

CHAPTER ONE

Are YOU Doing Everything You Can?

Seattle, Washington

January 1, 1944

Hobie pushed harder against the bike pedals, harder against the cold wind scrubbing his face, as he followed the Adairs' Chrysler sedan. Duke loped along behind, pink tongue flapping. Even a smart dog like him would have no idea why they were out there, in the cold and wet, instead of home eating leftover Christmas cookies and reading the newest Hardy Boys mystery. Dogs didn't know what it was like to have best friends move away.

Legs burning, Hobie kept pumping. But he was no match for the last hill. The bike slowed, then clunked to a stop. He was out of steam. Dead in the water, as Dad might say. Panting, Hobie flung up his arm in one last good-bye wave. Mr. Adair answered by tapping the horn three times. As the sedan turned east, toward the highway to Portland, Scooter's head popped out the window. He yelled

something, but the wind carried it away before it reached Hobie.

And then the car was gone.

Scooter was gone.

Duke brushed against Hobie's legs. "At least I've still got you," Hobie said, scratching the German shepherd behind the ears. "Right, boy?"

Hobie slid off his bike and began pushing it toward home, trying to catch his breath. The thought of school without Scooter made the pushing even harder. They'd been pals since first grade, when Scooter accidentally knocked out Hobie's front tooth with a tetherball. Luckily, it was a baby tooth. In the past four years, the only time Hobie had walked to school without Scooter was when the chicken pox was going around. He got itchy all over again thinking about how lonely Monday's walk was going to be.

Mom called Scooter a "pistol," but she would smile when she said it. Usually. That time with the whoopee cushion at her bridge club she didn't smile. But Hobie couldn't help chuckling even now, remembering the look on Mrs. Allen's face when she'd sat down.

The rain, coming down harder, soaked through Hobie's corduroy jacket to his T-shirt. After a block or so, he swung his leg over the bike and began pedaling again. Mrs. Lee was out, sweeping, even though her little grocery store was closed for the holiday. She waved as Hobie rode by.

He passed the playfield and then the school. He knew it would only make him feel worse, but Hobie rode to the far side of the building, peeking in Mrs. Thornton's fifth-grade classroom. The desk there, in the row farthest from the door, third back, would be empty on Monday. Hobie had helped Scooter clean it out, right before Christmas break. The schoolbooks went back in the supply cupboard, the pencils and erasers into Scooter's pencil pouch, and the comic books — the ones carefully hidden under a fan of old math work sheets — had been deftly tucked inside Scooter's jacket. Their teacher never saw a thing.

Mrs. Thornton must have come in over the vacation to put up that new poster on the wall behind her desk. A finger pointed out at Hobie over a caption that read, ARE YOU DOING ALL YOU CAN?

Hobie stepped away from the window, wiping moss from his hands. Everyone he knew was doing

all they could. Dad had left Uncle Tryg in charge of the family fishing boat, the *Lily Bess*, to fly B-24s in Europe. Mom joined the Red Cross, and his little sister, June, was knitting socks for soldiers. Holey socks, sure, but she was only seven.

And now, the Navy needed Mr. Adair to work at the Portland shipyard. “Doncha know there’s a war on?” Scooter had said, trying to make a joke when he told Hobie about the move. But neither of them had laughed.

Duke shook himself all over, spraying Hobie but good. “Okay, okay,” he said. “We’ll get going.” As they turned away from the building, Hobie heard the *slap-slap-slap* of a basketball on pavement. Someone was shooting hoops in the covered area. He pedaled over to see who.

And when he saw, he backpedaled so fast he nearly ran into Duke.

Mitch Mitchell. Ever since he’d overheard Scooter and Hobie playing like they were Hop Harrigan and his sidekick, Tank Tinker, he hadn’t missed a chance to take them down a notch, making fun of their “baby games.” And that was one of the nicer things

he said. Mitch could hit as hard with words as other guys could with fists.

Hobie gave a quiet whistle. He felt like an ant farm had burst open inside him. He needed to move, to shake everything off. "Beat you home!" he called to Duke, legs racing faster than his thoughts.

He was no longer plain old Hobie Hanson but Hop Harrigan, about to break the world's airspeed record. Hobie barreled down the sidewalk, popping over an exposed root before veering around an old lady in black lace-up shoes. She hollered at him as he flew by.

As their house came into sight, Duke launched into action. He stretched out his front legs, running in that funny rocking motion of his. Front legs, back legs. Front, back. Front, back. Well ahead of Hobie, he bounded up the porch steps and skidded against the door, panting.

Hobie was panting, too, as he rolled to a stop. Duke picked up one of his old tennis balls and trotted over, pushing his muzzle into Hobie's hand.

"What? I have to reward you for beating me?" Hobie buried his face in Duke's neck, breathing

in his warm dustiness. If only Hobie could bottle this smell and keep it on his shelf, like Dad's Barbamol.

"Fetch!" Hobie cranked back his arm and chucked the ball. Again and again. No matter how far Hobie threw it, Duke snagged the ball before it hit the ground. It was like he had wings.

"The Army sure could use a dog like Duke." Mr. Gilbert stepped down from his front porch next door, pipe in hand. "My nephew sent his dog, and now he's guarding a munitions plant."

Hobie had heard about people doing that. There was even a song called "The K-9 Corps" playing on the radio lately: "From the kennels of the country, from the homes and firesides, too, we have joined the canine army, our nation's work to do." Hobie turned off the radio when it came on.

Duke nudged at his hands as if to say, "What are you waiting for? Throw the ball." Hobie patted him. Just because Duke *would* make a good guard dog didn't mean he *should* be one.

"We all have to do our part." Mr. Gilbert picked his newspaper up from the porch and tucked it under his arm.

That was easy for him to say. He had a dumb old cat. Not a dog.

"I think my mom needs me," Hobie said. "See you later."

He climbed the steps with legs as wobbly as if he'd ridden his bike up Mt. Rainier. So what if Mr. Gilbert's nephew donated his dog? Hobie was already doing his share. He couldn't even remember the last time he'd bought a comic book; he was spending all of his dimes on war stamps. K-9 Corps! Hobie yanked the door open, then let it slam shut.

"Your show's almost on!" June said. "Mommy said Kitty and I could listen, too." She held up the raggedy doll that she carried everywhere.

Hobie didn't really hear her; Mr. Gilbert's words got in the way.

A smooth radio announcer's voice filled the room, which was warm and damp from the heat of Mom's ironing. *"For 1944, let's all resolve: Eat a good breakfast and do a better job! And let crispy, toasty brown Grape-Nuts Flakes help make it easy for you."*

June danced Kitty on Hobie's head. "We like crispy, toasty brown Grape-Nuts Flakes, don't you?"

Hobie batted the doll away.

“Mommy!” June cried.

“Hobie, be kind to your sister.” Mom licked her fingers, the iron hissing as she tested it. “Remember what your father said.”

How could Hobie forget? “You’re the captain of this family while I’m gone,” Dad had said. “I’m counting on you to step up and do what needs to be done.”

Hobie had stepped up. He walked June to and from school every single day. He rode his bike to Lee’s Grocery whenever Mom needed something. He mowed the lawn all summer and raked leaves in the fall. But to Dad, being a captain was more than actions, it was attitude.

He took a deep breath. “Sorry, June.”

“Kitty forgives you.” June proved it by dancing the doll on Hobie’s knee.

The announcer came back on again. “*Presenting Hop Harrigan — America’s Ace of the Airways!*”

Hobie scooted closer to the radio. In yesterday’s episode, Hop got amnesia after a fight with some rotten Nazi spies. He’d been so confused, he didn’t even recognize his good old sidekick, Tank.

Duke rested his head on Hobie's leg as they all listened to the latest installment. Thankfully, Hop recovered in the nick of time, just as he was about to spill the location of the professor's secret laboratory.

"That was a swell one," June announced. "Kitty's favorite so far."

"Shh." Hobie held his finger up to his lips. "There's more."

"This is your announcer with an important message from Hop. In the radio audience today are twin brothers Mike and Spike Jankelson. These two young Americans have loaned their collie, Laddie, to Uncle Sam. Hop wants you listeners out there to know he sure is proud of these boys. And he wants to encourage every dog owner to consider following Spike and Mike's lead —"

Hobie snapped the radio off.

"The show's not over!" June fussed.

"Pretty much."

"I wanted to hear the whole thing."

Hobie made a face. "Tune in tomorrow," he said, mimicking the announcer.

June flounced out of the room, taking Kitty with her.

Mom set the iron down. She tipped her head toward the radio. "There are lots of ways to help. But you don't have to do them all." She winked. "I think that last rubber drive should've earned you a purple heart."

Hobie felt his face get hot, remembering. Scooter thought it was as funny as a Laurel and Hardy movie, but Hobie had nearly shriveled up like a slug when Mrs. Lee donated not one but two of her old girdles.

He leaned his chin against the kitchen table. "Why did Dad enlist?" His head bounced up and down as he talked.

Mom sat down next to him. "There's no one answer. Mostly, he felt he could do something, make a difference." She ruffled Hobie's hair. "You and your dad are like two peas in a pod." She bent over, kissed the top of his head, then went back to her ironing.

Hobie's head felt too heavy to lift off the table. He wasn't like his father at all. Dad was brave. He did things, even if they were hard. Like taking the

Lily Bess up to Alaska each summer. Or helping Uncle Tryg keep an eye on the Sasakis' house after they got sent to those camps. Or leaving his family to fight in a war.

Hobie wasn't anything like that.

Because, deep down, even though he knew it was the right thing, he didn't think he could ever give Duke to the Army.