

THREE PROUD WOMEN



A Fiction Novel

By

MICHEL POULIN

THREE

PROUD WOMEN

A FICTION AND ALTERNATE HISTORY NOVEL

BY

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WARNING TO POTENTIAL READERS

THIS FICTION NOVEL CONTAINS GRAPHIC DESCRIPTIONS OF WAR, VIOLENCE AND SEX, AS WELL AS COARSE LANGUAGE AND CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECTS THAT ARE UNSUITABLE FOR CHILDREN. WHILE THIS NOVEL DEPICTS SOME HISTORICAL PERSONS AND EVENTS FROM THE PAST, THIS IS A WORK OF FICTION TAKING PLACE IN AN ALTERNATE TIMELINE AND WORDS OR DEEDS ATTRIBUTED IN IT TO PERSONS WHO EXISTED DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT HISTORICAL REALITY.

ABOUT THIS NOVEL

This novel follows the novels ANGEL GIRL and AND AN ANGEL SANG. Its story takes place in a parallel timeline I designated as 'Timeline C', which split from another parallel timeline, 'Timeline B', in 1941, while Timeline B itself split from the original historical timeline (ours) in 1940, due to the involuntary time travel of Nancy Laplante, a Canadian war correspondent and reserve army officer, from 2012 'A' to 1940 'A'. This story is centered on three women: Sergeant Greta Visby, a young female member of the United States Marine Corps in 1999 'C'; Ex-General of the Army Ingrid Dows, who has just retired from U.S. service and is starting a civilian career; and Nancy Dows, Ingrid's daughter and a talented young musician and singer on the rise.

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CHAPTER 1 – A PROUD MARINE

19:14 (Eastern Standard Time)

Friday, June 25, 1999 ‘C’

Sixth Marine Regiment’s NCOs’ Mess

Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, U.S.A.



Most of the men present in the bar-lounge room of the NCOs’ Mess of the Sixth Marine Regiment turned their heads to look at the young blond woman wearing a summer tan uniform who had just walked in. For one, she was presently the sole woman inside the bar-lounge section of the mess. She also happened to be tall, athletic-looking and quite pretty. Two of the men sitting on high stools at the bar watched her walk towards the bar, but with very different expressions on their faces. One, Staff Sergeant Jeffrey Brown, was smiling to the woman as she approached him, while the other, a sergeant, eyed her with barely disguised contempt. Brown noticed that and in turn stared hard at the man, who sat three stools away from his.

“What’s your problem, Jenkins?”

“My problem? She just got promoted to staff sergeant after only four years in the Corps, while I am still stuck at sergeant despite my own six years in the service. Don’t tell me that there isn’t favoritism involved in that.”

“The reason you are still a sergeant is simple, Jenkins: you proved yourself to be a poor squad leader, on top of showing by your treatment of the soldiers of your squad that you are an avowed racist. In comparison, Greta Visby showed outstanding valor and leadership skills in both combat and in garrison and gained the respect of her soldiers. It’s that simple! So, you better leave her alone tonight.”

Jenkins, a man from Alabama, shot back an angry look at Brown, who happened to be an African-American. However, understanding that starting an argument or even a fight here would only result in trouble for him, he left his still half-full beer mug on the counter and stepped off his stool before stomping away, nearly colliding with the blonde woman as he crossed her path. Greta Visby had to take a quick step sideways to avoid him and then stared at Jenkins as he walked away without apologizing. Continuing her walk to the bar, she finally sat on the stool next to Brown and spoke to him in a low voice.

"What's wrong with that asshole today, Jeff?"

"He is jealous of your promotion, Greta. However, don't pay attention to him: he is not worth it. So, you came to the bar-lounge to celebrate your promotion to staff sergeant?"

"Uh, not really, Jeff. I came mostly to have a nice cold beer while watching the evening news on the bar's television set. I am hoping that they will show at least part of the retirement ceremony for General Dows which was held at the White House this afternoon. Since I was giving a class on rifle squad tactics at that time, I was unable to watch that ceremony."

"Aah, I see! Still, congratulations for your promotion."

"Thanks, Jeff!" replied Greta before ordering a beer from the barman. As she did so, Brown discretely admired her body and face. He was happily married but that didn't mean that he couldn't admire female beauty from time to time. A tall young woman at 177 centimeters of height, with shoulder-length blond hair twisted into two short braids and with clear blue eyes, Greta Visby was the perfect image of a Scandinavian beauty, for one simple reason: she had been born in Northern Sweden from Swedish parents and had lived there until her father moved to Alaska after the death of his wife, when Greta had been fourteen-years-old. There, she had lived in Alaska's outdoor nature, hunting, trapping and fishing with her father, until she had enrolled in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1995. The short sleeves of her summer tan uniform' shirt made evident her uncommonly muscular arms for a woman, something Jeffrey knew could be attributed to her past outdoors life in Alaska and to the intensive physical training she was assiduously following. That training included lots of weight-lifting and exercise bicycling, so her legs were at least as muscular as her arms. Having seen her often at the base gymnasium, Jeffrey also knew that Greta sported a proverbial 'sixpack' denoting her high level of fitness and strength. Still, that didn't mean that Greta looked like some kind of man-like woman. At the age of 23 she could definitely be described as a sexy-looking girl, with firm, medium-sized breasts and wide hips. The resulting overall look, along with her friendly and easy-going character, had made most male Marines around her wish that they could date her. However, as far as Jeffrey knew, Greta had been careful not to date any of the Marines on base, something that could have been construed as detrimental to discipline due to possible accusations of improper behavior between members of different ranks. As for her private life when outside of the base, nothing was really known about it, except for the fact that she regularly went to nearby Jacksonville

during her free weekends to train at a martial arts studio, where an ex-Israeli paratrooper gave classes in Krav Maga, the no-holds-bar martial art adopted decades ago by the Israeli Defense Forces. While she had been a member of his rifle squad, Jeffrey had seen Greta make many strong male Marines go down when pitted against her in unarmed combat training sessions. She also happened to be both a qualified rifle marksman and a pistol sharpshooter, thus adding to her impressive military skills. Her sharp intelligence and highly developed outdoors and tactical skills further helped Greta be what she was now: a brave, skilled and competent rifle squad leader.

As the barman finished serving her a mug of cold draft beer, the evening NBC news program started on the bar's television set, placed high so that all in the room could see its screen. Greta happily smiled when she saw that General Dows' retirement ceremony was actually the first main item in the news program. While General of the Army Ingrid Dows had started her career as a fighter pilot in the Airforce, she had quickly become a legend throughout the Marine Corps, where she was both admired and respected. Even though Greta already knew pretty much everything about Dows' military career, she still listened religiously to the newscaster as he described her 57-year military career, started in 1941 in the Philippines during World War 2, and her accomplishments through a total of seven wars and two regional conflicts. The NBC co-host, a woman, also talked about her exploits in Space, which she had opened to the United States by becoming the first human being ever to fly into Space and then developing the American Space Program throughout the years as National Director of Space Programs for the United States. Her staggering accomplishments had also included landing on the Moon, then on Mars, before traveling to the Jupiter and Saturn Systems as commander of the first interplanetary ship to travel to the outer parts of the Solar System. Greta had a nearly religious fervor-look in her eyes when her crucial role as commander of all American combat forces during the Russia-United States War of November 1996 had saved the country from nuclear Armageddon.

"Our country owes so much to that woman." said softly Greta as the clip on the retirement ceremony ended. "And to still look young at the age of 74, on top of possessing all those supernatural powers. We will never see someone like her again."

"Maybe, maybe not!" replied Jeffrey. "Remember her daughter Nancy: she has proved to be actually a half-angel, half-human girl, with powers even more extensive than those of her mother. And, with the way she publicly demonstrated her powers

during the last few years, nobody can now deny what she is, unless they show some tremendous bad faith and hypocrisy.”

“Hum, sounds like the Church to me.” shot back Greta, a sarcastic smirk on her lips, making Jeffrey wince.

“Ouch! Touché!”

“I wonder what General Dows will do next, now that she is out of uniform and retired from military life.”

“I heard that she plans to work as a test pilot and aircraft designer in an aeronautical company.”

“That would make sense. She designed most of our military aircraft and Space vehicles since the end of World War Two, so she shouldn’t have any problems finding employment.”

“And what about you, Greta? Did the colonel tell you what your next assignment will be, now that you are a staff sergeant?”

“I will still command my actual rifle squad until an opening at platoon-level will become available in our battalion. I must say that I will regret having to leave the First Rifle Squad: I enjoyed commanding the guys of our so-called ‘Ethnic Squad’. They may have been derided by many as a mismatched group of misfits but they proved to me that they are great Marines and they in exchange fully accepted me as their leader, contrary to some others we know.”

“Yeah! Unfortunately, there are still plenty of assholes like this Jenkins around. Well, here is a toast to your promotion, Greta. May you climb high in the Marine Corps.” The two of them then knocked their mugs together before taking a pull from their beers.

CHAPTER 2 – A RETIRING COMMANDER

15:06 (West Coast Time)

Saturday, July 3, 1999 ‘C’

1402 South McDonald Street, West End District

Port Angeles, coast of Juan de Fuca Strait

Clallam County, Washington State, U.S.A.



Ingrid Dows, as she appears at age 74

“That dresser will go upstairs in the main bedroom, guys.”

“Yes maam!” replied one of the two moving company employees carrying the large, varnished wood piece of furniture inside the small bungalow home Ingrid had recently bought in Port Angeles, a small community of about 18,000 people located on the coast of the Juan de Fuca Strait, opposite the Canadian island of Victoria. Letting the two men climb the stairs to the upper floor, Ingrid went to her kitchen, where a third employee had started to bring in the various cardboard boxes containing her kitchenware, cutlery and dinning ware, and started opening the boxes, using a box cutter. As she took out her kitchenware and dishes, she looked a number of times outside through the kitchen windows giving a view of the waters of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, less than 100 meters from her house. That view was both nice and soothing for her, as she always had been fond of the outdoors. In fact, the location of her new house, close to the shore, had been a prime reason for her to buy it. It wasn’t a big house, nor was it fancy or luxurious, but it was plenty enough for Ingrid, who always had frugal personal needs and could be content with little, even though her accumulated military pension and bank accounts would have allowed her to easily buy a much bigger and luxurious home.

Seeing that the movers were now carrying in the last piece of furniture into her new house, Ingrid stopped her work for a moment and took thirty dollars from her wallet, which she carried on herself in a pocket, before waiting for the movers to come back to the house entrance. The older mover smiled to her while presenting her a clipboard on which a waybill was fixed.

“We’re done, miss! If you want to check our work first, then I will ask you to sign for the reception in good order of your belongings and furniture.”

"No need to check, mister: I counted the items as you brought them inside from your truck. Where do I sign?"

"Right here, maam, along with writing down the date."

Ingrid quickly executed herself, then gave back the pen to the man, along with the three ten-dollar bills.

"Thank you for your good work, gentlemen. Have a nice supper on my account on your way back."

"Why, thank you very much, maam!" said the happy worker, who nodded in salute to her before leaving. Going to the entrance door behind the three men, Ingrid watched them close off their truck and then roll out of her entrance. That was when she saw a police patrol car, stopped at the entrance of her property and which had been hidden by the movers' truck. Taking a quick decision, Ingrid got out and closed her front door behind her, then walked calmly to the patrol car, which bore the markings of the Port Angeles Police. A female police officer stepped out of the vehicle as Ingrid was approaching her. Ingrid was the first to speak while still walking.

"Hello! Can I do something for you, Officer?"

"Not really, miss: I was simply curious to see the latest person to move into Port Angeles. Officer Carol Wright, at your service."

"And I'm Ingrid Dows. I just moved in from Arlington, Virginia, and will be working at the new Hiller aircraft plant at the nearby Fairchild International Airport."

"Ah, yes! And what is your specialty, if I may ask, Miss Dows?"

"I'm an aerospace engineer and a test pilot. I will be test-flying the aircraft which the new Hiller plant will produce."

"Sounds like a fine job to me, miss."

"It is indeed, Officer. While you are here, may I ask you where I could go buy a few groceries items before everything shuts down for the Fourth of July tomorrow?"

"Oh, there are a few places you could go for that, miss. The closest are a couple of convenience stores and one small groceries store situated on West Fourth Street, just before the marina. As for tomorrow, you are right in assuming that pretty much everything will be closed off then, so don't wait too much before going to do your shopping, miss."

"Thanks for the advice: I will heed it, Officer."

"It was my pleasure, miss. Welcome to Port Angeles!"

"Thank you, Officer."

Ingrid then returned inside her new house as the policewoman got back inside her patrol car and then drove off towards the port area. However, Ingrid went out again after only a couple of minutes, carrying a large thermos ice box. Putting the ice box in the trunk of her convertible Firebird TRANS AM, she then drove out onto South McDonald Street and turned on McDonald Street, then on West 14th Street in order to get to the port area and shop for some essentials.

Some six minutes later, she was parking her car in front of a small family groceries store on Marina Drive and got out. Taking her empty ice box with her, she entered the store and went directly to the cashier's counter, behind which stood a small, mature woman in her fifties.

"Good afternoon, madam! I just moved into Port Angeles and my refrigerator, which had been unplugged and moved for travel, won't be ready to store perishables for at least another day. Do you mind if I first buy and then pack bags of ice at the bottom of my ice box before I purchase some more items in it?"

"Go right ahead, miss. Our ice freezer is in the back, against the left wall."

"Thank you, madam."

Going to the said freezer, Ingrid lined the bottom of her ice box with six bags of ice cubes, then added another six bags on top before returning to the cashier, where she put down her ice box and grabbed a shopping basket.

"I shouldn't be long, madam."

"Take all your time, miss." replied the cashier, smiling back to her. Ingrid then roamed quickly the alleys of the small store, picking up some milk, butter, fresh eggs, bread, a pack of bacon, a variety of jam and peanut butter jars and a couple of bags of frozen and cut vegetables. Returning with the lot to the cashier, Ingrid paid for her items before asking a question to the woman.

"Madam, would you be able to counsel me on a nice place where I could go have supper. No need for that place to be fancy: I am fairly simple in my tastes but I like places with a healthy, balanced menu."

"Then, I strongly advise you to go try the 'Toga's Soup House Deli & Gourmet', on Highway 101, just past Valley Creek. Do you have a map of Port Angeles, miss?"

"Yes, I do!"

The woman then took out her own map and explained to Ingrid how to get to that restaurant, which already sounded very tempting to Ingrid. Thanking the woman, Ingrid

picked up her heavy ice box and carried it out to her car without any apparent effort, surprising the cashier. She was soon reversing out of her parking spot and rolling through town, heading eastward first before turning south on South Lincoln Street, which soon became Highway 101. The Toga's Soup House Deli & Gourmet restaurant turned out to be a charming Victorian style house converted into a restaurant and, judging from the cars parked into its small parking lot, appeared to be quite popular. Parking her TRANS AM and getting out of it, Ingrid locked it before walking inside the restaurant. While the internal decoration and furniture was quite simple, Ingrid liked at once its quiet atmosphere, where a mix of mature and senior citizens ate alongside a couple of younger families with small children. Going to a vacant table in a corner of the dining room, Ingrid promptly received a menu from a passing waitress, ordering at the same time a glass of milk. Her eyes widened with glee once she opened the menu and started looking at the various items offered in it.

"Smoked Salmon Chowder? Pork Schnitzel Sandwich? SOLD!"

Taking a minute or so to read and memorize the whole menu first, she then intercepted the waitress and gave her choice of menu to her.

Less than five minutes later, she first received her smoked salmon chowder, then her sandwich plate another six minutes afterwards. She was still eating her schnitzel sandwich with gusto when she saw three men wearing U.S. Coast Guard uniforms enter the restaurant. From their wing insignias and ranks, Ingrid pegged them at once as aviators, probably serving at the small local Coast Guard air station, in the port area. One of the aviators, a captain, who was scanning the dining room for an empty table, then hesitated when his eyes caught on Ingrid. Followed by his two comrades, the young captain slowly approached her table before stopping two paces from it and speaking to her in a low voice, trying to be discrete.

"Uh, sorry to bother you like this, miss, but would we know you by chance?"

Ingrid smiled, then quickly wiped her mouth with her napkin before getting up from her chair and presenting her right hand to the young officer.

"You are indeed correct, Captain: General of the Army Ingrid Dows, retired, at your service. Please, have a seat at my table with your two comrades."

The captain shook her hand and spoke again.

"Then, let me present myself to you, General: Captain Ronald Atkinson, of the Port Angeles Coast Guard Air Station. These are my copilot, Lieutenant Ken Nakamura, and my loadmaster, Warrant Officer John Canning."

"Pleased to meet you all, gentlemen. But sit down, please. You must be getting hungry at this hour."

"Indeed, General!" replied Atkinson while taking one of the empty chairs, imitated by his two comrades. Ingrid then waived at the waitress, who promptly came and distributed menus to the newcomers. Still, Atkinson couldn't help ask Ingrid another question.

"And to what do we owe the honor to see you here in Port Angeles, General? Are you on some post-retirement vacation traveling?"

"Make it a very long post-retirement vacation period, Captain: I just moved in to a new house and a civilian job here in Port Angeles. But take the time to choose your supper before we talk more, gentlemen."

Still a bit overwhelmed by this most unexpected meeting, the three aviators consulted quickly their menus before giving their orders to the waitress. Ingrid then shocked them by talking to the waitress as she was about to walk away.

"Put everything on my tab, miss: it's on me."

That left the three aviators both stunned and incredulous, with Canning objecting feebly.

"But, General..."

"No but, Warrant: my military pension is probably bigger than the total of your three salaries. Besides, I am most happy to pay for your meals. So, how are things in Port Angeles, Coast Guard-wise?"

"Rather busy, General." answered Atkinson. With the heavy maritime traffic passing through the Juan de Fuca Strait and the often-bad weather out at large, we have quite our share of emergency assistance calls and rescue missions. We do have three search and rescue helicopters at our station but our support facilities are minimal, to say the least."

"How minimal, Captain?"

Realizing that he may have said too much, Atkinson hesitated, prompting Ingrid in insisting.

"Don't be afraid to say things the way they are, Captain: I am now retired and am not part of any commission of inquiry. I suppose that the Coast Guard budgets are rather minimal these days."

"You could say that, General. While we are able to operate and maintain properly our helicopters, there are no official accommodations in Port Angeles for our personnel: we have to rent civilian facilities for that. Thankfully, the service does cover part of those rental costs."

"An old problem indeed in all of our services. I did my best while in command of our forces to improve the service and living conditions of our personnel and of their families but the Congress didn't always support my requests for supplementary housing budgets. I am afraid that this will stay a problem for a long time still."

"I have to agree with you on that, General. May I ask what kind of civilian job you moved into, here in Port Angeles?"

"You may, Captain. I am the chief test pilot and designer at the new Hiller aircraft plant at the local airport."

"That's super, General! Can we hope to see a new type of Hiller aircraft be designed and produced here?"

"Maybe!" replied Ingrid, a mysterious smile on her face. "Uh, tomorrow is the Fourth of July. Does your unit plan to have some kind of special activities in order to celebrate it?"

"We do, General. While our ground facilities are limited, we are preparing a few helicopter tours for the families and children who will attend our open day event."

"Nice! Are such open days popular around here?"

"Oh yes, General!" said Atkinson, smiling. "Kids are especially fond of our helicopter tours. Hopefully, the weather will cooperate tomorrow. You must know how gray and wet the Washington State and the weather in this area could be."

"Oh, I do, Captain. Well, I believe that your food is starting to arrive. Bon appétit, gentlemen!"

After a good 45 minutes spent eating and discussing together, their group separated, with the three aviators warmly shaking hands with Ingrid before leaving on their own way. Now back in her car and looking at her local map, Ingrid saw that the most direct route back to her new house would make her pass close to the Fairchild International Airport, where the new Hiller aircraft plant was located. She thus decided, since there still was some daylight, to go have a look at it, at least from the outside. Starting her engine, Ingrid then backed her car out of its parking spot and started rolling west on Highway 101, then turned right after about 1.6 kilometers on Fairmount Avenue.

After another kilometer, she turned left on West Laundsen Boulevard and a bit later on the South Airport Road. That road had recently been lengthened in order to give access to the new Hiller aircraft facility. That facility proved to be fully completed and operational, with a perimeter security fence around it and a security access gate manned by a lone private security guard. However, due to the late hour, the few workers and staff who normally worked at the plant on Saturdays had already left, as the security guard explained to Ingrid after checking her identity. Ingrid hesitated for a moment before deciding to wait until Monday before paying a visit to the facility. She did contemplate the complex for a long minute before turning around, wanting to make a first impression of it in her mind. While of the size of a large aircraft hangar, it was much smaller than the facilities of other, bigger aircraft manufacturers, like the Boeing Seattle plant or the Lockheed facilities in Burbank, California. Still, it represented an important investment for the Hiller Aircraft Corporation, which had been quite small as an enterprise before Ingrid had started to design her Aircar and Airbike for Hiller, designs which had then propelled the company forward and had made it earn hundreds of millions in profit. Now, much of those profits had been used to build this new facility in Port Angeles, a risky economic and financial gamble for the company. While someone else would be the general manager of that facility, it would be up to her to design new aircraft which would be both innovative and competitive commercially and would sell well. Contrary to most of her past aeronautical design work, this time she would be designing purely civilian aircraft, not military ones, something that suited her just fine. After 57 years of military service, nine wars and conflicts and thousands of people killed directly by her during air combat operations against opposing forces, Ingrid was truly tired of war and of killing. Now was her chance to contribute in a peaceful way to the aeronautical world.

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