EXPECT TROUBLE

By JoAnn Smith Ainsworth

 

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**Chapter One**

Philadelphia, PA, 1943

U.S. WAVES Lieutenant Olivia “Livvy” Delacourt abhorred being

late. “And it’s my new superior who is waiting.”

Tension pressured the nape of her neck. Armed with one week of

driver’s training, she gripped the Super Deluxe ‘42 Ford’s steering

wheel like she was doing battle with Old Man Winter himself. March

had come in like a lion to a country enveloped in a world war and

gave no hint of going out like a lamb. A relentless wind whipped up

dirty snow from Germantown Avenue’s icy cobblestones to mix with

moist flurries that stuck to the windshield. Ice coated the tree

branches and hid on snow-blanketed sidewalks. Clutching the steering

wheel, Livvy sent a prayer heavenward that she’d get this metal

behemoth and herself safely to headquarters.

This morning—without warning—the Navy Department jerked her

from a challenging Cryptology assignment transcribing enemy phone

conversations and reassigned her, of all things, as driver to a naval

commander overseeing the formation of the top secret Joint U.S. and

Allied Intelligence Project. Livvy hoped there’d be something

“intelligent” about her assignment. She preferred working her brain,

not her foot on a pedal.

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Clank, clank, clank. The snow chains attacked the metal fenders,

making her head ache. She scrunched her eyes and wrinkled her

forehead to concentrate. She was looking for an estate with a

wrought iron gate and a Pennsylvania flagstone fence around its five

acres of land. There. She guided the heavy ‘42 Ford through the

opened gate and onto the unplowed driveway stretching toward the

three-story mansion known as Hamilton House. At one time, her

family could’ve afforded a place like this—before the Crash of ‘29.

No smoke rose from the chimneys. No lights beckoned. The

grounds under a blanket of snow and ice looked abandoned.

What a welcome.

Livvy followed the tire ruts made by a single car with a lower belly

that had scraped off the top layer of snow. When the tracks veered off

toward the garages, Livvy stayed on the main drive. She pulled to a

stop next to broad steps leading to the multi-columned porch of her

new—and impressive—headquarters. She took the car out of gear, set

the brake and turned off the engine.

Before pulling on her navy blue wool gloves, Livvy glanced at her

wristwatch and her stomach tightened. Fifteen minutes late. She’d

get chewed out. Oh, well, there was nothing she could do about that.

The expected blast of bitterly cold air hit her when she stepped out

into ankle-deep snow. She leaned into the driven snow to mount the

steps to the front door. From the corner of her eye, she saw that her

bobbed, brunette hair—where it escaped from under her cover—had

curled tightly from the damp. Her glasses and wool overcoat were

acquiring a covering of snow while crossing the driveway. Bedraggled.

What a first impression.

Inhaling a deep breath, she squared her shoulders and pushed the

doorbell. No sound. She pushed the bell again. Nothing.

“I’ll have to get that fixed.”

She knocked loudly.

The door opened with an alacrity that startled her. The rigidity of

the uniformed man towering above her made her feel she should

click her rubber-booted heels. She tried to see his face, but snowflakes

got in her eyes. She blinked and saluted. “Lieutenant Delacourt

reporting for duty, sir.”

A disembodied voice growled from the darkened doorway. “You’re

late!”

Livvy’s jaw dropped. She recognized that voice, one she hadn’t

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heard in almost ten years. The voice belonged to her colossal high

school crush—Barrington Drew, III—Trey to his friends. Sadly, she

wasn’t one of them.

In all the morning’s haste—saying good-byes, moving her things

out of her desk in Cryptology and packing her belongings in the barracks—

she’d never asked about her new commander. Besides, a war

was on. She was trained to accept without question whomever the

Navy threw at her and to do her duty as required. Who would’ve

guessed the new boss would turn out to be her teenage heart-throb?

Her heart pounded with the remembered agony of unrequited

feelings for the handsome and wealthy senior, youthful daydreams

not based on reality. It wasn’t as if he’d spare a glance for a plump,

impoverished and bespectacled freshman when he was already dating

Livvy’s first cousin, the ultra glamorous Gwen.

Peeping through snowy lashes, she could see that the thin-as-a-rail

high school playboy had added muscle. An engineering slide rule

and two drafting pencils lodged in his left breast pocket. Wavy black

hair—now cut military style above the ears—framed a wide forehead

and laughing eyes that, in the past, seemed continually amused.

Right now they didn’t look amused.

“Wait here while I get my overcoat.” He turned abruptly and

walked away.

Livvy flushed beet red, humiliated. No inkling of recognition.

True, she’d lost some weight since her teen years and a uniform

might act as a disguise, but come on. There should be some glimmer

of recognition.

She’d barely regained her emotional balance when he reappeared

with a briefcase clutched tightly in his gloved hand. He brushed past

her and out the still-open front door. “Let’s get going or I’ll be late.”

He rushed down snow-covered steps, leaving it to his lieutenant to

close and lock the front door. Locking it against what, she didn’t

know. The place looked barren of furnishings.

Darn. She’d expected more courtesy from a man of Trey’s social

standing. Then she gave herself a mental slap. Commonplace courtesies

weren’t part of a wartime society. Courtesy was extended by

rank, not gender or social standing. Her duties as a lowly WAVES

lieutenant included opening doors for the male officers, not vice

versa.

She pushed at the bridge of her horn-rimmed glasses to settle

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them more comfortably on her nose before pulling shut the mansion

door and listening until the lock clicked into place. When she turned

around, Trey was climbing into the back of the sedan already layered

by snowflakes. He slammed the door closed before she could make

her way down the slippery steps. She needed to be quicker in the future.

Her former heartthrob hadn’t recognize her. While wondering

how to act, her hand lingered overly long on the car handle after

opening the driver’s side door. She heard, “What are you waiting for,

Lieutenant? You’re letting the warm air out.”

Good grief. Just like her mother.

“We need to get going or I’ll be late for my first assignment.”

She could sympathize with that problem.

Livvy climbed behind the wheel, thankful the Ford still held the

heat generated on the trip to Hamilton House. She turned the key,

depressed the clutch, got the car into first gear and inched down the

snowy driveway toward the street. There were no tire tracks for her

to follow on the way out.

“Where to, sir?”

“We’re headed for NAMU.”

“Where?”

“The Naval Aircraft Modification Unit north of Philadelphia in

Warminster. It’s the former Brewster Aircraft Factory.”

Livvy had her map out and ready on the front seat. She stopped

the car at the gate to study the map.

“Never mind that.” His tone was curt. “I have my own map. I’ll

give directions.”

She pursed her lips. How long would he continue to snap at her?

She heard him unlock his leather briefcase. In the rearview mirror,

she watched as he spread a map across his lap and put a finger

on their position.

“Left or right?”

“Right. Keep your eyes on the road. I’ll watch for street signs.”

She pulled out onto Germantown Avenue and headed back toward

Johnson Street in the direction she’d come.

Livvy glanced in the rearview mirror. Trey wore a disgruntled expression

as if she were the source of every setback he’d ever experienced.

Great. Make her more nervous than she already was, why didn’t

he?

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“Bear left on Washington Lane.”

Livvy made the turn without sliding on the ice. The driving

teacher had harped on driving on snow and ice in her training.

“Has anyone told you about your assignment?” His voice was matter

of fact, without a jot of friendliness.

“No one, sir. I was ordered to pack all my gear early this morning

and drive to Germantown. I don’t even know where I’m staying tonight.”

“You’ll be quartered at Hamilton House. We both will. “

Her new assignment had a bright side. Too bad regulations forbid

hanky panky between officers.

“We’ll be quartered with two naval intelligence men who’ll police

the grounds. They should be there by the time we get back.”

From what little she saw of the property, Livvy decided all the security

men would have to do was glance out the window now and

then. The unbroken snow would speak loudly that no one was sneaking

up. Who’d want to, anyway? The place was almost bare of furnishings.

Any secrets were probably locked in that briefcase the commander

was clutching, not back at Hamilton House.

“If I may ask, sir, what are we doing this morning?”

“I’m interviewing the civilian manager of a naval aircraft factory.

I’m an engineer.”

As if she didn’t know.

“I’ve been assigned to uncover any plant vulnerability to saboteurs.

You’ll take shorthand notes.”

“I’ve been assigned as your driver, not a clerk.” Blast it. She must

break herself of the habit of speaking before thinking and contradicting

her boss on top of it.

“You’re assigned as my aide. I need to get a secure facility up and

running as quickly as possible. Driving is only one part of that.

Mostly, the Navy needs your business skills.”

Halleluiah. Some “intelligent” work after all. The military wasn’t

being stupid like she first thought when they stuck her in driving

school. Driving was an add-on to the whole package. With this opportunity,

she might be the first in her Sarah Lawrence College

graduating class to set up an office. She smiled. A definite feather in

her cap. Losing Cryptology for this project wasn’t a demotion. It was

a promotion.

“What about paper and pencil?” Trey asked. “I have extra paper

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and pencils if you need them.”

As if a Sarah Lawrence graduate would get caught without her

notepad and sharpened pencils. “I always carry supplies.”

“Good.”

At least she got one scrap of praise out of him.

“Turn left on Old York Road and follow the Route 611 signs all the

way north to Warminster. There are no more turns to worry about.”

Much to her relief, he didn’t sound irritated anymore.

She settled back in the seat as they travelled their slow and noisy

way toward the NAMU facility. When she heard Trey pull a batch of

papers from his briefcase, she glanced at him in the rearview mirror.

“I need to study these drawings.” He put his head down to focus,

leaving her to the challenge of getting them to Warminster. She secured

her grip on the steering wheel and continued her battles with

the monster-sized car and Old Man Winter.

Livvy was still a block away from the NAMU complex when the

first waves of nausea hit her. A metallic taste flooded her mouth. Insidious

buzzing—like millions of bees hovering over a clover patch—

flooded her head.

*Oh, no. I don’t need this.*

A psychic attack was coming on. Her heartbeat increased and her

breath caught in her throat. Her hands sweated, causing the steering

wheel to slip from her grip so that she lightly sideswiped a snow

bank.

“Watch what you’re doing.” Trey barked the command from the

backseat.

Usually, her clairvoyant visions pertained to something going on

in her life. Why would driving a naval officer to a meeting start one?

Livvy groped in her standard-issue WAVES handbag for a pill box

and swallowed two aspirin tablets without water. She worked up

enough spit to take the taste out of her mouth while she clung desperately

to the steering wheel. She mentally created psychic roses

and flung them to the outer rim of her aura until surrounded head to-

toe. This psychic trick, taught to her by her mother, saved her

many a time since her mom’s death. Livvy prayed the protections

learned as a teenager would work today.

Trey spoke as she slowly entered the NAMU gate. “Ignore the

main building. They’ll be in the inventory shed around back.”

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Livvy maneuvered the car past a series of buildings until she came

to the back lot and a small brick warehouse she thought considerably

larger than a shed.

“Ten minutes to spare.” Trey seemed relieved.

When she pulled into an empty parking space, dark and sinister

energy struck her sharply in the belly. “Oof,” she said before she

could stop herself.

“Something wrong, Lieutenant?”

“No, sir.”

She dragged herself out of the car and around to the passenger

side to open the door for the commander. A man in a business suit

came out of the NAMU building and greeted them.

“Paul Lesisko, civilian plant manager.”

Trey introduced himself and his lieutenant. Nothing dramatic

happened when the man shook Livvy’s hand. The manager wasn’t the

source of her upset. Nor did she pick up negative vibrations from the

men standing around outside. Something else was going on. She

wished she knew what that something was.

Livvy stood by while the men talked and gestured. The buzzing in

her head gradually subsided while she held the psychic barriers in

place. Only the slightest ringing in her ears remained. She checked

her thought processes. Unclouded—and just in time, too. The men

were entering the brick building and she needed to take notes of the

inspection.

Livvy pulled her glasses off and rubbed the bridge of her nose to

relieve tension. She pulled a shorthand notebook and pencil from her

handbag and scurried after the commander and Mr. Lesisko. Stopping

a short way from the men, she flipped open the shorthand pad

to a clean page. She dated it and glided the pencil across the page,

leaving behind swirls and lines as shorthand notes of the men’s conversation.

“These are overflow parts from the main factory warehouse.” The

manager described the bin tags that marked which inventory was

critical and which was not.

Trey asked questions on the age of the building and the various

renovations. His slide rule was in and out of his pocket several times

while he studied the structure and calculated stresses. He asked for a

set of blueprints and other engineering data to take with him after

the inspection tour. The plant manager gave an order to a worker

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nearby, who left for the main building to develop a set of blueprints.

Livvy trailed after the men in the drafty warehouse, shivering as

she wrote notes and barely succeeded in keeping the negative energy

at bay. She was more than ready for a trip back to Hamilton House in

a warm car by the time Mr. Lesisko told them they were just about

done in this building. “There’s only an add-on room in the back to

see.”

The closer Livvy got to the bins at the far end of the small warehouse,

the more her pores released sweat and her head pounded.

Even with protections in place, a full-blown psychic episode was returning.

The trauma was more intense than any she’d ever experienced.

She clenched her teeth as a brown fog drifted before her eyes.

She swayed on her feet.

Trey caught her elbow. “Are you all right, Lieutenant?”

“Fine, sir.” She gritted her teeth. She wanted to yell she was under

attack by evil spirits, but they’d think her crazy. She’d learned over

the years to keep her clairvoyance a secret closely guarded by family

and friends.

Mr. Lesisko made a brief comment on the stock stored there and

then said, “We’re finished here anyway.”

Livvy stopped taking notes and packed up her notepad. Something

bad was imminent. She had to get everyone away.

“Excuse me, Commander. There *is* something wrong with me.”

She touched her head where the headache was the worst. “I need

some fresh air.”

“Would you like the plant nurse to take a look at you?” the plant

manager asked.

“I’d be grateful, sir.”

Mr. Lesisko ushered them toward an exit door. “This way to the

infirmary.”

She followed the men toward the exit.

Just then a blast rattled the building. Something crashed against

her head and shoulders and threw her to her knees, causing ripples

of pain and flashes of light before blessedly knocking her out.