

ELIZABETH WEIN

*Black Dove,*  
**WHITE RAVEN**

From the author of **CODE NAME VERITY**

*Also by Elizabeth Wein*

**CODE NAME VERITY**

**ROSE UNDER FIRE**

ELIZABETH WEIN

# Black Dove, WHITE RAVEN



Special thanks to Dr Fikre Tolossa for sharing his  
expertise on Ethiopian history and culture.



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**For Susan**



Sinidu told me I should aim for the sun.

I still have a plane. There must be *some* way I can get Teo out safely. I think Momma's hoard of Maria Theresa dollars is enough to pay for the travel. I am hoping my new passport is waiting for me in Addis Ababa. But Teo . . . Teo is trapped. I have thought about trying to get him a British passport — Colonel Sinclair has friends who have not left Ethiopia. I could throw myself at them in disguise as Helpless-Young-American-Girl-All-Alone.

I wonder if I could sweet-talk someone at the British Legation. But Momma couldn't even sweet-talk the Americans in our own legation, and of course the British probably can't do a doggone thing for Teo even if they wanted to. Legations have not got all the powers of embassies, and I don't know if they are even running any more, since the invasion and the shooting started. I don't

know anything that's happened in the past four months, except what I've seen from the air.

What about the French? Momma was still friendly with Pierre Ferrand and those Imperial Ethiopian Air Force pilots last time we were in Addis Ababa. But we're not French either, and I don't even know if they're still here.

It is a waste of time trying to pass Teo off as Italian. I think I pretty much burned that bridge behind me when I stole a plane from the Italian Air Force.

Sinidu is right. I am here at Lake Ashenge, north of Koram, and the emperor is in the hills above the town. There isn't anyone else who can help me.

I have nothing to lose. I am going to dare it. I will aim for the sun.



~~March 4, 1936~~  
Yekatit 25, 1928

Humble Greetings to Your Most Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia!

I am writing to you (politely, I hope) to beg you to forgive my brother, Teodros Gedeyon, for the bond he owes your servant, *Ras Amde Worku*, and to grant him an Ethiopian passport.

We have not met you, but we saw you just before your coronation, and again when you landed for a few minutes at Tazma Meda. You know our mother, the photographer and flyer Rhoda Drummond Menotti, who works in your progressive clinic there. You used to let her land on your airfield at Akaki near the capital. Her aircraft has also been flown honourably in your service by my brother Teodros. He was given his pilot's licence by the same man who trained your own Imperial Ethiopian Air Force pilots.

Your Majesty, I am a white American myself and I don't believe you will expect any national loyalty from me. But my foster brother is an Ethiopian citizen because of his Ethiopian father. I count on your mercy and wisdom as I beg you to shower your blessing and generosity on Teodros. I have lived in Ethiopia since I was a little girl and am broken-hearted to have to run away as it is falling.

I am on my own. I am desperate. I don't know where else to turn for help. But I know that you can grant Teo a passport. You have children too, and some of them are not grown up yet. Princess Tsehai is our own age, and Prince Makonnen is very young. You must understand what it is to fear for your family.

I thought I would send you some things my mother kept, our baby stories and our older stories, some writing exercises and our flight records. I hope they help you understand what has happened to us.

I am embarrassed that everything is written in English. Teo and I both speak Amharic, but we don't write it very well, and I know that your translators are busy. My apologies! Also I'm embarrassed about the writing, which is silly here and there, especially in the beginning. But we both like to write, and sometimes I feel like the only thing I *can* do is write. It helps me think. Maybe you know what I mean.

I beg to tell you all that we have done for Ethiopia, and for you, this year.

I anxiously await your response and remain,

Your obedient servant,

*Emilia Drummond Menotti*

PS The captured Italian aircraft is also for you. I hope it is payment enough for the big favour I am asking.

## THE ADVENTURS OF BLACK DOVE AND WHITE RAVEN

*This story is by Em M. and it is writen down by Teodros Dupré*

*Once upon a time there was a very beaoutiful lady that was able to wear every costume and she coud make things and save peple and her name was White Raven. Everybody liked to watch her making her costumes. She travled in her flying machene with her partner named Black Dove. Sometimes he coud be invisable. They flew everywere together and that means they were always in the soup together. One day in there plane they saw a big grey cloud and when they got close they saw that it was made all out of birds flying very close together. They flew arond the cloud and they landed safelly. The End*

*(May 1928)*

Theme for *Miss Shore* by Emilia Menotti

Subject: 'My Earliest Memory'

Beehive Hill Cooperative Coffee Farm

Tazma Meda, Wollo Province

Oct. 19, 1934 (Teqemt 9, 1927)

You don't have much choice about what your parents make you do until you're big enough they can't tie you down. I am not sure this is my earliest memory, but it is the oldest one with details in it. It is of being tied into the open cockpit of a Curtiss Jenny flying machine by Cordelia Dupré. When I was little, Delia took up more space in my head and heart than my own father. In fact, she still takes up more space there. Delia is the most important thing that ever happened to our momma.

I know that this memory takes place when I was five years old because I was five years old when Momma and Delia bought the Jenny, their own airplane. It was a biplane that looked a lot like the one we have now, one wing above the other with open cockpits. Well, there were four of us to fit into the Jenny's two cockpits, counting me and Teo. But Teo and I weren't very big when we were five, and Momma and Delia figured out ways of taking us along.

This memory is not of my first flight. My first *flight* was in France in 1919 when I was five *weeks* old, not five years. My father, Papà Menotti, did the flying. Momma carried me against her belly in a scarf tied around her waist under her big leather flying coat because they didn't want anyone at the airfield to know they were taking me along. It was on the day of my baptism. Momma's parents are Quakers and they don't hold with any kind of religious ceremony, but Papà is Roman Catholic and Momma wanted to make him happy. So she agreed to have me baptised if they did my 'baptism in air' on the same day. Momma thinks I might have been the youngest person ever taken for a flight in an aircraft then.

But I don't remember that. What I remember is, when I was five years old, Delia lifting me out of Momma's arms and putting me into the Jenny. Delia was crouching between the wings and Momma was standing on the ground in front of the wings and holding me up to her. I remember reaching out to Delia and how pretty she looked in her leather flying helmet that was exactly the same dark brown colour as her skin, with her hair just peeping out around the helmet like a soft, crimped frame for her face. She had on pink lipstick because she and Momma had just finished an air-show performance and Delia always prettied herself up for the crowd. She lifted me into the

plane and plunked me on the seat in the cockpit squeezed in next to Teo.

‘There they are, in the soup together!’ She laughed. ‘Rhoda, get up here and look at our kids – they’re a double act, just like us.’

It was the first time they’d ever taken us flying in the U S of A because they’d never owned their own plane before. None of the owners of the borrowed planes they flew wanted to get a bad name if their plane crashed with a couple of little kids inside, being flown by a woman (Momma) – or, even worse, by a Negro woman (Delia). If anything like that had happened, it would have shut down an aircraft owner for good. But now that Delia and Momma owned their own plane, fair and square, they could do whatever they wanted with it.

Momma must have stood on her toes to peep up over the edge of the cockpit to look at us, and she and Delia both laughed.

‘Tie ’em down,’ Momma said, and Delia laughed again.

I craned my neck to see Momma hop up lightly on to the fragile body of the aircraft behind us, straddling the fuselage like it was a horse. (Once, when she first started wing walking, she put her foot through the fabric of the lower wing and broke her ankle and couldn’t get it out. Delia had to land the plane with Momma all balled up in

the wing struts. Delia was the best pilot ever.) Momma watched while Delia tied us down. I remember Delia doing it and how I felt like I was going to be the safest person in the whole world after she was finished.

I remember Delia's hands – the shiny pink scar in the shape of a heart that she got when she was learning to fly, spilling hot engine oil on her hand, her slender dark fingers and her rose-red varnished nails. She strapped us up with white silk aviator scarves because the aircraft harnesses were too big for us. She tied us together.

'Now you hold on to each other,' Delia said. 'Like this.'

She crossed Teo's left hand over to mine, and crossed my right hand over to his, so our arms were woven together.

'You are going to be the new Black Dove and White Raven, so your two mommas can retire!' Delia told us. Momma laughed. I clung to Teo's hand because – I remember this *so well* – I thought she meant we were supposed to make the plane go, and I was worried that I didn't know how to. (Now I know she tied us down so that we couldn't grab hold of the control wheel in front of us. There was one in each cockpit.)

Delia told us, 'Now, if you feel scared, just hang on tight to each other and squeeze. Three squeezes means, "Are you scared?" and four squeezes means, "I am not scared." If you tell each other you're not scared, you'll



feel brave. Then lean back so you can watch your momma, 'cause she's going to do the showing off. You know you'll be safe because I'm going to do the flying!'

I remember feeling *so relieved* it wasn't going to be up to me.

'Oh, put a cork in it, Del,' Momma said crossly. Delia was always teasing Momma about being a better pilot than she was.

Teo repeated in my ear, 'Put a cork in it,' because it sounded goofy. We both snickered.

When she'd finished tying us up, Delia pulled on the leather gloves which she had in her pocket, and you couldn't see her pretty nails or her pretty scar any more, or even tell how little her hands were, and she leaned down and kissed us both one at a time. She left pink lipstick on Teo's forehead and probably on mine, and she said again, 'Now you're a double act like me and Rhoda.'

Their double act was not on stage but in the air. They were called the Black Dove (Delia) and the White Raven (Momma) and they did an aerial show together, barnstorming in flying circuses all over the U S of A. They did aerobatics (mostly Delia, because she was the better pilot) and wing walking (mostly Momma, who was not scared of getting out of a flying machine and riding it like a horse while it was in the air). Wing walking doesn't

mean ‘walking’ so much as it means daredevil fooling around outside the airplane while it’s flying. Even just standing up between the cockpits counts. But also doing a handstand over the pilot or eating a picnic lunch on top of the wing. Momma did parachute jumps sometimes too. People are always impressed by *anybody* doing stunts like these, but especially a pair of pretty girls.

Black and white, night and day, that’s what people used to say. On the ground, when people were watching, Momma and Delia milked that contrast for all they could get. But on their own and in the sky they never paid any mind to black and white – they were just two crazy people who loved flying.

‘All set, Rhoda?’ Delia asked, after she’d finished tying us up.

Momma answered smartly, ‘Aye, aye, Cap’n!’ because whichever of them was piloting was the captain; then Delia climbed into the pilot’s seat. Momma was still straddling the plane behind us, and she twisted her wrists into the straps she’d got rigged in the wires over our heads as a kind of safety net. Someone on the ground in front of us must have swung the propeller to get the engine going. I remember feeling very excited, but not nervous. If I leaned back I could see Momma perched on the plane right behind me. Teo and I hung on to each other’s crossed

arms and nudged each other in the ribs.

‘We are in the soup together!’ I echoed Delia.

‘Put a cork in it!’ he echoed Momma.

We laughed like cackling chickens. It doesn’t take much when you’re five.

And then the plane started to move and soon it was bumping over the grass and then, without me or Teo even realising what was going on, we were flying. We were so little we couldn’t see out of the cockpit. All we could see was Momma’s arms in the straps over our heads and the upper wing like a big sail and the blue sky all around us, and all we could hear was the engine and the wind singing in the wires. And Delia was flying.

That is my earliest memory.