

chapter one

The Beginning

The ocean waves splashed sporadically over the ship's bow as it cut through the briny sea like a scalpel in the hands of a skilled surgeon. January's midday sun shone brightly through the periodic break in the clouds warming the frigid air to a brisk yet tolerable temperature for the last of the American troops as they sojourned home. None of the soldiers aboard ship seemed to mind that the boat they were sailing had at one time been a seized dreadnought battle cruiser re-commissioned under the heading USS Leviathan, replacing its former SMS title. All meters, gears, and labeling, including the camouflage paint that adorned the ship's hull remained intact and distinctively Deutschland but no one cared. The only concern any of the returning GI's had was that the war was finally over and they were heading home.

Aboard ship, recently promoted Army Corporal Geraint Evans mindfully walked between the jittery masses of GI's milling around the deck and made his way abaft in search of a few feet of open rail. The Corporals diligent hunt afforded him a little patch of sunny solitude where he quickly laid down the burden of his rucksack and lit a much needed cigarette. Geraint exhaled the calming smoke and began hashing out the dilemma he was facing. One thing for certain, Geraint had every intention of fulfilling the oath he had made to his

dying friend no matter how badly it complicated the homecoming he would have with his folks. Geraint and his mother had not parted on the best of terms. In fact, a battle of wills between them and a confession of sorts had become the catalyst to which Geraint ran off to join the army with his friend and cohort, Orville Jenkins, in the first place. Unbeknownst to Geraint, Orville had his own motives for wanting to get out of town but it was not until the two of them were bivouacked together outside of Paris that Geraint discovered his friends reason why.

It all became clear early on into their deployment when Orville had to fess up to one of his more embarrassing shortcomings. It happened one day during mail call while Geraint and Orville were sitting around eating their k-rations. A soldier carrying the mail called out Orville's name. The two GI's were caught completely off guard. Up until then neither of them had received any correspondence from home. Orville was stunned that someone back home cared enough to write to him and after swallowing a belly full of pride, along with his k-rations, had to admit to Geraint that he could not read and needed his help.

Geraint remembered protesting at first but Orville had been insistent. The only reason Geraint resisted at all was because he had apprehensions about reading someone else's personal love letters but as soon as he discovered whom it was that wrote the letter, he had become very intrigued. Until her letter arrived, postmarked Detroit, Michigan, Geraint had no clue where his ex-neighbor, Kelly Hennessy, had gone or that his old army buddy had an apparent relationship with her.

Orville's first letter from Kelly had been a real eye opener. The bombs going off all around them were nothing compared to the bombshell Kelly dropped. She explained every detail as to why she had abruptly left town and why she was living in Detroit with her aunt. She also informed Orville that she had given birth to their son

whom she named Morgan after Geraint's deceased brother. Every line written was more explosive than the one before and left Geraint and Orville with their jaws unhinged and completely gob smacked. After the initial shock had been absorbed Geraint expressed that he was glad for Orville, Kelly and their baby boy. He finally understood why Kelly had mysteriously disappeared from the neighborhood and why his buddy had been so eager to get out of town.

Any and all letters from home were greatly appreciated and Kelly's letters, although controversial, were no exception. They afforded Orville and Geraint a sense of home even though they were written in Detroit and not from their hometown of New Salem. Still her letters kept them grounded and in touch with what was going on in the States. They both looked forward to receiving them and could not wait until the next one arrived where they would quickly reply.

Geraint recalled how happy his friend was at the time and that he had been in the process of making all sorts of grandiose plans about moving to Michigan, marrying his sweetheart and raising their son.

Kelly's letters boasted as to how much she had fallen in love with Detroit and Detroiters. She claimed the homes were beautiful, plentiful, affordable and perfect for raising a family. According to Kelly anyone could get a good paying job in one of the nearby steelworks as they were always hiring. Kelly claimed that you could not throw a stone without hitting a factory. Kelly made Detroit sound so good Geraint toyed with the idea of relocating there to stay near his friends.

All their plans crumbled one day while the two of them lay wounded in an army hospital in France. Geraint had indeed been wounded but his friend Orville was worse and fading in and out of consciousness. When the last letter arrived from Detroit it was more explosive than Kelly's first letter. The bombshell that Kelly's aunt detonated was far worse. The terrible news turned out to be Orville's final insult. It informed him that his beloved Kelly had unexpectedly

died of the flu pandemic that had spread worldwide. Orville needed to come and collect his son as soon as the war ended. Aunt Ruby claimed that if he did not come for the boy she would have no choice but to place him into an orphanage.

The devastating tale of woe sent Orville plummeting into a sea of despair where he lamented, languished and drowned in sorrow over his lost love. Without Kelly in his life, Orville saw no point in going on. Orville made Geraint promise that he would take care of Morgan in his and Kelly's stead. After the promise was secured Geraint stood by and watched his friend slip slowly away and die.

Geraint was released from the hospital as soon as the war ended. He went straight to the cemetery where he paid his last respects to Orville before boarding the USS Leviathan to begin his journey home.

Geraint gazed out onto the sea's vastness and appreciated it for what it was, a beautiful passage home. Without Orville and Kelly, Geraint had lost his interest about staying in Detroit. All he wanted to do was pick up Morgan and go home to see his folks. Geraint wondered about how his mother would react when he turned up on their stoop toting Orville and Kelly's son. He also wondered how the Hennessy's would take the news. Geraint knew from Kelly's letters that her father would not be a problem but was unsure how Cate would behave knowing her grandson would grow up as an Evans and not a Hennessy.

Geraint felt sick thinking about it all and threw up his hands. He had worried enough and decided that it was out of his control and whatever would happen, would happen. Everyone would have to get over it and accept Morgan for Orville and Kelly's sake. Geraint was determined that he would do his best to honor their memory.

The fresh salt air made Geraint miss his folks all the more. He thought back to happier days, a lifetime earlier, when he was just a boy. Born in Wales, Geraint remembered the first time he and his

family boarded the ship bound for America when he and his brothers ran around the deck like a bunch of wild Comanche's on the warpath. It was one of his favorite memories from his childhood. Thinking back made him appreciate those carefree days so long ago. Once back in the States, Geraint kept his promise and made a quick stop in Detroit to collect Morgan. The woman taking care of him, Kelly's Aunt Ruby had been taken aback when Geraint unexpectedly turned up instead of Orville. She had been visibly shaken when she heard what had happened to her ward's father and after a tearful goodbye and a trip to the local cemetery, to visit Kelly's grave, Geraint and the baby Morgan left Detroit for good.

Geraint returned to New Salem with Morgan and they were greeted with open arms where they enjoyed a wonderful homecoming. Geraint's mother and father were delighted to see him and doted over the toddler. Rhodri and Mari fell instantly in love with Morgan and after setting some boundaries that the baby would grow up as a member of the Evans family, the Hennessy's agreed it was for the best.

Cate Hennessy, Kelly's mother, had some genuine misgivings about her grandson calling her dearest friend "Mom" but after a number of fights with her husband, Sean; she ended up caving into his threats and kept her mouth shut about Morgan being a Hennessy. Cate realized it would be best for the boy not to know that Sean was his grandfather because he despised the child's illegitimacy. For that reason, Cate needed to protect Morgan from Sean's cruelties and biases and agreed to keep quiet concerning Morgan's true identity.

Dai Evans and his wife Ann, formerly a Hennessy, were inadvertently placed into the most awkward position of all. Ann was Kelly's younger sister where as Dai was Geraint's younger brother. The two began dating just before Geraint went off to war and they married before he returned. Because of the Hennessy/Evans complicated relationship they decided the only thing to do was to take a neutral posi-

tion and kept quiet. With the Hennessy's and Evans' secret discretely worked out, everything in time fell into place and everyone returned to their normal routines.

Three years passed and with the experience of WWI burned into everyone's more recent memory the small unassuming coal mining town of New Salem thought it fitting that their town's historical society should decide how the community should memorialize their local heroes that bravely gave all for God and country. Because of the worthy cause and the generosity of some local backers, the society raised enough funds to acquisition the minting of a detailed bronze plaque to commemorate America's cost of freedom.

The unveiling ceremony took place on a cold, rainy November day near their parks gate. The entire town anticipated the event and turned out for it in spite of the rain. A lone bugler played a solemn ballad from the grandstand, which brought tears to a number of eyes.

The beautifully adorned plaque had Old Glory draped criss-crossed near its top and a pair of canons on either side. The focal point was the local soldiers' names and their ranks that extended down the peened face of the bronze plate. It was punctuated with four embossed stars centered beneath. A smooth, shiny ribbon made of bronze, curled gracefully around the outer edge. The magnificent plaque had been affixed to an eight-foot obelisk that protruded from a cement footing for all to appreciate and admire.

The placement of a poppy wreath ended the somber affair. As the crowd dispersed Mari and Rhodri Evan's took young Morgan by the hand and wondered if it was time to tell him about his father and what his name on that plaque meant. It all seemed so complicated and they feared that the information would only confuse him.

Cate Hennessy and Mari Evans had been the best of friends for years but with friendship aside, Cate harbored feelings of jealousy and envy. Mari, whom she really did count as a wonderful friend,

in her opinion had a great life and everything going for her. Mari was fortunate enough to have a loving, nurturing relationship with a handsome viral man who trusted her to the nth degree. Cate's husband Sean trusted no-one including his wife and held nothing but contempt for his neighbors. Sean had been crippled in a mining accident which left him paranoid and unbearable to live with. He blamed the Evans for meddling into his personal business concerning his daughter's son and wished Geirant had kept his nose out of it altogether and left Morgan in Detroit where he belonged.

When Sean found out that his daughter Kelly had died he instructed his sister Ruby to do what he thought was the right thing and place the boy in an orphanage where he belonged. Sean never wanted to see the boy and would not have if Geraint had left him in Detroit.

Sean's refusal to acknowledge Morgan as anything other than, "the little bastard", remained a cause of great contention between him, his wife and the Evans'. Cate dreamed of the day that her husband would die a slow, agonizing death so she could tell Morgan the truth about his identity but wishing and dreaming was all Cate ever did.

In time, Cate put away her resentment towards Mari but never toward her husband and became thankful for the small role she could play in her grandson's life. Because she was a neighbor and close family friend, Cate was able to participate in her grandson's life without exposing him to Sean's abusive name calling.

By the age of six, Morgan began to take on a great deal of his father's attributes and personality. In Mari's eyes, Morgan was turning into Orville and there was not a thing she could do about it. Morgan was becoming his father's spitting image. Cate saw him differently and even though she recognized the resemblance, she could also see Kelly's influence in the child. One thing both Cate and Mari were relieved about was that they knew, no matter what, Morgan would

never have to bare the stigma that came with illegitimacy and, worse still, the Jenkins name. The child not only looked like his father, he bore his father's impish ways and tendencies towards mischief.

Dai and Ann moved into their own house but were yet to start a family. Geraint remained at his parent's house with his sister Catherine and young Morgan. Geraint took a job in the mines and worked alongside his father, Rhodri and his brother Dai.

Sean Hennessy, whom had been confined to a wheelchair because of a mining accident, stayed indoors and wallowed in his own misery much of the time. Fortunately for Cate her husband often took naps in the afternoon, which gave her some room to breathe. As soon as he would drift off she would sneak next door. On warm days she and Mari would sit together out on their porch and quietly chat. If the neighborhood children happened to be playing in the front, as they often did, Cate would signal for them to be quiet so they would not wake the beast.

The fall and winter months were Cate's favorite time of year. The cooler temperatures and quieter neighborhood allowed Sean to sleep comfortably for hours. In anticipation of her friend's arrival Mari would put the kettle on and brew a fresh pot of tea according to Sean's predictable sleep schedule. The two friends enjoyed their afternoon tea together and found it especially nice when they had the house all to themselves. It was on those days that Mari and Cate felt free to have a really good gripe session without worrying about prying ears. The women talked about this, that and the other with their conversations varying from concerns about the price of potatoes to the unusual weather they were having, to something about their children.

Often Sean's name and antics would breach the theme of their conversation and dominate it. During one of their closed sessions Mari offered a surprising confession of sorts about something Morgan had done while at church. According to Mari, it seemed

that Morgan was growing up fast and from the gist of her story Cate thought, maybe a little too fast. While alone one day Mari told Cate about an incident and although they were definitely alone, she kept looking around her kitchen sheepishly and had trouble concealing her embarrassment. Cate listened as Mari broke into a nervous laughter as she explained Morgan's little indiscretion. Mari's revelation about Morgan and what he did at the church shocked Cate when she heard it and felt relieved she was not there when *it* occurred. She could thank Sean for that one because he was the one that insisted she stay home that day or she would have been there.

Cate knew it would be a long time before Mari would be able to show her face amongst the congregation without some backlashes because of the whole episode. Mari explained that it all happened during the lady's semi-annual designated cleaning day. Mari had taken both Catherine and Morgan with her rather than leave them at home, a decision she would later regret.

Catherine had been designated to mind the nursery but offered to help clean instead. Miss Stella Jakes, who had recently moved to the area and lived in the boarding house just outside of town, volunteered to stay with the babies and younger children in her stead. This was agreed so that the women could concentrate on the mission at hand.

While Miss Stella was busy changing a baby's diaper, Morgan and little Lily Crenshaw somehow slipped away and sneaked into the church's utility closet and quietly closed the door. Although it was dark inside with many unseen obstacles they had enough room and light to satisfy their curiosities. Miss Jakes had been so new to the congregation that she failed to realize two of her wards had gone missing.

The church organist, Mrs. Cummings, came dawdling into the nursery to chat with Stella for a time before going over to the utility closet to retrieve some more oil soap and cleaning rags for the

women. She almost fainted when she opened the door. Her blood-curdling scream echoed throughout the entire church and she yelled to Stella and ordered her to get the babies out.

Stella had no idea what was going on but feared that by the way Mrs. Cummings behaved, something terrible was hiding in that closet. Whether it was a poisonous snake or rabid raccoon that had creaped in and hid amongst the buckets and mops did not matter. Miss Jakes intended to protect the children from whatever harm was lingering within. Without hesitation Stella scooped up the babies and ushered the toddlers into the main church. A rush of women, that had up until the scream, been busily wiping down the pews, scrubbing the floors and windowsills dropped their rags and polishes and ran in to see for themselves what disaster had befallen them.

Every woman in the church, except Stella, including the pastor's wife saw what young Morgan and little Lily Crenshaw were up to. Mrs. Cummings' initial scream would have scared the pants off Morgan but his trousers were already off and lying on the closet floor. The two children were naked as a jaybird and realized, by Mrs. Cummings reaction, that they were in deep, deep trouble.

The guilty pair were caught in the act and stood there wide eyed and trembling. Lily was so scared she urinated on the floor. When their mothers and the rest of the women rushed in and saw their nakedness their jaws dropped as though they were looking at the devil's incarnate. The risqué scandal sent Morgan and Lily's mothers scrambling to snatch up their children's clothing as they hurriedly dressed them.

Elsa Crenshaw and Mari didn't say a word to the righteous onlookers but had a few superlatives for their heathen children. Elsa nervously forced Lily's dress on over her head even though it was inside out. Mari had trouble finding Morgan's shoes and dragged him home by his ears barefooted and smacking his behind all the way. As soon as the commotion died down and the crowd dispersed

the women went back to their cleaning and engaged in some major tongue wagging. Embarrassed by it all Mari's daughter, Catherine found Morgan's missing shoes and hid them in a cleaning rag and left for home.

While sitting in church after hearing all the sordid details from Mari, Cate Hennessy thought Sunday's sermon was particularly brutal and noticed both Mari and Elsa doing their fair-share of squirming every time the Pastor hit on permiscuous topics during the service.

When Morgan turned seven he tried his hand at stealing sweets from the local grocer. The boy was slick as snot and could easily pull the wool over Mari's eyes. While she was busy picking out the very best food for their family Morgan would sneakily pocket a piece of candy. He would either deposit his incriminating wrappers through the hole in their outhouse or he would toss them into the coal stove where they would quickly burn up, destroying all evidence.

Morgan visited the five-finger discount counter one too many times without consequence and became over confident. Morgan ended up stealing a whole pocketful of some transparent brown colored candy that had a lovely looking sugary coating. The grocer had labeled the wooden barrel "Horehound." Morgan thought they looked delicious. He got away with the initial heist and really looked forward to enjoying his booty. That was until he popped one in his mouth and the sugar wore off. The luscious looking hard candy turned out to be the nastiest tasting crap he had ever purposely put into his mouth and spit it out almost gagging. Rather than throwing the rest away Morgan thought he could be clever and offered to share his unwanted gain with a couple of his friends who were appreciative of his gesture at first. Morgan laughed to see their sour faces as they spat the "treat" to the ground and thanked him sarcastically for nothing.

Morgan thought this was truly funny until laundry day came around. Mari, who always went through his pockets in search of the

obscure dead caterpillars, frogs or bugs found some of the incriminating uneaten candy. Mari was furious and figured out where his ill-gotten gains had come from. Morgan lied about the whole incident when he was first confronted but Mari knew better and marched him straight back to the local grocer to face Mr. Pennington, the store owner and made him fess up to his dastardly deed.

His punishment was to do whatever menial chore Mr. Pennington entrusted him to do around the store every weekend for an entire summer. Mari and Mr. Pennington agreed that the punishment was appropriate and might prevent him from becoming a future felon. By the summer's end Morgan had paid for his crime spree and everything went back to normal except that he was not allowed in the grocery store. Morgan had learned his lesson and never attempted to steal anything ever again.

Morgan ran with a small posse of friends, who were all about the same age and would play outside until they were called home which usually happened around suppertime. All the neighborhood parents watched out for each other's children and were granted authority to cuff any one of them, upside their heads, if they were caught misbehaving in any way.

It was an unwritten law that if one of their kids came home unhurt but crying it usually meant they had done something wrong. If that was the case and their parents got wind of it, punishment would come swiftly and without mercy for even the slightest infractions.

Wherever the neighborhood boys and girls met, they came prepared to play. The girls carried a pouch full of jacks and a small red rubber ball. Their happy voices would call out "onesies", "twosies", "pig in a poke" and the likes. If the girls were not playing jacks they would be busy rhyming while jumping rope. "My mother and your mother were hanging out clothes; my mother punched your mother right in the nose...what color was her blood?" The girl while skipping would then call out some obscure color that she would spell before

jumping out and allowing another girl in.

The boys wouldn't be caught dead playing jacks or jumping rope. They carried their own entertainment in the form of a tin box full of marbles. Sometimes one or more of the boys would forget a book or homework when they came to school but they never forgot their marbles.

As soon as their teacher called recess the boys would eagerly race out of the classroom door and into the schoolyard nearly running over the cootie carrying yucky girls. Their teacher, Mrs. Applegate, forbade the boys to play for keeps and went into a whole dissertation where she explained that it was gambling.

Unbeknownst to her the boys still played "keepsies" on the sly. Their games could become pretty intense if the mibster, or shooter, made a clean knuckle down shot. With dead cool aim a player would slam his one inch agate swirled shooter into one of the other boys' cat's-eye knocking it out of play to the moans and groans from the gallery. Shooting with your hand off the ground was against the rules. If you happened to call "slips" fast enough, on a miss hit, someone neutral to the play would measure the distance and if the marble moved over ten inches it would be deemed a shot and the mibster would lose his turn.

The boys could repair a chipped marble by taking it home and dropping it into their mother's jar of lard overnight. The next day all they needed to do would be to fish it out and give it a good rub down where it would magically appear to be practically new again.

Another game the boys enjoyed was called War. They each had amassed a stash of WWI toy soldiers that were painted and made of lead. Morgan and most of his friends liked sucking on their army figurines as it created a strange tingling sensation on their tongues that they all seemed to like. Their mothers yelled at them about putting the soldier's into their mouths, only because they were dirty not because of the lead content. In spite of the warning the boys did it anyhow.

The American toy soldiers were by far more detailed and had better weaponry than any of the German or Japanese toy soldiers. Barclay, the company that produced them, made this apparent so that the American soldiers would always have the superior force. Stamped under the base of each soldier was the maker's name, which Barclay proudly displayed, along with the "Made in USA" label.

All the children took turns playing in each other's yard. Cate and Mari enjoyed watching the boys playing while they sat and talked savoring their tea. Cate Hennessy would caution the boy's to play quietly and would point to her side of the adjoined house. All the children knew what she meant by the gesture. None of them wanted to wake Sean Hennessy who was a cantankerous old beast and they would scatter whenever they heard him screaming from inside the darkened house.

All the local children thought he was like an old dog that lived under a porch. They recognized his bark even though they would barely see him and were frightened that one day he would snap his chain and come after them. Mari told Cate that even she thought Sean had grown more reclusive and paranoid in his old age. The two of them did their best to keep young Morgan away from him now that he was old enough to understand the verbal viciousness that Sean would throw his way.

It never mattered to Sean that Morgan was his own blood and that his eldest daughter had died shortly after giving birth. The only thing he cared about was how Kelly had disgraced the family name by having a child out of wedlock. Sean considered Kelly dead to him from the moment he put her on that bus bound for Detroit and that her spawn was nothing more than an unwanted waif that should have been placed in an orphanage at birth.

When the Hennessy's received the word about Kelly's death, Sean forbade his wife Cate from attending the funeral and sent a wire

instructing his sister Ruby what she should do with the baby and for Cate this was the last straw. The day Geraint arrived in New Salem with baby Morgan after the war caught everyone involved off guard. Geraint's parents were floored by it after having lost their own son , also named Morgan. Sean was furious with his neighbors taking the "little bastard" in, while his wife Cate was ecstatic because of it.

Cate had long before given up on the notion that she would ever see the child let alone be part of his life. She would be forever indebted to Geraint for bringing him home. As far as Cate knew, Ruby had taken her brother up on his advice and placed Morgan in a Detroit orphanage. Nobody had been more thankful to see that baby come home than Cate Hennessy.