



Eagle & Crane

SUZANNE RINDELL

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They bump along the country road, rolling through golden hills that are punctuated with granite boulders and dotted with clusters of oak trees that appear blackish green from afar. Every so often the road dips through a marshy patch here, a thicket of wild blackberry bushes there. Broken branches and nibbled leaves; the signs of beaver and deer. Verdant meadows and white flashes of cabbageworm moths. As they near the orchard, clouds of sparrows and finches make nervous, disorganized dives at the soft yellow weeds around the plum trees, little groups of them assembling like constellations and abruptly breaking up again, each and every tiny nervous body keeping one eye turned to the sky for the shadowy shape of a hawk soaring high above.

When they reach the break in the low split-rail fence, the sheriff steers the car onto the property and along the dirt drive, through the many rows of trees, and toward the leaning peak of the largest foothill. The morning air is laced with the sharp, peppery scent of dry grass burning.

'Awful smoky out,' Agent Bonner remarks, once the automobile comes to a stop.

'Rice fields,' the deputy says as the three men step out of the sheriff's old Model A. 'Somewhere down in the valley. It's after harvest, see. This is when they burn 'em. Smoke gets trapped up here, against the foothills. Kind of sets around a spell.'

The sky is indeed filled with a thick haze, turning it the color of dull gunmetal; the sun is a flat white disc, small as a dime and lost in a sea of gray.

‘It’s routine farming business. The rice fields aren’t Jap-owned,’ Deputy Henderson continues. ‘Or if they were, they aren’t anymore.’

He is young, the right age for a soldier, but there is an air of being excluded about him, and of lingering teenage angst. Probably flat-footed. Or poor eyesight, Bonner thinks. Those are the most common 4-Fs, when you can’t tell by simply looking at a man. Henderson’s hair is the color of tarnished brass; his face and neck are very pink, the flesh cratered, ropery and swollen with acne. Just to look at him, a man could feel the sting of what it must feel like to shave.

‘Let’s get this over with,’ Sheriff Whitcomb says. At least it is obvious why *he* isn’t marching around in a uniform on the front: too old. He is thin, with haunted blue eyes. A pair of jowls and one tuft of white hair sprouting from an otherwise shiny dome. Bonner spied the tuft back at the station, before the sheriff reached for his hat and offered to drive the group out to the ranch. Every town seems to have a pair like this, Bonner thinks. Henderson and Whitcomb. One will eventually replace the other, and the cycle will begin again.

‘You said Louis Thorn is living in the old farmhouse now?’ the sheriff calls over his shoulder, speaking to Henderson. He is polite enough to Agent Bonner, but it is clear he prefers to pretend the agent is invisible.

‘Yes.’ Deputy Henderson answers the sheriff in a quick, eager voice. ‘Old Man Yamada signed it over to him, before they lost legal rights. So Louis owns it fair and square.’

‘That’s mighty interesting,’ Agent Bonner remarks. Bonner’s certainly heard of cases where Japanese families had signed over their property to their white neighbors before being evacuated to the camps. In every single case, the Japanese were hoping to eventually have their land, homes, and cars returned to them, which implied a kind of special trust in one’s neighbors.

‘It ain’t how you think. The whole town was mighty shocked the Yamadas did that,’ Henderson says. ‘The Thorns and the Yamadas had a long-standing dispute over this land.’

‘Why’d he sign it over to the Thorn family, then, if there was bad blood?’ Bonner asks. He looks to Whitcomb, but Whitcomb shrugs and looks away,

his gaze dilating with disinterest. Bonner can tell the sheriff finds explaining town gossip to an outsider tedious.

‘Louis Thorn and Harry Yamada was friends – sort of,’ Whitcomb says, dispassionately. ‘Maybe Old Man Yamada put some stock in that. The old man didn’t have any friends who weren’t Japanese, himself. Maybe he figured it was worth a shot.’

‘Took a fat chance on that,’ Deputy Henderson grunts, reaching one hand up to rub at his pimply face. ‘I say Louis ain’t givin’ this land back. His father and grandfather always told him this land was Thorn property in the first place. They’d likely roll over in their graves if he was to think about giving it back.’

‘All right,’ Whitcomb says, pulling out his revolver, spinning the cylinder to ensure all six rounds are there, and putting it back in his holster. ‘Let’s just see if he knows anything. Keep it civilized. Should be pretty straightforward. We’re talking about a law-abiding citizen here; I don’t have any reason to believe Louis Thorn’d lie to us.’

They begin walking up the incline of the foothill toward the tidy white clapboard house nestled into the hillside just below the top. Louis Thorn might be living in it now, but Old Man Yamada had originally built it half a century ago – back when the latter was still a baby-faced young man, an early settler to the area. The house sits into the hill in a slightly cantilevered fashion, with a small wraparound porch from which a person can look out over the orchards below; neat rows of plum trees extend below one side of the house, a grove of satsumas in the middle, and almond trees on the other. The property consists of some fifty-odd acres, and as the three men climb the foothill now, they can see that the trees eventually peter out to reveal a wide, flat pasture some distance away. As they pause to look, three sets of eyes fall upon the far-off shape of a small, impromptu hangar down below, looking as though it had been thrown together hastily from available materials.

It is the place where the Yamadas kept their biplane, and where Louis Thorn purportedly still keeps it now. Or so Agent Bonner has been informed. The FBI took special note of the biplane after the two remaining members of the Yamada clan – Kenichi and Haruto ‘Harry’ Yamada – broke out of

the Tule Lake Relocation Center, where they were being detained. The plane made the FBI more nervous than usual, but either way the Yamadas were to be tracked down and returned to the segregation center, and as soon as possible.

The three men arrive in front of the house and climb up the twenty or so stairs that lead up to the porch. No need to knock; their boots make a good deal of noise on the wooden planks. The screen door swings open on creaking hinges before the third man reaches the top stair.

‘May I help you fellas?’

The door claps shut. Louis Thorn, dressed in a long-sleeved undershirt and trousers, his suspenders hanging beside his hips, looks at the men standing on his porch, glancing searchingly from one to the next. One half of his face is dewy, clean-shaven. The other half is covered in lather. He is still clutching the straight razor in his left hand.

At the sight of the razor, Whitcomb lightly touches a hand to the butt of the gun on his own hip. ‘Mornin’, Louis. The way I hear it, you got the run of things here these days,’ the sheriff says, taking the lead.

‘That’s right,’ Louis responds. There is a note of caution in his voice. He looks over the sheriff’s shoulder, taking in the unfamiliar sight of Agent Bonner. For a brief instant Louis appears startled to see the FBI agent, but quickly recovers himself.

‘Looks like you settled into the place pretty good,’ the sheriff presses on.

Louis returns his gaze to the sheriff but doesn’t reply.

‘I take it you heard about them Yamada boys already.’

‘I heard,’ Louis says. His voice is low, steady.

‘Then you know we’re here to ask you if you seen ’em.’

Louis blinks. ‘Harry and Mr Yamada?’

‘Yes.’

‘I reckon this is the last place they’d come.’

‘So you’re telling me you ain’t seen them?’ the sheriff prods.

‘No.’

‘And you wouldn’t be inclined to help those Yamada boys if they came knocking?’

‘I told you, I haven’t seen them since.’

‘All right, all right,’ the sheriff relents. ‘You understand, we gotta ask, Louis. Agent Bonner here can’t go about his business till them boys have been found.’

‘Mr Thorn.’ Agent Bonner introduces himself, clearing his throat and extending his hand. Louis hesitates, then passes the straight razor to his other hand. The handshake is curt.

‘Look here, Louis,’ the sheriff continues, ‘I don’t know what you got goin’ on in that head of yours. Maybe you got it in your head to protect these fellers, even if they’re Japs. Or maybe,’ he says, lowering his voice, ‘you’ve gotten accustomed to being a property owner. Ain’t no crime in that. Maybe if they came back here they wouldn’t exactly be welcome. Like I said . . . I don’t know what you got goin’ on in that head of yours. But, to tell you the truth, I’m an old man, and I could give two shits.’

Whitcomb pauses, certain that he has everyone’s attention now.

‘What I *do* know,’ the sheriff adds, ‘is that it would make all of our lives a hell of a lot easier if you let us take a look around the property and see if we can’t prove you’re telling us the truth.’

Louis is silent a moment. ‘All right,’ he finally answers.

The sheriff nods. Louis moves as if to go back inside the house to finish his shave.

‘The biplane,’ Agent Bonner says, reminding everyone.

‘Oh,’ the sheriff says, turning back to Louis. ‘The agent here has to ask you some questions about that airplane being kept on the property . . .’

‘Yes?’

‘How’d that plane come into your possession?’ Bonner begins.

Louis hesitates. ‘Bank auction,’ he says.

Bonner has read the file: he knows that Louis is skipping details, leaving out the part where *Kenichi Yamada* – not Louis – bought the plane at a bank auction, and only later signed it over to Louis.

‘We used it for our flying circus act, but I don’t do that stuff anymore. I work for the US Army Air Corps as an instructor up at the Lincoln airfield. I train flyboys headed to the Pacific, mostly.’

Bonner already knows this, too, but does not interrupt. It was always better to let people do their own telling.

‘Do both Yamada men know how to fly the plane?’ Bonner asks.

Louis shakes his head. ‘Only Harry.’ He pauses, then repeats Harry’s full name as though to clarify. ‘Haruto Yamada.’

‘And before your instructor days, you and Haruto Yamada’ – Agent Bonner flips open a notebook – ‘you charged spectators to watch you perform stunts in this plane? That’s how the two of you became friendly?’

Louis shrugs. ‘Originally, we both worked for Earl Shaw and put on a barnstorming act for his flying circus. Later we had our own act . . . it was called Eagle & Crane.’

‘Eagle & Crane?’

‘Uh-huh.’

‘Sounds mighty . . .’ Agent Bonner pauses, looking into the air for the proper word. ‘Showy.’ Louis narrows his eyes just slightly at Bonner, but Bonner presses on. ‘What sort of tricks did you perform?’

‘Oh, wing walking and barrel rolls and such,’ Louis replies. ‘With Earl’s show, sometimes we flew two planes in formation, did loop-the-loops. Later it was more choreographed stunts. Parachute jumps, that type of thing.’

Bonner nods. He scribbles a note.

‘Say . . .’ Louis asks, his eyes narrowing again. ‘Why so many questions about our business with the plane?’

‘Well,’ Bonner says, clearing his throat, ‘it goes without saying that the Bureau feels an escaped evacuee who knows how to fly an airplane might be a liability.’

Louis doesn’t comment. Bonner knows he’s obligated to ask the questions the FBI expects him to ask, so he presses on.

‘Do you have any reason to believe Mr Yamada might attempt to gain access to your biplane?’

Louis pauses, considering. He shakes his head.

‘If Haruto Yamada *was* able to gain access to the biplane, do you have any reason to believe he might use his flying skills to commit an act of war?’

‘*An act of war?*’ Louis repeats. ‘You mean hurt folks with the plane somehow?’

‘Yeah,’ Deputy Henderson suddenly chimes in. ‘I’ll be damned if Pearl

Harbor ain't taught us all about how vicious those Japs can be – can't put anything past a-one of 'em!

Louis's head snaps irritably in Deputy Henderson's direction. His hand holding the straight razor twitches.

'No,' Louis answers, returning his attention to Agent Bonner. 'I don't think Harry would do anything along those lines. It's not . . . it's not Harry.'

'You sound defensive on Harry's behalf,' Bonner remarks.

'I'm not defensive.' Louis stiffens. 'I'm just not going to say something is one way when I know it's another. Harry ain't about to steal the Stearman and crash it.'

As if by the most absurd cue, their ears suddenly prick to the sound of an airplane engine droning in the distance. Louis knows from the sound of it that the plane is flying at an unusually high altitude, the steady whine of the engine humming like a dying mosquito.

All four men – Louis included – hurry to the railing at the edge of the porch and look up. Sure enough, there in the sky is the familiar silhouette of the Stearman. The group stares at the plane, powerless and immobile as they watch it inch across the sky, all of them mute as they listen to it drone along.

But then they hear an even more alarming noise. The engine sputters and coughs, and for one long, horrendous second shudders loudly, until finally it goes silent. It is a sequence of sounds Louis has never heard the airplane make before, a noise ever so slightly different from the stalling noise it makes if you pull up too hard . . . and yet, the second he hears it, Louis recognizes the sound with a sick feeling in his gut: it is the engine running out of gas.

What happens next is baffling. The biplane falls from the sky, a flying thing no longer, like Icarus and his melted wings. No one pulls up on the nose or raises the wing flaps. Instead it drops like a stone, or – even swifter – like a bird diving on purpose. But a bird can recover from such a dive. A small biplane cannot – that is, not without an expert pilot intent on maneuvering the contraption for all it was worth.

The men standing on the porch hold their breath as the biplane plummets. Then all four of them reactively wince, steeling themselves as it makes impact,

nose-first, directly into the makeshift hangar. A small fireball leaps into the air, then transforms into a sea of black smoke.

The smoke adds to the thick haze in the air, completely blotting out the September sun.

‘Well . . . *shoot*,’ Whitcomb mutters. He spits onto the porch and turns now to Louis Thorn. ‘You care to revise your statement, son?’

2

The crash site belches black, oily smoke while the local fire engine nearly pumps the well on the Yamada ranch dry. When the color of the thick smoke finally changes from black to white, the firemen begin to breathe more easily behind their homemade masks of wetted cloth, knowing they have turned the tide on the fire. Now it is only a matter of time until the entirety of the charred mass quiets down to a steamy hiss. The air for miles around smells strange, laced with ash, the sickly scent of burning rubber, and the queer metallic odor that usually precedes a large thunderstorm.

Of the two bodies found in the wreckage, one is clearly that of the elderly Jap, Kenichi Yamada. The other is presumed to be the body of his son, Haruto Yamada. The body itself is badly charred, but a singed, tattered version of the US Army uniform that had been issued to Haruto Yamada shortly before he went AWOL still clings to the remains as they pull the body from the burning mess.

Despite the chaos at the crash site, Bonner takes care never to lose track of Louis Thorn. In particular, he studies Louis's expression carefully when the two bodies are covered with sheets and lifted away on stretchers. *Maybe you've gotten accustomed to being a property owner . . .* Sheriff Whitcomb had said to Louis earlier on the porch. *Maybe if the Yamadas came back here they wouldn't exactly be welcome.* Bonner had wondered if Louis was helping to hide the escaped evacuees. Now Bonner must consider the possibility that Louis is, in fact, involved in a much darker crime.

When the commotion begins to die down, Bonner sidles up to Louis.

‘I think we ought to continue our conversation, Mr Thorn,’ Bonner suggests in a firm but gentle voice.

Louis turns to stare at Bonner with a dazed expression. He is still half-dressed and half-shaven. Smudges of black grease and specks of tar from the crash complement the few smears of shaving lather still clinging to his cheek.

‘How about we go back up to the house and sit down?’ Bonner presses.

Louis’s dazed expression melts, then sharpens, as though coming back into focus. He looks down at the ground. His brow furrows.

‘All right,’ he agrees.

Several minutes later, the two men sit down to talk in the front parlor of the old Yamada house. They are perched across from each other on a pair of matching pink silk settees. In fact, the entire room is a study in symmetry. Two silk settees. Two small square glass coffee tables between them. Two bookshelves made of bamboo. Four beautiful silk scrolls hanging on the walls, all of them displaying inky watercolors of cranes and fish and far-off mountains. It is a curious blend of East and West: a series of treasured heirlooms presumably brought over from Japan, intermingled with the bulky pink settees and Western-style coffee tables.

With the other half of his shave yet to be completed, Louis managed to splash some water on his face once they got up to the house, wiping away the crust of dried lather and smudges of black grease. Despite the fact that half his face is still covered in thin, fair stubble, he’d put on fresh clothes and quickly wetted and combed his hair, too, and now, sitting across from Bonner, Louis seems cleaner, more collected. Bonner takes a closer look at Louis, assessing the details.

Louis is twenty-three, but looking at him now, Bonner notices he is distinctly boyish. With his dark blond hair, freckled nose, and blue eyes, Louis embodies the popular image of an all-American boy. Now Bonner wonders if that wholesome impression is part of a façade.

Louis can’t know it, but he is the reason Bonner requested the Yamada case. In recent months, Bonner had developed an aversion to fieldwork

and specifically requested desk duty. His fellow agents said he was nuts to volunteer for such drudgery, but Bonner was relieved to work in an office, away from the Japanese segregation centers, away from the manhunts for Japanese Americans considered uncooperative with the order to evacuate. Bonner didn't care that his peers predicted he would get bored. Boredom was a better feeling than some of the other feelings he'd had since his job began to revolve around the enforcement of Executive Order 9066.

However, when reports of two escaped evacuees from Tule Lake meant the FBI was going to send an agent to Newcastle, California, and interview the young man living on the Yamadas' old property – a fellow by the last name of Thorn – Bonner asked to be put on the case, back in the field, because the name and location held a special significance for him.

I figured you'd come to your senses sooner or later, his boss, Reed, said in an approving tone, oblivious to Bonner's ulterior motive. Reed approved his request and assigned Bonner to the case, which was how Bonner now found himself sitting across from Louis Thorn.

Louis is visibly nervous; it would be natural for the crash to set him on edge, but perhaps it is something more than that, Bonner thinks. Perhaps he senses Bonner's special interest in him. Or perhaps Louis had something to do with the crash and has something to hide. Louis turns his head as though he hears a sound outside, and the unshaved stubble on one half of his face catches in the light from the window, the hair gleaming with slight traces of red and gold. It is Louis's complexion that draws the agent's attention now, and not because of Louis's comical shave. Bonner is surprised he didn't notice before: bruises bloom over both cheekbones, and Louis sports a fresh cut under one eye.

'Looks like somebody roughed you up pretty good,' Bonner comments.

Louis touches a self-conscious hand to one cheek – the more naked, clean-shaven one.

'I went to get a drink at the saloon in town the other night,' Louis says. 'Got into a little scuffle.'

'How many nights ago?'

'Three.'

The bruises and the cut look more recent than that, but Bonner nods with brisk affability.

‘I hope you don’t mind if I verify that.’

‘Sure,’ Louis replies. ‘I’ll give you the name of the bartender down that way – will that help?’

Bonner thinks to himself, *Louis Thorn is either telling the truth, or else is a clever, cool customer. He has an earnest air, but something doesn’t sit right.* Aloud, Bonner says, ‘I’d be much obliged.’

Sensing Louis’s distracted mind-set, Bonner clears his throat. A broadcast squawks loudly from a Zenith radio perched on the mantel – one of the few objects in the room without a symmetrical twin. War updates, turned up to top volume.

‘That yours?’ Bonner asks idly.

‘Course,’ Louis replies. ‘The Yamadas turned theirs in.’

Louis means the Yamadas obeyed the order to turn the radio they owned over to the US authorities as an item of contraband that those of Japanese ancestry were not allowed to retain after Pearl Harbor.

‘They complied and never did anything fishy,’ Louis adds. He pauses. ‘Till now, I suppose.’ He shifts on the settee and changes tack. ‘Anyway, some weeks back I bought a new radio so I could follow—’ His voice breaks off. ‘Well, so I could follow all the news about the war, I guess,’ he finally finishes.

The kid must’ve been listening to it while he was shaving – maybe for the company, Bonner thinks. Bonner does that himself from time to time; it is a lonely thing to live alone, probably even more so in a strange house. But now it feels as though the radio is a disturbance, a small but terrible shrieking emanating from the corner of the room, intruding upon any real shot at conversation. Bonner rises from the settee and points.

‘May I?’

Louis nods, and Bonner switches off the radio. A dense quiet floods the room in a cool, relieving wave. Bonner lets the silence settle a little before breaking it again. He clears his throat once more.

‘Earlier you insisted the Yamadas weren’t likely to try to commandeer the biplane,’ Bonner says.

Louis raises a wary eyebrow at the agent but says nothing.

‘Doesn’t look like that turned out to be the case.’

Louis remains silent.

‘What do you think caused the crash? Do you believe it was an accident? Or do you think there was a target that the two Yamada men had in mind?’

‘I don’t know,’ Louis repeats. ‘I think I made it pretty clear I don’t think they had the inclination to hurt anyone.’

Agent Bonner pauses. The railroad lines that came up from Sacramento through the big station in Roseville were regularly used by the military to transport ammunitions manufactured in the Bay Area. Such a target would be ideal for a Japanese spy. And yet, that was not where the biplane had ultimately crashed. If they were trying to hurt someone other than themselves, they had failed spectacularly.

‘Seems lucky for us that it crashed directly down on the empty hangar,’ Bonner says now.

Louis grunts. ‘Easy for you to say. Weren’t *your* hangar.’ He pauses and grunts again. ‘Or your biplane.’

‘You said Harry was the one who knew how to fly the biplane?’ Bonner continues.

‘Yes.’

‘And his father did not?’

‘No.’

Agent Bonner must admit: the crash hadn’t hurt anyone except the two men in the plane. This means all possibilities must be explored and ruled out in his report. He clears his throat. ‘Do you have any idea whether Harry or his father may have been . . . well . . . despondent? Ready to give up on the world?’

Louis looks at Bonner for a moment before answering. ‘You mean ready to die by his own hand? That don’t sound like Harry to me.’ He pauses, then continues: ‘But I don’t imagine he or Mr Yamada were too cheerful about the camp they were in.’

‘So you *do* or you *don’t* think someone crashed that biplane on purpose?’

Louis shakes his head, reticent. ‘I don’t think anything. All I know is what I saw today, same as you.’

Bonner leans back and sighs. 'Well, that's just it,' he says. 'I don't know much about planes, but I've always been under the impression that they don't just drop like that from the sky – that even if the engine dies, there's some sort of maneuvering a pilot will try to do.'

Louis appears to relent. 'That's generally true, I suppose,' he says.

'And as far as I could tell, Harry didn't attempt any of that,' Bonner says. 'He didn't try to perform any emergency maneuvers.'

'No. It didn't look like it.'

'Why wouldn't he?'

'I can't answer that,' Louis says.

Suddenly, the men are interrupted. A back door slams, footsteps move swiftly through the house, and a young woman rushes into the front parlor.

'Oh!' she utters, stopping short when she catches sight of Agent Bonner perched on the settee opposite Louis. The young woman freezes, a deer caught in headlights. Something about her suggests a sense of urgency abruptly put on hold. It is as if she has blown in on a gust of wind; a fresh hint of the day outside – the Indian summer, the crisp leaves, the terrible burning scent of the airplane crash – swirls in the rush of air that arrives with her.

'I didn't know you had a guest,' she says to Louis.

Bonner takes a closer look at the young woman. She is pretty, but in a spritely, tomboyish manner. Her red hair is smartly bobbed, its coppery color as bright as a flame. She is skinny as a whip, and attired in a crisp white shirt and a pair of men's riding trousers.

'Did you see the crash?' Louis asks, a note of wary caution in his voice.

'Yes,' the young woman answers. 'Isn't it awful?'

'Harry and Mr Yamada . . .' Louis says.

'Yes,' the woman replies in a somber tone. 'I know.'

The young woman lowers her eyes to stare down at the rug beneath her feet, and after a second or two Louis follows suit, leaving Agent Bonner to glance back and forth between the two of them as though trying to make up his mind about something. He stands.

'I'm Agent Bonner,' he introduces himself to the young woman, holding

out his hand. 'The Federal Bureau of Investigation sent me here to make some inquiries about the Yamadas.'

'Oh!' the young woman exclaims, accepting Bonner's hand and shaking it firmly. 'Of course. I'm so sorry. My name is Ava Brooks.'

Bonner racks his brain, trying to guess at the relation between Ava Brooks and Louis Thorn. *Sweethearts? Neighbors?* She certainly entered the room as though she were familiar with the place.

'Ava has been helping to run the orchards while the Yamadas ain't here,' Louis offers, as though reading Bonner's mind.

'Oh.' Bonner nods and sits back down. 'I see. And you . . . live on the property?' While he has no reason to doubt them, Ava doesn't exactly look like a typical foreman. Bonner wonders if there still isn't something more between them.

'I live nearby,' Ava replies. Her tone has shifted and is slightly stiff, brusque. Bonner considers perhaps she was offended by what his question implied. 'It's a lot of work, keeping the orchards running without the Yamadas,' she adds defensively.

"Without the Yamadas"? It sounds as if you knew them.'

'Of course I knew them.'

This catches Bonner's attention. He retrieves his notebook and pencil again from his inside jacket pocket. 'If you're aware of the crash, then I assume you're also aware of the fact that the two Yamada men left the camp at Tule Lake without permission. I'm investigating their case.' He pauses. 'Would you mind telling me how you knew them? Have you always helped out in the orchards?'

Ava bites her lip. 'No. I suppose I first met Harry Yamada when he joined my stepfather's barnstorming troupe.' She glances at Louis. 'Louis and Harry joined at the same time.'

Bonner takes this in, slightly caught off guard. 'I see. You were all members of this . . .' He struggles to recall the details Louis gave him earlier, in order to describe it properly. ' . . . flying circus act?'

'Yes,' says Ava. 'More or less. That's how we met.'

'Interesting,' Bonner remarks. 'Did you also perform daredevil stunts?'

Women didn't ordinarily fly planes – much less dance on the wings – but from the looks of Ava, Bonner wouldn't put it past her.

Louis cuts in. 'No – Ava doesn't fly. She's afraid of heights. Never been up in the air, as a matter of fact.'

Agent Bonner frowns and raises an eyebrow. 'You were employed by a flying circus troupe, but you're afraid of heights and won't go up in an airplane?'

'I sold tickets for airplane rides,' Ava answers. 'And to use the word "employed", Agent Bonner, is to imply that I was paid for my work. It was my stepfather's nutty idea to start a barnstorming act. Back when Earl first started the show I was still a kid, and my mother and I were just along to sell tickets and lemonade.'

'Traveling with a flying circus . . . Sounds like a rather remarkable childhood,' Bonner says.

Ava shrugs. 'It beat standing on the breadline,' she replies.

She has a point: the Depression was unbearable for most families. If there is one thing good about this war, Bonner thinks, it's the effect on the nation's economy. Not exactly a fair trade-off, but still.

'Your stepfather – *Earl*, was it?'

'Earl Shaw,' Ava says. She nods, but something in her face hardens at the same time.

'Yes.' Bonner flips a page in his notebook. 'Louis mentioned him earlier. He was the founder of the flying circus and originally the owner of the biplane that crashed today?'

'I reckon that's the way of it, yes,' Ava replies.

'Can you arrange for me to speak to him?' Bonner asks.

'Why?'

Bonner blinks. 'Well, two Japanese detainees broke out of the Tule Lake Relocation Center, stole a biplane, and crashed it. And that biplane just so happens to have belonged to your stepfather at one point – not to mention the fact you just told me Haruto Yamada once worked for your stepfather. That seems as good a reason as any to want to talk to him, doesn't it?'

Ava frowns. 'All right, sure,' she says. 'But the problem is, I haven't the faintest idea where to find Earl, so I'm not certain I can help you.'

‘No one’s seen Earl in over three years,’ Louis supplies.

Agent Bonner is silent, thinking. During this brief pause, something shifts in Ava’s demeanor. She suddenly becomes bolder. She straightens her spine and takes a breath, all business.

‘I don’t mean to be rude, Mr Bonner,’ she says, ‘but if you’re nearly finished with your business here . . .?’

Again Bonner blinks at her, surprised. He realizes he is being thrown out.

‘I’d like to talk to Louis,’ Ava continues, ‘and there are things that need doing around the orchard . . .’

Bonner shakes himself, hiding his irritation. ‘Of course,’ he replies. He stands and straightens his suit. A tall man, Bonner dwarfs the room. ‘But I’d like to talk to you more at a later date,’ he says to Louis. He turns to Ava. ‘I’d like to talk to both of you more.’

‘Well, you’ve proven you clearly know where to find us,’ Ava says, a hard note in her singsong voice. The rote words are supplemented with a plastic smile. After ten minutes with the young lady, Bonner already knows: she is not the type to hide her disdain.

Louis stands, looking embarrassed by Ava’s behavior. ‘I’ll see you out,’ he says.

Ava retreats to the kitchen. At the front door, the two men shake hands.

‘I’ll be in touch,’ Agent Bonner promises.

‘All right,’ Louis says.

‘Oh,’ Bonner says, pausing and turning back. He fishes out his notepad and pencil one last time. ‘What was the name of the man you said tends bar in town?’

Louis blinks.

‘You said you could give me the name of the bartender who was there the night you got into that scuffle we discussed,’ Bonner prompts in a helpful tone.

There is a pause as Louis stiffens.

‘Joe,’ he says finally. ‘Joe Abbott is his name.’

‘Very good,’ Bonner says, scribbling the name into his notebook.

‘And the name of the bar?’

‘Murphy’s Saloon.’

Bonner nods and scribbles that down as well.

‘All right, then. You take care, now,’ he says to Louis.

‘You, too.’

Bonner steps out onto the porch where, hours ago, he first met Louis Thorn, and hears the porch door slap shut behind him.

And with that, Agent Bonner finds himself alone again. Looking around and seeing no car, he remembers that the sheriff drove him over to the former Yamada property and that Bonner left his Bureau car parked in front of the sheriff’s office. He shades his eyes and glances up at the late-afternoon sun beating down with surprising heat despite the thick smoke now in the air.

‘Well, I’ll be damned,’ Bonner mutters, putting his fedora on. He sighs and takes his jacket off, folding it over his arm and beginning the long, dusty walk back into town.