

A WOMEN'S WAR, TOO.

Written by

Ange Neale

NB/ British spelling

Email: ange_neale@icloud.com

Phone: (+61) 0484 222 394

This script is not based on one WWII servicewoman's true story or experiences, but on the true stories and real experiences of many servicewomen.

There were female Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) pilots and likely to be RAF Medical Branch personnel who were lesbians, but women rarely publicly outed themselves as homosexual in the uniformed auxiliaries in 1940.

Out of respect for those women's choices and privacy, I have made my protagonists, Jen and Alli, and what happens to them fictional.

This script draws upon actual government and military policy, published articles, true events, eyewitness accounts, and experiences that female pilots and servicewomen had as retold in interviews conducted with them or their autobiographies, including sexual harassment and sex-based discrimination as occupational hazards.

FADE IN:

INT. DOUGLAS DC-2 COCKPIT - DAY

Super: Wisconsin. February, 1940.

Immersed in dense cloud. The aircraft jolts and shudders in turbulence. Sleet splatters the windows as fast as the wiper blades can clear it.

The PILOT on the left is slumped in his seat, unconscious.

Fighting the yoke, one of the CO-PILOT's young hands reaches out to tap the altimeter: 5900 feet and dropping. The hand flicks the ice protection switch.

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. RURAL WISCONSIN AIRFIELD - DAY

A fire engine and an ambulance wait near a hangar marked with 'O'Keefe Air' signage.

A welcoming committee shivers in blustery conditions: GROUND STAFF, FIREMEN and PARAMEDICS wait with HAL O'KEEFE (40s).

HAL
(sotto, to the co-pilot)
Don't forget the de-icing boots,
kiddo.

Beside Hal waits his old friend and fellow pilot, Welshman DAVE MORGAN (40s). He's burn-scarred on his cheeks and jaw below where a pilot's goggles would have been.

The DC-2 breaks out of the murk. Ahead, an airfield with a patchy covering of snow and a single tarmac runway.

Dave's athletic son MATTY MORGAN (19) smokes nervously. He's on crutches with one leg in plaster. He's so good-looking, you just know he'll win life's lottery.

MATTY
Coming in kinda steep, aren't they,
Dad?

The co-pilot's hands pull back on the yoke, shallowing the aircraft's descent according to the pitch angle dial.

Those on the ground can see the aircraft start pitching up.

DAVE

They'll have been worried about ice building up on the wings if they'd approached pitched nose up.

The DC-2's wheels descend. It bucks and yaws in the wind on final approach, continuously correcting.

HAL

The airliner's fitted with the latest counter-measures. They'll be okay, Matty. They will.

Hal exchanges a glance with Dave. Neither man is confident.

Not the prettiest landing, but the DC-2 touches down. Braking, it skids sideways in the snow, but doesn't leave the runway.

Relief all around and some of the men applaud as the aircraft slows. Hal squeezes Dave's shoulder and teases him.

HAL (CONT'D)

I'm glad she's a better pilot than you are, Dave. She just saved me a foot-high stack of paperwork.

DAVE

With a bit more experience, she'll be a better pilot than most of us.

LATER

Also marked with 'O'Keefe Air' signage, the DC-2 idles, disgorging a dozen PASSENGERS down a mobile staircase.

In the cockpit, Dave's lanky daughter, co-pilot JEN MORGAN (18) switches off the airliner's twin engines.

A product of physical farm work and the Great Depression, studious Jen's the quintessential tomboy who's never met a responsibility she could avoid and doesn't care if her short hair resembles a bird's nest. Bigger things occupy her mind.

Relieved, Jen closes her eyes and bows her head. She mouths a 'Thank you, Ma' before shrugging out of her harness and leaning to check on her colleague.

JEN

The ambulance is here for you, Patrick. Our passengers are safe.

He's unresponsive but he is breathing.

Atop the stairs, a glamorous FLIGHT ATTENDANT reassures the last disembarking passenger eyeing the ambulance in concern.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Oh, it's a standard precaution if
someone on board feels unwell.

With the passengers all disembarked, the paramedics hurry up the staircase carrying a stretcher. Hal follows them up, dismayed by a slick sheet of ice across the wing.

In the cockpit, Jen slips out of her seat to give them room to tend to the pilot. She scoops up her sheepskin Irvin jacket and overnight bag then exits, pulling on the jacket.

END INTERCUT

Hal meets Jen at the top of the stairs.

HAL

That was some landing, kiddo. Real
seat-of-the-pants flying. Look...

He gestures at the iced-up wing. Jen pulls a face.

JEN

Oh, boy... Half an inch maybe?

HAL

Ha! And the rest.

JEN

I used the de-icing boots just
below six thousand. Either they're
not working properly, or that built
up in, what, five minutes?

HAL

(feigns nonchalance)
I've had worse. We'll check the
boots, just in case.

JEN

(re Matty's leg)
What's Matty done to himself?

HAL

Me, steal his thunder? That story
gets better with every telling. Oh,
hey... Union letter...

Hal retrieves a letter from a pocket for her. The return address is the Pilots' Association. Jen sighs and exchanges a glance with him, steeling herself.

She tears open the envelope and skims the letter, barely reacting.

JEN
No dice, Hal.

HAL
Dumb sons of bitches...

JEN
Your legal liability insurance...

HAL
My wife suggested we challenge them about not accepting female members and their regulations about non-union pilots, all the way up to the Supreme Court, if we have to. But the Commerce Department has awfully deep pockets, a cosy relationship with the big boys, and it could take years, Jen. I'll find work in the hangar for you while we figure out our next move. Are you gonna apply for college again?

JEN
Dad wants me to. Appreciate you sticking up for me, Hal. Hey, uh, Patrick doesn't look so good.

HAL
We'll get him the best care we can. Don't keep your Dad waiting.

Jen hurries down the stairs to hug Dave then Matty.

DAVE
Are you alright, sweetheart?

JEN
I'm fine. Ma was looking after us.

DAVE
Yes, I expect she was.

Her loss still pains Dave. He gives Jen a wan smile and they walk to a near-by pick-up truck loaded with steel milk cans.

JEN
(to Matty, re his leg)
Latest chore avoidance strategy?

MATTY
I was recovering from the fumble of
the season with the tackle of the
season, and busted some 'ant'
something-or-other in my knee.

JEN
Anterior cruciate ligament?

MATTY
Trust you to know.

JEN
I read. You should try it sometime.

MATTY
And raise everyone's expectations?
I can't even train until summer.

JEN
Terrific opportunity to improve
your grades.

MATTY
All work and no play makes Matty a
dull boy. You should try *that*
sometime, Jen. Play, that is.

Jen's about to retort and Dave intervenes in exasperation.

DAVE
Oh, for the love of God, you two.
Please don't start.
(to Jen)
How was Toronto, love?

JEN
Half the city's in uniform, Dad. If
I'd been a guy, they'd have press-
ganged me into their Air Force --
(to Matty)
-- And the Army'd have a rifle in
your hands in a heartbeat.
(re Matty's knee)
Well, maybe not yet...

Dave slides her a stern look not to bait Matty.

MATTY

I wouldn't mind that so much. Some of the guys on the team are talking about going to Canada to sign up.

DAVE

Stay put for now, Matty. Come spring, Herr Hitler will make his intentions clear.

INT. MORGANS' HOME - JEN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Jen unpacks her travel bag.

Seen through the window, Matty throws a football around with their THREE YOUNGER BROTHERS. He overthrows a ball towards a garden of bare rose bushes. One of the boys dashes for it.

DAVE (O.S.)

Hey, mind those roses, boys!

Jen retrieves a copy of 'Flight', a British aviation magazine, from January 4th, 1940.

She opens it to a page with a circled headline: 'Women Ferry Pilots'. There's also a photo clipped from a newspaper of eight women pilots in winter flying gear backdropped by two British Tiger Moth open-cockpit, dual-seater biplanes.

Jen regards an autographed wall poster of Amelia Earhart and photos of famous women pilots of the 1930s, including:

Pioneering Black & Native American pilot Bessie Coleman; cigar-smoking Florence 'Pancho' Barnes; androgynous Evelyn 'Bobbi' Trout; 1929 'Powder Puff Derby' winner Louise Thaden; globe-trotting English aviatrix Amy Johnson; and first Black American woman to hold a US pilot's licence, Willa Brown.

JEN

You'd all just go, wouldn't you?
You wouldn't wait for the courts.
(beat)
Dad's gonna need convincing.

INT. HANGAR - DAY

A small, single-engine commuter aircraft with its engine cowling open. Jen nervously shuffles new spark plugs in her hand. Hal finishes reading the 'Flight' article.

HAL

Have you asked your Dad yet?

JEN

I wanted to talk to you first, Hal.
Could I get a reference? If I
decide to ask him?

HAL

You'll get the best one I've ever
written, kiddo. You know, Britain's
buying American aircraft. You'd be
a real asset to them. Or, um, I
know a guy at McDonnell Douglas. I
could call him. Better weather down
there in Santa Monica.

Jen's grateful he offered, but... No, thanks.

HAL (CONT'D)

I wouldn't, either.
(re the aircraft)
How soon until I can take her out?

JEN

Another half-hour. Working on them
isn't so bad, Hal.

HAL

You're wasted here. You should go.

Hal puts the magazine up on the wing and exits. Jen turns
back to the aircraft's engine.

Out of her sight, two YOUNG MALE PILOTS (20s) watch Hal get
into his pickup-truck and drive away. They enter the hangar.

YOUNG MALE PILOT #1

Hey, grease monkey!

He snatches the magazine from the wing and skims the circled
article while the other pilot blocks her from retrieving it.

JEN

Quit it, guys! Gimme that back!

YOUNG MALE PILOT #2

What's she got?

YOUNG MALE PILOT #1

Ha! Like the King of England wants
broads flying his Spitfires!

JEN

I could handle that! I landed
eighteen thousand pounds of DC-two
yesterday all by --

YOUNG MALE PILOT #2
You're full of shit, grease monkey!

JEN
Look, it's not the RAF. They're a
civi -- NO!

Pilot #1 dumps the magazine into a bucket of muddy, soapy
water near the wheel strut, and they exit the hangar,
laughing and jeering 'Grease monkey!' at her.

Despondent, Jen fishes out the sodden magazine and shakes it,
then she tries to wipe the water off onto her overalls.

JEN (CONT'D)
Dog-gone... Assholes.

INT. MORGANS' HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Matty reads the 'Flight' magazine article, seemingly
unimpressed. Jen dries dishes.

MATTY
War's men's business, Jen.

JEN
Guernica, Spain. Nineteen thirty-
seven. The Luftwaffe flattened half
the town. You think only men and
boys got killed and injured? Air
power's changed warfare. It's a
women's war now, too, which makes
it everyone's business.

MATTY
Dad could really use the help here.

JEN
So you quit college and help him
since it's not like your thinking
skills and study ethic are superior
to, I dunno, our cows.

MATTY
And you wonder why you don't have a
boyfriend, Miss Smarty-pants.

JEN

You might wonder. *I don't. I don't* need some guy getting all weird with me because I study harder, practice longer, and I can do things that he likes to think of as guy stuff better than he ever could.

MATTY

For the record, girls get "all weird", too. I don't tell my dates my kid sister's a pilot. It's like that moment when Dorothy finds out the Wizard's a fraud. They're disappointed I can't fly and then they want to talk about you all night, like you're Earhart or something.

JEN

It's not your fault you get vertigo. I offered to teach you to fly on instruments.

Dave enters, carrying dirty dishes to wash.

DAVE

Are you two at each other's throats again?

JEN & MATTY

No, Dad.

MATTY

Jen, I'm all out of coffin nails. I think I left a pack up in the loft. Would you be the bestest-ever pal and fetch 'em? *Please?*

Jen hands him the towel and exits out the back door. Seen through the window, she jogs towards the barn.

DAVE

I really wish you hadn't started that, Matty. Your Ma's smoking had a lot to do with her bronchitis.

MATTY

I'm fine, Dad. So long as it doesn't slow me down on the field, Coach doesn't care either.

(re the magazine)

(MORE)

MATTY (CONT'D)

Are you really going to let her go to England?

DAVE

If that's what she really wants.

MATTY

She should be helping you out around here. She's only gonna get married. Why waste college on her?

DAVE

You don't know that. With your Ma's life insurance money, I'm buying milking machinery. We'll manage just fine without you both.

(Matty looks skeptical)

I hope she'll try for a scholarship again first. They can't ignore her forever. She's too smart to --

MATTY

*Oh, shit! **SHIT!***

To Dave's astonishment, Matty dumps the towel and hurries for the door as fast as he can on his crutches. He wrenches the door open and bustles out, yelling.

MATTY (CONT'D)

JEN! Come back!

EXT. MORGANS' FARM - DAY

Frantic, Matty gets tangled up in his crutches and nearly tumbles down the porch stairs. Dave follows, alarmed.

MATTY

JEN! Don't bother!

JEN

(hasn't heard him)

I'll be right back!

Jen hauls open the barn door and heads inside.

DAVE

Matty, what the hell's the matter?

MATTY

Dad, you have to stop her!