

A NOVEL

CODE NAME EDELWEISS



STEPHANIE LANDSEM

PRAISE FOR STEPHANIE LANDSEM

“A suspenseful tale of Nazis in Hollywood on the brink of WWII, *Code Name Edelweiss* is well-researched into the nuanced ideology that sought to strike against the goodness of humanity during a time of fear and hatred. A story chilling yet brave against the struggles of adversity, readers will be challenged to ask themselves, ‘If not me, then who?’”

J’NELL CIESIELSKI, bestselling author of *The Socialite*

“I love a good suspense novel, and *Code Name Edelweiss* kept me reading long after midnight. Knowing that it’s based on true accounts of Nazi activity in prewar US made it even more chilling. Stephanie Landsem does a masterful job of showing how easily and insidiously hatred and prejudice can grow—and what our response to it must be. Well done!”

LYNN AUSTIN, bestselling and award-winning author of *Long Way Home*

“Taut and tense, Stephanie Landsem’s superbly plotted thriller is a bold, chilling, and heart-racing look—through a young widow’s eyes—at fascist hypocrisy and peril in America’s 1933 Tinseltown. A page-turning tale, it’s equal parts genuine danger, passionate bravery, and fearless truth. Offering life lessons we must never forget, it’s a daring and inspiring triumph.”

PATRICIA RAYBON, award-winning author of *All That Is Secret* and *I Told the Mountain to Move*

“Tense and thought-provoking in equal measure, *Code Name Edelweiss* brings to life the glamour of 1930s Hollywood—and the grit of the Depression. Stephanie Landsem presents a harrowing look at the real-life Nazi organizations in Los Angeles before World War II, the racism lurking behind the friendliest faces, and the

honest temptation to give in to that racism when times are tough—all compassionately shown through compelling characters. An outstanding novel with a thriller of an ending!”

SARAH SUNDIN, bestselling and award-winning author of *The Sound of Light* and *Until Leaves Fall in Paris*

“Stephanie Landsem’s newest—about Nazis in 1930s Los Angeles and the ragtag group of amateur spies who braved everything to stop them—is thrilling, vivid, expertly researched, and all too timely. Single mother and secret agent Liesl, aka Edelweiss, is a compelling character and readers will root for her.”

SUSAN ELIA MACNEAL, author of *Mother Daughter Traitor Spy* and the *New York Times* bestselling Maggie Hope series

“Part John Steinbeck and part Mickey Spillane, this well-researched historical novel is a tale of inspiration and hope.”

HISTORICAL NOVELS REVIEW on *In a Far-Off Land*

“Talented writer Stephanie Landsem brings to vivid life the glamour and grit of old Hollywood in this moving story of ambition and secrets, forgiveness and love.”

JULIE KLASSEN, author of *A Castaway in Cornwall*, on *In a Far-Off Land*

“The stage is set perfectly with beautiful prose as Stephanie Landsem takes readers back behind the glamorous curtain of Hollywood, exposing the corruption on the other side. Like an enchanting, enduring motion picture, *In a Far-Off Land* will grip your heart with its timeless truth and captivate the theater of your mind.”

MELANIE DOBSON, award-winning author of *The Winter Rose* and *Memories of Glass*

“This is a story I’ll read again soon, knowing many more life lessons are there waiting to be discovered.”

T. I. LOWE, bestselling author of *Lulu’s Café* and *Under the Magnolias*,
on *In a Far-Off Land*

“Both gritty and glamorous, Stephanie Landsem’s *In a Far-Off Land* digs beneath the sparkle of gilded Hollywood to uncover the true gold of love, mercy, and forgiveness. Don’t miss this unforgettable story.”

REGINA JENNINGS, author of *Courting Misfortune*

“Depression-era Hollywood provides the perfect stage for the desperate and colorful cast of *In a Far-Off Land*. This tale is that of a journey from brokenness to healing, from emptiness to wholeness. Through the eyes of two characters who could not be more different, Stephanie Landsem gives us a timeless story of the prodigal traveling far from home and finding the way back again. Fans of Francine Rivers’s *Bridge to Haven* will not want to miss this.”

JOCELYN GREEN, Christy Award-winning author of *Shadows of the White City*

“From the first page, this remarkable story set in glittering Hollywood during the Great Depression captured my imagination. Aspiring actress Mina Sinclair’s amazing pilgrimage from the dark hollows of her despair into the light of unconditional love will offer hope to anyone who has ever believed themselves beyond redemption. Bravo!”

KATE BRESLIN, bestselling author of *Far Side of the Sea*, on *In a Far-Off Land*

“One of the best books I’ve read this year! *In a Far-Off Land* is a beautiful story echoing the power of mercy, forgiveness, and love as it peels back the multifaceted layers of those living in Hollywood during the Great Depression. Stephanie Landsem weaves a heroine

with as much spunk and edge as heart and soul. Just a gorgeous, page-turning novel.”

HEIDI CHIAVAROLI, Carol Award-winning author of *Freedom's Ring* and *The Orchard House*

“From beginning to end, I was riveted by this masterful retelling of the parable of the Prodigal Son and moved by the poignant exploration of the power of grace in the midst of shame. Superbly written and absolutely stunning!”

AMANDA BARRATT, author of *The White Rose Resists*, on *In a Far-Off Land*

“Fans of Susan Meissner and Kristina McMorris will be spellbound by Landsem’s gorgeously researched historical. Told with heart-wrenching conviction, *In a Far-Off Land* is a lyrical and thematic treatise on redemption, loss, and love and wielded with such surprising grace the reader will have many breath-catching moments. Landsem is a treasure of inspirational historical fiction, and *In a Far-Off Land* is no less than a masterpiece.”

RACHEL McMILLAN, author of *The London Restoration* and *The Mozart Code*

“Landsem’s *In a Far-Off Land* immerses the reader in a world long forgotten yet achingly familiar. Old Hollywood meets *The Grapes of Wrath*, and the redemption, romance, and regret are all beautifully written and deliciously authentic. It’s still dancing in my head and will be for a while.”

AMY HARMON, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Where the Lost Wander*

“*In a Far-Off Land*—an engaging story set in a fresh era—deftly threads themes from the biblical story of the Lost Son through the burlap of the Great Depression and Hollywood’s silk.”

SANDRA BYRD, author of *Heirlooms*

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To Joanie Lang, Sue Davis, & Wendy Tarbox
sisters in faith
friends of my heart

Once there is confusion and after we have succeeded
in undermining the faith of the American people
in their own government, a new group will take
over; this will be the German American group,
and we will help them assume power.

ADOLF HITLER, 1933

It has been said that for evil men to accomplish
their purpose it is only necessary that
good men should do nothing.

CHARLES FREDERIC AKED, 1920

If I am not for myself, who will be for me?
But if I am only for myself, what am I?
If not now, when?

RABBI HILLEL (PIRKEI AVOT 1:14)

CHAPTER 1

LIESL

Los Angeles
1933

“A girl like you oughta be in pictures.” Gary Perl turned away from his bird’s-eye view of the MGM studio lot and appraised me from my Peter Pan collar to the toes of my sensible oxfords.

I tucked my feet further under my chair. What I “oughta” do was my job, not listen to Gary Perl’s nonsense. I was in Mr. Perl’s corner office to take a letter to the German film board, translate it, and post it before the end of the day. Was this too much to ask—to do my work and get home to my children by five o’clock?

Mr. Perl crossed the acre of Persian carpet like a lion on the prowl, his gaze pinned to my ankles. I sat ramrod straight and glanced at the desk clock. How long must I put up with this foolishness?

“You know, you’re my favorite steno girl, Liesl.” Mr. Perl stalked slowly around the green velvet settee and the rolling cart with sparkling decanters of gin and whiskey. He was close now, too close for comfort. He leaned casually against the polished edge of his mahogany desk. “You’ve got better legs than Crawford and a face made for the camera. And that accent . . .” He whistled a breath as if blowing out a match. “You sound like Garbo. I could get you a screen test.”

I frowned at my pencil, poised over the blank steno pad. I did not have an accent, Greta Garbo was Swedish, not German, and I did not wish for a screen test. Furthermore, my skirt fell respectfully below my knees and, paired with the practical blouse, said secretary, not film star.

However, Gary Perl's expensive pin-striped suit with wide shoulders and silk tie said powerful. And so he was. Too powerful to displease.

"You know what they call you here, don't you, Liesl?" His smile failed to soften his sharp-featured face.

I did indeed know what they called me. The film stars all had nicknames—Mary Pickford was called America's Sweetheart, and everyone knew John Barrymore as the Great Profile—but the producers and executives at MGM thought it good sport to dub the secretaries and stenographers with monikers as well. As for the name they called me behind my back and sometimes to my face, it mattered little. I wished to do my job and nothing more.

I scooted back in my chair, away from his minty breath and sandalwood hair tonic. "The letter, Mr. Perl?"

He leaned over me and set one well-manicured hand on each arm of my chair. I was hemmed in, his obsidian-chip eyes only inches from my own. "Come now. All work and no play?" He raised his brows.

I quelled a sigh. I'd endured quite enough of Gary Perl's advances over the past several months. And yet the country was in a depression and MGM Studios wasn't immune to its effect. The girls in the typing pool reported memos about budget cuts, hiring freezes, films that wouldn't be made. Not to mention the new Dictaphones. Machines that would make stenographers like me—no matter how fast we took shorthand—obsolete. None of us was safe from the unemployment line.

Except for Mr. Perl, of course. He had a moniker of his own: Golden Boy. And while Mr. Thalberg was ill—nothing to be concerned about, Louis B. Mayer's memo assured us—the solvency of MGM was resting on Gary Perl's padded shoulders.

I met his gaze steadily and appealed to his better nature. “I’m sure you understand, Mr. Perl. My job is important to me, and Mrs. Adler—”

“You like me, don’t you, Miss Weiss?”

“It’s Mrs.,” I corrected sharply. The nerve of this man. What I liked was my paycheck. Mrs. Adler didn’t listen to excuses about amorous executives, and steno girls who didn’t get their work done were soon replaced.

“Ah, yes, a widow.” His mouth turned down in a mockery of sympathy and he eyed the ring on my left hand. “I’m sorry.”

I wasn’t a widow, and he wasn’t sorry. Men like him thought nothing of a pinch or a pat, a casual brush-against, an accidental nudge—with photos of their wives and children smiling at them from their shiny desks.

“I do believe the film board is waiting for this, Mr. Perl.” If I sounded peeved, it was because I was.

He straightened and walked around to the back of my chair, his hands landing on my shoulders, warm through my crepe blouse. “You’re cute when you’re angry, did you know that?”

I clamped my teeth together.

“How about this, sweetheart?” His hands massaged my shoulders and moved down my arms. “I’ll dictate the letter . . . then I get a little kiss. Seem fair?”

Did men have nothing else to do but play these absurd games? I opened my notebook, put my pencil to the first line, and looked up at him with raised brows as if in acquiescence to his suggestion. Perhaps he would forget about the kiss.

He did not.

With the letter done, I stood abruptly and walked to the door. I did not anticipate his speed. He caught me halfway across the Persian carpet, chuckling as if this were a game. He grabbed my arm, spun me around, and pressed his lips hard against mine, his hands groping upward. The shock froze me in place—I had not been kissed since Tomas—and I

twisted away, humiliation, anger, and something like grief hitting all at once.

He chuckled. “Come now, it wasn’t that bad.”

I lunged for the door, my heel catching on the fringe of the carpet as I stumbled quite ungracefully from his office.

“The Hun is on the run,” he hooted as I rushed past his secretary, but not so fast I didn’t see a smirk of laughter on her red lips.

Halfway down the third-floor hallway, I ducked into the women’s lavatory and leaned against the door, my breath coming quick and my face burning. How dare that man? I looked into the mirror over the porcelain sink. The Heartbreak Hun. I detested the name and did not look the part at the moment. My finger-waved blonde hair was mussed, my fair skin flushed and my blue eyes dark with anger. Why had I not slapped the conceited smirk right off Gary Perl’s face?

I took a deep breath and let it out. I needed my job—that was why. I had children and a mother depending on me, did I not?

I turned away from the mirror. *Tomas, what would you have me do?*

Tomas did not answer. He never did.

I smoothed my hair, ran cold water over my wrists, and tucked my blouse neatly back into the waistband of my skirt. I marched back to the typing pool and deposited my steno pad on my desk with a slap. Stella, at the next desk, glanced at me without breaking the rhythm of her typing. Her perfectly plucked brows flickered.

I sank down in my chair. The clatter of keys striking paper sounded like artillery fire as I stared at my Remington typewriter. Someday, someone—perhaps a woman with less to lose—would put Gary Perl in his place.