

AIN'T GONNA STUDY WAR NO MORE

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With grateful acknowledgment to Erik Erikson's book, *Gandhi's Truth* for his insights into the active and inspirational voice of pacifism.

And to Vic Morrow who gave us the heroic and humane Sgt. Saunders, a warrior with a soul.

< > Indicates foreign dialogue, French or German depending on characters.

The rain was pouring down in sheets as Lt. Gil Hanley stood at the door of the French farmhouse where the men of Second Platoon had taken shelter. Brockmeyer was still on the radio, trying to confirm their orders from Captain Jampel at Battalion HQ, but Hanley was about to tell him to give it up. They needed to get the comm equipment ready and hit the road.

King Company had been pushing hard the past week in pursuit of the German unit that had previously occupied this area. However, judging by the information that Cajé and Kirby had just brought him, the German troops they'd been pursuing were about to try and turn the tables on them.

Studying the bloodstained map, Hanley glanced at the two GIs before turning his attention back to the numbers hastily scribbled on the paper. His deep-set green eyes flicked between the two battered and exhausted soldiers as he pointed to the smudged pencil marks. "And you're sure about these coordinates? This is where you spotted the German artillery?"

"Yes sir," Cajé answered hoarsely, shivering from the cold breeze that fluttered the ragged curtains at the window. "The Sarge double-checked the compass headings before giving me the map."

Doc hurried up, a stretcher hoisted over his shoulder. "Got all the extra bandages and supplies I can cram into my kit, Lieutenant. We'll head back to pick up the Sarge as soon as you give the word."

"Sorry, Doc." Hanley's mouth was drawn into a grim line. "I can't spare you right now. HQ sent word that the Krauts are preparing for a major push at Ville St. Marie. We're going to have to keep our heads down during the artillery barrage and then be ready to lead the counterattack and roll them back."

"Then let me go and try to get to the Sarge and bring him back before the barrage," Cajé pleaded, his wiry body slumped with exhaustion but his face showed only urgency and determination.

"You know I can't do that." Hanley's gaze raked over the men of First squad. "We're already under strength, and we need every man who can shoot a rifle."

As the lieutenant turned his attention to Brockmeyer to see if he'd been able to get through to Jampel before shutting down the radio, Cajé and Kirby exchanged a desperate glance. The BAR man muttered under his breath, "Maybe they won't find him, Cajé. Maybe that farm is so out of the way that the Krauts won't even give it a second look."

Cajé clutched the Garand, his left hand brushing over the empty sheath on his ammo belt where he usually carried his knife. The one that he'd tucked inside Saunders' shirt as they'd left the noncom barely conscious in the cold, deserted barn.

There had been a damp chill inside even after they'd managed to push the heavy door closed on its rusty hinges. The walls were festooned with cobwebs, but as he'd poked into darkened corners in an effort to roust out any unwelcome vermin, Cajé hadn't found anything worse than a couple of field mice that squeaked indignantly before scuttling into the darkness.

Raking the cleanest, driest portion of scattered hay into a pile, he'd helped Kirby lower Saunders onto the makeshift bed and then peeled off his jacket and tucked it around the shivering noncom. Saunders glared up at the two of them as he burrowed down into the hay, seeking some comfort in this abandoned building.

"Dammit," he'd muttered hoarsely, trying push away the jacket, still warm from Cajé's body. "You'll need this more than I will. Keep it and both of you get going. Get that map back to the lieutenant."

Reluctantly they had obeyed.



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After the two soldiers left, Saunders closed his eyes and tried to rest, but the damp chill of the musty old barn made his whole body ache, not just his wounded leg. Even though he was soaked to the skin by the driving rain, his throat felt as parched as the North African desert. He groped for his canteen, struggling to remove the cap and quench his burning thirst.

As he gulped down its last drops, he heard a harsh creaking as someone dragged open the barn door, ignoring the protesting squeal of the warped wood. Saunders dug deeper into the pile of hay, hoping whoever had just entered did not intend to stay long. To his surprise, it was a young woman, dressed in a worn but neatly mended skirt and blouse with a knitted shawl wrapped around her shoulders. After pushing the barn door open, she began dragging on a rope tied around the neck of a stubbornly resistant cow.

The beast appeared half-starved, with hip and shoulder bones jutting prominently against its reddish brown hide. It also must have recently lost its calf, since its udder was overfull and dripping milk onto the floor. Initially bawling in protest, the cow caught scent of the grain that had been poured into the manger and eagerly followed the mademoiselle into the empty stall at the far end of the barn.

Stifling an overwhelming urge to sneeze, Saunders peered out at the girl as she pulled the stall door closed, addressing the beast in an irate tone.

<You're safe here, cow, if you'll just be quiet. Hopefully the Boche and the Americans will leave us alone .> There was a frightened look on the girl's face. <It would be a shame after all the trouble I went to chasing you down and herding you away from those awful guns, if some greedy soldier found you and cut your throat, just to chop you up for steaks. Damn all of them . . . and their bloody war.>

Though Saunders couldn't understand what the girl was saying, he was clear-headed enough to tell she was very angry about something. Unsure whether that anger was directed towards the Americans or the Germans, both of whom were scouting through the woods looking for information they could use in the coming attack, he decided to stay hidden as long as he could. Without Caje's translation skills, dealing with the girl and any family she might have would be a complication he did not need in his weakened condition.

Burrowing deeper into the straw, Saunders clamped his jaw to stifle any outcry. He hoped he could remain conscious long enough to escape from the barn and find a better hiding place after the girl left. Rubbing his eyes as he struggled not to pass out, Saunders gnawed his lip in frustration while the girl continued puttering around, adding bedding straw to the stall and bringing a bucket of fresh water from the pump outside. Once her prize was fed and watered, the girl located a rickety stool and an old wooden bucket in a corner, then gingerly seated herself where she could reach the cow's swollen udder. The scuffling noises continued, along with angry muttering, but despite her lack of expertise, the girl managed to milk the cow while it was eating.

After filling the bucket, she exited the stall, carefully closing the door behind her and then blew out the lantern. As she struggled to open the barn door, she was nearly knocked off balance as a large hound from a neighboring farm charged in, causing her to spill some of the milk. Putting the bucket on top of the feed bin so it would be out of the mutt's reach, she chased after the dog, determined to drive it out of the barn.

<Shoo! Get out! I worked too hard finding this cow to have you scare her so she won't let down her milk. Now, go away and chase rabbits . . . or soldiers. Hey, what are you doing? Leave that rag alone.> Then she realized someone was wearing the ragged jacket the dog was so determinedly pulling on. <Oh no, what's this?>

Despite Saunders' efforts to stay hidden, the eager dog grabbed hold of his sleeve and tugged on it. The sharp motion shook his whole body, going straight to his wounded leg. As he struggled to pull away from the dog, the girl stared at him with a frightened look on her face then she shoed the dog away.

Trying to keep the desperation out of his voice, Saunders appealed to the young woman not to reveal his presence.

"I won't hurt you," he said in a hoarse whisper. "Just let me hide here till my men come back. I won't be any trouble. I promise."

But despite his urgent plea, the girl grabbed his arm, obviously determined to get him on his feet and out of the barn.

<Get up. Get out. You can't stay.>

Saunders couldn't understand what she was saying, but it was clear that she wanted him to leave as quickly as possible. So he staggered upright at her frantic urging and started to limp towards the door. He only managed a half-dozen steps before his wounded leg collapsed under him.

As the girl struggled to pull him to his feet again, Saunders simply wasn't able to do as she demanded. Already weakened by the onset of shock, his abused body refused to cooperate any longer.

"Sorry, mam'sell," his voice was a hoarse croak. "Can't make . . ."

The whisper died to a moan, and his eyes rolled back in his head as he passed out completely.

Terrified that the German patrol she'd spotted in the woods earlier would come upon them and discover the American, the girl ran back to the cottage, her shawl streaming off her shoulders.

Slamming open the door into their sparsely furnished cottage, she panted, <Papa, papa, you have to help me. There's an American soldier in the barn. We have to get him out of there at once. If the Boche find him, they will think we are traitors . . . and shoot us.>

Irritated at her father's calm demeanor, the girl continued fiercely, <Then they will burn this house . . . and all your books and papers with it.>

<Well, if they shoot us, Jeanette, it will hardly matter what they do to the house or my books and papers.>

Her papa was a tall, thin man, with stooped shoulders, dark hair threaded with silver, and piercing gray eyes. He wore rimless glasses and though normally clean-shaven, currently there was a dark stubble of beard shading his sunken cheeks. His right leg was shrunken and twisted and he leaned heavily on a cane as he addressed his frightened daughter.

<Still it would be better for everyone, the soldier especially, if he was not found here.>

He limped towards the cottage door, <Show me this American. Maybe if we tell him the Germans are nearby, he will leave on his own.>

<He can't.> Jeanette said bitterly. <He's unconscious. When the Germans find him . . .>

<You left a wounded man alone and did not try to aid him, Jeanette? I thought you felt the same way I do about our obligation to show compassion to our fellow man.>

<This is no time to talk about obligations and compassion, Papa. The Germans will be here soon and if they find the American here, they will assume the rumors are true. About



your politics and your beliefs and they will shoot . . .>

The older man's dark brows arched upward. <I doubt these Germans are interested in my politics, Jeanette. And it's unlikely the American's presence would lead them to such conclusions anyway.>

<It doesn't matter what they think, Papa. His presence here endangers us and we must do something about it -- right now!>

Despite his thin body and lame leg, Pierre Montraux limped out to the barn and with Jeanette's reluctant help they managed to get the soldier's unconscious body upright. Together they dragged him into the cottage and then dropped him onto a narrow cot in a curtained-off corner of the kitchen. Hastily Jeanette stripped off the American's uniform and started to stuff it into the stove to burn, but her father quickly forestalled her.

<No, if the Germans stir the ashes and find the buttons or brass fittings, they'll ask questions. Find somewhere else to hide them.>

<But Papa> the girl protested. <I cannot leave you alone with him. What if he wakes up and tries to . . . to . . . harm you?>

<He's unarmed, Jeanette and, judging by his current condition, he's no danger to anyone. Besides, the Americans are supposed to be our liberators.>

Jeanette turned a suspicious glare at the unconscious Saunders. <Liberators, ha! If they don't kill us with their carelessly targeted bombs or misaimed artillery fire, they will probably burn your books and papers like the Germans did . . .>

Her father gave her an exasperated look, gesturing to the blood-stained uniform, <Stop worrying about what the Americans might do and get the uniform out of the house, where it won't be discovered.> As his daughter slammed the door to the cottage, Pierre Montraux turned his attention to their wounded guest and began to examine his injury.

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Before Hanley and his platoon abandoned the shelter of the farmhouse, Captain Jampel finally got through to alert the soldiers of S-2's intelligence about when and where the Germans would likely try to strike back against the advancing American troops.

After marking the captain's coordinates on his map, Hanley sent for Second Platoon's three squad leaders, McDonough, Aaron and LeMay. With Brockmeyer standing by the radio in case there were new orders from HQ, Hanley unfolded the map with the latest information about the Germans' location.

"Judging by the way their troops are positioned, the main line of resistance should be here, just outside the village of St. Marie. However, HQ is still suspicious it might be a feint. That's why King, Love and Fox Companies are spread out along this ridge just in case the Germans decide to fall back and push through these woods instead. The area is mostly deserted except for a few outlying farms and cottages, so there would be little chance of any diversionary attack being spotted. Our job is to stay alert and notify HQ if we see any unusual movement. Mac, your squad will keep watch at the bend of the river."

"Right, Lieutenant," The former Texas rancher spat out the piece of grass he'd been chewing and shouldered his M-1, motioning for the men of Third Squad to follow him. He turned a brief gruff smile towards First Squad, "Sure you don't wanna join us, Littlejohn? We've missed your smilin' face lately."

Littlejohn shook his head quickly, remembering a very hard week in Sgt. McDonough's squad after he'd disobeyed Sarge's orders twice trying to save Billy on a recon mission.

Hanley arched an eyebrow at the big rifleman, before turning his attention to Second Squad's sergeant, a student who'd dropped out of law school to enlist. "Aaron, you and your men take the high ground just beyond the river."

"Up and at 'em, Second Squad. Time to earn our keep." Despite his college degree,

the freckled redhead looked barely old enough to have graduated from high school.

“And LeMay,” Hanley’s expression was grimly sympathetic as he studied the Cajun scout, knowing the man was Saunders’ frequently chosen second-in-command. Cajé had the tactical skills to be a squad leader, though whether he had the necessary tough-mindedness was a question yet to be answered. “I want First Squad right here on this section of the ridge overlooking the valley. If there’s any movement by the Krauts this is where we should spot them first.”

“Got it, Lieutenant.” The scout paused for just a moment. “Any word from the other recon patrols if they located Saunders?”

“Not yet,” Hanley shook his head. “I’ll let you know if I hear anything.”

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Saunders regained consciousness slowly. He was stiff and sore but judging by the warmth around him, he was no longer in the cold damp barn where Cajé and Kirby had left him earlier. Instead, he seemed to be lying on a lumpy mattress, covered by a wool blanket that smelled of camphor. The bed itself was tucked away in the corner of a larger room, separated by a ragged curtain that gave it some degree of privacy. As he tried to push upright and shift his aching leg, he noticed that his uniform was missing, along with the bayonet that Cajé had tucked inside his shirt. Instead, he was wearing a threadbare flannel nightshirt, a blood-encrusted bandage and nothing else.

Alarmed, he struggled to sit up and focus his blurry vision. But as he did, he must have made a faint noise because the girl who had found him in the barn jerked the curtain back and leaned over him, holding a cup containing a dark liquid in her hand.

“Drink this,” she ordered harshly. “The Boche are here and you must not make a sound, or it will mean the end for all of us.”

As she held the cup to his lips, Saunders tried to push it away but he was too weak. Persisting until he was forced to gulp down most of the contents or choke, the girl continued to pour the pungent brew into his mouth, watching warily until he managed to swallow it all. Left breathless by her hurried administration of some kind of potion, Saunders wiped his sleeve across his mouth as he stared at his reluctant rescuer suspiciously, wondering at the bitter aftertaste from her remedy. The girl left the cup but moved away from his bedside, pulling the curtain tightly against the wall, while Saunders collapsed back against the pillow and tried to make out the voices in the room just beyond his hidden cubbyhole.

To his dismay, he heard someone speaking German just beyond the half-opened door to the cottage. As he clutched the ragged curtain, wondering when the enemy would come in and begin to interrogate him, he realized that the voice seemed very calm and matter-of-fact. Hearing a few words that he recognized, it sounded like a senior officer addressing his junior officers and noncoms, instructing them to secure an area and set up guards. Whatever this patrol’s objective was in this area, his capture and questioning did not seem to be a very important part. Still, the sergeant struggled to remain conscious and overhear anything that might be useful if he did get a chance to escape. After giving his orders, the officer entered the cottage and made an attempt to address someone in the main room in very hesitant French. To Saunders’ surprise, he heard an older man’s voice replying in excellent English.

“Kurt, after two years at University, if you can’t speak French any better than that you should be ashamed of yourself.”

“Bitte, Herr Professor, but how can you blame me when the French philosophers you assigned us to read were so boring and blasé. I would have much preferred studying the more robust works of our German philosophers, like Nietzsche.”

Judging by the brittle silence that followed the young German’s reply, the Frenchman was in no mood to continue the discussion. “Why are you here, Kurt? Excuse me, Hauptman

von Struyken? Surely not for further study of my 'unsuitable teachings.' After all, your fellow Germans closed the University and banished all its 'parasitic' teachers into the countryside to grow grain or raise pigs and contribute something more worthwhile to the Third Reich than our decadent ideas. With that outlook, you can hardly expect to resume our classroom debates."

"My superiors assigned me to hold this particular piece of countryside, Professor, and I thought I should look up my philosophy teacher and his lovely daughter to see how they are faring."

The girl who had given Saunders the potion replied in French to the German officer and though Saunders didn't understand exactly what she had said, it was clearly not a friendly response. However the young officer was not deterred and continued his explanation.

"When Paris fell, Hitler's staff was overjoyed at the opportunity to cleanse the 'City of Light' of the communists, socialists, and filthy Jews who dominated its corrupt politics. With universities contaminated by those degenerate ideas, it was obvious to the officers in command of the city that they had to be closed until proper discipline could be restored. I'm sure you won't be forced to remain in exile here much longer, Professor. Soon you will be summoned before an educational tribunal to be instructed in the correct philosophy."

"I doubt that my pacifistic beliefs will find much favor with your Aryan masters, Kurt."

"Surely you can't still cling to that outdated mindset, Herr Professor. After the overwhelming victory of our physically and mentally superior Aryan forces, you must realize the ultimate truth of 'Might makes right' and 'Only the strong survive'."

"Darwin was English, Kurt. Are your superiors embracing British teachings now?"

"Hardly," Kurt scoffed. "But his research ultimately revealed the truths of German philosophers, like Nietzsche. He merely followed in their footsteps. It's as simple as that."

The Frenchman maintained a stolid expression, refusing to respond to that arrogant declaration, which seemed to irritate the young officer into pacing impatiently around the kitchen. Saunders froze, holding his breath as he tried to remain utterly still and not draw the officer's attention, but to no avail.

The German officer paused in midstride, catching sight of the moving of the curtain that concealed the little cubbyhole. Jerking it back, he stared down suspiciously into Saunders' flushed sweaty features.

"Who is this . . . this interloper, Herr Professor? One of Jeanette's suitors? Or perhaps an American soldier?" He yanked the covers back as well, exposing the worn gray nightshirt that was the sergeant's current attire.

"Out of uniform, Amerikaner? I can have you shot for that, you know? For being behind German lines, spying on our troops." As the young officer buried his hands in the nightshirt and dragged the soldier half-upright, Saunders gritted his teeth, determined not to speak, but could not choke back a hoarse groan.

Only there was no sound, nothing but a harsh exhalation of air.

Saunders struggled to catch his breath, to rasp out a single whisper, but he could not speak at all. His voice had been silenced and as the German officer glared at him in disgust, he wondered what had been in that bitter liquid the girl had forced him to swallow.

Barely conscious, he could hear the professor saying in a rather impatient tone, "He's injured and unarmed, Kurt. Surely my poor feeble-minded nephew doesn't present that much of a threat to your elite Aryan troops. He cut his leg yesterday while attempting to chop wood for the stove and he needs peace and quiet if the wound is going to heal."

"Can't he speak for himself? After all, it's his leg, not his head that's injured."

"His mother died from the Spanish flu when Andre was just an infant. He was left alone in the apartment for several days and never spoke afterwards."

Kurt released his grip, staring down at Saunders with a scornful look, "Forgive me Herr Professor, but I did not realize you had any other family, besides your lovely daughter." Kurt turned a charming smile in Jeanette's direction, where she had turned back to the stove,

stirring a simmering pot.

“The Gestapo’s sources of information are not infallible, Kurt, and I hardly imagine that the German High Command would be interested in the misbegotten offspring of my youngest sister in the aftermath of the Great War.”

His former student shrugged with a rough attempt at abashed charm, “Well, you can hardly blame me for being suspicious of strangers, Herr Professor. After all, I had only met the charming Jeanette on campus at some of the faculty-student teas. This ‘feeble-minded’ nephew of yours, how long has he lived with you?”

“Since we left Paris. This cottage belonged to my parents and he’s lived here all his life,” the Frenchman answered curtly. “Now if you will allow my injured nephew to get some rest, I’m sure Jeanette will gladly fix us both a cup of tea before you rejoin your troops.”

The young German officer clicked his heels and made a brief bow to the professor. “I am most grateful for your offer, Herr Professor, but I should check on my sentries, since we are on alert for an Amerikaner attack. To make amends for my rude behavior earlier, I’ll send my medic in to examine your nephew’s wound and see if there’s anything he can do to speed his recovery.”

Montraux shrugged with attempted nonchalance, knowing to refuse the offer of medical treatment would only arouse the German officer’s suspicions. But he was quite certain that their American guest’s wound was from a German bullet which would definitely complicate matters.

Oh what tangled webs we weave when first we practice to deceive he thought somewhat ruefully, wondering how to explain that his “nephew’s” injury was the result of an encounter with a German Schmeisser and not an axe.

To his surprise, he saw that Jeanette had turned on one of her rare smiles and was endeavoring to charm his former student into having “just a small cup of tea. To sit and talk awhile about . . . Paris. And what is happening there since we left?”

Kurt von Struyken may have been a German officer, but he was also a young man who had been smitten with Pierre Montraux’s daughter during his time attending university in Paris. At that time, Jeanette had been a liberated young woman, engrossed in her own studies of botany and pharmacology, having little interest in spending time with one of her father’s students whose attitudes about women dated back to the 19th century Prussian values of “*Kinder, Küche, Kirke*”

While Jeanette set about distracting their German guest, Professor Montraux went to check on the American soldier. As he pushed aside the curtain, he remembered the chevrons on the soldier’s sleeve and hoped he was astute enough to keep as quiet as possible in the current situation. Noting that the sergeant’s face was flushed and sweating with the onset of fever, Pierre put his finger to his lips indicating that he should not speak. But the soldier choked out a hoarse grunt then thrust the empty cup Jeanette had left behind at the professor.

Curious, he sniffed at the dregs of the fluid at the bottom and immediately recognized its origin. *Dumbcane*. From her grandmother’s collection of exotic plants. Jeanette was taking no chances that the American might betray them, but had given him a draught to paralyze his vocal cords. Temporarily, at least.

He tried to reassure the soldier, whispering, “I’m sorry, Sergeant, but my daughter was afraid you might cry out in pain and give us all away. The loss of your voice is temporary. You’ll be able to speak in two or three days at the latest.” He looked down at the American’s neatly bandaged leg, wondering if there was any other way of disguising the nature of the wound.

Resigning himself to removing the bullet, Montraux reached up to the shelf over the bed and brought down the primitive medical supplies he and Jeanette had cobbled together earlier. Bandages and antiseptic, willow bark tisane for fever and a small sharp knife that his daughter had used the night before in an attempt to remove the bullet while the American was

still unconscious, but to no avail. This time for all their sakes, he must succeed or Kurt's medic would discover he was lying about the nature of his "nephew's" injury. And his identity.

As he held up the knife blade, Montraux saw the sudden alarm in the soldier's face. Realizing what the young man must be thinking, the professor shook his head, pressing his fingers to his lips and replying in the softest whisper possible. "We have to remove the bullet before Kurt's medic examines your wound. I told him that your injury was the result of an accident, chopping wood."

Though there was still a suspicious look in those sharp blue eyes, the American nodded his head weakly before dropping back down onto pillow. Clutching the blanket with a desperate strength, he shuddered as Montraux hurriedly unbandaged the wounded leg. The torn flesh was swollen and tender making even the slightest touch exquisitely painful but the professor knew the bullet must be removed for all their sakes. He wished that Jeanette could be the one doing this because of her smaller hands and more delicate touch, but she was attempting to distract the German officer and delay him from sending his medic to treat her 'cousin'.



Pierre took the blade and poured some of the antiseptic over it before beginning to probe tentatively into the torn flesh. The soldier's whole body went rigid and his hands clenched the blanket as he struggled not to move while the professor was trying to locate the stray piece of metal. Feeling the tremor of abused tissue under his fingers, Montraux pushed the blade deeper still, sponging away the blood with one of the rags Jeanette had boiled earlier to use as bandages.

There!

He couldn't see the piece of steel, but he felt its resistance against the blade and ever so carefully he edged the point of the knife under the bullet to ease it out of the wound. Hardly daring to breathe as he extracted the battered piece of metal, he examined it carefully, hoping that it had remained whole and not broken into fragments. After assuring it had remained in one piece, he folded it into his handkerchief and stuffed both into his pocket and then looked up at his patient, thinking he had probably fainted from the pain. Instead he found himself under the scrutiny of that gaze. Though his voice had been silenced, his body was still rigid with pain as the young soldier managed to gasp his question.

"Bullet out?"

Montraux nodded and reached into his pocket, but before he could show him the bullet, the American slumped into unconsciousness. Hastily Pierre poured a small amount of peroxide into the wound before re-bandaging it. As he left the small curtained cubbyhole, he caught Jeanette's eye and patted his shirt pocket. She nodded ever so slightly, continuing her bright empty chatter with the smitten Van Struyken. A short time later, the medic came in and made a perfunctory examination of their patient before reporting to his superior officer.

Kurt nodded brusquely and then came over to where Professor Montraux was seated by the window attempting to read by the fading light.

"The wound is deep and showing signs of inflammation. I'm afraid we have no drugs to spare for civilians, much less a . . . a . . . a mental defective like your nephew." He shrugged. "It would be a kindness to put him out of his misery, but I'm afraid we do not have any pain-

killers to waste. Though we might be able to spare a bullet.”

Closing the book and setting it in his lap, Montraux studied his former student, trying to conceal his dismay. “I see,” he replied thoughtfully, grateful for the presence of the book to hide the trembling of his hands. “Then it is your recommendation that we treat this ‘child of God’ as nothing more than a wounded beast. Since he is of no further use to us, then we should dispose of him like a horse with a broken leg or a dog too old to hunt. A typical Nazi supremacist outlook.”

There was a long silence that left the young German officer fidgeting with impatience before the professor continued.

“I see your superior officers have succeeded in their propaganda efforts, Kurt. That’s too bad. As one of my students, despite your frequent flaws in logic you at least showed some slight comprehension of twentieth century philosophy. However, your Fuhrer and his henchmen have reverted to a medieval mode of thought, as they preach their superiority over their fellow man and deny his right to life. Very typical of the antiquated thinking that hysterically erects cultural boundaries in a time of physical, social, or financial upheaval.”

“But these mongrel races -- the Slavs, the Jews, the gypsies -- are all inferior to us. We are obligated to rule over them, and dispose of them if they threaten our survival.”

“Don’t you remember our studies of the male animal’s destructive nature? How his instinctual reactions often cause him to destroy his own offspring in the berserk fury of his possessive impulses. Human violence and warfare is only a step up from that instinctive destruction, a form of systemized extinction that strikes out at any and everything it identifies as ‘other’. Warfare was invented as a kind of ritualized combat to control that instinct, a sacrifice of heroes to assure the survival of the communal body.”



“And is that not a desirable objective, Herr Professor? The survival and success of the communal body -- the nation -- is what every soldier hopes to achieve. With his service, or his sacrifice.” Van Struyken’s expression was smug, thinking that he’d succeeded in convincing his recalcitrant professor to come around to his more modern and patriotic way of thinking.

“Not when sustaining that nation’s survival and success is done at the cost of your own humanity, Kurt. Genocidal death sentences rob war of the little justification it has as a struggle between competing ideologies and make it a purely mechanical function instead. When you deny your enemy has a human face, you deny your own humanity as well. War becomes an automated operation . . . and you and your men merely cogs in a well-oiled machine.”

Kurt’s eager expression turned sour and he stood up so abruptly that his chair crashed to the floor. “You always could twist my words into something I did not mean. Our war is not just for the sake of honor but the very survival of our Aryan Race. We will not be chained by outdated ideas, borders and treaties of the past. The German People need room to flourish, to grow, to throw off the antiquated thinking of wrong-minded armchair philosophers who have no conception of the real world!”

He reached for his cap and made a curt bow to Jeanette, “Forgive me, fraulein, but I have duties to perform. Inspecting the cogs of my well-oiled ‘battle machine’ to make sure that we’re ready to face the mongrel American hordes.”

After Kurt had made his angry departure, Jeanette turned to her father in exasperation, “You could not let him win just one argument? You had to continue lecturing him, knowing he would never see things your way? Besides, making your point like that would only make him angry. More likely to put us under guard? Possibly even search the area thoroughly and find

his uniform.” She gestured toward the curtained off cubbyhole. “Kurt already thinks we’re protecting an imbecile, if you keep on baiting him like that, he’ll have all of us shot!”

Professor Montraux bowed his head, burying his fingers in his gray-streaked hair as he muttered, “Surely you don’t expect me to compromise the beliefs of a lifetime merely so that some little tin soldier can justify his murderous behavior.”

“That ‘tin soldier’ commands a great many armed men, Papa. And making him angry at us does not serve our best interests, or those of the American soldier you have so recklessly decided to protect.”

“I know, I know,” he sighed. “It’s just that young popinjay always brings out the worst in me, because he is so convinced of his Aryan superiority. It has always been too tempting to prick the balloon of his over-inflated ego. I will try to do better, at least until our unwanted guests make their departure.”

Jeanette relented, stroking his roughly whiskered cheek as she whispered, “I know you will, Papa. And I would not ask you to swallow your pride before him, except that our lives depend on his tolerance and goodwill. All our lives.” Her gaze rested briefly on the tattered muslin curtain and the wounded American sergeant concealed behind it.

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The rain clouds had finally dissipated only to be replaced by a storm of lethal metal as the 88s roared over King Company’s heads. Even if the German guns weren’t aimed directly at their gathered troops but at Division Artillery’s 105s, the thunder of their passage seemed loud enough to pound the gathered forces of Fox, Love and King Company into the muddy terrain.

Second Platoon clung to their position despite the thunderous barrage that sounded like it would bring the very heavens down around them. Each squad struggled to remain vigilant as the clouds of dust and smoke surrounding them made every movement on their perimeter appeared to be a possible attack by their foe. Eventually the firing ceased and an unnatural quiet descended on the stretch of ground where Second Platoon was keeping watch. With troopers’ nerves frayed by the earlier barrage, Hanley made frequent rounds of the various forward positions, trying to keep everyone alert and on their toes. Even so he would have missed the khaki-colored debris floating down the river if it hadn’t been for PFC Eddie Owen’s sharp eyes.

“There.” McDonough’s BAR man pointed at a sodden clump caught up in a small eddy at the riverbank. It was almost hidden by several overhanging branches, but as Hanley peered through his binoculars, he could tell it was an American uniform. Though whether there was anyone (or part of anyone) inside it was not readily apparent. Scrambling down the bank, one of McDonough’s men fished the drenched material out of the river and brought it up to show his superiors.

McDonough spotted the sergeant’s stripes immediately, “Looks like one of our guys took a swim and left his clothes behind.”

Coming up to report to Hanley, Caje studied the torn and blood-stained trousers. “They could be the Sarge’s, Lieutenant. That tear and the bloodstains match up with Saunders’ leg wound, just before we left him at that barn. Let me take Doc and see if we can’t find our way to that farm and bring him back.”

Hanley stared down at the torn, dripping uniform, feeling a hard knot in his stomach. If Saunders was behind enemy lines out of uniform, he could be shot as a spy. Or if he had been attempting to swim or wade down that river, back to the American lines, he could be in an even worse situation, going into shock and dying of exposure.

“We don’t even know for sure if it is Saunders’ uniform,” Hanley said in a grim tone. Knowing that the Sergeant was especially careful about not carrying letters or other personal

items when he went out on patrol, Hanley still checked the pockets carefully to see if there was anything that might give them a hint as to whether it belonged to his missing noncom.

To his surprise, he found a soggy piece of paper, tightly folded and tucked into the jacket pocket. Doubting that anything handwritten would have survived the uniform's immersion in the river, Hanley delicately unfolded the paper, being especially careful not to tear it. The return address in the upper right hand corner had been torn away with the noncom's typical caution and the headlong hurried writing was barely legible. It was a letter from Saunders' sister, Louise, with a poem hastily scribbled at the very end.

"Here's a poem we read at school last week, Goon. Sappy, I know, but thought you might get a kick from it.

*What is life if, full of care, we have no time to stand and stare
No time to stand beneath the boughs and stare as long as sheep or cows.
No time to see, when woods we pass, where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.
No time to see, in broad daylight, streams full of stars, like stars at night.
No time to turn at Beauty's glance, and watch her feet, how they can dance.
No time to wait until her mouth can enrich the smile her eyes began.
A poor life this if, full of care, we have no time to stand and stare.*

(Leisure by William Henry Davies -- 1940)

The ink was almost completely faded and the paper itself worn from being opened and refolded numerous times. Carefully, Hanley refolded the precious scrap and tucked it into his pocket, hoping to return it to Saunders at the first opportunity.

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Later that evening, after he'd spent most of the afternoon in a fevered doze, tucked away in his cubbyhole, Saunders' struggled back to consciousness, his whole body shaking with chills as the fever broke. The searing pain he'd felt earlier as the Frenchman had probed for the bullet in his leg had eventually subsided to a dull throb. But as evening approached, his muscles began to stiffen and wound became much more swollen and painful. Much as he hated the dizzy, nauseated feeling he experienced after a morphine injection, just this once he would have welcomed that nausea in exchange for some relief, so he could get to his feet and try to escape.

Saunders took a deep breath and tried to focus his attention elsewhere -- anywhere -- than the pain in his leg and the pounding of his head. Listening for the sound of German sentries or even the return of that arrogant young captain, he pushed the curtain aside and peered into the semi-darkened common room. There was a faint gleam from the dying embers in the fireplace and if he could believe his fever-hazed vision, no one was there. The professor and his daughter must have retired for the night and just maybe that young German officer was so smitten by the girl's charms, he'd decided against having sentries patrolling around the cottage and possibly peering into her bedroom.

The sergeant rolled weakly off the cot, cursing silently under his breath as his feet hit the floor jarring the wound with a fresh jolt of pain. If he could just stay on his feet and find a pair of pants, he might be able to sneak past the sentries and into the woods.

As he stared dizzily down at his bare feet, Saunders realized that besides pants he would also need some kind of footgear to have any chance of getting back to the American lines. Hopefully the girl hadn't disposed of his boots along with his uniform, but might have hidden them somewhere in the cottage.

Supporting himself by clutching the table, he tried not to make any noise as he peered desperately into cupboards and under shelves. Yet even as he searched, Saunders' thoughts

flitted darkly through his head like a flock of ravens. His chances of evading the guards that surrounded the cottage were slim. And considering the weakness of his wounded leg, he had even less chance of making a break into the woods and getting back to the American lines. Shaking his head stubbornly, he refused to surrender to the doubt that threatened to overwhelm him.

As he lurched away from the woodpile stacked by the stove, he stumbled against one of the kitchen chairs, causing it and himself to crash loudly to the floor.

Moments later the outer door slammed open and two sentries armed with Schmeissers burst into the room, demanding, "*Wo ist?*"

"*Was gehst hir?*"

As they caught sight of Saunders clinging to one of the chairs as he struggled to drag himself back to his feet, one consulted briefly with the other and aimed his weapon at Saunders' head, his finger beginning to tighten on the trigger.

But before he could shoot, Jeanette came running out of her room, her dark brown hair loose on her shoulders and wearing a thin cotton gown with a black knitted shawl wrapped around her shoulders. She stared at the wounded American sprawled against the table with the two German guards holding their weapons aimed at his head.

<What are you doing in here? Trying to kill my . . . my . . . cousin? Leave him alone, you animals.>

Irritated by the girl's hysterical outburst, one of the sentries turned his weapon on her and was about to fire, when Von Struyken pushed through the door, wearing only his uniform pants and a rumpled undershirt, <Don't shoot, private. And lower your weapon.>

<But sir, the man was trying to escape . . . and the girl was helping him.>

<Do as I say, private, and resume your post. I will deal with the girl and her idiot cousin. Just go.>

Attempting to smooth down his rumpled blond hair and straighten his undershirt into a slightly more seemly appearance, Von Struyken turned his attention to Jeanette who had managed to get Saunders' arm draped over her shoulder as she guided him back to his narrow cubbyhole.

"You could have been killed, you know. Running out and startling the sentries like that, in just your negligee. Hardly the proper modesty for a *madchen*. You should know better than to make hasty moves around armed men, *liebchen*. It's dangerous."

"I am not your *liebchen*, Herr Hauptman and you and your troops are intruders in our home. Please leave, before you disturb what little rest my father is able to get."

"As you wish, *fraulein*. I wish you a most peaceful slumber." And Von Struyken withdrew, closing the cottage door quietly behind him, leaving Jeanette wishing he'd been a little more persistent, staying at least long enough to help her get the wounded American back onto his bed.

Exhausted by his futile escape attempt, Saunders sagged against Jeanette as she helped him back onto his narrow cot in the curtained-off sleeping area. Pressing the back of her hand against his forehead, she examined the bloody dressing on his leg.

"Your fever seems to have broken, mon. . . Andre. "But it will likely return unless we can draw the infection out of that wound."

After offering Saunders a cup of water that he eagerly drained, she returned



to the kitchen area, fumbling through the pantry and peering in several earthenware pots, before pouring out several different types of herbs into neat piles on a wooden tray. Turning back to the wood stove, she stirred the ashes and added more wood, then filled a teapot and large bowl with water that had been pumped from the well earlier in the day. One group of herbs she mixed together and then steeped in water boiling in the teapot. The second pile she poured into the bowl, stirring thoroughly. Saunders watched bleary-eyed as she poured the brew from the teapot into a large mug, then dipped the clean rags they'd been using for bandages into the bowl.

Sitting beside him on the bed, she raised his shoulders as she held the mug to his mouth. Remembering the last time she'd given him something to drink, Saunders grimaced and struggled to push it away, causing some of the hot liquid to splash on her arm. Wincing, she placed the mug on the table and then she poured a dipper of cold water from the bucket on the scalded area.

"I guess I can't blame you for not trusting me, after the potion I gave you the first time."

She looked down at the reddened area on her arm, her voice low and apologetic, "I'm sorry. I knew the Germans were in the woods all around our cottage and I was afraid that if they came here and found you, they would accuse my father of cooperating with the Americans. I had to do something, anything to protect him. Even if it meant silencing you any way I could. The tea was an old nostrum from a plant called "Mother-in-law's Tongue", used to silence overly garrulous women. It temporarily paralyzes the vocal chords, but isn't really dangerous. It should wear off in a day or two."

Saunders grimaced at her, his expression still suspicious, but did not push away the mug holding the drink as she offered it again. Sipping slowly at first, he could tell that the lighter fresh taste of whatever she'd brewed this time was not the same as the bitter fluid she had forced him to swallow earlier. Emptying the cup, he sank back down on the pillow, relieved the throbbing in his head was at last beginning to ease.

Seeing the tension starting to relax in the American's body, Jeanette began to unwind the blood-stained bandage on his leg with a deft careful touch. After exposing the red, swollen flesh around the wound, she went over to wring out the clean rags that had been soaking in a large bowl on the stove. Saunders winced as she put the first of the heated cloths in place, then slowly begin to relax as the warmth soaked into his aching muscles and began to ease the pain.

"There," Jeanette said with acerbic satisfaction. "That should reduce the inflammation. You'll feel much better in the morning."

"Thanks," Saunders said in a harsh whisper, before turning an accusing look on Jeanette. "But what about the Germans? Is your father cooperating with them?"

Jeanette stared bleakly into Saunders' face, "I knew you would think that, that you would accuse him of being a *collaborateur* when all he wants to do is be left alone, to try and forget. He was a soldier in the Great War, fighting bravely at Verdun until he was wounded. The surgeon wanted to amputate his leg, but Father refused and was sent home to die. Slowly but surely, he recovered, but everything he knew had been changed by the war. So he began to study philosophy, especially pacifist ways of thought, wanting to put an end to war forever. Eventually he obtained his degree and became a professor at the university."

She stood up abruptly and began to pace. "Kurt was one of his students before the war, though why he was taking my father's course, "The History and Origins of Pacifism," I'll never know. After Paris fell, we were forced to flee the city and this farm became our refuge. It belonged to my grandparents and we hoped by hiding here to avoid the worst of the fighting."

Jeanette buried her face in her hands and began to sob. "For all the good it did."

Saunders pushed weakly up on one elbow, not knowing what to say or how to comfort the distraught Jeanette. Reaching up he pulled her down until she was sitting on the bed

beside him and patted her gently on the shoulder. "It'll be all right, Jeanette. I'll help you keep him safe . . . somehow." Whether she believed him or not, Jeanette quickly dried her tears and returned to her own room.

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Against his better judgment, Hanley finally gave in to Doc's plea, sending Billy and Cajé along with the medic to protect him and help carry the stretcher.

However, he warned the three of them, "Look, we don't know exactly where the main body of the German units are positioned right now. What we do know is that they're getting ready to mount a counterattack. You three need to avoid contact at all costs. If Saunders **has** been taken prisoner, don't take any reckless chances trying to rescue him."

"Right, sir." Cajé answered, his lean face somber.

Hanley gave the trio a rueful grin "You know he'll be mad enough at you for coming back after him, so try not to make the situation any worse."

He clapped Cajé on the shoulder as the scout nodded his head in agreement. "Good luck and watch yourselves."

After Billy, Cajé and Doc left, Kirby reported to Hanley as ordered and was somewhat disgruntled to discover that with Cajé gone after the Sarge, he was the current acting leader for First Squad.

Trying to bolster his nerve, the BAR man cleared his throat nervously.

"Beggin' the Lieutenant's pardon, sir, but why didn't you send **me** rather than Billy along with Cajé and Doc? I'm quieter, less likely to drop the stretcher carrying Saunders, and I got . . ."

"More firepower," Hanley's deep green eyes rested on the BAR slung across the front of Kirby's chest. "That's why we need you here, Kirby. If the Germans attack, your weapon's essential to provide the heavy firepower we'll need to push them back."

"Yes sir, lieutenant," Kirby answered despondently.

"It's twenty lives versus one, Kirby. And you know what Saunders would have to say about that."

*** **

When Saunders woke, judging by the lambent gray light, the sun had not yet risen. He took a deep breath, somewhat surprised to find himself clear-headed and with only the barest remnant of the pounding headache that had tormented him the previous day. He was actually hungry and thirsty and would have welcomed the opportunity to drag himself into a shower, even an icy cold one that seemed to be the only kind available to American troops.

He shifted his wounded leg, equally surprised that yesterday's bone-deep ache had subsided to minor throbbing. Whatever remedies Jeanette had used the night before had definitely done their job. He actually felt like he might live long enough to get back to the American lines, if he could manage to elude the German troops surrounding this farm.

Professor Montraux had just entered the kitchen, and begun stirring up the wood stove after blowing out the kerosene lamp he'd been carrying. As he pulled back the curtains, early morning light began to enter the cottage. Montraux then placed a pan of water on to boil and tossed in what looked like a handful of oatmeal.

"Groats" he said softly in Saunders' direction, noting the curious, more alert expression in the soldier's eyes. "Warm and filling, but not terribly tasty. Thank heaven there is milk from the cow. And hopefully a little bit of sweetness left in that honeycomb Jeanette found in the woods last week."

He peered into the pantry and brought out a small sealed jar, reflecting a golden light.

“Not much. But maybe enough for each of us to have a spoonful.”

Saunders actually felt hungry enough to eat a whole plate of ham and eggs, with a stack of flapjacks, dripping with butter and syrup on the side. But this morning he was grateful for whatever was available, even oatmeal without butter and brown sugar. He pushed up on one elbow and was about to swing his legs to the floor, when Montraux gave him a warning look.

“Best to maintain the pretense that you are just a breath away from death’s door, Andre. Karl and his troopers may decide to check in on us this morning. Lie back and I will bring you a damp cloth to wash your face and hands, then you can have a share of the porridge.”

Saunders gestured to the door that led to Jeanette’s room and Montraux shook his head and made a shushing motion. “I heard her pacing in her room half the night. Worrying what will become of us, of **you**, if Kurt suspects anything. Even though I’ve reassured her time and again, creative thinking was never Van Struyken’s strong suit. He will follow his superiors’ orders and leave us as we were. Then we will try to get you back to the American lines.”

Saunders stared at the professor, wondering how a seemingly intelligent man could be so blind to the real world.

“Don’t underestimate him, Professor,” the sergeant warned in a harsh whisper. “The captain’s in love with your daughter and may not want to leave her behind.” The husky note in the sergeant’s voice remained although he was regaining his normal speech.

Montraux scoffed, “Van Struyken isn’t in love with anything except his reflection in the mirror.” There was a dark bitter note to the professor’s voice, “And obeying the orders of his murderous superiors in this insane war.”

Saunders remained propped up on one elbow. “Your daughter says you were a soldier in the Great War, at Verdun. From what I’ve read in history about that battle, I’m not surprised at your feelings about **this** war.”

“War is an antiquated concept, young man. Something our species should have outgrown when we stopped throwing virgins into erupting volcanoes. Your own President Wilson recognized the fact when he proposed the concept of the League of Nations, so that wars would never again result from border squabbles or political misunderstandings.”

“But his idea was a failure,” Saunders said hoarsely.

“He was ahead of his time, that’s all. We are civilized people and war should be as abhorrent to us as sacrificing babies to brass-bellied idols. The very idea should make any intelligent individual sick to their stomach.”

The sergeant took a deep breath, speaking in a low intense voice. “No one **hates** war more than a soldier, Montraux. Watching your buddies blown to bloody bits, hearing boys cry for their mothers as their lives pour out into the mud. Charging up unknown hills again and again, fighting for lines on some officer’s map, instead of being safe and warm, at home with your family.”

The American leaned forward, his sandy hair falling across his forehead and his eyes blazing. “But we do it because we don’t want madmen like Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo invading **our** hometowns and putting our families and neighbors in prison camps. We fight against the Germans here and now, so our children will know what freedom means. Even if they have to fight some other obsessed maniac fifteen or twenty years down the line, dying on foreign beaches, buried in alien soil. Freedom isn’t free . . . and each generation has to decide if it’s willing to sacrifice its own flesh and blood to pay the price of that freedom.”

Montraux was silent for a long moment, before heaving a deep bitter sigh. “That price is much too high, Sergeant. And I refuse to surrender to the madness of war, no matter how justified it may be. I believe that this urge towards war and fighting is a kind of disease, like smallpox or the Black Plague. Maybe we can immunize the next generation against it. Maybe if enough people say “I will not kill my brother, my sister, my **fellow man**,’ then the killing will

stop.”

“Maybe,” the American sergeant’s eyes were hooded. Before either of them could continue their discussion, Jeanette entered the room. She was as neatly dressed as she could be in her tattered skirt and stained blouse, with her dark hair carefully brushed and pinned up. But there were dark shadows under her eyes and a strained look around her mouth.

“Good morning, Papa, Andre. I see that you’ve started breakfast without me. I’m not very hungry this morning anyway, so I’ll go milk the cow.”

“You need to eat something, petite. To keep your strength up. Besides surely you don’t want the two of us to eat the last of the honey without saving some for you?”

She heaved a large sigh, “Really, Papa. I just don’t have any appetite right now.”

Despite his own hunger, Saunders felt a cold apprehension in his gut. There was an air of resolve surrounding Jeanette, as though she’d made up her mind about something. He just hoped she hadn’t decided to save her father’s life by betraying him to the Germans.

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As Jeanette stepped out into the cool early morning air, she took a deep breath, briefly savoring the cool smell of damp leaves and freshly blooming flowers. Then she wrinkled her nose at the stench of unbathed men and poor field sanitation that overwhelmed it, turning towards the barn and the milk cow that she had retrieved from the woods three days ago.

To her alarm, several of Kurt’s troopers had appropriated the barn as their barracks area. She paused at the half-opened door, hesitating to enter and confront these enemy soldiers, knowing only too well the reputation of Wehrmacht troops with helpless women. Then she squared her shoulders and entered the door, determined not to be frightened away from her own barn.

To her dismay, one of the troopers was already milking the cow and looked up at her with a broad smile and a sly wink, “Guten Morgen, Fraulein.” Holding up the bucket, he seemed to be offering to share his stolen bounty and she hurriedly withdrew from the barn, fearful of what he might demand in exchange. Staring nervously around as the German platoon began to stir from their blankets and ready themselves for whatever orders their officer gave them, Jeanette walked swiftly beyond the Germans’ bivouac area towards the outdoor pen where the cow was usually kept in fair weather. There was a loose bale of moldy hay and an empty moss-covered watering trough at the far end, near the woods.

Jeanette stared bleakly at the empty trough and the rusty pump that once supplied it, wondering what she should do next. She shook her head in frustration, realizing that she should have brought a bucket of water from the pump at the house, to wash down the trough and then prime the pump so it would be able to draw water up from the well. She glanced up at the German troops stirring around the barn yard as they began to dress, shave, and wash themselves at the pump outside the kitchen. Waiting her turn there would be an open invitation to the young soldiers to take liberties that she wasn’t prepared to deal with, especially since there was no sign of Kurt, her supposed protector.

Blindly she struggled to use the pump to fill the trough, for no other reason than she had nothing else to do and no other place of refuge. But it creaked loudly, its mechanism dry and unyielding despite her efforts and she slumped down on the ground beside the empty trough, barely able to choke back her tears of fear and frustration.

“Mademoiselle” a softly accented voice hissed from the woods just beyond the pen. <Mademoiselle, are you alone?> Hearing the voice speaking her own language, Jeanette wondered if it might be one of their neighbors from another farm. But as she peered into the undergrowth, she spied a dark haired soldier wearing a beret and an American uniform. His French was oddly accented, but understandable and as she looked into the woods behind him, she spied two other American soldiers, one of them wearing the Red Cross of a medic.

<The American sergeant who was in your barn two nights ago. Can you tell us what happened to him? Is he a . . . a prisoner? Or was he able to escape? If he's hiding in these woods, can you tell us where? Or better still, show us?>

<Your friend is safe.> Jeanette answered first in French, then translated to English as she saw that the other two soldiers did not understand. "He is in the cottage with my father. We treated his wound, but he had a bad fever. Then the Germans came."

"Did they shoot him?" The younger GI demanded in a quavery voice. "Or is he a prisoner?"

"Neither." Jeanette answered quickly. "We removed his uniform when we treated his wound. Then I took it and his weapons and threw them in the river. We knew there were Germans all around and we did not want them to know we had an American soldier in our cottage."

"But they can shoot him as a spy," the younger soldier gasped.

"Not if they think he's a Frenchman." Jeanette answered in a low determined voice. "The German officer is a former student of my father's and he believes your sergeant is his deaf-mute nephew. He's safe for the moment."

The Cajun soldier blanched at the girl's blithe admission, wondering just how much trouble they were in right now with German soldiers all around and a French collaborator and his daughter holding their sergeant's life in their hands. He managed to ask in a hoarse voice, "How much longer until the Germans leave?"

The girl shivered, "I don't know. Kurt said he was awaiting orders . . . but my father has been lecturing him about the inhumanity of war. Its tragic waste. Hauptman Von Struyken is quite upset that my father is not impressed by his troops' superior talent at killing and the philosophical rightness of the Third Reich's cause."

Caje stared at the young woman, momentarily baffled. "Then your father is not a collaborator?"

The girl's cheeks flushed and she started to turn angrily away but Caje grabbed her by the arm and dragged her further back into the undergrowth. He pulled her down until they were kneeling face to face, with a fierce look in his eyes. "Don't **lie** to me, mademoiselle. Is your father a German sympathizer? Is he going to turn the sergeant over to the Germans?"



"Idiot! My father has been risking his home, his health, his very **life** trying to save your sergeant from being captured. My father fought the Boche in the Great War. He was crippled at Verdun and ever since, he has hated war! The past eight years, he taught philosophy, "The Roots and History of Pacifism" at the university in Paris until the city fell to the Nazis and the two of us fled into the countryside. The farm belonged to my grandparents before they died and we thought we would be safe here. Instead we are surrounded by soldiers and death . . ."

The girl's voice started out as a whisper, becoming louder with each indignant sentence until Caje clapped his hand over her mouth and glared at her, pulling out his bayonet and holding it in front of her eyes. "Quiet! Or you'll get us all killed."

Jeanette's eyes widened at the sight of the weapon, but she grew calmer and began to speak again in a low-voiced whisper. "Your sergeant is safe for the moment. I think his fever must have broken because my father was just starting to fix breakfast when I left the cottage. But I should probably go back soon or he'll wonder what has happened to me." She glanced

back nervously at the German soldiers surrounding the cottage, wondering if they would let her through.

Caje sheathed his bayonet again and reached inside his pocket for a piece of paper on which he quickly scribbled a brief note. "Give that to the sergeant. Then do whatever he tells you. This area is going to be very dangerous before long. When we rescue the sergeant, we'll try to get you and your father back to the American lines."

Reluctantly Jeanette took the hastily scribbled note and tucked it inside the waistband of her skirt, hoping that she would be able to get past the German soldiers without being searched or otherwise manhandled. The odds just might improve if she looked like she'd actually accomplished part of her errand to water and feed the cow.

She retrieved the battered wooden bucket that stood beside the trough and whispered to the three soldiers. "I need some water if I'm going to be able to use the pump and fill the trough, otherwise I may have difficulty explaining what I was doing out here so long."

Hurriedly Caje and Billy emptied their canteens into the bucket. As Jeanette started to hurry out of the woods and back to the pen, she whispered softly, "I will tell the sergeant that you're here. Hopefully the Boche will leave before too much longer."

Using the water in the bucket to prime the aging pump, Jeanette managed to fill the trough about a third full. Wiping the sweat from her hands and forehead, she turned around and found herself confronting three or four of Kurt's troopers. They were looking at her admiringly and one bold fellow reached out and squeezed her upper arm, joking with his comrades.

<This one would make a good hausfrau, nein? Strong as an ox and pretty as a new calf.>

Hastily, Jeanette slapped his hand away, glaring at him. <Get away from me, swine.>

<Oh don't play coy, fraulein. We know how lusty you French farm girls are. Just give us a little kiss . . . or two.> This time one of the soldiers grabbed her arm and started to pull her towards him. In the undergrowth, less than ten yards away, Caje watched, teeth gritted, with one hand clenched tightly around his bayonet as the young soldiers surrounded Jeanette, obviously intent on having a little fun.

Fortunately a Feldwebel spotted the potential row and hurried over to take charge of his troops, <Dumbkopfs. Are you **that** eager to get sent to the Russian front? She's not for the likes of you, but is the Captain's little French hen. And if he catches you mauling her, you'll be lucky if he doesn't shoot you outright.>

As the German sergeant shoved his men away from her, Jeanette hurried back towards the cottage, looking anxiously at the barn and wondering if she should try to let the cow out of her stall. But wary of another possible confrontation with Kurt's troops, she pulled her shawl tightly about her shoulders before entering the cottage.

To her relief, her father and the sergeant were alone, just finishing up their bowls of oatmeal. There was a small pitcher of milk on the table and noticing Jeanette's startled look, her father remarked quietly, "Kurt brought it in earlier when he was looking for you. Hoping for a kiss or smile of gratitude, I suppose. Quite typical of the Germans. To gift us with a very small portion of our own milk and expect us to be grateful they did not slaughter the cow."

"Hush, father," she said softly, taking in Saunders' wary, alert expression. "There are three American soldiers in the woods behind the cowpen. They gave me this message for the sergeant."

She reached in her waistband and retrieved the paper, handing it to Saunders. Hastily he unfolded the paper and scanned what was written there. Father and daughter stared at the sergeant's face intently, wondering what the message said and how their guest might respond.

But before they could find out there was a brisk knock at the door. Without waiting for someone to open it, Hauptman Van Struyken pushed his way briskly inside, with two of his junior officers beside him.

“Guten Morgen, Herr Professor, liebchen. I have some good news this morning.” He glared somewhat suspiciously at Saunders, who had slumped to one side, his mouth slack and a blank look on his face.

With an exasperated look, he gestured to his two junior officers, “Put that idiot back in his cubbyhole and pull the curtains. The Professor and I have serious matters to discuss and we don’t need this drooling imbecile as a witness.”

As the two complied with their superior’s command, a scrap of paper fell out of Saunders’ hand and although Kurt had been staring appraisingly at Jeanette, noting the rich color of her dark hair, along with her fine bones and intelligent eyes, he spotted the paper and picked it up. Scanning it briefly, he handed it over to the professor, with an arched brow, “King Two advances. Pawns move to redeem White Rook.’ A rather odd chess strategy, Herr Professor.”

Montraux took the paper, trying to hide the trembling of his hands as he replied, “One of our neighbors imagines himself a master chess player and is always sending me odd notes with some strange message about the game’s tactics.”

“And why are the notes in English, Herr Professor?”

Before Kurt could question him further, he was distracted, catching sight of Montraux’s nephew’s eyes as he was dragged back to his cubbyhole. Despite the professor’s avowal of his nephew’s mental ineptitude, the gaze that met Kurt’s held a surprising fierceness. Though he tried to shrug it off as nothing more than a brute animal’s untempered rage, those eyes held a depth of intelligence and resolve that did not fit the mental incompetent described by the professor. He started to unfasten the snap on his holster, then remembered his errand.

“I have some good news and bad news for you, Herr Professor. The bad, first. My men and I will be departing within the hour. The American troops are on the move and we have been ordered to stop them at any cost. I regret leaving you . . . and your nephew . . . undefended but we have no choice but to obey our orders.”

He continued smugly, “The good news is that Jeanette will be coming with me.”

Ignoring the shocked and disbelieving expression on her father’s face, Kurt gave Jeanette a patronizing smile as he slapped his leather gloves across his palm. “I know that you will agree with me that an innocent girl like Jeanette should not be exposed to the dangers of the battlefield or the lewd attentions of mongrel American troops. So for her own protection, I will be sending her to a safe retreat in the Bavarian mountains.”

There was a brief stunned look on Jeanette’s face at Van Struyken’s declaration, but she gave him a defiant reply. “I’m not leaving my father, Kurt.”

“I’m afraid you have no choice, liebchen.” He grasped her arm, steering her gently but firmly towards the door. “And don’t worry about packing any belongings. Proper clothing and toiletries suitable for the mistress of a German officer will be available once you arrive.”

Jeanette pulled angrily away, “I have no intention of becoming your wife . . . or **mistress**, you imbecile. I may not agree with all my father’s political views, but I will not abandon him, certainly not to go away with a ruthless posturing fool like you. Now take your filthy Nazi hands off me.” Leaning forward, she slapped his face as hard as she could.

There was a stunned silence that was suddenly interrupted by an outburst of shouting and gunfire. Saunders struggled to pull himself upright, a sinking feeling in his gut as he recognized the brief sound of American weapons fire before it was overwhelmed by the roar of Schmeissers and Lugers. Everyone in the cottage froze at the abrupt sound of battle and Kurt gestured sharply towards his junior officers, who hurried out to see what had happened.

During the seemingly interminable wait for them to report back, the company’s radio man dashed in with an urgent look on his face. He gave a hurried salute before handing a scribbled note to Van Struyken. The young captain’s face went set and grim as he snapped out a series of orders to the noncom.

As the corporal jotted down his reply, one of the junior officers returned with three

battered and bleeding American soldiers, being held at gunpoint by several German troops.

“Hauptman, we found these American soldiers in the woods, spying on us.”

It was Cajé, Doc and Billy.

Von Struyken’s face went so pale that Jeanette’s red handmark stood out starkly against his cheek, and he turned with a bitterly accusing expression towards Montraux.

“You lied to me, Professor. All your deceptive words about embracing peace and refusing to engage in war. When you really were an American agent, studying our movements, counting our troops, passing along information.”

He wheeled around and plunged his hands into Saunders’ ragged nightshirt, pulling the injured noncom up so their faces were scant inches apart. “And giving aid and comfort to the enemy. You can -- and **will** -- be executed for that, Professor.”

Jeanette choked out a harshly gasped denial, but her father drew himself as erect as his shattered leg would allow.

“I do **not** recognize your artificial divisions of humanity into ‘allies’ and ‘enemies’ as having any basis in truth. Your Nazi credo with its false adherence to the superiority of one social caste denies the universal truth of a single human community. It is an outdated belief that will not survive much longer. But if I must submit myself to death as proof of my obligation to our joint humanity, then so be it.”

Saunders pulled out of Van Struyken’s grip, struggling to stand upright as he panted hoarsely, “He didn’t shelter me voluntarily, Kraut. I threatened to kill his daughter. Slit her throat. He had no choice.”

Van Struyken sneered at the three of them. “You’re as poor a liar as you are a soldier, Amerikaner. Considering the times that she was out of your sight as well out of your reach, that threat was meaningless.”

Turning his back on Saunders, he swaggered over to where Jeanette was being restrained by one of his junior officers.

“The only question becomes whether I have all six of you shot now. Or take Jeanette with me and dispose of her later, after I tire of her rustic charms.”

Jeanette tried to lunge forward and slash her nails down Kurt’s face, but his lieutenant grabbed her by the arms. Van Struyken stared at her in contempt, “No, I think not. Despite a somewhat vulgar and earthy appeal, she probably harbors any number of unpleasant vermin and diseases. So I think I shall . . .”

But before he could finish his statement and order the prisoners executed, the cottage was inundated by a barrage of American fire, not just small arms, but mortars and .50 caliber machine gun fire. The American counterattack had begun.

<Take cover and commence firing,> Van Struyken heard his noncoms ordering hoarsely. <The Amerikaners are moving up all around us.>

Standing there, momentarily frozen by the sudden reversal of fortune that threatened to leave him at the mercy of the American troops he so despised, Van Struyken raked a furious glance over his prisoners. He knew that the troopers and noncom were useless as hostages and he should have them shot now, before they became a further liability. Then the fierce gaze of Professor Montraux seemed to stab through to his soul, if he actually possessed one, staring at the Mauser he had aimed at the unarmed Americans.

Kurt ordered two of his troopers move all the prisoners towards the rear of the cottage and keep them under close guard. For a brief moment he considered using one of the GIs to escort Montraux and his daughter to the American lines but realized the futility of such a rash move would likely result in their deaths.

And despite his earlier vitriolic outburst, he still held a grudging admiration for his onetime professor who insisted on stubbornly clinging to his antiquated ideals. Even after his own harsh accusations, Kurt did not want to see the two of them shot before his very eyes.

Saunders dropped against the wall with Billy, Cajé and Doc beside him and growled

weakly, "What the hell are you doing here? I told you not to come after me."

"The lieutenant sent us ahead of the main attack, Sarge." Doc replied. "I thought we could get through and bring you back before the main attack was launched." He ducked as a stream of .50 caliber bullets ripped through the heavy iron kitchen stove, "Looks like our timing was off."

Crouching there helplessly with his fists clenched in frustration, Saunders knew better than to ask Cajé about King Company's plan of attack. He had no intention of endangering this operation. But if there was just some way he could divert Van Struyken's attention, disarm him and order his troops to surrender, that might distract the Germans long enough so Montraux and his daughter weren't caught in a crossfire.

Saunders signaled Nelson and Cajé to jump their guards when their attention was focused on returning fire from the windows. He would try to tackle Van Struyken and disarm him. Cajé balked at first, pulling a hidden knife from his boot and indicating he would sneak up behind the Hauptman and slit his throat. Saunders almost agreed then caught sight of Montraux and his daughter huddled together in a corner of the cabin and remembered what the professor had said over the past two days. Instead he shook his head, indicating he would deal with Van Struyken.

As the three soldiers lunged at the German troops attempting to distract them, Billy tackled his opponent, swinging wildly. To his surprise, a lucky punch to the chin, floored his foe, knocking him out. Snatching up the German's weapon, he was momentarily frustrated by its empty magazine and fumbled at the soldier's belt for another one.

Cajé's target was a much tougher fighter and as the two of them grappled on the floor, Van Struyken turned and spotted the Americans' escape attempt, snapping off a hasty shot before Saunders could reach him. The bullet slammed into the scout's shoulder, momentarily stunning him and leaving him at the mercy of his opponent.

Saunders dived towards Van Struyken, forcing his gun into the air and away from his men, while Nelson struggled to reload the German weapon and save the wounded scout from the beating he was taking. Doc crouched in front of Montraux and his daughter, attempting to shield them from the battle, then Nelson got the magazine in place and snapped off a quick burst just above the head of Cajé's opponent.

The German trooper froze as Nelson gulped out what little German he did know, "*Hande hoch!*" Then he moved cautiously over to where the trooper was climbing slowly to his feet and pointed the weapon at his head. After Billy motioned for his prisoner to move away from the scout, Doc scrambled to Cajé's side, trying to determine the extent of his injuries.

The sergeant gripped Van Struyken's right arm with both of his and the two of them swayed back and forth, struggling for control of the weapon. Although weakened by his wound, Saunders was more skilled in hand-to-hand combat and had almost managed to wrest the Luger away from his foe. Suddenly a burst of fire came in through the window and hit the German officer square in the back, spinning him out of Saunders' grip.

Blinded by pain and fury, Kurt took aim and squeezed off three rounds aimed directly at the sergeant, before toppling to the floor.

The first two missed.

The third one did not . . . but went directly into the chest of Jeanette Montraux.

There was a momentary startled look on the young woman's face, before she collapsed in her father's arms, saying with her dying breath, "I'm . . . glad . . . it wasn't you . . . Papa."

"**NOOOO!**" Pierre Montraux gusted out in a scream of unbearable pain, as he clutched his daughter's bloodied body. "Not you, child! You can't die . . . or it's futile, all for **nothing.**" And he buried his face against her shoulder, sobbing bitterly.

Dragged to the floor by Van Struyken's collapse, Saunders groped for the kitchen table, pulling himself upright so he could make a quick survey of the tactical situation. The shots outside the cabin had subsided to brief sporadic flurries from a few die-hard resistors. He

could hear American voices ordering mop-up details, calling for medical aid, and one particularly familiar voice calling his name.

“Saunders, Saunders, where the hell are you, Sergeant?”

“Right here, Lieutenant,” Saunders limped towards the doorway and signaled his platoon leader.

Hanley stuck his head cautiously inside the cottage filled with the smell of blood and cordite. He glanced at the German corpses, including the young officer lying at Saunders’ feet, and Billy Nelson standing there with a cautious grip on a Mauser, before hurriedly taking note of the condition of his sergeant and First Squad’s scout.

“Doc,” he started to call out impatiently and then spotted the company’s medic, his hand on the man’s shoulder as he knelt by the side of a bitterly weeping Frenchman, clutching the bloodied corpse of a young woman.

Saunders’ and Caje’s wounds were not critical and could wait a little longer for treatment.

“What happened, Sergeant?”

“The professor and his daughter treated my wound, gave me shelter, and tried to protect me from the Germans when they made this cottage their CP.”

Hanley gave his sergeant a hard look, certain there was much more to the story than he was admitting.

Meanwhile Pierre Montraux continued to mourn for his butchered daughter. “It was all for you, *ma petite*. Trying to teach warmongers and communists, the radical protests, the candlelit vigils . . . all futile efforts to show the people of the world there was a better way than the bloodstained futility of war. That we could all live in peace together. But to no avail. It’s all ashes, nothing but ashes.”

Doc leaned over and closed Jeanette’s beautiful empty eyes, before reaching into the medical kit for his ever-present testament. Flipping past the usual consoling verses in Psalms, he turned to the prophet Isaiah, chapter two and found the verses that he hoped would begin to heal the raw wound in Pierre Montraux’s soul.

“And he shall judge among many nations and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more”



Hanley stood in the doorway of Montraux’s cottage, hearing that softly whispered plea for peace, and answering in a gruff voice.

“But not yet. Unfortunately, not yet.”

The End