WHITE EAGLES

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For Mark

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ITALY

PART 1: Invasion

CHAPTER 1

"I can't believe you've been called up first!" Leopold said as he stared at the letter his twin sister Kristina had just opened. "Unfair!"

Leopold stood by the hall table at the bottom of the stairwell – where all the post for their building got left. Kristina's letter was headed with the Polish Air Force's crest – a fierce white eagle.

Last year, Kristina and Leopold Tomiak had both completed their basic pilot training. Now they shared a flat and worked as instructors at the Vistula Aeroclub outside Warsaw. It was the summer of 1939 and three months until their nineteenth birthday.

It had been an uneasy summer – Germany's army was gathering near Poland's borders. All of Europe was worried. The German Luftwaffe was the most fearsome air force in the world. Every now and then you could see their spy planes flying high over Warsaw. It made your skin crawl when

you looked up, wondering if they'd drop a bomb or fly away without causing trouble.

So far, they'd always flown away.

Kristina and Leopold had signed up for the Polish Air Force Reserve. Now the shadow of war loomed and this letter commanded Kristina to join them. She would be a liaison pilot – flying missions to take strategic photographs, deliver messages and sometimes transport important passengers.

"Why you and not me?" Leopold cried. Kristina's brother was hot-headed and open-hearted, always bad at hiding his emotions. "I got my pilot's licence first!" he added. "And I've trained more solo flyers than you have!"

Kristina laughed. She was the more level-headed of the twins and was used to Leopold's dramatics. "You only just edged ahead of me this morning!" she reminded him. "I was winning yesterday, before your solo student today. And tomorrow I'll be in the Air Force!"

"I expect my letter has been delayed in the post," Leopold said. "What kind of missions do they want you to fly?" He snatched the letter from Kristina's hand so he could see it better. "Communications. You'll still be based at the

Vistula Aeroclub. Oh, and the plane they're giving you is just an RWD-8. A training aircraft – like we fly every day!"

"It has an extra fuel tank," Kristina pointed out. "It can go twice as far as those old flight-school trainers. I'll be leaving you in the dust."

She turned to meet her brother's eyes. She could tell by the look on Leopold's face that he was proud of her – if also a bit envious.

Kristina knew they'd probably be sent to different regiments at some point, but she hoped they wouldn't be too far away from each other for now. Leopold was her best friend as well as her brother – they'd moved away from home together and were so busy with work that they hardly saw their parents.

"Kristina Tomiak, fearless scout for the Polish Air Force!" Leopold said. "A young eagle! You'll be spying on German troops – leading fighter pilots to their prey! Perhaps they're giving the liaison jobs to the girls so that the men can fly the fighter planes. No doubt they'll make me a fighter pilot when I get my letter."

"If no one tips them off about how big-headed you are," Kristina told him.

"Hah." Leopold laughed. "Then you'll be jealous of me instead of the other way round!"

Kristina thought he was probably right about the women pilots getting liaison work so that the young men were free to fight. But this letter meant she had real air work to do, and she wasn't jealous at all.

"We'll be eagles together," Kristina said.