

WALTER DEAN MYERS

SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY EDITION



FALLEN ANGELS

“**S**omebody must have told them suckers I was coming.”

“Told who?” I asked.

“The Congs, man. Who you think I’m talking ’bout?”

“Why you think somebody told them you were coming?”

“Cause I don’t see none of ’em around here. They don’t want their butts kicked.”

“Yeah, okay.” I looked at the guy’s name tag. It read “Gates.” “Hey, Gates, I’ll tell you as soon as I see some Congs.”

“I’m going on in the bathroom,” he said. “Make sure they ain’t none in there.”

“Right.”

I watched him wade through a sea of GIs, stopping now and again to talk to one of them.

“Does he really think we’re in Vietnam already?” Specialist, Fifth Class Judy Duncan looked sharp in her dress uniform as she leaned against the Coke

machine. Most of us were in fatigues, the army's work clothes. I had been sitting next to Judy on the flight from Massachusetts. She had brought along an assortment of snacks to eat on the plane and was now digging into a bag of potato chips as we waited for the plane to refuel in Anchorage, Alaska, on our way to Vietnam.

"He's just a clown," I said. "On the plane he asked a captain to wake him up when we reached Cong City."

"Where you say you were from?"

"New York," I answered. "You?"

"I tell most people I'm from Dallas," she said. "But I'm really from Irving. That's right outside of Dallas. I don't think anybody is really from Dallas anymore."

"You took advanced training at Fort Devens?"

"Unh-uh. Sam Houston, in Texas. I did basic there and then went right into medical school. I got assigned to the hospital in Devens, but it got boring."

"Now you going to see the world?"

"Something like that," she said. She had a nice smile. "I think somebody figures if I see Nam first, everything else is going to look good to me."

The plane had been half empty coming from Massachusetts to Anchorage. We picked up about fifty more guys in Anchorage, most of them infantry from Fort Lewis. There were a few nurses with the group, too, and Judy went and sat with them.

We were served dinner shortly after we were airborne, but I wasn't hungry. I usually can't eat when I'm nervous, and going to Nam made me ner-

vous. The only reason I was going anyway was because of a paperwork mess up. At first my unit was scheduled to go to Nam, but a doctor at Fort Devens had said that my knee was too bad for combat duty. I was assigned to a supply company while I waited for new orders. But then my old company didn't go to Nam, they went to Germany instead — which was cool because there wasn't any fighting going on over there — and I got orders for Nam.

“Look at it this way, Perry,” the captain had said. “The only reason you're going to Nam is that it takes forever to process a medical profile. Once it catches up with you, you'll be headed home. In the meantime you'll get to Nam, they'll put you behind a desk in some headquarters company, and the worst thing that'll happen to you is that you catch a social disease in downtown Saigon that'll rot your twinkie off.”

I hadn't been too worried about going to Nam. From what I had heard, the fighting was almost over, anyway.

Our next stop was Osaka, Japan, and I slept most of the way. We landed at a commercial airport because of some kind of disturbance at the military facilities. There was supposed to be a change of planes, but they didn't have another plane available until the next morning. A tall, square-shouldered first lieutenant gave out meal tickets, and we were told we could use them at the airport cafeteria. The people at the cafeteria were civilians, and they didn't want any part of our meal tickets, even though a sergeant tried to explain to the head of the cafeteria that the U.S. Army would redeem them. Two cor-

FIGHTING TO SURVIVE

Seventeen-year-old Richie Perry has just graduated from high school. There's no way he can afford college, and the streets are just too hard. So he signs up for the army and gets shipped off to Vietnam. In a battlefield jungle where every move can mean the difference between life and death, he meets Peewee, Lobel, Johnson, and Brunner. They're all here for different reasons, but now they share a single dream—getting out alive.

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