

CHAPTER ONE

Evalina

Saturday, March 21, 1942
3 months after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor
San Francisco, California

When I jolt awake, the familiar fear smothers my early morning thoughts and thrums through my veins. I gasp for breath, as if there's a shortage of oxygen, until I convince my rhythm to slow.

No light comes into my room—too early—but I draw back a panel of my gingham curtains and peek outside anyway, just to reassure myself that it's all still there—my narrow street, my neighbors' houses, my entire world.

And there it is, the sound that roused me from my fearful slumber. The faint squeak of bicycle pedals as the paperboy pushes himself up our steep hill. When I look closely at the front door of the house across the street, I spot the newspaper lying across the front step like a welcome mat.

The planks of my wooden floor creak as I slip out my door, past Mama and Daddy's quiet bedroom, down the narrow, steep staircase, and out the front door. Even in the dim lighting of the streetlamp, the bold headline of the *San Francisco News* reaches up and grabs at my heart:

within these lines

First Japanese Ready to Leave Coast

No, no, no. My heart pounds as I reach for the newspaper.

How can you know something is coming, spend every waking moment with it gnawing at you, and still feel a jab of shock when you see it begin?

I devour the article that details how over sixty Japanese Americans living in Los Angeles have voluntarily gone to Manzanar—a place in southern California I had never heard of until earlier this month.

“Evalina?”

I jump at Mama’s groggy voice. “Hi. I didn’t mean to wake you. I just couldn’t sleep.”

With her puffy eyes, Mama looks at the newspaper in my hand. Her mouth is set in a grim line. “This obsession is not healthy, Evalina. I know you’re worried, but we have nothing to fear. I don’t know what it will take for you to believe that.”

“Mama, they’re going to make *all* the Japanese go.” My voice cracks. “Even the ones who were born here like the Hamasakis’ children.”

“Who?”

I swallow. I shouldn’t have mentioned them by name. “One of our produce suppliers at Alessandro’s.”

“Oh. Yes, of course.” Mama stifles a yawn, seeming unaware of how far I tipped my cards. “You’re safe, honey. I know sometimes those articles make it sound like Italians are going to be rounded up too, but we’re not.”

“If the government was being fair, we’d be forced to go too. Especially a family like ours.”

“But we’re not. Stop seeking trouble. Come inside before somebody sees you looking indecent.”

I’m wearing my favorite pajamas, which have long pants

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and long sleeves, but Mama hates that I bought them in the men's department. I shuffle back inside the house, and Mama soundlessly closes the door.

She scowls at me in the gray light of the entryway. "I'm going back to bed. I'm tired of these conversations, Evalina. I'm tired of waking up to you crying. Or hearing from your friends that you're distracted and preoccupied by the news. This is not normal behavior for a girl your age."

"Our country is at war." I force my voice to be soft. "How am I supposed to act?"

Mama's mouth opens. I'm wearing away the thread of patience she woke up with—I can see it in her eyes—but I don't know how to lie about this. Why, I'm not sure, because I'm certainly lying about plenty of other things.

"Evalina . . ." Mama takes several thoughtful breaths before saying, "I'm going back to bed. You do the same."

I follow her up the stairs, the newspaper still grasped in my fist behind my back, and I go into my bedroom. But instead of crawling beneath the covers, I ease open my closet door and pull out my green pleated skirt, the one I was wearing when Taichi and I first met.

The words from this morning's article run through my head as I undo the rags in my hair and brush out the curls. "I don't understand how this can be happening."

I clamp my teeth over my bottom lip. I know that's the kind of thing Gia and Tony have been telling Mama, that I'm muttering to myself all the time—that I'm distracted, snappy, and crying easily. Gia should at least understand why, but maybe her "*Carpe Diem!*" kind of personality can't foresee what's going to happen to the Japanese Americans.

I read the entire *San Francisco News* twice before the clock ticks to 6:30 and I can justify leaving. In the last year, Mama

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and Daddy have grown accustomed to my leaving the house early on Saturday mornings, but since the attack on Pearl Harbor they've requested that I leave notes about where I'll be and what time I'll be home.

I scribble half-truths on a scrap of paper in the kitchen, grab my handbag and a grocery sack, and let myself out the back door where my bicycle is chained in the alley. After tucking my belongings in the front basket and securing the tie on my wool trench coat, I coast downhill toward the bay.

The early morning fog envelops me, and I can feel the dampness soaking into my hair and tightening my curls. The fog is so thick this morning that I can't see the waters of the bay until I'm on the waterfront. I bike along to the soothing *slap, slap, slap* of the water chopping against the docks.

At the park, I find the first of the farm trucks there and unloading, but I don't see the familiar green Chevy of the Hamasakis. Suspicions roar in my head, but I silence them with a look at my watch and common sense. It's not even 7:00 yet. Sometimes they're here by 7:00, but not always. This is nothing to panic about.

My watch ticks to 7:05. Which is barely after seven, and the market doesn't open until eight. Farm truck after farm truck come to a stop, and now it's 7:15. They are *always* here by 7:15. But maybe there was traffic on the bridge. Plenty of obstacles could cause a delay between their farm in Alameda and the waterfront. Just because they have always been here by now doesn't mean that something bad has happened.

I stare at the gap the Hamasakis' table usually occupies. Mr. and Mrs. Ling, who are always in the spot beside them, are nearly done setting up, as are the Carricks on the other side.

I glance at my watch again—7:30—as movement catches my eye. Two Caucasian men carry a folding table and wedge it into the Hamasakis' spot.

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Mrs. Ling watches them and then goes back to placing her display signs on the table. Mrs. Carrick notices, and her jaw sets. I'm too far away to hear anything, but she says something to the newcomers. They respond with a shrug and continue with their setup. Mrs. Carrick looks at her own watch and then she looks across the street to where I'm sitting.

Before I can tell my legs they should do otherwise, I push my bicycle across the street to the park. Mrs. Carrick and I have not talked a lot, just warm chatter when I've purchased olives from her or her husband. Even though they're only at the market once a month or so, she's always seemed to know the real reason I come.

"Good morning, Evalina," she says when I draw near to the table. "Where is your friend?"

"I don't know. I hoped you would."

The men are unpacking crates of strawberries and lettuce. One of them sees me watching and offers a polite smile.

Mrs. Carrick shakes her head. "No, but as we set up this morning, I heard some of the other families talking about last week. They said some of the Japanese families were treated poorly. The Akiyamas' little girl was even spat on."

I was here last week, and I didn't see anything like that . . . but I wasn't here as long as usual. Instead of Taichi working their stand with his mother, it had been Taichi with his best friend. Diego had agreed to watch the stand while we took a walk along the shore. He hadn't seemed particularly happy to do it—which is common for Diego—but Taichi and I have so little time alone that I didn't question it.

"I just saw Taichi on Thursday and he didn't say anything about being treated poorly."

Though even as I say it, I know that if Taichi had been threatened or spit upon, he wouldn't have said a word to me. He wouldn't want me getting riled.

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Mrs. Carrick's mouth curves downward. "I'm sorry to say, I think this is only the beginning."

I purchase olives, and I can't help glancing at the Caucasian farmers while Mrs. Carrick counts out my change. One of them is arranging bundles of asparagus that are annoyingly beautiful—better looking than the asparagus Taichi brought to the restaurant on Thursday.

"If you see them this week," Mrs. Carrick breaks into my thoughts, "tell them they were missed, won't you?"

"Of course. Thank you."

Despite the temptation of the asparagus, I push my bicycle past to head home. I stop when I see that in addition to her normal signs of prices for produce, Mrs. Ling has hung a new banner from the table that reads *WE ARE CHINESE*.

As I stare at it, Mrs. Ling notices me and smiles. "Some white people get confused. They think we are the enemy."

"The Hamasakis aren't our enemies."

"Of course not. But I don't know how long that will matter." Mrs. Ling holds out a beautiful navel orange, round and bold. "Share this with your friend. May it bring you both good luck."

The market doesn't officially open for a few more minutes, but San Franciscans already mill about the rows of tables, haggling over prices of the first spring vegetables. The men who stole the Hamasakis' spot chat with customers and the sight makes my chest burn.

I put the orange in my basket and pedal along the street. The fog has thinned, but my thoughts are hazy with anger.

At the ferry ticket booth, I pull coins from my handbag and place them on the counter. "When does the boat leave for Alameda?"

CHAPTER TWO

Taichi

Alameda, California

When the door closes behind the two FBI agents, I take my first full breath in the last thirty minutes. So many Issei men have been whisked away to prison camps, including Uncle Fuji, but my father is still here. All four of us stand here huddled by the front door, blinking at one another.

Their engine kicks to life, and I'm lightheaded from relief. We are still all together. We are still in our home.

"They're spineless men." Aiko's hands clench and her voice is steel. "I detest them."

Mother doesn't even admonish Aiko for speaking hatefully. She doesn't say anything, just keeps looking at my father as though, like me, she can't believe he's still here with us.

"You were right about burning our belongings," Mother says, her words thick.

Father doesn't answer, but his eyes hold tenderness.

The day of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Father had told us we must gather everything in our home that tied us to Japan. Letters, family photographs, kimonos, books in Japanese, records of Japanese music. Mother hadn't argued with him in front of us, until she realized that he intended for her to burn

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her Japanese dolls too. Even Aiko had cried when Mother fed her childhood treasures to the flames.

All these months it had seemed like we'd burned family heirlooms in vain, but when the agents surprised us with a knock on the door this morning, there had been sweet relief to know they would find nothing worthy of suspicion. They had certainly been thorough in their search of our small home.

"How dare they ask why we are packing, as if we're doing something sinister." Aiko's fists dig into her hip bones. Next, she'll stomp away. "What are we supposed to do when the government is stealing everything from us?"

"They are not stealing." Father sounds tired. "The Medinas will watch everything while we are away. When we come back, it will all be here."

Aiko makes an exasperated noise in the back of her throat, pivots on her bare heel, and storms into the kitchen, where she had been helping Mother pack before the men knocked on the door. After twenty-one years of Aiko's moods, we are all immune to them. With the ground beneath our family constantly shifting these days, her moods are a strange kind of comfort. At least some things have stayed the same.

Father looks to Mother again. "*Shikata ga nai.*"

"*Shikata ga nai,*" she says in agreement.

The way they're looking at each other, with the comfort of twenty-three years of marriage stretching between them as they repeat the Japanese mantra—"It cannot be helped, it must be done"—makes me avert my eyes and slip down the short hall to my bedroom.

How long ago did Evalina give up on me being at the market this morning? I should have told her on Thursday during my delivery that we might not be there. Profits had slipped—despite Evalina's best efforts—and that was before

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the Akiyamas' girl was spat upon. I should have told her that we were moving out of our house, moving in with my aunt. But as usual, we'd had no privacy.

Oddly, Evalina seemed to be at the forefront of Mother's thoughts too when she told me about the decision over breakfast. "Mr. Cassano's daughter who likes the produce so well will have to buy elsewhere. She is such a loyal customer."

I didn't trust myself to respond in case what Diego says is true, that I might as well have throbbing hearts for eyes when I talk about Evalina.

Mother had smiled at me over her teacup. "Strange for a girl her age, to spend Saturday mornings at a market. But it is good for business."

The telephone in the kitchen rings, jolting me out of the remembered conversation—and Aiko answers with a terse, "Hello."

That will be Mrs. Medina, who would've seen the government car outside our home and who is not the type to wait for information to come to her.

I take in the various piles in my room, which I had been sorting before the knock on the door. Almost everything will be packed in boxes or left where it is, under the care of the Medinas. Precious few of my belongings get packed in my suitcase for Aunt Chiyu's.

My baseball bat and glove are on the bed. That's right. When the knock came, I had been considering whether they should stay or go.

I pick up the bat, but instead of the normal comfort of the smooth wood in my hand, I hear Mr. Nielsen shrieking from the stands during my last game, when I went an unusual 0 for 3.

"Hey, coach! Why don't you bench that yellow Jap instead of my son?"

within these lines

“Taichi?” Aiko’s voice is so meek I think she’s Mother until I turn and see her. She stands in my bedroom doorway, her face slightly gray while her eyes search mine.

“What is it?” For a fleeting moment, I imagine the men from the FBI have returned and taken Father after all.

“There’s a phone call for you.” Aiko’s words are carefully measured. “She says her name is Evalina Cassano.”

I swallow. “Okay. Thank you.”

I brush past my watchful sister, and her footsteps stay close to mine as I walk through the living room to the kitchen. The telephone receiver lies on the countertop.

I expect Aiko to give me privacy, but instead she resumes her work in the cupboard closest to the telephone. On our porch, Mother and Father appear deep in conversation with Mr. and Mrs. Medina. How much time do I have before they come back in?

Aiko nods to the telephone. “She’s waiting.”

I’ve certainly kept plenty of secrets for Aiko over the years; I shouldn’t doubt her willingness to keep this one for me.

I angle away from my sister. “Hi.”

“Hi.” That one syllable is full of relief. “I’m sorry for calling. I didn’t know what else to do when you weren’t there.”

“I know, I’m sorry. I didn’t know for sure until this morning, or I would’ve told you.”

“Was it your sister or your mother who answered?”

I glance at Aiko, who is taking great effort to be nearly silent in her work. “My sister.”

“Oh, good. I thought so. If one of your parents answered, I was going to pretend we had an eggplant emergency at the restaurant. Or that I was desperate for blackberries.”

I chuckle. “Either would be believable. You have a reputation.”

In the background, I hear a car honk. I assumed she was calling from the restaurant, but I guess not. I need to tell her

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about the farm and Mother and Father's decision about leaving, but the words all stick in my throat. I thought I would have until Monday, when I make my next delivery to Alessandro's, before I had to tell her.

Evalina laughs, high and bright. She's nervous. "So I've done something that you're maybe not going to be happy about."

I grin at the wall. I have no trouble imagining her reaming out whoever took our spot at the market. Or, if she learned about the Johnsons' teenage son spitting on the Akiyama girl, spreading rumors about their produce. "What've you done this time?"

"Well, I was really worried when you weren't there this morning. So I sorta took a ferry to Alameda."

"Evalina . . ." My heart seems to pound right in my ears. "You're in Alameda?"

Beside me, I sense Aiko has stopped packing away dishes and is now unapologetically eavesdropping.

"I could just go home?"

But I hear the pleading in her voice. *Please come get me, she's really saying. I took a risk in coming here. I'm hoping you'll take a risk too.*

I don't even care that Aiko is listening, or that I haven't a clue how I'll get out of the house without explaining to Mother and Father. "Don't you dare go home. Of course, I'll come get you."

"Okay. I'll see you soon, then?"

"I'll see you soon." I hang the receiver on the wall and I look into the smirking face of my sister.

"Is it possible that my perfectly behaved, do-everything-he's-told baby brother has been keeping a secret from me? From *all* of us?"

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The knowing shine in her eyes makes my chest tighten. “I don’t have time to explain right now, but I’ll fill you in when I get home.”

Aiko withdraws the truck keys from her sweater pocket—*why does she have them?*—and dangles them just out of my reach. “No, you’ll explain now. I will even lie to Mother and Father for you, but you have to tell me who Miss Evalina Cassano is.”

“As soon as I get home—”

Aiko shakes her head. “I like to be paid up front.”

No one can draw a cross look from me like Aiko. “She’s waiting for me.”

“Then you had better explain fast, little brother.”

I suck in a quick breath and exhale. “Her father owns Alessandro’s, one of the restaurants we supply. We’ve gotten to know each other over the last year. That’s all.”

Aiko raises her eyebrows. “No, I don’t think ‘that’s all.’”

I pitch my voice low. “What do I have to say before you’ll give me the keys? That she’s my girlfriend? Fine, she’s my girlfriend.”

Her dark eyes dart over my face. “You *really* like her.” It’s not a question.

I hold out my palm. “Keys, please.”

Aiko’s lips purse. “Evalina Cassano doesn’t sound very Japanese.”

“Because it’s Italian.”

“Oh, Taichi. This is heartbreak waiting to happen.”

I stare at her, stunned. We live in a state that doesn’t allow interracial marriage, so it’s a natural response. So natural that I had said the same thing to myself over and over as I denied how deeply I had come to care about Evalina. So natural that I had spoken the words out loud just before our first kiss.

This will only lead to heartbreak.

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Hearing the word afresh—on the lips of my notoriously rebellious sister, no less—makes me feel as though I’ve swallowed fire.

I snatch the keys out of her hand. “You wanted to know who she is, and I told you.”

“I’m sorry, Taichi,” Aiko says. “She sounded really nice.”

I don’t respond, just barrel out the front door. To Mother and Father’s surprised faces, I say, “I’ll be right back. Aiko will explain.”

If there’s anything I can trust Aiko for, it’s to come up with a believable cover story. In her first year of college, she hid a Caucasian boyfriend for six months and nearly got away with hiding a miscarriage too.

I drive away much slower than I would like, not wanting to appear too rushed. My teeth grind together as I think of the way Aiko looked at me with such pity. Not that it matters. I don’t need her good opinion.

But even after I’ve left the farm, I find I haven’t let go of Aiko’s use of the word *sounded*. That Evalina *sounded* really nice.

As though Evalina is already a piece of my past.