
The
LAST
PILOT. PATRIOT. SPY?
HAWK
ELIZABETH WEIN

The LAST HAWK



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Barrington Stoke

For Jared (The Great Houweini)

First published in 2021 in Great Britain by
Barrington Stoke Ltd
18 Walker Street, Edinburgh, EH3 7LP

www.barringtonstoke.co.uk

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library upon request

ISBN: 978-1-78112-955-5

Printed by Hussar Books, Poland

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PROLOGUE

Ingrid Hartman's Notes for a Confession – France, July 1944

It's strange to be a prisoner and yet to have stopped being afraid. I suppose that should tell me I've made the right decision.

But I don't know what my future holds – it's a blank sheet ahead of me. I can't be sure of anything. I have no idea what will happen to me – where I'll end up and if I'll be allowed to fly again. I don't think I can ever go home – and by home, I don't mean to my family. I don't mean to the village where I was born and grew up. I mean I'll never be able to go back to Germany, whether we win or lose the war.

Perhaps my own decision will change what happens. I hope it *does*. But whatever happens, I won't be welcome in Germany any more.

I might be a prisoner, but my name is still Ingrid Hartman, and I am still seventeen years

old. I still have straight brown hair cut short so it fits easily under a flying helmet, a pale face with a pointed nose and bright brown eyes that gave me the nickname “Flying Mouse”.

But who am I now? I’m no longer the stuttering girl in the corner of the schoolroom, the one who’s always looking at the sky. I’m not the dreamer who’s happier with birds than people, who watches hawks for hours and lets sparrows eat crumbs from the palms of her hands. I’m no longer the student at the gliding school with her head in the clouds. I’m a refugee now – an enemy prisoner of war. Would my own father call me a traitor?

I’d like to believe he would not, if he knew the truth. I’d rather think of myself as a patriot – fighting for my country against the monsters who pushed it into the fearful corner it stands in now.

I told the interrogators from the US Army that I would write down my story for them.

That’s what I’m going to do.

PART 1: The Fledgling

CHAPTER 1

My journey began last winter, in February of 1944, in our pretty Alpine village of Ulmenhain. My mother died six months before. My journey began because the telephone and the doorbell rang at almost exactly the same time.

My father was out at a meeting with the Ulmenhain mayor, and I was alone in the house with Minna, our housekeeper. It was snowing hard. When the telephone rang, I didn't pay any attention. I was forbidden to answer it because of my stutter. I was in the living room, engrossed in a book I'd borrowed from my friend Emil. He'd given it to me early last summer and I'd already read it five times, but it never grew dull – partly because I loved the book, and partly because I missed Emil and liked to imagine what he'd thought when he read it.

It was called *Wind, Sand and Stars* and was written by a French pilot named Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. I was in the middle of a dramatic true story about how Antoine's plane crashed in

the desert and he nearly died of thirst. I hardly heard the telephone. A moment later, I hardly heard the doorbell. I assumed Minna would get the door as well as the phone. That was part of her job.

After a pause, the doorbell rang again.

I looked up from my book this time, realising that Minna must still be on the telephone, upstairs in my father's study. I wasn't supposed to answer the door, because I found it so difficult to talk to people. But there was no one else in the house.

As I hesitated, I heard the door open and snow being stamped from someone's boots. There was the sound of angry footsteps crossing the wooden floor of the hall.

I stood up and put down my book. Who had let himself in? Who would do that apart from my father?

A tall man suddenly marched into the front room where I was sitting. He was older than my father, with thin blond hair combed over his shining scalp. He wore polished black boots and a long brown overcoat and red armband – he was a Nazi Party official. His peaked cap was in his hand, and he shook snow from it over my mother's wool

carpet. His entire head was red, even the skin that showed beneath his thin hair.

"Are you deaf, girl?" the man barked at me. "I have rung the doorbell twice and knocked as well, and you have been in here the whole time ignoring me! Are you Arno Hartman's daughter? What shameful disrespect!"

I was horrified, realising that he must have seen me in the window. A Nazi Party official had banged at our front door, and he thought I'd ignored him on purpose! It would get my father in trouble as well as me.

"I beg your p-p-pardon!" I burst out. "I thought our housekeeper would c-c-come—"

"Is that how a polite young German girl greets an important elder?" growled the angry man.

I nearly choked as I realised I'd forgotten to say "*Heil Hitler*". It should have been the first thing I said. That's how you were supposed to greet everybody, not just Nazi Party officials. You could get reported to the police if you didn't say it.

Instead of trying to apologise again, I gave the Nazi salute and gasped out, "*Heil Hitler!*"

At that moment Minna came bustling downstairs and into the room.

"Region Leader Wulfsen!" Minna said. She knew exactly who the officer was and why he was there. "I've just had a telephone call from Herr Hartman." So it had been my father himself on the phone – what irony! "He's on his way back from the mayor's office now and apologises for his late arrival. Please, let us make you comfortable while you wait."

Minna turned to me. Her face was pale, but her expression was neutral. "Ingrid, would you make coffee for our guest?" Minna said. "I'll show Region Leader Wulfsen upstairs to your father's study. Please get a tray ready in the kitchen, and I'll come back down to fetch it."

I bowed to Region Leader Wulfsen before I left the room, and gave Minna a tight but grateful smile as I slipped past her to get to the kitchen. She'd saved me from having a conversation with a Nazi official – something my father and mother had spent the last ten years trying to avoid.