



# THE WOMEN OF ARLINGTON HALL

**JANE HEALEY**

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE SECRET STEALERS*

## PRAISE FOR JANE HEALEY

“A stirring tribute to the American codebreakers who helped identify spies during the Cold War, Healey’s novel offers up a joyful ensemble of women at the top of their game while also providing a nuanced look at the motives behind those who chose to betray their country. This is a terrific read: ripe with romance, filled with nail-biting suspense, and a celebration of the power of female friendship.”

—Fiona Davis, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Stolen Queen*

“Jane Healey knocks it out of the park with her new heavy hitter *The Women of Arlington Hall*. This page-turner has all the goodies historical fiction lovers will devour: Cold War espionage; a brilliant, fiery female codebreaker; spies in love (yes, please); girl code; passion; and suspense. Catherine (Cat) Killeen, just out of Radcliffe, is accepted into the special Russian Section intelligence unit to help foil the Russians’ plot to steal atomic secrets from the United States in the 1940s. A woman of her time and *ahead* of her time, Cat stops at nothing to reconstruct the elusive KGB codebook and track down those Russian spies living in America, who infiltrated the highest levels of government—even if the price tag is her own life. Healey doesn’t miss a beat merging real-life events with fictional flair and rich plot twists. Lots of recognizable Cold War players make cameos: Herbert Hoover, Klaus Fuchs, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Unputdownable. Healey at her very best.”

—Lisa Barr, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Goddess of Warsaw*

“With *The Women of Arlington Hall*, author Jane Healey brings historical fiction readers everything we look for in an enthralling read. Healey weaves deep and meticulous research on the Cold War–era codebreakers into a page-turning plot replete with spies, romance, intellectual puzzles, little-understood historical events, betrayals, and suspense. Alongside a heroine who, appealingly, is both brainy and still finding her way in life, we learn about the complex world of post–World War II political intrigue, even as she navigates the twists and turns of her personal life. A fascinating, fun, and compelling read.”

—Joy Jordan-Lake, bestselling author of *Echoes of Us*

**THE  
WOMEN  
OF  
ARLINGTON  
HALL**

## **OTHER BOOKS BY JANE HEALEY**

*The Saturday Evening Girls Club*

*The Beantown Girls*

*The Secret Stealers*

*Goodnight from Paris*

**THE  
WOMEN  
OF  
ARLINGTON  
HALL**

a novel

**JANE HEALEY**

LAKE UNION  
PUBLISHING

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, organizations, places, events, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

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Published by Lake Union Publishing, Seattle  
[www.apub.com](http://www.apub.com)

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EU product safety contact:  
Amazon Media EU S. à r.l.  
38, avenue John F. Kennedy, L-1855 Luxembourg  
[amazonpublishing-gpsr@amazon.com](mailto:amazonpublishing-gpsr@amazon.com)

ISBN-13: 9781662526503 (paperback)  
ISBN-13: 9781662526510 (digital)

Cover design by Faceout Studio, Amanda Hudson  
Cover image: © Lucky photographer, © VValD, © Leigh Prather /  
Shutterstock © Science History Images / Alamy © Eysblink



*For my daughters, Ellie and Madeleine, who inspire me  
every day.*

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It may be roundly asserted that human ingenuity cannot concoct a cipher which human ingenuity cannot resolve.

—*Edgar Allan Poe*

There are at the present time two great nations in the world . . . the Russians and the Americans . . . Their starting point is different, and their courses are not the same, yet each of them seems marked out by the will of Heaven to sway the destinies of half the globe.

—*François-René de Chateaubriand, 1802*

# Part One

## *Chapter One*

***Monday, September 15, 1947***

***Arlington, Virginia***

As the taxicab drove away, I stood with my purse hanging over my elbow like a weighted pendulum, my big brown leather suitcase next to me as I gaped at what appeared to be a small city surrounded by a fortress. Armed guards stationed along the perimeter of the fence stood watch as hundreds of military officers, as well as civilian men and women, arrived to start their workday, showing their security badges to the guard stationed at the main entrance.

I shook my head, taking it all in, not quite believing I was here. After everything that had happened over the past few months, I had finally arrived at Arlington Hall.

“Excuse me, miss. Can you please show me your credentials?” A stocky young guard approached me, and I realized I must look ridiculous standing there with my suitcase, just staring at everything.

“Oh, sorry, I . . . I don’t have them yet. But I am supposed to be here. Today is my first day,” I said, trying not to sound too eager.

“What’s your name?”

“Catherine Killeen.”

“Follow me, Catherine Killeen.”

He took my suitcase, led me to the guard booth next to the main entrance, stepped inside, and made a phone call. I knew for certain this was my start date, yet still I watched him and resisted the urge to nervously pick at my nail polish, considering my options if the person on the other end of the line said they’d never heard of me.

“You’re to go up to the main building. Someone will greet you upon entering,” the guard said upon hanging up. “Are you okay with that suitcase? Do you need someone to help you?”

“I’m fine, thank you,” I said with a quiet sigh of relief as he let me pass through the gate.

A minute later I regretted not taking the guard up on his offer. The winding path to the main building was longer than it looked, especially for

someone dragging a clunky suitcase. When I finally reached the entrance, I had to hoist it, step by step, up the stairs to the front doors, all while awkwardly holding my purse under my elbow. Despite the early hour, the humidity was oppressive, and now I was red-faced and sweaty for my first day of work.

Formerly an all-girls school, the stately main building of the Arlington Hall government complex had a beige brick facade and a three-story portico adorned with massive white columns. Catching my breath, I walked through the front doors into a grand foyer with an impressive central staircase, detailed moldings, and French doors. The air smelled of musty books and polished wood, and there were industrial fans strategically placed in a vain attempt to cool down the building's interior.

"Catherine Killeen?" A woman with reddish-brown hair, an angular face, and thick, black-framed glasses greeted me as soon as I entered.

"Yes, hello," I said, taking off my straw hat and reaching out to shake her hand. "Please call me Cat . . ."

"I am Margaret Sherwood, in charge of orientation," she said in a clipped tone, after the briefest handshake. "Follow me to the drawing room, please. Your Arlington Hall employee orientation will begin in about fifteen minutes."

"Sounds good, thank you," I said.

"Why do you have your suitcase with you?" she asked, glancing at it over her glasses as I tried to keep up with her brisk pace. "Don't you have a place to stay?"

"No, I stayed in a hotel near Union Station because I arrived late last night," I said. "But I . . . my professor led me to believe that housing arrangements would be made for me?"

"No, no," Margaret said with a tsk. "Your professor was wrong. I swear some of these academics who recruit for this program do not pay attention to the logistical details at *all*."

I stopped walking, jolted by her words. I couldn't afford another night at the Phoenix Park Hotel. Where on earth would I go?

"So, you're telling me that there's no housing for me here?" I said, a little lightheaded from panic.

Steps ahead, Margaret whirled around and looked at me.

“No, I’m afraid nothing was arranged ahead of time for you,” she said, her tone less shrill, more sympathetic.

“Sorry, I obviously should have confirmed housing beforehand,” I said, trying not to sound as alarmed as I felt. “Professor Burke can be oblivious.”

“Well,” she said with another tsk, “I suppose I can give you some suggestions at the end of the day, Ms. Killeen.”

“Thank you, I really appreciate that,” I said, giving her a tight smile as we started walking again.

She led me down one of the corridors into a drawing room where a dozen women were sitting at circular tables. I sat down at an empty one in the far corner of the room and shoved my suitcase underneath it, relieved to have a moment to collect myself. I tucked a stray curl back into my bun and took a compact out of my purse, reapplying some light-red lipstick and blotting the perspiration off my cheeks with a tissue. My normally pale face was still flushed a deep pink from the walk, making the small constellation of freckles across my nose less prominent.

Ten minutes later, Margaret Sherwood returned with a half dozen more women, and I cringed when I realized not one of them was carrying a suitcase. I was the only one who had moved hundreds of miles from home without confirmed lodging. A petite woman hurried over and took a seat next to me, as Margaret handed out papers to each of us, along with black ballpoint pens.

“Effie LeBlanc,” the woman said with a Southern accent I couldn’t quite place. She had wide-set, pale-blue eyes, and her ash-blond hair was pulled back with a red silk headband. I shook her hand, and she nodded at Margaret. “Honestly, she could pass for one of the high schoolers I taught back in New Orleans, but she’s a little scary, isn’t she?”

“More than a little,” I said with a smile. “Cat Killeen, so nice to meet you.”

“Good morning, ladies, and welcome to Arlington Hall, official headquarters of the Army Security Agency, ASA for short,” Margaret said. “We will go through some paperwork, then I’ll take you to get your identification badges.”

She held up two badges for show-and-tell and continued speaking.

“These badges are your security credentials, and you must show them every morning upon entering the main gates, as well as any other buildings. The color at the bottom of your badge shows your level of access. First rule to remember: You are never allowed to have your picture taken with the badges on, or to wear them outside these facilities.

“After you’re issued your credentials, you’ll attend several lectures from top military officers on topics of critical importance for all new employees. Then myself or another supervisor will interview you. Finally, you’ll receive details on what department and building to report to for training tomorrow. Any questions before we begin?”

After our murmurs of no and some head shaking, she continued.

“The first document in front of you is the United States Loyalty Oath,” Margaret said. “Please read it over and sign it.”

The loyalty oath asked that we swear to “defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic” and that we take this obligation “freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion.”

I signed it, with my own theories as to what enemies we were defending against now that the war was over.

“The second document in front of you is the United States Secrecy Oath.” She held one up to show us, walking among the tables, looking each of us in the eye as she passed.

“You must sign this oath, swearing that you will never discuss your activities here outside of your official duties—not now, not ever, even after you are no longer working here. This includes with your family members. If anyone asks you what you do here, you tell them you are a secretary and you do the basic tasks that secretaries do—sharpen pencils, file papers, type—you get the idea. When you pray at night, you give God thanks that you’re a secretary, because He doesn’t even need to know what you do.”

Effie stifled the smallest laugh at this, but she stopped when Margaret glared at her.

My family knew I hadn’t moved all the way here to become a secretary. I’d have to come up with a better cover story for them than sharpening government pencils.

“To be clear,” Margaret continued, “discussing your activities here with anyone on the outside opens you up to prosecution under the

Espionage Act. And—I'm required to say this to all new hires—understand that you will not be spared the full consequences of treason against the United States simply because you are a woman. And yes, the punishment for treason is execution. If you are uncomfortable with these terms, you are free to leave the premises now, and we will rescind your offer of employment.”

She paused for a moment, letting the gravity of her words sink in.

“Now,” she said, “would anyone like to leave?”

We all shook our heads no. *The punishment for treason is execution.* The words unnerved me, and I could tell, looking around the room, that I wasn't the only one. The consequences were dire for revealing our “activities” to anyone, but we still didn't even know what these activities *were*.

“Okay, then please sign your papers, and I will come around to pick them up,” she said, getting back to business.

“So do you have any idea what your job is here?” Effie asked under her breath as we signed.

“I've got a vague idea,” I whispered back. “The professor who recruited me said that it was top secret and that I was a good fit, and I'd learn the details when I arrived. But apparently, we're not learning anything from Margaret.”

“We're in the same boat, then,” Effie said, nodding. “And I guess we're really in it now, whatever in the world *it is*.”

“No doubt,” I said as I looked over the papers to make sure I hadn't missed anything.

I couldn't stop bouncing my knee because my nerves were getting the best of me. I had no place to stay and no idea what my job was, and I was pretty sure I had just signed my life away to the US government. I grasped the Saint Rita medallion around my neck and said a silent prayer to her. Seeing as she was the patron saint of lost causes, it wouldn't hurt to have her on my side today.

I was just about to ask Effie about her living arrangements, but she spoke first.

“So where are you from, Cat?” she asked as she handed her paperwork to Margaret.

“Cambridge, Massachusetts. Am I supposed to even tell you that? I feel like I’m already in trouble, and I haven’t even started yet,” I said with sarcasm.

“No kidding. I think we’re fine, if we don’t get on no-nonsense Margaret’s bad side,” Effie replied. As if hearing this, Margaret looked right at us and asked the group to gather our things and follow her.