

**A Promise Born**  
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(excerpt - not for print or distribution)

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The grinding of brakes straining to bring trains to a stop vied with the final whoosh of steam. Even in the early evening, people hustled around the Washington, D.C. Union Station. They darted between the trains lining the tracks, reflecting the excitement filling Evelyn Happ. She didn't know which way to look next other than down the tracks that would lead to her future. In moments, she'd join seventy other Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service, the navy's WAVES, as they boarded a train leaving Evelyn's home in D.C. for points west.

The WAVES would get off the train at an unknown destination, assigned to a job contributing to the war effort. That's all she knew. The cloak-and-dagger atmosphere only added to the sense of adventure. Her instructions mirrored that of the other WAVES: board the B&O's Diplomat. Nothing more. Somewhere down the tracks, they'd get off.

The heels of hundreds of shoes clacked against the cement. Finally, the adventure had begun.

"Come on, Vivian." Evelyn grabbed her friend Vivian Grable by the arm. The waifish girl double-timed to keep pace with Evelyn's strides. "If you don't start moving, you'll miss the train."

"All the activity is fun to watch."

Lonnie Smuthers smacked her gum and rolled her eyes. "Don't push the girl, E. If you walk any faster, you won't need a train. I prefer to ride."

"Why won't the navy tell us where we're going?" Vivian brushed a strand of blond hair out of her cornflower blue eyes.

"War secrets." Evelyn grinned. "Don't worry, Viv. I'll stick close." Sometimes she felt bland compared to these two women. Neither her brunette hair, cut to the government-specified length and curling under her cap, nor her gray eyes stood out in the sea of WAVES.

Viv shook her head. "Fine. Let's get this journey underway. I'm ready for whatever the navy throws our way."

“It’s why we joined.” Evelyn pulled Vivian down the platform. “Adventure. Service. Intrigue.”

WAVES service would be a vast improvement over anything Evelyn had found on the East Coast in the private sector. Few companies had taken her engineering degree seriously. All those hours working through textbook after textbook, studying and cramming, didn’t amount to anything without someone letting her do the work. She could have traveled to the West Coast and tried a company like Boeing, but she hadn’t felt quite that adventurous. Somehow it was easier to head into the unknown in the company of a group of women she had trained with for weeks. Unexpected friendships had developed among them. Friendships that would make the coming unknowns an adventure.

The WAVES: smart uniforms, flexible navy rules. Most of all, the WAVES had a place for her to do something for her country. If she was really lucky, she would get to use some of that until-now-ignored education.

A whistle sliced the air, and Evelyn shrugged her shoulders to her ears as gals squealed around her. Soldiers hurried past them, all rushing to reach their trains. “There it is.” Viv pointed with her free hand to track eight. “Let’s hurry.”

“Don’t worry. We’ll make it.” Even as Evelyn said the words, excitement quickened her steps. She spotted the Baltimore & Ohio behemoth. The engine’s gold lettering stood out against the black paint as it belched smoke. “Ladies, I do believe it’s impatient to get us on board.”

Lonnie groaned. “I highly doubt that mass of steel has a solitary feeling.” She nudged Evelyn. “Get those romantic notions out of your head and climb aboard.”

Lonnie’s down-to-earth approach wouldn’t weigh Evelyn down. No, she had the opportunity to do something meaningful with everything she’d learned while studying at Purdue University.

Finding the dark green passenger cars of the Diplomat, the gals climbed on board. Evelyn led the way down the narrow hallway until she found their sleeper berth. The three women crashed into each other and the walls in the small room until they’d tucked their bags out of the way. Other WAVES boarded, their excited voices fading as they found their berths. Moments later, a jolt shimmied through the train. Evelyn placed a hand over her stomach to stem the excitement. Sometime soon—the navy hadn’t given any indication how far they would travel—she’d arrive and learn her role.

“We should try to get some sleep, gals.” Lonnie pulled her hair into a net and washed her face. “Who knows what the morning holds?”

Evelyn might not know, but she could imagine. As she settled onto the top berth, she let her mind wander through the possibilities. Communications? Aviation? Code-breaking? Evelyn doubted the navy would use her in the medical or Judge Advocate General areas

because of her training. Regardless, the Allies needed all the help they could get, especially as the Battle of the Atlantic refused to go their way.

“I hope we’re not going all the way to California.” Viv’s soft voice pierced the darkness.

Evelyn had to agree with Viv. She could only imagine how long it would take with the starts and stops to take on fuel and drop off passengers and mail. The suspense about her assignment might kill her during the journey. “Think of the beaches and sunshine. They wouldn’t be so bad.”

“How’s a girl to sleep with all this jostling?” Lonnie growled from a lower berth.

The train threw Evelyn against the wall as it raced around a curve. She rubbed her elbow where it had smacked the side. “Carefully, though most people find it soothing, don’t they?”

Viv nodded. “Relax into the berth.”

“We could tie you in place, Lonnie.” Evelyn kept her tone innocent. She shifted around until she found a comfortable position on her bunk. Evelyn pulled the thin blanket to her chin and forced her muscles to relax. Soon enough, they’d know their destination. She closed her eyes and surrendered to sleep.