

## Chapter One

# STOWAWAY BRIDE



It was a beautiful sunny day, June 10, 1943. I waited at home for Art in the front porch swing. Bees were buzzing, the air soft and the grass was sweet and fresh. World War II was raging on both sides of the world, but the world would have to wait. Art had called from Florida the night before and said he would be in Nashville for the day. He was in the last stages of training as a squadron leader to leave the country with a squadron of 100 men (10 planes, 10 men to a plane).

I was now 23 years old and working. Artis Railey was my teenage sweetheart. He was a bomber pilot stationed in Florida prior to his assignment. Unbeknownst to me, his squadron was scheduled to leave for overseas

within the next thirty days.

His training allowed him to pick his crew and schedule his flights. He had scheduled a flight to Nashville and would be arriving the next morning to spend the day. I took the day off my job at the IRS.

Upon arrival he stated that he didn't want any ifs, ands or buts about it. Rather than a wedding at some vague time after the war, *we were getting married the next day*. I was delightfully dumfounded that someone was ordering me to make up my mind, to make a decision, to make wedding plans. He had given me an engagement ring two months earlier, in April when I went to his graduation from 4 Motors (B-17) planes in Sebring, Florida; and we planned to be married but had not, until this day, June 10, 1943, set a date for the wedding. With such a pronouncement from him we set out for the city. I went to my office and resigned my IRS job, which at that time was the Secretary to Miss Rosa Freedman, Head of Personnel Dept. It was my duty to type the payroll for all the Revenue employees. She said, "Lucille what will we do, your leaving on such short notice." I told her some of my co-workers would fill in, 'cause this was love and war and I had to go.

Art was so handsome and impressive. All my work friends were in awe of him. Ruth Keyes said, "He has the grace of a Bengal tiger." Most flyers did have trim, tough

physiques because of their rigorous training. Art once said he had developed calluses on his hands when flying formation.

I told my friends good-bye and proceeded to the shops for a trousseau. This was accomplished in a couple of hours. Neither money nor time would allow for more preparation. I quickly chose a pale pink dress, hat, veil, white gloves, white bag and shoes. The bag came with a choice of an initial. I proudly told the clerk, "My name will be Railey by this time tomorrow." She said, "Well, you shall have an 'R' on this bag." Can you imagine a bride with an initial bag rather than a hand bouquet? Everything has always been different for me.

After a hurried dinner with family at Mama's house, we all hastened to the airport for the flight to Florida. One man from my office said, "I never heard of anyone eloping and taking their mother with them." He was teasing me and Mama.

When we gained admittance to the field we left my family at the administration building and went to meet Art's crew. They proved to be an eager group and huffed at the idea of our not being able to smuggle me aboard the plane at Berry Field. It was only then that I learned I was to be smuggled aboard. Up until this point I had fancied myself tripping lightly onto the plane with all my friends and relatives throwing kisses, corsages and rice. I had

forgotten that a B-25 is not entered like a transport, but instead one climbs a ladder and goes up through the hatch. Well, I can't say that I had cold feet, nor for one moment did I plan to turn back, but I was scared blue; that was until the crew chief appeared on the scene. He seemed to be equal to anything. When he heard of the plan he said, "Leave it to me." He reminded me of the "Fonz" in Happy Days. He too had a girlfriend in Nashville and she had come to the airport to see him leave. He had already done a swell job of getting her past the guards and out to see the plane which was positively against orders, so he was being dog-eyed by a husky looking guard who explained in no uncertain terms that no other civilians were to go further than the administration building. Art had first told the guard he wanted to show his wife, namely me, the plane but the guard had said, "Lieutenant, we trust your wife but we cannot allow any civilians further than the Officers' Club."

The Officers' Club was at the very tip edge of the runway. That called a halt until the crew chief announced he was planning the strategy. This is what he decided – since the sun was setting and in so doing silhouetting the planes as they sat on the field, it was a cinch that any female would stand out like a neon sign among nothing but uniformed men, especially one in a white linen dress and shoes which I happened to be wearing at the time. The only thing to do was for me to dress

in one of Art's coveralls and wait for dusk-dark before going to the plane.

Then another problem presented itself. Where was the transition from female to male attire going to take place? I certainly couldn't go into the ladies' room and come out like a grease-monkey (the role I was to assume) nor did I dare go into a men's restroom. Stumped but not defeated, we sat down on a pile of lumber in the unfinished part of the Officers' Club which was to be a dance floor later. Then we decided if we sat there in a circle and appeared interested in each other's conversation that little by little I could don the costume, and no one would ever notice the difference since the place was not yet lighted and it was fast growing dark; and that is what we did.

When I had given my jewelry to Art, rubbed off my make-up, put on the co-pilot's shoes and stuffed my hair up high under somebody's cap, I realized again, or maybe it was the first time, what an awful risk I was taking. If our plan were discovered, it could mean only one thing for the boys and that would be court-martial. For my part I couldn't imagine what penalty a civilian misdemeanor of this sort carried but Alcatraz seemed commensurate. I knew what those boys had paid for their commissions and I thought of the crew who had nothing to gain by this recklessness and everything to lose and how loyal they were all being. At

this point one said, “If you get by with this, Lucille, it will sure be something for you to remember.” Then someone else said, “And if you don’t, it will be something for us all to remember.” We all laughed nervously.

We appointed one of the boys to watch each of the guards and after they instructed me how to walk like a man, taking big long steps and slouching my shoulders, we set out to the plane. Fear seized me like a big hand when we were in full view of the guards. What if they stopped us? Art had said, “If they question us, I’ll do the talking for all of us.” But that didn’t ease the fear I was now feeling for I noticed a man walking along with us whom I didn’t recognize as a crew member. He said nothing. We all walked in silence, and the silence was deafening. It seemed the plane was not nearly so close as it had appeared before we started walking. That march to the plane reminded me more of a funeral procession than a slap-happy bunch helping a stow-away bride make her escape. The guards were either very near blind or not looking at all for I’m sure if they noticed, they would have decided at one glance that no grease monkey ever had a complexion as pale as mine or wore fingernail polish either. One of them did ask the co-pilot why he was without shoes. He said, “My feet hurt.” The silent figure on Art’s left proved to be one of us, and once at the plane’s hatch, Art ascended and pulled me

through after him. The relief that showed on everyone's face was compensation enough for the effort.

They settled me on top of a shelf-like contraption right above the radio compartment and told me to be as quiet as a little mouse and that if anyone spoke up the hatch, not to even breathe. They left the crew chief on guard duty to make sure no one came near the hatch. Art and his co-pilot went back to the administrative building to tell my family good-bye and to get clearance for the plane. It was terribly hot there in the plane especially with a full outfit of clothes on underneath those bulky coveralls and, to add to my misery, the chief told me when a long period of time had elapsed and Art had not come back, that he might have to "sweat it out." I asked him what he meant by "sweating it out." And added that it seemed to me if anyone was sweating it out it was I. He explained that if an airport had weather reports that were not conducive to good flying, they could ground a plane for hours or maybe even overnight if the weather didn't clear up. This was a heavy thought – spending the night in that outfit would certainly be torment and it would be extremely hazardous to try getting back to the safety of our car without being caught. But before the thought could actually take shape, the boys came back and brought the clearance papers with them.

They had seen my family again and some of my friends from the office who had come to the airport to see me off but had arrived after the smuggling process had begun. Art told them how successful we had been so far and promised that as he passed the administration building he would blink his lights twice so they would know we were off. Art was an outstanding flyer – had already on several assignments flown Generals on trips out of U.S. (i.e. overseas flights.) He sent me a newspaper clipping of one such trip.

At last we were ready to start. We were to fly a straight course and it was the first night navigation the navigator had done. He had planned we would go in on the beam which would have meant going via Atlanta, Jacksonville and back to the Southwest, but Art thought otherwise since that was a longer route and so much time had been lost getting me on board. The young navigator was very much concerned, and I began to wonder if the crew as a whole was not by this time feeling that I was a “bad omen,” but then one of the fellows began to rig me into a parachute and I guessed as how they didn’t really mind my being there after all. I wondered how there happened to be an extra parachute along.

Even today, I stand amazed at the daring caper of this trip. Art evidently thought he only had 30 days to live and he was going to have me at all costs. He had it all worked

out - they were all helping him and he was as cool as a cucumber. No wonder he was a Squadron Leader. I don't believe Eisenhower could have dreamed up such a stunt.

Now on board, the co-pilot handed me a little note that some of my friends had given him while he was at the administration building and I learned later they had also given him a lovely nightgown for me and a corsage of gardenias but he, in all the excitement, had left both packages on the counter in the operations office. They had entrusted him with these farewell tokens because they felt surely Art was too excited to depend on and he had not done one whit better. The note was some farewell message that I kept reading over and over and being pleased with – for I thought how nice of them to come unsolicited and, when they had missed seeing me, to send a note.

While I was in this reverie the crew chief shouted in my ear above the roar of the motors, which by this time was deafening, to hold onto something because we were about ready to leave the ground and he said it would be necessary to keep stationary. I was expecting to be thrown for a somersault but the jolt was very mild. I had ridden in a transport plane before and one time with Art in a trainer but this was entirely different. By this time I was over my fear and drunk with excitement.

My brother, who was watching from the runway, said

he couldn't swallow for thirty minutes because of the fact that the tower rerouted our take-off to another runway at the last second. The second runway was much shorter than the original one and since the plane was to gain the necessary speed from the distance of the original runway, we did not have such power for the shorter and as a result became airborne just in time to clear an embankment at the extreme edge of the airport. But of course I was not aware of the near tragedy and it seemed only a second before I was gazing back on Nashville which glittered from the air like so many little stars. The lights around the city reservoir looked like a necklace and the town in general a toy village all lighted up.

The boys really got a kick out of my enthusiasm and I was deliriously happy. Art would talk to me over the inter-plane communication phone and when we were some distance on our way, he let the co-pilot take over and he and I crawled on our stomachs down through the narrow passageway to the nose gunner's position in the glass-encased nose of the plane.

Leaving like this certainly made Lochinvar and his conquest seem like kid stuff I thought. If ever anything seemed unreal and out of this world and beautiful, that did. There we sat in a sphere of glass, bathed in moonlight, hurling through space with thousands of stars looking down