



To the
Farthest
Shores



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Prologue

U.S. ARMY BASE AT THE PRESIDIO
SAN FRANCISCO, 1898

Jenny Bennett woke as pebbles clattered against her window. She sat bolt upright, trying to get her bearings. As a hospital nurse, she was often called upon in the middle of the night, but always by a knock on her door.

Even as she scrambled from beneath the bedsheets, another spray of pebbles hit the glass. She dashed to the window, wincing at the cold tile on her bare feet. Standing by the lamppost below was the distinctive figure of Lieutenant Ryan Gallagher, his sandy blond hair glinting in the circle of gaslight. Ryan was the most straight-laced man she knew, hardly the type to be flinging pebbles against her window in the dead of night.

She tugged up the window sash. “What’s going on?”

“Can you come down?” Ryan called up in a hoarse whisper, trying to avoid waking others in the building. Over two hundred people slept in this army barracks, but only a handful were women. As a civilian nurse, she was fortunate the army let her lodge here.

Otherwise she'd have to make the long cable car journey from the city each day.

"I'll be right down."

April in San Francisco was chilly, so she shrugged into a coat and tugged on a pair of boots. She finger-combed her straight black hair, trying to pull it into some semblance of order before running down to meet Ryan. They'd only known each other for three months, but she'd been in love with him for two.

A glance at the clock revealed it was three in the morning. What on earth was Ryan up to at such an hour? She hastened down the steps, out the door, and straight into the shelter of Ryan's waiting arms. She smiled as he lifted her from the ground, holding on tight as he twirled her around.

"I almost didn't recognize you in those civilian clothes," she said once her feet were on solid ground. "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine," he assured her, drawing back to gaze into her face. He seemed unusually somber—sad, even. He was usually in such good spirits, and his mood worried her. "Let's go somewhere private," he whispered.

The Presidio sprawled over three square miles on the northern tip of the San Francisco peninsula. Most of it was wilderness, but the western side contained an army base, the hospital, and training facilities. The army used only a fraction of the land. The rest of it was blanketed with towering pines, eucalyptus groves, and sycamore trees, making the Presidio feel like a primeval wilderness. The forest also provided plenty of seclusion from the chaos on base.

Normally the Presidio housed less than a thousand people, but since President McKinley declared war against Spain, the base had been mobilizing for conflict. Troops from across the nation streamed into the Presidio, preparing to sail for the Spanish colonies in the Far East. Thousands of pup tents were scattered like

mushrooms across the lawns and parade fields to shelter the newly arrived soldiers.

Jenny followed Ryan on a meandering path through the tents, still confused by his strange behavior. Was he ill again? It had been three months since the USS *Baltimore* hobbled into port with half its crew suffering from typhoid. Ryan had been among the stricken, his case bad enough to hospitalize him for two weeks. He finally recovered but was still rail-thin.

During his stay in the hospital, Ryan had been consistently polite, managing a weak smile of gratitude each time she tended him. His warm brown eyes always softened the instant she came into view, and he was the kindest man she'd ever met. He read the Bible before breakfast and murmured a prayer of thanks before each meal.

She'd started calling him Galahad, partly because it was similar to his last name, but mostly because it was how he seemed to her. She secretly gave lots of her patients nicknames: Bossy Man, the Weeper, the Nice Texan, the Rude Texan . . . but from the moment she met Ryan Gallagher, she thought of him as Galahad.

She couldn't imagine why he'd come to see her at such an unseemly hour. He wasn't in uniform either, which was out of character. The Presidio was an army base, but since the declaration of war, the navy had anchored their fleets in the harbor and their officers had moved into Presidio quarters. Ryan had been one of those naval officers, looking wickedly handsome in his crisp, white dress uniform. It wouldn't be long before the ships set sail for the Philippines, and already she ached at the thought of Ryan going to some tropical jungle to fight a war no one understood.

It got darker as they moved into the cool sycamore forest, a carpet of damp leaves cushioning her footsteps and giving off a loamy scent. She startled at a sudden cascade of birdcall, odd at this time of night. She glanced at Ryan with a question in her eyes.

“Night herons,” he whispered. “They forage in the hours before dawn, always in groups. They’re very social creatures. We must have surprised them.”

Ryan knew everything about animal and marine life. It was one of the things she found so attractive about him. Jenny had spent her entire life in the city, but Ryan courted her with walks along the seashore that rimmed the Presidio. During those walks he taught her to see the world with new eyes. He would hunker down on the beach to show her the underside of a starfish. He told her about red rock crabs and how they acted like stewards of the estuary by keeping the bottom of the bay clean. Ryan could explain the difference between a fungus and an alga. Sometimes they simply walked in silence, but even then she felt like singing and laughing at the same time. Ryan touched a part of her soul she hadn’t even known existed. It had been easy to ignore the war during those golden afternoons, but it was suddenly all too real.

Ryan pulled her a few feet off the path behind a tree and drew her into an embrace. “I’ve come to say good-bye,” he said, and it felt like she’d been punched in the stomach. None of the ships were leaving until next month, and Ryan wasn’t well enough to be sent into combat yet. This didn’t make sense.

She pulled back to peer into his face. “Where are you going?”

“I can’t tell you. I don’t know how long I’ll be gone, but I couldn’t leave without saying good-bye.”

She was speechless. They’d just found each other, and now he was leaving ahead of all the other troops? It seemed impossible for a man as gentle as Ryan Gallagher to be going to war. He belonged in a college classroom or a church pulpit, not a battlefield. They had already begun planning a life together. They were going to buy a saltbox cottage on one of the bluffs north of the city, a place where they could bask in the purity of the sunlight and clean ocean breezes.

“Will you write?” she managed to ask.

“I’ll try.”

That seemed odd, too. Above all, the military took extraordinary measures to ensure mail was delivered to and from their soldiers. It was one of the few things they could offer to make remote postings more bearable. Writing should be an easy thing to promise, but Jenny knew Ryan wouldn’t lie to her.

She grasped his forearms as she tried to memorize each feature of his handsome face. She didn’t even have a photograph of him. “Why are they sending you out so early? None of the other men are leaving until next month. I don’t want them sending you off when you’re still twenty pounds underweight and could suffer a relapse.”

He smiled gently. “Jenny, I’m fine.”

“You’re letting the navy take advantage of you.” Ryan was so instinctively generous that he let people exploit his good nature. She didn’t know what she’d done to deserve a man as gallant as Ryan Gallagher. She was a girl from the wrong side of San Francisco, and he was a hero straight out of a storybook.

“I can’t say anything more, but I don’t want you worrying about me, alright? I’m going to be okay. I might even be home before Christmas.”

His words were meant to be comforting, but they had the opposite effect. Didn’t people always underestimate the enemy? Ever since Congress had declared war, soldiers had boasted it would take only a few weeks to trounce the Spanish, but Jenny wasn’t so sure.

“Ryan, it’s *Spain*,” she said, ashamed of the tremble in her voice. “Spain has been one of the greatest naval empires for centuries. How can you say it won’t be dangerous? Even crossing the ocean to the Philippines is dangerous.”

“I haven’t said I’m going to the Philippines.”

Jenny made no answer, but everyone knew the war would be fought in the Philippines, where Spanish soldiers had been

entrenched for three hundred years. Even before the formal declaration of war, the navy began funneling men, munitions, and ships into the San Francisco harbor for the grand expedition that would leave next month. Jenny never would have met Ryan except for this war, but she dreaded the thought of his leaving.

“I’m still worried about you,” she said. “Something about this doesn’t seem right.”

He touched her cheek, his face radiating warm sympathy. “I don’t want you worrying over me. As I came to see you, I spotted a shooting star. Did you know it’s a sign of good luck?” He drew her into his embrace again, holding her tightly. “Don’t tell anyone I was here tonight,” he whispered into her ear. “It’s not something that can get leaked.”

“Of course.” Civilian employees were warned to keep quiet about all troop movements and activities on the base. It seemed impossible to believe the Spanish would have planted spies among them, but she would keep quiet. Suddenly the war felt very real, and she didn’t want it to. She wanted to go on meeting Ryan on the quadrangle, having picnics on the cliff overlooking the bay, and fooling herself into believing their magical interlude would never end. How long would it be before he held her like this again? It seemed so unfair. To have finally found someone, only to have him torn away so quickly.

“Before I go, I want you to know how much I love you,” he whispered against her cheek, and her heart squeezed. He withdrew a few inches to gaze down into her face. “As soon as I get back, we’ll get married and start the rest of our life together. I wish I’d had a chance to buy a ring, but everything is happening much faster than I thought.”

This might be the most wonderful and heartbreaking moment of her entire life. Her heart threatened to split wide open. “That sounds really good,” she managed to say.

He fumbled in his pocket, then pressed a heavy gold watch into her hands, the metal still warm from the heat of his body. "At least take my father's watch. Something to remember me by."

"No, Ryan, it's too much." She tried to give it back, but his hands were firm as they closed around hers.

"Keep it safe for me," he said. "I'll be back someday with a wedding ring, and then we can trade, okay?"

"I can do that," she whispered.

"I wish things didn't have to be this way, but it's time for me to go. You won't see me again until this is all over."

"I'll be waiting for you," she said. "I don't care how long you're gone, I'll wait forever."

For some reason, her declaration seemed to make him sad. A shadow passed over his face as he pulled her into his arms, rocking her gently in the moonlight.

"Good-bye, Jenny. I'll never forget you. No matter where I go, your heart and spirit will be with me always."



Months went by with no news from Ryan. Each day Jenny held her breath as she approached the post office on the base. Other people received plenty of letters from the soldiers sent overseas, but Jenny's box was always empty. She checked the casualty lists daily, saying a prayer of relief each time she failed to spot Ryan's name.

The war didn't last long. By September it was all over and soldiers began returning home, but there was still no news from Ryan. As Christmas came and went, she feared he'd been killed and somehow his name was not recorded on the casualty lists. What if he'd been captured and trapped in some foreign land where he didn't know the language? He could have suffered a relapse of typhoid or some other tropical disease. Ryan had no family and no one to sound the alarm that he'd gone missing.

It was impossible to sit by and do nothing, so she wrote to Washington to inquire about a sailor who seemed to have vanished. She wrote to the Secretary of the War Department and the captain of the USS *Baltimore*. She wrote to Admiral Dewey himself. It came to nothing, all of them claiming Ryan was deployed and in good health, but she could not believe it when months went by without a single letter from him.

It took over a year for the first and only letter she would ever receive from Ryan to arrive at the Presidio. Jenny stared at it with disbelieving eyes, but it was short and to the point.

Dear Jenny,

I fear I was too optimistic about our future prospects. I have been offered an important opportunity with the navy and have accepted the commission. I will not be returning to California, but I wish you the very best with whatever your future holds.

I am deeply sorry for any false expectations I may have created during my convalescence at the Presidio.

*Sincerely,
Lt. Ryan Gallagher*



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SIX YEARS LATER
SUMMER 1904

Jenny stepped outside the hospital, gazing at the sunrise just beginning to light the horizon. While sunrise signaled the beginning of the day for most people, for Jenny it meant bedtime.

Civilian nurses had been reassigned to overnight work after the war ended, and returning soldiers took the desirable day shifts. Working through the night was a struggle, but it was her only option if she wanted to continue working at the Presidio's hospital.

It was still chilly, and she drew her heavy woolen cloak tighter. Normally at this time she returned to her quarters, drew the shades, and slept until noon.

Not today. Her stomach clenched as she anticipated her meeting with Captain Soames, the medical director for the hospital at the Presidio. Once a battlefield doctor, Captain Soames had been working at a desk since the Spanish-American War ended only eight months after it began. He was a humorless, hard-bitten man who had little patience for the civilian employees at the base, but he was the only person who could grant the favor Jenny so desperately needed.

He wouldn't be in his office yet, so she made a quick trip to the barracks where civilian nurses lodged on the top floor. Her room was compact, tidy, and spotless. It ought to be, given that she swept it daily and wiped the windows, the mirror, and the hardware with a mild vinegar solution twice a week.

After scrubbing her face and hands, she changed her collar for a fresh one. All the nurses wore blue cotton dresses beneath a white apron and topped with a starched collar the army supplied to them each week. Jenny paid extra to have a freshly starched collar daily. Cleanliness was important to her, and any time she locked horns with Captain Soames, she wanted to look flawless. She shook her ebony hair free of its pins, brushed it to a high shine, and then coiled it back into an elegant twist. Pinning the folded nurse's cap into place was the last detail before heading to the captain's office.

He didn't seem pleased to see her, even less so when she explained what she wanted, but she pressed on without letting him shake her composure.

"Skeeter Jones is a bright boy, but unless he has surgery on his eyes, he will be practically blind within a few years," she explained.

"And you want the army to pay for it."

Skeeter was a twelve-year-old orphan who earned less than a dollar a day selling newspapers, so yes, Jenny needed to find someone willing to pay for it.

"Dr. Samuelson tells me that symblepharon surgery is a routine procedure that requires less than an hour in the operating room. I'd be willing to pay any costs associated with medication. . . ."

She let the sentence dangle. Her finances were already stretched dangerously thin since what happened last month, but Skeeter needed this operation. A defect in his system was causing the folds of his eyelids to become anchored to his eyeball, making it hard to see. A simple incision done by a skilled surgeon would change the entire course of Skeeter's life, but it had to be done now, before

he grew much older. Operating rooms at the hospital sat vacant most of the day, and it would cost the army very little to perform this operation.

“Find some other benefactor to pay for it,” Captain Soames said. “If it becomes known that the army is treating charity cases, we’ll have lines stretching to the Embarcadero and complaints about favoritism.”

“Or it might improve our reputation with the city.”

“Find a way to pay for it, Nurse Bennett. Then maybe I’ll hear your request.”

“How am I to pay for it when you pay me scarcely half what you pay the male attendants?”

The captain heard the veiled accusation in her tone. “The night nurses get paid less because you do little more than babysit sleeping patients. Of course we aren’t going to pay you the same salary as the staff during the day. If you don’t like your job here, then quit. If you aren’t earning what you need, then quit. If you don’t like the way I run the hospital, then quit. Is that clear, Nurse Bennett?”

She met Captain Soames’s glower with her chin held high. “Quite clear. The army must be proud their officers can express themselves so forcefully and without resorting to bothersome courtesy.”

Captain Soames let out a bark of gruff laughter. He’d had a grudging respect for her since the time he saw her tackle a soldier trying to steal morphine from a supply cabinet. While most nurses hailed from respectable families, Jenny grew up along San Francisco’s waterfront and wasn’t intimidated by unruly soldiers. Although she liked to pretend it didn’t exist, a streetwise toughness from her youth still lurked just beneath her prim, starched uniform.

Captain Soames threw down his pencil and looked at her in frustration. “Why don’t you just get married like a normal woman? Then you won’t have to work six days a week and still scrounge for money to do a kid a favor.”

Jenny tried not to blanch even though she'd heard the question plenty of times over the years. She'd fallen in love once, and it had been a disaster. The most humiliating thing was that even after receiving Ryan Gallagher's terse letter, she couldn't shake free of his memory. Something about it didn't seem right. Maybe it was just her reluctance to face the truth, but she feared something very bad had happened to Ryan and he was trying to shield her from it.

She had clung to that foolish hope for years, even pressuring her friend at the payroll office for information on his whereabouts. All Vivian had been able to tell her was that Ryan's address had been kept confidential for his entire career in the military, but she later learned he had resigned from the navy early last year. His official forwarding address was now in a tiny fishing village near San Diego.

Jenny could no longer delude herself. As a civilian, Ryan was completely free to contact her if he wished. San Diego was only a day's travel by train, and still she heard nothing from him.

"I have no plans for marriage at this time," she told Captain Soames. There had been no one else for her since Ryan, and too many men had let her down over the years.

Only Simon was different. She and Simon both knew what it was to be homeless and hungry. Since the day he took her under his wing when she was a nine-year-old street urchin, they had always looked out for each other.

The gritty world of San Francisco looked askance at a middle-aged man befriendng a pretty young girl, so she'd taken to referring to Simon as her father from the very beginning. For all intents and purposes, Simon Bennett *was* her father, the only father she'd ever known. She even took his last name because "Bennett" sounded solid and respectable. He fed her when she was hungry, made sure she went to school every day, and consoled her when kids in the neighborhood taunted her because they knew where she came

from. During the boom years, it was Simon who paid for her to attend nursing school.

The boom years were long over, and now Simon needed help. Last month his jewelry shop had been robbed. Thieves kicked in the plate glass window at the front of his shop and walked away with all the jewelry, including Simon's beloved assortment of pearls.

Simon had been collecting and selling pearls his entire life, but the theft left him broke. He didn't even have the money to replace the window and had to nail boards over the opening. Simon's landlord had warned he would be evicted if he couldn't replace the window within the week.

With no other options, Jenny had sold the watch Ryan gave her to buy the plate glass window. Guilt had tugged at her conscience when she laid the watch on the pawn shop counter. It had belonged to Ryan's father, a man who worked as a missionary in the Far East. Both of Ryan's parents had died before she met him, and she felt disloyal selling one of the few keepsakes he had from them.

She hardened her heart. If Ryan cared about his father's watch, he could have asked her for it. She owed Ryan Gallagher nothing and Simon everything.

The sale of Ryan's watch brought enough to install a new window, but it wasn't going to save Simon's shop. Jenny had been funneling all her spare money to help him restock the store, and it meant she had nothing left to help a boy who was quickly going blind.

She needed to play her ace card. When Captain Soames was first appointed to the Presidio, she'd read everything she could find about him. The details of their childhoods were different, but she and Captain Soames both shared the same hardscrabble core, and she knew exactly what it would take to persuade him.

"Your family emigrated from Ireland when you were a baby," she said. "You were one of nine children who grew up in the toughest

ghetto of New York City. You didn't have a pair of shoes until you were eight years old. No one ever handed you anything. You joined the army at sixteen and your life got even tougher, but the army gave you the only thing you ever asked for. *A chance*. You labored, sweat, fought, and bled to get where you are . . . but you weren't blind, Captain Soames. You never would have had a fighting chance in this world if you had been blind."

Captain Soames glared at her, and she glared right back. This fight was too important to lose. She waited, counting her heartbeats while he shifted in his chair.

"Go tell Dr. Samuelson to put the boy's surgery on the schedule."

It felt like the sun rose inside her, radiant with light, heat, and hope. She didn't let a trace of it show on her face as she nodded.

"Thank you, sir."



Jenny usually met Vivian Perez for lunch at one o'clock each afternoon. There weren't many female employees at the Presidio, and Jenny and Vivian quickly bonded amidst the thousands of male soldiers stationed at the West Coast's foremost military base.

Instead of eating at the noisy mess hall, they took their lunch to a table outside on the quadrangle.

Jenny twirled a tin drinking cup between her palms. "The surgery for Skeeter's eyes will be in two weeks," she told Vivian. "I'm going to ask Simon to let the boy move in with him after the surgery, because the orphanage won't have the staffing to tend to him. Of course, I can only hope Simon won't be evicted before then."

She sighed as she unwrapped her chicken sandwich on a flaky croissant roll. She didn't have much appetite but needed her strength. Opening her sandwich, she ate the chicken from the middle and left the croissant untouched.

“What about Simon finding some kind of paid work?” Vivian asked as she tucked into her own sandwich.

It would be the easiest solution to their problem. Getting Simon a respectable job somewhere would be practical, efficient, and logical. Sadly, none of those adjectives could be applied to Simon Bennett.

“I would have better luck rerouting the path of the sun than getting Simon to behave logically,” she said, unable to keep the trace of fondness from her voice. It was the erratic income Simon earned during her childhood that inspired Jenny to go into nursing. Nursing was a practical skill that would always be needed. People got sick in times of plenty and when the bottom dropped out of the economy. Hospitals could be depended on to pay their wages on time, and she appreciated the steady income.

She leaned her elbows on the table and let the breeze caress her face. She liked this spot because it carried the scent from a nearby patch of eucalyptus shrubs. It was a clean smell. Fresh and crisp. Sometimes she snipped a few twigs to take to her room.

“I wonder what that girl is doing?” Vivian asked, and Jenny followed her friend’s gaze.

A few yards away, a little girl in a white smock tugged at a heavy stone bordering the rose garden. She couldn’t have been more than three or four years old, and the rock was almost as big as she was. This didn’t stop the girl from giving it her all, tugging with her weight.

The child seemed to be alone. Jenny doubted the girl could budge that rock, but it was best to be safe. She rose and approached the child, whose straight black hair had slipped free of its hair clips to obscure her face.

“Are you all alone out here?” Jenny asked.

The girl straightened. She was a beautiful child with distinctively Asian features. There were plenty of Chinese people in San Francisco, but Jenny rarely saw them at the Presidio.

“Papa told me to play here,” the girl said in a lightly accented voice. Jenny wondered if Papa knew his daughter was wallowing in garden mulch while wearing a clean white frock.

“Come join us at the table until your father gets back,” Jenny prompted, and the girl obediently followed the few steps to the table beneath the cottonwood tree. “Are you hungry? Would you like a bit of croissant?”

The girl looked confused as she studied the croissant. “Bread?” she asked.

“Yes, it’s bread.”

“Yes please, ma’am.” The child swiped at her hair, and a barrette slipped even further, barely hanging on to her silky black strands.

“Come, let me fix your hair,” Jenny said. “Your papa won’t like it if you lose those pretty seed pearl barrettes.”

There was quite an industry in mechanically grinding oyster shells to make seed pearls, so they weren’t terribly expensive, but Simon would have a heart attack if he saw a child carelessly lose a pair of seed pearl hairpins while playing in the dirt. The child let Jenny finger-comb her hair, but it was a challenge to get the clips securely anchored in the slippery strands.

Her name was Lily, and once she began chattering, it was impossible to stop her. Lily told them she had two pet cats at home, one of which killed a jellyfish and brought it into their house, which made her papa laugh so hard he had tears on his face. Her papa owned an entire beach, and he had a fancy uniform that sometimes he wore and sometimes he didn’t.

“Lily?” A man’s voice called from base headquarters on the other side of the quad.

“Papa!” Lily hopped off the bench and went tearing across the quadrangle toward a tall man in a crisp, white naval uniform.

Jenny stared, not trusting her eyes. “Ryan?” she whispered.

He was too far away to tell, but the man reminded her of Ryan

Gallagher. Maybe it was just the navy uniform, when almost everyone else at the Presidio was in the army, but he looked so similar to Ryan it awakened a rush of bittersweet longing.

Without conscious thought she stood and started walking toward him. She'd only gone a few steps when the child reached him. The naval officer squatted down to scoop her up, tossing the girl into the air with a hearty laugh.

She knew that laugh, a golden tenor that came straight from the heart. It was him. It had to be. While she stood mute and motionless, the little girl looked over her father's shoulder and waved good-bye. The man followed his daughter's gaze and glanced back at Jenny.

He froze as if spellbound. There was no doubt.

Ryan Gallagher was back.

Before she could take another step, Ryan hoisted Lily higher into his arms, turned the other way, and set off toward the officers' quarters without a backward glance.

"Jenny?" Vivian asked. "What's going on?"

It took a while to find her breath. "That man reminds me of someone I once knew."

"Ryan Gallagher?" During her brief courtship, Jenny had breathlessly relayed all the details of her whirlwind romance to her friend. It had been painful and embarrassing when she had to tell Vivian that Ryan changed his mind and they wouldn't be getting married after all.

She didn't want to reopen that painful chapter and shook her head.

"He's nobody," she said simply.