

Forty Women bring together a group of women from different backgrounds who work together to survive after being hijacked in a foreign country.

FORTY WOMEN

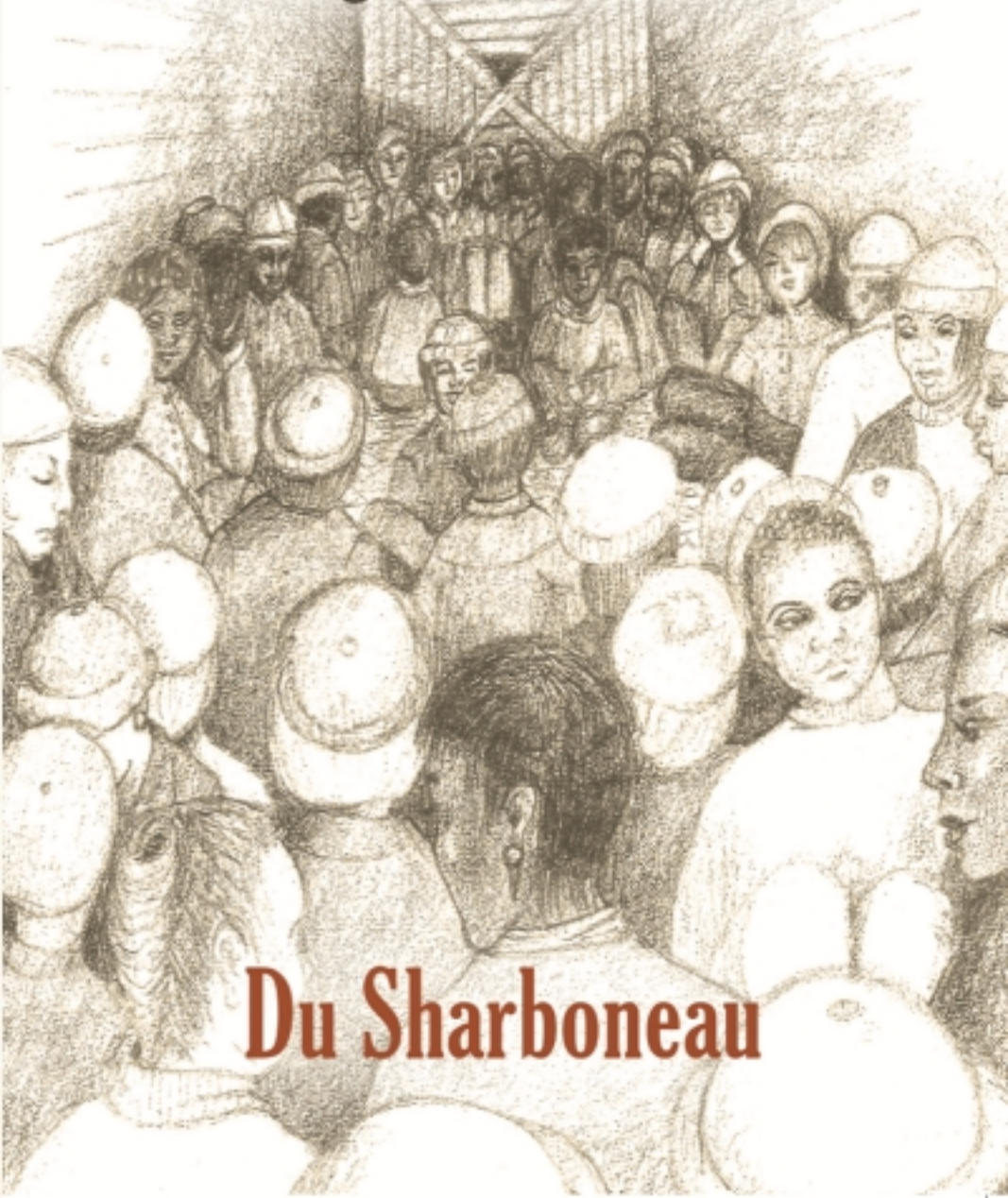
By Du Sharboneau

Order the book from the publisher Booklocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/11602.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**

Forty Women



Du Sharboneau

Copyright © 2020 Du Sharboneau

ISBN: 978-1-64718-979-2

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2020

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Sharboneau, Du
Forty Women by Du Sharboneau
Library of Congress Control Number: 2020917900

Chapter I

It didn't matter that they weren't all in the same class on the plane. The 68 women had all submitted what were called "World Stories" and had done a trip to different parts of the world.

They didn't know each other; but that didn't matter either. They were separated on the plane by first class or second class seats. With the exception of one woman who belonged in first class; but there wasn't a seat for her. The second class sections were all ages, almost all nationalities – all Americans, either black or white.

The 'prize' money had been supplied; but the plane fare was up to the women to pay; therefore, with the exception of the one from first class who didn't have a seat, the 40 women from second, all "spoke the same language;" so to speak. They got along well even though the ages were spread from 24 to 65; there were all kinds of similarities and enjoyable hours.

The woman who belonged in first class, had books to read and was friendly enough to listen as some of the women told about the story they had submitted giving them this "gift of flight" as they expressed it.

They were given travel bags, large purses and world maps. First class refused the bags and purses; they had all their, what they called, "travel outfits" and things matched - nothing wrong with that. Second class was content and happy about everything.

In the hours it took to reach their first stop, somewhere in Germany, ideas and history and likes and dislikes got banged around in first class; but in second, everyone found a “buddy” to talk to about their lives up to this point. They were similar, not much money in any of them, and problems with “being accepted” by the black women didn’t come up, fortunately. That’s not a subject for enjoyable conversation.

The hours passed and so did the first country they were supposed to visit!

First class, having had more experience with flying got nowhere talking to the stewardess. It seemed, she always was “on the run” and “would get back to them later.” That “later” came much later!

The woman who was supposed to have been in first class, made a fuss; trying to grab hold of the stewardess whenever she came through from first class. She started a list of “complaints” beginning with having to be in the “cheapy” section. When someone suggested that they should all try to figure what was going on and “take it easy”; she told them where they could stick that idea!

It got very quiet and somebody, in a low, quiet, loud-enough-to hear voice said, “Is this still the ‘Women’s Flight Program’?” and everyone felt the relief.

It wasn’t first class. It didn’t have to be. The opportunity of being a part of the Women’s Flight Program was exciting enough without feeling inferior sitting in the second class section on the plane.

First class was filled with governors’ wives and women in high positions across the nation. They were all a part of a whole, glued together by the desire to help oppressed women all over the world.

Some of the women had made more than one determined journey, amassing at a given designation where women from many countries met to show unity and strength. One or two had attended all six

Forty Women

world-wide meetings since the first one held in China some years before.

This meeting was to be held in Germany. Not that the German women had more complaints than women of other countries; but it was a good central location.

Second class vibrated with laughter and talk. Very few women had come alone on this trip. Most were single, owners of small businesses who had budgeted themselves to make the trip; it being a positive thing to do.

Somewhere in the midst of the merriment and noise came a hushed voice, a hurried, frantic whisper passed from seat to seat, silencing the listeners with apprehension.

So, it was easy to hear the captain as he made the announcement, "May I have your attention."

The news that had trickled through to the rear of the plane, the suspicion that one of the women seated in the front had when the curtains flickered open allowing her to see a man with a gun, was true.

The plane was being hijacked. The tremor of the captain's voice as he described their new destination and instructed everyone to cooperate authenticated the report.

The stillness was broken by loud sobs followed by a rush of questions and comments by the women. This was brought to a halt by the appearance of two men swinging guns toward the second class section.

A stewardess was thrust in front of them. Perspiration was on her forehead and whiteness circled her mouth as she tried to bring forth words.

She glanced at the look of terror on her passengers' faces. In as calm, clear and loud a voice that she could manage, she relayed the instructions emphasizing the need for quiet and remaining exactly where they were.

The trio disappeared behind the curtain.

Ellie sat transfixed watching the curtains settle into place. "My God," she thought, "I'm too old for this kind of stuff."

Ellie, in her late 60's, wasn't too old to want to join and encourage a movement which would help liberate women. That's why she was on this flight. She wasn't a die-hard feminist; she actually wanted the women who had children to stay home. But, she had encountered enough unfairness when she had been working; other than when she had been a teacher, to know it was there. That was a small part of the treatment women were receiving around the world.

Now, here she sat, as afraid and shocked as everyone else.

Sobs were stifled. Some were even reluctant to reach into their purses for handkerchiefs, though their eyes and noses ran freely.

Gradually, as though melting from a fixed position, they began to wipe their faces and look around. They tried whispering to see if their words reverberated through the plane.

Feeling confident that the sound didn't carry, some shared their anxieties quietly, catching the eyes of other passengers. They tried to organize in their dilemma and fear.

It wasn't possible to keep still and that quiet for long and gradually the section began to show movement and a low buzz of voices. A main question was, "Do I ask someone if I can leave my seat to use the bathroom?" It was suggested not bothering anyone, to sit still, not to leave the seat.

Landing in Germany should have been one hour from when the captain's announcement had been made. Now, well over two hours had passed. They must have flown over the German airport and they were still heading in the same direction. That was the consensus, at least, no one having felt the plane turn.

Irene had been the only other older woman in the group besides Ellie, whom she had met while waiting to board the plane. She thought it would have been nice to have sat together. She wasn't making much headway in conversation with the young black woman in the adjoining seat whose friends sat across the aisle. The woman's attention was usually turned in that direction.

So Irene, alone on the trip, hadn't talked it over with anyone. She undid her seat belt, stood quickly, and headed for the rear bathroom among gasps and low exclamations of protest.

A few minutes later she emerged, her eyes frantically searching to make sure the men with guns were not there waiting to blow her to bits. She hurried to her seat, and another woman popped up. And so it went for another hour.

What countries were there east of Germany by about a thousand miles? Hardly anyone knew her geography well enough to come up with answers. Had they been in the first class section, more information would have been forth coming.

Second class was completely ignored by everyone. Had the curtain moved occasionally, no one seemed to have noticed.

Another hour passed, and the plane started its descent. The landing was bumpy and rough; the plane seeming to be trying to stop on a dime.

It was dark outside; but along with the shouts occurring in the front section and the movement outside, Ellie tried to determine their position. It seemed military trucks, soldiers, and searchlights made it a base of some kind. Ellie passed the information on in quick

whispers; until the curtains were torn back and the stewardess was pushed through.

“Please,” she said almost crying, “stay in your seats. We’ll - -“

She was pulled back through the curtains before she could finish her instructions.

Things became very quiet, as the crew was assembled below on the tarmac. Ellie, sitting by a window, strained to see. Even though the lights were focused on the group, fog had begun to obliterate all else. She watched with growing terror as she interpreted the actions of the hijackers. They were pointing towards the rear of the plane and to the ground. The stewardess was waving her hands and shaking her head in rebellion of whatever they were indicating. She was suddenly slapped across the face so hard her body bounced back into the captain, who supported her and stared in disbelief at the attacker. The stewardess was torn from the grasp of the captain and shoved along ahead of two of the hijackers, lost to sight.

Ellie sprang to her feet and began putting on her jacket and reaching for her small, blue bag in the overhead compartment. As she was doing so, she said, “Get your jackets. Get your things. I believe they’re going to take us from the plane!”

A few others stood and began searching for jackets and their belongings stored above.

“Who the hell do you think you are?” screamed the pretty blonde woman towards the front; who had claimed to belong in first class.

The blonde woman had turned to her friend and said in a loud, clear voice, “There’s a little leader in every group!” They both laughed.

Others seemed puzzled, not knowing how to react.

Forty Women

Ellie was explaining to those around her what she thought was going to happen.

Most expressed a very defiant, “They can’t do that!”; but were busily shoving arms into sleeves and looking for gloves.

Loud shouts were heard in first class and the stewardess was once again shoved through the curtains, followed by two men with machine guns.

The guns were swung towards the stewardess, whose face was a smear of tears, mucus and blood.

There was pity in her eyes as she yelled, “You are to leave the plane immediately! Don’t talk!”

Being close to the front, the blonde woman was lifted by her arm, protesting loudly and shoved through the curtain. Those who had heeded Ellie’s words were grabbing at packs and jackets as they scrambled towards the front.

The women in first class appeared stunned. Not a word was spoken; but they were loading the plastic bags from their seats with gloves, crackers, peanuts, hats, scarves, money, aspirin, candy, anything and everything they could get their hands on.

As the women from second class stumbled through the aisle, the first class women thrust the plastic bags into their hands, pockets and packs. They whispered words of encouragement and touched them as they went by. Some were crying openly.

One of the hijackers stood on the top step outside the plane while the others held their guns trained on the rest of the passengers and prodded the women from the back towards the door.

Below them was a group of uniformed men holding rifles. The lights from their vehicles faced towards the ladder making it difficult

to see beyond their brightness. The airliner's crew stood in a tight group beside a military officer.

The first to reach the bottom of the metal stairs was the blonde woman, who still protested loudly and was indicating she didn't have a coat by rubbing her arms with her hands. She marched directly to one of the army officers and pushed him on the arm to get his attention. He calmly took out his revolver and shot her in the face. Those on the steps froze in place and were quickly pushed on by the women in the rear who had heard the shot; but were not aware of what had happened.

It was a quiet, frightened group who was led from the plane and toward a large building away from the tarmac.

When they reached the building, a flashlight was shown onto the front door making a concentrated circle of light upon which the women didn't intrude. Some had stepped onto the rough, wooden platform running across the front of the building. It was with this movement that Ellie had noticed a figure slip away from the group and around the dark corner. She looked around quickly to see if the guards had noticed. They seemed intent on getting the women inside so they could get back with the others.

One soldier opened the door, as another flashed a light around. Then, motioning to the women to enter, he placed a padlock on the door and left.

The women stood in silence just within the door, listening as the plane gained momentum and rolled down the runway. No one moved until the last roar of the engines could be heard. When they finally did move, it was together as though tied.

It was Ellie, again, who spoke; whether because she had been a teacher or because she was the oldest, she realized that they needed to work together. "We have to save ourselves," she said slowly, "and in order to do that, we must become as organized as those soldiers out there."

She didn't wait for comments. Comments led to confusion and it was difficult to regain control once that happened. "Until we know where we are and what's going to happen to us, we need to form some groups so we can have leaders. We need to follow orders so we can stay alive. Some of you have come on this trip with close friends. Please stand next to those friends, while I count how many of us there are and separate us into smaller groups. That's the only way we can get everyone's ideas without talking all at once. We also don't want the soldiers to be aware of us getting organized or they'll take us to different places and what we have now is strength in numbers."

Quietly, they found their friends. Extra jackets were passed to those shivering in short sleeves. It was the first part of October, and nights at this latitude, were beginning to be cold.

More with motions than actual movement, Ellie divided the women into four groups. She next asked them to select a captain or leader. Of the four women picked who had stepped toward her, three were black, not surprising since the majority of the women were. They were also the ones who had come with friends on the flight. The same attractive faces that had been so animated in enthusiasm during the trip stared solemnly at Ellie now. She addressed the four women giving them their instructions.

"Make sure that each person in your group has a number. We don't all know each other's names yet. It's important that we don't lose anyone. The captain of this group will be Group One, number one, all the way to ten. This group," she pointed to the quiet cluster of women who were listening intently, "will be Group Two, numbers one to ten." She pointed to the next selected captain, and the women behind her. "You'll be Group Three, numbers one to ten. Group Four captain, you're number one and there are eight in your group; but number nine's outside and I'll be number ten."

Ellie knew this would cause a stir, and before it began she said, "One of our women slipped away from the group as we were being led into this building. I don't think the soldiers saw her and I'm sure

she's hiding out there waiting for a chance to help us." She waited for this to sink in before she began again, "This is the kind of thinking and action we're all going to have to do. We're Americans, alone in another country. We're not just going to wait to see what happens. If we work together, we can do things for ourselves. I'm going to ask that you keep as quiet as you can. We need to listen for what's going on outside and not bring attention to ourselves. The captains and I need to talk and make plans. You've got ideas. We need to know them; but first things first," and Ellie motioned to the four women to move in closer.

Other than a few whispered comments about how cold it was, the women listened while the five discussed the situation.

It was decided that a complete inventory was to be taken of the large room. Each captain would take her group to a corner, working back from there. They were to stay together as much as possible trying to discern, in the darkness, what lay around them and to look out the windows on their way back.

Ellie had assigned Group Four, the group she was in, to the front left corner. Tall, narrow windows ran across the wall matching the small-paned windows of the two padlocked glass doors, where they had entered, running down the sides of the building. Its style reminded Ellie of the 1930's look of the Air Force Base near the small town she had grown up in.

Only the faint light of day came through the windows. Peering through into the swirling fog, not an electric light could be seen in any direction. Inside, the front was completely empty. It took only a few minutes for the two front groups to meet again at their original spot; but considerably longer for the other groups, who were stumbling and bumping toward the back.

When all were assembled in the front again, it was learned that the rear part was filled with cots, some with blankets. There was a bathroom in the corner. Some chairs and two tables were against the

windowless back wall. Boxes and barrels were stacked outside under the windows.

No one had seen a guard and no one had seen the woman Ellie had mentioned. They were becoming anxious about her.

Groups One and Two were asked to bring cots and blankets forward. A circle was formed with the women, without a cot, sitting on blankets on the floor.

Ellie said, "Here are some ideas we've thrown around. First, we don't think we're the hostages. Some people saw soldiers going up the steps onto the plane. We were taken off to make room for them. The ones in first class were important people, worth taking for whatever reason. Maybe that's why there aren't any guards around. At least, no one has seen any. I think," Ellie paused and swallowed, "I think we'd better get out of here as fast as we can."

"Why? Maybe they'll just let us go," someone said.

"No!" hissed Sharee, a tall stately black woman who, it seemed to Ellie to have looked too sophisticated and dainty to be as capable as she was proving to be. Sharee had seemed to have been every place at once, explaining and encouraging others as they silently made their plans. Her dark face was even darker in the shadows, "No, don't you believe it! Are we going to wait to see what they're going to do to us? What if you're wrong? What are you going to do when a gun's pointing at you?" She stopped, panting with emotion.

Everyone knew by this time what had happened to the blonde woman. Those who hadn't seen it had been told.

"We take control!" Sharee whispered harshly. "I think we have to get out of here and find the woman they shot. How horrible if she's not dead and just layin' there needin' help. And we've got to find the other one, too." There was a thoughtful silence, and the light rattle of the padlock on the doors was audible. Gasps came from the startled group.

Almost as one, Ellie and Sharee sped to the door, keeping out of the line of vision, poor as it was, through the door's glass.

A hunched, slight figure began a gentle tapping on the door with her nails. Sharee stepped forward and pressed her palm against the glass, and the tapping stopped.

She called, "Do you have anything to break the lock with?"

The head shook back and forth. The woman remained pressed against the door, no doubt more afraid than the ones inside.

"We'll have to break a window, one of the side ones." Ellie hadn't gotten the words out of her mouth, when she heard a shuffle towards the back and two women returned with a chair.

To break a window quietly seemed like a difficult task. However, the small, old pieces of framing gave way easily and four bottom panes were quickly removed.

The woman on the outside began to push boxes under the window with the intent of getting in; but she was stopped by the long, dark leg of Sharee going out the opening.

Sharee gave the shivering woman a hug and explained what they'd planned to do. Other women had crawled outside, one holding a blanket.

"We need a lot of us," someone whispered. "Otherwise, we'll get lost in this fog."

It was a long way out to the tarmac. With a woman standing within sight of each other, they formed a trail; one which Sharee and Jean, the woman who had been trapped outside and two other women, Wanda and Pat, followed.

Thick patches of fog riveted the group in place; afraid of losing sight of the last woman in the chain.

They spotted the body as the fog lifted. Leaving Pat behind, the rest hurried to where the woman lay, small and frail and lifeless with gobs of blood-soaked hair covering her face. By spreading the blanket and rolling the form onto it, the three each took an edge and hurried back to Pat, who grabbed the fourth corner.

Gathering the women along their trail, they were back to the building at a fast clip. Saddened faces watched as they lifted the blanket-wrapped body inside. Ellie motioned towards the back where they placed the woman on one of the tables.

“I have her purse. Shall I leave it on the table?” Jean asked.

“No, we’ll keep it. Ask everyone to come back here.” Ellie felt around and removed chairs that were in the way while she headed back.

When everyone had gathered in the back, shuffling along with their arms out in front as bumpers, standing silently waiting, Ellie whispered, “We’re going to leave her here.”

“Then,” someone said, “We should say good-bye.” Her voice cracked.

“Yes we should.” Ellie could barely get the words out.

“Dear God,” said a voice that was soft and low from the edge of the cluster of women. “She is one of us. She’s our sister. We leave her here.” The voice was sobbing now. “But she’s in your care. Please, please take her to you and watch over us, too. Amen”

Amens came from choked voices, and the women began to move to the front. Once there, they stood around awkwardly.

Jean broke the silence, “I still have her purse.”

“We’ll need it.” Ellie sniffed. “We need her name and we can use whatever she has in it. Who doesn’t have a purse?”

“I don’t,” someone said, and Jean handed it to her.

“We need to take an inventory,” continued Ellie. Captains, separate with your groups. Find out who doesn’t have a jacket, gloves, hat, or purse. Check back with me and we’ll try and make sure everyone has something warm to wear. Where’s the woman who was outside?”

In the dark, Jean was pushed towards Ellie, who explained what was going on and brought her to her group.

The woman who had organized the Women’s Flight had recommended certain items of clothing. Although dresses, suits, and some formal wear would be worn during their stay, warm comfortable clothing was a must for traveling. The temperature would be a little lower than most were used to. Slacks, pant-suits and jeans were worn by the women on the plane. With the exception of a few, most wore sturdy shoes.

It was surprising how little everyone had brought with them from the plane, with the exception of Ellie, who had taken her small, nylon bag. Almost everyone else had just their purses and jackets, with hats and gloves stuck in the pockets. A few had scarves and most had the white, plastic bags given to them from the women in first class.

“We’ll use our purses to carry things in so, if they weigh a ton, get rid of whatever isn’t useful. Better talk it over, don’t get rid of something we can use. The other person who didn’t have a purse, take my blue bag.” Ellie handed it out into the darkness and someone took it.

“We should keep one or two cameras,” Sharee said, “especially if they have a flash. We should assign someone to take pictures every now and then; just in case.”

“I’ll do it,” said a voice from the group.

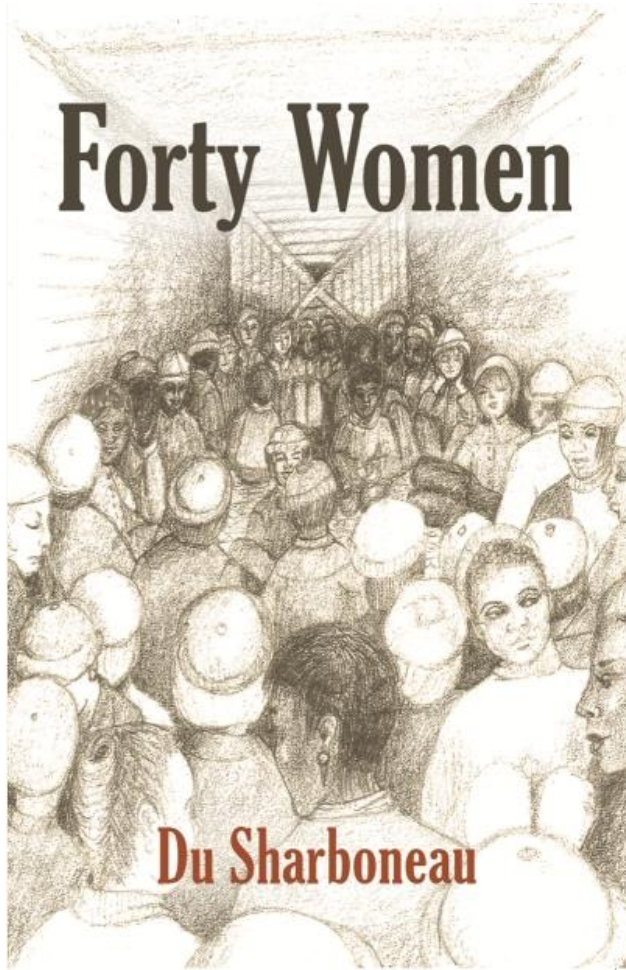
“Good. Then, will you go to the back and take a clear picture of the woman?” Sharee said.

The same voice agreed, and volunteers said they would go with her.

Everyone waited for the flash. It was their first glimpse of the big room.

The captains, along with Ellie, decided they had to stay where they were until morning. They worked out a plan of action and each captain went back to her group to discuss it; meeting again several times before their plan was finalized.

Sharing blankets on the floor, as the cots were too cold, the women tried to sleep. Two people sat beside the doors, whispering quietly to keep themselves awake. They did one hour shifts and by the fifth shift change, the hour had arrived to leave.



Forty Women bring together a group of women from different backgrounds who work together to survive after being hijacked in a foreign country.

FORTY WOMEN

By Du Sharboneau

Order the book from the publisher Booklocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/11602.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**