ve squeezed themselves up to the front. Not that there’s anything to see. Just the exit of the maze. They’re pretty much just looking at a wall of cereal with a gap in it but not one person in Earhart County can take their eyes off it.

The official guy takes Goober and Mayor O'Casey round the back of the maze and down a long corridor to the center.

Mayor O'Casey is snorting at Goober's cool bag, "I won't be in here long enough for snacks but I'm glad you've come prepared to be wandering for a good while."

Goober glares at him, takes out a ham sandwich and puts it in whole, "Mmmmfblshnnf."

"Ah such a great speaker. It's a shame you won't ever make Mayor."

The official guy pulls a klaxon out his pants.

"You both understand the rules? You need to exit from the main exit to win. First one out is Mayor."

He holds up the klaxon. In any other town it'd probably be a hot chick in shorts with a big scarf. In Earhart County it's an aging little grey man with a klaxon in his pants.

Ready.

Set.

Go.

PAAAAAARRRRRRRRRRP.

Now it may seem like the whole of Earhart County is standing in front of that cereal maze watching to see who it's going to spit out first but there are a small number of people who are not there. I'm not talking about SeaView because those nurses have wheeled most of them out to watch. There are more checked blankets per inch in that U-boat field that day than Yosemite in picnic season.

No, the people who aren't there are the people working up at the flangeomatic factory. They haven't been given any time off to watch the elections. Not even just the afternoon. But it's not Mayor O'Casey's employees who are interesting right now. It's one of his ex-employees. It's Mr. Omagh. Mr. Omagh who's been moping about the office trying to work out how to leave.

Mr. Omagh who's made a decision.

He walks on over to the corner with the box.

The box.

It's warm from the sun and it's gleaming with Mr. Omagh's care. After fifty years. After fifty years of care.

He's got hold of a tool kit that got handed in when the electrics were rewired two years ago. He rootles through and pulls out a hammer without noting it in the catalogue book first, what the hell, Mr. Omagh is out of control. It takes three real good swings before the lock breaks and falls to the floor. Then he runs his fingers down the sides to the join of the lid. Mr. Omagh is only a small guy. It takes everything he's got, his pacemaker pounding. It takes everything he's got but he does it. He finally does it.

He N²s that son of a bitch.

CHAPTER THIRTY FOUR

Well I don't know about you but Jimmy didn't need to tell me what was in Mr. Omagh's box. What has been in Mr. Omagh's box for the last fifty years. I know exactly what it was. It's what Goober and Dr. Zippermeyer have spent their lives looking for. It's what Butcher Harris reckoned the Nazis were just three months away from making. It's what could have changed *everything*.

That is if Flight Commander Robin Perdusa hadn't downed it. Hadn't downed that Ju-88. If he hadn't downed that Ju-88 Ken Makenzie style. There's a word for that. The Soviets used to do it something beautiful. Taran they called it.

Imagine trying to do that in an Airacobra.

And see, when Robin Perdusa taranned that Ju-88, he didn't just save the lives of everyone in Earhart County moor secret HQ. He didn't even just save the lives of everybody in Earhart County. He actually saved the lives of half the goddamn country because that Ju-88 had been carrying an honest to God, no shit, nuclear bomb.

Butcher Harris had said it hadn't he. He knew they were close.

And that's why Goober wanted to find it so bad. The only plane he lost and it was carrying a goddamn nuke. If Earhart County had managed to get all the concrete shit off the sides of that Ju-88 they'd have seen a little sign. The one which Goober had seen. The one which a good couple of years later Goober suddenly understood and made it his life's work to find. The same sign painted by Dr. Zippermeyer's colleagues. The ones

who weren't piddling about inventing a bunch of junk to waste time and money. The ones who were serious and desperate enough.

And that is what Mr. Omagh has. That's what he's been looking after all these years. Minus the outer shell and packed into a box, an honest to God, no shit, Nazi nuclear bomb.

Goober and Dr. Zippermeyer had been so close hadn't they? Mooching about in that car park. If only they'd have thought to go on up to Lost and Found and say, 'Hey, we lost a nuke. There's no chance someone handed it in is there?'

God knows what either of them would have done with it if they'd found it. Jimmy didn't ask. Maybe they were going to tackle that problem when they got to it. Maybe there were just going to call in the bomb squad, ask them if they'd pop over and disarm their nuke. Whatever they had planned, they were too late. Mr. Omagh is the one who's found it, still warm, minding its own business in his office.

I guess a bunch of stuff was running through Mr. Omagh's head. One would have been relief that the torpedo explosion hadn't shaken it up enough to set it off. But certainly the most urgent thought would have been Mrs. Stewart-Packard's fault, because I swear to God this thing was *humming*.

I say it was her fault but it will have been the whole coven's fault really I guess. Because it was the whole coven which dowsed for the highest energy spot in Earhart County which in turn took them to the nuke. And they'd been dancing all nudey round that nuke site when it was still under the bog, before Mayor O'Casey bought it and filled it in with concrete.

They'd been dancing round it for a good fifty years until Mrs. Stewart-Packard did her part and sealed the deal with her whole, all will become not lost and stay not lost forever thing. Her whole stay not lost nudey dance.

And so maybe, just maybe it wasn't Mayor O'Casey firing Mr. Omagh that gave him the balls to open that box. Maybe it was Mrs. Stewart-Packard. Maybe her not lost dealio meant that someone had to find it and as Goober and Dr. Zippermeyer didn't go up to Lost and Found and because they used Geiger counters instead of dowsing rods. I guess that someone had to be Mr. Omagh.

See, the Mr. Omagh's of this world have their uses. I'm sure Mr. Snoogles was very fond of him too.

Back over at the elections, I don't know if Goober was running to save Earhart County or to stop the nuke site being flooded but I think it was a little of both. I do however have a fair old idea of what went on in the maze because Goober told Jimmy all about it after.

Turns out Goober had never run a maze before and he didn't particularly want to exert himself what with spending all morning on his feet in Mayor O'Casey's car park so he decided rather than rely on his own abilities that he'd rely on Mayor O'Casey's. And he just goes on ahead and tags along with Mayor O'Casey. I'll bet that would have just driven Mayor O'Casey good and mad. He'd be all,
"Get the hell away from me."

And Goober he'd be all, "Did I ever tell you that cheese doesn't agree with me so much?"

"Why would I care about that?"

"Oh you'll care, give it a minute. I just ate a cheese sandwich. There'll be a change in the quality of air any time soon."

"There wouldn't be if you let me alone and found your own damn way out."

"What? You don't like my company? I'm offended."

"Ok listen. I'm going to go back to the center. You go wherever the hell you want, just make it far away from me."

"But you don't want to miss the cheese. It's spectacular. Like an 1812th Overture for the nostrils."

"I wish I had a couple of cannons right now." And I'll bet he really means it because see as long as Goober is following him about, he can't get that map out his pants and find his way out. And not only that but unless he starts from the center, the map won't even be real easy to read. While Goober is telling him about his lactose induced wind instrumental, Mayor O'Casey has been getting lost.

After standing outside for fifteen minutes, Jimmy said the town hall lady told him it was the longest Mayor O'Casey had ever been in a maze. She said he usually made it out under ten minutes. Sometimes under eight. And the whole of Earhart County are getting their little hopes up at this. They actually start to think that maybe their town won't disappear under the waters. Like maybe they haven't lost it all, like there's light at the end of the wind tunnel.

When Mayor O'Casey and Goober had been in the maze for twenty five minutes, Mrs. Lacey in accounts gets an internal phone call from Lost and Found, which can only have gone along the lines of:

“Hello, accounting?”

“Mrs. Lacey?”

“Mr. Omagh. How are you? Do you need any help? I have a break coming up.”

“Mrs. Lacey, I need some help.”

“Anything you need Mr. Omagh. Have you eaten yet today?”

“Uh, I'm not so hungry right now. I uh, I'm just tidying things up here and I've uh found, well Mrs. Lacey I've found a nuclear bomb.”

“I made too many sandwiches today Mr. Omagh. I can bring you over some if you like.”

“It's a bomb Mrs. Lacey. It's a nuclear bomb and I uh, I don't know who the owner is.”

There's a silence.

“They're tuna.”

“Mrs. Lacey?”

“Yes Mr. Omagh?”

“Do you still drive that big silver car?”

“Yes.”

“How about you bring those sandwiches on over Mrs. Lacey and you can take a look.”

“The sandwiches? Alright then Mr. Omagh.”

So Mrs. Lacey will have taken her lunch box and walked on over to the Lost and Found department and at some point she's going to come to terms with what Mr. Omagh is telling her and she's going to have the bright idea of what to do with it.

"We'll have to tell Mayor O'Casey. He'll know what to do."

"Ok. Do you think he'll give me my job back?"

"You turn up with a nuke Mr. Omagh, I'm sure he'll do whatever you want."

Then after a lot of fussing, Mrs. Lacey goes off and comes back in the elevator with an industrial cart and a bunch of flangeomatic machine operators and they push that nuke down and into Mayor O'Casey's car park and towards her hatchback.

Now a weird thing is happening to those iron filings I told you about. As they walk through the car park, pushing that nuke on the cart, the loops made in the marsh move with it. Rippling through the bog as they load Mrs. Lacey's hatchback up and find a place to squeeze Mr. Omagh in with it.

That's when the crazy ass shit starts. Because this nuke that has lain in Mr. Omagh's Lost and Found all innocent like for all these years, has been dosed up good and proper by Mrs. Stewart-Packard's people and now is jammed up close and personal to Mr. Omagh. Mr. Omagh whose chest is crushed against it. Mr. Omagh's chest, the one with the pacemaker.

And you know about the pacemaker.

The one with the tiniest fleck of flyshit plutonium in it.

The fleck of flyshit that's trying to join the plutonium in the nuke. Just enough if it gets there, to make critical mass.

And Mrs. Lacey climbs in and it's awful warm suddenly in her car and so she puts her foot down and speeds along to Mayor O'Casey, with the heather and the moss all looping and changing round the poles of that nuke and Mr. Omagh's pacemaker.

Back in the maze Goober has finished all his sandwiches and is halfway through his beer. He's still tagging along to Mayor O'Casey but the mist that was lightly seeping in from the moors has started rolling in like low flying storm clouds. It's beginning to feel damp and cold and the corn crop walls make silhouettes against the white, they're shaped like giant people swaying gently. And Goober, he takes his eyes off Mayor O'Casey just for a second, that's all it took, and Mayor O'Casey runs like all get out until he busts through a cereal wall into another lane of maze. He will have pulled that map out the minute he gets away and he has a notion that he's roundabout the top left winkle area so he starts working his way like Billio through that cereal.

Goober he takes it in his stride. Once you've lost 2 crew members over Peenemunde and limped home on one engine with a 109 on your tail, you tend not to panic at much. He puts his empty bottle of beer back into that soft rectangular cool bag the landlord gave him and he picks a direction and he starts walking.

Now I'm going to tell you what happened next out of Jimmy's eyes. Right out of Jimmy's eyes because I swear he had the best seat in the house for what happened next. Because the people of Earhart County are standing about getting colder and colder. Everyone are murmuring, nobody wanting to make too much noise in case Mayor O'Casey can use it to orientate himself and get out first. The mist is pouring in from the direction of the moor behind the maze and all round, they can't believe it's been almost forty minutes and nobody has emerged out of the maze. And then there's a hollering and a horn blaring and a car comes flying into the field with its windows down and Mrs. Lacey and Mr. Omagh yelling like madmen. Half the crowd have to dive out the way but Jimmy he's right at the front and he turns back to look at the exit just in time. Just in time to watch the stalks of cereal bow down in loops to the pull of the bomb and there in the haze, in the Earhart County mist, cool bag in hand, the shape of Rear Gunner Goober McFarlane walks right on out. Right on out over the fallen stalks.

I don't know how many stalks fall. But let's call it over 57,143.

Well Earhart County can't believe it. They're cheering so loud you can't hear the band play or the majorettes baton twirl.

You can't even hear the car horn.

Or Mrs. Lacey yelling.

Mrs. Lacey who's really sweating now.

She gets out the car leaving Mr. Omagh and his pacemaker with the bomb.

Goober is climbing onto the podium. The official is so excited the klaxon falls out his pants as he's shaking Goober's hand and holding it over his head like a gold medal winner and shouting into the microphones.

"MAYOR GOOBER MCFARLAAANE."

And I got no idea how Mrs. Lacey does it but she rams her way to the front and hurls herself onto the podium and a couple of people think it's all part of the celebration and join her until she grabs that klaxon and PAARPS it for all it's worth and screams down the mike.

"THERE'S A BOMB IN MY CAR."

CHAPTER THIRTY FIVE

Can you imagine? Right in the middle of all the celebrations and suddenly:

“THERE’S A BOMB IN MY CAR.”

Everyone turn to Goober as he’s Mayor now and I guess he’s the best one to turn to because he knows exactly what it is Mr. Omagh found. He knows and Dr. Zippermeyer knows and when Mrs. Lacey yells, “IT’S A NUCLEAR BOMB. MR. OMAGH FOUND IT IN LOST AND FOUND.” Well then the whole of Earhart County know too. And then she adds, “I THINK THERE’S SOMETHING WRONG WITH IT. IT’S HUMMING.”

Goober looks down off the podium at Dr. Zippermeyer and Dr.

Zippermeyer points to his right. Lily looks at what he’s pointing at and Goober looks over too and nods.

“Gimmie your keys.” Goober grabs the keys off Mrs. Lacey and pushes his way through the crowd and climbs into the driver’s seat. “Afternoon Mr. Omagh.”

Dr. Zippermeyer pulls on Jimmy’s sleeve, “Come with me. We needink some help.”

Well everyone are pretty excited. They're moving away from the car as Goober inches it forward. And that’s when Jimmy realises what Dr. Zippermeyer was indicating because Goober pulls up so close to that U-boat that Mrs. Lacey’ front bumper goes ‘bink’.

Dr. Zippermeyer gets Jimmy and Lily's shopping cart and a couple of other people and gives them instructions to get the bomb loaded into the torpedo tube of that U-boat.

I swear.

Jimmy said they rammed it in good style and Dr. Zippermeyer tells everyone to clear the area as he climbs in. And they step back and watch and they all stand there a long time. All silent. Everyone staring at the side of the U-boat that his daddy sank. Waiting, waiting. Wondering if Dr. Zippermeyer could really pull it off until

BAM.

That U-boat torpedo blasts that nuke so high and far it makes it all the way to the ocean.

BAM.

It shoots it out something beautiful.

And Dr. Zippermeyer has saved the day hasn't he? Because that bomb doesn't stop flying until it's way out. Way, way out. Right on the outskirts of Earhart County waters. Out where you'd need Rear Gunner eyes to see.

Out where the tritium ship was.

Where the tritium still is.

Where all that radiation saturated water which hasn't dispersed lies.

Not that Earhart County know it yet.

All that Earhart County know is the bomb is gone and Mayor O'Casey is done and everything is not lost. Earhart County has not lost. And while they're celebrating and whooping for Dr. Zippermeyer who's sheepishly

climbing out the U-boat, the mist has come in so thick they don't even see Mayor O'Casey find his way out the maze. They don't even notice the off yellow fog rushing in from the coast. Fog heavy with tritium and plutonium and whatever it is that Mrs. Stewart-Packard did with her wish for all things to become not lost forever.

Fog so dense only a Rear Gunner manages to spot *it*. To spot *it* before even the sound reaches the people.

It's something that makes him go, "*Goddamn.*"

It's a Lockheed 10E.

A Lockheed 10E with six fuel tanks, beautiful all metal, 55 feet wingspread and twin vertical fins coming in low and straight and steady.

Honest to God.

In the ripples of the mist soaked cereal.

Amelia touches down into Earhart County.

CHAPTER THIRTY SIX

Well that's it. That's what Jimmy told me. That's exactly what Jimmy told me I swear. I got it all perfect. I remembered it all stone cold sober because when he was telling me, I dropped my beer see. I spilt it down my beard, right down my beard and I did not drink a drop.

CHAPTER THIRTY SEVEN

$[h(m^3M^2R^1M^9\beta\Omega H^{10}ae^4G^2F^3\uparrow[h(\rightarrow F^3/Vega/ae)[h(\Omega K^3W^4[v(\downarrow)]bb^3AaeM^2$
 $AEF^3M^2AG^6H^8W^1C)]\rightarrow F^3/747/\downarrow M^2\downarrow F^3/Fokker/\downarrow M^2IM^2[h(\pi L^2H^1)]D[h(s^3$
 $9s^1)][h(s^1)]Q\phi[v(H^8)][h(W^2)]M^2/Propp/[h(L^6H^5)(\lambda^2\Omega\uparrow F^3/P51/G^8\Omega^1\downarrow i^2y^2M$
 $^6W^1\downarrow H^5bb^2;L^2H^5\lambda^3X^1)(M^2\uparrow F^3/P51/\pi U^1ae^7)(\lambda^1\phi\beta^2H^5WX^1W)(\lambda^2\uparrow F^3/P51/ae^9$
 $Z^1L^2aeE^3A^7\downarrow F^3/MiG3/ae^1L^2)]\theta[h^1(\Psi^3XW)]M^{10}[Propp(NU)]G^9X^3[v(\beta^2[\Sigma H$
 $^{12}W^8\mathcal{K}]D)]M^2A\lambda^1[\Sigma H^{12}W^8\mathcal{K}]DQ[h(s^1)][h(s^1WC)]\uparrow F^1\downarrow oM^2AM^2D\theta t[h^1(\downarrow$
 $)]h^1(\downarrow F^1ae^3)][v(\Psi^3H^8)]M^2[h^1(G^9\beta^2G^9\beta^2G^3F^1)]\beta^3X^3[h(ae\downarrow)][h(W^1s40ae^9L^2a$
 $e)]\beta^3X^3\uparrow A^4[R^4[h(s^1/T6/)]bb^7R[v(s^1)]]M^2\beta^3[v(H^8A)]\beta^3[h(ae^3G^4F^8ae)]M^2[h($
 $L^1bb^2)]h^1(L^1bb^2H^4)]D\beta^2[h(\uparrow F^3i^2bb^7DM^6X^3ae^{10}L^2bb^2H^4ae\downarrow F^9)]D[h(s^1)][h($
 $M^2\uparrow F^3/P51/\pi U^1ae^7)(F^3/P51/ae^5L^2ae)[h(\uparrow F^3/P51/\pi bb^7aeG^{10}M^6Z^1ae)][h(\uparrow F^3$
 $/P51/G^9oW^1(G^9X^3)\downarrow)]\beta^3ae^1[\Omega aeW^9][\Omega aeW^9CW^6]\beta^3X^3A[h(ae\Omega X^3E\downarrow)]\lambda^1t[$
 $h(\uparrow F^1aeE\downarrow)]\lambda^1[D][h(\uparrow F^1aeo\Psi Q[h(\lambda^2RF^1H^4)]\lambda^1[h(ae)][h(\lambda^2RF^1H^4)][h^1(W^9)$
 $]\uparrow F^1\lambda^1[v(X^2U)]G^9\beta^3M^3AG^9ae^1[h(L^4)][h(L^4ae[ae^{10}]F^8oRW^9E^4)][h(L^4ae[ae^1$
 $^0]F^8oRW^9E^4)]G^9D[v(\beta^2H^5)][h^1(H^4\Psi^3)][h(\lambda\uparrow F^2/P51/G^{10}M^6bb^3jZ^1bb^2L^4oE\downarrow$
 $C\phi)][h(W^9E^4F^8ae^3\phi)(\Sigma H^{12}W^8\mathcal{K})][h(H^4\rightarrow W)][H(\uparrow F^3/Vega/ae)][h(\lambda^2\uparrow F^3/P$
 $51/G^{10}[A^3G^{10}]M^6ae^{10}ZW^1L^5aeE)][h(\lambda^2\uparrow F^3/P51/G^{10}M^6ae^{10}ZW^1L^5aeE)C[h($
 $F^3/Spitfire/\pi L^2H^{11})][h(\Omega H^8W^2)][h(R^4W)][v(\beta[\Sigma H^{12}W^8\mathcal{K}])]W[v(X^2)]\beta^2[h($
 $\lambda^2\Omega\uparrow F^3/Huey/[h(H^{11})]\Omega^1\theta R^5ae^2W^9E\downarrow W)]C\Phi[h(M^6)]H^{10}ae^4[h(H^{10}W^3)]\phi[h$
 $^1(ae^3G^9\phi)][h(H^4/Lanc/)][\pi/F/A-$
 $18Hornet/][\pi/757/]H^4[h(W\mathcal{K})][\Sigma H^{12}W^8\mathcal{K}]DH^4Ds^1[H^4\Psi^5s^1]s^1H^5[v(M^6L^3\Psi$
 $^2[L^3\Psi L^3\Psi L^3\Psi\dots][v(X^3)]D[h(F^1\downarrow)]DW[v(X^3H^{13}X^2[\Sigma H^{12}W^8\mathcal{K}]WH)][Propp$
 $(H^5DE^4)][v(UAX^2DH^{13})][h(\uparrow F^3/BellX1/\downarrow W)\lambda^3X^3[\Sigma H^{12}W^8\mathcal{K}]\downarrow F^4\phi G^9[h([v$
 $(\downarrow)F^3/P51/bb^7G^{10}M^6bb^2L^2ae)][h(v(\downarrow)]bb^3AaeM^2AEF^3M^2AG^6H^8W^1C)][h(\downarrow$
 $F^1)][h(ae\downarrow F^1)][v(\beta^2)]A^3M^2[h(H^4\Psi^5E^4W)][h(M^2G^7[H^5/P38/H^5/P51/L^1H^5][$

$L^1H^5])M^2\beta^2G^9\Psi^5X^3\mathcal{K}\Psi^5WD\beta^3\theta\beta^3[h(\uparrow F^3/Mosquito/bb^2o\downarrow L^2)][h(L^2E^4\downarrow F^2)$
 $\beta^2\theta R[h^1(G^9H^{13})][h(H^5)][h(\rightarrow F^3/RyanM-2/S/)]H^5\Psi^5A[h(H^{13})]\beta^3M^8$
 $[v(H^4X^3H^7)]\Omega[h(\downarrow F^1)][v(\beta^2[H^5/Airacobra/H^6/P51/])]A^1\theta[h(s6bb^2jL^2E^4)]\beta G$
 $^9[\lambda^2\uparrow F^3/Lanc/\downarrow G^{10}M^6X^3L]G^9)\theta[h(H^4)][h(F^3/B24/s9)][v(F^3/109/s275)][v(F$
 $^3/190/s2/B24/M^6/P47/M^6/P38/G^{10}/P-$
 $51/ae^1G^9ae^5)]A^3[\Sigma H^{12}W^8\mathcal{K}]\uparrow F^1[h(H^5)][h(F^3/Hurricane/H^4M^7H^5)]G^9$
 $[h(F^3/Hurricane/M^7H^5Z^1L^4H^4W)]\theta[L^2/MiG3/][h(R\Omega^1W\mathcal{K}[h(H^8o\pi W\mathcal{K})]\theta$
 $\beta^3F^3/Heinkel1111/[h(s^1)][s^1]LD\theta DF^5D\theta G^9D[h(ae)]D[d(A)][ae]\theta[h(DX^3E^4n$
 $^1)][h(H^4A^3W)][h(DX^3E^4n^1W^1)]D\Psi[\Psi(H^4)]\theta[\Psi(m^2\Psi\downarrow)]E^4\theta[W^3][Propp(D)]$
 $[v(\lambda^2\uparrow H^6X^3)]\downarrow F^3/Heinkel1111/\lambda^1[h(s20/Yak/)]\downarrow\theta[H^5][\Sigma H^{12}W^8\mathcal{K}]G^1\lambda^1\theta[Pr$
 $opp(ae^1W^9E^4)]D\uparrow F^2[h(L^3\Psi)[W^9]][v(L^3ae^1)]DW^9\theta[h(H^4[h(F^3/Hurricane/s1$
 $7T^4)][h(X^3)]ae\Psi^5G^1[v(H^{13})][h(E^4)]\theta\uparrow F^2\downarrow C[v(X^2H^{13})]W^9E^4\beta^2C[h(H^4M\Psi^4$
 $W)](R^5W)][v(M^6X^3)][h(RW\mathcal{K})][h(R)][\Psi][h(L^2bb^2jae[h(H^4)]W^9E^4)]\uparrow F^1[h$
 $(\rightarrow F^3/Vega/ae)]\theta\uparrow F^3/Mosquito/w\Psi^5\lambda^1[h(\uparrow F^2)]W^9\pi L^1[h(G^1M^8R^3\Psi^5\beta^2E^1\Psi^5$
 $bb^8G^9X^3\Psi^5ae^1W^3[ae^1bb^9G^6)]F^7\uparrow F^1W^9[h(ae[h(H^4)])]W^9D[\rightarrow[h(\rightarrow)][v(X^2)$
 $][Propp(ae^8)][\Sigma H^{12}W^8\mathcal{K}]\theta\Omega^1[h(E^4)]\downarrow F^3/Mosquito/\uparrow F^2W^3\lambda^1Q[h(s6)]C[h(M$
 $^2\phi[H^4]W)][v(H^{13})][h(\mathcal{K}H^8L^4\mathcal{K})]\mathcal{K}[v(\beta^2)]M^1[Propp(N^2D\theta)][h(Z^1)[h(Z^1)[h($
 $Z^1)]]E^4[h(ae^1)][\theta]A^4\Psi^3[h(\Psi^3X)][h(\beta^2H^{13})][v(H^3)]U[Propp(G^1\Psi^5\uparrow F^2)][v($
 $G^4\beta^2\Psi^5)][h(H^8W\mathcal{K}m^1W\mathcal{K}bb^2jW\mathcal{K}g/109/W\mathcal{K}\downarrow L\mathcal{K})]U\Psi^5[(\downarrow W)][\Sigma H^{12}W^8$
 $\mathcal{K}57143]C[h(W^6)][Propp(\downarrow F^2\Psi^5)]\theta[h(A\uparrow F^2\Omega^1[h(s^1))][d(\Psi^5R^5W\Omega^1)]C[h($
 $\downarrow)]ae^1bb^9G^6]$

THE END

Earhart County:
The Making of a World War Two
Wondertale
Nicola Johnson

Introduction

There has been a progressive resurgence in World War Two fiction over recent years. As if the public consciousness, wrestling with the lack of moral clarity surrounding the Iraq War, is desperately harking back to a war that offered no ambiguity in the portrayal of its villains. Perhaps the timing of this interest has something to do with the rapid dwindling of Churchill's finest generation and a last attempt to understand them and their stoicism. Or maybe, in the midst of Plato's grim predictions for a society that is run by a democracy becoming actuality, we are all yearning for the days when Britain stood as one.

My initial aim was to write *Earhart County*, a novel set in the South West of England, about World War Two aviation. It set out to entertain a mainstream audience whilst still appealing to those with a deep seated interest in the area. The novel intended to use the element of patriotic pride that is so deeply embedded in Britain's psyche, by including the incredible, heroic reality of World War Two. *Earhart County* wished to call upon the image of the devil-may-care bomber crew whilst also highlighting the terrified, real people about to fly. The odds of a bomber crew's survival became an important theme throughout *Earhart County* to highlight this. That the average lifespan of a rear gunner in combat was seventeen seconds was a vital part of the tone of the novel. The unbelievable odds these people faced to survive was a lasting image that *Earhart County* desired to create.

The premise of *Earhart County*, was to take as much research as possible about World War Two aviation and create a novel which rightly

hails the aircrew who risked so much, as heroes. *Earhart County* wanted to show them not just as heroes of their time but as legends. This is one of the reasons I began to look to the realm of myths and folktales. The emotional impetus was a feeling that if King Arthur should be heard of in every British household then so should people like Douglas Bader, Ken McKenzie and Chan Chandler. A new mythology needed be made, not just one for aviation fans but one which would appeal to a mainstream audience and this is also where the use of folktales became a useful device. The folktale has such a broad audience. Educational and unthreatening, they have an appeal which has guaranteed their lasting presence; they clarify our sense of morality and knowledge in a world where such are often uncertain.

Within this thesis I am going to look at the three different areas of research and study undertaken for the writing and creation of *Earhart County*. Firstly, I'll begin to look into those histories and biographies of the Second World War which are particularly pertinent to my novel. In doing so, I'll explore the War as having an enduring legacy in today's world, in terms of both conditioning the physical landscape and architecture of England, as well as the attitudes of the national psyche. In the second section, I'll document the structure of my novel, which was informed by research into the Russian wondertale, specifically Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of a Folktale*, as a way to secure a mainstream audience. The creation of characters will be discussed here as well, specifically those based on major historical figures. This argument naturally extends into a discussion of post-war science fiction and magical

realism as a viable way to deal with the atrocities of the Second World War as a subject. Section three will offer an understanding of how women are utilized in war fiction, and how my own work hopes to add to this tradition. Throughout this thesis, my argument will engage those post-war and contemporary fiction writers, who provide the greatest literary context for *Earhart County*. These writers include Kurt Vonnegut, Roald Dahl, Sebastian Faulks, and Len Deighton, whose respective works *Slaughter House Five*, *Going Solo*, *Charlotte Grey* and *Bomber*, were influential the way in which my novel might incorporate history and achieve an authentic voice in a fictional form.

1. The Legacy of the Second World War

Once the desire to mediate between those who have a real interest in the war and those who do not, was established and the decision to focus on the aviation side of World War Two was made, the next step was to study as much as possible about it. It was a large and complicated field. For the first few months, aircraft manuals made no sense to me. Mistakes in linear improvements to various aircraft were easy to make and *Earhart County*'s narrator became the most challenging voice I had ever attempted to write, because the narrator of *Earhart County* needed to be a person who knew everything about aircraft. On top of the narrator being a fanatic of aviation, it was imperative for him to be the most realistic and most believable character in the novel. Whether an audience would suspend

their disbelief when reading about dragons and sound wave machines was important, but their belief in the narrator was absolutely vital. I wanted the audience to trust in the narrator's knowledge enough to understand the truth behind the people and events mentioned in *Earhart County*. This was also the reason I aimed to make readers of *Earhart County* believe the author and the narrator were in fact one and the same. This was an issue that would cause work on the novel to stop for weeks on end while various aircraft were investigated sufficiently to make it possible for the narrator to make a throwaway comment such as:

Don't get me wrong, those T-6's are pretty and all but judging by where that U-Boat was, I'm not so sure it shouldn't have been a Swordfish.¹

Earhart County looks at the feats of Bomber Command and the RAF in World War Two and is also heavily concerned with what the war has left behind not just psychologically but also physically. It looks at how the war has changed the landscape of Britain, both urban and natural, the type of world that sprang up after the conflict and the kind of influence it has had on the people. It is a legacy that Brits feel compelled to keep alive and Len Deighton in his foreword to *RAF Bomber Command in Fact, Film and Fiction* really captures this feeling when he says:

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.²

¹ Russell Johnson, N. *Earhart County*. p 57

² Falconer, Jonathan. (1996) *RAF Bomber Command in Fact, Film and Fiction* Somerset: Sutton, p. ix

Indeed Britain has been shaped by more than its loss, and physical reminders of World War Two can be found in abundance in modern life.

The effect on the British landscape can be seen in plenty of areas in the country. The bombed out churches stand proudly in urban localities as monuments to the Blitz and due to the bombings the architecture of cities changed irreparably from places of historical architectural beauty to economically, simply built structures. With even just a glimpse at the South West, where *Earhart County* is set, you can see the evidence and the remembrance of the War. Studying in Plymouth near to the moor on which the novel is set, also meant the city had the greatest amount of influence on the creation of the fictional town. It was particularly fitting therefore during the initial research to discover that Plymouth has the only monument dedicated to every country and every man and woman who fought in Bomber Command, erected by Rear Gunner Jim Davidson. It is of, fittingly enough, a rear gunner holding his parachute, and stands amongst other monuments on the Hoe where it is frequently the focal point of Remembrance Day parades and flypasts. Another demonstration of just how close to the surface of modern Britain the war still is, can be seen in examples such as the P-38 Lightning discovered in the shallow waters in North Wales. It was found whilst I was researching the novel, and its skeletal image through the sea's mist played its part in the inspiration of *Earhart County*, indeed there were several World War Two plane wrecks uncovered during my study. In 2007 an entire de Havilland Mosquito was found in Wavendon during building work, just one year later a Corsair was excavated from a field in Somerset and these

discoveries are constantly being made.³ Nissen huts, another landscape legacy of World War Two, are dotted up and down the country, often in the process of returning back to nature and there is something haunting about these disused buildings and abandoned aircraft.

Novels and memoirs attest to this, such as Len Deighton's *Goodbye Mickey Mouse*, which discusses the eerie atmosphere that lingers in these remnants of the war. In his novel, an airman returns after many years, to the airfield where he was stationed. Len Deighton's descriptions of the old base are disconcerting and his anthropomorphism serves to highlight this feeling that there was once something alive that is now dead about the field when he describes:

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.⁴

The idea that the framework of the buildings is a skeleton is exactly how they seem to come across. The P-38 in the shallows of the Welsh beach stands out like the fossilised remains of some kind of dinosaur. Certainly they are things which should have life about them. In the book *Tail End Charlies*, which is essentially a collection of anecdotes from various Bomber Command aircrew, Walter Mayberry sums this up when revisiting his old airfield. In a way very similar to Len Deighton's protagonist, he says that they are:

³ <http://www.redkitebooks.co.uk/aa/index.htm> (Accessed: 20 February 2011).

⁴Deighton, Len. (2009) *Goodbye Mickey Mouse*. London: Harper Collins, p. 1

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.⁵

This atmosphere that surrounds World War Two relics gives way easily and frequently to feelings of the past that surround them and ghost stories centred on airfields abound, such as the ghost of W.F. Hodgson who is said to haunt RAF Linton-on-Ouse⁶. *Earhart County* has a description of an old World War Two headquarters on the moor and the description of the inside is a reflection of these once alive places.

Then she walks them through a canteen and goddamn if it's not the Mary Celeste of all canteens. Plates on tables with cups and knives and forks, some of them on the floor. No food about any more but jackets still on the benches.⁷

It is not just the architecture and machinery of World War Two that survives today but also the more dangerous aspects of the war. Mines and bombs are constantly being found in British waters and on British soil. Throughout the writing of *Earhart County*, World War Two explosives were found continuously. In 2007 a bomb was found in Aberdeen, in 2008 a hand grenade was found in Helston and in 2009 a bomb still with its Whitley Bomber aircraft was found in North Yorkshire. Most recently, in Plymouth in November 2010, a bomb was uncovered during the city centre demolition of the former Hoe building and

⁵Rennel, Tony & Nichol, John. (2005) *Tail End Charlies: The Last Battles of the Bomber War 1944-45*. London: Penguin Books, p. 412

⁶Beaty, David. (1983) *Strange Encounters: Mysteries of the Air*. Suffolk: Chaucer Press.

⁷Russell Johnson, N. *Earhart County*, p. 192

detonated in the Sound. These examples however, are repeated almost on a monthly basis and the news frequently contains stories of explosives from the war era being found in gardens and on beaches.

Earhart County has a bomb at the heart of it. It is not found in a farmer's field or in a backyard vegetable patch but in the Lost Property office of Mayor O'Casey's factory. It's a bomb which was found after the war, put into a box and placed in the care of the Lost Property officer. Mr Omagh, in charge of the Lost Property office, does not realise there is a bomb inside the container and true to the theme of myth and legend in *Earhart County*, he fights a Pandora's box struggle of curiosity as to its contents. The *Earhart County* bomb is not only at the centre of the Lost Property Officer's world but it is also at the centre of Rear Gunner Mcfarlane's and his character has spent his entire life trying to find it. While plotting *Earhart County*, I knew I wanted something to be at the centre of the search and settled on the bomb after reading numerous exciting accounts of the mine and bomb findings round Britain that were constantly in the public eye during my studies.

The environment for *Earhart County* is based on the landscape of the West Country. It combines the tors of Dartmoor and the ghosts of Bodmin with the secret bunkers and experiments in chemical warfare carried out in Exmoor. It also plays on a certain feeling of isolation that can often be felt in small Cornish towns the further south you get.

Earhart County is similarly filled with reminders of the war, on the moors within the novel is a World War Two bunker reminiscent of the headquarters on Exmoor. The novel also contains a U-boat which has

been dragged onshore up to a farmer's field, where it is preserved as a memorial to the achievements of the protagonist's father. This is a direct reference to the U-boat that really was sunk and then pulled out of the sea to be used as a museum that now stands in Merseyside. In addition to the U-boat in *Earhart County* a German bomber is found underneath the concrete of the town's only factory. The small town also shares the same geometric design as Atlantis, with the streets having been built in concentric circles and at the heart is a statue of Robin Perdusa in his World War Two flight gear. Also featuring in the town is a museum dedicated to World War Two aircraft and a pub which is covered in old photographs of the war. Each room of the pub is named after a famous pilot, many of whom fought in World War Two. Wherever the protagonist turns in the small town, he is reminded of the war and in turn, so is the reader.

But as previously mentioned, the legacy of World War Two is also held within the attitudes of society and there will always be a feeling in Britain's psyche about the finest generation and a comparison made to the youth of the day. In Len Deighton's *Goodbye Mickey Mouse*, right at the very start of the novel, the protagonist fighter pilot, Mickey Morse, visits his old airfield with his wife and adopted son. Despite the fact that the airfield means so much to Morse and that it was the place where his biological father died, his son cannot be bothered to get out of the bus to see it. This strained relationship between a war veteran father and his progeny is echoed in a lot of war fiction and Sebastian Faulks deals with this phenomenon in both *Birdsong* and to an extent in *Charlotte Grey*.

The protagonist of Faulks' *Birdsong* is Stephen Wraysford, a soldier fighting to stay alive in World War One and the secondary character is not his son but his granddaughter. Her story runs alongside her grandfather's when at the age of thirty eight, she suddenly becomes interested for the first time in what kind of a man he was and what his experiences were. She muses that this may only be interesting to her now that she has reached an age where she expects not to have children; unable to look to the future of her genes, she looks to the past. Through her grandfather's diaries and by speaking to two veterans who knew him, she discovers just who he was and what he went through. By the time she really gains an understanding of him, she discovers she is pregnant. And pregnant, she reads the records of his time spent trapped in a mine under the battlefield alongside Jack Firebrace, whose son had recently died of diphtheria. Trying to encourage Firebrace to fight to stay alive Stephen attempts to give him a reason to continue.

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Stephen's relationship with Jack's family including a daughter he didn't know he had, helps heal the post-traumatic stress that was rendering him incapable of functioning on a human level. This is particularly relevant to *Earhart County* which contains this same theme of children and the stress post-traumatic disorder places on families. The emotional distance Stephen feels, is the same one the protagonist's father suffers

⁸Faulks, Sebastian. (1994) *Birdsong*. London: Vintage, p. 452

from in *Earhart County*. In fact at the centre of *Earhart County* is this relationship between a decorated war veteran father, Robin Perdusa and his not particularly successful son Jimmy. Robin who thrived in the atmosphere of World War Two, where the enemy was clear, turned however, from confident hero to guilt ridden uncertainty when faced with the ambiguity of The Vietnam War. Many American pilots have spoken out about the trauma and of their serious anxiety caused by Curtis LeMay's alleged philosophy to bomb the country back to the Stone Age. Indeed many American pilots, so horrified at just how badly the land was being bombed, secretly dropped their payloads over the sea rather than continue the total devastation. This is what causes Robin Perdusa's withdrawal from the world. The stiff upper lip and pride he took in his role of a fighter pilot leaves him after he struggles to fight in a war with no clear cut villains.

His son, Jimmy Perdusa, is born after The Vietnam War and knows nothing of the man his father was before it. In this sense *Earhart County* can relate to *Birdsong*, as like *Birdsong*, Jimmy spends the novel learning just who is father really was. In Sebastian Faulks' novel, Stephen's life is told through diaries. In *Earhart County* however, a novel based on the oral folktale, Robin's life is revealed through the anecdotes told by a village who dearly loved him.

However, it is not just post-traumatic stress that stops a proper relationship forming between Jimmy and Robin Perdusa. There is also a sense of Jimmy not being able to live up to his father's achievements. *Earhart County* clearly identifies Jimmy as unsuccessful and his feelings

of inferiority in comparison to his father are alleviated not by Jimmy winning the Earhart County election, because ultimately he is disqualified, but by a message sent by his father via his last will and testament. What his father could not say in life, he was able to convey in death. This is the climax of *Earhart County*, the moment where Jimmy Perdusa's father is able to communicate finally beyond the grave, how important and cherished his son was to him.

The struggle to communicate and the performative dimension involved in telling others about the war is central to Faulks' *Birdsong*. Like other war fiction, it appropriates the authentic lingo and it is supported by veterans such as Bill Carmen. Carmen, a World War Two veteran airman, discusses the issue in *Tail End Charlies* with the added emotional aspect that veterans were cautious about telling war-tales since they didn't want to theatricalise the experience:

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Faulks' character, Gregory, utilizes this language and is emblematic of this very sentiment:

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.¹⁰

⁹Rennel, Tony & Nichol, John. (2005) *Tail End Charlies: The Last Battles of the Battles of the Bomber War 1944-45*. London: Penguin Books, p. 413

¹⁰Faulks, Sebastian. (1999) *Charlotte Grey*. London: Vintage, p. 488

This concept is incorporated into *Earhart County* with its protagonist Jimmy Perdusa knowing nothing at all whatsoever about his father's time flying in World War Two. He knows so little, he's not even aware the P-51 Mustang aircraft his father flew, was a solo plane. This, for the most part is due to his father's unwillingness to 'shoot a line' to the point of a complete communication breakdown with his son. Balancing out Jimmy's complete lack of knowledge about the war is the entire population of Earhart County all of whom take the legacy of World War Two seriously. Everyone in the town is an aviation fanatic and can recount many air battles and aviation tales. In Earhart County the antics and the achievements from World War Two will always be remembered, in fact the only character in the town who is not interested in the war is also the novel's villain, Mayor O'Casey.

The legacy of the Second World War is, of course, treated seriously and often gravely, but it's also worth mentioning that the ubiquitousness of its aftermath has enabled the War to be subject of comedy as well. The double act of Armstrong and Miller, utilise this concept in a popular television sketch called *The Pilots*. They combine the attitudes and vocabulary of contemporary youth with World War Two pilots and accents. It produces the most extraordinary effect, of two terribly well spoken men in uniform, filmed in black and white, complaining about how they have to wear regulation flying gear and can't express their individuality through their clothing.

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.¹¹

It is not just a modern day vocabulary which makes these sketches so effective but also the psychology of today's youth in comparison to the youth of the war era. The Armstrong and Miller pilots not only trivialise the issues important to today's generations but also broach the topic of LMF (Lack of Moral Fibre) the humour of which stems from two RAF pilots completely lacking in LMF and then complaining about being discriminated against because of it. It makes for an absurd comedy, which in turn shows how deeply imbedded into the psyche of modern society, the war's generation of airmen truly are.

2. Structuring Earhart County as a Folktale

2.1. An English Novel, a Russian Morphology

Once sufficient research into World War Two and its aircraft and aircrew was completed, the manner in which the novel would be told was the next step in creating *Earhart County*. It was decided early on to create a narrator who would play the same role as the storyteller around the campfire. Using the device of a storyteller who is not involved in the

¹¹<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHCZrgHwa50&feature=related> (Accessed: 20 February 2011).

action of the story would give it a very traditional folktale feel, helping to invoke a sense of myth and legend despite the contemporary setting. In order to do this there had to be a shift in focus and a modern day narrator needed to be created. He would be the aviation fanatic, he would have the ability to be all-knowing when it came to aircraft, and he would be the basis upon which the entire novel would hang. The most vital part of the process suddenly became making the narrator someone an audience would have complete faith in. If the narrator mentions an incident that happened over the channel in 1940, it was important to draw attention to the anecdote as history not fiction. And with the novel being based on folklore, it would be the narrator's job to make the real history embedded in the magic realism of the novel, believable.

Earhart County's objectives were to be as informative of the war as possible. Still, set in contemporary Britain, my novel is not a *wartime* story but a war story. Holger Klein differentiates between the two in his study of Britain in *The Second World War in Fiction*:

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The idea to use the medium of folklore to write the novel was not to detract from the realities that exist within it, but to help the audience digest the horror and the heroics by using a familiar genre. It also helped in drawing together a mass of anecdotes so that Earhart County itself could be the site of many different historical happenings. The reality of

¹² Klein, Holger. (1984) *The Second World War in Fiction*. London: Macmillan, p. 10

locality could be ignored and a mass of history and rumour could all be based within that one small town. The folktale and the magical realism it would create became the tool to do this.

With the research into World War Two aviation done, I then began studies into folklore and had not, at the start of the project understood how large an area this was. Just as I had no idea how enormous the world of aviation between 1939 to 1945 was, I was relatively new to the complex diversity of folklore across the country and across the globe. Cornish folklore formed part of the initial research, as the novel was to be set on the Cornish moors and Cornish folklore has a particularly intriguing way of fitting into the landscape, for example stories of how the Cheesewring came to exist, or the tale of the formation of the Merry Maidens standing stones. However, Cornish folklore did not contain narratives of the right format that was needed for *Earhart County*. Due to researching the Soviet Night Witches at the time, I looked into Russian folklore and found it the perfect medium for *Earhart County*. Not only did it contain a strong recognisable structure of the type that was suitable for the novel, but it is also traditionally a spoken genre. So much of my research into the experiences of World War Two aircrew contained spoken anecdotes, that the oral nature of Russian folklore therefore was instantly a sympathetic medium to sit alongside tales of aviation feats. This is reflected in Russian folklore even when it has been recorded on the page. In most typical Russian folktales, the narrator refers to the fact that he has been told the tale he's telling, far more than in traditional British folktales or Cornish folktales. When a character must make a long journey in a

typical Russian folktale, the narrator draws attention to his own lack of time to tell the story in,

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.¹³

When there is a celebration at the end of the tale, the Russian narrator is always there to see it and comment on the feast or wedding. While this kind of narrator was chosen for *Earhart County* as a way to structure the novel, it soon became a device that would make the writing of it both simpler and more difficult at the same time. Simpler because the narrator could safely use, when needed, a certain amount of exposition, difficult because as previously mentioned, a vast knowledge of aircraft was imperative.

Russian wondertales have a very firm narrative structure, a beginning middle and end, but are also capable of producing numerous variations. In *Morphology of the Folktale*, Propp ascertains that there are only thirty-one functions within Russian wondertales and that those thirty-one functions succeed in creating an,

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.¹⁴

This is exactly what *Earhart County* was looking for. A type of narrative with an unalterably strict structural format that due to its very

¹³Alexeieff, Alexander. (1975) *Russian Fairy Tales*. New York: Panteon, p. 10

¹⁴Propp, Vladimir. (2000) *Morphology of the Folktale*. Texas: University of Texas Press, p. 21

restrictiveness allows endless possibilities; for *Earhart County* needed a singular wondertale to run throughout, a tale which both echoes the war narrative of the protagonist's father and the actions of the son fifty years later.

The importance of the wondertale within the novel is apparent in its repetition amongst the leading characters. It also serves to show the real hero in the novel, not the protagonist or the father of the protagonist but the secondary character, Rear Gunner Mcfarlane, because in a novel about Bomber Command, the rear gunner will always be the hero.

Looking at the most basic premise of Propp's morphology, his separation of the folktale into thirty-one functions, we can take a brief look into the workings and the structure of *Earhart County*. Right at the beginning of the novel the fabricated wondertale '*Prince Ivan and the Dragon*' is told. The narrative functions of this tale are as follows:

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| g: | (Interdiction) Ivan is warned of dragons in the East. |
| B: | (Meditation) Hero lacks a special sword to defeat them. |
| ↑: | (Departure) Hero leaves on a mission to find the sword. |
| F: | (Acquisition) Hero is given a flying horse. |
| G: | (Guidance) The horse takes the hero to the sword. |
| ↓: | (Return) The hero returns home. |
| H: | (Struggle) Hero defeats the dragons. |
| W: | (Wedding) Hero marries and ascends the throne. |

This structure is echoed throughout the novel. Jimmy and Robin Perdusa's plots follow this sequence of events almost exactly, however, their stories differ by one function. In both of their cases, their main struggle (H) happens earlier on, but where they differ from Prince Ivan, they are identical to each other. Jimmy Perdusa's plot echoes his father's in the order of its same narrative functions.

g: (Interdiction) Me 109 sighted in the distance.

B: (Meditation) Lack of support against Ju-88.

↑: (Departure) Flies off to stop bombing.

H: (Struggle) Dogfight.

F: (Acquisition) Map from HQ.

G: (Guidance) Driven back from HQ.

↓: (Return) Robin returns the last part alone.

W: (Wedding) Celebration of the return of lost pilot.

g: (Interdiction) Jimmy gets news of father's death.

B: (Meditation) Lack of lucky charm.

↑: (Departure) Jimmy travels to Earhart County.

H: (Struggle) Tritium ship is destroyed.

F: (Acquisition) Machine to wake up Lily to get vital info.

G: (Guidance) Flown by Lily to site of lucky charm.

↓: (Return) Returns back to Earhart County.

W: (Wedding) Celebration of finding father's true intention.

The character whose narrative structure follows the wondertale exactly (in terms of Propp's thirty-one functions) is Mcfarlane. His functions are as follows:

- g: (Interdiction) Goober sees Ju-88 bearing the nuke.
- B: (Meditation) Lack of wreckage or explosion.
- ↑: (Departure) Goober sets off to find Ju-88.
- F: (Acquisition) Given Geiger-counter.
- G: (Guidance) Machine shows whereabouts of plane.
- ↓: (Return) Returns to Earhart County.
- H: (Struggle) Fights Mayor O'Casey in the maze.
- W: (Wedding) Celebration of victory and Goober ascends the mayoral throne to become mayor of Earhart County.

The idea within the morphological structure indicates that Mcfarlane is the true hero of *Earhart County*. It is Mcfarlane, not Jimmy who saves the town from the Atlantian floods. Mcfarlane who protected

his crew from his rear gun turret during the war, and McFarlane who spends his life worrying about the effects of the Ju-88 that got away. So while the protagonist of *Earhart County* is certainly Jimmy Perdusa, the heroes will always be those who made up Churchill's finest generation. This concept is embedded firmly in the style of the novel, in the narrative of the novel and within the very structure of the novel.

The folklore on which *Earhart County* is based can be seen most clearly in its penultimate chapter. Here it uses a version of the conventional ending almost all oral Russian wondertales have, that of a request for payment in the form of a drink. However, even here, *Earhart County* tinges it with its adopted style of language.

Well that's it. That's what Jimmy told me. That's exactly what Jimmy told me I swear. I got it all perfect. I remembered it all stone cold sober because when he was telling me, I dropped my beer see. I spilt it down my beard, right down my beard and I did not drink a drop.¹⁵

Narrating a novel with the folktale genre was an interesting contrast to the reality of World War Two history. Creating a novel that would appeal to a wide audience was important to me, as was writing something as historically authentic as possible. And while there exist some biographical accounts that compare beautifully to folklore, most of World War Two was the very opposite of a wondertale.

In combining the wondertale with World War Two, there was an interesting opposition between what G. K. Chesterton calls the

¹⁵ Russell Johnson, N. *Earhart County*. p. 321

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.¹⁶

found in folklore and the breaking down of morality and the lack of a sense of order of World War Two. In its entirety World War Two is the clear fight between evil and good, between the racially cleansing force of the Nazis and the chipper Allied underdog. In the public awareness the war is as simple as a folktale, however, *Earhart County* wished to be more than a general overview. *Earhart County* aimed to be a veritable thousand and one tales of short personal narratives of Bomber Command to give a sense of enormity to the war. And it is in the day to day action of the war and the struggles of the individual that the folktale-like clarity of a moral war starts to muddy.

The study into small moments within the war reveals a lack of justice, reason, and a breakdown of morality. Prisoners of War often in their desperation had to steal food from each other to survive and Soviet acts of cannibalism took place only for the perpetrator, nonetheless, to die of starvation. Vonnegut's *Bluebeard*, the son of a survivor of the Armenian massacre by the Turks comments:

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.¹⁷

¹⁶ Chesterton, G. K. (1969) *All Things Considered*. Henley-on-Thames: Darwen Finlayson, p. 192

¹⁷ Vonnegut, Kurt. (1998) *Bluebeard*. New York: Bantam Doubleday, p. 35

In folklore it would be inconceivable for injustice to go unpunished but in reality many war criminals escaped punishment, the most famous being Mengele's successful disappearance and Operation Paperclip which provided quiet nine-to-five jobs for Nazi scientists. In *The Periodic Table*, Primo Levi refers to a crematorium that is still a successful business after the war due to its rapid, new, technological advances in cremation. He recognises it instantly as a company which developed those advances in order to provide for the concentration camp genocide. In World War Two there was often no law and often no reason to the suffering. The natural order of life was disrupted. There is a definite lack of structure to the existence of people during the era and the lives of people in entire countries became nonlinear. World War Two affected civilians more than any other war so that the entire world ceased to obey any ideas of justice or reason. The natural narrative of a human life could not be distinguished even for many years after the war finished. However, everything G. K. Chesterton credits to folklore, a created world, ideal and perfect as a medium for a narrative stripped down to its very bones, holds intrinsically a sense of order and rules.

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Therefore *Earhart County*, by wishing to be both a wondertale and a war story was battling from the start against the two opposite worlds of morality and injustice. Its aim was to take the structure of the wondertale,

¹⁸ Chesterton, G. K. (1969) *All Things Considered*. Henley-on-Thames: Darwen Finlayson, p. 192

which has a firm sequence of events, and use it to tell a story set amongst the lack of direction felt by those who endured the seemingly endless war.

One of the reasons World War Two lends itself so readily to the wondertale, is not just its legendary heroes but the strange supernatural quality this era had. It was traumatic era that pushed the human body and psyche to the very limit, which in turn seems to be directly proportional to the amount of superstition and the amount of unexplainable phenomenon people experienced. *Earhart County* sought to use this superstition borne out of desperation to set the tone of the novel and the characters within it, and within this scope it also incorporated the hurried magic of a technology that was almost more science-fiction than science fact.

Something integral to any character created in a war setting is an item almost everything airman had. It is mentioned in every biographical and fictional World War Two aviation account I have read, the object being the lucky charm. It's central to the storyline of *Earhart County* as it is the whole reason the protagonist of the novel comes over to England. Most airmen had something they took into their aircraft with them, the most popular being stockings from a girlfriend worn as a scarf. However, religious and Catholic items were often used as well, like for example Staff Sergeant Eddie Picardo who took his rosary into battle. Perhaps the most famously used protection during the war was Psalm 91 and there are many urban myths and legends, not just from World War Two but also stemming from World War One, where a fictitious battalion 91 first emerged. The myth of Battalion 91 is that in sharing their number with

the protective Psalm suffer zero losses throughout the entire war. Jimmy Stewart the actor and Liberator flying ace is also linked to one probable fabrication whereby his World War One veteran father passed on the Psalm to him as protection. Whilst it is a common legend of World War Two, it functions well for Jimmy Stewart who successfully flew one of the most difficult aircraft to bail out of in an emergency, the aptly nicknamed Flying Coffin.

However, mascots came in all different shapes and this is something *Earhart County* utilizes, for the charms can be as strange as Harry Yates' wishbone from a family pet chicken¹⁹ and can be gifts as in Bob Pierson's knitted doll made by a young wheelchair bound girl²⁰. Len Deighton, well aware of this small superstition of aircrew, assigns a doll called Flan to pilot Lambert whilst also mentioning the general trend for lucky charms.

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.²¹

Earhart County takes this item, so integral yet so mundane, and makes it into a thing of mystery. The protagonist only knows that his father wishes him to have it, not what it is and when he finds it finally, it's a wretched old thing.

¹⁹Rennel, Tony & Nichol, John. (2005) *Tail End Charlies: The Last Battles of the Bomber War 1944-45*. London: Penguin Books, p. 84

²⁰Rennel, Tony & Nichol, John. (2005) *Tail End Charlies: The Last Battles of the Bomber War 1944-45*. London: Penguin Books, p. 137

²¹ Deighton, Len. (2009) *Bomber*. London: HarperCollins, p. 271

It's kind of brown and soft and it has a loop of string coming out the top. It's like the grossest car air freshener Jimmy ever saw. And Jimmy's daddy sent him all the way over the Atlantic, on Amelia Earhart's Atlantic path, just to get it. To get this soft, brown, nasty ass, car freshener piece of crap.²²

But it has an important meaning the father can't convey to his son in words, and like Bob Pierson's knitted doll, it was given initially to the father as a gift. In the case of *Earhart County's* central lucky charm, not only does Robin Perdusa come home safely after the war but the mascot also turns out to be lucky for his son, as by searching for the gift he learns about the man his father was and gains an understanding of his father's love.

While mascots and superstitions are things found in abundance in any war, World War Two is also seeped in other extraordinary events, inventions and myths. Certainly the Nazis were famously interested in the occult and their use of runic symbolism and Himmler's terrifying attempts at establishing a Nazi/pagan religion have surrounded them in fact, myth and fiction. Examples of this can be seen with Otto Rahn being forced to search for the Holy Grail, Hitler's Spear of Destiny and Christmas trees adorned with swastikas instead of stars. This occult lunacy of the Nazis has been the inspiration for many books, such as *The Black Sun: Montauk's Nazi-Tibetan Connection* which while being based on history, often turn into speculation and theory. However, despite the sometimes extreme views held in these kinds of books, World War Two was a period where science and science-fiction were truly often hard to separate.

²² Russell Johnson, N. *Earhart County*. p. 261

Earhart County revels in this side of the era, where technology such as Radar which is science fact, was in actuality born out of the British Government's quest to create a science fiction like death ray. This kind of wonder technology slides easily in to replace magic articles such as the enchanted swords and flying horses from fairytales. Another parallel that can be drawn between history and folklore has to do with the interest at the time in the power of extra sensory perception. It was tested in remote viewing trials and echoed by Mengele in his psychotic experimentation on twins. This can also be found in many Russian wondertales, just as *Ivan And The Dragon*, features its own remote viewing articles, for example a magic knife which the hero takes on his quest, knowing that if the knife rusts, the hero's kingdom is in danger.

A theme which crops up under a few different names and inventions from Nazi Germany is that of the mad scientist. Shauberger, a scientist who worked on water flumes has been at the very heart of Nazi UFO myths, and Churchill allegedly took looking for Foo Fighters seriously. This sometimes fact, sometimes fiction element of World War Two almost creates an incredible mythology of its own and Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Bluebeard* deals with one of those fascinating allied plots of subterfuge. The protagonist in the novel tells about his time in the military where he was an artist painting expert camouflage for the allies. Certainly the artists and craftsmen became incredibly skilled in the area of disguise and deception. Successful tactics, such as inflatable tanks to fool the enemy into thinking they were more heavily armed than they were and

wood painted to look like ships from the air, really did work. *Bluebeard's* protagonist Rabo Karabekian recalls:

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.²³

Earhart County contains its own version of Shauger in the form of Nazi scientist Dr. Zippermeyer. Dr. Zippermeyer is another potentially mythological character who is purported to have designed device after device which did not work. His failures cost the fatherland dearly, spending millions of Hitler's Reichsmark, expending hours of human effort and using up plenty of resources. The legend, whether true or false, contends that a junkyard of machines was found at the end of the war by allied soldiers. The most famous of these machines was the sound cannon, a machine which used sound waves intended to literally break up planes going overhead. This, as explained in *Earhart County* would have potentially worked up close but due to the way sound waves disperse, means it was totally ineffective over distances.

Dr. Zippermeyer first came of interest to the studies of *Earhart County* because of his alleged use of sound waves. Waves, in all forms, are a major theme in the novel which includes ocean waves, radio waves, brain waves and the effect sound waves have on the human brain. In *Earhart County* Dr. Zippermeyer therefore, a myth already associated with sound waves, became a man who wasn't a crazy scientist with little grasp of wave dispersal but an anti-Nazi humanitarian who deliberately wasted Hitler's resources on weapons that he knew could never work.

²³ Vonnegut, Kurt. (1998) *Bluebeard*. New York: Bantam, p. 2

The legend of Dr. Zippermeyer then became entangled with that of Lily Litvak's as his sound wave technology rescues her from machine induced dementia. As Propp would have it, Dr. Zippermeyer therefore becomes the *donor* of the wondertale. His character exists to give something to the protagonist to aid his quest. Lily Litvak once healed becomes the helper, showing the protagonist the way to his father's mascot.

Many studies have been made into how close the Nazis were to making the atomic bomb with the general conclusion being that they were far further than the legend suggests. *Earhart County* however, full of the mythology and wonder of World War Two, takes it to its limit and has Rear Gunner Mcfarlane chasing down a Nazi bomb and dedicating his life to the finding of it. In this way *Earhart County* means to take reality and legend and works to create something that has the potential to be real, whilst still containing all the magic of a wondertale.

During World War Two there were so many strange and incredible inventions and achievements both successful and unsuccessful, that they could have potentially saturated the novel. Instead *Earhart County* selected only the phenomena which would fit the necessary narrative structure of the novel, whilst still introducing enough mysticism to give the book a magical atmosphere.

Using research based on Portland Down's chemical trials, *Earhart County* forms its own secret headquarters where chemical weapons were tested and in this way sets the scene for another strange phenomenon, the character of Mr. Purcell. Mr Purcell exists in the form of the ghost outside the headquarters on the Earhart County moors; the twist comes

when the protagonist finds he is still alive. His spirit does not remain on the moor due to a sudden death, instead Mr Purcell's spirit remains due to trauma, and the reliving of his moments of extreme pain in spirit form are a metaphor for his reliving the trauma psychologically.

Mr Purcell is not the only ghost mentioned in *Earhart County* despite being the most prominent, and spiritual phenomenon in reality was experienced by many soldiers at the time. *Earhart County* did not create the ghost of Mr Purcell from research into the wondertale, instead he was drawn from both factual and fictional accounts of the era. The most famous factual source for Mr Purcell is the spiritualist belief system of Battle of Britain hero, Hugh Dowding. Dowding believed unequivocally in the existence of ghosts and spirits and often attended a spiritualist to contact them.²⁴ Whether this belief stemmed from a form of trauma experienced in battle or if it was based on reality becomes almost a moot point, Dowding and many other airmen really did see and hear and feel the spirits of their downed comrades. In Jim Davidson's autobiography *Winged Victory* he even talks about a ghost plane which he sees from his rear gun turret and speculates if it was truly a ghost plane or some kind of manifestation of the spirits of Air Crew who did not make it home. Certainly even today stories of spirit Lancasters abound and most old war airfields contain at least one good ghost story.

Roald Dahl broaches this subject several times in his anthology *Over To You*. His pilots witness the spirit of a young child after she's been killed in the story *Katina* and in another story, *Only This*, a mother

²⁴ Beaty, David. (1983) *Strange Encounters: Mysteries of the Air*. Suffolk: Chaucer Press.

astral project to die alongside her pilot son. Both of these stories deal with characters experiencing extreme trauma and this is the concept *Earhart County* is using with the character of Mr. Purcell. It is the extreme trauma of being a test subject to chemical weapons that causes his spirit to return again and again to the horrors of his war experiences night after night.

Mr Purcell's transition from a ghost to the metaphor of trauma relived was also derived from *Slaughterhouse Five's* protagonist Billy Pilgrim and his insect in amber syndrome. Mr Purcell's experience of being tested on in *Earhart County* is so traumatic, part of him relives one particular incident of being made to run through poison gas repeatedly. The mythology of *Earhart County* gives his memories form so that his spirit can be seen returning time and again to the moment he was made to run through the gas. It is the ghost of a man who is not dead, a suspension in amber of trauma.

The headquarters of *Earhart County* are based on those at Exmoor and, like Exmoor, more than chemical testing experiments took place there. *Earhart County's* base includes a type of device based on the calcium efflux machine which is a device that manipulates sound waves. It's the reason in the novel for the German bombing attempt which caused the incident of Jimmy's pilot father being shot down and started Rear Gunner Mcfarlane's lifelong search for the bomber. The calcium efflux machine is the stuff of science-fiction. It allegedly slows down brainwaves and when used in experiments on rats, causes early fatigue. *Earhart County's* device, while using sound waves, causes something

akin to Alzheimers. This illness was chosen for being a topical one for the World War Two generation and it is used to explain the disappearance of one of the Soviet Union's favourite heroes of the war, Lily Litvak, a major character in the book.

Lily Litvak is the Soviet Union's version of Amelia Earhart. Both are women pilots of mythological proportions, and both disappeared causing much speculation and many theories. Litvak however, was half Earhart's age, and also a fighter ace. Also, unlike the still missing Earhart, Litvak was allegedly discovered in 1979, under the wing of her aircraft by a class of school children who were searching for her remains so that she might be awarded the Hero of the Soviet Union. This end however, accepted by the government, does not sit entirely well after the magic and myth surrounding her disappearance. For this reason, theories of what happened to her still exist, with sightings of her, not only being led away a prisoner in 1943, but also of her being seen in modern day sightings of the same nature as those connected with Earhart and Elvis. And as *Earhart County* is a place of magic, it chooses this version. It has Lily Litvak working in the secret bunker on *Earhart County* moor, meeting Robin Perdusa and disappearing due to the Alzheimers machine experiment gone wrong. Every now and then *Earhart County* contains a rewriting of history that is less tragic than the potential reality and while World War Two had enough magic and myth of its own, *Earhart County* creates its unique ending for the remarkable woman and pilot that was Lily Litvak.

Earhart County, then, is related to the science-fiction that was popular just after the war, and not just with veterans like Vonnegut or

Levi but also with authors like Philip K Dick who were drawn to the genre by the war. Philip K Dick received a Hugo award for *The Man In The High Castle*, a novel which paved the way for the speculative fiction of *Earhart County*. Whilst *Earhart County* rewrites the history of Lily Litvak, *The Man In The High Castle* rewrites the history of World War Two, and creates a world where The Nazis won. It is a view into a world of constant fear for the Jewish protagonist and uses this purely science fiction genre to discuss, amongst other things, the desperation of those who became victims of Nazi idealism. Robert Harris too used this same method in his novel *Fatherland*, again about a world in which the Nazis won. Robert Harris' world was as claustrophobic as Philip K Dick's with the climax being the uncovering of photographs detailing the atrocity of the concentration camps.

Science fiction is particularly used to discuss the most distressing areas of the Second World War. Philip K Dick for example wrote his now classic *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, after reading SS diaries in which a soldier complains about not getting enough sleep because the women and children in the nearby camp wouldn't stop screaming. The idea that a human being could be so lacking in compassion that they were more concerned for their own rest than the dying of the innocent and the helpless, inspired the psychopathic androids of the novel. In Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*, Billy Pilgrim is literally beamed out of the war every time it gets too traumatic for the protagonist to experience. In this way Vonnegut is able to highlight the horror of the POW camps and of the Dresden bombings, portraying them as events which were too

traumatic to even relive through literature. Billy Pilgrim's manic time travelling drags him from being a prisoner of war to becoming an alien zoo exhibit. This is similar to Primo Levi's abrupt abandonment of the main narrative of the *The Periodic Table*, where he instead turns to embedded tales of a folkloric nature. Indeed throughout his work both the science fiction genre and the fairytale genre served Levi well. His short stories where the protagonist grows wings and learns to fly, or learns the ability to slow down and speed up time²⁵ are haunting when viewed with his experiences of Auschwitz in mind. There is something unspoken which these two pieces convey that is so compelling due to their innocence and hope, the hope that Levi always fought to maintain, that can be seen more clearly in these stories than in anywhere else of his writing.

Many authors, not just Levi, Vonnegut and Dick created narratives containing the extraordinary to convey the horrors of the Second World War, as with Roald Dahl where it exists within his stories of ghosts, shades and out of body experiences. The war that these novels illustrate using the fantastic and the tragic are what inspired *Earhart County* and its wondertale core.

Despite the darkness of the era, there was a certain wonderful magic about it. Indeed the war produced some of the most folkloric, yet real history of the last century. Alongside Lily Litvak and Dr Zippermeyer, it produced mythical characters whose stories did not end in mystery or sadness. Douglas Bader for example was Britain's number

²⁵Levi, Primo. (1997) *The Mirror Maker*. London: Abacus.

one aviation legend and he is such an instantly recognisable hero of Achillean proportions in the world of aviation that he can be referenced without even being named. Take the moment he enters Jean Offenberg's journal *Lonely Warrior* effectuating awe in both aircrew and reader.

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.²⁶

More than just being a mythological character, the first half of Bader's life story is so well plotted it uses its own femoral form of Chekov's gun, with him initially being hindered by the flying accident that took his legs, then being saved only by the fact that he was able to pull his artificial legs off to escape his damaged plane. With this kind of storybook hero in mind, Robin Perdusa the protagonist's father in *Earhart County* was loosely based on the real fighter pilot Robin Olds, a man who even has his own Arthurian legend.

Robin Olds was the only ace fighter pilot in the world who participated in both World War Two and the Vietnam War. It was imperative to the plot of *Earhart County* to have the protagonist's father, Robin Perdusa, fight in both wars. Whilst Robin Olds, unlike Robin Perdusa, was not the American Number one ace, he did shoot down 17 planes and had incredible skill in both flying and strategy. His reputation is so elevated, there is a myth in existence which says that somewhere in the pentagon is a glass case in which Robin Olds stands in full flight gear. Next to the case is a sign saying,

²⁶Offenberg, Jean. (1974) *Lonely Warrior* Frogmore: Mayflower Books, p. 90

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.²⁷

It is surely in these kinds of narratives, the kind that surround the military, that the roots of *Earhart County* can be seen. And while Bader's narrative fizzles out after several prison breakouts and Robin Olds' Arthurian legend has no beginning, middle or end, it is possible to take aviation gems such as these and weave a narrative that does obey the rules of folklore without detracting from the reality of the senselessness of an era saturated in horror. In fact at the very epicentre of *Earhart County* was the desire to create a folklore for Bomber Command out of awed respect, to facilitate a folklore in which Ken McKenzie's exploits easily trip off the narrator's tongue. It aimed to be a place where rags to riches had less to do with Cinderella and more to do with the transformation of the Airacobra from an unpredictable machine in the hands of the Americans to a thing of beauty and accuracy when controlled by Soviet pilots.

The wish to make *Earhart County* authentic in terms of its Second World War history and period detail was tied to my need to create the right voice for the novel. Without authenticity the very reason for wanting to tell these stories falls by the wayside. Certainly the research medium that was the most influential to the creation of *Earhart County* was the autobiographies and the journals of aircrew. Amongst these was a book called *Tail End Charlies* which details accounts of many different

²⁷http://www.usafa1961.org/robin_old.htm (Accessed: 20 February 2011).

experiences of Bomber Command aircrew. Covering a great deal of World War Two from an aviation perspective, it breaks off every other paragraph to quote the exact words of various crew of Bomber Command. In this way a short description of D Day is turned into something personal as Bill Low's recollections demonstrate:

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The result of immersion in these books was to discover a striking similarity in the narrative style adopted. Whether British, American or Belgian, the nature of telling aviation tales was the same, and this style was obviously cultivated in the mess halls and Nissen huts of the wartime airfields. Not only is this form utilised in autobiographical works but can also be seen in the fiction of Roald Dahl when dealing with tales of aviation. This method of narrative was one of the first things adopted in *Earhart County* to create the correct tone with which to deal with Bomber Command. It is sparse, quite harsh, peppered with expletives and far more poignant perhaps than a more poetic form of prose. The highpoint of writing *Earhart County* was during a meeting with a Tuskegee airman in which he described briefly the kind of life he was living in the war. His exact phraseology I had written already in *Earhart County* being spoken by Rear Gunner McFarlane when he was talking about his World War Two exploits. This was the moment I realised my research into the speech

²⁸Rennel, Tony & Nichol, John. (2005) *Tail End Charlies: The Last Battles of the Bomber War 1944-45*. London: Penguin Books, p. 213

patterns and terminology of World War Two pilots had paid off and that the style of language used in *Earhart County* was as authentic as I could make it.

Before writing *Earhart County*, I first completed a short story which was a trial run of the character of Rear Gunner Mcfarlane. His voice was the most important to the novel in that it is the voice the narrator emulates. It was the intention of *Earhart County* therefore to have it permeate everything within the manuscript. The entire novel, like a Russian wondertale, is narrated by a nameless character and in the case of *Earhart County* it is someone who has been heavily influenced by World War Two, specifically World War Two aviation. To an extent this is every child who has ever made a model aircraft and hung it from their ceiling. The narrator of *Earhart County* however, has gone a step further than the enamoured model making child, this is a person who, without being a flyer himself, or an historian, has a heartfelt obsession with World War Two aviation. In fact the narrator was who I was to become in order to write *Earhart County*.

While starting the writing of the novel in 2007, the study into aviation needed to be underway before the novel could even be plotted. In fact research for *Earhart County* began in 2002, with the book *Amelia: A Life of the Aviation Legend*. This led to further study into other early female aviatrixes and several books covering the female military pilots of the Soviet Union, most notably *Night Witches: The Untold Story of Soviet Women in Combat*. It was in fact in this way that Bomber Command became such an important factor to *Earhart County*, and the Lancaster

Bomber and the American P-51 Mustang fighters quickly became focus points of research. My interest in aircraft can even be seen emerging from the novel I wrote previously to *Earhart County*, a book about the Vietnam War called *BuddyMeensVille*. *BuddyMeensVille* started as a short story and was extended to a novel due to a request from my agent during my time studying for *Earhart County*. It ended up with an aviation anecdote written every ten to fifteen pages as my interest in aircraft grew.

Right from the initial stages of planning the novel, the voice of the narrator intended to have the similar twang, tone and vocabulary that the anecdotes and autobiographies of aircrew used. In my notes, whilst plotting *Earhart County* and forming characters, the one thing that is consistent is the style and speech pattern that broke up the research. Between scribbled notes and character studies, I found myself jotting down anecdotes told in the narrator's voice, the following is one such example from my notepad:

There was one time when Mrs. Shroeder forgot to turn off her lights in the blackout and three German bombers came and Robin shot down two, landed in her back garden, told her to turn them off and went back up and shot down the last one. He was the best, I'm telling you. Better than Bader.

While the character of Rear Gunner Mcfarlane was not the voice of the narrator, his was the speech pattern the narrator himself wanted to emulate. With this in mind, the narrator is not the only character to use a version of Mcfarlane's turn of phrase. Because *Earhart County* is so heavily narrated by a strong personality, great effort was made to make

every character in fact sound like the unnamed story teller. An author can impose many different voices on their characters but the narrator of *Earhart County* talks for everyone. I therefore aimed to give everyone a distinctly separate and identifiable voice while at the same time, giving the impression that they are all coming from the narrator and his story telling. At times the English characters sound American and even the Russian Lily Litvak uses US slang so that the reader does not forget they are being told this story and are continuously reminded of the existence of the narrator. This is revealed more obviously in some points more than others:

‘The guy reads the tickets. He reads the name on the tickets and he looks up.
‘J. Perdusa? Are you Robin Perdusa’s son?’
‘Yes.’
‘HOLY CRAP.’
Wait. Hold it. That didn’t sound very British. I can do better than that.
‘Are you Robin Perdusa’s son?’
‘Yes.’
‘WELL BUGGER ME.’²⁹

Gunner Mcfarlane’s voice therefore in an interesting way, became the most important influence on the narrator as a character and in turn determined the style in which the novel was written. The short story in which I practiced using this voice was called *Twenty-Eight Percent*. It’s a very simple piece and short but it was the vital first stepping stone in establishing the most important character in the book, and in turn, the tone and voice of the entire novel. The whole story is told by one character

²⁹Russell Johnson, N. *Earhart County* p 15

and is about a particular flying mission. It is a stronger voice than the one used by the storyteller in *Earhart County*, but is recognisable as the seed for the novel's narrator.

I was born in Oklahoma but I moved to England bout three years before the war started. Lived there sixty-seven years now but can't never get the Oklahoma outa my voice. Can't never get the shrapnel outa my ass neither. Oklahoma and WORLD WAR TWO. Two things that'll stick in ya for good.³⁰

The voice and tone I've attempted to recreate can be seen in the autobiographies of airmen, in the fiction of veterans like Roald Dahl and despite not being an airman, it can also be seen to an extent in war veteran Kurt Vonnegut's work.

What makes this voice so particular is its attitude as much as its vocabulary. In the case of Bomber Command aircrew it is the speech pattern of incredibly young men who flew in the most horrific situations night after night, only to be thrown back into civil society day after day on returning. It is the language of men who witnessed their squadron dying, sometimes in great numbers only to make it back for bacon and eggs with the knowledge that they must repeat it all over again next mission. Their energy, their bitterness and their unfailing sense of humour can all be seen in their way of speaking. However, it went further than this as there became a kind of rule not to talk too much about it, to be over cautious of shooting a line. It was a kind of show of bravado but often one which was

³⁰Russell Johnson, N. *Twenty Eight Percent* p 1

made stronger by admissions of fear. Take the following excerpt from the diary of a gunner in *Tail End Charlies*. It's blunt, to the point, packed with expletives and whilst it is a confession of fear, there is definitely a form of bravado to it.

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.³¹

This is a good example of how modern the aircrew's language sometimes seems compared to the more reserved movies of the era. In fact the film industry used such mild language in comparison that the reality comes as a surprise when these contemporary sounding expletives enter their vocabulary. Often this kind of language comes about as the situation worsens and it was regularly mixed with humour as a way of lessening tension while demonstrating just how bad things were. In Norman 'Bud' Fortier's autobiography, he records the moment a pilot asks what he does if during his mission the mechanics on his plane fail and his bomb won't drop. He is told to

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.³²

It is a deadly serious moment and a valid question, returning to the airfield and landing with a full payload killed many airmen. But there is no good answer to the question, humour and blasphemy are utilised instead of any

³¹ Rennel, Tony & Nichol, John. (2005) *Tail End Charlies: The Last Battles of the Bomber War 1944-45*. London: Penguin Books, p. 77

³² Fortier, Norman 'Bud'. (2003) *An Ace Of The Eighth: An American Fighter Pilot's Air War in Europe*. New York: Random House, p. 97

reasonable response. It is the same kind of humour seen in an account from *Tail End Charlies* when a pilot finds himself in the terrifying position of flying through the thick British fog. He is asked if he can see the runway lights, to which the American pilot responds:

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Again it is a youthful form of humour in the face of a terrifying situation, and this method of dealing with treacherous conditions and the close proximity of death was a boost to morale in many situations. Take the famous British number one fighter ace Johnnie Johnson when after a near miss by a rocket he makes the statement,

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.³⁴

This way of dealing with the horror also helped avoid introspection, or at least discouraged it amongst aircrew. When a bullet on target fails to go off, a pilot in Fortier's autobiography jokes that if it had succeeded he would,

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.³⁵

³³ Rennel, Tony & Nichol, John. (2005) *Tail End Charlies: The Last Battles of the Bomber War 1944-45*. London: Penguin Books, p. 115

³⁴ Sarkar, Dilip. (2002) *Johnnie Johnson: Spitfire Top Gun*. Worcester: Ramrod Publications, p. 114

³⁵ Fortier, Norman 'Bud'. (2003) *An Ace Of The Eighth: An American Fighter Pilot's Air War in Europe*. New York: Random House, p. 97

He does this instead of thinking too deeply, at least on the outside, of his own mortality. Indeed this incredible talent for understatement was almost a rule for these men.

In addition to these rhetorical tropes of bravado and humour, *Earhart County* also aspires to capture the fear a pilot would feel. The aim of *Earhart County*'s style then is to be full of youthful wit, tinged with bitterness and the great fatigue with which the aircrew suffered. It wants to voice the terror but also the amazing feats these men pulled off night after night. And it was important to remove the prettiness of fairytales, despite being based on the wondertale, to give it the darker feeling of World War Two.

'You know what it's like to fall out the sky in a goddamn AVRO?'

'No.'

'No, see? I've cut more donuts out of seat parachutes than you've had hot dinners son.'

'I've had a lot of hot dinners.'

'Ya, well I've cut a lot of donuts.'

'You had donuts on the plane?'

Goober looks at him, 'I want you to picture this. I want you to picture it good and hard, you're that far back in that plane you can't see a soul. In a turret so small you can't fit a parachute on your back and so you found yourself a special one you can sit on. Now you think about what your ass would do sitting out there with a goddamn 190 on your tail. Think about just how bad your ass'd pucker. That's cutting donuts son.'

'That is so gross,' says Jimmy.

'Yeah well, you just think about that next time you have a hot dinner.'

'Great,' says Jimmy, 'just swell.'³⁶

Earhart County naturally contains this kind of war veteran comedy. It is a harsh humour, one born out of desperation, and is notable

³⁶ Russell Johnson, N. *Earhart County*. p. 166

throughout almost all World War Two veteran's work. Primo Levi is the exception here, and its absence in his work is significant in that his experience of the war was so polemically different to even Vonnegut's Prisoner of War experience that it is not comparable to other books within a comedic context. Whilst World War Two in fiction has been approached in a diverse number of ways, every autobiography I studied contained examples of humour, and in turn, so did real life conversations and encounters with veterans. Indeed the humour within many of these autobiographical works made them quite simply some of the most hilariously comical books I have ever read. Rear Gunner Jim Davis' autobiography *Winged Victory* is the perfect example of a veteran's work containing moments of extreme wit and slapstick. His well told Bomber Command anecdotes conjure up horror, hilarity and humanity, and are skilfully written. *Earhart County's* humour is derivative of *Winged Victory* perhaps more than any other autobiography, as it was one of the first real life Bomber Command accounts of the war that I studied. Every autobiography that followed was almost a confirmation of the vital lessons in comedy and fear that was learnt from Davis' work. His stories have a ring of the folktale about them in that they have, over the years, become polished and expertly told for the maximum amount of entertainment and excitement. One of the tales which particularly stands out and was influential to *Earhart County*, is his anecdote of how experiencing extreme fear for hours on end whilst stuck in his treacherous position in the rear gun turret caused him to develop cystitis during a mission. This simple beginning gives an insight to the high stress of the bombing runs

which in turn provides a valuable element of horror into his story. He leaves his rear gun turret to use the small Elsan toilet further up the plane, but in his hurry to get back into position he forgets to lock the lid shut. When the Lancaster comes under fire and is forced to corkscrew terrifyingly out of trouble, the Elsan lid opens and its contents are hurled all over the crew. Rear Gunner Davis however, who is sectioned off in his nice clean turret has no idea what has happened in the rest of the plane until they land. As a final flourish, he finishes the anecdote with the men stepping out of their Lancaster covered in waste, only to have a member of the ground crew stare at them in disbelief and announce:

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.³⁷

This is the kind of humour that is utilised in *Earhart County* and Davis' work is infused with it. Indeed even the anecdotes written by other veterans that are contained within his autobiography reflect this same brash comedy. Take one particular description of NCOs from *Winged Victory*:

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.³⁸

³⁷ Davis, Jim. (1995) *Winged Victory: Story of a Rear Gunner - Lancaster WW II*. London: R. J. Leach, p54

³⁸ Davis, Jim. (1995) *Winged Victory: Story of a Rear Gunner - Lancaster WW II*. London: R. J. Leach, p89

This type of vulgarity was conducive to many comedic moments in Earhart County and can be seen throughout the book.

‘Mayor O’Casey could go out, fart the tune to The Great Escape and as long as he’s always the first person out that maze, he’s going to be Mayor forever. And frankly, there are probably a lot of people in Earhart County who would much prefer him farting The Great Escape than him giving his field of wheat at harvest time story one more time.³⁹

A version of this toilet humour appears also in Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse Five*, and it is most evident in the moment the protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, is ill from eating too much food after going so long without. He is stuck in the Prisoner of War camp latrines alongside everyone else who had marched in with him, and despite what is actually an upsetting situation, Vonnegut creates a moment of precious humour out of the comments of one man who is stuck there with crippling diarrhoea. It is so carefully well timed that the reader’s initial pity for the prisoners’ horrific situation does not dampen the comedy of his exclamations that he has been so ill that he has even passed his brains. Indeed it is made both funnier and more upsetting still when it is revealed that despite the protagonist of the book being the fictional character of Billy Pilgrim, the comments had emanated from Kurt Vonnegut himself. Writing fictional novels in which the author makes a guest appearance is something Vonnegut has done several times, however, this time it is especially comic, and especially moving due to the situation being so tragic.

³⁹ Russell Johnson, N. *Earhart County*, p 108

Dahl also indulges in this sort of youthful humour in his autobiography *Going Solo* when he recalls the day a man fell into the latrines in Greece. However, in Dahl's fiction there is a sense of innocence to his silliness and in this way he creates characters that are at times even more pitiful than Vonnegut's poor Billy Pilgrim. In one of his most poignant moments his humour turns heartbreaking when in the short story, *A Piece of Cake*, the protagonist goes to the trouble of painting amusing cartoons on the tail of his Gloster Gladiator, as well as writing a joke in German on the fuselage. He does this in the hope that German fighter planes would see it and be too busy laughing to shoot straight. When he comes under direct fire, it is both ridiculous and heart wrenching.

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.⁴⁰

Like Vonnegut and Davis, Dahl's humour is not without bitterness, his sardonic but highly accurate description of a Gloster Gladiator bi-plane is both comic and terrifying and comes from his own very real, very awful and almost fatal experience,

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Dahl, Roald. (1988) *Going Solo*. London: Puffin Books, p 47

⁴¹ Roald. (1973) *Over to You*. London: Puffin Books, p. 42

A lot of this humour originates, to varying degrees, out of the ridiculous, and by the ridiculous I do not mean funny. In fact it was present in the everyday situations of World War Two, and the moments where lives were on the line were the most horribly ridiculous of all. Joseph Heller's protagonist, Yossarian, in *Catch-22* says several times throughout the novel that

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.⁴²

In the novel this statement is taken by those around him to be over paranoid and untrue. They are in a war in which two armies are trying to kill one another, to personalise it is seen as unreasonable and exaggerated behaviour by the other characters in the book. Yet it is a perfectly valid thing to say, as a member of Bomber Command, the Germans *are* trying to kill him. Indeed the difficult missions he is being made to fly, as well as the constant increase in the number of mandatory flights he must make, means his life is being excessively endangered by his own side also. The difference between saying 'me' instead of 'us' is that suddenly something taken for granted in the middle of a war is in fact revealed as a hideous and ridiculous situation. These kinds of revelations are present throughout veteran's work, in their autobiographies, part-autobiographies and in their fictional accounts, where aircrew, soldiers and civilians find themselves in predicaments of such ridiculousness they are at times almost unimaginable. For the most part there is nothing at all funny about them, for example, situations where pilots are ordered to fly seven men

⁴² Heller, Joseph. (1974) *Catch-22*. London: Corgi, p. 23

into flack riddled skies, or where buzz bombs bring down entire streets of houses. These books contain missions with outrageously low survival rates and describe a world in which Russian ground crew were forced to cling to the wings of their planes in fierce Siberian blizzards in order to weigh them down and prevent them from being blown away. Take for instance one of the many preposterous situations in which Roald Dahl found himself:

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This sense of the ridiculous is something Spike Milligan's autobiographical work describes expertly, and in *Monty: His Part In My Victory* he reveals memories of the odd surroundings that he so often found himself in.

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.⁴⁴

However, the funniest moments of his work, stem from the most melancholy situations. One particularly haunting moment was when a beautiful voice begins to sing in the night and clearly moves all those who hear it from their tents. It is such a contrast, an English voice singing so sweetly out in the middle of war torn Africa, that it silences everyone for the duration of the song. When this exquisite and delicate singing

⁴³ Dahl, Roald. (1988) *Going Solo*. London: Puffin Books, p. 153

⁴⁴ Milligan, Spike. (1987) *Monty: His Part In My Victory*. London: Penguin, p 28

quietens, when the atmosphere becomes suddenly homesick and morose, Milligan recalls a voice piping up:

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.⁴⁵

Unlike Milligan's *Monty: My Part In His Victory*, Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* is not an autobiographical work, however, as a veteran pilot of Bomber Command, he has an inside understanding of how it felt to come under fire in a rickety old bomber plane. Heller's novel is a bitter and satirical one and perhaps more than any other fictional work I studied, *Catch-22* plays on the ridiculousness of the situations created by the war with an angry, fierce humour. Indeed rather than being anything close to a standard comic novel it rather plays closer to the tragic genre, especially as it obeys the tragic tendency of isolation according to Northrop Frye,

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.⁴⁶

Yossarian is isolated from everyone except the cleric, who appears just as bewildered as he is and is just as incapable of escaping the nightmarish hell that *Catch-22* describes. Indeed the world in Heller's novel is almost as fantastical as Vonnegut's alien zoo in *Slaughterhouse Five*, and despite the humour and perversity of the hero's situation, it is a

⁴⁵ Milligan, Spike. (1987) *Monty: His Part In My Victory*. London: Penguin, p 82

⁴⁶ Frye, Northrop. (1990) *Anatomy of Criticism*. St.Ives: Penguin, p 54

distressing read. His work is very different from Jim Davis' *Winged Victory* which on top of having a serious history to tell, also intends to make you laugh, as does Dahl's autobiography *Going Solo*. Yet *Catch-22* is not without comedy, it succeeds in being both tragic and farcical. It is a strange mix of horror and satire, blended with the terror of bombing runs that are written by a man who really had been there, mixed with the terrifying and pantomimic superiors. In fact in Heller's own words, this concoction does not make for a comedy at all.

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.⁴⁷

Again the word ridiculous appears in connection with real war situations and whilst it is not always portrayed with humour, when it does, it is highly effective. *Earhart County* wished to use this kind of humour also, but coming from a modern perspective and writing as one who has not experienced fighting for one's country, raised complications and restrictions. Whilst *Earhart County* is not totally without bitterness or satire, it has a tendency to keep to post-war issues, for example the first time Leonard Cheshire is mentioned:

Now SeaView Old Folk's Home is actually one of those homes set up by that Pathfinder guy. Leonard something. What was his name again? Leonard...Leonard Thingy. Leonard Equability UK, you know him.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ <http://www.notablebiographies.com/He-Ho/Heller-Joseph.html>

⁴⁸ Russell Johnson, N. *Earhart County*, p 49

This is a brief reference to the marketing company who proposed changing the name of Cheshire Homes to Equability Uk, therefore erasing the name of Leonard Cheshire from his own charity after the years he personally spent nursing ill war veterans and their families. Indeed *Earhart County* touches on many post-war injustices utilising an angry humour that is derivative of the style typical to war veterans.

However, *Earhart County* shies away from using this kind of humour in connection with situations which arose during the war. It is one thing for Douglas Bader to crawl without legs to the porch of a French farmhouse and relax with a cigarette whilst waiting for the Germans to capture him, but it is entirely another thing altogether to be so flippant when you are sixty years and a comfortable study away from the action. With *Earhart County* being a book which praises the men and women who underwent the terrors of the war, it did not feel acceptable to make light of it. This appears to be an issue that is not entirely restricted to *Earhart County*, looking at modern World War Two novels and their approach to comedy immediately reveals a different use of humour to those written by veterans. *Blue Man Falling* illustrates the pranks aircrew got up to between flights, pranks of the sort that are moments of hilarity when described in autobiographical works, yet their effect in *Blue Man Falling* is quite different. One particular stunt involves a man who has dressed up as a turkey for Thanksgiving being chased by a man dressed up as a pilgrim, it is silly behaviour and yet there is something pervasively melancholic about the scene. Without the immediateness of the veteran

storyteller, without the truth of autobiography behind it, there is somehow a lack of hilarity and *Blue Man Falling* uses this humorous sketch with a sad air of knowledge of what is in store for the characters in the novel. Len Deighton's humour also is tinged with a sadness, that again despite having a distinctly Milligan feel, leaves the reader moved and saddened rather than laughing.

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.⁴⁹

Bomber and *Blue Man Falling* were not designed to be comedic novels however, and their moments of humour, resulting from the ridiculous, are not meant to make them light hearted or comic. In this way *Earhart County*'s aims differ and yet *Earhart County* still had to overcome the main things which made autobiographical work so funny, the veteran storyteller, the desperation of the situations the authors found themselves in and the real life experiences described in the work. Therefore *Earhart County* aimed to look into humour from a slightly different angle. What Dahl and Vonnegut and Milligan all seem to capture is this feeling of youth and vigour and hilarity in the face of desperation, and this is what I decided to aim for in the humour of my own work. With this in mind, and using the style of speech used by veteran aircrew, *Earhart County* looked to create the feeling of veteran humour without attempting to produce an exact copy. It uses crude humour and often childish humour to create an immediate form of comedy. I did not want to create a humour tinged with melancholia,

⁴⁹ Deighton, Len. (2009) *Bomber*. London: HarperCollins, p 261

instead I wanted an optimistic comic style that echoed the pranks and sense of humour that the veterans had and still have.

“You couldn’t find your ass with both hands. No offence like.”

“Well look who’s wrong. Here it is.”

“You found her?”

“No. I found my ass.”⁵⁰

There is also at times a romance evident in veteran’s fiction and in their autobiographies. This romance which Northrop Frye equates with sentimentalism, was particularly influential to *Earhart County*. Take for example Heller and Offenburg who both write about a very similar character of pantomimic proportions, named Orr in *Catch-22* and Ortmann in the journal, *Lonely Warrior*. Both characters crash land into the sea almost every mission and both characters are the source of great humour. In fact Ortmann is a comedic highlight of Offenburg’s work. When Ortmann returns after each ditched flight he always relays an amusing anecdote about what happened in the sea or how the coast guard now recognise his face. And whilst *Lonely Warrior* is not fiction, there is a definite climax to the book in the moment that Ortmann ditches into the sea and does not return. As the reader there is a feeling of the inevitable about this, yet Ortmann is such a source of joy that it is painful to read. Then suddenly, out of the blue, and quite unexpectedly for a non-fiction book, Ortmann returns to the airbase. Amongst the celebrations he tells them that after ditching into the sea, he released a yellow dye into the waters to help the coast guard find him. However, he then proceeded to

⁵⁰ Russell Johnson, N. *Earhart County*, 40

fall out of his dinghy and into the dye, turning his skin such a hue of yellow that after being fished out by the coast guard and sent to the hospital for a check up, it was presumed he was jaundiced, and as such was not allowed out until it had worn off. This is an incredible moment for what is essentially a real life journal, and it induces in the reader a very basic and deep rooted sense of what is right and how things should be. Not only is there joy at his return, but the ridiculous situation he found himself in is cause for hilarity. It is exquisite to find such romance and such comedy existing in the day to day ramblings of a man's journal, and it is therefore delightful to see such a similar story occurring in Heller's novel. Heller's Orr ditches into the sea during every mission and it is the reason his protagonist Yossarian will not fly with him, however, when finally Orr does not return after ditching, Yossarian's grief is broken by a postcard from Sweden. In Heller's novel, Orr makes it out of the war by paddling to Sweden, and Yossarian finally realises that Orr was purposefully ditching into the sea time and again, to learn how to do it in preparation for his final escape attempt. This ending is unexpected and uplifting and contains a sense that although it is wildly unrealistic, it is simply the right and correct way for this character's comedic narrative to finish.

This final dose of romance in Heller's novel and even, despite it being a factual diary, in Offenburg's journal, is welcome, and *Earhart County* being not just a war story but a wondertale contains a great deal of it. Like Heller's work, it forfeits a realistic ending for a desirable one and

this is something typical in the genre of comedy. It is something that is right morally,

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.⁵¹

In this sense the edges of comic and fairytale tendencies blur and both are satisfied by this finality of the tale. A good example of this in *Earhart County* is again in its final moment, where Amelia Earhart, after being lost just off Howland Island for sixty years, finally touches down into Earhart County. It's not a realistic or believable end, but within the genre of comedy and fairytale, it is the ending that truly should be.

Earhart County's comedic nature is further expanded by being part wondertale. In folklore, particularly Russian wondertales, there also exists a kind of grim humour. If the harsh environment of the battlefield suscitated a black strain of trench humour, then perhaps the hell of Russian winters, and terrifying political regimes served a similar purpose in inspiring a comparable kind of dark comedy. Indeed Russia is a country famous for hardship and Russian wondertales, even comic ones, can at times reach some very dark and strange places, particularly in humorous tales about corpses and how to dispose of them in a profitable manner. There is also horror, desperation and terror in wondertales with many stories about murderers, ghosts, and handsome strangers eating dead

⁵¹ Frye, Northrop. (1990) *Anatomy of Criticism*. St.Ives: Penguin, p 176

bodies from the church mortuary, as well as a vulgarity of a humorous kind that wouldn't be entirely out of place in the trenches. These come in the form of stories where princesses are sampled by suitors before marriage, where men play hunt the birthmark on beautiful women, as well as many other wonderfully naughty occupations. Indeed laughter itself in wondertales is often a very ancient symbol of conception and therefore signifies life. In this way it is an important part of the wondertale genre, Propp discusses the concept that within the framework of the wondertale, laughter equals life and rebirth, whereas an absence of laughter equals death. Reaching beyond the wondertale and into the ancient customs of Russia you can see practices such as ritualised laughter during the planting of crops and during birth. In this sense, literally, the humorous tales cause laughter and bring life to homes which, in the bleakness of a Siberian winter, would otherwise be deathly grim places. Looking at this within the context of World War Two, one is reminded of the celebrations in the streets on VE day. Laughter was prevalent right across London as the people who had lost so much drew an end to the war and looked ahead to life again. This mixes with the concept of life and as Northrop Frye discusses, a typical ending of comedy is of life, new life, for example marriage, birth or the beginnings of a new and better time. This concept applies to *Catch-22* which ends with Yossarian suddenly seeing the possibility of escape to start life anew, and to *Earhart County* which sees the rebirth of the town under a new mayor.

Earhart County in its entirety reflects a mixture of light and dark humour. It has a folkloric and magical side to it, which very much obeys

the traditional tendencies of comedy and romance. It does draw inspiration from the black, satirical and at times vulgar humour of the more bawdy aspects of the war anecdote and wondertale, however, *Earhart County* has more of a tendency to sympathise with the Ortman and Orrs of veteran's work. It relates more to Vonnegut's personal appearance in *Slaughterhouse Five* than with Billy Pilgrim. And whilst there is a bitterness there and a sarcasm in its humour, there is also the romance and innocence of the fairytale.

Earhart County's comedic devices were also a way to engage the audience and it obeys almost all of the traditional rules of the tendencies of the genre. The protagonist of the novel, Jimmy Perdusa is not the most exciting of characters, this fits Frye's statement that,

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This in a sense is Jimmy's biggest problem, his father, Rear Gunner McFarlane and even his brother are more interesting than him. In fact surrounding Perdusa are a myriad of people who are all more qualified to be heroes than him, and there is a large cast of characters who all pull together to try to help defeat the villain, Mayor O'Casey. This concept of producing an entire town of characters is most expertly done in *Under Milk Wood* and indeed *Earhart County* cannot compete with the

⁵² Frye, Northrop. (1990) *Anatomy of Criticism*. St.Ives: Penguin, p 44

intricacies of such vast characterisation. However, there was certainly a desire of *Earhart County* to create a novel that included the stories of as many people as possible, just as *Under Milk Wood* and the film *The Battle Of Britain* succeeded in doing.

A final comedic device that *Earhart County* uses is the application of a narrator, which distances the audience from tragedy, the tragedy being, in the case of *Earhart County*, World War Two. This is not because *Earhart County* ignores the loss of life or the terror veterans experienced, indeed at the very heart of it is the number 57,143, the death toll of Bomber Command. However, *Earhart County* is quite pointedly not a tragedy, *Earhart County* is a work born out of hero worship and as such encourages its readers to look at the incredible feats that those men carried out on a day to day basis. In fact Lenin commented on the nature of Russian wondertales in a way that fits the psychology of *Earhart County* perfectly, he said that,

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.⁵³

This fits my motivations of *Earhart County*, as quite clearly you can see within the novel, my own hopes and longings that Bomber Command and the veterans of World War Two will continue to be celebrated and remembered by future generations as great heroes. Indeed when Northrop

⁵³Afanaser, Aleksandr. (1975) *Russian Fairytales*. Toronto: Random House , p 650

Frye discusses this idea of communal possession of a narrative in connection with medieval mystery plays, he also touches on a longing of *Earhart County* for World War Two to also be and continue to be a communal possession of Britain. *Earhart County* is a utopia of remembrance, and by reading it you too become a citizen. Because of this concept, comedy was vital to *Earhart County* for more than simply wanting to echo the humour in veteran's own work. It became a device to stop the novel from becoming a form of preaching. Continual hero worship of Bomber Command runs throughout the book, appearing in every anecdote even when it seems to be about something else. For example the narrator talking about Jimmy embarrassing himself in school became an excuse to mention a pilot who was famous for successfully employing the use of taran in his Hawker Hurricane.

Still makes me laugh, only problem was, after that, the class were laughing so hard no one took much notice of my talk and I had this amazing model too of a Hawker Hurricane that me and my father had spent most the weekend making. I'd even painted the little pilot to look as close to Wing Commander Ken Mackenzie that one time in the Battle of Britain as possible.⁵⁴

The comedy of *Earhart County* is also vital in helping to entertain readers who are not interested in aviation. As the veterans themselves

⁵⁴Russell Johnson, N. *Earhart County*. P 191

have discovered, a humorous anecdote is an effective way of drawing in an audience who may not otherwise want to know. With the aviation side of the war being even more of a potentially alienating hazard, comedy became a good way of relaying a mass of aircraft information without losing the interest of the reader. In this sense, humour became as important to *Earhart County* as the wondertale.

2.2 The Wondertale and War Fiction

It is often said that no words can adequately discuss or recreate a representation of the war and yet Primo Levi, Kurt Vonnegut and Roald Dahl create their own way of using language. If there is a fear that descriptions fall flat, the feelings their words evoke do not. Language may fail, but through science fiction and magical realism, the works of Levi, Vonnegut and Dahl reveal so much of what cannot be said.

Without having experienced the war for themselves, contemporary authors such as Len Deighton, Sebastian Faulks and Mary Doria Russell are free to approach the era differently. There is no fear for the modern author of 'shooting a line'. They are fully able, without any twinge of conscience, without any sudden pang of modesty, to celebrate and laud the heroics of every single participant in the war. Len Deighton does not hold back in his work the incredible day to day heroics carried out by the RAF and Bomber Command. He celebrates every last man, even those who were not famously on the front line, even those who perhaps were not particularly liked. There is a place for all of these characters in his novels.

Whilst Deighton specialises in the war in the skies, Faulks and Russell give intensely detailed accounts of the war on the ground. Their ability to follow fictional lives through the war, displays the most incredible knowledge of the minutiae of the lives of the people of the era. There are no hesitations in the works of these contemporary authors, their descriptions are incredible and inspire feelings of admiration and great sympathy for the lives the war destroyed and twisted beyond recognition.

The use of fairytales and magic in the works of Levi, Vonnegut and Dahl is not seen in Deighton, Faulks or Russell's work. Perhaps there is a confidence in contemporary novelists that they will have an audience who will listen, or there is a desire to explain in great detail just what veterans suffered. Modern fiction often portrays the people struggling through the war as heroes, even those who were ordinary, everyday people and in this can also be seen in *Earhart County*. It comes from a mixture of admiration and gratitude and is unabashed when it comes to lauding the bravery and hardships of the finest generation. However, it is not something that veterans themselves are comfortable with saying and can almost be summed up by Bill Carmen's comment in *Tail End Charlies*, when he fears people will think he is shooting a line. This attitude is echoed in the incredible modesty of Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* which combines a hesitancy to discuss his experiences in detail with a feeling of overwhelming confusion for the entire war. And Roald Dahl also writes with a great modesty, making light of life and death situations from which he was saved only by his incredible but downplayed flying skills. The work of veterans is

captivating, and contains the mentality of those who have experienced the kinship and the devastation of the era. They draw authentic images of youth, foolishness and a complete inability to fully understand the war. If most things are easier to get into perspective by stepping back and viewing as a whole, World War Two, can often be seen most clearly by the confused, exhausted people who are in the midst of fighting it and remembering it. Reluctance in these works to celebrate the author's own achievements seems due to the concentration of loss, trauma and the deaths of friends and family. Two generations and sixty years after the war, the writing of *Earhart County*'s characters and story was a daily and constant reminder of this.

Levi's *Periodic Table* and Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* and *Bluebeard* inspired the beginnings of *Earhart County* more than any other fiction. The magical realism utilised in their work was something I very much wanted to exist in the world of *Earhart County*. With the decision to use folklore made, there was a search to find a novel that covered a similar area and Vonnegut's *Bluebeard* was a vital discovery in finding a link between what I wanted to do and what existed already.

Bluebeard is the story of a man whose Armenian parents fled to America after surviving the 1915 holocaust of over a million of his people. The protagonist, Rabo Karabekian plays the part of Bluebeard because he has a large locked potato barn on his property which he forbids anyone to enter. The book is written as a memoir of his life which includes his war memories but acts at the same time as a kind of diary of

his life at the time of writing. Despite it being a journal it uses a style of writing that is reminiscent of oral tales right from the start, and in this way *Earhart County* is derivative,

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Whilst not being an autobiographical book, Vonnegut returns to the Prisoner of War camp which he describes in *Slaughterhouse Five* making it suggestive of Vonnegut's real war experiences. The Prisoner of War camp in fact becomes the climax of the novel when the potato barn is opened to reveal an incredible, candid painting of Karabekian's experience of the day World War Two ended in Europe, including the figure of *Slaughterhouse Five*'s female Soviet tank soldier. Metaphorically it is a thousand and one tales of a range of individuals caught in the climactic moment of emancipation, all frozen like insects in amber in the extremity of war. In fact it is five thousand, two hundred and nineteen tales, with Karabekian able to tell the entire war story of each figure. In this sense it is essentially the post-war fiction version of *Tail End Charlies* with its collection of biographical and autobiographical accounts of over a hundred and forty aircrew. Both books take World War Two and show the many separate moments and people involved, and this was a serious aim of *Earhart County*.

To an extent, if in a different style, this was also what Mary Doria Russell achieved in her novel *A Thread Of Grace* and what Sebastian Faulks reveals in his World War One novel, *Birdsong*. Both of these

⁵⁵ Vonnegut, Kurt. (1998) *Bluebeard*. New York: Bantam Doubleday, p. 1

novels show a cross section of people fighting for their lives. In *A Thread of Grace* the focus of the novel are the people of Italy from the moment the country sides with the allies, right through to the end of the war. In *Birdsong* it is the people fighting in the trenches of World War One who are the main characters. Both books contain a single protagonist who is followed more closely than any other, while at the same time they each tell the tragic stories of those all around them. In fact in *Charlotte Gray*, which can be seen to be a continuation of the lives of the characters from *Birdsong*, the sentiments of *Bluebeard*'s heroine Cerce Berman on the enormity of the war are echoed. After standing in the potato barn and looking at the image of the war she says:

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What Circe Berman feels is similar, if less traumatic as the process Charlotte Gray's father goes through the night she witnesses him breaking down over the enormity and the horror of what he has seen.

This in a sense is also what *Earhart County* strives to be, albeit from the aviation perspective, it aimed to be a glimpse of the sheer number of lives involved. In fact *Earhart County* clearly gives the number as fifty seven thousand, one hundred and forty three, which is the closest figure known of the number of Bomber Command who gave their lives. Whilst *Earhart County* cannot cover anything near to this number

⁵⁶ Vonnegut, Kurt. (1998) *Bluebeard*. New York: Bantam Doubleday, p. 313

of lives, if does attempt throughout to draw attention to as many aircrew as it can, take for example a moment when magic comes into play:

The spell she wove back in then with those eleven other people could just have helped give Guy Gibson the stones to use his own Lancaster as a shield so as to get the rest of the dambusters safe to their mark. It could have been what stopped the Luftwaffe from hitting Britain's number one ace Johnnie Johnson's Spit more than once in the whole war. It could have helped urge the Tuskegees to fight to be able to fight for their country and gave the Suicide Jockey Glider Regiment their sheer insanity to have the courage to climb into those things.⁵⁷

Both *Tail End Charlies* and *Bluebeard* inspired this layering of anecdotes and *Earhart County* worked at including as many aircrew as possible in these tiny references. Due to the oral nature of *Earhart County* that had been inspired initially by the Russian wondertale and the kind of veteran accounts as seen in *Tail End Charlies*, the concept of narrative embedding fit perfectly. The story as a whole was embedded around the encompassing and yet also anecdotal life of the narrator. It is encompassing because it starts and finishes with him and anecdotal because his life is revealed only in small scraps that are often in the context of other people.

Jigsaws and soap operas really can get in the way of important stuff. I had a five thousand piece jigsaw of Joseph Frantisek once. It was of him flying his Hurricane and blasting all hell out of the skies. Czech guy really but awarded the Polish VM 5th class. 17 kills. Took down Messerschmitts galore. Totally insane like but one of the best damn pilots in the war. Got the DFM and a bunch of other stuff too. In fact even though he's not Polish there

⁵⁷ Russell Johnson, N. *Earhart County*. p. 242

could be a bog out there with his name on it. He's probably throwing a stick for Guy Gibson's dog as we speak. Anyhow I'll be damned if I got much of anything done until I got that final 109 in a nose dive finished. Took me a week and cost me my Spanish high school final too.⁵⁸

Roald Dahl utilises narrative embedding in his short stories. His book of part autobiographical tales *Over To You* is an exquisite glance into the world of aviation at war and he uses a form of metalepsis that is emulated in *Earhart County* when he writes,

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He uses this narrative embedding to make a comment about the mental state of the bomber pilots discussing the unfortunate Stinker. Dahl makes it clear that talking about Stinker's descent into guilt induced madness shows also how close the bomber pilots are to following the same route. It is perfect in its telling and also perfect in the way it chooses to discuss the issue of guilt felt by bomber pilots without actually talking about it directly. It is a perfect mirror of Bomber Command and their autobiographical works which cannot dwell too long on the concept of guilt, possibly out of fear of becoming as unable to function as old Stinker. In fact if one takes an author who has suffered more deeply than any other, Primo Levi, it is clear that it is not always the description of atrocity in the concentration camp in *The Periodic Table* which is most

⁵⁸ Russell Johnson, N. *Earhart County*. p. 17

⁵⁹ Dahl, Roald. (1984) *Over To You: Ten Stories of Fliers and Flying*. Hammondsworth: Penguin, p. 154

effectively emotive but in Levi's wondertales about growing wings or magic watches.

While Levi's work and *Earhart County* are vastly different, it is possible to see the wondertale serving similar purposes. Like the story of old Stinker in Dahl's *Someone Like You*, the metalepsis serves to remove the audience from the pain while still giving an understanding of it. Words will always fall short when attempting to communicate the holocaust. And yet there is something in the childish simplicity of wanting to grow wings and fly away, an innocence that can be found so deeply inside the nucleus of the wondertale, that to see it alongside discussions of the worst actions ever committed by humanity, is intensely emotive. The wondertale that contains Chesterton's 'core of ethics' being evoked amongst the burning corpses of six million innocent men women and children will always be the most haunting moment in Levi's works. Levi talks to us in a language that we all understand, the language of children, the language at the base of our first understandings of morality.

Earhart County's use of the wondertale aids the author as much as the reader. Not only because words cannot describe the trauma experienced by airmen expecting every flight to die but because the author cannot. It is also not the place of *Earhart County* to attempt to understand the hell of falling out of the sky in a Lancaster riddled with flak. And so it uses the device of the wondertale, the metalepsis and the narrator who is well outside the action to be able to discuss the heroism of Bomber Command.

Being a mixture of fiction and autobiography, *Slaughterhouse Five* straddles the gap between history and literature. It is almost closer in style and content to *Tail End Charlies* than it is to novels such as *Charlotte Grey*, in that after departing from the standard lineal structure of a novel, it becomes a collection of anecdotes that culminate in the carpet bombing of Dresden in 1943 by Bomber Command. Despite this the novel achieves a level of suspense and direction through repetition of phrases. Simply but effectively it informs the reader immediately that despite the jumping timeline, the novel is following a strict plan.

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This opening promises the reader that the author knows exactly where the novel is going, despite the erratic sequence of events. In addition to this, throughout the novel a short but meaningful three words are repeated every time someone or something dies, and it is introduced as being the phrase of an alien race who themselves do not obey linear time and so do not feel grief or mourning at a death.

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Vonnegut, Kurt. (1991) *Slaughterhouse Five*. London: Random House, p. 16

⁶¹ Vonnegut, Kurt. (1991) *Slaughterhouse Five*. London: Random House, p. 1

In these three words can Vonnegut's novel be summed up. It took him a long time to write about his experiences of the Dresden bombings, in part because the result was so traumatic, so horrific that words fell short, but also because of a difficulty in making sense of the moment. For Vonnegut, not only was Dresden a shocking and horrific experience, it was also a meaningless one. What else is there to say when thousands of people die in such a tragic way but 'so it goes'? But the repetition of this phrase works also as a device. It suggests a sense of order in an otherwise chaotic time and serves to link up the many diverse moments of Billy Pilgrim's life to create a cohesive narrative.

In Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, he labels repetition as a

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when viewing it within the wondertale. This is exactly how Kurt Vonnegut utilises it and certainly Mary Doria Russell also uses it as a connective element in *A Thread of Grace*. Her novel follows several characters from 1943 right through to the end of the war. By making her novel realistic to the way the war changed and damaged so many lives, it loses to an extent the basic pattern of a simple narrative. Her character's lives become an aimless struggle simply to survive the final two years of World War Two in Italy. They experience no great triumphs or tragedies

⁶² Propp, Vladimir. (2002) *Morphology of the Folk Tale*. Texas: University of Texas Press, p. 74

at the conclusion, only a sense of loss and exhaustion. Therefore instead of a plot forming the arc of the novel, Mary Doria Russell uses the repetition of a key phrase which creates the connection between the beginning and the conclusion of the story. The phrase is simply:

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It is a challenge issued regularly by the mother of a Jewish girl before the war, every time her daughter makes a generalisation of people. At the start of the novel the Jewish girl makes a generalisation and is asked by her mother who has a gentle way of drawing attention to ignorant discrimination, to 'name two' of the people she is stereotyping. It is a long time before the phrase is seen again and between the first usage and the last there are a multitude of atrocities including the mother and her sons dying in a concentration camp. However, the phrase finally surfaces in the disturbing climax. A Nazi concentration camp doctor, who to an extent has attempted to make redemption for his crimes, is caught by Italian partisans. His defence for his actions of murder, is a generalisation of his numerous victims, he claims they were not innocents but thieves, drunkards and killers. The climax comes when the daughter of the Jewish mother stops the partisans from hurting him. Giving him a chance in which she knows he will fail, she asks him therefore to name two who were people who deserved to die. When indeed he does fail, he is gunned down allowing the narrative to be pulled full circle in the most brutal but

⁶³ Russell, Mary Doria. (2005) *A Thread of Grace*. London: Black Swan, p. 416

orderly manner. *Earhart County* too uses this device with Mayor O'Casey's endless comparisons of fortune and misfortune as, '...like a field of wheat. A big golden field of wheat. And when the harvesters come and harvest, there's always one stalk it misses.'⁶⁴ This simile in fact dates back to World War One and was used to explain the reasons one man would survive while all around him died. *Earhart County* returns the phrase back to its literal state where like *A Thread of Grace* it is used finally in the climax. The field of wheat literally bends, representing the fallen fifty seven thousand, one hundred and forty three air and ground crew of bomber command.

...he turns back to look at the exit just in time. Just in time to watch the stalks of cereal bow down in loops to the pull of the bomb and there in the haze, in the Earhart County mist, cool bag in hand, the shape of Rear Gunner Goober McFarlane walks right on out. Right on out over the fallen stalks.

I don't know how many stalks fall. But let's call it over 57,143.⁶⁵

The cool bag is vitally important for this scene as its shape is the same as a parachute, so that McFarlane, despite his old age, recreates the many surviving photographs of aircrew strolling back from their bombers, parachute in hand.

The use of repetition associated with such serious atrocity in *Slaughterhouse Five*, *A Thread of Grace* and even *Earhart County* echoes so many aircrew in their autobiographical accounts. Almost every one of them who witnessed a friend dying under extreme conditions or

⁶⁴ Russell Johnson, N. *Earhart County*. p. 40

⁶⁵ Russell Johnson, N. *Earhart County*. p. 286

experienced a particularly devastating bombing run seems to say the same thing. An example of this in *Tail End Charlies* can be seen when Walter Hughes says:

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This sentiment is echoed in *Bluebeard* where instead of a key phrase, the repetition comes from the narrator returning time and again to the most horrific moments of his life and the deaths of his friends. He also shows how his father did the same and alludes throughout to his mother's terrifying survival of the Armenian holocaust. This is what *Earhart County*'s intention is, this inability to forget the horror, and it is suggested every time the field of wheat analogy is made.

3. Women and War in Contemporary Fiction

Aviation in Second World War fiction is often the territory of male characters. *Earhart County* employs a male narrator, and the father-son dynamic is central, but women also play a functional part. In the beginnings of my research into writing *Earhart County*, Amelia Earhart was the initial inspiration into the world of aviation and became central to the novel as a device to link together the themes of loss and being lost.

⁶⁶Rennel, Tony & Nichol, John. (2005) *Tail End Charlies: The Last Battles of the Bomber War 1944-45*. London: Penguin Books, p. 251

Earhart was exceptional not just because she was the first woman to do many of her record breaking flights, but because she was often the first pilot to do them. Whilst it was important for the plot of the novel for Amelia Earhart to get lost on her way to Earhart County and miss visiting the town, it very quickly became important, in the light of her achievements to include a strong female character from the war era. This would also serve to balance out the very masculine world of World War Two aviation around which the book centres. Despite many women in aviation roles in World War Two, most novels represent the larger proportion of women who played tough yet more traditional roles. Len Deighton features loyal wives and factory working girlfriends, Roald Dahl's stories are filled with pimps and strippers and Liz Jensen, in *War Crimes for the Home*, writes an insanely jealous, infanticide committing madwoman. In each of these cases however, female characters are generally kept out of the active world of fighting and flying, and are put firmly in the roles of mothers and lovers.

There was however, far more to women in World War Two than this. The finest generation produced bravery and courageous feats in its women as well as its men and in turn it produced women capable of terrible acts of violence every bit as awful as their male counterparts. An example of this is Irma Grese, a sadistic concentration camp guard hung for her war crimes in Luneburg. In fact both World War Two and World War One were the moments in which women began to show the country that they were every bit as capable as men, taking over the farms and the factories and keeping the country ticking over whilst the men were away.

Before looking at the enormous scope of women in World War Two that *Earhart County* would choose from, it was important to start with the roles post-war and modern fiction puts them into. Roald Dahl as an ex-RAF pilot is a good place to start. His autobiography, *Going Solo*, mentions some excellent women. Pre-war references to women include the mad old married couple who gallop naked around the ship every morning for exercise with no embarrassment about their nudity. He also mentions female ex-patriots living in exhausting hot climates, themselves hard and stalwart and more than a little dotty.

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However, once his autobiography moves into the war, the women he chooses to remember are softer and more angelic. Particularly the nurse who helps him regain his eyesight after his famous crash in his most hated of all planes, the Gloster Gladiator. Dahl almost forms a romantic bond with this nurse, especially while he is still blind, but once his sight is back this fades away and his attention is turned to a world of fighting.

In his fiction, specifically his short stories, Dahl sexualizes women that bit further, whilst similarly showing pathos. For example, in a story from his collection *Someone Like You*, his bomber pilots discuss the beautiful women in the bar, but it soon turns to how their bombing runs have almost certainly killed a vast number of women just like them.⁶⁸ Whilst being made objects of the pilots' guilt and desire, it doesn't

⁶⁷ Dahl, Roald. (1988) *Going Solo*. London: Puffin Books, p. 11

⁶⁸ Dahl, Roald, (1973) *Over to You*. London: Puffin Books, p. 157

necessarily give the impression that women are being assigned to a helpless role, merely, that the men are succumbing to the laws of attraction. In another story, *Madame Rosette*, Dahl shows particular sympathy to those women reduced to stripping and forms of prostitution because of greed and the War. Milligan, Vonnegut and even Deighton continue in this nature of representing women in terms of both male desire and female empowerment.

In his comedic autobiographies, Milligan certainly expresses a weakness for women, but often portrays them as being smarter and more mature than the men in his novels. He belittles himself in his recollection of the desperate attempts he used gain their attention:

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Kurt Vonnegut's eponymous protagonist Bluebeard is less self-conscious about his use of women, until he is put to order. He talks about spending the war

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a phrase he is made to feel bad about when Circe Berman, a very strong woman, translates this to mean

⁶⁹ Milligan, Spike. (1987) *Monty: His Part In My Victory*. Middlesex: Penguin, p. 100

⁷⁰ Vonnegut, Kurt. (1998) *Bluebeard*. New York: Bantam Doubleday, p. 238

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.⁷¹

In Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*, he further casts women as narrator Billy Pilgrim's saviours. There is the actress who his mind and body go to when the suffering in the POW camps becomes too overpowering, a rich wife who saves him from a life of poverty, and finally a mention of the female Soviet soldier operating the tank that frees him from the camp. This distinctively atypical role for a woman was heavily significant to my writing of female characters in *Earhart County*. It mirrors several distinct moments in war writing where women are celebrated in unfamiliar roles. For example Len Deighton's novel *Bomber*, features a young woman climbing out of the cockpit of an expertly landed Lancaster to the surprise of male onlookers. It bears a wonderful similarity to Norman J Fortier's *An Ace of the Eighth*, when he witnesses the same thing in reality.

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Whilst many men of the era were against female pilots, there were those in favour of them. In 1934 the author of *Biggles*, Captain W. E. Johns wrote an article for *Popular Flying* magazine which clearly stated that women are going to fly and to:

⁷¹ Vonnegut, Kurt. (1998) *Bluebeard*. New York: Bantam Doubleday, p. 238

⁷² Fortier, Norman 'Bud'. (2003) *An Ace Of The Eighth*. New York: Random House, p. 36

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.⁷³

He also recognised a place for lady aces in war, however, Johns' opinions were a lot more progressive than the reality. The ATA were not formed until 1940 and then were restricted to ferrying aircraft only. They were not permitted to engage in combat to the extent that the aircraft they ferried were not even fitted with guns or ammunition. This was clearly due to prejudice and had nothing to do with a lack of ability as the ATA contained pilots as renowned as Amy Johnson and Dorothy Spicer. Instead these ridiculous opinions came from men such as Charles Great Grey who once argued that:

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Female pilots suffered such prejudice during the war, that despite allowing women to transport aircraft, they would not allow them to fly armed. This placed ATA pilots in the precarious position of flying across the Atlantic without any means to defend themselves from enemy fire, and their skill in evasive manoeuvres often meant life or death.

Despite these aviation contributions made by women, they were in the minority in the war and contemporary fiction reflects this. *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* contains a cast of mothers and would be lovers who struggle to exist in a Cephalonian village during the war but who are

⁷³ Cadigan, Mary. (2002) *Women with Wings*. Chicago: Academy, p. 161

⁷⁴ Cadigan, Mary. (2002) *Women with Wings*. Chicago: Academy, p. 169

passive creatures unable to fight against the enemy in their situation. The central female character in A L Kennedy's *Day* is little more than the recollections Day has of his mother, an angelic woman whom he is besotted by and Kennedy even continues a traditional Oedipal route by having him kill his own father. Liz Jenson's *War Crimes for the Home* produces an interesting alternative to the innocent female. A desperate woman caught in a love triangle with her sister's husband, finally loses her sanity altogether and murders one of her babies. It's a leap from such passive female characters and while it keeps the protagonist firmly in a female traditional role, it certainly breaks some taboos of motherhood.

Sebastian Faulks' novel *Charlotte Gray* however, is about an entirely different female character. The protagonist is a woman fed up of her passive role in London whilst her fighter pilot beau flies dangerous missions into France. When he goes missing she takes advantage of her position where she has been parachuted into France as an undercover courier, to look for him. Refusing to come home, she chooses to continue helping the French resistance and her experiences compared to the pilot's who is injured and being taken care of, outweighs his in danger and success. Charlotte Gray is very much the fictional European version of the famous female spy known as High Pockets. Whilst Claire Phillips' real life experiences of working undercover were so treacherous they seem more fictional than those found in *Charlotte Gray*, they were in fact a heroic reality of the war.

Through *Earhart County* I wanted to show women in this kind of active role despite admiring the WAAFs, the landgirls and the factory

workers greatly. My own grandmother worked in an ammunition factory, which was not only a dangerous job but one that caused every tooth in her head to rot until they had to be removed in one sitting with no anaesthetic. However, *Earhart County*, was drawn more to Amelia Earhart's style of exploits and Claire Phillips' kind of courage. With this in mind it was women in the 1940s fighting alongside men and proving to be equal and at times more than equal, who really provoked interest. The Soviet Union only used women in their military as a desperate last resort but they proved themselves to be incredible fighters. This combined with a certain pride instilled from a Soviet heritage made the female fighter and bomber squadrons a fascinating point of research.

Earhart County decided to feature a woman who belonged to the Soviet Night Witches, or *Nachthexen* as they were known to the Germans, women who were first and foremost some of the Soviet Union's finest female pilots. They were enthusiastic recruits and were given, initially, endless night bombing missions in the ridiculously outdated biplane Po-2. They would fly sometimes up to eighteen bombing runs a night, navigating by using a map on their knees, a watch and what they could see over the side of the open cockpit. Their planes were so slow the female pilots learnt incredible ways to outmanoeuvre the Luftwaffe. They could turn tighter than the German aircraft due to the Po-2 being such a slow aircraft. The top speed of the Po-2 was 94mph, the stall speed of a Me 109 was 120mph. They also took great care to remain as hidden as possible by flying so low they were hidden by hedgerows and by cutting their engines when approaching targets so as to fly in silently. They also

used a most courageous technique when dealing with search lights; understanding that their rickety old planes could not possibly make it out once coned. They would always fly in threes; the first two pilots would deliberately get themselves coned by the lights so that the other could complete their bombing run successfully. *Earhart County* comments on their ability:

If all they flew was equal to the other guys, there's no way they'd have been allowed in the air force. They had to be better. And they were.⁷⁵

The anecdotal nature of *Earhart County* fit well within the research of these women as they flew so many more missions than their male British counterparts, and the most famous tales of the Night Witches centre around the already mentioned Lily Litvak. The first tale is the time she shot down Luftwaffe ace Staff Sergeant Erwin Maier. Maier, once in the hands of the Soviets, asked to meet the excellent pilot who had beaten him and yet when Lily walked through the door, he flat out refused to believe it could have been her. He assumed the Soviets were making fun of him, until Lily talked him through the dogfight step by step. The second anecdote was of a male Soviet pilot refusing to fly with a woman on his wing. He finally said that if a woman pilot could stick closely to his wing throughout a bout of aerobatics, then he may consider allowing her to fly missions with him. The woman he chose to make his point with, was Lily. Considered to be the most beautiful of the Night Witches, she is sometimes said to have been shy and sweet but there are reports

⁷⁵ Russell Johnson, N. *Earhart County*. p. 108

from her colleagues in Bruce Myles' *The Night Witches: Untold Story of Soviet Women in Combat*, that she was in fact a very assertive woman. If he had chosen any of the other Night Witches, perhaps the story still would have ended in the same way. They were after all each exceptionally skilled pilots, but Lily would become especially famous for her bravado. He took her up and she stuck to his wing throughout the whole sequence and seemingly desperate to throw her off he attempted one last stunt, by diving down ridiculously close to earth before pulling out. He didn't survive the stunt, Lily however, did.

These two stories help build the myth that was Lily, with her Yak fighter being instantly recognisable because of the lilies she painted on the fuselage. She became the focus of the Luftwaffe however, and when her squadron was encountered they would go out of their way to target her. While reports differ as to how many Luftwaffe it took to shoot her down, *Earhart County* chooses the most popular account, that it took eight planes, two of which she took down with her.

Whilst the female pilots proved themselves to such an extent that they were given one of the Soviet Union's best fighter planes, the *Yak*, they never lost their femininity. When their male squadron leader said that women shouldn't wear trousers and issued them with skirts, they were literally overjoyed. They wore lipstick against regulation and when ordered to cut their hair to a more military style length, a few of them couldn't bring themselves to do it and instead tied it up in such a cunning manner that it appeared short. Not only was it important to them to look as feminine as possible on the ground but also they never lost a certain

feminine softness in combat. One wonderful anecdote has a young female pilot successfully shooting down a Ju-88. When no parachutes opened, terrified she had killed them, she landed her plane down in the field alongside the downed aircraft and ran out to try and help them. What she saw were two young men whose parachutes had failed to open. A fellow Night Witch worried when she saw her colleague's plane on the ground also landed and said that she saw her cry for the two dead Luftwaffe pilots before being good and practical and taking their parachutes to make underwear. This story sums up the Night Witches perfectly, they could out-fly the men but kept an emotional softness and never lost that domestic practicality of waste not want not.

With *Earhart County*'s portrayal of Lily Litvak came the aim that people's expectations would be challenged not because of an underestimation of women, but because the area of female fighter pilots in the war era is fairly unknown. Lily's character pushed also at the expectations that can be made about old age. In the novel, she starts off with severe dementia, talking constantly about a yak which is presumed to be her favourite animal. When her dementia clears however, not only does she revert back to being an assertive, intelligent woman but she is also revealed, despite her age, to be an amazing pilot. Having spent a lot of time in nursing homes, it still fascinates me to find out the exploits that often very frail, old people have carried out, and in the case of Lily's character there is the double surprise of her having had such a masculine role in the war. In *Earhart County*, Lily was one of the most rewarding to

write and the most interesting to study. Though I hope *Earhart County* has the feel of a fun wondertale, her character, for me, is a serious one.

Conclusion

As a Wondertale, *Earhart County*, is a novel formed out of a collection of anecdotes and history, both real and mythological. No part of *Earhart County* is invented without basis and it is at times the novel's most outrageous points that are the most historically accurate. The gas trials are based on those at Portland Down. The U-boat that has been dragged up onto dry land and preserved is based on the U-boat U534 now resting in Merseyside. Lily Litvak was a real person just as Robin Perdusa was based, albeit loosely, on the fighter ace, Robin Olds. Dr Zippermeyer whether fact or fiction was not an invention of *Earhart County's* and neither was the machine that induces dementia through the use of sound waves. The bombs, the torpedoes and the ship polluting the sea with tritium, they are all derived from reality and, in this sense, *Earhart County* is a kind of Brigadoon of World War Two. It is a place that contains legacy after legacy and is populated by a community who are proud of their airfield heritage. Not only does the town contain the physical and psychological remnants of the war, but so too does the novel, itself, in its inspirations and in the very language it chooses to use.

Whilst using some very real historical people and events, *Earhart County* is also a novel that takes folkloric structure to a very aware level,

to the point that it has its own Vladimir Propp in the form of Mr. Omagh, who comments on the structure of the embedded narratives within the novel. These narratives are vital in the novel's aim to be as accurate as possible in its celebrated account of Bomber Command's actions. It nods in the direction of World War Two's mythical characters, Bader, Cheshire, Gibson, Bong, even, without mentioning names, Gibson's dog. However, at the same time it creates myths, for those without aviation knowledge, out of lesser known legends, Pattle, McKenzie, Frantisek, Litvak. And it uses embedding to make real life actions part of that mythology, from the Soviet airborne ramming tactic of taran, to Peenemunde and the famous moment when a pilot brought his Lancaster home despite having eight feet of its nose blown away. It makes a comparison between dragons from the East and the Luftwaffe. It contains the obligatory characters of a wondertale, the hero, the villain, the donor and the helper. Its narrative style is a mixture of oral folklore and World War Two autobiographical works and it aims to be a piece of modern folklore. To use Chesterton's words, the novel's form aspires to

Figure (Text/Chart/Diagram/image etc.) has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.⁷⁶

to describe a time when nothing seemed to obey a sense of order.

⁷⁶ Chesterton, G. K. (1969) *All Things Considered*. Henley-on-Thames: Darwen Finlayson, p. 192

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Airshows

Fairford Air Show 2007

Duxford Air Show 2008

Cowes Week 2009 (Red Arrows and Spitfires only)

Signing Events

Aces High Art Gallery, Dambusters signing.

Duxford Air Show, Tuskegee signing