

STROKE OF GENIUS

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PROLOGUE

Denver, Colorado.

Sara Alistair's name was scrawled across the face of the courier-delivered envelope, the labored penmanship belonging to a noted oceanographer named Josh Hart. Next to her name, Hart had scribbled, 'Break out the champagne. We found it!'

Inside the envelope was a half-century-old newspaper article clipped from the Santa Barbara *Daily Mail*. The newspaper had the jaundiced color of age and exposure and an eggshell brittleness; Alistair stared at the dateline: December 20, 1941. *Two weeks after Pearl Harbor.*

Eight words were stamped in red across the body of the article:

CENSORED

By Decree of the US Defense Command

The article was entitled **The Sinking of the SS Galileo** and read:

Union Oil Company officials fear that one of their tankers, the 9,820 ton SS Galileo, was torpedoed and sunk early yesterday morning by an I-class Japanese submarine at while en route from Avila, CA. to Anchorage, Alaska. The vessel listed a cargo of 4.8 million gallons of high grade crude oil and a crew of thirty-eight.

Apparently, there were no survivors. And while no evidence of the tanker has yet been recovered, there has also been no report of an oil spill. Since all ships of commerce have been on radio-silence status following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Galileo's position at the time of the attack is still in dispute.

A Morse Code transmission, apparently received at 3:39 a.m., the morning of the 19th, appears to be the most promising link to the incident, however, the US Defense Command has steadfastly refused to acknowledge such a transmission.

According to a source at the Avila shipyard, the tanker had a storage capacity of 5.8 million gallons, though holding tanks #2 and #7 were empty due to ongoing

structural repairs...

Alistair skipped to the bottom of the page where Josh Hart had penned the following words:

'Sara. We discovered the *Galileo* eight days ago while charting underwater zinc deposits, two miles south of the Sanctuary Islands and 11 miles due west of Monterey. The torpedo hit an empty holding tank, just like we thought. Which explains why the tanker went down so fast and why there was no oil spill. By my calculations, that puts it smack dab in the middle of Mission Petroleum's North Pacific oil field. Which means...'

Alistair stopped reading. The note and the article crumpled in her fist. She whispered, "Which means the coast of California is in for the surprise of its life."

For more of Stroke of Genius, please call or e-mail. I look forward to hearing from you.