

Chapter One

June 26, 1942

Washington, DC

My watch said it was fifteen minutes before eight in the morning, but I could already feel the oppressive DC humidity rising as I stood under a tree and gazed across the street at the three-story brick building with enormous white columns. I looked down at the sweaty piece of notebook paper in my hand, where I had scribbled the address, checking for the fourth time to make sure I was at the right place:

The East Building, 2430 E St. NW, across the street from the State Department. A brick building with columns. Enter through Gate Two. Ask for Alice Montgomery at the main reception desk.

A large chain-link fence with barbed wire lined the perimeter of a complex that comprised four buildings. I couldn't see any signage or markers, nothing whatsoever to indicate what went on inside.

For the hundredth time I questioned my decision to do this, to come and interview for a government job I didn't actually need in an organization I knew very little about.

“Excuse me. Can I help you?” I turned to see a young woman observing me from a few feet away. She was a couple of inches taller than me, five foot five, with pale blonde hair, and wore a light-blue-and-white-striped summer dress with cap sleeves and a navy-blue straw hat that flattered her heart-shaped face. I looked down at my dull, plum-colored shirtwaist dress and wished I had gone shopping for something new to wear today. I hadn’t stepped foot in a department store for months, since well before the funeral.

“It’s just that you look like you might be lost.” She gave me a small smile.

“Well, I think I’m in the right place, but I’m a little early for my eight o’clock interview.” I pointed at the building. “That is 2430 E Street Northwest, yes? I didn’t see any sign.”

“There’s no sign, but you’re correct,” she said. “I work there. Do you want to walk in with me? I can point you in the direction of reception when we get inside; it can be a little confusing.”

“Oh, thank you. I would appreciate that,” I said, relieved. “I’m Anna. Anna Cavanaugh.” I held out my hand.

“Irene Nolan, happy to help,” she answered as we crossed the street.

“What kind of work do you do here?” I asked, eager to hear from someone who actually worked in the building. Irene paused before answering.

“Oh, mostly research, organizing, you know . . .” She waved her hand. I glanced at her sideways as she quickly changed the subject. “So, let me guess. Wellesley grad? Or maybe Smith?”

“Radcliffe, actually,” I said. “I graduated four years ago and did a postgraduate year in Paris.”

“Ah, well done,” she said with a nod. “I adore Paris. Did you enjoy living there?”

“I did,” I said. “It was one of the best years of my life. Such a beautiful city. The culture and food, the people—I fell in love with all of it. I might not have come back if not for the war.”

"I'll bet. I'm a Vassar girl, class of '38, like you. Do you know who you're meeting with today?"

"I'm supposed to ask for Alice Montgomery when I arrive, but I'm also meeting with William Donovan."

Irene nodded and gave me a wide smile, clearly impressed.

"Wow, Wild Bill, the legend himself, is meeting with you? Is that right?" she said. "Now, that's interesting. He's so busy these days, he rarely has time to interview anyone."

"He's a friend of my father's," I said. "I'm sure that's the only reason he's meeting with me in person."

"How do they know each other?" she asked. "He's been pulling recruits from everywhere he can to try to build this place up fast—business connections, social circles, family and friends."

"They grew up together in Buffalo, New York," I said, not really thinking of myself as a "recruit" and wondering what she even meant by that.

"Ah, no wonder he's meeting you in person," she said. "That's much more than a casual acquaintance."

I nodded. We arrived at Gate Two and walked up the incline toward the building. Irene wasn't done with her questions.

"Is your husband in the service?" she asked, glancing down at my wedding band. I felt my stomach drop as she kept talking. "Mine is. Military intelligence, which means we can discuss absolutely nothing at the dinner table, except for baseball, which he obsesses over and I barely tolerate. He's a Yankees fan."

She looked over at me for a response.

When I got dressed that morning, I had agonized over whether or not to wear my wedding ring, as I had every morning since January 22, when I had first learned the news. I didn't want to make her feel uncomfortable. There was no casual way to say it, so I chose not to say it at all.

"He was shipped out to Hawaii after Pearl Harbor," I said. "He's a Harvard Medical School graduate, and a group of them went there

to help with the injured, implementing some promising new medical procedures.”

It wasn't a lie exactly, just an omission of the entire truth.

“Oh, wow,” she said. “Does he know you're interviewing here?”

“No,” I said, feeling my cheeks burn. I had never been a good liar.

“I'm sure he'll be so proud when he finds out,” she said.

I just gave her a small smile as we walked up the granite steps toward the main entrance. Men in uniform and smartly dressed women were hurrying by us, ready to start their day. I still had not seen one single sign declaring what government department actually resided in this building. It was so odd, but then, given the rumors in the newspapers about Donovan and this department, not entirely surprising.

A dark-haired young man tipped his hat and opened the door for us, and we entered the high-ceilinged main hall. It looked like any modern-day office building and had a musty sweet-and-sour smell, a combination of something like floor polish and ink. Still, there was no placard listing any departments, and no numbers on the few doors I could glimpse from where we were standing.

“Reception is down that hallway to the right. Check in with the secretary,” Irene said, pointing. She reached out and shook my hand. “It was so very nice to meet you, Anna. If they offer you a job here, just know it's a fascinating place to work, like nowhere else. Truly. And there are more than a few young women like us. Smart women. The hours are long, but it could be the type of job to keep you busy while your husband is away.”

“Thank you,” I said. If I never saw her again, I wouldn't have to feel guilty about not telling her the truth. “And thank you very much for your help this morning. I appreciate it.”

“Good luck,” she said. “I hope to see you soon.” She turned and joined the throng of employees hurrying to their various destinations as I headed in the opposite direction.

“Alice Montgomery is no longer working here,” the secretary at the reception desk told me in a clipped tone when she glanced up, peering over the top of her tortoiseshell cat-eye glasses at me after I announced my arrival.

“Oh, okay, that’s who I was told . . . ,” I started.

“Maggie Griggs, who is in charge of recruiting and hiring women, will be coming to get you, but you’re going to have to wait at least thirty minutes,” the secretary added. “Maggie is very busy and wasn’t anticipating having to meet with you herself. Have a seat. Today’s papers are on the table.”

I sat down in one of the black leather chairs and picked up the *Washington Post* from the glass coffee table. There was an article about Major General Eisenhower’s arrival in England and another about the recent Battle of Midway in the Pacific, but I was too distracted to read beyond the headlines.



The last time I’d seen William Donovan was the evening of Connor’s funeral. When I thought back to that terrible period, the first thing I remembered was how my body had ached with bone-weary exhaustion. I had never realized before how physically draining grief could be. I also remembered feeling numb, shocked about the turn my life had just taken. It had all been so surreal, like playing a part in a play, or living someone else’s life.

At the post-funeral reception at my parents’ house in Cambridge in late January, I prayed for the moment when all the guests would leave and I could go upstairs and collapse onto the twin bed in my childhood room. I had been sitting in the corner of the dining room with Mary, my best friend from the Winsor School, the all-girls private high school we had attended. She stayed beside me most of the evening, slightly

protective as I greeted the endless array of friends, relatives, and strangers that felt obligated to personally offer me their condolences.

After a group of Connor's friends from Harvard Med School hugged me good-bye, I asked my younger sister, Colleen, to get me another cup of coffee from the kitchen. When she returned, she handed Mary and me glasses of red wine.

"I think we could all use this more than coffee—especially you, Anna," Colleen said with a wry smile, sympathy in her eyes as she kissed my forehead before heading back to the kitchen to check on things.

"I may fall asleep in this chair if I drink the whole glass," I said to Mary.

"Nobody would blame you," Mary said, putting one arm around me and resting the hand holding her glass of wine on her enormous pregnant belly, her black dress stretched to its limit. For a second I placed my head on her shoulder, smelling the apple scent of her shampoo in her chestnut-brown hair, always pulled up in a bun. Mary and her husband, Joe, lived only a few blocks from me in DC, and I'd never been happier about that—because I'd never needed a friend nearby more than I did now.

"Mary, you and Joe have stayed long enough. You don't have to sit here with me all day; my parents and sisters can . . ."

"He's fine," Mary said. "He's out back with Colleen's fiancé, smoking and having a couple of beers. Who's that man your parents are talking to? Where do I know him from?"

I strained my neck to see my mother and father in conversation with William Donovan, Congressional Medal of Honor winner and the most decorated military officer of the last war. My father and Donovan had been friends since they were in grammar school.

"That's Major General William Donovan, the legend himself," I whispered, shocked to see him standing in our dining room. "I wasn't expecting him to come."

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He had only met Connor once, at our wedding reception eight months earlier.

With his arrival, I felt the atmosphere of the funeral reception change. There was a palpable excitement, a charged electricity not usually felt in such a somber setting. The stocky, silver-haired Donovan had the kind of magnetism that changed the energy in the air around him. He embraced my petite mother in a hug that nearly lifted her off the ground. And when he put her down, she laughed with tears in her eyes, clearly touched that he had come to pay his respects.

Hollywood had made a film about his unit in the war called *The Fighting 69th*, which had elevated his profile to an almost movie-star level of fame. After making a fortune as a lawyer on Wall Street, he was now working for President Roosevelt as an adviser. My family members and friends still in attendance were trying not to stare or whisper, but they were failing miserably across the board.

I watched as he gave my youngest sister, Bridget, a hug, and then my father and Donovan made their way through the crowded dining room to me. My father looked as exhausted as I felt, with dark circles under his large blue eyes that matched my own, and I swore his salt-and-pepper hair was saltier than it had been a week ago.

“General Donovan,” I said, getting up to give him a warm embrace. “Thank you so much for coming.”

“Ah, dear Anna,” Donovan said in his quiet voice. He held on to both my hands after our embrace. “I am so very sorry for your loss. Connor was a fine man, with such a brilliant mind.”

“Yes, he was brilliant,” I said, feeling myself blush. Every single person who had offered their condolences had mentioned Connor’s brilliance.

My father went to fetch Donovan a drink as I introduced him to Mary, and we talked a little more about Connor and the service. He looked at me with the empathy of someone who knew loss far too well.

His twenty-two-year-old daughter, Patricia, had died two years prior in a horrible car accident on the way home from American University.

“Anna, might I have a quick word with you on the front porch, where it’s more private?”

“Of course,” I said, frowning a little, wondering what he might have to say to me. I picked up my glass of wine and nodded to Mary, who gave me a look of curiosity as she headed out to the backyard to find her husband.

The cold winter air felt refreshing after the stuffiness of my parents’ crowded house, and I took a deep, grateful breath. It smelled of snow and a hint of cigarette smoke wafting from the guests in the backyard.

“I will keep this brief because I’m sure you’re very tired,” Donovan said. “I know firsthand what grief can do to a person.”

“I know you do,” I said, giving him a sympathetic smile in solidarity.

“I also understand that your world has been turned upside down, and you don’t know what you’re going to do in the next hour or day, much less months from now,” he said, pulling out his wallet. “But I wanted to give you my card. If you ever need anything in DC, I can be reached at this number day or night.”

“Thank you,” I said when he handed it to me. “That’s very kind of you.”

“The other reason I want you to have it is because, if you decide to remain in DC, and if you’re interested in a job outside of teaching, I could use somebody like you in the government organization I’m building.”

I looked up from the card, completely surprised by his words. The truth was, I had been interested in a job outside of teaching for a long time. But life, specifically married life, had gotten in the way of those plans. “Someone like me?”

“Top of your class at Radcliffe, fluent in French and German, *and* you’ve studied abroad in Paris—yes, someone like you,” he said, smiling, his cheeks turning ruddy from the night air. “Why wouldn’t I?”

Why wouldn't he?

"Thank you," I said, nodding. "I don't know what I'm doing next, to be honest . . . You're right, I'm still . . ." I struggled to find the words.

"I understand," Donovan said, putting a hand on my shoulder. "But if you ever decide you're interested in learning more, call this number. Please consider it."



"Hello, Anna Cavanaugh? Excuse me, Miss Cavanaugh?"

I dropped the unread *Post* and jumped up from the chair, embarrassed to have been caught preoccupied with my thoughts.

"Yes, hello," I said, reaching out my hand. "I'm Anna."

"Maggie Griggs," the woman said, shaking my hand as she sized me up. "Nice to meet you. Come, let's go to my office to talk before you meet with Donovan."

Maggie Griggs was a handsome woman I guessed to be in her late forties. Her chestnut hair was streaked with gray, and she had an angular face. She wore a red-and-black plaid skirt and a white blouse under a short-sleeved black cardigan. We walked down the hall, and she greeted various people we passed.

"How old are you again, Anna?" Maggie asked.

"I just turned twenty-five," I said.

"That's right." She gave me a sideways glance and nodded. "You could pass for seventeen."

"I get that a lot," I said, trying not to sigh. "It makes teaching high school students a little difficult . . ."

I was petite, with thick, jet-black curly hair, large round eyes, and dimples in both cheeks—a combination that made me look very young for my age.

"I can imagine that it might," she said. "Donovan says he's looking for girls that are 'a cross between a Smith grad, a Powers model,

and a Katie Gibbs secretary.’ You’ve certainly got the looks and the education.”

“Um, thank you,” I said, not sure how to take the compliment.

We reached her office, and she opened the unmarked door for me. The room was small and spotless with a desk and two file cabinets. We sat down, and my eyes landed on a rather thick, cream-colored folder with my last name on the tab in the middle of her desk.

“Mrs. Griggs, forgive me, but the only things I know about this organization come from the vague references to it in the papers. I know it’s now called the Office of Strategic Services—could you please explain what goes on in this place?”

“Ah yes, you’ve read about Donovan as FDR’s ‘international man of mystery’ and all that nonsense in the *Post*?” Maggie said, laughing. “The press loves Donovan. And I can’t say he minds the attention. As for the recently named Office of Strategic Services, the OSS, it’s the brainchild of General Donovan and President Roosevelt. It was formed about a year ago and dubbed the Office of the Coordinator of Information, or COI, with Donovan reporting directly to Roosevelt. It was actually just renamed the OSS this month—same mission, but now it’s an agency under the Joint Chiefs of Staff.”

“Okay,” I said, frowning since that still told me nothing.

She pulled a letter from the top of my file and put it in front of me.

“But, before we get into any more details, Miss Cavanaugh, I need to you to sign this confidentiality agreement. You will be legally bound to keep this and any conversations you have today secret, regardless of whether or not you end up working here.”

I nodded and gave the letter a quick read, knowing there was no way I wasn’t going to sign it. I had to know what in the world was going on in this mysterious building with no signs or numbers on the doors. I had to know what kind of job they had in mind for me. I wanted a reason to stay here in DC this summer, instead of going to the Cape, where I would have to endure the constant, pitying looks of friends and

family and also deal with my mother's overbearing ways. I was supposed to be getting on a train in two days, but this place might offer me an alternative plan.

Maggie Griggs paused as if for dramatic effect, pulling a pack of Marlboro Slims out of her top drawer. She offered me one before she lit her own. I declined.

"The mission of the OSS is multifaceted," she said. "But its main objectives are analyzing all data related to national security and coordinating espionage activities behind enemy lines for the armed forces."

"So, research and . . . espionage? Spying. *Spies*," I said, not quite believing what I was hearing. I didn't know what I had expected her to tell me about the OSS, but that was not it. "You're sending spies behind enemy lines?"

"Yes, spies, to gather intelligence and engage in guerrilla war tactics, among other things," she said. I'm sure she could tell my interest was piqued. "However, we do much more than that. We have a large division here devoted to research and analysis of strategic information such as the geographical studies of various war zones, and another that focuses on how to create and spread disinformation and propaganda. There are multiple groups within the organization working on ways to subvert the enemy.

"As the person in charge of recruiting women—*lots* of women—I've got my work cut out for me," she said, leaning to crack the window behind her, as the little office was getting smoky. "I've been cautiously taking out ads in magazines and newspapers, but of course they have to be vague. Since I can't describe exactly what the job is, it makes it difficult to compete against the recent, more glamorous recruitment campaigns of the Women's Army Corps. Meanwhile, every damn morning Donovan gives me more positions that need to be filled. Yesterday it was a 'combination seamstress and secretary for the North Africa office.' That one's not going to be easy."

"So, you're even sending women overseas," I said.

“We’ve started to, yes,” she said.

“How many will you be sending?”

“Oh, in the hundreds at least,” Maggie said. “To Africa, England, Switzerland—wherever we need them.”

“France? To Paris?”

“No, none to France,” Maggie said. She paused for a second. “Well . . . let’s just say not yet.”

“Wow. I had no idea,” I said. I felt like I had stumbled into a secret club, which in some ways I supposed I had.

“Yes, this is a chaotic and frenzied place to work,” Maggie said. “We haven’t hired nearly enough people to staff these operations, but everything we’re doing here makes me thrilled to be a part of it, and most people here feel that way—passionate about the mission.”

“I can understand why,” I said, more curious than ever as to what type of work she had in mind for me.

“After the breathtaking intelligence failures that led to Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt tasked Donovan with building this organization from scratch very quickly. There’s been little time for tight security checks. So, many of the people he has hired are people he could trust due to personal connections or referrals. This has included close friends, business clients, club members, professors from elite colleges, linguists, and established writers.”

“And sons and daughters of friends?” I asked.

“Yes indeed, many of those as well, including President Roosevelt’s son.”

“Are there any female spies?”

“A very select few,” she said. I couldn’t quite decipher the look on her face. “But let’s talk about why you’re here and what role we have in mind for you. The timing of your phone call last week was serendipitous, Miss Cavanaugh. Alice Montgomery’s role was as General Donovan’s secretary and right-hand woman. Her last day was supposed to be in two weeks, but her father’s health has taken a turn for the worse,

so she had to head to South Carolina yesterday. We would like you to consider being her replacement.”

My mouth dropped open, and I was about to start asking questions, but she kept talking.

“The job requires, first and foremost, ultimate secrecy,” she continued. “You may not keep a diary of any sort. You are not to discuss anything about what goes on here with anyone in the outside world, not even family. Like many others here, you know him personally, but you’ll have to be prepared because, as a boss? Donovan is hard driving. The man never stops. There will be long hours, evenings, and sometimes weekends.”

“Um . . . okay . . . ,” I said, trying to process what she was saying to me.

“But I will tell you, he thinks you’d be perfect for the job—given your obvious intelligence, as evidenced by your grades at Radcliffe and your language abilities,” she said, thumbing through the pages in the folder. “You spent a successful postgraduate year at the elite *École Libre des Sciences Politiques* in Paris before coming home to teach high school French in Boston and then here at the Sidwell Friends School in DC after getting married to your fiancé last May. I’m very sorry about the loss of your husband, my dear.”

“Oh, um, thank you,” I said. I felt my cheeks burning. Her knowledge of Connor’s death and my background had thrown me. “My French is very strong overall. My German is good. I can read and understand it very well, but my speaking ability in German is not as strong.”

“Thank you for being honest, dear, but to have those two languages? Well, it’s still quite an asset,” she said as she continued to look through my folder. “Your recommendations from Radcliffe were stellar, of course. Particularly Professor Moore, who said you were . . .”

Maggie riffled through papers, and I felt my face grow even hotter as she read. “Highly intelligent and hardworking. A near photographic

memory like few I've encountered. And my only student who sounds like a native Parisian when she speaks.”

“Wait . . . you have letters from my professors?” I said, raising my eyebrows. “But I only called here last week . . .”

“We have references from your professors, as well as from some of your colleagues from both the Winsor School in Boston and the Sidwell Friends School. Donovan had you properly vetted months ago,” she said, showing me the letters.

I blinked at them, slightly stunned at the revelations about the OSS, and the fact that they'd already vetted me.

“Did Donovan have me vetted after he talked to me at Connor's funeral?”

“Oh, long before that, dear,” Maggie said. “Since the day he started working for Roosevelt, he's been building up his list of possible recruits.”

“And I was vetted a while back, but this position became available yesterday?”

“Yes, he wasn't sure what role you would fill initially,” Maggie said, watching my reaction. “But, as it turns out, we have an immediate need for a secretary for him, and . . . he'd like you to consider it.”

So many thoughts were running through my head. Donovan had vetted me before the funeral, meaning he wasn't offering me a job out of pity because I was a widow. That mattered. He wanted me here based on my intelligence and abilities, not because he was doing me a favor.

I had a train ticket home in my purse. According to my mother's meticulous plans, I should be “relaxing and healing” this summer on the Cape and moving back to my family home in Cambridge after that. My parents would try to convince me I wasn't ready for something like this, that I still needed time to get over my grief.

But just the thought of spending the entire summer on the Cape made me feel suffocated. I pictured my mother dragging me to play bridge at the club or pushing me to go out with summer friends I barely knew anymore. My sister Colleen had already told me how she planned

on setting me up on dates that I definitely wasn't ready to go on. This job, this opportunity, was the perfect solution. I would tell my parents that I had to stay in DC because this was an opportunity to serve my country that I absolutely had to take. And it could be a chance at the kind of work I had once dreamed of doing.

"So, what do you think? There is a great deal more to tell you about the role and this organization. But I need to know, are you seriously interested?"

"Well . . . I . . . are you offering me the position?" I asked, thinking there was no possible way this could be happening so quickly.

A loud knock on her office door made me jump.

"Come in," Maggie said, raising her voice. William Donovan walked in, his silver hair in a fresh military cut. Maggie and I both stood up.

"Dear Anna," he said, and I gave him an embrace. "I know we were supposed to meet later this morning, but I've been summoned to the White House so I won't be able to after all. Maggie has given you some of the details?"

"She has, yes," I said. "And thank you."

"Anna was just asking if we were offering her the position." Maggie looked at him, arms crossed as if to say, *You tell me*.

"Of course we are," Donovan said. "You'd be perfect. And I'm sure Maggie's told you, we don't have any time to interview a hundred girls, especially when I know you'd be the best of the lot anyway. What do you think? Do you want to work for me? To be a member of the OSS?"

"I . . . when would I start?" I asked.

"Monday," Donovan said.

"This Monday?" I said, taking a deep breath. There wouldn't even be a short family vacation. There would be no going back home for a long time. But I didn't want to spend the entire summer on the Cape being treated like some hothouse flower. I knew that for sure now.

“Of course. There’s a war going on, my dear.” He looked me in the eye, his face very serious now. “Now, Anna, if you’re not ready for something like this yet, if you need more time, I understand. Maybe in the future, something else—”

“I’ll take it,” I said, interrupting him. “I don’t need more time; it’s such a great opportunity.”

His face lit up, and he clapped his hands together.

“That’s my girl! You won’t regret it, Anna. I promise you that. Maggie, you’ll get her all the paperwork and get her squared away so she can start Monday?”

“That I will, sir,” Maggie said, lighting another cigarette.

“Thank you,” Donovan said. He patted me on the shoulder. “Do you want me to call your father, tell him about it?”

“Thank you, but I’ll take care of my parents,” I said, not looking forward to my conversation with them.

“Well, if you need me to talk to Dick and Deidre for you, let me know. I’m happy to make the call and explain to them why I need you here more than they need you on the Cape,” Donovan said with a wink as he opened the door to leave.

“Thank you, sir,” I said.

“Now I’ve got to get to Roosevelt before he has my head,” he said. “I will see you both on Monday.”

He was going to meet with the president. I had accepted a job working for the president of the United States’ right-hand man. I felt a mix of elation and fear, and a kind of giddy anticipation about the future that had eluded me since long before Connor died. Maggie’s talk of sending girls overseas was one of the things that excited me the most. If I proved myself working for Donovan, maybe that could be in my future as well.

“Congratulations,” Maggie said to me, holding out her hand.

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“Did I . . . I just accepted the job, didn’t I?” I said, shaking her hand, a little incredulous, though I couldn’t stop smiling.

“You did,” she said, grinning back at me. “Donovan has that effect on people.”

“So he does,” I said, nodding, still not quite believing what had just happened.

“Welcome to the OSS, Anna Cavanaugh.”