

DRAGON'S TRIANGLE

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To Irv Kaine and his brothers in arms,
the veterans of World War II

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The real USS *Bonefish* (SS-223) was a Gato-class diesel-electric submarine launched in March of 1943. On her eight patrols, she sank a total of twelve Japanese ships, five of those under her last captain, Commander Lawrence Edge. Her story, and that of the other eight Hellcat subs, is a tale of one of the most daring submarine raids in the history of World War II. Called Operation Barney, this effort at the end of the war saw a wolf pack of American subs enter the Sea of Japan in June of 1945, using the very new technology of FM sonar to map the minefields that had protected that piece of water. These subs delivered a final blow to both Japan's merchant and military shipping.

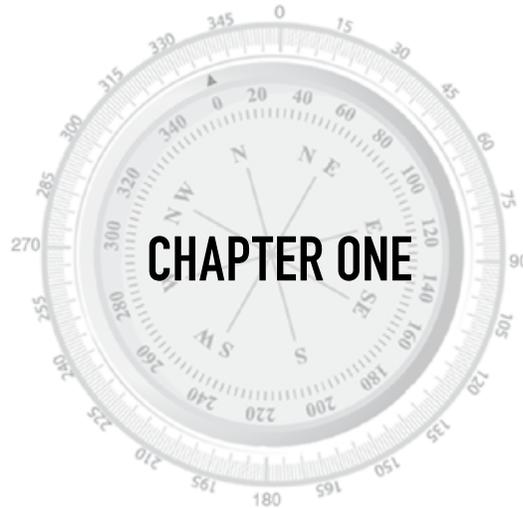
Tragically, the *Bonefish* did not return from her final mission and her wreck has never been found. Japanese records released after the war have led the US Navy to assume she was sunk by Japanese vessels in Toyama Wan, Honshū on June 18, 1945.

My novel, *Dragon's Triangle*, is a work of fiction and the characters herein bear no resemblance or relation to the real eighty-five men who lost their lives defending their country, nor does my imaginary story reflect the true respect I have for the men and women of the United States and the Philippines whose devotion to country and service put an end to that war. This book is dedicated to the veterans of World War II.

Christine Kling

All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that
good men do nothing.

—Edmund Burke



Ao Chalong Anchorage Phuket, Thailand

N o v e m b e r 1 5 , 2 0 1 2

When the voice erupted from the VHF radio, Riley jumped. The sandpaper in her hand slid off the teak handrail and scratched the boat's gel coat.

"Bonefish, Bonefish, this is Merlin II."

Eerie to hear this call just when she was thinking about him—as though he were reading her mind. She wanted to talk to him, too. His wet swimsuit lay on the cabin sole where he had stepped out of it, and his iPad and sheet music covered the main salon table. He had been sitting below playing guitar and crooning his Carolina bluegrass while she sanded and put another coat of varnish on the starboard handrail. Okay, it wasn't his boat, so she couldn't expect him to do the maintenance, but before he hopped into that dinghy and raced off to the yacht club, he might have cleaned up after himself. He now spent so much of his life with the 1 percent he often forgot how the rest got by.

In two steps she was at the chart table, and she grabbed the microphone.

“This is *Bonefish*. Up one?”

He started speaking immediately on the new frequency. “Riley, glad you were listening. I think you’ll want to come ashore.”

“Okay, what’s up?”

“There’s something here you’re going to want to see right away.”

She climbed up the steps and peered across the still, flat water of the bay. She spotted the lighthouse and then looked right until she could make out the low structure of the Ao Chalong Yacht Club.

“What’s going on? Are you at the club?”

“Yeah, I played one set, and when I went to the bar for a cold one, Roger told me he had something for you.”

Riley cocked her head to one side and stared at the mike in her hand as though it could explain what he was talking about. When it didn’t, she pressed the button and said, “Go on.”

“It’s a letter, babe. Postmark is Bangkok. No return address. Funny-looking handwriting. Kinda looks weird, nervous-like. Anyway, I figured you’d want to know.”

A letter for her? Addressed to the Ao Chalong Yacht Club? Who even knew she was here? When she communicated with her employers at Mercury Security or with her best friend Hazel it was always by email. Snail mail was about as relevant to her as a vinyl record.

Still, someone had sent her a letter. Who the hell wrote letters anymore?

There was one very remote possibility. She shook her head. No way. She was done chasing after that dream.

Only one way to find out. She keyed the mike. “Thanks, Billy. I’m on my way in.”

The oars struck bottom, and with one last pull she drove the flat-hulled dinghy onto the beach. Riley hopped out and pulled the boat a few feet up the sand. She ran her cable around a palm tree and through the

dinghy pad eye, then snapped on the big combination lock. Security was never far from her thoughts, just as when she set her alarm system before leaving the boat. The sun had already set behind the island's mountaintop Big Buddha statue. Even with the sun gone, the sweat dripped from her brow and upper lip. She'd rowed as if there were some hurry, and harder still when her old Marine Corps shoulder injury began complaining. Somehow it felt right to punish herself for even considering that *remote possibility*. After chasing shadows from Martinique to Venezuela to Panama and across the Pacific for more than three years, she had moved on. Billy was proof of that, wasn't he? She dug her grapnel anchor into the sand and started up the beach toward the lights of the Ao Chalong Yacht Club.

A big white awning covered the deck, protecting the dark wood tables and wicker chairs from the effects of both Thai seasons—wet and dry. At one end of the deck, Billy Barber sat on a stool picking his guitar and nearly swallowing the microphone as he wailed “Honey, let me be your salty dog” to the three occupied tables. Riley stood next to a palm tree out in the dusky darkness. She knew he couldn't see her yet.

Damn, he looked good. When it came time for them to part, and she reckoned that time wasn't far off, she would miss him. His deep tan and the almost-white blond hair falling into his eyes made him look like the quintessential surfer dude. In fact, he was a Grand Prix-level professional racing sailor conditioning here in Phuket and preparing for the King's Cup Regatta in December.

They'd met at a bar that belonged to an Aussie, a former sailor. The bar was sort of a yachting hangout, and Billy had been telling stories about his racing success as bowman on *Merlin II*, the custom eighty-footer that belonged to some gazillionaire. Billy's North Carolina twang brought back bittersweet memories, and Riley had been smiling as she listened to him regaling the crowd with tales of a spinaker run on the Route du Rhum race that finishes at Pointe-à-Pitre

on the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe. He must have thought she was smiling at him because when he finished his story, Billy Barber came over and introduced himself. And after all the lonely, abstinent years, she'd given in to him.

It had been four years ago, back in the spring of 2008, that Riley had learned of her father's terrible secrets and witnessed his murder. She and Cole Thatcher had gone on to share an adventure like nothing she had ever experienced—up until that day when Cole disappeared at sea while diving in the wreck of the World War II submarine *Surcouf* off Guadeloupe. Believing she might still find the love of her life alive, she raced halfway around the world trying to decipher the clues Cole had left for her: a Spanish lullaby and those engraved numbers on the French Angel coin. She'd tried every combination she could think of to break the cipher. But nothing worked. She couldn't find him in Venezuela or the Cayman Islands. He'd mentioned the Dragon's Triangle, but it turned out to be a big stretch of empty ocean between the Philippines and Japan made infamous by strange disappearances of ships and planes—on the exact opposite side of the world from the Bermuda Triangle, where the *Surcouf* had disappeared.

Thailand had been her last hope.

She'd never found Cole Thatcher or his boat, the *Shadow Chaser*. The US Coast Guard no longer listed the vessel in their documentation records. It was as though the Dragon's Triangle had swallowed Cole and his first mate, Theo, and the *Shadow Chaser*, and there was no proof left they had ever existed.

But sailing single-handed was lonely and chasing never-ending dead ends was frustrating.

And then along came Billy. Just like that song. There was no romantic pretense between them—it was pure, no-strings-attached sex. She and Billy both knew the connection would last only until one boat or the other hoisted anchor and sailed away. And lately, she'd been itching to do just that.

The problem wasn't that he was boring or messy and certainly not that he didn't please her as a lover. The problem was that Billy Barber couldn't compete with a dead man.

When Billy finished his song, Riley stepped up onto the concrete slab and crossed between the tables. He saw her and smiled. Then he turned and spoke to Roger, who walked to the other end of the bar and grabbed something next to the cash register. By the time she reached him, Billy was holding out an envelope.

"Here you go. Your letter."

"Thanks."

"Why don't you stay for a drink?" he said. "My set will be over after a couple more songs."

Riley nodded, though she wasn't certain what he had said. She was staring at the handwriting on the crumpled envelope. Her throat tightened. Of course she knew better, but still she had allowed herself to hope. The address was printed in block letters by what looked like a shaky hand.

She slid onto a stool and placed the letter on the bar. With her elbows planted at either end of the envelope, she rested her forehead on the heels of her hands and stared at the handwritten address. It was all wrong: the handwriting, the postmark, and the name *Marguerite Riley*. No one called her that. Least of all Cole.

Roger set down an icy Singha beer next to her. Ignoring it, she slid a finger under the flap and tore the envelope open. She slid out one sheet of paper and unfolded it. The words were written in the same squiggly block letters.

Dear Marguerite Riley,

*You do not know me, but I was a friend of your grandfather,
Lieutenant Oswald Riley during WWII. We were in the OSS*

together. I have an antique trinket he gave to me back in '45, the last time I saw him. I should like very much to meet you, to tell you about my friend Ozzie, and to give you this remembrance of your grandfather. I promised him I'd give this to his family, and too much time has passed. Now, I don't have much time left and I'd like to fulfill this promise to an old friend.

I apologize for this abrupt request, but I hope you can meet me at noon on Saturday in the Chatuchak Weekend Market in Bangkok. A friend has a booth called Land of Smiles Antiques on Soi 3. I work there sometimes.

I hope you can make it. I will tell you what happened to your grandfather.

*Regards,
Peewee*

When her eyes got to the end of the page, they bounced back to the beginning and she read it again. And then again.

Riley was not aware the music had stopped until Billy slid onto the stool next to her.

“So what’s in the letter?”

She looked up and handed him the paper. As he read she did some quick calculations. This Peewee would certainly be in his nineties, just like Henri Michaut, that other World War II survivor she and Cole had met back in the Caribbean.

Billy chuckled when he got to the end of the page. “Peewee?” he said. “Doesn’t that sound just like a character right out of an old World War II movie? He’d be the sidekick guy you’d know was going to die before the end.”

Riley took the letter back from him and read it again. She looked up at Billy and shook her head. “I don’t get it. How did this guy find me?”

Billy shrugged. "It's getting to be a pretty damn small world." He waved his hand to take in the crowded anchorage. "At least half those boats out there have websites and blogs, and they're always writing about the other boaters they meet."

"Most ninety-year-olds aren't reading blogs, though. You'd think he'd explain a little more. Like what does he mean—a trinket?"

"Don't know." He rested a hand on her bare knee.

Riley looked at the hand and quashed the impulse to brush it aside. "I wonder what he really wants from me."

Billy shrugged. "So what do you know about this granddad?"

She shook her head. "Not much. He died long before I was born—in the Second World War."

"Surely your dad must have said something."

"My dad—" She coughed as though to clear her throat. Even four years after his death, she still had difficulty talking about her father. "My father didn't talk about my grandfather much, and I was five when my grandma died. I barely remember her."

"No family photos or anything?"

She lifted her aching shoulder, leaned her head into the pain, and then stretched her neck by looking up at the patio's white awning. She drew in a deep breath. "My dad had one photo album with a few old black-and-white pictures in it, but he never said much about it. The only thing he ever said about the war was that my grandfather joined the Coast Guard before Pearl Harbor, then got recruited into the OSS."

"What's that?"

"The Office of Strategic Services. Military intelligence. My brother Mikey tried one time to find out more about our grandpa, but the records were still sealed."

"So no idea what happened to him?"

Riley shrugged. “Dad said the military never told his mother any details. Only that Grandpa was transferred to the Pacific after the Germans surrendered in May of 1945, and then—he just disappeared.”