



THE LADY GANGSTER

Chapter 24

Praying All Night for a Man to Die

I knew my father as a peace-loving man. To me he always presented the best example of living life by the dictates of the Sermon on the Mount. He seldom lost his temper, and he always went the extra mile not to offend or be offended. What he next told me was a shock.

Saipan was when I prayed all night for a man to die.

I was unable to form a question.

He could tell by my silence that I wanted to ask, so he went on without me speaking: *The ship left us. They had to. You can't sit all night off of a beach and be a target. So the Fuller and the other transports moved out. When that happened I got very concerned. It was my ship. My home...and it was gone. Now I knew how the troops on the beach felt after we dropped them off. At night the transports have to move. Makes sense, but it is scary when you are the one left on the beach.*

At night, the beach was a very different place. We had been moving back and forth along our part of the beach all day, trying not to be targets. We jumped in and out of foxholes and trenches and hid behind equipment. The beach was loose sand on top of coral and rock. The trenches and foxholes we dug had to be shallow because it was so hard to dig.

When the sun started to go down, a Marine who seemed in charge of a forward detachment came back to instruct all of us in the beach platoon. He told us to dig holes as fast as possible and be ready to stay in them all night. Snipers were expected. He ran forward and we never saw him again.

I began to dig. The beach was hard, and the best I could do was dig a shallow horizontal foxhole. I placed chunks of coral, rock, and equipment along the island side of the trench and hunkered down. I held my .45 and kept it outside its holster. I knew that if I was ever to need it, I'd need it fast. If the Japs pushed the Marines back, they'd be close. I prepared myself to shoot anything that didn't look like a Marine.

I finally croaked out a question. "You...you said...you said you prayed for a man to die?"

Nothing I'm proud of. He was silent.

A Sailor's Memoir

I stayed silent also.

Then, after a long wait, he explained: *That Marine was right. When it got dark the snipers zeroed in on us. A shot hit near me. There was no way to know where they came from. All I could do was hug the bottom of my hole. I must have looked like an easy target. Maybe he thought I was an officer. We didn't wear insignias on our uniforms, and I had a side arm and guards around me during the day. Whoever was shooting at me thought I was important.*

This one guy kept aiming just at me, all the time. If I moved, even the slightest, he'd pop one at me. He came real close that first time, but I was so scared I never gave him another good chance. I didn't breathe much. I was afraid my expanded chest would make me a better target. I tried to shrink myself. The bugs came out and started in on me. I was afraid to move and I let the bugs munch and fly about. All the while he kept shooting at me.

That's when I started praying.

As the night wore on, I'd hear shots being fired at suspected sniper positions by the Marines in nearby foxholes. I prayed each time that "my guy" was the one they'd hit. I'd hear the shouts that the Marines hit one. I'd get relieved a second and then...pop! He'd send another one at me.

I prayed and prayed, all night long. I wanted that man to die. I didn't know a thing about him except that he wanted me dead. So, I paid him back the only way I could...and kept praying that he'd be killed.

It went on and on and on. All night long he chiseled away at the protection I'd built along the edge of my foxhole. Zap! Zap! Zap! He'd hit the edge and a little bit more of my barrier disappeared. I couldn't make myself smaller. I was running out of protection.

I remember looking up at the night sky. Every so often a flare would go off and the Marines would shoot up into the palm trees. Each time they shot, I prayed harder. It was a race. The Marines would get my guy or he'd chip away at my position and eventually get a good angle, a better shot...at me. Sometimes his shots zinged over me. Those weren't what worried me. As the barrier got smaller and the bullets aimed at me got closer and closer—that's what worried me.

I pulled the car over. We sat well off the road—somewhere in southern Indiana—and the world outside our car held no interest for me. I

THE LADY GANGSTER

wanted to hear every detail without distractions. “I know you made it, how close did he get to you, how’d they get him, who got him?”

He sighed and then shrugged. *I don’t know.*

I was frozen.

He continued: *The sun was almost up. I knew that he knew time was running out. He started firing faster. Zap! Zap! Zap! He didn’t pause. Zap! Zap! Zap! He wasn’t going to wait for a good shot. He was going to make one by destroying what little protection I had left. One shot creased my shirt and another hit the edge of my foxhole at what seemed the same instant. I knew the next one, or the one after that, would hit me.*

That’s when the sun came up.