

# FLY BABIES

By Rusty Harding

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# FLY BABIES

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**SYNOPSIS:** 1943 – WWII is raging. Five young American women, all qualified pilots, lend their skills to the newly-created Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs): Dotty, the wide-eyed farm girl; Peggy, the spoiled heiress; Pauline, the seasoned barnstormer; Hazel, the Asian-American who has already witnessed the horrors of war; and Mazy, the African-American who is fighting her own war against prejudice. All five come together on the desolate plains of west Texas, where they experience the challenge, the triumphs, and the tragedies of serving their country on the home front. And where they quickly discover that not all battles are fought overseas...

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(7-10 females, 3 males)*

NURSE (f) .....	30-35; (5 lines)
DOROTHY "DOTTY" LEWIS (f).....	80+; Elderly Dotty (31 lines)
DOROTHY "DOTTY" MOORE (f).....	20-25; Younger Dotty (255 lines)
LUCY POWELL (f).....	20-25; (27 lines)
MAZY BUFORD (f).....	25-30; African-American (59 lines)
SGT. "LOUIE" LEWIS (m).....	20-25 (156 lines)
PAULINE YATES (f).....	30-35 (116 lines)
HAZEL YING (f).....	25-30; Asian-American (59 lines)
PEGGY TAYLOR (f).....	20-25; (81 lines)
JACKIE COCHRAN (f).....	35-40; (81 lines)
COL. THOMAS EVANS (m).....	50-60; (20 lines)
CAPT. JOHN WHITAKER (m).....	25-35; (86 lines)
DIANE GREELY (f) .....	20-25; Mazy's granddaughter. (6 lines)

**POSSIBLE DOUBLING**

LUCY can double with DOTTY (Younger)

MAZY can double with DIANE

NURSE can double with PAULINE

**DURATION:** 120 minutes

**SETTING:** Hospital Room and Military Barracks

**TIME:** Present day and 1940s

**SYNOPSIS OF SCENES****ACT ONE**

SCENE 1: Hospital/Nursing Home, Present Day

SCENE 2: WASP Military Barracks, 1943

SCENE 3: WASP Military Barracks, 1943

SCENE 4: WASP Military Classroom/Wardroom, 1943

SCENE 5: WASP Military Barracks, 1943

SCENE 6: WASP Military Classroom/Wardroom, 1943

SCENE 7: WASP Military Classroom/Wardroom, 1943

**ACT TWO**

SCENE 1: WASP Military Classroom/Wardroom, 1943

SCENE 2: WASP Military Classroom/Wardroom, 1943

SCENE 3: WASP Military Barracks, 1943

SCENE 4: WASP Military Classroom/Wardroom, 1943

SCENE 5: WASP Military Barracks, 1943

SCENE 6: WASP Military Classroom/Wardroom, 1943

SCENE 7: WASP Military Barracks, 1943

SCENE 8: Hospital/Nursing Home, Present Day

**PRODUCTION NOTES**

At first glance, “Fly Babies” can appear to be a daunting production. However, as with any period piece, it is far more important to be “evocative” than authentic. Costumes, sets, props, etc., should be as realistic as budget permits, but do not need to be exact replicas.

## SETTING

The stage should be divided into two sections: a (1943-era) military women's barracks, and a combination (1943-era) military classroom/flight room. Military housing of that era tended to be extremely spartan and primitive, with olive drab, gray, and khaki being the primary colors. Cheap – and unpainted – plywood paneling was also extensively used.

**BARRACKS:** Includes four military/camping-style folding cots with bedding, four steel lockers, and a table & chair(s). Two doors: the main entrance/exit, and another labeled "Latrine".

**CLASSROOM/FLIGHT ROOM:** Includes four school-style chair desks, a large blackboard, and a wall rack holding four clipboards with official-looking paperwork. There should be one main entrance/exit door, and a second door labeled "To Airfield". Military-style posters, drawings, and/or aircraft blueprints can be displayed for atmosphere.

**HOSPITAL:** A rollaway hospital bed, privacy curtain, nightstand with contemporary-style radio, and two plain chairs should be set up in mid-stage for the opening and closing scenes.

### REFERENCE FIGURES:

#### Suggested Classroom/Wardroom Blackboard Format

PILOT	AIRCRAFT	STATUS	NOTES
Taylor	223	RFF	
Hayes	117	RFF	
Johnson	014	RFF	
Yates	103	RFF	
Ying	221	RFF	
Cooper	113	RFF	
Moore	012	RFF	
N/A	211	OOS	



## COSTUMING

Costumes need to reflect the styles of the times. Nurse, Elderly Dotty, Diane, and Lucy are dressed in present day attire. All other cast is dressed in 1940's attire.

**DOTTY** – One everyday outfit. Three sets of military coveralls (one large, one normal, one tattered after plane crash). Work shoes, either dark brown or two-toned “saddle” style.

**PEGGY** – One everyday outfit. Two sets of military coveralls (one large, one normal). Work shoes, either dark brown or two-toned “saddle” style.

**HAZEL** – One everyday outfit. Two sets of military coveralls (one large, one normal). Work shoes, either dark brown or two-toned “saddle” style.

**PAULINE** – One everyday outfit. Two sets of military coveralls (one large, one normal). Work shoes, either dark brown or two-toned “saddle” style.

**MAZY** – Two sets of military coveralls (one normal, one tattered after plane crash). Work shoes, either dark brown or two-toned “saddle” style.

**COCHRAN** – US Air Force uniform: long-sleeved chambray blouses, navy-blue “pencil” skirts, and black pumps. Appropriate ranking insignia.

**WHITAKER, LEWIS, and EVANS** – US Army uniform: long-sleeved khaki work shirts, pants, and ties, along with dark brown dress shoes. Appropriate ranking insignia.

**LUCY and DIANE** – US Air Force uniform: long-sleeved chambray blouses, navy-blue “pencil” skirts, and black pumps. Appropriate ranking insignia.

**NURSE** – Nurse scrubs.

**ELDERLY DOTTY** – Elderly attire.

## MAKEUP

Makeup, hairstyles, and accessories should reflect the styles of the period. The character of “Whitaker” requires facial “burn scars” to simulate war injuries.

## MUSIC/VIDEO

It is recommended that period-style music and/or video be incorporated into the production as a means of enhancing the atmosphere, and/or to assist in scene transitions. WWII-era artists (i.e., Glenn Miller, the Andrews Sisters, Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, etc.) are recommended, as well as period-era newsreels and/or videos pertaining to the WASPs. It is left to the discretion of the director as to their use. As always, with any such media use, all copyright laws should be observed.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE: There is singing/humming from period music throughout the work. What is stated is a suggestion, any period-style song will suffice.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

It is extremely important to remember that this play contains language that is crucially relevant to the time period. It is not intended to offend or incite, but rather to present a historically accurate portrayal of the attitudes, prejudices, and mindsets of the 1940's.

## PROPS

- Rollaway hospital bed (*a wheelchair or reclining chair can suffice.*)
- Folding privacy screen (*hospital-style*) (*optional*)
- Bedside table
- Assorted medication bottles
- Four (4) standing lockers (*school/gym style*)
- Four (4) folding cots (*military/camping style*)
- Four (4) pillows/slipcovers
- Four (4) blankets (*dark green or olive drab*)
- Four (4) women's purses (*1940's period*)
- Four (4) suitcases (*1940's period*)
- Four (4) wooden school desks (*adult size*)
- Five (5) wooden clipboards
- Ten (10) WASP mascot cloth patches
- Two (2) desks or small tables w/chairs

- Two (2) wastebaskets (*wicker or wooden*)
- Woman's "bomber" jacket ("*Jackie Cochran*")
- WASP mascot poster
- Chalkboard (*3'x4' or larger – see Reference Figures*)
- Chalk
- Eraser
- Bucket
- Mop
- Jeweled earrings (*1940's period – "Peggy"*)
- Portable radio (*contemporary*)
- Rubber snake (*realistic-looking*)
- Eyebrow pencil ("*Hazel*")
- Heavy-gauge metal/bailing wire (*1' or less*)
- Nylon stockings ("*Pauline*")
- Woman's wallet (*1940's period*)
- Man's wallet (*1940's period*)
- Toy duck (*cloth or rag-style – "Hazel"*)
- Toy wooden airplane (*propeller-style*)
- Stage/play money
- Locker door mirror
- Wax paper cups (*1940's period*)
- WASP wings
- US Army colonel's collar pins (*WWII-era*)
- US Army captain's collar pins (*WWII-era*)
- US Army sergeant's chevrons (*WWII-era*)
- Two (2) US Air Force pilot's wings (*contemporary*)
- Misc. women's clothing/makeup/accessories (*1940's period*)
- Misc. military-related posters/pictures (*WWII-era*)
- Four (4) (*simulated/costume*) leather flight helmets (*WWII-era*)
- Four (4) US Air Force 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant's female officer's epaulettes (*contemporary*)
- Two (2) US Air Force female officer's necktabs (*contemporary*)

## PREMIERE PRODUCTION

*FLY BABIES* had its world premiere in June & July of 2017. It was performed by Lunatic Theatre Company at the Richardson Theatre Centre in Richardson, TX, with the following cast & crew:

### Cast

NURSE .....	Madyson Greenwood
DOROTHY "DOTTY" (OLDER) .....	Fradonna Griffin
LUCY POWELL .....	Brittain Osborne
MAZY BUFORD.....	Latreshia Lilly
SARGEANT "LOUIE" LEWIS.....	Jake Blakeman
DOROTHY "DOTTY" (YOUNG).....	Brittain Osborne
PAULINE YATES.....	Madyson Greenwood
HAZEL YING .....	Debbie Fu
PEGGY TAYLOR.....	Becca Tischer
JACKIE COCHRAN .....	Laura Lester
COLONIAL THOMAS EVANS .....	Nelson Wilson
CAPTAIN JOHN WHITAKER.....	Salvador McCaffrey
DIANNE GREELY.....	Latreshia Lilly

### Production Crew

Director .....	Leigh Wyatt Moore
Stage Manager .....	Darby Villano
Set Design.....	Rusty Harding and Kevin Paris
Set Construction.....	Kevin Paris, Jake Blakeman, Sal McCaffrey, Rusty Harding
Sound and Lighting Designer.....	Richard Stephens, Sr.
Sound and Light Board Operator .....	Wyatt Moore
Radio Announcers.....	Greg Cotton and Richard Stephens, Sr.
Costumes.....	Kasey Bush
Props .....	Team Lunatic, Crew and Cast
Backstage crew .....	Elizabeth Moore
Poster and Playbill .....	Becky Byrley

**DEDICATION**

*To my wife, Debra, as always, for her love and infinite patience; to Leigh Moore, whose inspired suggestion was the genesis for this story; to the incredible cast and crew of our world premiere; and to the thirty-eight brave women who died during their service to the WASPs — may their courage, dedication, and sacrifice never be forgotten! — this play is lovingly dedicated...*

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**ACT ONE, SCENE 1**

**AT RISE:** *ELDERLY DOTTY* lies (seemingly asleep) in a hospital-style bed. A small radio sits on a nightstand next to the bed, along with several medicine bottles. A single chair also sits nearby. **NURSE**, wearing scrubs, enters and quietly approaches the bed. She checks *ELDERLY DOTTY'S* vital signs with a stethoscope, then gently and kindly pushes a stray strand of gray hair off of her face. She starts to turn the radio down.

**ELDERLY DOTTY:** *(Eyes still closed.)* Don't you dare touch that dial.

**NURSE:** *(Startled.)* Oh, I'm sorry, Dotty. I thought you were asleep.

**ELDERLY DOTTY:** Bullshit. You thought I was dead.

**NURSE:** *(Laughing.)* Oh, please. I knew you weren't dead.

**ELDERLY DOTTY:** Then don't touch my radio. If I'm going to die, I want to go out to Glenn Miller or Artie Shaw.

**NURSE:** You sure you don't want to hear some Hip Hop? [Or current music genre]

**ELDERLY DOTTY:** *(Eyes still closed.)* You'll burn in hell for that.

*NURSE* laughs and starts to exit. An attractive young woman, *LUCY*, suddenly enters. *LUCY* wears the uniform of an Air Force officer, complete with pilot's wings. *LUCY* stares at *ELDERLY DOTTY* with obvious concern, then looks at the nurse.

**LUCY:** *(Whispering.)* How is she?

**NURSE:** Crotchety as ever. Your grandmother?

**LUCY:** Great grandmother. Will she know I'm here?

**NURSE:** Oh, sure. But don't stay too long. And whatever you do, don't touch the radio. *(Exits.)*

*LUCY* stares at *ELDERLY DOTTY* silently for several moments, then slowly walks to her bedside. She sits down in the chair and lovingly takes *ELDERLY DOTTY'S* hand. *SFX: music fades.*

**LUCY:** *(Softly.)* Great-grandma Dotty? Gee-Gee? It's me, Lucy.

*ELDERLY DOTTY'S eyes slowly flutter open. She looks around with a scowl of confusion, then slowly focuses on LUCY.*

**ELDERLY DOTTY:** Lucy? Lucy! Oh, my, sweet little Lucy Goosey!

**LUCY:** *(Leaning forward to hug ELDERLY DOTTY.)* Oh, Gee-Gee! You haven't called me that in years!

**ELDERLY DOTTY:** You'll always be my Lucy Goosey, baby girl. When did you get here?

**LUCY:** Just now. I drove straight over from the airport. I haven't even been home, yet.

**ELDERLY DOTTY:** Oh, dear, you know your parents will kill us both, don't you? *(Beat.)* Only in my case, it doesn't matter.

**LUCY:** Don't talk like that!

**ELDERLY DOTTY:** Lucy, we're both grown up enough not to pretend. I know I'm dying. *(Beat.)* And I'm not afraid.

**LUCY:** I know. You were never afraid of anything, were you?

**ELDERLY DOTTY:** Only Congress. But who isn't?

**LUCY:** Oh, Gee-Gee, you always could make me laugh. Even in the worst of times.

**ELDERLY DOTTY:** That's the best time to laugh, baby girl. *(Frowns curiously at LUCY'S uniform.)* Lucy! You got your wings!

**LUCY:** Yes, ma'am. I see you haven't lost that incredible eyesight.

**ELDERLY DOTTY:** I would never have been able to fly without it. Your great-great-grandfather used to call me his little eagle-eye. I could always spot the landmarks around Clovis whenever he'd take me up crop dusting with him. I once found our way home through the fog, when I saw old man McElroy's windmill. Your great-great-grandfather told me later he was afraid we'd've run out of gas and crashed if it hadn't been for my eyes.

**LUCY:** Long before GPS, I guess.

**ELDERLY DOTTY:** GPS? Baby girl, in my day GPS was a dime-store compass and a Texaco map. If you didn't know where you were, you landed on a country road and asked some farmer for directions.

**LUCY:** I'm afraid you can't do that in an F-16.

**ELDERLY DOTTY:** Damn shame. All those fancy computers and electronics. The most sophisticated thing on the old Stearman was a padded seat. But I was extremely grateful for it, believe me.

**LUCY:** Yet, you know, for all of that, I still envy you. You flew when it was still a challenge. Just you and the sky and your skill. I remember all those stories from when I was little. Every time you told me what it was like, I only wanted all the more to fly.

**ELDERLY DOTTY:** Better than sex, isn't it?

**LUCY:** Gee-Gee! *(Beat, giggling.)* Well, almost.

**ELDERLY DOTTY:** It's funny, your great-grandfather didn't share my passion. He was actually afraid to fly. But he never stood in the way of mine.

**LUCY:** Gee-Gee, I have the most incredible news!

**ELDERLY DOTTY:** You've been accepted by NASA?

**LUCY:** I wish. I'll have to put a few thousand more flight hours under my belt. No, it's about you, when you were in the WASPs!

*ELDERLY DOTTY looks away, suddenly sullen.*

**LUCY:** Gee-Gee? What's wrong? You were in the WASPs, weren't you? During World War Two?

**ELDERLY DOTTY:** Yes. *(Beat.)* Yes. I was.

**LUCY:** That's what I wanted to talk to you about. I met—

**ELDERLY DOTTY:** *(Suddenly interrupting.)* Lucy, there's something I need to tell you about... *(Beat.)* about that time. Something I've never told anyone. Not even your mother.

**LUCY:** What's that?

**ELDERLY DOTTY:** I was in the WASPs, yes, and I'm very, very proud of my service. But there was something that happened back then that I've never really come to terms with.

**LUCY:** Gee-Gee, what are you trying to tell me?

*ELDERLY DOTTY falls deeper into her pillow and sighs sadly. It's apparent she's no longer in the present. She struggles for words.*

**ELDERLY DOTTY:** Baby girl, you have to understand, it was a different time back then, and I don't mean just the music. People were different, attitudes were different. *(Beat.)* And it wasn't always for the good...

*Blackout.*

**ACT ONE, SCENE 2**

**AT RISE:** *The scene is a 1943 military-style barracks. Four folding cots are placed in two neat rows. A set of steel lockers stand against an upstage wall. A poster hanging on the wall displays the mascot of the WASP's. A door near the beds bears the stenciled word "LATRINE". A small table and chairs provide the only other furnishings. MAZY softly hums a hymn as she mops the floor. MAZY wears a crisp but threadbare dress and worn shoes. She looks up at the sudden sound of LEWIS singing happily from offstage.*

**LEWIS:** *(Offstage. Singing.)* DON'T SIT UNDER THE APPLE TREE  
WITH ANYONE ELSE BUT ME  
ANYONE ELSE BUT ME  
ANYONE ELSE BUT ME  
OH, NO, NO, DON'T SIT UNDER THE APPLE TREE  
WITH ANYONE ELSE BUT ME  
TILL I COME MARCHING HOME

*LEWIS, a handsome young man wearing an army uniform, does an exaggerated jive dance as he enters the barracks room. He reads through papers attached to a clipboard, then stops singing and smiles affably when he sees MAZY.*

**LEWIS:** Hi-de-ho, Mazy

**MAZY:** Morning, Sgt. Lewis.

**LEWIS:** Looks like we've got another batch of ladies coming in this morning.

**MAZY:** I've got everything ready, Sergeant Lewis.

**LEWIS:** Mazy, please. Sergeant Lewis is for the grunts and the jerk officers. Everybody calls me Louie.

**MAZY:** Sergeant Lewis, you know folks like me can't be on a first-name basis with folks like you.

**LEWIS:** What, because you're colored? Come on, Mazy, I grew up on Ninety-Sixth Street. South Harlem. All my friends were colored. Hell, I was the only white kid on our stickball team. Stuck out like a snowman in a coal mine. They called me Louie, you call me Louie.

**MAZY:** Whatever you say, Sergeant Lewis.

*LEWIS sighs in defeat, then eyes MAZY speculatively.*

**LEWIS:** Say, Mazy, you ever tell Miss Cochran what you told me?

*MAZY looks up at him sharply, then shakes her head and shrugs dismissively.*

**MAZY:** Wouldn't do any good.

**LEWIS:** Why not? She seems like an okay dame. Wouldn't hurt to give it a try. What do you think?

**MAZY:** I think you got hit in the head too many times playing stickball, Sergeant Lewis.

*LEWIS laughs, then flips through the papers on his clipboard.*

**LEWIS:** Where the hell are my D-2's? I always forget the stupid D-2's.  
*(Starts to exit.)* Hold the fort down, Mazy. I shall return.

*LEWIS exits, as MAZY continues to mop and hum. She glances offstage at the sudden sound of women talking. DOTTY, HAZEL, PAULINE, and PEGGY quickly enter. All four wear period clothes of the 1940's, although PEGGY'S are obviously much more fashionable and expensive. They carry suitcases and purses, and they look around intently and curiously as they enter.*

**HAZEL:** Oh, it feels so good to finally get off that bus!

**PAULINE:** I'll say. Five hundred miles of oil wells, scrub brush, and beer joints. Texas is just as bleak from the ground as it is from the air. *(Glancing around at the barracks.)* Well, isn't this cozy?

**DOTTY:** Reminds me of summer camp.

*HAZEL suddenly runs to one of the cots and flops down on it.*

**HAZEL:** Dibs on this one! *(Lies back.)* Ah, this is heaven!

*DOTTY throws her suitcase on another cot.*

**DOTTY:** It's just a cot. (*Testing the mattress.*) Not very soft, either.

**HAZEL:** Who cares? I grew up in a two-bedroom apartment in Portland with four brothers and sisters. This is the first time I've had a bed to myself. (*Rubbing the mattress.*) And it's dry!

*MAZY has been quietly gathering up her cleaning supplies. She starts to hurriedly exit, then suddenly bumps into PEGGY. She drops her mop and nearly splashes PEGGY.*

**PEGGY:** (*Shrieking.*) You stupid little fool!

**MAZY:** I'm sorry, miss.

**PEGGY:** Sorry won't pay for a new dress! Can't you watch where you're going?

**MAZY:** I'm truly sorry, miss. Truly.

*MAZY quickly reaches for her mop, but DOTTY has picked it up. She hands it to MAZY with a shy smile. MAZY stares at her for a moment, obviously startled, then takes the mop and quickly exits.*

**PEGGY:** Honestly! Those people are so incredibly clumsy.

**DOTTY:** She said she was sorry.

**PEGGY:** Oh, who cares? (*Glancing around.*) I'm sorry, but this won't do. This just won't do at all.

**PAULINE:** How's that?

**PEGGY:** This... this place! Look at it, it's disgusting!

**PAULINE:** It's an army barracks, sweetie, not a hotel.

**PEGGY:** So? Does that mean we're not entitled to some comfort? I mean, really, look around. There's not even a place to hang our clothes.

*DOTTY opens one of the lockers.*

**DOTTY:** I think that's what these are for.

**PEGGY:** Oh, I don't think so!

*LEWIS suddenly enters, smiling broadly.*

**LEWIS:** Hi-de-ho, ladies!! Welcome to Avenger Field. My name is—

**PEGGY:** (*Interrupting.*) Are you the concierge?

**LEWIS:** The con-see-what?

**PEGGY:** The concierge, the manager, the person we go to with complaints?

**LEWIS:** You know, I've been called a lot a lot of things in my life, but that's a first. Yeah, I guess that would be me.

**PEGGY:** Good! I want to officially register a complaint as to these living conditions. They are completely unacceptable. Daddy will definitely hear about this.

**LEWIS:** Daddy?

**PEGGY:** My father, Jonathan Taylor. I'm Peggy Taylor. Jonathan Taylor? President of Taylor Airlines?

**LEWIS:** (*Still clueless.*) Oh, *that* Jonathan Taylor.

**PEGGY:** Yes, and I guarantee he won't like this one little bit. I mean, really, what sort of army is this? There are no dressers, no closets. And where is the ladies' room?

**LEWIS:** (*Nodding towards the nearby door.*) That would be in there.

**PEGGY:** But, that says "latrine".

**PAULINE:** That's military jargon, sweetie. I think it's an Indian word that means "powder room".

**LEWIS:** (*Catching the joke.*) Yeah. Yeah, that's exactly right. Apache, I think.

**PEGGY:** Thank God! I've been flying for nearly four hours.

**DOTTY:** You came here in your own plane?

**PEGGY:** Of course. Didn't you?

**DOTTY:** I came by bus.

**PEGGY:** Good for you, honey. I'm sure that was a grand adventure. But I have my own Piper. Uncle George gave it to me for my twenty-first birthday. Well, he's not really my uncle, he's my dad's best friend. George Putnam? You know, Amelia Earhart's husband.

**DOTTY:** You knew Amelia Earhart?

**PEGGY:** She's the reason I learned to fly. Daddy thought it would be great to have a girl pilot in the family. Terrific for publicity. Aunt Amelia – that's what I called her – she used to call me her little flying sister. She even wanted me to go around the world with her on her last flight, but Daddy said I was too young.

**PAULINE:** Too bad.

**PEGGY:** Excuse me?

**PAULINE:** That she disappeared. Terribly tragic.

*PEGGY frowns at her for a moment, then starts to open the latrine door. She steps back quickly with a horrified scream.*

**LEWIS:** What's wrong?

**PEGGY:** The toilets!

**LEWIS:** Are they backed up?

**PEGGY:** No! They're, they're... *(Beat.)* they're all out in the open! Oh, Daddy is definitely going to hear about this! What am I going to do? There was no place to land between here and Chicago.

**PAULINE:** Sweetie, I took care of that problem years ago. I cut a hole in the seat of my cockpit. Whenever I feel the urge I just scootch my britches down and look for an open field.

**PEGGY:** Eww! That's disgusting!

**PAULINE:** Call it whatever you like. *(Beat.)* Just be sure you always fly above me.

**PEGGY:** There has got to be a private bathroom somewhere in this hellhole! *(Hurriedly exits.)*

**LEWIS:** Good luck with that, toots. *(To the others.)* Is she always like that?

**PAULINE:** Jeez, I hope not.

**LEWIS:** In any event, allow me to reintroduce myself. I am, well, I am apparently the *concierge*. *(Bowing expansively.)* Lewis, Sergeant Andrew J. Lewis. Or, as my friends call me, Lucky Louie.

**PAULINE:** Okay, I'll bite. What makes you lucky, Louie?

**LEWIS:** Well, for one thing, I ain't overseas. And for another, I have the distinct pleasure of serving such lovely ladies as yours— *(Suddenly noticing DOTTY.)* Hel-lo, sugar! Are you rationed?

**DOTTY:** Rationed?

**LEWIS:** Taken. Married, engaged, going steady? Please, say it ain't so.

**DOTTY:** Can the corn, Romeo. Cheesy lines don't work on me.

**LEWIS:** Ah-ha! A practical gal. Excellent! Skip the chitchat and go right for the goods. Well then, what'll it be, toots? You name it, I can get it, rationing or not. In addition to being the concierge, I happen to be el dog-robber extraordinaire.

**HAZEL:** Dog-robber?

**LEWIS:** Yeah, you know, a gofer, scrounger. As they say in certain circles, if it ain't nailed down and Louie's around...

**DOTTY:** You mean you're a thief?

**LEWIS:** Thief? Really, toots, thief is such a denigrating word. I prefer...  
(*Beat.*) ...re-appropriator. Another Apache term.

**HAZEL:** Can you get nylons?

**LEWIS:** Sure. What's your size?

**DOTTY:** Wait a minute, they're not making nylons anymore. All of it's going to make parachutes for the war.

**LEWIS:** (*Grinning.*) What war?

**PAULINE:** What about beer?

**LEWIS:** Hmmm.

**PAULINE:** I thought so.

**LEWIS:** No, no, not impossible. Difficult, but not impossible. Also against regulations. Not that that's ever stopped me, of course. Now, if you had asked for a chocolate malted, that I could get today.

**HAZEL:** (*Eagerly.*) A chocolate malted? You can get a chocolate malted?

**LEWIS:** Absolutely. Smitty's Drugstore in Sweetwater. Best in the entire state of Texas.

**PAULINE:** Sweetie, if you can get us a chocolate malted, you just might live up to your name.

**LEWIS:** Hubba, hubba! Who said war is hell? (*Starts to exit.*) I'll be back in two shakes. Chocolate all around, right? (*To DOTTY.*) Except for you, toots. Strawberry, right? To match those luscious lips.

**DOTTY:** Chocolate's fine, thanks.

**LEWIS:** (*Exits.*) Hold down the fort, ladies. I shall return!

**DOTTY:** You do that, MacArthur. (*Beat.*) What a creep!

**PAULINE:** I think he likes you, sweetie.

**DOTTY:** Great. That's all I need, a dog-robber. Thanks, but I think I'll pass. (*Holds out her hand.*) Dorothy Moore. But everyone calls me Dotty.

**PAULINE:** Pauline Yates.

**DOTTY:** Pauline Yates? As in "Perilous Pauline", the barnstormer?

**PAULINE:** You've heard of me?

**DOTTY:** Are you kidding? I've seen you fly! Five years ago, at the New Mexico state fair. You did an outside loop above the grandstand. I remember everyone screamed and dove for cover when it looked like you were going to crash right into us. You pulled up just at the last second. Incredible!

**PAULINE:** Oh, yes, I remember that. I'll let you in on a little secret, sweetie. The throttle stuck. *(Beat.)* I almost did crash into you. What about you? Are you a barnstormer?

**DOTTY:** No. My dad's a crop duster in Clovis. He taught me to fly when I was ten. I went to work with him right after high school.

**PAULINE:** No brothers, I take it?

**DOTTY:** How did you know?

**PAULINE:** Sweetie, please, like everything else, the sky is a man's domain. The only reason I'm flying at all is because my husband lost his partner and needed a replacement in a hurry. We flew as a team, right up until he was killed a couple of years ago.

**DOTTY:** I'm so sorry.

**PAULINE:** Risks of the trade. But you know, once I started, I couldn't stop. Even after Ray died, I just had to get back up there. It's almost like a drug. *(To HAZEL.)* What about you, sweetie? Did you learn to fly in China? You are from China, right?

**HAZEL:** Second generation. *(Reaches down to shake PAULINE'S hand.)* Hazel Ying. I was born in Portland, but my father did diplomatic work in Nanking. My uncle flew for the Nationalist Air Force. He taught me how to fly when we were visiting one summer.

**DOTTY:** Nanking? Isn't that where the Japs killed so many people?

**HAZEL:** 'So many' is an understatement. Half the population was slaughtered. I flew transport planes the whole time the city was under siege. We managed to save quite a few, but a lot more still died.

**DOTTY:** You must have seen some terrible things.

**HAZEL:** Let's just say I was glad to get home.

**PAULINE:** So, here we are, three women crazy enough to fly, and even crazier to join the army.

**DOTTY:** I thought there were four of us.

**PAULINE:** You mean Miss Private Bladder of 1943? Well, crazy is a relative term. *(Beat.)* And some of us are more relative than others.

*PEGGY suddenly re-enters. She is still obviously flustered.*

**PEGGY:** Can you believe it? Every single bathroom in this place is exactly the same! And the worst part is that no one even seems to care!

**PAULINE:** War is hell.

**PEGGY:** *(To PAULINE.)* Honey, would you be a dear and stand guard while I go in there? I simply can't wait any longer.

**PAULINE:** Don't you worry, sweetie. I'll be like Horatio at the proverbial bridge. None shall pass.

**PEGGY:** Thanks! You're a peach!

*PEGGY exits through the latrine door. DOTTY and HAZEL glance at each other, then at PAULINE.*

**DOTTY:** Are you thinking what I'm thinking?

**PAULINE:** Way ahead of you. Give it just a minute. And... *(Beat, looking at her watch.)* ...now!

*DOTTY, PAULINE, and HAZEL all walk through the door. PEGGY screams from offstage. Blackout.*

### ACT ONE, SCENE 3

**AT RISE:** *The scene is the same barracks room one day later. DOTTY, PAULINE, PEGGY, and HAZEL are putting on military-style coveralls. Their last names are stenciled on the front, along with a WASP mascot patch. The clothing is obviously much too large for any of them, and DOTTY, PAULINE, and HAZEL struggle to roll up sleeves and pant legs. PEGGY wears the same ill-fitting uniform, along with jeweled earrings, and she sits on one of the bunk beds and applies makeup from a compact. PEGGY appears sullen and subdued.*

**PAULINE:** I give up! Are these coveralls or parachutes?

**HAZEL:** No kidding. I could fit all four of my siblings in here.

**DOTTY:** I'm not sure how many folds this cloth can make.

**PAULINE:** (*Holding out arms to display drooping sleeves.*) You certainly wouldn't know there are shortages in this country.

**DOTTY:** Don't they have anything smaller?

**HAZEL:** I heard Sgt. Lewis say the smallest available were 44 long. I didn't think our guys were all that big.

**PAULINE:** They're not. (*Beat.*) Oh, you mean height-wise. (*To PEGGY.*) What, no complaints about the uniform, sweetie? I would have thought you'd be calling daddy to send your seamstress in his private plane.

**PEGGY:** I'm not speaking to you. You're a very crass person.

**PAULINE:** Thanks. I try.

**PEGGY:** Not that it's any of your business, but I did call my father last night. He said that he understood my concerns, but he said that we all need to make sacrifices. In fact, he's even had to make some of his own. He just lost our chauffeur to the draft. Now he has to drive his own car.

**PAULINE:** (*Facetiously.*) No! Will the horrors of this war never end?

**DOTTY:** (*Appraising the coveralls.*) Maybe they shrink when they wash.

**HAZEL:** We can probably get Sgt. Lewis to scrounge some safety pins.

**DOTTY:** Please! He'd probably just steal them off of baby diapers at the local orphanage.

**LEWIS:** (*Suddenly stepping inside.*) I would never steal safety pins from orphans, toots. (*Beat.*) Candy, on the other hand...

**DOTTY:** Don't they teach you to knock in the army?

**LEWIS:** They do, but I passed it up for jeep repair. For what it's worth, I think you gals look swell. (*To DOTTY.*) In fact, *you* would look swell in anything, sweetheart. Like an angel in gossamer.

**DOTTY:** Oh, be still my foolish heart!

**LEWIS:** Finally starting to grow on you, huh?

**DOTTY:** Oh, yeah. Like a fungus. Take a powder, creep.

*LEWIS winks at her slyly and clicks his tongue. DOTTY looks away in apparent disgust, but it's obvious she's intrigued.*

**PAULINE:** The malts were terrific, Louie.

**HAZEL:** Yes! Thank you so much. It almost made up for that horrible supper last night. What was that stuff, anyway?

**LEWIS:** Ah, yes, the chipped beef on toast. Or, as we lovingly call it, SOS.

**PAULINE:** SOS?

**LEWIS:** Shit on a shingle. Better get used to it, ladies, it's an army staple, along with powdered eggs and Spam. Army chow leaves a lot to be desired. *(Beat.)* Like taste.

**HAZEL:** Do you know if they have a Chinese restaurant in Sweetwater, Louie? I'd kill for some Peking Duck.

**LEWIS:** To be honest, I'm not sure they have any *Chinese* in Sweetwater. But I'll check. *(To PEGGY.)* By the way, toots, I managed to scrounge some plywood. Thought I'd build some partitions for the toilets.

**PEGGY:** Really? *(Beat.)* Oh, well, better than nothing, I suppose. And it's Miss Taylor, not toots.

**LEWIS:** You're welcome, toots. Listen, ladies, I came to give you a heads-up, Miss Cochran will be visiting the barracks this morning. *(Glancing at his watch.)* She should be here any minute.

**DOTTY:** *(Eagerly.)* Jackie Cochran? Coming here?

**HAZEL:** I've always wanted to meet her!

**LEWIS:** Just be sure to look sharp.

*COCHRAN, an attractive blond woman, steps inside the barracks unseen to LEWIS. She wears a military-style bomber jacket emblazoned with the WASP mascot and silver WASP wings.*

**COCHRAN:** Actually, sergeant, they look very sharp to me.

*DOTTY, PAULINE, HAZEL, and PEGGY form a hurried shoulder-to-shoulder line and salute COCHRAN. COCHRAN flashes a pleasant smile.*

**COCHRAN:** Please, ladies, there's no need for that. I'm a civilian just like you. On behalf of General Hap Arnold and the Army Air Corps, I'd like to welcome you to Avenger Field and the great state of Texas. Most of you probably noticed on your arrival that there isn't much here in the way of scenery. I'm not sure what God intended when He created Texas, but He must have found it amusing. It's one of the few places on earth where cows outnumber people. Just be sure not to take off or land whenever there are cattle on the strip. It's not good for the cow or the aircraft, and we have to pay for both if they're damaged. The cows are incredibly expensive, and the aircraft only slightly more so. *(Beat.)* Pilots we replace for free.

*COCHRAN patiently waits for the chuckling to stop before continuing.*

**COCHRAN:** Seriously, you ladies are here because you're pilots. You've passed the basic criteria: you have a license, more than two hundred hours of flight time, and you've made it through the physical and psychological testing. Now comes the hard part, learning to fly military aircraft. For the next four months, you will undergo a grueling series of classes related to military flight, including mechanics, radar, navigation, and even engine repair. *(Taps the silver wings on her lapel.)* Once we're certain you've mastered those skills, you'll be permitted to wear these wings and fly Army planes. And fly you will. Your job will be to ferry aircraft from the factories to the coasts, where our boys will pick them up and take them overseas.

**PEGGY:** *(Eagerly, suddenly interrupting.)* Will we get to fly overseas?

**COCHRAN:** *(Slightly piqued at the interruption.)* No. That's reserved only for the men. Now, it's important you realize that, as civilian employees, you're free to leave at any time. But, if you do choose to stay, you will conduct yourselves accordingly and follow all Army rules and regulations. *(To PEGGY.)* That means no makeup or jewelry, cadet. Sorry.

**PEGGY:** But, how are we supposed to look our best?

**COCHRAN:** *(Eyeing PEGGY'S name tag.)* Cadet... Taylor, is it? We're here to fly, Cadet Taylor. There will be opportunities for publicity photos, at which point you will need to look presentable, of course. But for the most part no one will see you.

**PEGGY:** (*Obviously frustrated.*) You don't remember me, do you, Miss Cochran?

**COCHRAN:** I don't think so. Have we met?

**PEGGY:** Peggy Taylor. Jonathan Taylor's daughter. We met at a fundraising benefit in Chicago last year. You were helping Daddy raise war bonds. He raised over ten thousand dollars that night!

**COCHRAN:** Oh, yes, of course, Taylor Airlines. Your father has done a lot to promote the WASPs, and it's very much appreciated. (*Beat, pleasantly.*) But you still can't wear makeup and earrings, Cadet Taylor. Sorry.

*PEGGY visibly deflates as COCHRAN continues.*

**COCHRAN:** The army will pay you one hundred and fifty dollars a month for your services, which, you might be interested to know, is twice the amount your male counterparts receive. However, as civilians, you will be responsible for all of your own expenses. Should you choose to stay here on the base, you will be charged one dollar and sixty five cents per day for room and board. You will also be responsible for your uniforms, laundry, personal toiletries, and any medical and dental expense. (*Beat.*) I know, it sounds daunting, but trust me, I've yet to see any of my ladies go broke. Speaking of which, I expect all of my ladies to be just that, ladies. No drinking, no carousing, no fraternizing... (*Glancing at LEWIS.*) ...regardless of how handsome our soldiers may be. You are members of the Women Airforce Service Pilots, and as such, you have a tremendous obligation to live up to, and I fully expect you to appreciate that. (*Beat, solemn.*) Finally, you need to know up front that this will be a risky endeavor. As pilots, you know as well as I do that flying is a dangerous business. Accidents happen. I've already lost a few girls, and, much as it pains me, it's likely I'll lose a few more. I pray that you aren't among them. Be diligent, be careful, and be safe. Now, are there any questions?

**DOTTY:** (*Excitedly.*) Miss Cochran, it's such an incredible honor to meet you! I've heard so much about you. You're the speed queen! (*Beat, suddenly embarrassed.*) Oh, I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to...

**COCHRAN:** It's all right, Cadet Moore. I've been called much worse, believe me. That's one of the few names I'm actually proud of. And the honor is entirely mine, as it is to meet all of you ladies.

**DOTTY:** You won the Harmon Trophy, twice! And the Bendix Race. Los Angeles to Cleveland in eight hours! That was a faster time than Jimmy Doolittle!

**COCHRAN:** I had the advantage of seven years and a faster plane. I'm fairly certain he'd beat me now. Besides, he made it all the way to Tokyo to bomb the Japs, something I would dearly love to do.

**PAULINE:** (*Holding out her flopping sleeves.*) Is there anything we can do about these, ma'am?

**COCHRAN:** (*Laughing.*) I'm afraid the army isn't known for its sense of women's fashions, Cadet Yates. But we do have a young Negress who works on the base. She's an excellent seamstress. She can make the modifications. Sergeant Lewis will arrange it, I'm sure. (*Gesturing to LEWIS.*) By the way, all of you should know that Sergeant Lewis is the glue that holds this entire motley effort together. As you'll soon learn, however, he has his own way of doing things, which I have wisely learned not to question. Isn't that right, sergeant?

**LEWIS:** (*Slyly.*) I have no idea what you're referring to, ma'am.

**COCHRAN:** Of course not. Let's keep it that way.

*EVANS and JOHN WHITAKER suddenly enter. WHITAKER'S face is badly scarred. WHITAKER eyes the women with a very sullen expression.*

**LEWIS:** (*Snapping once again to attention and saluting.*) Atten-hut!

*EVANS returns the salute quickly and nods a greeting. He appears harried and distracted.*

**EVANS:** Miss Cochran. Sorry I'm late. Army business, you know.

**COCHRAN:** Yes, sir! (*To the women.*) Ladies, allow me introduce our base commander, Colonel Evans.

*EVANS clears his throat and steps forward. He is obviously uncomfortable.*

**EVANS:** Thank you, Miss Cochran. (*Nods at the women.*) Ladies. Welcome to Avenger Field. Let me first say that I am extremely proud of Miss Cochran and the entire WASP initiative. You ladies are playing a vital role in our efforts to win this war, and I commend you for your service. I know it must have been difficult, being women, leaving home and family behind. I truly hope you don't find our military ways too overwhelming for such lovely ladies as yourselves. (*Looks at each of them with a cloying smile.*) Of course, that being said, it's extremely important that you realize this *is* a military base, and that certain protocols and decorum must be maintained at all times. At no time will there be any sort of fraternization between yourselves and the base personnel, either officer or enlisted. I trust each and every one of you to remember that.

**COCHRAN:** (*Smiling thinly.*) All of my ladies understand that, Colonel Evans.

**EVANS:** I have absolutely no doubt of that, Miss Cochran. But nature is what nature is. (*Glances at his watch.*) Well, once again, duty calls. I'll leave you to carry on, then. (*To the women, with another forced smile.*) Ladies.

*COCHRAN, LEWIS, and WHITAKER salute as EVANS nods curtly and exits. COCHRAN glances at WHITAKER for a brief moment, her expression blank, then shares a brief look with LEWIS.*

**COCHRAN:** (*To the women.*) This is Captain John Whitaker. He will be your flight instructor for the duration of your training. In addition to being a skilled pilot, Captain Whitaker is also a bona fide ace. He shot down six Japanese aircraft during the Guadalcanal campaign. (*Beat.*) An action for which he won the Silver Star.

*PEGGY, PUALINE, DOTTY, and HAZEL stare at WHITAKER with curiosity. WHITAKER stands silently, his expression still stoic and sullen.*

**COCHRAN:** The captain's job is to teach you how to fly military aircraft, and to fly them safely. Listen carefully to what he tells you, because it's meant to keep you alive. Isn't that right, Captain Whitaker?

**WHITAKER:** It is indeed. *(Beat, almost snidely.)* Miss Cochran.

**COCHRAN:** *(Reacts to the snub almost imperceptibly, smiling at the women.)* I will leave you in Captain Whitaker's capable hands, then. *(Beat, saluting the women.)* A pleasure to meet all of you, ladies. Again, welcome to the WASPs. I truly look forward to serving with you.

*PEGGY, PUALINE, DOTTY, and HAZEL return COCHRAN'S salute. COCHRAN and LEWIS share another brief look as she exits. LEWIS remains, eyeing WHITAKER with an anxious expression. WHITAKER continues to stand quietly, eyeing the women intently. The silence slowly becomes uncomfortable, and PEGGY, PUALINE, DOTTY, and HAZEL begin to glance at one another anxiously.*

**WHITAKER:** *(After a long beat.)* You know, I've been in this man's army for twelve long years, and I thought I'd seen every stupid, dumbass, cockeyed idea the brass could ever come up with. But this? This takes the friggin' cake. *(Scoffs.)* Women pilots! Now I know this country's gone to hell. As far as I'm concerned, women shouldn't even be in the army, let alone in the air. *(Beat.)* However, since I did swear an oath to serve my country, no matter how FUBAR it may be, I intend to do my best to teach you broads how to fly. From this point on, you will do exactly as I say, *when* I say, and *how* I say, and you will *not question my orders.* *(Beat.)* Is that understood?

**PAULINE:** *(Incredulous.)* Is it all right if we breathe?

**WHITAKER:** I don't like smart-asses, doll-face, especially the female kind. You have something to say to me, you will address me as *sir*.

**PAULINE:** I'm sorry. *(Beat.)* Is it all right if we breathe, *sir*?

**WHITAKER:** *(Glaring contemptuously.)* Don't push it, doll-face. *(Turns to PEGGY.)* What about you, baby doll? You got something smart-aleck to say?

**PEGGY:** *(Obviously taken aback.)* You... you... you're mean!

**WHITAKER:** Mean? *(Laughs.)* Baby doll, you haven't seen *mean*. Trust me, you don't want to.

*PEGGY struggles with her emotions, then finally loses her composure and begins to cry.*

**WHITAKER:** Oh, did the big bad soldier hurt the little fly baby's feelings? (*Chanting.*) Fly baby, cry baby!

*DOTTY looks at LEWIS pleadingly.*

**LEWIS:** Sir, with all due respect, you might want—

**WHITAKER:** Am I talking to you, sergeant?

**LEWIS:** (*Snapping to attention.*) Sir! No, sir!

**WHITAKER:** Then shut the hell up.

**DOTTY:** (*To WHITAKER.*) Why are you talking to her like that?

**WHITAKER:** Little girl, I can talk to any of you however the hell I please — you heard Goldilocks.

**DOTTY:** Who?

**WHITAKER:** (*Sneering.*) Sorry, *Miss Cochran*. Like she said, my job is to teach you how to fly and keep you alive while doing it. If you die it'll be your own stupid fault. Not that I even give a damn. (*Looks at HAZEL curiously.*) Ying? Are you a Jap?

*HAZEL is too stunned to reply.*

**DOTTY:** She's Chinese. (*Beat.*) Sir.

**WHITAKER:** There's a difference?

**PAULINE:** Her people have been fighting the Japs longer than we have.

**WHITAKER:** Too bad they didn't kill each other off. (*To HAZEL.*) A chink, huh? Well, Ying-Yong, I didn't know they even had planes in China. I thought they just laid around all day smoking opium.

**HAZEL:** (*With a broken Cantonese accent, suddenly grinning.*) Oh, yes, we have planes! They made of bamboo. All run by pedals!

**WHITAKER:** (*Obviously taken aback.*) Pedals?

**HAZEL:** *(With a broken Cantonese accent.)* Oh, yes, pedals! Have to pedal very fast, keep propeller turning! Need very strong legs, otherwise *(Blows raspberry.)* Land in rice paddy! I have strong legs. Grandfather, he try flying, but his legs not strong enough. *(Blows raspberry.)* He land in rice paddy.

*HAZEL smiles at him sweetly. WHITAKER stares at her. He's not completely sure if she's serious.*

**WHITAKER:** Yeah, well, we don't have many rice paddies around here. Hurts a little worse if you hit the ground. *(To all of them.)* All right, fly babies, listen up. Starting tomorrow morning, we're gonna see exactly what sort of mettle you're made of. Don't expect me to be impressed, because we all know it's a waste of time. Just behave yourselves and I might not have to spank you. *(Starts to exit, then looks at HAZEL.)* Tell you what, Ying-Yong, I'll go and see if they have any flied lice in the mess hall. *(Laughs as he exits.)*

**HAZEL:** *(Glaring after him.)* It's fried rice. *(Beat. With a broken Cantonese accent.)* Prick.

**DOTTY:** *(To the others, incredulous.)* What the hell was that?

**PAULINE:** Sweetie that was your typical, run-of-the-mill male bastard. He's marked his territory and warned the females to stay away. You really threw him for a loop, Hazel. I don't think he knew if you were kidding.

**HAZEL:** That was always my father's defense. Make the round-eye think you're crazy and he'll leave you alone.

**DOTTY:** *(To LEWIS, sharply.)* Why didn't you do something?

**LEWIS:** *(Shrugging.)* Nothing I could do, toots. *(Taps his chevrons.)* Bars trump stripes.

**HAZEL:** What's wrong with him, anyway? What happened to his face?

**LEWIS:** He and his squadron got jumped by a flight of Jap Zeros over Guadalcanal. They were all killed, except Whitaker. He managed to shoot down six before they splashed him in the sea. He got burned pretty bad before he could bail out.

**DOTTY:** But why is he here with us?

**LEWIS:** His wounds keep him from flying, so the only thing he can do is train. But, he can't train combat pilots.

**PAULINE:** So they gave him to the WASPs. Lucky us. *(To PEGGY.)*

Are you okay, sweetie?

**PEGGY:** *(Still sobbing.)* No, I'm not okay! He yelled at me!

**LEWIS:** You get yelled at a lot in the army, toots. Better get used to it.

**PEGGY:** I don't want to be in the army! I want to go home!

**PAULINE:** *(Sharply.)* Then go home!

**PEGGY:** *(Wailing.)* I can't!

**HAZEL:** Why?

**PEGGY:** Daddy won't let me! He said me being in the WASPs is the best publicity he's had in years. He said if I quit I'd be on my own. I don't know where to go. Oh, God, I don't want to be alone!

**PAULINE:** *(Softening.)* Peggy, listen to me. Sweetie, stop crying and listen! You're not alone. We're all in this together. Look around you, Peggy. There are no daddies here. Or mommies, or husbands. It's just us. And as long as we work together, we can do this. *(Beat, turning to the others.)* I don't know about the rest of you, but I came here to fly, and no pompous army asshole is going to stop me, hero or otherwise.

**DOTTY:** Did you hear what he called us, Pauline? *Fly babies.*

**PAULINE:** I heard. But you know something? I kind of like it. Has a nice ring to it. Fly babies. *(Beat.)* What do you say, ladies? How's about we show that son of a bitch exactly what we *are* made of? *(Holds out her hand.)* Fly babies.

**DOTTY:** *(After a beat, clasps PAULINE'S hand firmly.)* Fly babies.

**HAZEL:** *(Adds her own hand.)* Fly babies.

*They all turn to PEGGY. She stares at them silently for a moment, struggling for composure, then nods quickly and grabs their hands.*

**PEGGY:** Fly babies.

*Blackout.*

**ACT ONE, SCENE 4**

**AT RISE:** *The scene is a military classroom a few days later. Various WWII-era military-style posters, pictures, and aircraft blueprints hang on the walls. DOTTY, PAULINE, HAZEL, and PEGGY sit together in chair desks facing a large blackboard. The blackboard is divided into chalked grids which list last names, aircraft numbers, and operational status. WHITAKER stands in front of them and holds a wooden model airplane, which he maneuvers as he speaks.*

**WHITAKER:** ...So, as the angle of the bank increases, or the rate of climb accelerates, so does the G-force. Depending on how fast you're climbing, you can very easily black out. It's always best to keep your rate of acceleration smooth and steady. (To PEGGY.) By the way, baby doll, can you tell me what the "G" stands for?

**PEGGY:** *(Beat, obviously uncertain.)* Gravity...?

**WHITAKER:** Very good. You get a gold star. Won't momma and daddy be proud? (To HAZEL.) You know, I always wondered whether gravity was the same in China as it is over here, given that they're on the opposite side of the world. Tell me, Ying Yong, does what go up always come down, or do you just float off into space?

**HAZEL:** *(With a broken Cantonese accent.)* Oh, yes, gravity same. Always come down. Just like grandfather. *(Blows raspberry. Then leaves her tongue sticking out for a moment longer than necessary. Grins at WHITAKER innocently.)*

**PAULINE:** What about negative G's? That rate can be a lot worse on a dive, like when you're coming out of a loop.

**WHITAKER:** What would you know about loops?

**PAULINE:** I'm a barnstormer. I do them all the time.

**WHITAKER:** Oh, a barnstormer. You mean you do your cute little stunts for the circus kiddies? Isn't that sweet? Listen, doll face, you won't be doing any stunts here. The only time a loop is needed in the army is when you're trying to get the bastard who just killed your wing man. When you've just seen four of your best friends blown out of the sky, then you come and talk to me about loops.

**PAULINE:** I pulled my husband out of a burning wreckage and watched him die in my arms. Does that count? *(Beat.)* Sir?

*WHITAKER stares at her for a long moment. It is obvious he doesn't know what to say. He is about to reply when MAZY suddenly enters. She is carrying a large box full of trash.*

**WHITAKER:** *(To MAZY.)* What the hell do you want?

**MAZY:** I'm just here to get the trash, sir.

**WHITAKER:** You should have done that earlier. We're in the middle of a class.

**MAZY:** Yes, sir. Sorry, sir. I meant to, but I was busy.

**WHITAKER:** You mean lazy.

**MAZY:** Yes, sir. *(Beat, starts to exit.)* I'll come back.

**WHITAKER:** No, go ahead and get it. Just be quick.

**MAZY:** Yes, sir. *(Starts to collect the trash from a corner of the room.)*

**WHITAKER:** *(To PAULINE.)* Okay, Miss Barnstormer, you think you know so much about looping? What's a possible effect of an accelerated climb on a carburetor-fed engine?

**PAULINE:** *(Frowns anxiously.)* I know this. Ray talked about it a couple of times. Something to do with the fuel line?

*WHITAKER smirks, then looks at the others.*

**WHITAKER:** How about the rest of you? Come on, ladies, you're supposed to be pilots. This is something you damn well may face, and you'd better be ready for it. What's a possible effect of an accelerated climb on a carburetor-fed engine?

*PEGGY, PAULINE, DOTTY, and HAZEL look at each other curiously. MAZY has started to leave with the trash, but she stops to listen. She eyes the others silently.*

**PEGGY:** What's a carburetor?

**WHITAKER:** Baby doll, I'm gonna pretend you never said that. *(Beat.)* I'm waiting, fly babies.

**MAZY:** Gravity causes the fuel to stop flowing. The engine could die.

**WHITAKER:** *(Sharply.)* How do you know that?

**MAZY:** Because it happened to me.

**WHITAKER:** You?

**MAZY:** Yes, sir. *(Beat.)* I'm a pilot.

*PEGGY, PAULINE, DOTTY, and HAZEL look at one another in disbelief.*

**WHITAKER:** You can't possibly be a pilot! You're a nig—

**MAZY:** *(Interrupting sharply.)* I'm still a pilot.

**WHITAKER:** Nobody trains colored women pilots in this country. Where'd you get your license?

**MAZY:** In France, at the FAI. Same place as Amelia Earhart. *(Beat.)* And Bessie Coleman.

**PAULINE:** Bessie Coleman?

**WHITAKER:** Who the hell is Bessie Coleman?

**PAULINE:** She was a barnstormer, one of the best. *(Beat, looking back at MAZY.)* And she was colored.

**WHITAKER:** *(To MAZY.)* Little mammy, if you think for a minute I would actually believe that load of bull crap, then you're out of your f—

*As he speaks, MAZY reaches into her pocket and pulls out a small leather wallet. She opens it as she walks toward WHITAKER and holds it out at arm's length. WHITAKER stops talking abruptly as he stares at the wallet.*

**WHITAKER:** Son of a bitch! Now I have seen everything! First it's broads, then it's chinks, now it's niggers! I need a smoke!

*WHITAKER brusquely pushes past MAZY and exits. PAULINE looks at MAZY, gesturing to the wallet.*

**PAULINE:** May I see that? *(Beat.)* Please?

*MAZY stares at her for a moment, obviously uncertain, then hands her the wallet. DOTTY and the others lean in to try to see it.*

**PEGGY:** What's the FAI?

**HAZEL:** The Fédération Aéronautique Internationale. They govern the standards for sports flying. If you're going to break a record, they're the ones who set it.

**PAULINE:** They were founded by the Olympic Congress. (*Looking at MAZY.*) And they only take top pilots.

**DOTTY:** (*To MAZY.*) How did you get this?

*MAZY glares at her, then grabs the license from PAULINE.*

**MAZY:** I earned it! (*Angrily turns away and grabs the box of trash.*)

**DOTTY:** No, wait! That's not what I meant. I—

*MAZY hurriedly exits without reply. DOTTY and the others stare at each other.*

**PAULINE:** Well, I'll be damned...

*Blackout.*

## ACT ONE, SCENE 5

**AT RISE:** *The scene is the women's barracks in early evening. PAULINE, HAZEL, and PEGGY are putting on civilian clothes and applying makeup. DOTTY still wears her coveralls and sits on one of the cots writing a letter.*

**HAZEL:** Can you believe Louie actually found a Chinese restaurant in Sweetwater? Let's hope they make a decent Peking Duck.

**PAULINE:** What if they don't?

**HAZEL:** Then I'll go back in the kitchen and make it myself.

**PEGGY:** You'd do that? Just barge into someone's restaurant and take over?

**HAZEL:** Sure. (*Beat, grinning.*) I speak the language.

*PAULINE points to a small stuffed toy duck sitting on top of HAZEL'S locker.*

**PAULINE:** Speaking of ducks, what is that?

**HAZEL:** That's Yaya, my good luck charm.

**PAULINE:** A duck for luck?

**HAZEL:** Why not? Ducks fly in all sorts of weather. Nothing ever grounds them. Besides that, they're delicious.

**PEGGY:** Well, I don't care about restaurants, but I'd definitely like to get a drink. Maybe go dancing.

**HAZEL:** Louie said someone named Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys were in town. He said they're really popular, sort of like the Texas Glenn Miller.

**PEGGY:** Better than nothing, I guess. Do you think there'll be guys there?

**HAZEL:** Definitely not soldiers. They're forbidden to come anywhere near us. I heard they call Avenger Field "Cochran's Convent".

**PAULINE:** Well, I'm not quite ready to be a nun. Trouble is, the only civilian men who haven't gone off to fight are too young, too old, or too stupid.

**PEGGY:** Too stupid for what?

**PAULINE:** Never mind.

**HAZEL:** *(Frowns at her skirt hem.)* Uh, oh.

**DOTTY:** *(Glancing up from her letter.)* What's the matter?

**HAZEL:** Thread in my hem tore. I'll have to pin it.

**DOTTY:** Maybe that colored girl can fix it for you. She did a fairly decent job with the overall sleeves.

**PEGGY:** Speaking of which; do you really believe she's a pilot?

**PAULINE:** Her license looked real enough. Hard to fake something like that. *(Glances down at her leg.)* Damn, I've got a run in my stocking. That was my last good pair, too. Looks like I'll have to take Louie up on his black market offer.

**HAZEL:** *(Holds out her eyebrow pencil.)* Why don't you just draw a seam? That's what I always do.

**PAULINE:** Sweetie, if I had legs like yours that wouldn't be a problem. But on me they'd just look like two sagging burlap sacks. Anyone have any clear nail polish?

**DOTTY:** There's some in my locker. Top shelf.

*PAULINE opens DOTTY'S locker and screams loudly.*

**PAULINE:** Snake!

*PEGGY screams and swiftly clambers up on one of the cots. DOTTY and HAZEL move warily closer and peer into the locker.*

**HAZEL:** Is it poisonous?

**DOTTY:** It's a garter snake. And it's dead.

**PAULINE:** Cripes! I nearly peed my pants. Very funny, Dotty!

**DOTTY:** I didn't put it there! It probably crawled in from outside.

**HAZEL:** Pranks.

**DOTTY:** What?

**HAZEL:** Louie said there's somebody on the base pulling pranks on the women. They think it's one of the enlisted men, but they don't know who.

**DOTTY:** It's probably *Louie*. That jerk!

**PAULINE:** Well, after that I really do need a drink.

**PEGGY:** I hate snakes. Are you sure it's dead?

**DOTTY:** Yep. (*Picks up the snake.*) Want to see?

**PEGGY:** (*Screams again and jumps off the cot.*) No, I don't want to see!

**DOTTY:** (*Starts toward the latrine.*) Fine. I'll flush it down the toilet.

**PEGGY:** Like hell you will! I can't stand going in there to begin with.

**PAULINE:** This time I'm with her. Throw that thing in the toilet and I may have to cut a hole in one of the trainers.

*DOTTY chuckles and throws the snake out of the barracks door.*

**DOTTY:** Happy, now?

**PAULINE:** Hell, no; I'm not drunk, yet. Aren't you coming with us?

**DOTTY:** I'd really like to, but I owe my folks a letter. Think I'll just stay here and turn in early.

**PAULINE:** Suit yourself. You're wasting a perfectly good Saturday night. Not to mention a chance to get away from Frankenstein.

**DOTTY:** Franken...? Oh, you mean Captain Whitaker.

**PAULINE:** An asshole by any other name...

**DOTTY:** That's not very nice, Pauline.

**PAULINE:** Neither is he.

**DOTTY:** He'll still be here Monday morning, unfortunately. But you have a good time.

**PAULINE:** Thanks. Maybe I'll get lucky and find a handsome Texas cowboy with flat feet. *(Beat.)* Long as that's the only thing that's flat. *(To the others.)* Come on, ladies, the Fly Babies are going to soar!

*DOTTY laughs as they exit, then resumes writing her letter. MAZY appears the door holding some folded clothing. She knocks lightly on the door jam.*

**MAZY:** Excuse me, I have some sewing for Miss Yates.

**DOTTY:** Oh, yes, just leave it on her bunk, I guess. *(Gesturing.)* That one there.

*MAZY hurriedly sets the clothing down and starts to exit.*

**DOTTY:** Wait, please. I'm sorry, I don't know your name.

*MAZY pauses, eyeing DOTTY warily.*

**MAZY:** Grace. Grace Buford. But most folks call me Mazy.

**DOTTY:** Mazy? That's an unusual name.

**MAZY:** It's short for Amazing.

**DOTTY:** Excuse me?

**MAZY:** Amazing Grace Buford. *(Beat.)* My mama really loved that hymn.

**DOTTY:** *(Laughing.)* So does mine. I think it's a very nice name. I'm Dotty Moore.

**MAZY:** Miss Moore.

**DOTTY:** Please, call me Dotty.

*MAZY shakes her head with a shy smile and quickly starts to exit.*

**DOTTY:** *(Stands quickly.)* Wait, please, don't go, not just yet. I wanted... *(Beat.)* I wanted to tell you I was sorry. About your license, the other day in the classroom. I didn't mean to imply you hadn't earned it, truly.

**MAZY:** That's all right.

**DOTTY:** How did you learn to fly, if you don't mind my asking?

**MAZY:** You mean because I'm colored?

**DOTTY:** No. *(Beat.)* Well, yes, I guess so. I'm sorry. I've never known many colored people.

**MAZY:** *(Straight-faced.)* We don't bite.

**DOTTY:** *(Laughs, obviously taken aback.)* No, it's not that. I'm just curious, that's all. My dad taught me to fly. Did your father teach you?

**MAZY:** My papa was a janitor. He never set foot in an airplane. Never drove an automobile, either.

**DOTTY:** Then how did you come to learn? And in France?

**MAZY:** Only place I could. There's a few places here that'll teach colored men, but no one takes colored women.

**DOTTY:** And they do in France?

**MAZY:** They don't seem to mind us over there. Not really sure why. Reckon they never had slaves.

**DOTTY:** *(Beat.)* How did you get there? I'm sorry, I don't mean to be nosy. It just sounds so... exciting. What made you want to fly?

**MAZY:** When I was five years old, papa took me to the state fair. There was a plane there, doing all kinds of loops and rolls. It landed on the grass right in front of me, and I watched the pilot climb out. It was a colored girl. Papa said her name was Bessie Coleman. He took me right over to her and that plane. I remember she looked down at me and smiled, and she asked if I wanted to go for a ride. She was selling rides for fifty cents, but papa told her he didn't have the money. She told him that was fine, any little girl pretty as I was could ride for free. She sat me right in her lap and we flew all over that fair. *(Smiles to herself with a look of exuberance.)* Lord, I remember that day as if it was yesterday. I felt like a bird, looking down at all those people as tiny as little ants. Right then I knew, one way or another, I was going to fly.

**DOTTY:** I know the feeling. My dad would take me up in his crop duster all the time. We'd fly over our house and I'd wave down at my mother while she was hanging the laundry. I'd see my friends' houses, my school, the town, the whole world just spread out below, as far as you could see. It made you feel like, like...

**MAZY:** Like God?

**DOTTY:** Yeah. *(Beat.)* Almost like God.

**MAZY:** When I got older, I found out Bessie got her license in France. Mama had taught me how to sew pretty well, so I figured I could get a job as a seamstress and work my way over. Took me two years, but I saved enough for a boat ticket. Took me another year working in Paris for enough to apply to the FAI. I wasn't even sure they'd let me in, but I knew I wasn't going home without trying. But they did. They let me in. I earned my license, and then I flew all the time.

**DOTTY:** That must have been incredible!

**MAZY:** It was grand. The whole time was grand. The French pilots, they sort of... adopted me, I guess. They took turns letting me fly with them over Paris. I even buzzed the Eiffel Tower. Twice! (*Beat, quietly.*) Then papa died, and I had to come home. Haven't been able to fly much since.

**DOTTY:** What about the WASPs? Did you apply?

**MAZY:** I applied. (*Beat.*) They sent my application back.

**DOTTY:** Have you told this to Miss Cochran? I bet if you talked to her she'd listen.

**MAZY:** You sound just like Sergeant Lewis.

**DOTTY:** Sergeant Lewis? He knows you can fly?

**MAZY:** Mm-hmm. And I'll tell you what I told him; it won't do no good.

**DOTTY:** But your training, the FAI, that has to count for—

**MAZY:** Waste of time, Miss Moore. We both know that.

**DOTTY:** Doesn't seem fair.

**MAZY:** Lots of things in life ain't fair. But you learn to live with them.

**DOTTY:** Forgive me for asking, Mazy, but, if you can't fly, why are you here?

**MAZY:** Because I want to serve. It's my country, too. (*Beat.*) Even if some folks don't think so. And even if all I ever do is sew uniforms or clean barracks, it's still something. Besides, I wanted to be close to it again. I wanted to hear the engines, smell the fuel. It's like something that gets into your blood, you know? Once it's there it can never come out. Does that make any sense?

**DOTTY:** I think so, yes.

**MAZY:** I have to go.

**DOTTY:** It was nice meeting you, Mazy.

**MAZY:** Nice meeting you, too. (*Turns to leave, beat, turns to DOTTY.*) I hope you do real well, Miss Moore, real well.

*MAZY nods a goodbye and swiftly exits. DOTTY stares after her anxiously. Blackout.*

### ACT ONE, SCENE 6

*AT RISE: Barracks Classroom a few days later. COCHRAN, LEWIS, EVANS, and WHITAKER are together. LEWIS stands at attention in front of COCHRAN, holding his ubiquitous clipboard.*

**EVANS:** *(To LEWIS.)* Cow manure?

**LEWIS:** Yes, sir. We found it in one of the trainer cockpits.

**COCHRAN:** Where did it come from?

**WHITAKER:** *(Smirking.)* Probably from one of the cattle. There's a lot of them around the base.

**COCHRAN:** *(With a scowl at WHITAKER.)* I meant; who put it there?

**LEWIS:** We don't know, ma'am. But we're trying to find out.

**EVANS:** Why would someone put cow manure in an aircraft?

**WHITAKER:** Hijinks.

**EVANS:** Excuse me?

**WHITAKER:** Probably just some of the boys having fun, colonel. You know, base hijinks.

**COCHRAN:** Is that what you call destruction of government property, captain? Hijinks?

**WHITAKER:** *(Scoffs.)* It can be cleaned out, ma'am. No worse than when a pilot throws up from airsickness.

**EVANS:** Is the aircraft still functional?

**WHITAKER:** Absolutely, sir. Might be a little smelly for a while, but no harm done. *(Smirks at COCHRAN.)* Kind of funny, when you think about it.

**EVANS:** *(Chuckles.)* I suppose it is. Soldiers do get bored, especially way out here. I suppose it's natural for them to let off a little steam now and then, pull a few pranks. *(Smiling at COCHRAN.)* Happens on every army base.

**COCHRAN:** *(Returning the smile sweetly.)* Ah, yes, of course. Boys being boys. *(Beat.)* Like drilling peepholes in the women's shower. Yes, I'm all too familiar with that sort of behavior, Colonel Evans.

**EVANS:** (*Scowling uncomfortably.*) Now, now, Miss Cochran, I don't think there's any need for you to be upset. It's just a harmless prank.

**COCHRAN:** With all due respect, colonel, this isn't the first such *prank*. My ladies are doing their best to maintain that level of protocol and decorum you demand, but it's extremely difficult when that respect isn't returned. There are pilots deliberately diverting their flights to Avenger because they've heard a rumor that my girls sunbathe nude on the roofs.

**LEWIS:** (*Incredulous.*) They do?

*COCHRAN looks at him sharply. LEWIS quickly flips through his clipboard papers.*

**EVANS:** (*Sharply.*) Miss Cochran, all of my soldiers understand the meaning of respect, especially for the fairer sex. But a few harmless jokes never hurt anyone. That's the army way. (*Glancing at WHITAKER with a sly grin.*) Why, I remember once in France, during the Great War, we found a, well, a lady of the evening, and we hid her in the chaplain's tent. You should have seen his face when—

**COCHRAN:** (*Interrupting.*) Forgive me, Colonel Evans, but my fear is that it may very well go beyond *jokes*. Today it's cow manure; tomorrow it may very well be a tampered engine, and possibly the life of one of my pilots.

**WHITAKER:** (*Scoffs.*) I don't believe it would ever go *that far*.

**COCHRAN:** (*Eyeing him sharply.*) And why is that, Captain Whitaker? What do you know about it that I don't?

**WHITAKER:** (*Glancing warily from COCHRAN to EVANS.*) I don't know anything about it, Miss Cochran. (*Beat.*) Why would you think I would?

**COCHRAN:** I don't know what to think. I only know that my ladies are here to fly, not to entertain bored soldiers.

*COCHRAN and WHITAKER stare at each other intently for several moments. EVANS clears his throat sharply.*

**EVANS:** Yes, well, I should think this matter can be settled fairly quickly. Captain Whitaker, I'd like you to speak to the men. Make it clear to them that the WASPs are to be shown every courtesy. No more of these little jokes. Is that clear?

**WHITAKER:** *(Saluting sharply.)* Yes, sir. Every courtesy, sir.

**EVANS:** Good. *(Smiling at COCHRAN.)* I think that should resolve the situation, Miss Cochran. If you'll excuse me?

*COCHRAN and LEWIS salute as EVANS turns to leave. EVANS takes WHITAKER by the arm.*

**EVANS:** John, I was wondering if I could get your opinion with regards to that problem we're having with the simulators? I think we ought to try and...

*WHITAKER briefly glances back at COCHRAN and smirks as he and EVANS exit. COCHRAN glares after him, obviously seething. She shakes her head and sighs.*

**COCHRAN:** And here I thought we were only fighting the Germans and Japs.

**LEWIS:** Permission to speak freely, ma'am?

**COCHRAN:** Of course, sergeant.

**LEWIS:** I think Captain Whitaker is still fighting a few battles of his own.

**COCHRAN:** Aren't we all? *(Beat.)* I appreciate your coming to us with this, sergeant.

**LEWIS:** Ma'am. *(Nods politely and starts to exit.)*

**COCHRAN:** Sergeant Lewis, just out of curiosity, how do you feel about women flying?

**LEWIS:** I'm not sure I understand, ma'am.

**COCHRAN:** It's no secret that a lot of the men are opposed to what we're doing. These *(Beat.)* ...*hijinks*, are obviously a part of that. How do *you* feel about the WASPs?

**LEWIS:** To be completely honest, ma'am, I'm afraid of heights. I don't care who flies. Just as long as it ain't me.

*LEWIS salutes again and turns to leave. COCHRAN laughs and turns to pick up some papers from a nearby table. DOTTY suddenly appears in the doorway just as LEWIS starts to exit. She frowns at LEWIS warily.*

**DOTTY:** Sergeant Lewis.

**LEWIS:** *(Smiling affably.)* Cadet Moore. I trust you're doing well today?

**DOTTY:** Um... fine. Thanks.

**LEWIS:** Excellent. Glad to hear it. You'll be sure to let me know if there's anything you need? Anything at all? After all, that's my job; to make certain you ladies are well taken care of.

**DOTTY:** *(Still leery.)* I will. Thank you, sergeant.

**LEWIS:** My pleasure, cadet. Always at your service.

*LEWIS nods politely as he steps past her. He whistles happily as he exits, then surreptitiously swats DOTTY on the behind with his clipboard. DOTTY jumps in surprise and glares after him, then smiles to herself slyly. She approaches COCHRAN hesitantly and salutes.*

**DOTTY:** Excuse me, Miss Cochran?

**COCHRAN:** *(Looks up from her papers and returns the salute.)* Cadet Moore.

**DOTTY:** May I speak with you for a moment?

**COCHRAN:** Absolutely. By the way, how are you and your squad getting along?

**DOTTY:** Very well, ma'am. They're all terrific ladies.

**COCHRAN:** All of my girls are terrific. How's your training going? Anything I should be aware of? Problems? *(Beat, pointedly.)* With anyone...?

**DOTTY:** I don't... *(Long beat.)* No, ma'am. No problems at all.

**COCHRAN:** That's good to hear. I want you to let me know if there are. What is it you wanted to see me about?

**DOTTY:** It's about Mazy Buford, *(Beat.)* the colored girl that works on the base.

**COCHRAN:** Oh, yes, the young seamstress. What about her?

**DOTTY:** Did you know she's a pilot?

**COCHRAN:** A pilot?

**DOTTY:** Yes, ma'am. She trained in France, at the FAI. I saw her license.

**COCHRAN:** Well, that's incredibly interesting. No, I was not aware of that, cadet.

**DOTTY:** I was wondering whether, well, whether she might be able to join? The WASPs, I mean?

**COCHRAN:** Cadet Moore, I think we both know the answer to that question.

**DOTTY:** But why, ma'am? Hazel, I mean, Cadet Ying, she's a WASP, and she's Chinese. A lot of people don't like Chinese, either.

**COCHRAN:** It's not that simple, cadet. There are *(Beat.)* ... protocols.

**DOTTY:** But you said you needed good pilots. Cadet Yates said the FAI only takes the best. Surely Mazy would qualify. Doesn't she at least deserve a chance?

**COCHRAN:** *(Gestures to a nearby chair.)* Sit down, Cadet Moore. Please.

*DOTTY sits in one of the chair desks.*

**COCHRAN:** Do you know what I did before I became a pilot?

**DOTTY:** No, ma'am.

**COCHRAN:** I was a hairdresser. I had a salon in Saks Fifth Avenue. I did quite well, as a matter of fact, even had my own line of cosmetics. Some of my clients were quite wealthy. One of them was married to a pilot and he offered to teach me how to fly. *(Beat, wryly.)* I remember we were no sooner in the air than he put the plane on auto pilot and swapped the controls for my breast.

**DOTTY:** My gosh! *(Beat, catching herself.)* I'm sorry, captain. What did you do?

**COCHRAN:** I told him that if he didn't land immediately I would tell his eminently prominent socialite wife exactly what sort of a lech he was. Needless to say, we were on the ground in record time. *(Beat.)* But the experience didn't sour me on flying, Cadet. In fact, I wanted to go right back up. With a different instructor, of course. As soon as I started flying, I couldn't stop. I sold my salon and put everything I had into my own aircraft. I also started to compete. Every time some hot-shot male pilot would tell me I couldn't fly this far or this fast, all I wanted to do was wipe that arrogant smirk off his face. I

earned that title of "speed queen", Cadet Moore. Maybe that makes me a little arrogant, but I'm not ashamed to say that whenever I proved them wrong, it felt great. And that's what I'm doing right now; proving them wrong.

**DOTTY:** I'm not sure I follow, ma'am.

**COCHRAN:** It took me three years, Cadet Moore. Three years of petitioning General Arnold and the War Department to get this project started. You have no idea how much resistance I've faced; fighting tooth and nail just to prove that women could fly as well as men. And it isn't just one brash woman bucking the system, now; it's a thousand. There are men, cadet, very powerful men, who want to shut us down. I have no doubt they're not going to stop until they do. If I take Mazy into the WASPs, no matter how good she may be, it'll be all the excuse they need. *(Beat.)* I can't let that happen.

**DOTTY:** But there are colored men flying in combat. I read about it in Life Magazine.

**COCHRAN:** The Tuskegee Airmen. Yes, I'm very much aware of that project. And I'm very proud of them. But you need to understand; the rules are different for women. And not just in the Army. *(Stands.)* Was there anything else, cadet?

**DOTTY:** *(Stands quickly.)* No, ma'am. Thank you for listening, Miss Cochran.

**COCHRAN:** *(Smiling.)* Call me Jackie. I appreciate you coming to me with this and your integrity. I wish all my girls were like you.

*DOTTY quickly exits. COCHRAN stares after her with a weary sigh. Blackout.*

**ACT ONE, SCENE 7**

**AT RISE:** *Barracks Classroom a few days later. DOTTY, PAULINE, and HAZEL swiftly enter. They are wearing coveralls and leather flying helmets. HAZEL'S stuffed duck is tucked in one of her pockets.*

**DOTTY:** *(Pulling off her helmet.)* Wow! That was incredible! I never knew anything could go so fast!

**PAULINE:** You've never dated some of the men I have.

**DOTTY:** What was it called?

**HAZEL:** A Texan, I think. But that was just a trainer. Wait till you fly a P-40. Talk about fast.

**PAULINE:** You flew a P-40?

**HAZEL:** In China, yes.

**DOTTY:** Whatever it was, it made my Dad's Stearman look like a tricycle.

**PAULINE:** Hazel would know more about tricycles.

**HAZEL:** *(Laughing.)* This one I had to pedal just a little harder.

**PEGGY:** *(Enters suddenly, obviously upset.)* God, I hate that man!

**PAULINE:** Sweetie, be more specific. That word encompasses the entire world.

**PEGGY:** Who do you think? Captain Whitaker.

**PAULINE:** Ah, of course. What did Frankenstein do this time?

**PEGGY:** He's all upset about something with the plane. I don't know why, I did everything he told me to do. He just kept yelling.

*WHITAKER enters the classroom with a fuming glare at PEGGY. He is also wearing military coveralls.*

**WHITAKER:** Taylor! Are you at all familiar with the concept of lift?

**PEGGY:** Lift?

**HAZEL:** *(With a broken Cantonese accent.)* Lift? I know lift! Have to have lift to keep plane flying. Otherwise, *(Blows raspberry.)* Land in rice paddy!

**WHITAKER:** Can it, Ying-Yong, I know you speak good American.

**HAZEL:** *(Under her breath.)* Too bad you don't.

**WHITAKER:** *(To PEGGY.)* Yes, baby doll, lift. You know, air flows across the wings of an aircraft, which creates buoyancy, which in turn keeps the plane flying. *Lift.* Only in order to maintain lift, you have to maintain speed. What the hell is wrong with you that you can't keep the friggin' plane moving?

**PEGGY:** Well, I'm sorry, captain, but that plane is so much bigger than my Piper.

**WHITAKER:** Your Piper? Taylor, a *kite* is bigger than a Piper! Baby doll, I am not a religious man, but if I have to keep flying with you, I am absolutely certain it will lead to baptism! I was never that scared in combat! Throttle, Taylor, throttle! *(Makes choking gesture with his hands.)* Otherwise, I will throttle you! Is that clear?

*PEGGY struggles with her emotions, obviously close to tears.*

**WHITAKER:** Oh, jeez, are you going to start blubbering again?

*PEGGY glares at him, then looks at the other women. She forces herself to composure.*

**PEGGY:** No, sir!

**WHITAKER:** *(Looks at DOTTY.)* Moore!

**DOTTY:** *(Saluting quickly.)* Sir!

**WHITAKER:** You were a little too bumpy on the landing. Don't cut the engine till you're closer to the ground. *(With a smirk at HAZEL.)* That runway isn't a *lice paddy*.

**DOTTY:** Yes, sir.

**WHITAKER:** *(To PAULINE.)* Yates, a little faster on your turns, and try to keep your banks more shallow. You're not performing for the circus crowd.

**PAULINE:** *(Sotto voce.)* Not even with a clown in the cockpit?

**WHITAKER:** How's that?

**PAULINE:** I said it was loud in that cockpit. *(Beat.)* Sir.

**WHITAKER:** Don't push it, doll face. *(To HAZEL.)* Ying-Yong?

**HAZEL:** Captain?

**WHITAKER:** *(Grudgingly.)* I didn't have to correct a single move. You really knew that plane. Not bad, Ying-Yong. *(Beat.)* Not bad at all.

**HAZEL:** Thank you, captain.

**WHITAKER:** What was that symbol?

**HAZEL:** Sir?

**WHITAKER:** You painted a Chinese symbol with your lipstick on the side of the plane. What does it mean?

**HAZEL:** *(Shrugging.)* Oh, that? It means good luck. I write that on all of my planes whenever I fly. You can never have enough good luck. *(Smiling innocently.)* Sir.

*WHITAKER frowns at her suspiciously for several moments, then shakes his head.*

**WHITAKER:** *(To ALL.)* I want your flight logs on my desk by eighteen hundred. Dismissed.

*PEGGY, HAZEL, DOTTY, and PAULINE salute as WHITAKER turns to leave. He stops to shake his finger at PEGGY again.*

**WHITAKER:** Throttle! *(Exits.)*

**PAULINE:** *(With a smirk at HAZEL.)* Okay, sweetie, you can tell us; what does it really mean?

**HAZEL:** *(Grinning.)* Fat ass.

*DOTTY, PAULINE, and HAZEL laugh.*

**PEGGY:** He's still mean. I can't do anything right for him.

*HAZEL pulls her duck from her pocket and hands it to PEGGY.*

**HAZEL:** Here. I think you need this more than I do.

**PEGGY:** *(Indignant.)* Are you serious? A toy? Why the hell would I need a stuffed toy?

**HAZEL:** It's not a toy, it's Yaya. He's always brought me good luck.

**PAULINE:** *(To PEGGY.)* I'd take it if I were you, sweetie. Right now you need all the luck you can get.

**DOTTY:** *(To HAZEL.)* But I thought you said you never flew without it?

**HAZEL:** *(Shrugs.)* I think I can solo for a while. *(Beat, smiling at PEGGY.)* It would mean a lot to me if you would take it. Please.

**PEGGY:** *(Takes the duck hesitantly.)* Okay. *(Long beat.)* Thanks.

**PAULINE:** *(Pulls off her helmet.)* Well, I'm going to go shower and then hit the mess hall. I think they're serving SOS tonight.

**HAZEL:** Yum. My favorite.

**PAULINE:** And to think it's only a dollar sixty-five a day.

**DOTTY:** You guys go on. I'm going to fill out my flight log.

*PAULINE, HAZEL, and PEGGY exit. DOTTY takes a clipboard and pencil from a rack on the wall and starts to write. LEWIS suddenly appears in the doorway behind her. He grins broadly and begins to sing.*

**LEWIS:** *(Imitates Frank Sinatra.)* I'LL BE SEEING YOU

IN ALL THE OLD FAMILIAR PLACES

THAT THIS HEART OF MINE EMBRACES

ALL DAY THROUGH...

**DOTTY:** *(Wincing.)* You know, it's really too bad they didn't send you overseas. You'd win the war in a week.

**LEWIS:** How's that?

**DOTTY:** You'd bore the Japs to death! *(Glaring at him.)* How did that snake get in my locker?

**LEWIS:** Is that a new Spike Jones song? I haven't heard it. How's it go?

**DOTTY:** Don't play dumb! You put a garter snake in my locker. Scared Pauline and Peggy half to death!

**LEWIS:** *(Sighing.)* Not again.

**DOTTY:** Again? What are you talking about? Look, I know it was you.

**LEWIS:** Please, toots, a snake? That sort of juvenile jape is beneath me. Unless it's at least a felony, I never take part.

**DOTTY:** Then who did it?

**LEWIS:** You're not the only one asking that question. But if I find out, I'll be sure to let you know. *(Turns to leave.)* Later.

**DOTTY:** Sergeant Lewis... Louie... wait.

**LEWIS:** *(Turning back.)* You called me Louie. Could this be the start of something... *(Beat.)* magical?

**DOTTY:** *(Scoffs.)* Hardly. *(Beat.)* Can I trust you?

**LEWIS:** As long as it ain't with money, sure.

**DOTTY:** I'm being serious.

**LEWIS:** So am I. What do you need?

**DOTTY:** You knew Mazy was a pilot?

**LEWIS:** Mazy? Yeah, I knew. She told me.

**DOTTY:** And that they won't let her join us?

**LEWIS:** That surprises you?

**DOTTY:** No, but it makes me angry.

**LEWIS:** (*Shrugging.*) Nothing you can do about it.

**DOTTY:** What if there was? Would you help me?

**LEWIS:** Help you what?

**DOTTY:** Let Mazy fly.

**LEWIS:** (*Beat.*) Are you out of your friggin' mind?

**DOTTY:** Maybe. But will you help me?

**LEWIS:** Geez Louise! You know, if you were a guy, I'd say you had big ones. Big *brass* ones! Do you have any idea what you're asking?

**DOTTY:** I know what it sounds like, but if you think about it, it's really not that hard. That trainer has dual controls. All I have to do is get Mazy in the cockpit. Once we're in the air, she can fly it.

**LEWIS:** And how the hell do you plan to get her up there? In case you hadn't noticed, there's a slight difference in her appearance.

**DOTTY:** That's what I was hoping you'd help me with. Aren't you the 'dog-robber extraordinaire'? 'You name it, I can get it'...?

**LEWIS:** Hey, sweetheart, give me a break. We're not talking about sneaking booze onto the base. This is a little more complicated. Besides that, they hang you for that sort of shit. Pardon my French.

**DOTTY:** So you won't help?

**LEWIS:** Look, toots—

**DOTTY:** My name is Dotty, not toots.

**LEWIS:** Sorry. *Dotty*. Okay, I admit Mazy's getting a rotten break, and I would love to do what I can, but what you're asking is just a little too much. The only way you could ever get her into that plane would be... (*Suddenly trails off with a curious frown.*)

**DOTTY:** Would be what?

**LEWIS:** You have to make two solos in that trainer, right?

**DOTTY:** Eventually, yes.

**LEWIS:** And one of them's at night?

**DOTTY:** I think so. (*Beat.*) What are you thinking, Louie?

- LEWIS:** I'm thinking how sometimes I'm too devious for my own good. There's a maintenance shed at the near end of the runway, right? Suppose the night you solo, we have Mazy wait in that shed. You roll up just prior to takeoff. You'll have to pause for clearance, anyway, so no one will be the wiser. Mazy can run out and climb inside while you're waiting for the tower to give you the go-ahead.
- DOTTY:** What about Captain Whitaker?
- LEWIS:** He'll be in the tower, and it'll be too dark to see that far. Besides, I can step in about that same time and create a distraction.
- DOTTY:** (*Snidely.*) What are you going to do, sing?
- LEWIS:** I doubt he'd appreciate my Sinatra any more than you. However, this is the army. There's always paperwork that needs signing.
- DOTTY:** You *are* devious.
- LEWIS:** So my mother always said, God bless her.
- DOTTY:** Are you saying you'll actually help me?
- LEWIS:** Depends. What's in it for me?
- DOTTY:** What do you want? (*Scowling at his sudden smirk.*) Within reason, Louie.
- LEWIS:** How's about you go to a movie with me in Sweetwater? There's a new Bogie film playing, called "Casablanca". Heard it's pretty good.
- DOTTY:** You know we're not supposed to fraternize.
- LEWIS:** And I'm not supposed to help you get us shot. Or hung. (*Beat.*) Whatever.
- DOTTY:** Touché.
- LEWIS:** Tell me something, Dotty. Why are you taking this sort of a risk? You could lose a hell of a lot.
- DOTTY:** So could you.
- LEWIS:** Sweetheart, if I don't buck the system on a daily basis, I'll die of boredom. But you're not me. Why is Mazy flying so important to you?
- DOTTY:** You'd have to be a pilot to truly understand. Do we have a deal or not?
- LEWIS:** Ah, what the hell? We'll probably both end up on the gallows, but hey, who wants to live forever? (*Holds out his hand.*) Deal.

*DOTTY takes his hand. LEWIS grins at her, then suddenly pulls her close and kisses her. DOTTY pulls away, horrified.*

**DOTTY:** You jerk!

**LEWIS:** *(Obviously flustered.)* I'm sorry, toots! I mean, Dotty. I'm truly sorry.

**DOTTY:** You should be! That's not how you kiss. *(Beat.)* This is!

*DOTTY suddenly rushes forward and kisses him eagerly. Lights fade to blackout.*

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