

My NAZI
NEMESIS

A DARK THRILLER

RICH DiSILVIO

THE AUTHOR

Rich DiSilvio is an author of both fiction and nonfiction. He has written books, historical articles and commentaries for magazines and online resources. His passion for history, art, music, and architecture has yielded contributions in each discipline in his professional careers.

My Nazi Nemesis is DiSilvio's third novel and fourth book. Rich returns to a WWII setting, which he had treated in his first novel, yet delves deeper into the Holocaust and the depraved nature of human behavior. However, with the protagonist being a cocksure CIA agent with a biting sense of humor and a very colorful supporting cast, the novel emerges out of the darkness to shed humor and light, thus making for an entertaining read.

DiSilvio's previous works include *A Blazing Gilded Age*, which offers a searing look at the ugly underbelly of a golden age, with historical figures, such as J.P. Morgan, Theodore Roosevelt, Mark Twain, Nikola Tesla, and many others woven into the fictional storyline; *Liszt's Dante Symphony*, which is a thriller/mystery, replete with ciphers, spies, serial murders, and a gripping tale that covers the rise of Hitler's Nazi Germany from its Prussian roots under Otto von Bismarck. Finally, there is DiSilvio's magnum opus, *The Winds of Time*, which is a non-fictional tome that astutely analyzes the titans who shaped Western civilization.

DiSilvio's work in the entertainment industry includes projects for historical documentaries, including *Killing Hitler: The True Story of the Valkyrie Plot*, *The War Zone series*, James Cameron's *The Lost Tomb of Jesus*, *Return to Kirkuk*, *Operation Valkyrie*, and cable TV shows and films such as *Tracey Ullman's State of the Union*, *Celebrity Mole*, *Monty Python: Almost the Truth*, and many others.

He has written commentaries on the great composers (such as the top-rated Franz Liszt Site), and conceived and designed the Pantheon of Composers porcelain collection for the Metropolitan Opera. The collection retailed throughout the USA and Europe.

His artwork and new media projects have graced the album covers and animated advertisements for numerous super-groups and celebrities, including, Elton John, Pink Floyd, Yes, The Moody Blues, Cher, Madonna, Jay-Z, Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash, Miles Davis, The Rolling Stones, Jethro Tull, Alice Cooper, Eric Clapton and many more.

Rich lives in New York with his wife Eileen and has four children.

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NEMESIS
Das Lügner

RICH DiSILVIO

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This book is a work of fiction that incorporates both fictional and historical settings and characters. While historical figures and events have been incorporated, however, some were altered to fit the fictional story line, such as the fictionalized scenes with real-life characters. In regards to all other fictional creations herein, any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales are entirely coincidental.

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Thank you
for your interest in
reading this excerpt.

Enjoy!

Rich DiSilvio

1

Deathfall

October 2, 1942

I screamed in bloody terror,

“You sleazy Kraut!” as I was violently shoved out of a Junkers Ju 52 at twenty thousand feet. The herculean thrust of its three mighty propellers blasted me backward, accelerating my unexpected freefall. The airstream tore off my officer’s cap and rippled my skin as I fell helplessly through a mist of dark clouds. Perilously, I spiraled toward Earth in the pitch-darkness of night, several miles west of Hamburg, where my body might very well end up mangled and splattered on a dirt road or a small farm in a matter of minutes.

Images of SS *Oberführer* Alois Richter’s gloating face flashed before my mind’s eye. Just seconds ago, he had stood in the open doorway of the aircraft gazing deep into my panic-stricken eyes while I scratched feverishly to hold onto anything to prevent my fall. By a fluke, I had snatched a parachute mounted near the door just seconds before being

maliciously shoved out, yet the dirty pig had drawn his knife and cut a deep gash into the pack's canvas membrane. Just before the dreaded last push, Alois had honored me with one of his sarcastic witticisms as the Kraut cackled, "Well, Jack, look at the bright side. If at first you don't succeed, you'll never jump again!"

Purging the Nazi's nefarious face from my mind, I was now confronted with the grave issue at hand: somehow I had to turn Richter's death-push into a success and prove the bastard wrong.

My hands frantically reached for the parachute's straps, which flapped wildly in the wind, and I began harnessing myself. My heart raced, but nowhere near the dizzying velocity of my decent, which was increasing at an alarming rate. Clothes whistling, my eyes began to water, when suddenly one of the pack's straps whipped around, its buckle carving a crafty gash across my chin.

Once the pack was secured, my fingers quickly began pulling the silk material out of the jagged slit—compliments of the asshole Alois—which I now prayed would catch the wind and deploy with some semblance of a functional canopy.

Gazing upward toward the heavens, I closed my eyes and pulled the ripcord. *Nothing happened!* "God, no!" I screamed.

My fingers dug fervently into the slit once more and began pulling out the partially severed silk canopy. Strands of suspension lines began flowing upward, like boiling spaghetti doing a macabre death dance—as if mocking my mortality. Once again, Alois's smug, sinister face appeared before my mind's eye, delighting in his handiwork and the amusing thought of my imminent demise. His illusionary face faded from sight as dark clouds consumed me. Lost in a black void, fear gripped me *tight*.

Turning my gaze earthward, in an attempt to assess how many minutes or seconds I had left to live, I suddenly felt a gut-wrenching jerk as my body bounced upward! As I eagerly gazed skyward, a grunt eked out from the very pit of my stomach. Despite being partially choked by unruly strands of suspension cords, the glorious canopy had miraculously prevailed. It was a sight to behold as purple shades of moonlight cascaded over its soft, silky skin.

Down below I could see faint silhouettes of treetops lining a roadway and an open field near what I suspected was the Elbe River. Pulling hard right on the suspension lines, I attempted to steer myself towards the field. My descent was so rapid I didn't have time to maneuver fast enough, and I crashed into a towering sycamore maple tree, my body sliding down, hitting branch after branch as the soft leaves brushed against my body and brought me to a most welcome stop. Dangling some eight feet off the ground, I quizzically looked upward to find the source of my levitation. There, before my eyes, was a hefty branch gracefully clutching my canopy as if the hand of God. Overwhelmed with bliss, I cried.

St. Louis, Missouri

September 20, 1957

Some people say I have the gift of gab, but actually, I'm a rather private and reserved man. I have to be, being that I was an OSS officer during the war and rolled right into the CIA afterward, when it changed its name.

My name had also changed from Jack Goodwin to Jack Hornsby—for covert reasons—but for clarity in my storytelling I'll use my birth name: Goodwin. I'm Irish-American, but the

real deal being born in Cork, Ireland and then transplanted to Astoria, Queens when I was nine. My brownish-red hair and ruddy, white complexion are complimented by hazel eyes, which hover about five feet five inches above the ground. Adding my forehead, I max out at five feet ten inches tall—a little less after I get a crew cut. Well, as I like to say: the Devil Dog is in the details. So I salivate over facts.

Anyhow, my fifteen-year-old daughter Eleanor loves when I reminisce about my escapades in the war. She's a pretty gal with dark brown hair, blue eyes, olive complexion, and is comfortable either reading Jane Austen with a cup of tea or blazing down the track like Roger Bannister. And although she's heard that particular tale of mine several times before, naturally there are many other stories that I felt were too graphic and disturbing to thrust upon her tender little ears. But now that she's a cool-cat teenager in this crazy new world of Elvis Presley's rowdy rock 'n' roll, and Allen Ginsberg's radical Beat Generation I suppose I should be more *hip*.

Gazing over at my daughter, who is currently sitting on the living room couch, chewing on an Atomic Fireball, I'm now prepared to start unlocking the WW II vault buried deep in the back of my thick skull.

"Hey, Daddio, although I've heard that one before, you didn't quite tell it the same way. There are more details and even some nasty words, which you always scold *me* for saying."

"That's true, Ellie. But you're only one year away from your sweet sixteen, and it's time for me to start revealing more information. There are some very important and disturbing things that happened in the past that you need to know."

Eleanor squinted, eyeing me up as the wheels in her sharp little mind turned like a fine Swiss watch. Although Eleanor tried to fit in with her young, rebellious crowd, she

was truly a fifty-year-old woman in a fifteen-year-old's body. Pensively, she rubbed her chin. "Well, I've long suspected that this Alois Richter character had more to do with your life than just that deadly skirmish over Hamburg."

Grasping my freshly brewed cup of Joe off my green, Formica kitchen counter, which divides both rooms, I strolled into the living room and took a seat next to her. "You're a very perceptive girl, Ellie. Yes, there's a far greater story to be told. But not just about Alois. Your mother is part of this convoluted equation also."

Eleanor's adorable face withered, now solemn and pensive. "You told me Mom died in 1945, at the end of the war, but never told me how."

"Exactly, princess. And now that you're old enough, I have to get this burden off my chest and enlighten you to the truth. But be prepared, some of this is going to be very ugly. Wartime brings out the worst in people."

My inquisitive daughter fell silent. I could see the anticipation and anxiety consuming her. I swallowed hard, knowing this wasn't going to be easy. But this day had finally arrived, and like a good soldier and special agent, I'm well accustomed to executing tough missions. I pulled out a Camel and my trusty Zippo and lit up.

"Ellie, I think it's best that I start from the very beginning...how I met your mother, and then how Alois entered our lives. Alois's name, by the way, is derived from Latin *Aloisius*, meaning 'famous warrior.' And a bloody warrior he was. Perhaps infamous would be more apropos. Alois also happened to be the name of Adolf Hitler's drunken and abusive father. That should give you a good idea as to how wicked Alois the Nazi Warrior is. He has been my Nazi nemesis for fifteen years."

Eleanor squinted at that last bit of information as she leaned back into the couch and clutched each of her elbows, bracing herself for the coming storm.

2

First Meeting

March 9, 1942

To begin with let me clarify my agency's founding and subsequent name changes. In 1941, America was already involved in world affairs with FDR's cunning Lend Lease program and being hailed as the Arsenal of Democracy. Meanwhile, Hitler's theater of war was expanding rapidly with his *Blitzkrieg*, or lightning war. President Roosevelt was wise enough to realize that we needed a secret service, and in July of 1941 he called upon William "Wild Bill" Donovan to create what would be called the office of the Coordinator of Information, or COI. By June 13, of the following year, its scope broadened and it became the Office of Strategic Services, or OSS, which Donovan was to model after Britain's MI6 with their guidance. Our function, naturally, was to engage in espionage, propaganda, subversion, and sabotage—all devious things that stir my soul with delight.

On March 9, 1942, my mission was to fly a sortie into Poland, parachute out with four other agents—each of us wearing civilian three-piece suits—then make a rendezvous in Munich, Germany by any means possible. The main op

would then commence from there. That night we took off from London, the sky was a deep, phthalo blue and fairly clear. Yet upon entering Polish airspace, we encountered dense clouds making navigation difficult. Unexpectedly, anti-aircraft fire shot up like a swarm of colossal fireflies, illuminating the sky—then all hell broke loose!

Our B-24 Liberator hummed and vibrated while our gunners' eyes anxiously scanned the exploding sky for enemy aircraft. Through the mist a Junkers Ju 87 emerged, heading straight for our port side, when Harry Lewis, our ace gunner, yelled, "Jerry at 9:45!" Quickly swiveling about, he emptied several rounds into the dive-bomber's fuselage. Bullet holes speckled its aluminum skin when the Plexiglas canopy suddenly shattered, most likely killing the pilot, who'd lost control. As he careened under us, the top of his rudder blade came ripping through our underbelly, looking like a shark's dorsal fin slicing through metal. Air began gushing in as we all scattered to put on our parachutes. Then the death knell came: a Messerschmitt Bf 110 appeared out of nowhere! It was cruising at over 500 mph with its twin 20mm cannons blaring! Pivoting quickly, I saw the nose of our B-24 being shred into confetti as our pilot and navigator screamed, disintegrating into a bloody mixture of glass, aluminum, and guts.

My wide eyes gazed around to see who else was alive while I swiftly buckled up my harness. Only Harry and I were left standing when the plane began listing into a steep nosedive. Flashing our thumbs-up, we both sought an exit. The fuselage was riddled with large gapping holes, offering us several exits, yet all had sharp jagged edges. Harry was on the opposite side of the aircraft, when I saw him salute farewell. With fear in his eyes, he turned and bailed out. Quickly, I pivoted to face the large breach before me while my body wavered in the blustering airstream. My mind

flashed with the thought of how, in a matter of seconds, our quiet flight had turned into a hellish nightmare—the majority of my crew dead and perhaps me too, in a matter of seconds. Making the sign of the Cross, I held my breath and leapt through the opening, out into the unknown.

The vision before me now was surreal. Just darkness and thick layers of clouds, nothing tangible was in sight. I suddenly began choking as the burning smoke trail of our plane's avgas and hydraulic fluid rose up into my nostrils, stinging my lungs. Reaching for the D-ring, I pulled it hard. The canopy unfurled with a *pop!* and I drifted slowly into a dead sea of fog and soot as the caustic smells of sulfur and oil continued to rankle my lungs. It seemed like an eternity before the clouds began to thin and I saw Poland for the first time. A sprawling terrain of meadows and trees emerged, all bathed in the bluish-gray hues of night.

My feet hit the ground, and I quickly unbuckled my harness. Ditching my parachute into the nearby bushes, I promptly patted the counterfeit civilian papers in my vest pocket, sighing with relief they were still intact. I then gazed around doing a 360-degree sweep. All seemed relatively quiet—almost too quiet. A few small pops of gunfire echoed in the distance, but then stopped. My pulse simmered to a calm and steady beat as I called out for Harry using his code name, Karl, and began walking aimlessly. Having completely lost my bearings, and my compass, I simply chose a direction on gut instinct. I walked for a good twenty minutes, calling out "Karl" into the darkness of night, yet heard no response.

While plowing through the tall grass, I suddenly heard an unnervingly peculiar sound. The irritating hum grew louder and louder, sounding like a gargantuan sewing machine, clanking and thumping. My body began to vibrate as the disquieting clacking noise grew rapidly closer. I

swiveled to the sound and was thunderstruck! I hit the dirt as an antiquated Polikarpov Po-2 biplane soared over my head, its wheels only two feet away from leaving skid marks on my head.

The breeze whooshed past, and I sprang up to see the bizarre image of this Soviet jalopy as it crash-landed some 80 yards away. I ran toward the wreckage, hurdling over small bushes and tall grass, while being engulfed in drifting veils of fog. As I approached, I could see the Soviet pilot trying to free himself as the five-cylinder radial engine caught fire, quickly igniting the jalopy's wood and fabric frame. Fire spread rapidly and smoke billowed, yet I could still see the pilot struggling to un-harness himself. Scampering toward what now looked like an emblazoned barn fire as the wood and canvas crackled, I peeled off my jacket and beat back the flames. I made my way to the cockpit and pulled out my knife. Startled, the pilot turned and intuitively reached to stay my hand. I shook my head, pointed to the restraining straps of his harness, and went ahead and severed the Grim Reaper's deadly clutches. The pilot smiled, and leapt out of the flames and into the world of the living.

We both ran several yards away when the plane's fuel tank suddenly exploded, our bodies being blasted to the ground while the plane vanished into a blaze of flames and smoke. Anxiously, we sprang up and gazed into the inferno, amazed to be watching the fire and not burning *in* it. He turned and stared at me through charred round goggles, his entire face and leather cap blackened with soot, and he smiled, his white teeth gleaming like footlights on a vaudeville stage. The happy little fellow then embraced me, and, to my surprise, kissed me on the lips. Startled, I pushed him back, only to see him pull off his leather cap to unfurl her long beautiful hair!

St. Louis, Missouri

September 20, 1957

I glanced at Eleanor with a smile as I extinguished my Camel's smelly butt into the ashtray. "And *that* is how I first met your mother."

With a giggle, she replied, "Your plane crash was terrifying, but this tale about meeting Mom was rather sweet. You had me worried. I thought I'd be hearing a horrifying Hitchcock thriller."

"Darling, this story is far from over. Sit back and relax," I advised as I got up and strolled into the kitchen.

I opened the refrigerator and grasped a Schlitz. They say the Milwaukee brew is now the top contender in sales with my local Anheuser-Bush, but to be honest, neither one floats my boat. I'm a Black Label man myself. But my CIA partner always brings this squirrel piss over. She has horrible taste, except in men. You get the idea.

Just to aggravate myself, I then took a peek out the rear window. Christ, tomorrow's Saturday and I'll have to mow the damn lawn, *again*. I had bought this small, redbrick ranch in Richmond Heights to limit yardwork, but even my Irish luck abandoned me. I don't know whom the imbecile was that came up with the idea of manicured lawns and fancy topiary, but having grown up in rustic Ireland and then Astoria, Queens, I prefer either raw, undisturbed nature or hard cement—preferably the latter. I guess I must thank the Romans for that invention; strong, durable, and maintenance free. But too bad they didn't make it in Kelly green.

Walking back into the living room, I popped the top of my Schlitz beer and sat beside Eleanor. "Okay, now where was I? Oh yes, it was a foggy night in Poland."

3

An American & Soviet in Poland

March 9, 1942

The midnight fog began to lift slightly when, to our surprise, searchlights sliced through the clouds like laser rapiers doing a choreographed duel. Unable to speak Russian, I said in German, "*Folge mir!* (Follow me!)"

Her light blue eyes seemed to glow as they peered into mine. "Do you know where you're going?" she asked in perfect English.

My brow rose with surprise, as I replied in English, "Is my German not good?"

"No, it's perfect. It's just that I saw the B-24 go down, but more importantly, I see the handle of your Colt."

I smiled and drew my jacket over the weapon. "And I see *you* speak English, comrade."

"Yes. As well as German, Polish, French and Italian."

"Damn, you foreigners really tan our American hides in the languages department." My eyes did a 180-degree

sweep. "But we best get a move on." I clutched her hand and began running toward the dense forest some 300 yards away. "And, no. I don't have any idea where I'm going," I said, "but we certainly can't stay out here on this open meadow!"

Dashing through the grass we came upon the first row of tall trees, which appeared to be like tall sentinels guarding a magical forest, and we slipped in. At about fifty feet in, we came to a stop and spun around. Out of breath, we held our sides, panting. Peering through the webbed network of branches and twigs, we watched the gigantic spotlights scan the sky, forming luminous rays of Xs and Vs. To our surprise, after several swipes the light show unexpectedly ended. We both sighed with relief as our eyes briefly connected and then gazed back at the partially obscured horizon. The air was still and silent. A faint glow illuminated the open meadow as a sliver of the crescent moon pierced through the undulating clouds, like a scalpel cutting cotton.

I gazed back into my new Soviet comrade's eyes and smiled. After exchanging names, however, I was compelled to ask her a burning question. "What the hell were you thinking flying that old, 1920s heap of trash?"

She smiled. "Believe it or not, these old biplanes are actually proving to be very effective. And not just against the *Luftwaffe*, but also their ground troops."

"How so? By making the Krauts laugh to death?"

Veronika smirked. "No! I'll have you know that the word is out: the Nazis *are* frightened of us."

I laughed. "Oh, come on. Now you're pulling my leg."

"I'd like to pull you hair! You're rather fresh."

I realized I might have overstepped my manners so I slapped on my serious face. "I apologize. Please..." a slight giggle escaped before I could finish "...explain."

Crossing her arms, Veronika heatedly tapped her foot on the ground. “Are you finished being rude?”

My eyes quickly scanned the forest for activity as I replied, “Okay, okay. I’m a fool. There you have it. That was your first taste of a silly twenty-seven-year-old American. Now, please, continue.”

With skeptical eyes, she said, “You see, these old biplanes are able to fly in very low, just above the treetops, and are undetected by radar due to their wood and fabric construction. Therefore, we stealthily cruise in and then release two or three bombs, which although not many do terrorize the enemy. It’s more psychological intimidation than massive bombing, naturally, but we women are proud to do our part.”

“Women!?” I burst out laughing. “Oh, come on! Do you mean to say your entire outfit is comprised of women?”

A smirk once again etched her beautiful face. “You’re cruising for a slap! Ally or not.”

I covered my unruly mouth and turned away to regain composure, spotting a felled tree that had snapped in half, and realized that could be *me* if I kept it up, as I then gazed back into her beautiful blue eyes.

However, it was clear by the look in those eyes that Veronika was still not too enamored with me, as she said, “This is one area that the Soviets do surpass all other nations. Marina Raskova, a great female pilot, formed Aviation Group 122. In fact, the Amazon warriors of antiquity were also from the Ukraine region. So Soviet women have a long and valiant history, Jack. Meanwhile, you foreign males are all just a bunch of knuckle-dragging Neanderthals. And you should all be clubbed!”

I chuckled. “Well, if we get out of here alive, I would love to go clubbing with you. I know several great night spots in London.”

That witticism seemed to work as it managed to crack the Amazon warrior's steely armor. She giggled and shook her head. "I heard about you Americans."

My head recoiled. "What do you mean? Are you insinuating that all American men are Don Juans? Remember, Veronika, *Señor Don Juan* was a Spaniard."

"Don Juan is just a stereotype for most men."

"Well, I'll concede that most men are amorous, but God was the one who injected us with testosterone."

"Oh, so you're blaming God?"

I laughed. "Well, we mortal men didn't inject ourselves with it, did we? So whom else should I blame? And don't forget, it was sexy, naked Eve who made Adam fall from grace."

Veronika smiled and waved her hand dismissively. "Oh, please, let's not get into religion. But I'll agree: some women are just as lustful as men and love chasing after them. Meanwhile, I'm running *away* from men. Evil men, that is."

"What do you mean?" I said, my curiosity piqued.

The lovely Russian took off her jacket and all traces of her Soviet uniform and tossed them away, revealing a fancy white lace blouse with an opulent gold brooch studded with rubies, and a maroon pleated skirt that complimented her curvy hips. "Stalin is a sadistic mass murderer, and this was my last flight for that wretched man and his warped country. I've worn these civilian clothes under my uniform on my last three missions, but didn't have the nerve to escape. Now it seems fate took that dilemma out of my hands and had my plane shot down. It then brought you into my life to pull me out of the flames and escort me to safety."

I nearly choked. "Veronika, I'm no angel of mercy or Saint Christopher. Look around. We're lost in some woods, in God knows where, Poland. To say *safety* is a bit premature." My eyes nervously glanced at the forest's

perimeter. “Besides, I happen to have great admiration for Russian culture and an interest in communism. God knows capitalism has failed miserably in America. The Depression has turned our once golden paradise into a sprawling ghetto. Granted, Roosevelt’s New Deal has created jobs, but as far as I’m concerned, a state-run enterprise is just a variation of Fascism. So I don’t know where America is heading these days.”

“From what I’ve heard, Roosevelt’s New Deal is only a temporary system to kick-start your economy. Once it becomes productive, the helpful hands of your government will be withdrawn. Yet, in Russia, the bloody hands of Stalin choke and decimate everything. Even German officers are allowed some degree of freedom to voice their opinions to their superiors. Yet in Russia, no one is allowed to dispute a command by Stalin. I mean *no one*. Even those in the highest ranks never know if they, too, will suddenly be deemed an enemy of the state and put to death or sent to a Gulag for a life of freezing hell. Whole ethnic communities have been uprooted and sent to Siberia. Others abandoned and left to starve, while others are executed en masse. No one knows why. And no one dares to ask. It’s a nightmarish world of fear and savage brutality.”

I rubbed my chin, dumbfounded. I peered around, making sure the area was still secure, and said, “Veronika, I don’t doubt you’ve heard of horrible crimes and conspiracies being committed, every nation seems to have them, but I truly find it hard to believe. The Russia I grew up learning about, and is now our ally, has many Americans joining the Communist Party back home.”

Veronika cackled. “Huh! Americans that join the Communist Party in your country are idle country club chatterers who don’t know about the blood and guts that spill in our streets and desecrate Mother Russia.”

Just then a rustling sound caught our attention. We both turned toward the sound to see an owl gnawing on a small rodent. Glancing back at one another, I said, "You see, it's an ugly world for *all* life on Earth."

"That it is," she said as her eyes anxiously scanned the forest. "So what should we do now?"

"I suggest we just lie low, right here, until daylight."

Veronika nodded and began scooping up a pile of leaves. Having formed a mattress, she sat down.

I smiled. "That looks comfy, can I join you?"

"Who's asking? Don Juan or Jack Goodwin?"

"Well, as you said, we're one and the same."

She chuckled. "Although you're a bit dense and annoying, there is a special charm about you."

I clutched my heart. "You *slay* me. Now I know the rapture of being impaled by Cupid's sardonic arrow."

She shook her head. "You're an idiot. But you did save my life. So, yes, you may have a seat."

My smile grew into boyish grin, like the one I wore when Darla—a girl I had a crush on in grade school—finally accepted my entreaty after three devastating rebuffs. I sat beside Veronika, trying not to stare too much, but found that my eyes kept getting drawn back to her lovely face, soot-stained and all. Her dark brown hair with blond highlights—or perhaps they were red highlights, I couldn't be sure in the dark—was simply radiant. Or at least as radiant as hair can be at night in a dense forest enshrouded with wispy veils of fog. Then again, that's probably my amorous imagination conjuring up an ideal prototype of womanly beauty, because, as I said, God is the one who made this direct hotline from the crotch to the brain, which seems to short-circuit logic. All I knew is that this woman had some crazy spell over me.

She gazed into the sky and back down at me. “Do you know what the Germans call us women pilots?” I shook my head, as she said, “Night Witches.”

I laughed. “I was just thinking about how you have some crazy spell over me.”

Veronika smiled. “Well, I’m not into black magic, even if my sooty face says otherwise.”

We giggled and stared at each other for what felt like seven dreamy seasons, or seven deadly sins. Whatever it was, it was grand.

The songs of crickets and rustling of leaves in the breeze filled the night air along with the sweet smell of pine, as we both leaned on each other and then slowly backwards against a tree. We gazed through a myriad of branches into space as our eyelids grew heavy. Before long I could feel the weight of Veronika’s body pressing against me, warm and limp, as she slipped into a peaceful slumber. Meanwhile, regardless of my exhaustion, I had to stay awake. Someone had to be the sentry, and I happily volunteered. Well, let’s just say I was chosen by default.

Straining to stay awake, my mind started to rehash my mission. I wasn’t here in Poland for a romantic rendezvous with some unknown Soviet Night Witch. I had an operation to perform, a serious operation no less, and had to start thinking of ways to improvise. My entire crew was killed, or in Harry’s case, probably just lost, and everything had to change. A complete revamping of the mission was never rehearsed, never even contemplated. *Shit! What a mess!*

Just then, I heard a slight rustling sound in the bushes. My head spun around gingerly, trying to locate the source while not waking Veronika. My eyes strained to focus in the dark, but all I could see was a gray blurry mass. Then suddenly my heart pounded and face flushed as my eyes finally focused! A pack of four wolves were stealthily

creeping toward us, their bone-chilling eyes all aglow, like the eyes of the very Devil himself.

I subtly nudged Veronika and quickly covered her mouth. Her eyes bulged as she shifted upright. I released my hand and she whimpered, "Oh my God!"

In a stupid attempt to allay her fear, I whispered, "If you know of any spells, now's the time to use them."

The sharp elbow into my side seemed to indicate she didn't appreciate my levity.

Meanwhile, the four wolves crept ever closer; step-by-step their paws crackled the dried leaves, sending an unnerving chill down my spine. With each crackle I could almost feel the inevitable crunch of our bones in their powerful jaws. In plain English, I was scared shitless.

Slowly, I reached into my holster and slid out my Colt M1911. The alpha male wolf stepped in front of the betas and turned his massive head toward me. His infernal, marble-like laser eyes seemed to pierce right through my pupils, incinerating my retinas and my nerve. His black rubbery lips rippled and saliva dripped as he now prepared to reveal his large white fangs, the razor-sharp canines that would soon be tearing our flesh apart in a bloody frenzy.

Veronika squeezed my left arm tighter as I now pointed the barrel of my gun at this devil in wolf's clothing. I grit my teeth and belched out a menacing growl, thus triggering the mighty alpha's lethal response. With a chilling growl, the wolf lunged toward me! In an instant, his huge head was within ten feet, and that's when I unleashed my .45 caliber chunk of human ingenuity. His head exploded as his massive body skidded into my lap. Veronika screamed while I grabbed the bloody carcass and brandished my trophy. With a primal yell, revealing my own choppers, I showed his beta bitches that this animal takes no prisoners!

St. Louis, Missouri

September 20, 1957

“Dear God!” Eleanor screeched. “That was terrifying.”

“Indeed it was.”

“But do you mean to say that you always faced danger with a corny joke or two?”

I chuckled as I pushed my half-full can of Shlity squirrel piss away. “Well, I do feel that levity keeps you more relaxed and thinking clearly, because if you let panic reign, it clouds your judgment and could cost you your life. In my line of work it’s crucial to outthink your rival. However, I must admit, retelling an event does lend itself to embellishments. For the art of storytelling is likewise an important survival skill.” With a wink, I got up to make myself a Tom Collins.

“Hmm, hitting the hard stuff already?” Eleanor commented.

I smiled as I returned to the sofa and placed my highball on a St. Louis Cardinals coaster. Using a Bachman pretzel rod, I stirred my drink and then licked the moist, salty end of my pseudo cigar. “Well, the story will start getting even darker, so a stiff drink will make it a little easier to tell.”

Eleanor’s cute face suddenly lit up with a sly smile. “So, Daddio, can I have one too?”

I chuckled. “Sure.”

Eleanor’s eyes widened with delight. “Really?”

“Yes, when you’re eighteen.” Eleanor smirked as I took a sip and added, “Now let’s continue.”

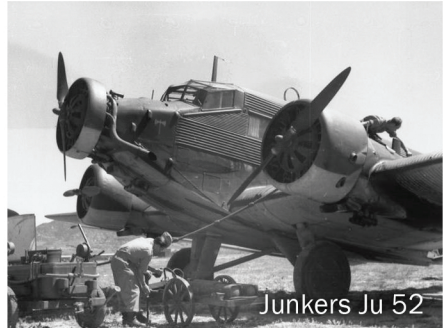
Photos



Auschwitz's deceptive "Work Makes Freedom" entrance gate sign.



B 24 Liberator



Junkers Ju 52

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Löwenbräukeller, Munich



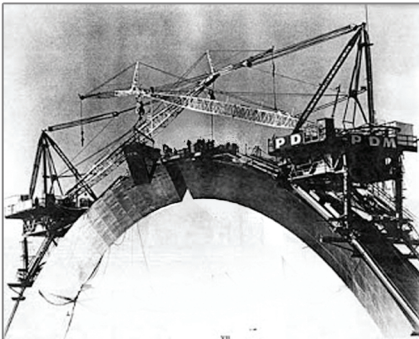
Rudolf Höss
Commandant of Auschwitz



Marina Raskova (1912-1943)
Ace Soviet pilot who established
the Aviation Group 122.



Alfredo Casella (1883-1947)
Denigrated Italian composer
whose works are being
rediscovered, many now
praised as masterpieces.



The Gateway Arch in 1965
nearing completion with
custom-made lifts.



Po-2 biplane used by Soviet women
during WWII that earned them the
name *Night Witches*.



Riva Aquarama: posh Italian
speedboat, like the one Eleanor
and Peter used on Lake Como.

Thank you

for reading this excerpt!

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Happy reading,
Rich DiSilvio