

Book Two: THE CHOICE Series

HOPES ON THE HORIZON

A NOVEL



NAN RINELLA

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same, . . .

The Road Not Taken,
Robert Frost (1874–1963)
American poet

HOPES ON THE HORIZON

BOOK TWO

NAN RINELLA



PROLOGUE:

THE VETERANS



Build me a son, O Lord, who will be strong enough to know when he is weak, and brave enough to face himself when he is afraid, one who will be proud and unbending in honest defeat, and humble and gentle in victory.

General of the US Army Douglas MacArthur
(1880–1964)



THE AMERICAN ACE

To become an ace a fighter must have extraordinary eyesight, strength, and agility, a huntsman's eye, coolness in a pinch, calculated recklessness, a full measure of courage and occasional luck!

Lieutenant General James Harold "Jimmy" Doolittle
(1896–1993)

US Eighth Air Force Europe

January 1946
Columbia University
West End Bar, Morningside Heights
Manhattan, New York

"Bright move, Hollywood, letting these kids talk you into going out with them," scoffed Ridicule, needling Dan with his wartime call sign.

Daniel McCauley looked around the table at his three undergrad fraternity brothers—Ivy League to a man.

"Can the grounded fighter jock really have anything in common anymore with these schoolboys—eastern elites to boot? What'd you expect? That you can erase three years of engaging those crack pilots of the German Luftwaffe and recover your carefree college days before your dream crashed. Ha!"

Just what I need—my own thoughts mocking me. Dan lit a Lucky Strike.

"Cheers!" The four lifted their beer mugs and drank. Smoke from the cigarette swirled above them.

"So where were you initiated, McCauley?" The house president's accent? Definitely upstate New York.

"Stanford."

"California?" Obviously not impressed.

“You *from* there?” The arrogant Bostonian gazed down his aquiline nose at Dan.

“Yeah, born in Hollywood, as a matter of fact.” That ought to rattle these New Englanders even more. “But don’t look so disappointed. My family was one of the first to settle Southern Cal, so I do have a pedigree . . . of sorts.” After an uncomfortable pause, his line drew slight sniggers. So much for fraternity brotherhood.

“When did you graduate, McCauley?” Unquestionably New England as the starched white shirt and sweater vest implied. The guy took out a pack of Canadian duMauriers and an engraved lighter.

“In ’42.”

“You’re just now getting your masters? What were you doing all that time?”

“The war.”

“*You* were in the war?” Dan couldn’t tell if they were impressed or shocked. “Germany or Japan?”

“I was a fighter pilot. Major, army air forces. Flew against the Luftwaffe over France, Belgium, and Germany.”

“Did you kill many Germans?”

“A few.”

“Were you an ace?”

“Yes.”

“Hey fellas, that’s more than a few. Were you ever shot down or did you crash?”

“A few times, yeah. Thought they were going to start charging me for the aircrafts.” His joke was lost on them.

Why are they looking at me that way? What am I, a circus freak?

The frat boys continued to pepper him with questions. “Were you scared?” “What’s it like to kill?” “Was it exciting?” “Did you win any medals?” “Did the Germans look like devils?”

“Big mistake thinking you have anything in common with the brothers anymore, moron.” Ridicule fired a round at his six. *“Thomas Wolfe was right. ‘You can’t go home again.’”*

You’re losing altitude fast. Break now, Ace, and blow this joint.

Dan shook his head at more questions. “Sorry guys got a date. See ya.” After he stubbed out his smoke, he pushed his chair back bumping the man behind him. “Sorry . . . excuse me, oh, Dr. Hampsmire.” And with that, Dan beat it out of there.

The next day

Psychology 301

After dismissing the class, Dr. Hampsmire invited Dan for coffee. They found a table out of the way in the Student Union, and sat drinking their brews, the silence uncomfortable.

The professor was fiftyish with a long thin face and sleepy smile. Kind grey eyes reminded Dan of his dad, who always could read his mind. Is this guy going to say something or is he expecting me to? “About last night, right?”

“They don’t understand, you know. Those boys have no concept of war. Obviously, no one’s told them not to ask.” He produced a pack of Pall Malls and offered Dan one, then lit both.

“And you understand?” Mindlessly Dan stirred his coffee though he took it black. “Are you going to ask, sir?”

“Don’t need to. I’ve seen it before.” He ran his fingers through his thick gray hair.

“Seen what sir?”

“The effects of war on our veterans.”

“Which are?”

“Feeling lost. Experiencing loss, remorse, disappointment. No longer comfortable in your own skin, at home or in the world.

How does he know? “Are you psychoanalyzing me?”

“Am I? Or just reading you?”

Dan stared off behind the professor’s shoulder. He shrugged. “Actually, right on target, Doc.” He exhaled with a sigh.

“We take a young man with principles, ideals, faith, and dreams, and turn him into a killer. He kills for years, telling himself he’s just doing the job. Then we expect him to come home and take up his life where he left off. I hope someday our military will give some thought to our veterans’ mental wounds. But it’s not so now, is it Mr. McCauley?”

“No sir, it’s not. Were you in the last war?”

“No. I’m a pacifist. But my son wasn’t. He was an aviator like you. But Jeff didn’t come home.”

“I’m sorry sir.”

“I am too. He had a sterling future ahead of him. A complete waste.”

“You didn’t think defeating Germany and Japan was the right thing to do?”

“There are always other ways.”

“Well, no one tried those, so we had to fight.”

“You remind me of my son. Jeff was a handsome boy, too. He believed in the cause and loved flying but hated the killing. What about you?”

“I didn’t think much about the killing part, at least, not till the end.”

“The end of the war?”

“No, the end of my flying.”

“You came home early? Gave it up?”

“No, I loved it.” He’d hardly spoken about his experiences and wouldn’t now, but this man had already stripped away his façade. “I crashed, lost a kidney, got grounded. My dream to fly jets in the army—down in flames.” Dan gazed into his empty cup.

“I’ll get us a refill.”

When the professor returned, Dan took the initiative. “Damn, didn’t take you any time to get me on your couch, Doc.”

“If you don’t talk to someone, the pain will poison your soul. Except for your eyes you hardly look twenty, but you have to be . . . at least twenty-five?”

“Just call me baby face.” Dan shrugged.

“You have your whole life ahead of you. I hate to see you waste it.”

“That’s what my uncle tells me.” But what kind of a life is there without flying?

“He’s a psychologist?”

“No, a priest.”

“Ah,” a knowing smile flickered as those silvery eyes read Dan’s soul. “So, you’re disillusioned with your god now. Am I right?” Dan grimaced. “And bitter. Maybe even angry—no, not *maybe*—you *are* mad at this god, and it’s got you twisted up tight as an overwound clock.”

Dan slammed his cup down. “Yes! I’m mad as hell at God for taking away the thing I loved more than anything to punish me for all the killing. All I’ve wanted to do since I saw my first airplane was fly them, especially those army jets.” He broke off short, breathing hard. “That’s the worst sin of all. Unforgivable. Yes, Doc, I am lost. So very lost. And damn bitter!”

Shame lit his cheeks on fire. “*Just spill your guts, why don’t you, for all the world to see.*”

“Son, you’re falling for guilt-talk. That shouts louder than all accusatory feelings. Don’t listen.”

“You’re echoing Uncle Mike’s words. ‘Confess and move on,’ he says. ‘Christ will give you the strength.’ Well, I have tried, and I’m making no progress—zilch.”

“It sounds like you’ve lost trust in your god.”

A sledgehammer slammed into Dan’s cranium. Jerking up his head, he peered into kind gray eyes. Could that be true? Had he stopped trusting God because He’d given up on that boy who was born to fly? If Jesus Christ was not the Son of God, He couldn’t impart enough strength for anyone to overcome their problems.

“So, Doc, what are the answers? You have any?”

“I might. Like searching deep inside yourself for the strength and courage to regain your faith—faith in *yourself*. Find that inner voice that can shout out those guilty accusations.” The prof’s eyes took on a mischievous gleam and his voice a syrupy tone. “Oh, you poor boy. Robbed of your one true love. Your life is nothing now.”

“What?” When did I invite you into my mind?

“Have you picked up those whispers on your radar, Major?” Dan stared. “Of course, you have. Self-pity doesn’t have to shout to catch your attention, does it? I doubt you enjoy much radio silence with despair, shame, doubt, and those rampant feelings yammering at you.”

“What do I do?”

“For starters, come with me to a meeting of the Humanist Society of America tonight.”

“And that will help?”

“Like I said, Mr. McCauley, you might just find a place to begin and some peace.”

“You’re a humanist?”

“I am.”

“You’re saying humanism has the answers?”

“Come and find out. Obviously, your faith in a god has let you down. There is a great deal of strength when you trust in yourself.”

“*Why not?*” declared Bitterness. “*What can you lose?*”



THE SCOTTISH HERO

Of all the factors, which make for success in battle, the spirit of the warrior is the most decisive.

British Field Marshal Bernard “Monty” Montgomery
(1887–1976)

4 February 1946

German port of Bremerhaven

Company Sergeant Major O. C. Ogilvie looked out from the escarpment surveying how the River Weser flowed into the North Sea. If he could see across the expanse of water, he’d find Edinburgh. And north from there, Angus and home. The day was ending, time of the gloaming.

“Och. Glenda lass, I miss you so,” he whispered. That all-too-familiar gnawing ache spread from his gut to his fingertips and toes. He collapsed on a bench and put his head in his hands. As the sun dipped into the sea mist, the pain dragged his heart down into its darkness.

“How’s a ruined bloke supposed to breathe life into a ruined occupied country when the hapless blighter has to work at taking in a breath and forcing it out again?” He sagged as Self-Pity bore down on him.

“Come hame dear laddie,” Mam had written.

His head snapped up. “No! I can’t!”

“You can’t face me, can you little brother? I’m the one enemy you can’t vanquish.” Memories of Fergus’s hooting laughter cut through the stillness. His painful invectives. “Dad’s horrid mistake, an ugly giant, an embarrassment for a sibling.”

“Has the mighty hero any courage left to brave his brother’s verbal fusillades? No? Didn’t think so.” Despair descended on him.

“Sergeant Ogilvie.”

He jumped around, snapping to attention. “Sergeant Major!” Ollie towered

over the balding stocky man. Regimental Sergeant Major Duncan MacWhirter had been his superior noncommissioned officer since he enlisted in '42.

"At ease, Ogilvie, got two letters for you."

Ollie peered down at MacWhirter. "It's her birthday today."

"Bless ye laddie." He pressed him back down on the bench.

The first letter was from Glenda's father. The second from his father. Ollie read it first.

My dear Mac,

This is the most sorrowful missive I've ever had to send. Your dear mother died last night from pneumonia. I am grieved beyond measure. I regret that this war has kept you from saying goodbye.

I look forward to your return and thank God that you have survived.

Da

Mam, oh Mam. Not you, too? *Why God? Why?* Glenda had made him believe in Mam's God again. But now? Could he believe in a God who took them both away? As Ollie sank to his knees and began to weep, MacWhirter moved in resting his hand on Ollie's shoulder.

"Why didn't you take leave when the war ended? You should have gone home." Guilt shoved its knife through his gut.

He should have been there. Bless Da for not reprimanding him.

Mam gone. So, you've left me too.

"What kind of God takes the good and leaves sinners? Like Fergus—your hypocrite brother? Like you?" Self-Pity pressed its advantage.

When his sobs abated, Sarge patted Ollie on the back and squeezed his arm. "I'm considering parting from this man's army. How about you? You only have another year to put in. Isn't it time for us to strike out on another path?" MacWhirter tucked the unread letter in Ollie's pocket.



THE ENGLISH INTELLIGENCE OPERATIVE

Never say “no” to adventures. Always say “yes,” otherwise you’ll lead a very dull life.

The Spy Who Loved Me (James Bond, Agent 007),
Ian Fleming (1908–1964)

March 1948

Room 39: Admiralty Building, Whitehall

Commanded to report to Captain A. Joe Baker-Cresswell, Lieutenant Hugh Claiborne waited in the anteroom of the newly assigned Deputy Director of the Naval Intelligence Division. Under Baker-Cresswell’s command, in May 1941, the crew of the HMS Bulldog (a destroyer) had captured the German submarine U-110 and recovered the Enigma machine.

As an intelligence officer, Hugh had devoured all the information he could find on the electro-mechanical rotor cipher machine. The German Navy had used it to encrypt and decrypt shore-to-sea messages. Oh, the hubris of the Germans, considering their codes unbreakable. But we had the last laugh. A broad grin broke across his face.

Capture of the machine, its cipher keys, and code books was a critical intelligence breakthrough for the Allies. It allowed codebreakers to read German signal traffic. Hugh had heard estimates that the find might have shortened the war exponentially.

Pride massaged his ego. “*And you did your part in the operation, Genius. Not that anyone will know. All those brilliant successes you intel chaps achieved—not for public consumption. However, one can’t complain, can one, after the commander’s sterling performance evaluation recommending early promotion? Finally! Damn hard*

to get promoted without sea duty and combat experience. Those special assignments garnered rare praise though. Good show.” Satisfaction emanated from every pore. *“Now knock the grin off your face, Lieutenant.”*

Sweat amassed under his formal jacket as Hugh stood at attention facing the captain.

“It’s an honor, Captain Baker-Cresswell.”

“And, it was my honor to serve under your father, Lieutenant.”

“Thank you, Sir.”

For five years Hugh had been part of the Operational Intelligence Center, the heart of NID, assigned to the Special Intelligence Unit Command under Commander Ian Fleming. SIU agents worked to obtain intelligence such as codes and documents. Via covert infiltrations into enemy territory, they also captured equipment or personnel providing intelligence to the advancing Allied forces.

“You are a skilled specialist and have comported yourself well, Lieutenant. Commander Fleming gave you high marks.”

“I was mostly an analyst, Sir.”

“Without which intelligence is just a lot of data. However, I understand you did more than analyze. Lieutenant Claiborne, the war and direct aftermath are over, and I’ve been made aware of your contribution. What do you want to do now?”

“When I joined up, I wanted sea duty like my father, Captain, but now I’m pondering my options.”

“Did you relish your work in the NID?”

“Aye, Sir. It was mentally challenging—”

“But you wanted more. Like, perhaps action in the field?”

Desire burgeoned. *“What do you know, Genius, the war is over but there’s still hope for honor and glory.”*

A hint of a smile escaped before Hugh could suppress it.

The captain grinned. “I thought so. I’ve a proposal for you.”