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NIGHTS OF FIRE

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NIGHTS OF FIRE

Leonie Daniels

CHAPTER ONE

Normandy, France

June 3, 1944

He emerged from the black emptiness of unconsciousness like an infant being born. Innocent. Ignorant. Bewildered.

His first sensation was pain. *Everywhere.*

Not the sudden, piercing pain of a knife or bullet, but a dull, persistent ache which consumed him from head to toe.

He groaned and rolled his head.

Moving was a mistake. It made the general pain in his head agonizingly specific. He felt as if his skull were splitting open. As if his brain had been wounded.

Immersed in darkness and misery, he took several short, shallow breaths, concentrating on controlling the thunderous throbbing of his head.

It didn't work.

He groaned again.

He heard a strange sound, like rushing wind. It confused him, and the confusion combined with the pain made him scared and angry all at once.

There was a sudden jolt. That was when he realized he'd been in motion. The jerky movement rocked his whole body. Worst of all, it made his head feel like it would fall off.

He moaned. Then he heard the rushing wind again.

Something brushed his forehead...A touch?

Yes, a warm, soft, human touch. Fingers stroking him. Trying to soothe him. Then the sound again.

"Shhh..."

Not rushing wind. Someone shushing...shushing *him*, he dimly realized. Telling him to be silent.

He didn't know why, but he knew it was important, knew he should obey. He could accept that silence was imperative.

A pause, then more movement.

Yes, he was moving forward. In motion, somehow. Yet not moving.

Being moved.

He heard wheels against the ground. Wooden wheels. Clattering. Now...hooves. A horse. Just one.

He was in a cart or wagon.

He felt the scratchiness all over him. Suffocating him. He was buried in hay, he decided. Or maybe straw. But why?

The wagon jolted again. His body screamed in agony as he ground his teeth together to remain silent. The struggle sent him plunging headlong into the blackness again.

* * * * *

This time, voices roused him.

He listened to their strange chattering, lying silently beneath the straw. The wagon was still. The horse snorted.

Chattering, pattering, *drum-drum-drum*.

Smothered by straw and darkness and confusion, he tried to open his eyes, but they wouldn't respond.

Chattering, pattering...He vaguely recognized the *drum-drum-drum* as his own heartbeat, thundering with agonizing intensity in his head.

The chattering gradually started to sort itself out from the pattering. People speaking, chattering...in the falling rain. It was raining? And the voices...

German, he realized vaguely. The voices were speaking in German. That's why they sounded strange. As soon as he realized that, he started picking up traces of the conversation, scattered bits and pieces which meant nothing to him.

A woman's voice. Young and lush, but stiff with formality and speaking awkwardly. "Uncle's farm...work to do..."

And a man. Probably young, too. Speaking fluidly and with aggressive authority. "Papers...Alone, Fräulein?...so early...in such bad weather?"

There was some rustling. Then silence. He heard a car engine. Nearby. It came towards him. Only after it passed did the wagon start moving again.

Clop-clop-clop...

Hooves.

Patter-patter-patter...

Rain...*Water*.

He wanted to ask for water. Wanted air.

But he must remain silent. He remembered that. And it made sense to him.

He licked dry, cracked lips and let the throbbing in his head carry him into the darkness again.

* * * * *

He felt the wagon tremble as if it sensed danger. He fought for consciousness, sensing a change. What was wrong? The wagon...It had stopped, he realized. No longer in motion. Now it was shaking slightly, *trembling*...as someone climbed into it. His stomach contracted with animal fear as someone started pawing at the straw which covered him. He'd been found! He tried to fight, resisting the hands which grabbed him, but he was clumsy and ineffectual.

"Paul, no! It's only me."

A woman?

He was panting with panic and pain.

"Paul, *stop*. It's me."

The same woman he had heard before.

"We're safe now," she said.

He didn't feel safe. His heart pounded like the trotting hooves he no longer heard. He tried to speak. Only a groan came out.

She spoke some more. A jumble of sentences, rich and musical. He got lost in the sound of her voice and drew no meaning from her words. After a few comments which sounded like questions, she switched languages, further confusing him. "Do you understand me?"

No. Yes. I don't know.

"Paul, can you get up? Can you help me?"

What?

"I want to get you up to the loft. You'll be safe there."

Up...Loft...Safe...

This was English. What had she been speaking a moment ago? Not German...

"Fr...fra..." *Français?*

No, that wasn't the English word for it. Did he want the English word for it?

"French," he whispered, barely able to force a word out of his dry throat.

"*Tu veux que je parle français?*" she asked, sounding puzzled. *You want me to speak French?*

"No...Yes..."

They were supposed to speak French, weren't they? At all times?

Oh, Christ, his head hurt! He couldn't be sure. Didn't know. Was so confused.

Who was she? Where were they? What the hell was going on?

He felt her hands on his face, then his neck. She put one hand under his head — *God, it hurts!* — then another under his shoulder.

"Sit up," she said in English.

He tried. He couldn't. She guided his hand to something. Some part of the wagon. He used it to pull. Together, somehow, they made a huge effort, and then he was sitting upright.

He wanted to vomit.

"Good," she said, "good, *chéri*. Rest a minute." Then he heard a strangled sound, and she said, "Oh, what have they done to you?" She sounded so broken-hearted, it made him want to cry.

"Oh, my love," she mourned, "look what they have done."

He wondered whom she was talking to.

"I was afraid, so afraid," she murmured brokenly.

Her English sounded wrong. Lovely. Seductive. But somehow wrong...He suddenly realized it was because of her accent.

"Are.. Are y..." *Are you French?*

Yes, of course she was. That made sense to him, too, though he had no idea why.

"Can you stand?" she asked.

Stand.

Nothing happened. He couldn't even move.

"Can you open your eyes?"

He hadn't realized they were closed.

He opened them. Well, *one* of them, anyhow. The other wouldn't respond.

Gentle fingers touched the one which wouldn't open. He made a noise in his throat and pulled away from the pain.

"They've beaten you so badly," she whispered. "But you're safe now. And you'll feel better soon. You *will*."

Good, because feeling like *this* for the rest of his life didn't hold much appeal.

Saying so, however, was far too much effort at the moment.

The wagon quivered a bit as she climbed out of it. Then she was urging him to come forward. She pulled at his legs while he pulled with his arms. It was an absolutely awful process, and as soon as he put his feet on the ground, he gave in and finally threw up. Dry heaves, really. There was nothing in his stomach.

Still, the pain made him black out again.

When he regained consciousness, he was semi-upright and leaning against her. She was crying.

He wished she would stop. It made him feel guilty somehow.

"Walk," he mumbled, recalling that she wanted to take him somewhere. "Loft?"

She sniffed, wiped her face, and agreed, "*Oui*."

He had a general impression of lots of sun-gold hair and a lovely face. She was tall and slim, and strong enough to keep him upright. The breasts pressed against his chest were full and ripe, and the hips under his hands were firm and gently curved.

“Sorry,” he muttered, removing his hands. He collapsed almost immediately.

She held him in her arms, staggering a little under his falling weight. Then she turned, slipped her body under his shoulder, and urged him to lean on her. He could no longer keep track of whether she was speaking in French or English. For some reason, he seemed able to understand her in either tongue.

His vision started reeling wildly with pain and exhaustion as they staggered across the barn together — *Oh, we’re in a barn* — and then climbed a ladder up to a loft. That was nightmarish. She kept his body pressed firmly between herself and the ladder, guiding his hands and his feet with her firm grasp every time he faltered. He was so miserable after the first few rungs that he almost wanted to die; but he had to keep going because he knew he’d hurt her badly if he fell, since he’d certainly take her with him and probably even land on top of her.

He found himself lying face down in a pile of straw.

He heard rain pattering on the roof, then became aware of someone shuffling around. He rolled his throbbing head, then realized his eyes were closed again. He opened the one that worked and saw her bustling around the loft, looking hurried and purposeful. Pale light streamed through a high window.

Oh. We’re in the loft.

He supposed that meant he had managed to climb the rest of the ladder, but he didn’t remember doing so, and certainly didn’t remember collapsing here on the floor.

The next thing he knew, she was pushing him, rolling him over. He let her. Then his various injuries, particularly his head, howled in protest when she started dragging him across an uneven surface. He realized she had rolled him onto a blanket and was using it to haul him across the floor. He didn’t know why, and he wished she would stop.

Fortunately, he didn’t remain conscious for long.

* * * * *

He came and went often after that, journeying between the blank darkness of oblivion and the raging daylight pain of reality like a bewildered commuter who couldn’t remember where he was supposed to be. Several times, the woman wasn’t there, and he panicked, not knowing where he was or what would happen next. But she was always there the next time he awoke, and her tender care soothed him — even when it hurt like hell.

She was cleaning and binding parts of him that he thought would really rather be left alone. She applied a cool compress to the eye that was swollen shut. She examined

his head at length, even after he told her not to, and asked him questions about how many fingers she was holding up and what colors he saw.

She gave him water and then, later, something hot and sweet to drink. Tea, he supposed, but he was too exhausted to ask. And certainly too exhausted to ask who she was, why she was doing this for him, or what had happened to him...

* * * * *

Dark.

He opened his good eye.

Still dark...No, not entirely. Moonlight shone through the window high overhead.

Moonlight? He listened...it had stopped raining.

He took a cautious breath, exhaled, then tried the whole process again.

He was relieved to discover he felt better. He wasn't about to go play baseball, but he felt better. His head still hurt, but it had stopped throbbing with wild savagery. His back hurt as if someone had been whipping it—a lot—but he recalled the woman putting some soothing balm on it; and now it, too, felt somewhat better. The rest of him was still one big ache, but not as bad as before. Jesus, she was right, they really had beaten him badly.

He froze.

Who had beaten him? And why?

He didn't know.

Who beat me? Who did this to me?

How could he not know that?

Where was he? What was he doing here? What was happening to him? Who...Why...

Jesus Christ.

The central question to his dilemma suddenly formed in his mind, crystal clear, razor sharp, and horrifying in its stark simplicity.

Who am I?

How was it possible that he had no idea?

No idea whatsoever.

Jesus, who the hell am I?

Panic tore through him. He didn't know! He couldn't remember anything. Nothing! Fear and confusion flooded him.

He heard harsh, scared sounds. They were coming from him.

The woman, he realized suddenly. Maybe she knew.

Since he didn't know her name, he called out, "Hello?"

No reply. She wasn't there.

Worse panic.

Where is she?

It was as if the only other person in the whole world had suddenly dropped off the planet, leaving him all alone. Empty. Void. No memory. No one else. Nothing.

"Wh...Where are you?"

Still nothing. Using all of his strength, he sat up. His chest was heaving. He felt sweat break out on his skin. His head started pounding unbearably.

"Come here!" he shouted.

He heard noises below. Things hitting the floor as someone dropped something. Then rapid footsteps.

A different kind of fear flooded him. Someone had beaten him. He was still in danger. She had wanted him to be quiet in the cart.

He went still and silent in the dark, listening as someone crossed the barn and ascended the ladder.

"Qu'est-ce qu'il y a?"

He sagged with relief when he recognized her voice asking him what was wrong. Her dark shape, only hinted at by the moonlight, appeared at the top of the ladder a moment later. Then she crossed the loft, passing into the moon's rays, all pale and silvery in the night. God, she was lovely. He hadn't realized before, hadn't really seen.

She rushed to him and knelt at his side, her alarm at his wild, panting, shouting condition evident even in the dimly glowing darkness. He tried to tell her what was wrong, but the words were coming out in an incoherent, tangled rush. He sounded crazy. He knew he did, he could hear it; but he couldn't seem to control it.

And then his head—*oh, God, my head!*—was pounding hideously again, his brain and his skull clashing like violent enemies. It felt like the Battle of Britain was going on behind his eyes.

Her hands stroked his face, his cheeks, his forehead, trying to soothe him. She was shushing him, murmuring nonsense to calm him down. There were so many things he needed to know, needed to ask her, but he couldn't think, couldn't even form words now. He was just groaning and clutching his head in agony, and he knew she must think him completely insane.

He felt her easing him back down onto the blanket she had laid over the straw for his comfort. Her lips were soft and warm on his brow as she kept whispering to him. Then he felt her mouth against his cheek. Damp and gentle. Her breath was in his ear—*shhh, shhh*—and she was the rushing wind that had saved him and sheltered him.

He surrendered. Because he wanted to. Because he knew no other way to live through the pain and the moment and the bewildered terror. He surrendered because hers was a touch that inspired it. Her fingers slipped under his neck and massaged him

with the same gentle firmness he already knew from the way she had tended his injuries. She seduced him into relinquishing his panic. Eased him into welcoming her warmth and tenderness in place of his urgent confusion.

He sighed when he felt her try to soften the hard tension in his shoulders. Her fingers were strong and knowledgeable, delving into the hidden hollows between corded muscles to ease him into submission with a hypnotic, soothing rhythm while she kept murmuring to him. He felt her unlocking him, unraveling him, turning him from something hard with fear into something fluid with her comforting warmth and seductive handling.

He shifted, then sucked in air through his teeth when his tormented back protested. She murmured something in concern, and he felt her hand moving across his back...yet didn't feel it.

Bandages, he realized. She had bandaged his back.

Part of it, anyhow. As her hand slid further, he felt skin against skin again. That was when he realized he was shirtless.

Not just shirtless...

Good God, I'm naked.

She had taken off all his clothes?

"Wh...Who... Wh..."

Who are you?

"Shhh...Shhh..."

She stretched out beside him and rolled him slightly towards her, easing his weight off his back.

"It'll feel better soon," she promised softly, stroking down his back with such a light touch that it made him shiver.

"Are you warm enough?" She edged closer to him, pressing into his body until he could feel her heat through the threadbare blanket, which was now carelessly bunched between them.

He was warm enough. Felt like summer.

Felt like a warm, shapely woman rubbing up against him...

"All right now?"

"Wh...Wh..."

"Oui?" she supplied, switching back to French as she misunderstood his feeble attempts at speech.

Where am I?

A barn. With a Frenchwoman who spoke weak German and good English.

He tried to study her with his good eye. Moonlight streaked across the rough bed she now shared with him. Her skin looked like mother-of-pearl. Her hair poured pale gold over her shoulders. The patterned fabric of her simple dress looked speckled in the

moonlight, almost as if she wore some exotic animal skin to entice him—or to elude him, in case she chose to disappear again into the dappled shadows, leaving him alone.

“Don’t...go,” he choked out.

Her palm on his face. So tender. “No, *mon amour*, I won’t go.”

Relief weakened him, muddled his mind. He closed his eyes and inhaled, catching her scent. Oh, she smelled good. If moonlight had a fragrance, this would be it. The scent carried him somewhere vaguely familiar, someplace he wanted to be—always. Something rich and wonderful unfurled inside him as he inhaled her again while her hands—so warm and elegant and strong—moved over his face, his hair, his neck.

“Wh...Wh...”

“Shhh, I won’t go. I’m right here. I’ll be right here when you wake up. I promise.”

Who am I?

“Who...”

She kissed him suddenly, startling him. So quick and light, he wondered if he imagined it just because he wanted it.

But then her breath was on his cheek, and her body shifted even closer, and he knew that no delirium could feel this real. Her lips were against his again, and she tasted him at her leisure. Slow, sweet, languid.

He held perfectly still, dazed and delighted and mystified, while her lips continued to sip so delicately from his. Then her fingertips replaced her mouth, tracing his lips.

“Does it hurt?” she asked.

What? No.

Then he winced when she did hurt him.

Ah. That was what she meant, why she was being so delicate. His lower lip was stinging now.

“I don’t want to make it start bleeding again,” she said.

How had that happened?

He had a sudden memory of biting down hard on it. *Why?* To keep from screaming. While they tortured him.

Tortured me? Who? Who?

“What’s wrong?”

He had gone tense all over and was breathing harder again.

Who?

“Did I hurt you?” she asked.

“Nazis,” he said suddenly.

The Nazis did this to him.

Why?

“Shhh, you’re safe now. You’re safe.”

Her arms began to circle him, moving carefully.

Nazis...Germans! He had heard *her* speaking to a German! He jerked away from her. The sudden movement hurt, and he groaned aloud.

"Don't," she exhorted. "No one is here but me. You must be still. Please."

She had rescued him. He fought for clarity. Yes, she had smuggled him past the German. She was trying to help him.

"Sorry," he muttered, forcing himself to relax.

"Oh, my love." She sounded broken-hearted again.

He didn't resist her embrace this time. His trembling embarrassed him, but he let her pull his head down to the soft V of her neckline and press his face into the scented hollow of her breasts.

He moaned softly, but not with pain. God, she was soft. So soft. Smelling of moonlight. Warm like safety. All flowing curves and silky skin, seductive strokes and comforting caresses. He rubbed his face against her throat and, when she sighed with what seemed like pleasure, opened his mouth to taste the creamy smoothness of her neck.

She made a desperate little sound and dug her fingers into his hair, pressing his head closer. He licked his dry lips, then rubbed them along the swanlike grace of her throat, kissing...tasting...sucking, even though it made his lip hurt a little.

She arched into him, lifting her breasts to his mouth like an offering. He nuzzled the thin, worn fabric of her dress. His hands, which had been exploring her shoulders and waist, crept up to fondle and feel all that round, ripe, womanly sweetness which trembled with her panting breaths.

All his blood seemed to pool in his loins, now heavy and throbbing with sudden need. His penis, mercifully uninjured, stirred, growing pleasantly hard and twitching with the sheer joy of touching her like this. Of being alive and in her arms. Something hot and sweet and familiar rushed through him.

Alive.

He hadn't realized until now that he had thought he was going to die. If not now, then before. Before *her*. Before *this*.

I'm alive.

And suddenly his body was intent on proving it.

He tugged with blind impatience at her neckline, wanting more. Wanting to bury himself in her warmth and softness, wanting to plunge into her body in hot, raw celebration of being alive. She sighed and rubbed her deliciously round breasts against him as he fumbled with the buttons of her dress, his cock straining eagerly as he realized she was welcoming his clear if clumsy attempt to strip her and claim her body as his prize. He made a frustrated sound, his knuckles brushing her turgid nipples as his disorientation and the darkness thwarted his efforts to undress her. He abandoned the buttons and moved his hands over her breasts, feeling their weight and fullness

through the material of her dress. He massaged and squeezed, a little rough in his eagerness. His throat constricted with mounting passion as his fingers explored her hard nipples through layers of fabric, and her tortured breath and grasping hands assured him she enjoyed what he was doing.

Then she slipped both her hands between them, first to stroke boldly between his legs, then to fiddle with her buttons until her dress finally spread open under his eager hands. She wore a slip underneath, its sheer fabric clinging lovingly to the curves of her body. He grunted with dissatisfaction, desperate to touch her skin, to worship her naked body with his. She laughed very softly, then disentangled herself and sat upright. He watched while, glowing like an opal in the moonlight, she pulled her dress off her shoulders so that the bodice hung around her waist, then pulled the thin straps of her slip over her arms.

Silvery light dappled the rich globes of her breasts and kissed the delicate peaks with tender flecks of rippling shadow. He stared, feeling the thrum of his blood as his erection grew harder, his body yearning for the mysterious beauty she was offering him without question or explanation.

She took one of his hands and brought it up to her breast, where her flesh was so warm and satiny soft. She pressed herself into his palm as she rubbed it against the tight bud of her nipple.

"Ohhh." She closed her eyes and tilted her head back, the gold of her hair mixing with the silvery light. She moved erotically, rising up on her haunches and sinking again, a primal motion which captivated him. His mouth went dry with desire as she moved, lost in her own tranquil rhythm, rubbing herself against his palm in a luxuriant massage. Her waist undulated delicately, and her breath was deep and indulgent. Unable to resist, he squeezed and kneaded with his fingers. She moaned and then opened her eyes. Her lips curved in a lazy smile, and then she reached for his other hand, which she drew to her mouth. She planted a wet kiss on his palm, then licked it. He groaned as her agile tongue moved avidly over his fingers. Then she drew his hand down to her other breast, leaning towards him so that he could easily massage them both now.

When just touching her wasn't enough, he pinched her nipples and tugged. She gasped and flinched, but readily sank towards his mouth, sliding her fingers into his hair to guide him to her nipple. He moved his mouth over the tip of her breast and explored the hard peak with his tongue, licking and sucking, his arms tightening around her as she moved in reflexive response to his teasing. She even tasted like moonlight, like magic made flesh, as if the dappled night had given her form and substance.

Then she was kissing him, harder now, satisfying his hunger. It hurt, but he didn't care. He nibbled on her lips, massaged her tongue with his, then suckled it, feeding on her, begging her silently for more, even more...

She made a sharp noise and pulled away. He reached for her – and groaned when it caused him pain.

"Your lip," she said. "It's bleeding again."

He lay back, trying to control his breath. His head was throbbing again.

He felt her tongue flick lightly against the corner of his mouth once, then twice. Licking away the blood, he realized.

Suddenly embarrassed and confused, he turned his head and brushed at his mouth.

"We shouldn't do this," she said. She sounded rueful rather than embarrassed or contrite. "You need rest. Not..." A touch of laughter, maybe a little shaky with emotion. "Not this."

He nodded – and immediately felt piercing pain.

Now his head throbbed with every lust-fueled breath, every heavy beat of his passion-pumped heart. In the sudden shift of mood and focus, his straining erection quickly became the least of his body's grievances.

He said nothing, already as exhausted as he was aching.

It was a hell of a tribute to her charms, he thought, that he'd gotten even that far, given the condition he was in.

"Sleep now," she said. "I'll be nearby."

His eyes were already closed.

"I'm going to finish putting away the supplies I was bringing in when you shouted for me."

Was she speaking English or French? He wasn't even sure now. His weary mind passed over the words and just absorbed the meaning.

"A little food. Water. Bandages. I didn't want to carry much, in case I was seen," she continued. "And I've got to get rid of your clothes. But I won't be long, and I'll be able to hear you if you need me."

When he didn't reply, she prodded, "Paul?"

Paul.

That must be me.

Was it familiar? *Paul*...He just didn't know.

Who am I?

He was too tired to ask.

Who are you?

It didn't seem important right now.

One thing he did remember: Morning always came. Presumably it would come again.

All his questions could wait until then. They would have to.

Reaching the end of his strength, he let the night close over him.

CHAPTER TWO

June 4, 1944

A rooster crowed. The shrill noise crashed through his skull and into his aching brain like a bayonet.

Someone please kill that damn bird.

It crowed again.

He opened his good eye. With a little concentration, the bad eye, he was relieved to discover, also opened slightly this morning. He couldn't see anything with it yet, but it was already a little better.

He looked around. Pale gray light gave the loft a dreamlike quality.

Someone snuffled delicately within inches of his ear. He turned his head, which immediately pounded.

She was there. The woman. Sleeping right beside him.

Beautiful, as he had thought. Light flattered her even more than darkness did. Now she looked almost like something the dawn had conjured. Not a girl, but still young. At a guess, somewhere in her late twenties.

Who was she? Someone close to him, he supposed, since...

He stopped breathing the moment he realized she was under the blanket with him. He suddenly remembered her as she was last night, passionate and uninhibited under his hands. Now she was wearing only her slip. One thin strap slid down her smooth arm. He glanced around and saw her dress laid neatly upon a bale of hay.

The rooster crowed one more time, positively begging for a shallow grave. The woman stirred, snuggled closer to him, then roused and opened her eyes. They were big, very blue, long-lashed. She had high cheekbones, a pointed chin, a lush and sensual mouth.

He became hotly, awkwardly aware of his erection.

"Good morning," she whispered sleepily. She closed her eyes and rolled towards him, gliding her leg across his body as she did so.

He made a rough noise as the soft luxury of her thigh rubbed across his throbbing cock and aching balls.

He felt the puff of her breath against his neck. "I guess you're feeling a little better." She sounded amused.

"Um..."

His mind, at least, was clearer. He was still bewildered and confused, but a night's rest and the dawning light of day ensured he was no longer irrational with panic. On

the other hand, if she kept rubbing her thigh against him that way, he'd become irrational with lust in just a few seconds. He reached up to take her shoulders, intending to set her away from him.

She surprised him by pulling away, "No."

She sat up. Her golden hair tumbled gloriously around her shoulders. There was some straw in it.

He wanted her. Even if he wasn't going to act on it, he couldn't keep it off his face. What man alive wouldn't want her, golden and cream-colored, smiling at him in the glowing dawn with sleepy seduction?

"No," she repeated. "Your head... You should try to remain still, I think."

I need to know what's going on.

"I...need..." His dry voice cracked.

Her lips curved in a broad smile. A woman's smile. "I know what you need."

She took hold of the blanket, tugged it off of him, and tossed it aside. Naked under her bold gaze, with his groin hot and hard for her, he fumbled for a coherent thought.

We have to talk.

"We...We—"

She put her fingers over his lips to silence him.

Their eyes locked for a moment. His world reeled, and he forgot what he wanted to say. What he needed to know.

Then her gaze followed her fingers as they traveled down his body. She watched her fingertips slide over his chin and down his throat to his chest. She traced his collarbone, then circled one nipple once, twice, and again, before brushing lightly across it. Her eyes grew dewy and heavy-lidded as she spread her palm across his flat stomach to massage it with firm, circular strokes.

He felt like he would dissolve or explode by the time she finally slid her fingers into the springy dark hair of his groin, toying with it briefly before she grasped the hot shaft eagerly straining towards her touch.

He sighed and trembled a little. Her lips, pink and slightly swollen now, parted. She licked them slowly, then gave him a long, deliberate, teasing look. His hips moved in response. She smiled, enjoying her power.

It didn't matter that he didn't know her name, didn't even know his own. Right now, nothing in the world mattered except this. He covered her hand with his own and lifted his hips, massaging himself against her. The slow, hot friction of her palm, the rhythmic flexing of her strong fingers...

His eyes closed in ecstasy. Then her cotton-covered breasts were pressed against his chest, the tight buds of her nipples hard through the thin material. He gave up guiding her hand, because she so obviously knew exactly what she was doing, and he wrapped his arms around her as she kissed him. Her tongue was silky and full in his mouth. Her gentleness made him impatient, even though he realized it was because she didn't want

to hurt him again. He tried to deepen the kiss, to drink more greedily from her mouth, but she pulled away, frustrating him.

Her hand was vigorous now, rubbing his cock hard enough to make his hips pump in response, then moving to squeeze and tease his balls. Her mouth was hot and damp on his chest, and he quivered when she sucked hard on his nipples, being greedy with his body after being so cautious with his mouth.

He stroked her beautiful hair as she licked his stomach, his navel, his hip. Her tongue traced the crease of his thigh while her hand kept rubbing his cock. Then her fingers tightened so hard around his erection that he gasped...and shivered with mingled hunger and relief when she let go.

She gently nuzzled his groin, as if to make up for her momentary roughness. And then her lips, so incredibly tender and gentle, closed over the tip of his penis.

He held his breath. It seemed like the whole *world* held its breath. Then her tongue flicked him as delicately as the touch of a butterfly's wing. Again and again, a rapid flutter of mind-shattering torment. He panted hard, trembling and helpless under this brutally exquisite assault.

She made it worse, though, even worse, traveling down the length of his shaft with those butterfly licks, pausing at her leisure to kiss, suck, nibble—even jolt him into shuddering excitement with a hard nip here and there.

He wished he knew her name, because he wanted to say it over and over, a plea, a prayer, a paean of infinite pleasure.

He wanted to make love to her, wanted it so much he'd give up the right to ever know his own name again if he could just sink into her, become part of her, feel her wet heat welcoming and embracing him deep inside of her. He moved towards her, reaching for her. She gently but insistently pushed him back down. He tugged at her arm, unwilling to be denied.

She lifted her head, sighing as her hand tangled with his. Her swollen lips glistened wetly, taunting him ruthlessly now with their lush likeness to the part of her he most wanted to know, to touch and feel and explore, to plunge into with reckless abandon.

His hand was on her thigh, stroking her urgently, telling her without words what he wanted. With her eyes half closed, she suddenly shifted so that her back was to him as she knelt beside him. He was frustrated that she wouldn't give him what he wanted, but he was still too weak to do more than follow where she led. He stroked the curve of her hip, briefly kneaded her firm buttocks, then pushed up her slip to slide his hand under her body and between her thighs. She wore French underwear, loose panties which gave him easy access to the hidden delights of her body.

She stiffened and went very still as he cupped his palm over her fur-thatched mound, feeling the intense heat radiating from it. He combed his fingers through the damp, silky hair there, watching the way her whole body quivered. She moaned and dropped her head forward as his fingers began exploring the wet, delicate folds of her labia. Her hand tightened convulsively on his cock, and both of them froze for a

moment, their harsh breath rasping as the pale light of dawn shimmered on their bodies.

He wanted to say her name. He wanted it so much.

"Paul," she murmured. "Paul..."

He felt dizzy with passion, with the tumult she created throughout his body. Even the air seemed affected by this hot need and electric delight flowing between them.

She sighed deeply, then melted over him, bracing a hand on his hip as she took him into her mouth. So hot and wet. So deep. Over and over. Sucking so hard. He was shaking. *So hard*. He was going to explode. *Hard*. She was nursing, her cheeks drawing in, deep, so deep, while she suckled him like she was starving.

And then she was pumping her hips, grinding against his hand, rubbing herself urgently against his fingers while she continued making love to him with her mouth. She was so slick and wet and swollen...*Nursing without mercy....Rocking frantically against the hand he was rubbing between her taut thighs...Suckling him, sucking so hard...That swollen bud sliding between his rubbing fingertips...Oh, God, so hard...She reached between her legs to move his hand, pressing his fingers harder against her, so hard...Her tongue working him against the hard roof of her mouth...Slick and frantic in his hand...The soft back of her throat....Soft and wet and throbbing for him...Pressure, suction, wet and tight...Bucking as he touched her, writhing so wildly...He couldn't stand it...Pushing his hand so hard against her welcoming flesh...He would explode...Did she really want him rubbing her that hard?...Explode in her mouth, pour down her throat...Rubbing her so hard now, squeezing, pinching...Pumping into her sweet, sucking, wet mouth...Pumping while he pressed and rubbed and pinched...Coming in her mouth...yes...*

"Yes," he groaned.

Oh, yes...

Her groans were wordless, her mouth filled with him as he came, shuddering and melting. Consumed and broken. Her ruthless hand on his balls finished him, ensuring he was as empty and helpless as she could make him. Her throat moved as she swallowed, and he flushed and trembled all over, shaken, shattered, defeated.

And then all that slick, dewy sweetness drenching his fingers, pouring into his palm as her high, fast cries filled the air. She tugged on his hand, pulling it forward so she could grind against the heel of his palm, her hips straining as her cries turned throaty and harsh.

He wanted to make love to her, and it was too late now. For the moment. For now...

Use me. Do whatever you want. Everything you want.

She was rocking hard, pumping her hips with violence, her face still buried in his groin, hidden by her hair, as she moaned and gasped, using him exactly the way she wanted. He smiled and watched through heavy-lidded eyes as she came, her body

convulsing as her cries reached a dark crescendo, then relaxing into boneless satisfaction as she sighed in ecstatic relief and rested her head wearily against his belly.

He left his hand resting in the damp warmth between her thighs, which she squeezed together as if to keep him there. With his other hand, he stroked the tousled hair now flowing across his stomach.

He wished he had seen her face.

"How's your back?" she murmured sleepily.

"Mmmm..." He didn't know. Right now, he didn't care.

He was nearly asleep again when she asked, "Could you eat something?"

"Shhh..." He stroked the head resting on his body, afraid she would move away from him.

He felt her smile. "I could sleep a little," she admitted.

Oh, yes, next time, he wanted to watch her face.

He closed his eyes. As he drifted off, it started raining again.

* * * * *

They were shouting at him in a mixture of German and French...No English. Despite his fear, he was relieved. Did it mean they didn't know who he was?

Would they find out?

Dark...Dark...His cell was dark all of the time. No windows. Old stone walls that stank of fear. Even when they interrogated him, they made sure he saw no windows. No sense of day or night. Trying to confuse him about time, to make him think he'd been here longer than he had...He'd only faked the unconsciousness twice. The other times – three times? four? – they really had beaten him unconscious, he hadn't been faking. So now he was confused.

Not that he always had to be unconscious for the interrogation to stop. Just incapable of speech.

Yes, very confused. Five days? Six? Four?

He didn't know.

One thing he did know: He would die here.

He didn't cling to hope. He knew better. Knew that anything they promised was a lie. Knew that they would certainly kill him once they had what they wanted.

All he had to do was die without talking.

The beatings were bad, but he could stand that. They did something with water and electricity, though...Terrifying. Like a bad horror movie, only the pain was real and truly excruciating. He tried to escape from his own body. From his own mind.

Thank God they didn't seem to know about her. He'd been right to be so very careful about that. Because if they had her, yes, he knew he might talk. If they had her...No, he mustn't think

about her. Not even a thought. He couldn't risk murmuring her name in his delirium. Couldn't let it slip out in his sleep or in his murky, pain-ridden blackouts...He drove her from his mind.

Wouldn't think about any of the rest of it, either...Too many lives...Everything depending on his silence...

He tried to escape from his own body. From his own mind.

"Paul?"

This time they didn't even ask him any questions. Maybe they decided he really was the nobody he pretended to be.

"Darling?"

Or maybe they were just bored...

"Paul, shhh..."

He heard moaning. Some panting. "No..."

He didn't want to die. Wasn't as ready as he'd thought. No one ever was, of course.

"It's all right, Paul. You're safe. Safe."

He was thrashing, fighting back. Not ready to die.

"Paul, don't! Stop!"

Her voice.

"It's me! Stop!" she cried.

Head throbbing. Pounding. God, it hurt!

The pain brought him to his senses.

He opened his eyes. Only one really worked.

Loft. Barn. Daylight. Woman.

His blood was roaring in his ears. He was panting hard, damp with sweat. Fighting her as she tried to soothe him.

He'd thrown off the blanket. He was still naked. She was fully dressed again.

"What's..." He shuddered. "What's going on?"

Her hands on his shoulders. His neck, his cheeks. Her palm on his forehead. "Nightmare," she said.

"No," he said with certainty. "It happened. It's where I was. What they did to me."

Her blue eyes flooded with tears.

"Don't cry," he said wearily.

She nodded and sniffed. "I think you have a fever."

He stared blankly at her.

"I expected it," she assured him. "It will pass. But you must rest."

His breath started slowing down. "I have questions."

"So do I," she said, surprising him. "But first, drink the broth I've brought, then rest some more."

She started to rise from the bed of blanket and straw. He gripped her arm. "No."

She sank back to her knees.

Their gazes locked. She looked troubled, sympathetic, concerned. He was starting to feel angry with confusion and frustration.

It didn't help his mood that his first question was incredibly awkward, given what they'd done together on this rough bed at dawn. Still, he had no practical alternative other than a direct approach: "Who are you?"

Her eyes flickered blankly. She clearly didn't understand what he was trying to say. "What?"

He sighed and sat all the way up. Then he reached for the blanket he had kicked off, now pulling it across his lap. It was an absurd gesture, he supposed; she knew exactly what was there, after all. A vivid image of her sucking avidly on his cock clouded his mind. Her head moving up and down, her hair flowing around his belly and groin. Moaning with him in her mouth as she ground herself against his hand. Hot and swollen between her legs, so wet for him...Her mouth so good to him...Drinking him like nectar when he came. And coming the way she did, too, so totally uninhibited, eager, erotic...He felt his cheeks flush as he stared at her, recalling everything in vivid detail as he now tried to have this conversation with her.

"Paul?" she prodded.

"Um..."

She seemed completely unself-conscious. What they had done together was, in a way, even more intimate than sex. And she clearly didn't feel even a little awkward now, whereas he...

He was going to get a hard-on if he kept thinking about it. Jesus, wasn't he supposed to be injured and weak?

Snap out of it.

Abruptly, he asked, "What's your name?"

She frowned. "What do you mean?"

He licked his dry lips.

"I'll get you some water," she said instantly.

"In a minute." He again stopped her from rising.

She watched him. "Well?"

"I don't remember anything," he said baldly. "Nothing before I woke up in that cart of yours."

She waited patiently, still clearly not understanding the extent of what he meant.

"Oh, I'm getting some bits and pieces," he admitted. "Nazis...Gestapo..." He looked to her for confirmation. "I was a prisoner?"

She nodded.

"How long?" he asked hopefully.

"I'm not sure." The admission seemed to pain her. "You don't remember when they caught you?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you," he replied. "I don't remember *anything*. Not when they took me, or where, or why. I don't know who I am, or who you are, or what the hell is going on."

Her eyes grew rounder with every word. Her jaw dropped. "What?"

"Who are you?" he repeated.

"Paul!"

"No, I think that's me."

"Of course, that's you!" she snapped. Then the full impact of his problem hit her. She gasped and looked horrified. "You don't know who I am?"

He shook his head.

"Paul..." She spread her hands helplessly. "How could you..." Her gaze looked distracted for a moment, and then she seized his chin and turned his head.

"Ow," he said as it pounded in response to this sudden movement.

"Head injury," she murmured. "And..." She looked consideringly at him. "Trauma. Beating. Interrogation. Torture..." She nodded slowly, her expression dark with realization. "You've lost your memory."

"Most of it, anyhow."

Her gaze flickered again. "*Mais tu me comprends assez bien en français?*"

"Yes," he answered, "I understand you in French." He paused. "But English is my native language, isn't it?"

She nodded. "You're an American."

"But we're...in France?" he guessed.

"Yes, of course. I mean..." Her expression was settling into appalled shock. "You do know there's a war on?"

"War." He nodded. He was pretty sure he knew that. "Germans, bad guys. France, occupied. England and America, allies." There was a lot more to it, undoubtedly, but that could wait. He briefly wondered why he wasn't in uniform, then realized the obvious answer. "Am I a spy?"

"Office of Strategic Services," she supplied.

"OSS..." Did that sound right? He wasn't sure. But something else came to him. "I pretend to be French, don't I?"

"Yes."

"Who knows the truth?"

"Me. A small handful of people in the Resistance." She was still staring at him with that blankly stunned expression. "I don't know the exact number, because you're very secretive about your work."

"But the Germans think I'm French?"

"I don't know what they think now." The strain was starting to show in her face, her voice. "Until you were captured –"

"How long ago?"

She shrugged. "Less than ten days ago. That was the last time I saw you. Anyhow, until then, the Germans thought—at least, they certainly seemed to think—you were a wine merchant who lost everything when the war started. You pretend to be a bad businessman who keeps trying, without much success, to get your trade going again."

"And do you know why I'm really here?"

"Of course, I know."

"Because you're in the Resistance?" he guessed, recalling what she had said earlier.

"Well, yes. But also becau –"

"Why *am* I here?"

"To help prepare for the invasion."

"The Allied invasion..." he said slowly. "They need...intelligence gathering. From within France." He nodded. It made sense to him. "German strength. Artillery. Troops. Preparations to repel the invasion. Defenses along the sea. Minefields inland."

She nodded. "And coordination of the Underground."

"To support the Allies."

"Yes." She nodded encouragingly. "You're remembering?"

"Not exactly." He didn't know. "Maybe." He sighed. "I'm not sure." Was it memory, or just reasoning?

He raised a hand to his throbbing head...and felt the lump there. "Head injury," he said, finally understanding.

"Yes."

"Amnesia." Wonderful. He hadn't just lost his memory—he had lost it while serving as a wartime spy in a foreign country occupied by the enemy. "What could be better?" he muttered.

"There must be pressure on your brain. Surely when the swelling goes down..." she suggested.

"Do you know anything about head injuries?" he asked hopefully.

She bit her lip. "No."

"I wonder if I do."

"I doubt it." When he looked questioningly at her, she explained, "You really are a wine merchant."

"Oh. Did I really lose everything when the war started?"

She smiled weakly. "No. I gather business was hurt, of course, but you weren't ruined. Anyhow, you were recruited by the OSS and sent back to France when the Americans got into the war. Because you know the country and the language so well."

"I spent a lot of time here before the war," he guessed.

"Not in Normandy —"

"That's where we are?"

She looked surprised yet again. "Yes. We're just outside of Caen."

"When did I come to Normandy?"

"About eighteen months ago. You came here under orders. Claude Didier helped you establish your cover. He was the local Resistance leader."

"Was?" he repeated.

"He's dead," she said quietly. "The Nazis killed him last November. When he was arrested, we hoped it was just another round-up." She shook her head. "They killed him."

"But he didn't talk," he guessed. "Or you and I wouldn't still be alive."

She nodded. "He didn't talk." She sounded troubled, and her gaze was dark and worried as she studied him.

"Has someone talked now?" he asked. "Is that how I got caught?"

She looked away. "I don't know."

It seemed like something was wrong. However, rather than worrying about her problems right now, he concentrated on solving his. "Well, since neither of us knows much about head injuries, is there a doctor we can trust?"

"No!" Even she looked surprised at how vehement she sounded.

"Not even one doctor who wouldn't turn me in?"

"Not one we can trust," she insisted.

"But —"

"You'll start remembering," she said urgently. "The swelling will go down, and you'll start remembering. I know you will."

Something was definitely wrong.

He tried a different approach. "Do you have any idea where I was or what I was doing when they caught me?"

She looked upset. "No."

"Do you know who might know?"

"No one would know." She was calmer now and seemed very sure of her words. "You were off on a mission. I think you were meeting someone who had information about the invasion. But, as I said, you're very secretive."

Information about the invasion? "Well." He felt like she had just hit him with a baseball bat. "I guess that explains why the Germans wanted me."

Her face clouded.

He supposed he had important things to do now – but without his memory, he had no idea *what*. He looked at the lovely woman who had hidden him here, tended his wounds, and made love to him with erotic abandon, and he realized he still didn't even know... "What's your name?"

She looked appalled all over again. "You really don't know?"

"As I've just been saying, I –"

She gasped. "You have no idea who I am!"

"No. I'm sorry." He shrugged. "I –"

"You –" She looked him up and down. "You –" She looked down at his blanket-covered lap, and he suddenly knew *exactly* what she was thinking.

"Mademoiselle, I –"

The attempt at courtesy enraged her. "It's Gabrielle, you bastard!"

"Gabrielle. That's a very pr –"

She jumped to her feet. "If I hadn't just done everything I could to save your miserable life, I would kill you!"

Even though he thought she had a point, he nonetheless said, "All right, let's try to stay calm. This is a strange sit –"

"Calm! *Calm?*" Flushed with wrath now, she pointed to the rough straw bedding upon which he still sat and shouted, "You let me do *that* without even knowing who I am? Who *you* are? What my name is?" She kicked straw at him. "*Cochon!*"

"I'm sorry," he said. "You were just so...Um..."

"What?" she snarled.

"Gabrielle, please." He put a hand up to his throbbing head.

"Does it hurt?"

"Yes."

"Good!"

He sighed. "Look, I thought I was going to die. I remember that much. And you made me feel...alive."

For a few moments, he heard only the sound of her breathing. Then she said, her voice harsh and strangled, "I thought you were going to die, too."

Her temper faded as quickly as it had flared. She sank to her knees again. Now he saw tears start to stream down her cheeks. "I thought I'd never see you again. Never feel your touch or hear your voice. I thought you would die and leave me forever."

They were lovers? He should have guessed, he realized. His body had not forgotten her, even if his mind had.

"But," she continued, broken-hearted, "I never thought you would forget me. I didn't think that was possible." She cried harder.

“Gabrielle...”

Her eyes, framed by lashes made spiky with her tears, met his. “I’m your wife.”

CHAPTER THREE

June 4, 1944

Shock flooded him. "*What?*"

"Your wife," she ground out.

His head pounded fiercely. How could he have forgotten a wife?

"How could you have forgotten me?" she asked plaintively, twisting the knife.

"It's not...I don't know..." He made a helpless gesture. "I've forgotten *me*."

"Paul..."

"Yeah, I got that. What's the rest of my name?" he demanded.

"Finley. Paul Finley. You're from Philadelphia, originally. But here, you go by the name of Paul Fouquet. Born in Paris."

"You said this local Resistance leader, the one who died..."

"Didier," she supplied wearily.

"Didier. You said he gave me a cover?"

"He told people you were a distant relative. You lost everything, and so you came here to do some work for him and his wife in exchange for living in a shed behind their café."

"You and I live in a *shed*?" For some absurd reason, this appalled him.

"No. We live in my grandfather's cottage at the edge of Caen. Well, I live there. You do, too, really, but we still pretend you live in Didier's shed. Madame Didier still lives above the café, which she runs alone now. I think she knows you spend many nights with me, but I don't think Didier ever told her we were married." Gabrielle shrugged. "She's never mentioned it to me, anyhow."

He glanced down at her hand. No wedding ring. "We keep our marriage a secret?"

"Yes. You insisted. To protect me. The same reason you never tell me anything about where you're going or what you're doing."

He heard some resentment there. "Well, you *sound* like a wife."

She glared at him. It made her look like a wife, too, which made him smile.

"Who knows about us?" he asked.

"Didier knew about our marriage. So does Jean Deschamps, also in the Resistance. And the priest who married us knows, of course." Her mouth trembled for a moment. "Others in the Resistance...only know we're in love. I still go by my maiden name. Beaugard."

"Why did we get married?"

He wished he hadn't asked, when he saw how the question wounded her.

"Because we're in love," she said shakily. "But you didn't want the Germans to know, so we kept it secret."

"If they found out about me, you'd be in danger," he realized.

"Your superiors also know of our marriage. You told me that you had told them."

"Because I wanted you to be taken care of if I died," he guessed.

She nodded.

He touched her cheek, wanting to remember, trying so hard that his head felt like it was splitting open with the pain.

"Tell me more," he said. "Tell me about yourself. You said we live in your grandfather's cottage. Does he live there, too?"

"No, he died before the war. And after France fell, my uncle fled to England with the Free French to keep fighting. I was living in Paris, but it was..." She shook her head. "I came back here to try to keep this place going." She gestured to the barn around here. "My uncle made wonderful cheese. He took over the farm after my grandfather got too old and moved to the cottage in town." She sighed. "But the Nazis took everything that was his. There's nothing of value left here now."

"You didn't want to go back to Paris?"

"Not under Nazi rule. I chose to stay here."

"And you got involved in the Underground?"

"Yes." Her mouth trembled again. "And then one day, you came."

He felt robbed that he couldn't remember meeting her. That he remembered nothing before yesterday. "Gabrielle..."

She took a steadying breath and straightened her spine. "You won't remember things unless you get better. And you won't get better without food and rest."

He wanted to argue, but he knew she was right. So he accepted the broth she made him drink, which she heated over a lantern down in the main area of the barn. Exhausted, he also heeded her admonishments to sleep for a while.

* * * * *

Heavy artillery batteries, securely planted in concrete casements, lined the French shore. Nests of mounted machine guns flanked most of the beaches. Millions of land mines were hidden along the coast, and more were waiting inland.

His mind was a web of German fortifications, a map of Hitler's supposedly impregnable *Festung Europa*—Fortress Europe.

The decision had been made in April of '42: The Allies would invade Nazi-occupied Europe across the English Channel. But the invasion of North Africa meant they didn't

have enough strength for a strike into France in 1943, which was the year they began the long hard push into Italy.

Paul shivered with fever and kicked restlessly at the blanket covering him, hot and cold all at once. His good eye tried to focus on her...Gabrielle...as she applied something cool and damp to his face.

"How do I know what I know?" he muttered.

She sensibly ignored this obscure question and just murmured soothingly to him.

Had he reported what he knew about the secret weapons the Germans were preparing to launch from French bases? V-1 jet-propelled "buzz bombs" and giant V-2 rockets.

What about the beach defenses at Utah? He had to make the most comprehensive reports possible, or the Americans and British coming ashore would be slaughtered like lambs. Had he reported the details? Or did he still need to do that?

His head ached viciously, confusing him, making him mix up time and places and facts.

Juno, Omaha, Utah...No, that couldn't be right. Omaha was in Nebraska, not Utah...

"Be still," Gabrielle murmured. "Shhh..."

Coordinating with the French Underground—what a nightmare! Hundreds of scattered cadres, at least a dozen with whom he personally exchanged information. No clear chain of command. The Resistance...Resistant to everything, from Nazis to common sense...

God, he couldn't stand it if something happened to her. Why did he have to fall for a brave woman? Why wouldn't she flee to safety the way he begged her to?

"Please," he implored. "I want you to go."

She kept bathing his face and chest. "The fever will break soon. You'll be all right. I know you will."

He could tell she was lying...

All lies. A traitor among them. He hated leaving her now, but he had to. He mustn't fail to report, to get his final orders for the assault.

Field Marshal Rommel was waiting for it. The desert fox knew it was imminent. There were constant invasion alerts throughout the spring this year. Hitler's Atlantic Wall was fortified all along the Channel. Von Rundstedt insisted on heavy striking power deployed well behind the coastline, counting on destroying invaders weakened with confusion and supply problems as they came inland. Rommel was obsessed with making the beach heads impregnable. Paul had seen the constant patrols, the heavy defenses, the cunning traps and surprises. He had learned about the elaborate flame throwers capable of scorching potential landing sites on those beaches. Rommel did not intend to rely on Von Rundstedt's plan, did not intend to let the invasion ever get past the beaches.

Oh, yes, the Germans knew the invasion was coming. All they *didn't* know was the exact time and place.

Poker, Paul thought.

Victory might well depend on how well the Allies had bluffed.

"Poker?" she asked.

He grunted and pushed her away, upset that he'd spoken aloud.

Don't even think about it.

"Pas-de-Calais," he mumbled, standing pat on the biggest bluff in history.

General Patton, sitting in Dover, directly across the Channel from Pas-de-Calais, surrounded by herds of dummy tanks and aircraft and landing craft.

Some day, we'll look back and laugh.

"What's funny?" she asked.

Who was that laughing, he wondered? He joined in for a moment, but then stopped because it made his head hurt.

That crazy scheme the Allies toyed with, freezing ice and sawdust to form floating platforms which could be used as temporary landing docks or even small airstrips during the invasion...What genius thought up *that* one?

And that probably wasn't even the craziest idea to get taken seriously, however briefly, during this war. Ah, the books someone would write about all this some day...If anyone lived to tell the tale. If they weren't all corpses, ashes plowed into the earth of a world ruled by the Third Reich...

They couldn't let that happen. He couldn't let that come to pass.

"It's so simple."

"What is?" she asked.

So very simple, the general had said to him. *All we have to do is save the world.*

It kept him silent when he knew he mustn't talk.

Save the world and win the girl...

No, he knew he mustn't think about her. Not even a thought.

Mustn't think about the rest of it, either.

D-Day.

"Paul?"

Operation Overlord.

"Pas-de-Calais," he lied insistently.

The biggest bluff in history.

All they had to do was save the world.

* * * * *

Both eyes opened this time. The left one, not very much...but he could see out of it – though it took him a few moments to realize this, since it was dark again.

He wondered what that soft drumming was, then realized: rain. Again.

He lay there listening to it for a while, then gradually became aware of a faint splashing sound coming from the barn below him. "Ga..." His throat was dry. He tried again. "Gabrielle?"

"*Ici,*" she called softly. *Here.*

She climbed up into the loft. He could scarcely see her.

"So dark tonight," he muttered.

"This filthy weather."

"Rain. Storms. Wind." It meant something to him. It seemed like a problem. He just didn't know why.

She came closer. "You're better."

"Yes," he agreed.

"The fever broke after sundown."

Her silence was telling, so he informed her, "I still don't remember. Well, not much."

"Not much? What *do* you remember?" she pounced.

"Mostly...things about the war."

"The invasion?"

He went still. "No."

It wasn't entirely a lie. He wasn't sure what his jumbled thoughts meant.

Will the rain never stop?

Why did he care so much about the weather?

"Do you remember being a prisoner?"

*The pain...*His head started throbbing.

"Some of it."

"What?" she prodded, kneeling beside him now.

He could hardly see her tonight. "Is there a lantern?"

"Downstairs. We shouldn't use one up here, not with that window," she said. "This place is isolated, but even so..."

"If someone saw the light, they might investigate."

"Yes."

Needing human contact, wanting it, he reached out to touch her. She was in her slip again. Her skin was damp and cool. "You've been...washing?"

Her breath was shallow as he explored her. "Yes."

He brushed his fingers across her throat. "I...like to watch you wash."

"You're remembering?" she asked hopefully.

He shook his head. "No, I think it was a lucky guess." Based on the way his thoughts suddenly filled with a mental image of her—remembered, or just imagined?—sluicing water over her bare skin. Droplets trickling down the smooth column of her throat, sliding into the valley between her breasts...Water glistening on the pale skin of her back, tapering down to her waist...

He came out of his reverie when he heard her unhappy little sigh.

"It's so strange," she said. "You're right here, you act very much like yourself...Yet I'm so lonely for you, because you don't remember me."

"So this is what I'm usually like?"

"No. I mean..." She suddenly laughed, though it was a weak and shaky sound. "This is your personality, yes. But your circumstances—weak, ill, confused—make everything even stranger. You're normally in charge. In command. Confident. Organized. Efficient." She added archly, "Bossy."

"You don't seem," he ventured, "like a woman who would let me boss you much."

"I don't," she assured him. "We fight when you try."

He smiled. It sounded true. Even familiar. "Gabrielle..." The more he said her name, the more right it sounded to him. Memory? Or was he just getting used to her?

"Yes?"

"I, uh...Never mind."

While they held their silence in the dark, the rain started to let up.

"I'll get you something to drink," she offered.

"No, I'll come down with you."

"You shouldn't—"

"I need to go outside for a moment," he explained.

"Ah. Of course." She sounded very matter of fact. Well, a wife would be accustomed to her husband having normal human functions, after all. "I'll help you climb down."

She rose and leaned down to help him do the same. It was more difficult than he had expected. He was dizzy when he stood up, leaning against her for a moment while his body adjusted. Then, impatient with his weakness, he pulled slightly away from her.

"Come," she said, leading him towards the ladder.

"Wait a minute." He felt embarrassed at the idea of walking around naked with her. "Where are my clothes?"

"I burned them."

"Burned..." He seemed to remember her saying something about that. Ages ago. "Why?"

"They were all torn, and covered in blood and mud and...ugh, who knows what else?"

"But —"

"You couldn't have worn them again, *chéri*, *je te le jure*. So I burned them. I don't expect anyone to come here, but if I'm wrong, then it's better that no one should find those clothes. They'd realize right away that —"

"Yes, I see." He supposed he did. It was a sensible precaution. "But surely I must have other clothes?"

"Not here." Sensing his hesitation, she let out her breath on an impatient puff. "Paul, there is no one here but me, and I see you naked often." When he didn't respond, she added, "You *like* me to look at you naked."

He could well believe that. And at least he seemed to be in decent shape for showing himself off to her. "It's just that, uh..."

"I see." She was getting annoyed. "You let *me* do the things *I* did this morning when you didn't even know my name. But now that you know I'm your wife, you don't want me to see *you* naked."

"When you put it that way," he admitted, "it sounds bad. But this morning, we were making love. Whereas now —"

"Were we?" she snapped. "Love? You didn't even know my name!"

"But you knew I was your husband —"

"While you thought *I* was just some woman you were enjoying for a few minutes!"

"No, I thought you had saved my life —"

"Oh, and your way of saying *merci* was to roll around in the straw with me?" Her sarcasm made him wince. "What if some other woman had rescued you? Would you be in bed with *her* now?"

"Not unless *she* was also as bold as a cat in heat," he snapped back. "It's not fair to blame me completely for —"

She gasped in outrage. "A cat in heat! *Monstre*! You're the one who taught me to be bold with you! You like it!"

"I know! Without remembering! I can tell! In fact, I *love* it. I loved it so much this morning, I wanted you even though I was half-dead. So *why*," he demanded, angry by now, "are we fighting about it?"

"Because when I took off my clothes for you last night —"

"You were so beautiful, I —"

"Or put you in my *mouth* this morning —"

"And I'd have died a happy —"

"You might have found the time to mention," she snarled, "that you thought I was a total stranger instead of the woman you married!"

"My body could tell —"

"Because if I had known that you didn't know that we do things like that together all of the time —"

"We do?"

"Yes!" she cried furiously.

"In that case, I married very well, didn't I?"

"I might have been a little more...A little less..."

"Yes?" he prodded.

She sputtered, "I would not have..."

His anger was fading now, being replaced by amusement. And comfort. This *did* feel familiar. Wonderfully so. "Would not have what?" he asked, cheerfully goading her. Did he even like arguing with her? He *must* be in love.

"I would *never* have —"

"Put my hands on your breasts?" he offered helpfully. "Or taken me in your mouth —"

"Yes!"

"With, I might add, stunning expertise. Is it always that good, or was this morning special?"

"You'll just have to live with not knowing, won't you?"

"I guess you wouldn't have put my hand between your legs, either?"

"I did *not* —" She paused. "Did I?"

"And showed me how to make you happy."

"Since you'd *forgotten*."

"Still, I muddled through well enough, didn't I?" She grunted noncommittally in reply, so he continued, "Oh, well, if I've left you wanting, we can certainly —"

"Oh, stop," she said in exasperation. "Enough."

"Of course, at the time, you seemed pretty pleased. But I'll be the first to admit that I'm not quite myself, so —"

"Are you sure?" she said dryly, also sounding more amused than angry now. "Because you're starting to sound *just* like yourself."

He came closer, ready to make up. "Am I an irritating husband?"

"Very," she whispered, reaching for him.

They bumped noses in the dark, laughed softly, and then kissed. They were gentle, mindful of his sore lip — and of each other's volatile feelings right now.

"I'm sorry," he whispered. "I came back from death, and you were there. So beautiful. So free with my body...and with yours, too."

"Well, you're my husband," she whispered back, "even if you don't remember that."

He slid his arms around her, trying to imagine what this must be like for her, being with a spouse who didn't know her. She hesitated for a moment, then embraced him, too.

Her palms were smooth and warm on his naked back, and exquisitely gentle on the bandages she had put over the stinging marks of the whip the Gestapo had used on him. Her fingers absently kneaded his shoulders. Her breasts flattened against his chest, the worn fabric of her slip a delicate barrier between them. Her flat belly snuggled against his groin, and she ran her hands down to his buttocks, which she cupped and suddenly gripped hard, pulling his hips possessively against her.

"This body is mine as much as yours," she informed him fiercely. "You gave it to me."

Wedding vows. "With my body I thee worship."

"Yes. And you have been...well, a *very* dutiful husband in that respect."

"But not in other respects?" he asked.

She pressed her face against his neck. "As much as you can be, Paul. But the war is not kind to lovers. Or to marriage."

No. Obviously not. A secret marriage. A wife who was often alone. A husband who told her precious little about his work.

"How did I wind up in your cart?" he asked suddenly.

She sighed shakily. "That last time I saw you was in May. You —"

"What's the date now?"

"June fourth. Almost June fifth, I suppose. It's nearly midnight." Feeling his tension, she prodded, "Paul? What is it?"

"I don't know." June...June...D-Day.

The invasion will be soon.

He didn't know how he knew, but he knew.

Words and images suddenly flooded his mind, making his head ache fiercely.

Neptune. Overlord. Omaha. H-Hour. Utah. D-Day. Poker.

"I didn't know how long you would be gone," Gabrielle continued. "You're always vague. And your cover is always that you're trying to get back into wine brokering, going to cultivate some contact or investigate some possible business opportunity which seldom works out."

"What a pathetic fellow I must be."

He felt her smile. "You're good at making it appear so."

"Still, it seems that the Germans stopped believing it."

Now she trembled briefly. After a moment, she continued, "Then three...no, four days ago, Deschamps told me —"

"Who?"

She hesitated for a moment. He wondered why. Then she said, "Jean Deschamps. A musician from Le Havre who's working in Didier's café now. He's in the Resistance. Deschamps is one of the few people besides me and Didier who knew you were an American. And he told me that he found out that you had been arrested by the Gestapo and were being interrogated. They took you to —"

"— to a chateau they use. It's a few kilometers outside of Caen."

She froze. "You're remembering?"

He knew where he was, of course. The infamous chateau. Didier had died here. He would die here, too.

"I must be," he murmured vaguely, trying to seize and hold the memory, trying to squeeze everything he could from it.

"I knew you would want me to do nothing, to carry on as usual. But I couldn't, Paul, I just couldn't!" She sounded as if she expected him to argue about it. He didn't. "So I found your binoculars, and I came here to get my uncle's horse and cart. Then I hid the cart in the woods, about two kilometers away from the chateau, and I put the horse in a pasture that was closer. And I began my vigil, watching the chateau." She brought her hands up to his waist and dug her fingers in there. "I thought I was waiting for your corpse. If they had arrested you on a mission, they must know everything, or at least suspect enough to torture and kill you. I knew they'd never let you go alive. I knew I'd never see you again...But I thought if, maybe, they got rid of your body afterwards...If I could at least bury you..."

He felt her tears and held onto her, letting her feel how alive he was. Her skin had dried, and her hair smelled sweet, like fresh rainwater. He wondered if she had washed it, too, today. "Shhh..."

"And then they dumped your body outside the gates. Filthy and bloody, but even from far away, through the binoculars, I knew it was you. Of course I knew. I didn't care if they knew I wanted you, didn't care what they might do to me. You were dead, and I wanted to die, too. I went to you. I was crying..." She shivered. "And you were breathing." She hugged him fiercely now, careless of the wounds on his back. He ignored the pain and welcomed her embrace. "You were *alive*." More tears. Her voice quivered with relief.

She continued, more energetically now, "I don't know where I got the strength. I just know there was no way I was going to let you die. I got you as far as I could, dragging you, making you use your legs as much as you could, carrying most of your weight myself. You were completely incoherent, with no idea what was going on. I was sure you didn't even know who I was...Which," she added sadly, "you didn't. Did you?"

"I don't remember any of this. Even though you got my legs to work a little, I doubt anything else was functioning."

"Anyhow, I eventually got you to the horse and slung over his back. Then I led him to the cart and harnessed him. Getting you into the cart was even harder than getting you onto the horse."

"And you covered me with straw, smuggled me past a checkpoint, and brought me here by dawn."

"Yes."

No wonder he had married her. He was obviously no fool when it came to choosing a woman. He kissed her forehead. "I owe you my life."

"Yes, you do," she whispered. "And I will not let you take it away from me." Her mouth was warm and sweet against his. "So be careful coming down that ladder now. And eat something, for goodness sake."

CHAPTER FOUR

June 5, 1944

There was no window in the portion of the barn underneath the loft, so Gabrielle lighted a lantern in that corner as she waited for Paul to come inside. He had absurdly insisted on being left alone out in the dark while he attended to the call of nature—as if they hadn't shared intimate quarters, with all that implied, for over a year.

She briefly rested her head against the rough wooden wall of the barn, emotionally exhausted. Worrying about him after he had left on his mission had been hard, as always. Hearing he had been arrested by the Gestapo was horrifying, and nothing in her life would ever equal the agony of believing him doomed to certain death at their hands. Then there was the incredulous joy of discovering him alive, the terror that he wouldn't survive, the anxiety and sheer physical exertion of getting him here, caring for him...Through it all, the heavy weight of other fears loomed over her, breathing hotly down her neck, weighing darkly on her back.

If her associates in the Resistance knew he was alive...

No! They won't find out. I won't let them.

Not until she herself had the answers they wanted.

That he should have no memory of what happened in the chateau...It destroyed whatever half-formed plans had been in her mind. She was flooded with doubt and fear, which in turn led to guilt and uncertainty.

And no memory of me...

She couldn't stand it. She was amazed she hadn't crumbled under the weight of her despair when she discovered he didn't remember her.

They had loved each other without reserve. Before meeting him, she hadn't known it was possible for two people to be as close as they became after falling in love.

He was half of her heartbeat, the part of her soul which had been missing.

She had been that dear to him, too. She'd known it, and he had never let her doubt it. He had understood her, cherished her, teased her, put up with her, fought with her, worried about her, encouraged her...*loved* her.

But today....he'd had to ask her name.

Gabrielle stifled a sob and forced herself to concentrate on doing something useful. She heated water over the lantern's flickering flame. Then she briefly set aside the little pot and replaced the lamp's glass chimney before steeping some of her hoarded tea leaves in the water.

Tea, coffee, food, medicine, stockings, clothes...Everything was so hard to acquire these days. Paul had a good salary accumulating in America, his OSS pay, and a few

secret stashes of cash here which he used for bribes, weapons, and emergencies. Gabrielle had never dared use that money for their daily needs, though; they couldn't afford to attract any envy or attention.

She nearly wept as she thought of his injuries now. She should have risked stocking up on more bandages, more black-market medicine. He tried to hide it from her, but she could tell he was in pain.

Oh, my love...

How could he not know her?

He was the same man as always. The man she loved. The man she had wanted since the day they first met...But one with no memory of her now, of their love, of their marriage, of all they meant to each other.

A cat in heat.

Her blood burned with embarrassment as she remembered making love to him at dawn. It was one thing to behave that way with the man who loved her, who had pledged his lifelong devotion to her. The man who had taught her exactly what he liked, damn it, and encouraged her to experiment with his body, and hers, through all the long, luscious nights in the bed they shared! It was *quite* another thing, however, to behave the way she had with a man who didn't even know her, who had no awareness of the life they shared and the love they gave each other.

Yes, he had seemed confused, dazed, not quite himself. But that was to be expected of a man who had been tortured by the Gestapo and left for dead outside the gates of the chateau! How was she to know she was making love to someone who didn't speak her name because he couldn't remember it? He had touched her like her husband, responded to her as her lover, looked at her the way he always did.

She strained the tea.

Well, there was no point in dwelling on it, and it was silly to be embarrassed. He *was* her husband, after all.

Writhing against his hand, manipulating his fingers to show him what she wanted...

"Oh, God."

Sucking on him like he was made of sugar, relishing the hard, velvety feel of him in her mouth...Massaging him with her tongue, because she knew he loved that, and she loved doing it for him...

She sliced some of the bread she had gone home to get yesterday while he was sleeping. Before she came back here last night and took off her clothes for him.

Wanting his hands on her breasts, because she loved the way he massaged them. Pulling his hands to her hot, wanting body while he lay in the dark, weak, confused, half-dead, and not even knowing her name...Moaning and pushing her hard nipples into his warm palms...

"Cheese," she muttered. She would give him cheese with the bread. She'd nearly forgotten she had brought it.

Rubbing his quivering parts in the early dawn light, delighting in touching him, arousing him. So thrilled that he was alive, there, hers, whole...

"Hard." The bread was hard. Day old bread. She had nothing better to give him.

She felt the hot throbbing between her legs and knew what she wanted. She wanted *him* again. Now that he knew her name. Now that he could say it.

"Well, he is my husband." And they had never been able to get enough of each other. Not from the start.

She could make him remember. She knew she could. And she had to, because the longer this continued, the more danger they were in.

She turned when she heard him reenter the barn. He looked slightly damp from the fine drizzle now misting the air. She prayed the slackening of the rain was a sign that the foul weather and cloudy skies would finally be past them by morning.

"What took you so long?" she demanded.

He hiked up the blanket which he had insisted on draping around his waist to cover his nakedness. As if she didn't know exactly what was under there. As if she weren't his wife, with every right to see all she wanted to see.

Clothes. She rolled her eyes. After the first time they ever made love, right here, he wouldn't let her put on her clothes for eighteen hours. He just kept looking at her, touching her even in his sleep, waking to make love to her again...

She felt an irrational surge of temper flare through her. How could he not remember?

She took a steadying breath, recognizing how overwrought she was. Well, who wouldn't be, under the circumstances?

"I said," she prodded, "what took you so long?"

He nodded towards the far wall, where there was a blanket-draped window, then winced at the pain this caused in his injured head. "I was making sure you were right."

"About what?"

He glanced toward the lantern in the corner under the loft. "That it can't be seen from outside."

She put her hands on her hips. "Well, that *is* just like you."

She saw his mouth twitch at her irritable tone. "Is that for me?" He moved towards the food.

"Don't change the subject," she snapped. "Wandering around in the dark, in your condition, because no one but you is a good judge of what is safe or not safe. That is *so* like you."

"And tea, too? How thoughtful."

She sighed, seeing that he wasn't going to let her pick another fight. It was probably just as well, since fighting wouldn't make her feel better now. Fighting wasn't what she really wanted.

"Sit down," she ordered, indicating a rough little work table and a stool.

He sat on the stool, moving carefully, but with more ease than his earlier movements. It was probably good for him to be up and around now, she decided. And certainly good for him to take some nourishment. "Bread, cheese, fruit, tomatoes." She placed the plate on the table and shrugged. "I'll do better tomorrow."

He reached out to squeeze her free hand as he took the plate from her. "This is good," he assured her.

Paul...

Even the cut lip, swollen eye, and general bruising couldn't hide how attractive his face was. Dark-haired, dark-eyed, strong-boned. He tanned easily and had already picked up sun-warmed color even though summer was only beginning—though the past week in the chateau, with all they had done to him there, meant he was now a little paler than when she had last seen him. In their home. In their bed. He had made love to her, held her until she slept, and then left in the night, as she had known he would.

Seeing him finish his cup of tea, she poured more, then sweetened it. One shallow spoonful. Just the way he liked it. Not that he was much of a tea drinker. But coffee was hard to get.

He was thirty-three years old, and she supposed he didn't remember that, either. Big boned, broad-shouldered. Very fit. And, as she had good reason to know, full of stamina and endurance.

Heat pooled in her belly.

To keep her hands busy, she started removing the bandages on his back.

"Do you have to do that right now?" he asked.

"Yes," she said tersely. She had to touch him.

"Ow," he said mildly as a bandage stuck to one of the welts. They had whipped him. More than once. Two of the welts were quite bad.

"But most of them look better," she murmured to herself.

She gently cleaned his back, then let the wounds have some air. When he was done eating what she had given him, she offered him more food and was pleased when he accepted. A returning appetite was a good sign. He had seemed so close to death when she found him. Now she put fresh dressings on his back while he ate more, wondering if the beating would leave scars. He'd always had the most beautiful back. She, who was a sculptress by training and vocation, had felt uniquely qualified to appreciate the body he worshipped her with. The ripely-sculpted, smooth-fleshed, muscular beauty of his back had always entranced her.

She cleared away his plate when he was done eating, then finished dressing his wounds as best she could. After pouring him yet another cup of tea, she went outside to the water pump.

"What are you doing?" he asked when he saw her, damp from the weather, carrying a bucket of water back into the barn.

"Your hair is dirty," she said critically.

He eyed the bucket. "I don't think I—"

"I'll do it."

"Oh." He suddenly smiled. "In that case..."

She found an old flannel rag and, ignoring his fastidious protests, draped it over his shoulders. Then she turned him so that the bucket on the floor was between his feet. She placed a hand on his head and instructed, "Bend over. Slowly."

He did. "Ow."

She supposed the blood was rushing to his head, despite his careful movements. That swelling...Thank God they hadn't killed him with that blow. Not wanting to cause him more pain, she quickly sluiced water over his hair with a tin cup, letting the excess fall back into the bucket. "All right. Sit up."

She soaped his hair, then started gently rubbing his scalp, careful not to put pressure on his head injury. He was tense for a few moments, then closed his eyes, sighed, and relaxed.

She stood close, pressing her stomach against his bandaged back, while she worked the lather through his thick, short hair.

"That feels good," he murmured. "And...familiar."

She paused, seized by a desire to cry. A need to beg him to remember her, to come back to her.

"Gabrielle?"

She continued massaging his scalp, letting the lather-slick strands of his dark hair twine around her fingers. The heat of his back soaked through her slip, warming the chill inside of her.

"Do you do this often for me?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "Whenever you come home...I've always missed you so much, been so afraid you're dead this time..." She sighed. "So I like any excuse to touch you. To keep my hands on you. To be close. Like this..."

"It's very hard for you," he guessed. "The work I do. The way we live."

She rubbed her knuckles into his nape. "It's hard for you, too," she admitted. "You don't like me being here. Working for the Resistance. You've begged me many times to leave France. Since we met, really."

He turned his head slightly. "Tell me how we met."

"Bend over again," she instructed.

He did, and she started rinsing his hair, pouring cupfuls of water into it, watching the dark, gleaming hanks emerge from beneath the pale foam.

"Didier brought me to meet you," she said.

"Ah."

"You stared at me a lot."

"I believe that."

"I was supposed to encourage a Nazi major to court and seduce me. So I could get access to his secrets. You told Didier it was a bad plan, we must call it off."

"Of course."

She smiled now, remembering. "I thought you didn't trust me, didn't think I was capable or reliable."

"No, that wasn't it."

"You're remembering?" she asked hopefully.

He shrugged. "I can just tell. I would have seen from the beginning how capable you are."

Yes, she knew now that was true. He had seen that. And so much more. "Sit up."

He did, eyes closed. She dried his face, then started drying his hair.

"You avoided me at first. That...well, it hurt my feelings, because I was attracted to you." She decided not to remind him that within days of meeting him she had broken off her brief affair with Jean Deschamps, the musician in her Resistance group. What did it matter now? "Then one day you came to my cottage..."

"And?" he prodded.

She pressed against his head injury as gently as possible, letting the cloth absorb the water without rubbing. "You saw my work—"

"Your work?"

Her heart contracted yet again with a sense of loss. "I'm an artist."

He stiffened. "Wait." He pushed the towel away from his face and seized one of her hands. He studied it with intense concentration. "Strong hands, especially for a woman..." He closed his eyes, evidently trying to call up a memory. "Sculpture..."

"Yes." Her heart started to beat harder.

"You do...*beautiful* sculptures. Strong. Intense. More alive...than life."

Her smile was tremulous. "You said things like that the first time you came to my cottage and saw the things I was working on. And I believed you—"

"I meant it."

"—because you obviously weren't trying to seduce me. You wouldn't come within arm's reach of me, and you acted like a scalded cat if I tried to get closer."

"You make me sound like a nervous virgin," he protested.

She giggled. "Worse."

He let her pull away her hand to continue drying his hair as she said, "But admiring my work like that...Well, it was the most effective seduction of my entire life." She shook her head. "It's so hard for a woman to be taken seriously in the art world. Only *men's* art is serious and important and worthy of real attention, you know." She made a disgusted sound—something he had always called her "French noise."

"But I am a man of rare taste and perception," he surmised, "and so I immediately appreciated your talent."

"Something like that," she said dryly. "Then you revealed the purpose of your visit."

He turned and squinted at her with his good eye. "If I wouldn't even touch you..."

"You had come to urge me to run away. To leave occupied France. Maybe go live with my relatives in the Pyrenees. You also offered to help me get to America."

"Ah. But I obviously wasn't very persuasive."

"Oh, you were," she assured him. "Very persuasive. I thought it was a shame you weren't negotiating with Hitler."

Now he grinned. "But you're just the tiniest bit stubborn?"

"France is my home," she said firmly. "I'm certainly not leaving it before the Nazis do."

He frowned. "That sounds familiar."

"We've argued about this a lot," she explained.

"Ah."

She finished drying his hair, then tidied it by combing her fingers through it. "Much better," she declared. Then she rubbed her fingertips along his beard-roughened jaw. "But you need a shave."

"Too bad there's no..." He stopped speaking when she produced a razor.

"I brought this from home, when I got the food and other things."

"You think of everything." His mouth quirked. "Everything except my clothes."

"I wasn't expecting a sudden attack of modesty." She used the towel to dampen his face, then started lathering it. "Besides, I didn't think you'd be upright and active so soon. When I brought you here, you were so...Well, I'm very glad you're healing so fast."

He closed his dark, long-lashed eyes and submitted easily to her ministrations. As she began shaving him, she did her best to be gentle with the part of his face which was bruised and swollen. "Does it hurt much?" she asked, touching the injured eye with her fingertips.

"Oh, only in the sense that someone beat it black and blue."

She bit her lip. "Also purple, yellow, and red."

"I must look like a Picasso painting."

"Wonderful. You can remember Picasso, but not me."

"I wasn't trying to forget *him*."

His eyes flew open and he gazed at her in amazement, evidently as startled as she was by that comment.

"You were *trying* to forget me?" she asked weakly.

He stared hard at her face. "Don't think about her," he whispered. "Not even a thought."

"Who said that?"

"I did."

"I mean —"

"I..." He looked around distractedly. "I kept telling myself that. Until it came true. Until there was nothing in my head about her."

"Her," Gabrielle prodded.

"You?" he asked.

Paul...

"I was afraid to think about her," he continued vaguely, focusing on inner shadows now. "Afraid I might say her name in my sleep, ask for her when I was barely conscious. Afraid I'd put her in danger." Their eyes met. "You," he whispered, sounding both convinced and confused.

"If you can remember that —"

"Then why can't I remember *you*?" he supplied. He brushed his cheek against her outstretched fingertips. "Maybe I'm starting to, *chérie*."

Now her heart beat even harder. "And are you starting to remember the rest?"

"What rest?"

"Whatever else happened in the chateau!" she said impatiently.

"Beating and interrogation seem like a pretty safe guess."

She needed to know more than that. "But did you —"

"Ah!" He lowered his head, wincing.

"It hurts?" she asked.

"No." He realized how stupid that lie sounded and amended, "A little."

So "little" that his half-shaven face had gone pale and his eyes were starting to look glassy.

"Paul, you —"

"I'm fine," he insisted, his voice hoarse.

Men.

"Is there any more tea?" he asked.

"I'll make some as soon as I've finished shaving you. Have some water for now."

He accepted the cup she offered him, drank with his eyes closed, and sat very still as she finished shaving what she judged to be a week's worth of growth. When she was done, she made him more tea. He sat sipping it quietly while she tidied up around him.

Some of his color had returned when she asked, "Feeling better?"

"Yes."

He still looked tense. She came up behind him and put her hands on his shoulders, hoping to soothe him. His skin was warm and smooth, the muscles thick and sturdy beneath his flesh. Also hard as rock, at the moment. She started rubbing them gently.

He groaned. "*Oh*, that feels good."

She felt the hot glow of desire that touching him always ignited inside her. It spread through her body, warming all the cold places. Her skin tingled with awareness of him as she kneaded his muscles and caressed his shoulders.

"The first time I ever saw you without your shirt, I wanted to do this," she murmured, remembering that day. And also remembering, after they became lovers, what her massages inevitably led to them doing together.

"When was the first time?" His voice was husky.

"It was a few weeks after you came here. Didier had us watching the roads for a shipment of artillery. I came one night to report having seen it. It was much bigger than expected." Gabrielle was starting to feel a little hot, as if her clothes were too heavy and needed to be removed. "Didier insisted we wake you to discuss what we should do. So he and I went out to your shed..." She leaned down and whispered, "That's when I found out you almost always sleep naked."

"How shortsighted of me," he muttered.

"That's what I thought," she agreed. "Until you started sleeping with *me*. Then I decided I liked it." She liked curling up against his warm, naked back on a chilly morning. She liked waking up in the middle of the night to find him hot and hard and ready for her. And she loved the intimacy of him sprawled naked across her bed in the middle of the day, on those rare afternoons when they were able to enjoy a few uninterrupted hours together.

"Do you sleep naked?" he asked.

"Unless you're planning an annulment, I suppose you'll find out," she murmured.

She felt his puff of laughter and pressed herself against the length of his naked, bandaged back. She could make him remember. She *would*. "That night, when Didier and I came to the shed to speak to you, I saw the way your skin was..." She switched to French, unable to make love to him well enough in his foreign tongue. "Like polished oak. The way your muscles were...like sculpture. The hair on your chest..." She slipped one hand around his torso to touch the light furring over his breast. "I couldn't even think straight." She rubbed her cheek against his damp hair. "Didier told me to report...and I just stood there staring at you, like some mute schoolgirl."

"Surely I wasn't naked?"

She smiled. "No. You were buttoning your pants and buckling your belt. My mouth went dry. I wanted..."

"Yes?" he asked archly.

Heat spread through her belly and seeped down to pool in her loins, which throbbed in response to her memories and ached with fresh desire for him. "I wanted you to take your pants back off. To put your arms around me. To touch me..."

"And?"

"And Didier saw that I had lost my wits, so he started talking, telling you what I had told him. You were staring back at me, and you kept saying, 'What? Huh? Say that again.'"

"I guess I wanted to take my pants back off, too?"

"You've never said."

"I haven't?"

"We've never talked about that night," she admitted. "I mean..."

"This is the first time you're telling me you wanted my body that night?"

"Yes."

He turned his head slightly. "Did I look like I wanted to touch you, too?"

She smiled. "Maybe."

"I'll bet I did. I'll bet I was stupid with wanting you, especially if I saw how you were looking at me."

The renewed realization that he didn't remember made her heart ache.

As if aware of this, he gently prodded, "So what happened next?"

"You turned your back and started looking for your shirt." She brushed her fingers across his broad shoulders. "And I wanted to touch you just like this." She pressed both her palms into his warm skin and inhaled his scent. "Then you put your shirt on."

"How unkind of me."

"That's what I thought." She kneaded his shoulders, seeking and unlocking the tension there. When he sighed and sagged, she suggested, "Put your head down."

He folded his arms on the rough work table, then rested his head atop them. "Your touch is magic," he said.

Magic enough to make you remember everything?

She moved her hands to his neck, finding the tendons there and warming them into supple relaxation.

"So I was still..." He sighed with pleasure before continuing, "...playing hard to get?"

"Didier was amused. I was confused and frustrated."

"I've a shrewd suspicion I was confused and frustrated, too." He groaned as she stroked his neck, then said, "Falling in love when I was supposed to be concentrating on my duty. Disrupting plans because I was worried about your safety. Trying to convince a useful Underground operative to run away." His breathing was deep and even now, his muscles giving up their pain-locked stiffness to her coaxing. "I punished

myself for this craziness by denying what I wanted most—and that only made me crazier.”

She couldn’t tell if he was remembering, or just figuring it out. Maybe even *he* didn’t know which was the case.

“I tried to stay away from you...”

“Yes.”

“But...” He shifted and twitched his left shoulder, showing her that he wanted her to massage it. When she did, he sighed with delight. “But...Didier knew. Didier...I liked him.”

“You remember him?”

“I remember that I liked him. I remember...” He nodded and turned his head sideways. “I remember that he knew I loved you.”

“What else?”

He opened his eyes and stared at the far wall of the barn. She felt the tension start to creep back into his body. “I...I don’t know...” His breathing became uneven. Gabrielle immediately regretted pushing him. “There’s...*ah*...” He turned his head and pressed his temple against his forearm, evidently trying to stop the pounding ache from returning in full force.

“Don’t,” she urged. “Shhh. Shhh...Let it go.”

She melted down over him, rubbing her cotton-clad breasts against his back, wrapping her arms around him as she pressed her cheek against his hair. Trying to comfort him with her presence, with her weight and warmth and love.

He was panting a little. “Tell me more.” His eyes were squeezed shut.

She rubbed her hand over his balled fist. “Didier lost his sweetheart in the Great War. Instead of becoming bitter, he became a hopeless romantic. He saw what was between us and wanted us to...claim it. So did I.” She kissed his earlobe, remembering the many days and nights of emotional torment and sexual frustration she had endured because of his scruples. “But you were so stubborn.”

“Pot. Kettle. Black.”

She was pleased to see his humor returning and his fist relaxing. She moved one hand to stroke up and down his ribcage, luxuriating in the feel of him beneath her palm, delighting when he quivered under her touch.

“Wait,” he murmured. “Didn’t you say Didier has a widow?”

“Yes.”

“So he got married?”

She nodded, her cheek moving against the soft carpet of his hair. “His sweetheart was dead,” she said, feeling her voice reverberate through her chest to echo against his back, “but he wasn’t.”

“And a man has needs,” he murmured lazily.

Now she let her hand creep towards his modestly blanketed lap. "Some men even more than others."

"And some men have very demanding wives."

She paused and tilted her head to look suspiciously at him. His eyes were still closed, but a smile curved his mouth. "How's your lip?"

"As good as new," he lied. He shifted on the stool, jarring her seeking hand, and asked innocently, "Were you looking for something?"

"Nothing important," she assured him, straightening up and returning to massaging his shoulders.

He sighed with disappointment. "Just as well, really."

"Oh?"

"To tell the truth," he confided, "I'm a little sore there."

"Sore? You didn't seem sore this...Um..."

"No, this morning that was about the only part of me that *wasn't* sore. But now..." He shifted again. "Not that I'm complaining."

"You have nothing to complain about," she pointed out. *Really.*

"It was well worth a little soreness," he assured her.

"I wasn't rough," she insisted. Then she paused, remembering more accurately. "Was I?"

"Well, I'm weakened," he said generously. "Not as resilient as I probably am under normal circumstances."

"If you're looking for sympathy —"

"I'm sure I would know better than to seek it here."

"If you hadn't said things like 'harder' and 'deeper,' then I wouldn't have —"

"Did I really say that?"

"There's nothing wrong with *my* memory," she reminded him.

"I don't remember speaking at all."

"So if you're sore now —"

"Just a *little* sore. Nothing that would prevent us fr —"

"You have no one to blame —"

"I'm not *blaming* —"

"—but yourself."

He reached for one of her hands and brought it to his lips. "I can't claim to remember," he murmured, his warm breath caressing her fingers, "but I feel certain that you do that better than any other woman I've ever known."

"I should," she told him. "God knows I've had enough practice."

He laughed — then winced at some new pain this caused him. "I keep you busy, do I?"

"As I've said —"

"And you..." He pressed her knuckles against his cheek, his eyes still closed. "Can't keep your hands off me."

Her heart was thudding. "You're guessing."

She knew this mood of his. Knew it so well—even if *he* was currently a stranger to it, feeling his way blindly through his own habits of intimacy with her. The teasing mingled with tenderness. The playfulness edged with hot desire. The dark strength tempered by bright gentleness.

"All right, I'm guessing about you," he conceded, "but I can tell..." He sat up slowly. "...that I can't keep my hands off you." He used her hand to draw her around to face him, so that she was standing between him and the table.

His dark eyes were soft in the dim, flickering light. He looked at her...the way he often looked at her. She felt her eyes mist even as desire knotted in her belly.

"Do you know me at all?" she whispered, longing for him to remember her as she gazed down at him.

He was honest, as he always was with her. "I'm not sure. You seem so familiar, but I..." He shrugged, his expression regretful and frustrated.

"I want to make you remember me," she said huskily, her whole body aching for him.

"I want to remember you," he assured her, clearly understanding what she meant.

Gabrielle saw him hesitate, even so—probably because she'd been so annoyed about this morning. So she cupped his bruised, clean-shaven face between her hands. "You're my husband," she said encouragingly, "and I have never wanted to deny you."

His eyes grew lambent, sending her senses reeling. "And if I weren't your husband," he whispered, "right now, I'd be wishing that I was."

Her mouth trembled. She hadn't wanted to ask, but she had needed some sign from him that he was glad she was his wife, that he was pleased rather than appalled by their unremembered marriage. She had needed this and, in that way he'd always had with her, he had known and he gave.

"Paul," she whispered.

He sighed, then lowered his head and pressed his face against her belly. "Gabrielle."

"Let's go upstairs," she murmured.

"No," he said, still seated on his stool. "This is fine. Right here."

CHAPTER FIVE

June 5, 1944

Gabrielle felt his fingers on the back of her knee, gentle, exploring. He stroked down to her calf, then cupped his palm over the curve of muscle there.

Her legs weakened as his other hand slid under the hem of her slip to caress the back of her thigh. She moved her hands to his broad shoulders and let him take some of her weight as she sagged towards him, her breath shallow and faster than before.

He nuzzled her stomach, pressing his face into the crumpled fabric of her slip. He inhaled deeply, then sighed, rubbing his cheek against her. "You smell...so good," he murmured. "Familiar..." He inhaled again, breathing her in. "I've been here before."

"Here?" she repeated shakily.

He lowered his head, nuzzled her hip, then followed the curve of her thigh. "Hmmm. Like this. Buried in you."

She tilted her head back and caressed his still-damp hair, sighing as his hands worked magic on her tired legs. Massaging, kneading, easing her tension as she had eased his. No man but Paul had ever done this for her—tended her, soothed her, nourished her with his touch.

"I come here often," he whispered against her abdomen while his hands worked the taut muscles of her calves.

"Hmmm?"

"In my thoughts," he explained, his hands moving up so his thumbs could make exquisite movements around her knees, which grew even weaker and more pliant in response. "I can...well, not remember, exactly." He shrugged. "I can...tell. Feel it." He kissed her midriff. "Well, maybe it is a memory. Everything's all jumbled up in my head."

"You come here in your thoughts?" She felt dreamy, almost giddy as she looked down at him through half-closed eyes.

He lifted his head long enough to meet her gaze. "When I'm alone." He frowned as he tried to make sense of whatever was in his head. "When I'm away. Lonesome. Missing you."

She nodded. "That's when I come here, too."

They kissed, lips and tongues gentle, warm, slow. Then she pressed her forehead against his and felt his breath tremble into her mouth as he continued his massage, his fingers kneading her inner thighs as his palms rubbed the backs of her legs.

She started breathing deeper, feeling flushed and enervated. It was as if the air all around them was caressing her now, too. Seducing her. Planting fleeting kisses along her arms and dropping wispy caresses on her nape, her shoulder, her back.

He kissed her stomach with an open mouth, his breath hot and damp through the thin material. She felt his tongue there, moving languidly, silky and solid through the fabric covering her body.

"Pull it up," she whispered, meaning her hem.

"In a minute," he whispered back.

His slow hands worked their way up her bare skin until they found her panties. She made an incoherent sound when he slid his hands underneath them, all the way to the waistband, claiming her with a confidence which was achingly familiar to her, and then pulled them down. Slowly, so slowly. Slipping the worn cotton over her thighs, tickling over her knees, teasing over her calves and ankles. Trembling past her feet.

His hands traveled the same path back up her legs, and their eyes met again as he caressed her bottom. "I know your name this time."

She nodded and kissed his forehead, careful of his bruised eye.

"But I don't know much else right now," he continued.

She swallowed and gently traced his head injury, sure that the swelling was going down. Believing that with all her heart.

"*Mon Dieu*, they could have killed you with that blow." Her voice broke.

"I don't want you to feel..." He took her hand and held it against his cheek. "We could stop now. Wait until I remember more."

"Is that what you want to do?"

He used his other hand to drag her knee forward until it was pressing against his groin. He was very hard. "I'm asking," he said, "what *you* want to do."

"I've already told you," she said softly.

"I just —"

"I'm the one who remembers what we are to each other. What has been between us."

"I didn't mean what I said about a cat in heat," he murmured.

She smiled. "Yes, you did."

"You were fantastic." He pressed his face into her belly again, still holding her knee against his groin...moving her leg now so that she rubbed him lightly. "I'm a very lucky man."

"Then act like my husband." She didn't hide the longing she felt, her need for him to be as he was before. "Make love to me." That was what she wanted. More than satisfying her desire, even more than reaffirming that he was alive and whole, she needed his love now. She needed the open sharing of his heart which he himself had taught her to need from him.

His grip tightened on her bottom as he said, "Let's make love to each other."

"Yes," she whispered. "That's what I meant."

She gasped as he suddenly rose to his feet. Her hands clutched his shoulders as he lifted her onto the rough table behind her. He stroked his palms around her hips and over the tops of her thighs, caressing her languidly underneath her slip as he slid his hands between her legs to push them apart. Then he nestled into her, pulling her legs tightly against his blanket-draped hips as he pressed his groin into the warm juncture between her thighs.

The rough material was deliciously abrasive. "That tickles," she told him.

"Oh, yeah?" He wriggled his hips, making her laugh.

She tightened her legs around his hips to make him stop. He froze and swallowed hard. "Gabrielle..."

Their breathing gusted softly as their gazes met and held. His injured eye was bloodshot and partly-closed, but looking right at her. His good eye was dewy with tenderness, dark brown and intelligent even in the midst of his passion. She had always found his eyes, with their thick lashes and high arched brows, captivating. The shape of his mouth gave away his sensual nature, despite the self-discipline and austerity he often imposed on himself. His lower lip was still swollen and bruised, and so she was careful as she kissed him.

His skin was inviting and exciting in its warmth, having lost the alarming hot flush of his earlier fever. All the strength she remembered was in his hands again, which kneaded and massaged her thighs as he held them against his hips. She raised her knees briefly and then dragged them down deliberately, tugging away the already-slipping blanket wrapped around his waist. He drew in a sharp breath through his nostrils when the thick, rough cloth caught briefly on his erection, which then sprang free, bobbing eagerly, as the blanket fell to the ground. Their intertwined bodies shifted slightly as he kicked it away.

She braced her hands behind her and leaned back to let her gaze travel slowly down the length of his body, following his hard chest muscles past his ribs—a little more noticeable than they'd been ten days ago—to his smooth stomach. A thin trickle of dark hair led her visual quest past his abdomen to the rough nest where his penis and testicles were swollen and tight. His well-muscled thighs shifted in the embrace of her legs and he took a deep breath.

"You were right." He grinned when she met his gaze again. "I *do* like you looking at me naked."

She felt his straining cock brush the tender flesh of her inner thigh. "Yes, I can tell."

He rested his palms on her legs and nudged his hips closer to her. She looked down at her lap and saw the hard line of his erection burrowing underneath the pale fabric of her slip.

"Like a U-boat," she mused.

"Oh, it's not *that* big," he said modestly, making her laugh again.

He paused when the tip of his penis bumped into her belly, sighed, and then pushed a little, rubbing himself against her bare skin.

"That part of you..."

"Yes?" he prodded verbally while his velvet hard cock prodded her stomach.

"..feels..."

"Hmmm?"

"...so hot..." She looked down again, watching the vaguely defined, shifting shapes of their silent dance against the worn cotton of her slip. "Like you've still got a fever."

"I do, *there*." He rested his head against hers and looked down, too.

They were both breathing harder. Her breasts itched and throbbed inside her slip, impatient with the friction of the material against her aching nipples. His nipples were hard now, too, and darker than before, flushed and excited amidst the brown hair lightly covering his chest.

She arched her back and rubbed her breasts against his chest. His eyes grew heavy-lidded, and he lowered his head to kiss her neck. Hungry for him, she arched higher, her breath catching at the feel of his warm, moist mouth on her neck, her shoulder, the curve of her breast. His hips moved convulsively, and he poked her sharply in the belly.

She laughed shakily. "Do you at least remember where it's supposed to go?"

"It's coming back to me," he assured her, his voice dark and husky. "Somewhere around..." His hand teased her, moving around her skin as blindly as his cock. "No, no..."

She was giggling now. "Paul..."

"Don't worry, I'll remember..."

She closed her eyes and sucked breath through her teeth when his palm cupped her in the right place.

"Found it?" he whispered.

"You're..." She pressed herself against his palm and grunted. "Very close..."

"And you're very..." His mouth was hot against her cheek. "*Very*, aren't you?"

"Yes," she sighed, opening her legs wider for him.

He combed his fingers through the fine curls there.

"Yes," she murmured. "Yes, yes."

Then his lips were on hers, his tongue demanding entry. She opened her mouth for him the way she opened her legs, welcoming him, welcoming everything he gave her and urging him to take all he wanted. He tickled the roof of her mouth with his tongue while his fingers tickled between her legs. She shivered and moaned deep in her throat, digging her fingers into his shoulders as she tried to make him stop teasing her. It only made him tease her even more, his fingers fluttering along the delicate, damp cleft while his tongue flickered against hers.

"Paul," she whimpered.

"Hmmm?"

"Now," she insisted. She had missed him so much, been so afraid...she couldn't stand this! "Paul."

"What?"

His fingers delved deeper now, but still so delicately, so coyly, that he was making her hungry and crazy and craving. Losing control of herself, she held his head hard against hers for a furious kiss, trying to devour him.

"Ow," he said breathlessly.

She saw that she had made his mouth bleed again. She didn't care. Served him right. She kissed him again, even harder, and bit him this time. He grunted, but didn't stop kissing her back.

"Now," she repeated hoarsely.

"You said that," he breathed against her throat.

"I want you inside me." His fingers, dancing in the petals of her flesh...Whatever he had forgotten, he certainly seemed to remember his skills as a lover. She would fall apart if he didn't enter her. "*Right now.*"

"Like this?"

She gasped as he slid two fingers inside of her. "That's..."

"Hmmm?" His kisses were soft and hot.

"...a good start..."

"And this?"

"Oh!" She jerked sharply as his thumb brushed over the hyper-sensitive bud nestled in the slick, secretive crevice he had found.

He breathed into her ear, "Is that..."

"Oh...Oh...Ohhhh..." She dug her fingers into his shoulders.

"...also..." He licked her neck.

"Mmmm..." She quivered helplessly as his thumb started circling.

"...a good start?"

"Ah!" Gabrielle's legs clamped fiercely on his hips as her whole body convulsed with sharp stabs of piercing pleasure.

She felt like she couldn't get any air, even though she heard herself panting hard. She wanted to look at him, but her eyes kept squeezing shut as repeated thrusts of ecstasy speared her, racking her body without mercy as he stroked and explored her, teased and toyed with her.

"Paul," she sobbed, her voice high and weak.

"All that whimpering," he murmured, withdrawing his fingers. He made a fist and pressed his knuckles into her.

"Unghhhhh..." She pressed back.

"Is it possible..." He rubbed lightly, much too lightly.

She bit his neck and whimpered again.

"...that I'm doing this wrong?"

"Harder," she muttered, trying to press against his elusive knuckles.

He took his hand away altogether.

"No," she pleaded.

"No, *what*?" he whispered, massaging her thighs again.

"Paul..."

"What comes next? My memory, you know..." He kissed her briefly, pulling away before she could bite him again.

Trembling with need, she was determined to make him suffer, too. She seized his cock —

"Ouch!"

— with all the ferocity welling up inside of her —

"I only have one of those," he reminded her.

— and practically *yanked* it into the position she wanted.

"Gently, gently," he chided.

She kept her eyes locked with his as she used the tip of his swollen penis to stroke and soothe the places he had just excited and then abandoned. To her delight, it took only seconds for him to look utterly conquered.

"You're right," he admitted, his voice distracted and faint. "That comes next. In fact, now I seem to remember..." He moved and tried to enter her.

She tilted her hips to elude him, then squeezed him punishingly with her fist, making him wince. Her body was crying out for his, but first he had to pay for teasing her so.

"My turn to beg," he guessed, his eyes limpid and his lips glistening.

"If you feel like it." She sighed as she rubbed herself with the tip of his erection. "If not, I can wait until you do."

"Please," Paul begged on an imploring whisper. He pressed his open mouth to her collarbone and sucked on her skin.

She moved his penis in a tantalizing circle against her labia, moaning at the effect that washed through her body.

He was trembling now. "Let me inside you."

She loosened her grip, as if permitting his request, then covered herself with her palm when he again tried to enter her.

"Gabrielle."

"I have a headache," she announced.

Still trembling, he sputtered with laughter. "If anyone here is entitled to a headache, it's me."

"All the same, I feel —"

"Then lie down." He gripped her shoulders and leaned forward, using his weight and his strength to force her backwards on the narrow wooden table.

He brought her hands up beside her head and held them there. His bare chest pressed down on her, warm through her slip, a delicious heaviness against her throbbing breasts.

The weight of a man, *her* man, on her body, against her belly, between her legs, stealing her breath, overwhelming her with his size and strength and purpose...Gabrielle forgot their games. Forgot everything but the aching void inside her.

She brought her heels up to the edge of the table, raising her knees high in the air, tilting her hips to welcome him as he thrust inside of her. He was far more gentle than she had expected, given the hard impatience on his face now and the damp sheen of fevered desire covering his skin.

Their eyes locked as he pushed into her, fitting snugly and more deeply each time he pressed a little farther inside of her. She drew his head down to kiss him, and his tongue invaded her mouth the way his penis invaded her body. She moaned in her throat, every part of her body and soul alive for him, relishing him, luxuriating in their union.

When she felt him as deep inside her as he could possibly go, she wrapped her legs around his back, careless now of his wounds, and started massaging him with the muscles hidden deep inside her body. Squeezing, contracting, pushing, pulsing...

"Ohhhh..." He sagged down on top of her, his eyes squeezing shut and his face contorting with intense pleasure.

Gabrielle smiled and wrapped her arms around him, glorying in the way he went suddenly limp and helpless as she made love to him. His soft moans and harsh, gasping breaths thrilled her. He was not a man who relinquished command of himself easily, which made it all the more special that he was willing to do so with her.

She stopped before he came, not wanting this to end so soon. He understood, it seemed, and started kissing her, letting his hard cock throb heavily inside of her without moving his hips or indulging in the friction their bodies craved. Then his hands were on her slip, pushing down the straps and the neckline, until her heaving breasts were naked to his touch.

"Oh, *yes*," she sighed when his mouth engulfed her nipple without hesitation, his velvety tongue lapping and rubbing it eagerly inside his hot, wet mouth.

Gabrielle arched her back, and he responded, taking her even more deeply into his mouth, his teeth sinking gently into the soft flesh of her breast while his tongue worked her aching nipple against the ridged roof of his mouth.

She suddenly climaxed in hot waves, tears squeezing out of her closed eyes as she sobbed with pleasure and writhed helplessly in his arms. Filled with him, surrounded by him, devoured by him.

"Paul..."

Still suckling her, he started massaging her other breast. He was rough, so rough. It hurt wonderfully – so wonderfully that, without even managing to catch her breath, she came again, her sharp cries and ecstatic convulsions bursting through her in exact rhythm with his roughly kneading fingers and abrasive palm.

When her cries finally faded, he said something.

"What?" She couldn't hear him over the thundering of her blood and the loud gust of her own frantic breath.

She was exhausted now. Limp and helpless. Her legs had fallen away from him and were dangling weakly over the edge of the table. Her arms barely had the strength to move, their sole energy coming from her burning need to keep touching him – his back, his shoulders, his head, his arms...

"More?" he repeated.

"Oh," she said. "No." She would faint. Or suffocate. Or die.

"Oh, yes. I think so," he murmured silkily.

She shouted when he suddenly thrust hard, much harder than she had expected, so much harder than his gentle entry.

"Paul," she whimpered, already catching fire again.

"Don't quit now," he urged.

He moved so vigorously against her that her head bumped on the rough wood. She gripped the side of the table to keep from sliding right off as he plunged recklessly into her again. And again and again and *again*...She abandoned herself to him. Surrendered everything to his demands. *Oh, yes*...She reveled in defeat and submission, seized, conquered, vanquished. Ravished and pillaged. *Don't spare me*...He was pulverizing her, destroying her. Thrusting so hard into her it felt like he might come up through her mouth...

"Don't...stop," she begged, welcoming this reckless plundering with every straining muscle.

The floor, she realized vaguely...he was bracing his feet on the floor now, and using the leverage...*Oh, God*....to thrust so hard...*So hard*...So deeply and insistently...*Yes, yes*...

"More," she grunted.

"I thought so." His voice was almost inaudible amidst his harsh, desperate breaths.

She felt the demanding heat assaulting her loins yet again as he pumped into her, riding her with a mingled tenderness and violence that renewed all the hungry desire she had believed completely fulfilled only moments ago.

He let her burn, though. Denied her what she wanted. What she tried to take from him. Rough without satisfying her. Gentle without relieving her. Violent without finishing her off. Tender without soothing or pitying her.

"Paul!" she screamed.

He punished her with hot, savage kisses, plundering her mouth so ruthlessly that her throat ached. She needed more of those, but then he wanted her breasts again, suckling and nibbling on them with a voracious frenzy that she knew would leave them tender and sore later. She arched into him, eager to be consumed.

When she came again, it was like an avalanche, like something she shouldn't even live through. Devastating, demolishing, ransacking whatever was left of her after his ruthless subjugation. She felt him coming, too, heard him groaning ecstatically, felt his wild shudders, and absorbed his body's final explosion of pleasure deep inside of her.

Somehow, Gabrielle found the strength to stroke his back, her fingers finding bare skin amidst the bandages. She loved this moment. Always. The way his back moved convulsively with his orgasm. The play of smooth muscles, the sudden bow-tight arch, the helpless writhing...She inhaled deeply just before he sagged and collapsed. She had learned to gather enough breath at this very instant to help her get through the few moments when he rested weakly on top of her after coming, briefly forgetting about mundane things like letting his wife breathe.

Her whole body felt like it was turning to liquid. A pool of lava where her flesh and bones used to be. She couldn't stop quivering, didn't try. Paul's face was buried in her hair. She heard the soft sounds he often made, those faint, breathy, ragged, little moans that usually followed his climax. Her teeth chattered—an eccentric aftermath reaction she sometimes had to the extreme emotions and sensations he aroused in her. He had been amused the first time he noticed it; then he'd been incredibly tender when she told him it had never happened before. Never happened with anyone but him.

*Paul...*She couldn't stand knowing that all those private moments and intimate secrets between them were lost to him.

He *had* to start remembering. Particularly because even more important things than their shared past were at stake. His life, for example...

Paul shuddered again, then brushed his mouth against her cheek. "Gabrielle..."

He was here, in her arms, safe for now. Gabrielle stared at the rafters high overhead and tightened her embrace. Only days ago, she'd have given her life for this moment. She mustn't let anything spoil it now.

Morning would come soon enough. Until then, she would treasure this time with the husband whom she had believed she would never again see alive.

Gabrielle found the strength to roll her head sideways. Paul took a deep breath, then moved his head just enough so their eyes could meet again. He looked flushed and contented.

"I love you," she murmured, struggling for breath beneath his heavy weight.

He touched her cheek. "I'd be a fool if I didn't love you, too."

It wasn't the ideal reply, but she knew it was the best he could give her right now. Feeling dizzy, she tried to inhale.

He snorted softly. "Sorry." He started shifting so that his shoulder and hip, rather than her chest, would bear most of his weight.

"You always do that," she said now that she could breathe again.

He smiled lazily. "What an oaf I must be."

"I like feeling you all around me like that. Afterwards. When you're so soft and helpless for a moment." She smiled, too, and added, "Well, I like it until I need to breathe."

He spread his hand over her belly and started to say something—then tilted too far and nearly fell off the narrow table.

"Paul!"

He caught his balance with one foot against the floor. "I didn't pick the most practical spot for this, did I?"

He rose to his feet, then went suddenly pale and swayed. Gabrielle sat upright, her slip sagging around her elbows and her waist as she tried to help him.

"No, I'm all right," he said. "Just a little dizzy."

"Sit down," she urged.

He hooked one foot around the stool he had abandoned earlier, brought it closer, and sat down on it.

"Does your head hurt?"

"Not too much," he replied.

"But you're dizzy?"

"Well, that's to be expected after what you just did to me." He grinned and added, "So is the shakiness in my legs."

"But Paul—"

"It'll pass. Serves me right for jumping up like that right after you'd had your way with me."

She arched her brows. "*Whose* way was just had here?"

"Well, I guess we broke even," he conceded generously.

"Hah." She straightened her slip. "My insides feel like churned butter."

"Don't do that," he said softly.

She paused in the act of pulling up her straps.

"I find," he explained, hooking a finger into one strap to pull it back down, "that I like looking at you naked, too."

She let the slip sag back down to her waist. His gaze roved over her still-flushed breasts. "I like..." She was surprised to find herself strangely shy all of a sudden.

Perhaps because she supposed this felt new to him right now, which made *her* feel a bit like it was new, too. "I like you looking."

He scooted the stool a little closer, until he was sitting between her legs, then took her hand. "I remember..."

"What?" she pounced.

"Feeling this way," he said vaguely. "With you. Love. Sex. Happy. Close." He frowned and shook his head. "They're not specific memories. It's that...when I touch you, I know what you want, what you like. I'm not just guessing. I can tell that I've learned these things about you, in a past I just can't remember clearly. I recognize the feel of your skin. The taste of your mouth. When you touch me, I know you've done it before. I know...the way we feel together." His fingers idly stroked hers as he continued, "And the way you breathe, the sound of your voice, the way you smell...I can tell you're the woman I sleep with, live with, think about. The one I know best. The one I love. It was you I was afraid I'd betray when I was held prisoner."

"Betray?" she said so faintly that he didn't seem to hear her.

"I know it was you. But..."

"But what?" she prodded.

"Things are so vague. I think I can remember loving you, being afraid for you. Even trying not to love you, at first. But the specific things..." He pressed his lips together – then winced and touched his lower lip gingerly, bleeding a little again. "You *bit* me."

"What?" She blinked.

He nodded to the table upon which she sat, where they had just made love. "You bit me. *Hard*. Ouch."

"Oh."

"It was just getting better, too," he complained.

"I'm not going to apologize," she informed him. "You made me do it."

"I think that's an exaggeration," he objected. Seeing her expression, he smiled and amended, "Well, slight exaggeration, anyhow."

"It seems," she said, returning to the subject at hand, "that you're at least remembering more – or are more aware of your past, more aware that you *have* a past – than you were this morning." Realizing that it was well past midnight, she shrugged and tried, "Yesterday morning."

She leaned forward and gingerly touched his head injury. "And you don't seem damaged in any other serious way."

"Far from it." He slid her a sly glance. "As I think I've just proved."

"I mean," she said dryly, "no slurred speech or blurred vision. You can think and reason."

"And fulfill my conjugal duties."

"Even if you can't remember your wife."

He suddenly squeezed her hand. "I do remember you," he insisted.

"You probably wouldn't even know my name if I hadn't told it to you," she said sadly.

He sighed. "That's what I mean. That's the kind of thing I can't remember. Facts. Names. Incidents. Specifics. I feel like it's all *right* on the tip of my tongue, like a word you've forgotten for a moment and can't dredge up—but then you suddenly remember it an hour after you don't need it anymore."

He drew her hand up to his mouth, gently kissed her palm, and held it against his face for a moment. "I can remember being so in love that I didn't trust my own judgment anymore. I can remember feeling embarrassed about it, but being unable to change it or stop it. I remember laughing in bed with you, but I don't remember why or when or where."

"You're sure it was me? You were hardly a virgin when we met."

"No, I know it was you. And it was..." He looked up to the left, as if seeing the incident there in the distance. "It was daylight..." He started speaking more slowly. "Afternoon. We're both naked...no, you're wearing a big scarf...a shawl? And your hair is down..."

"Yes," she said, her heart flooding with relief as she recognized the day he was describing. "You *are* remembering."

"The scarf...shawl...it was from...North Africa...French colonies...Very sexy...black and see-through, with leaves..."

"Embroidered," she encouraged.

"Leaves embroidered in gold thread...and flowers embroidered in bright colors...silk thread...You used to wear it over your hair, and around your shoulders, on special occasions."

"Yes. Paul..."

"I took it and..." His gaze suddenly shifted to hers, bright and focused now while he continued, almost as if expecting her to deny it, "I used it to tie you to the bed?"

She cleared her throat. "Yes. That's right."

"And you..." He paused, then grinned. "Afterwards, you said you'd never be able to wear it to church again."

"And then on Christmas Eve, at midnight Mass, you made a *point* of asking me, in front of Madame Didier, why I wasn't wearing it."

His grin widened for a moment, then his attention moved to something else. "Madame Didier..." He shook his head. "Nothing. Not even a..." His eyes widened. "Her husband is dead. The leader of the local Resistance group."

"Yes. Since —"

"November. You said." He suddenly grimaced and touched his head, as if it were pounding again. "Who's...ah..."

"Maybe you should –"

"No. Tell me. Who's in charge since he died?"

She'd been so worried about them killing him if they found out he was still alive, she hadn't even thought to tell him until this moment: "You are."

He groaned. "Somehow, I just knew you were going to say that."

CHAPTER SIX

June 5, 1944

Paul's head throbbed as he considered this revelation. "Why did Didier leave me in charge? You said he knew I was OSS, knew I wasn't French."

Gabrielle sat on the table, still flushed and glistening from passion, aroused and sated. Her golden hair tumbled gloriously around her shoulders. She looked heartbreakingly beautiful, and her scent....Clean skin and warm woman, rain-washed hair and recent sex...*God*, she smelled wonderful to him – and familiar. He wasn't lying to comfort her. He did remember her now. But only in a visceral way. His senses remembered her, even more so now that she had so vividly reminded him of what they shared as lovers. His emotions were clarifying into utter certainty, too. This passionate, almost irrational devotion he was feeling wasn't a sudden infatuation. It was part of him, so much so that he'd felt strange and lost earlier, missing it without knowing what he was missing.

He just didn't remember any facts about her. Or anything else. It all seemed to be *right* on the tip of his tongue, *just* at the edge of his conscious thoughts...But the harder he pursued concrete memories, the more frustratingly elusive they seemed.

Gabrielle answered, "He respected you. Trusted you. And didn't trust many others."

"Why? Was he just naturally suspicious?"

She shrugged in that very French way she had. It made her naked breasts wobble briefly. He watched, not even pretending that he didn't – she was his wife, after all, and she'd just said that she liked him looking at her.

"Didier had vague suspicions of a traitor among us. He trusted you, me, Jean Deschamps..." She shook her head. "I'm not sure he trusted anyone else. And of the three of us, you were best able to lead if he died, so he chose you."

"Did anyone mind?"

"Deschamps, certainly. He's never liked you." She hesitated, as if trying to decide whether or not to say more.

"What?" he prodded.

"Nothing."

"Gabrielle?"

"I don't think Madame Didier was pleased, either."

He could tell it wasn't what she'd been thinking about a moment ago, but it was interesting enough that he asked, "Why? I mean, apart from the fact that her husband was now dead, which must have been hard for her."

"I don't know, and I may be wrong," Gabrielle admitted. "It was a feeling I got. She never really liked you much."

"Did anyone?" he asked.

She grinned. "Well, *I* find you tolerable." He rolled his eyes. "Most people whom you and I know in common like you, or at least respect you. But you know many people you don't tell me about." She leaned forward and suggested, "Perhaps they don't like you, either."

"So was Didier right? Was there a traitor among us?"

Her expression changed as she sat back. "You thought his death might be an indication that there was. But we never had any proof."

"No leads? No ideas?"

"None that led to any answers."

"Who knew about this besides you and me?"

"Your superiors."

"Anyone else?"

She made a vague gesture. "In a way. I mean, there has been suspicion among us all since before Didier died, and it got stronger after that. But I was the only one among us with whom you discussed any specific suspects or strange incidents." She frowned. "Do you think someone among us betrayed you to the Nazis, and that's how you got caught?"

"I don't know. And it seems that, until I remember what happened, I won't know."

"There were a number of people whom I don't know and don't really know about—"

"Who knew who I was, and who might have turned me in." He sighed. "Yes, I understand." Why couldn't he have lost an eye instead of his memory? "And what was I doing when I was captured? Where had I been? What do I know? And how important is it?" He met her troubled gaze and wondered aloud, "And did I keep it to myself, or did I talk in the end?"

She was very still now. "Do you remember anything from the chateau yet?"

"Nothing beyond what I've already told you," he replied wearily, rubbing his temples.

"Maybe if you tried to relax—"

He snorted. "A little while ago, you relaxed me as much as is humanly possible, *chérie*."

"And it didn't do any good," she said miserably.

"Bite your tongue." He added, "You've already bitten mine, after all."

"I meant—"

"I know what you meant." He put a hand on her knee. "It did do some good, in that sense. I told you. I'm remembering more. Just not—"

"Facts, yet. Names, dates, places, incidents." When he nodded, she continued, "But, er, relaxing helped you a little?"

He smiled. "Well, I suppose it was more complicated than *relaxing*, but, yes, it helped."

"Then maybe if we made it simpler." When he lifted one brow, she spread her legs wider and opened her arms to him. "Pull your stool closer."

He did. Then, feeling cool now, he reached down for the blanket on the floor and draped it over his shoulders, letting it form a tent over all of his body and the lower half of hers. She took his face between her hands for a moment, then speared her fingers into his hair, pulling his head down into her lap as her thighs bracketed his shoulders. Her belly was smooth under his cheek, the soft fabric of her slip soothing.

"Close your eyes," she instructed.

He did. Her fingers gently stroked his hair. He sighed and sagged, letting his head rest heavily on her. The scent of their recent passion rose from her loins, flooding his mind, comforting him, embracing him in a familiar sensation of peace and contentment.

"Talk to me," he murmured, wanting to add the sound of her voice to the cocoon she was creating for him.

"The first time I ever saw you," she said, "I knew. Not that I'd love you or marry you, or what kind of man you were. But I knew...*something*. Knew that I wanted to know so much more. Knew that I'd keep coming back. I suppose I knew that I'd been looking for you."

"Where did you see me?"

"In Didier's café. You were sweeping the floor."

"Oh, yes. My cover story."

"But I already knew the truth. Didier had asked me there specifically to meet you that day."

"So you already knew I was a dashing American spy."

"Terribly dashing," she agreed dryly, and he smiled. "Didier had told you I'd been cultivating the German officer —"

"The one you were going to let seduce you."

"Yes. You wanted to discuss the plan." He heard the smile in her voice as she added, "Then, as I've told you, you put a stop to it."

It made perfect sense at first, so even he didn't understand his own revulsion for the plan after meeting the woman. Didier was right about her, too: strong, smart, capable, gutsy. Good-looking enough to attract the German officer. To attract any man. It was more than looks, though. Charm, humor, warmth...and there was something so head-swimmingly sexual about her, despite her modest clothes and polite manner, that his mouth had gone dry and he'd had trouble concentrating on anything anyone said...

"Paul?"

He realized she must feel his tension. "A memory..."

She said nothing, just stroked his hair. But now he could feel her tension, too.

The door to the past closed, though, and the harder he tried to re-open it, the more it resisted him.

"Something else," he murmured. "Tell me more about us."

"Well, there was the night I realized you liked me. Um, more than liked me."

"More than liked," he repeated blandly. Even his mostly-absent memory had already shown him what an understatement that was.

"Well, you usually avoided me. Were jumpy and distant with me. Even a little cold."

"And I hurt your feelings when I overruled your plan to sleep with some Nazi."

"I *was* hurt." After a moment, she admitted, "But I got over it pretty quickly. My skin crawled even when he smiled at me. The thought of actually letting him —"

Paul grunted involuntarily. "Don't even share that thought with me, if you please."

He couldn't stand the thought of that pig touching her!

"You can't stand the thought of anyone touching her," Didier had surmised.

"It's too dangerous," Paul said coldly.

"Has it escaped your attention that there's a war on?" Didier prodded.

"Don't get sarcastic. I'm not in the mood."

"I can tell what you're in the mood for." When Paul glared at him, Didier grinned and added innocently, "A fight. Which I'm not going to give you."

"Gabrielle can make herself useful in other capacities that don't involve almost certain discovery and arrest."

"Almost certain?" Didier repeated. "According to whom?"

"I thought you weren't going to fight with me."

"I'm not. But I will argue. You're not thinking clearly. She's prepared to —"

"End of discussion."

"Oh, for pity's sake, why don't you just go after the girl yourself and get it over with?"

"Not going to happen. I have my duty, and she has hers...and...and..."

"Yes?"

Paul sighed. "Just give me some cognac and shut up, would you?"

"I knew it hurt your feelings," Paul said now, his head resting in her lap. "I knew you thought I didn't like you. And that state of affairs felt safer to me...except when I saw it was making you unhappy. I couldn't stand that."

"But when you were friendly to me, or kind, then I wanted you even more. And it made me feel that much worse when you withdrew again." She rubbed her palms gently over the blanket covering his wounded back. "So whenever I make you unhappy, just remember that you deserve it."

He chuckled. "So what happened the night you realized I 'liked' you?"

"I found out that Pierre Devereaux had died in a concentration camp." Her voice was filled with sadness now. "We had been good friends ever since art school. He was a homosexual. Soon after the Nazis invaded Paris, they took him away."

Paul closed his eyes and pressed his face into her stomach, sad for her, for the artist who had died in a concentration camp, and for all the innocents the Nazis were butchering across Europe.

"You collapsed at the post office," he said slowly, "where you got the letter from a mutual friend informing you of Pierre's death."

"Yes." Her hands gripped his shoulders.

"I...No, I don't think I remember more. I just remember...I was there, too...And seeing you scream and collapse like that...I felt like someone was tearing my heart out of my chest."

"You took me home. Stayed with me all night. Comforted me while I cried. Talked to me." He felt her kiss his hair. "You made me tell you all about myself, my friendship with Pierre, the times we spent together...Paris before the war. You helped me..." She made a little noise. "Helped me say goodbye to Pierre, in a way." She sighed shakily. "His arrest was a terrible shock. He didn't meet me when he was supposed to one day. So I went to his apartment...The door was off the hinges. Everything inside was broken and destroyed. They had actually...urinated on his beautiful work."

She wept, brokenhearted, for a world which would destroy such beauty. Her friend's work, fouled and besmirched. Her friend himself arrested, incarcerated, and murdered because the Nazis didn't approve of the way he loved.

She wept, and Paul felt his heart breaking with every tear, every sob. He held her in his arms, comforting her, talking to her, listening to her...and knew he could never really keep himself apart from her again. He didn't even want to try anymore.

Duty, responsibility, clarity, security...He'd figure it out. He'd manage it somehow. He had to be with her. Being without her didn't seem possible anymore.

"I had never gotten to see him after he was arrested," Gabrielle continued, stroking Paul's head. "I was never able to find out where they'd taken him. Then when I received the news that he was dead..."

"I've failed him!" she wailed. "I let them kill him!"

"Gabrielle," he said, his arms around her, "you couldn't have stopped them."

"I should have protected him!"

"You didn't even know they'd arrest him. And how could you have pro – "

"I should have gotten him out of there!"

"You couldn't even find out where he was," he reminded her. "Couldn't find any record that he even existed." She'd told him how the Nazis had denied all knowledge of Pierre's whereabouts, condemning his sexuality and insisting he had committed unspeakable crimes and then fled France. It wasn't true, and all of Pierre's neighbors knew it wasn't true; but Gabrielle couldn't prove anything under a government controlled by the murdering criminals who had taken her friend in the first place.

"Risking your life daily in the Resistance," Paul said, "is not failing Pierre. You're doing everything you can for him and for every other victim of the Nazis in France."

The fingers stroking his hair paused. "At some point in the night, I realized you cared about me. You were gone when I woke up, but I knew that things would be different from then on. You couldn't pretend after that that I didn't matter to you. Even *you* aren't that good at pretending."

"So you seduced me?"

"It was very much the other way around," she said primly.

He kissed her belly, pressing his mouth against the cotton slip long enough to be sure she felt his heat on her skin. "Tell me." He wanted to remember the first time they'd made love.

"You and Deschamps were going to spy on a German army contingent planting landmines. You wanted to know what was in the minefield and exactly what its geographical location and boundaries were. As you were preparing to leave, Didier told me to change places with Deschamps. You objected, but Didier pointed out that if you and Deschamps were caught, you'd go straight to the chateau. Whereas if you and I were caught, we could pretend to be lovers so absorbed in what we were doing that we had failed to notice the army."

"Oh, that's a likely story," Paul commented. "As if I would take a woman there to –"

"It's more likely than you and Deschamps feeling a burning desire to spend time together on fallow farmland with nothing around besides a new German minefield," Didier shot back.

"As it happened," Gabrielle said, "Didier probably saved your life with that plan. After we got the information we wanted and started making our escape, we encountered a small squad practicing maneuvers."

"So our cover came in handy," he murmured.

He grabbed her and kissed her, pulling her down into the damp, cool grass. God she tasted good, felt good, smelled good. Her mouth was warm and responsive beneath his, her tongue so sweet, he sucked on it like sugar. He felt her shifting restlessly beneath his caressing hands, heard her moaning softly with pleasure.

"Paul, Paul..."

He buried his face in the warm valley between her breasts, kissing, tasting, starving for her. He was already erect and hard for her, already planning to make her his before either of them took another step –

Already forgetting about the German squad which now crept up on them. His blood turned to ice as he recognized how much danger she was in.

Panting hard, he told her, "Slap me. Act offended. I lured you here. Let them rescue you."

She nodded, but begged, "Kiss me again."

"Do it now," he ordered, unable to resist, pressing his mouth urgently to hers.

"The Germans thought it was terribly amusing," she said. "We put on a good show for them. Lots of shouting, accusations, sexual hysteria. *You*," she added archly, "were particularly convincing."

"Oh, yeah." He winced. "A hard-on the size of a Panzer, as they said."

"You remember?"

"I'm now stunned that even a head injury could have made me forget, however briefly, what had to be the most excruciatingly embarrassing experience of my life."

"I think that's why they believed us. Surely not even dedicated spies would make themselves look so absurd." He heard her giggle.

"But even the embarrassment couldn't make me forget what it was like to have you in my arms." He closed his eyes and consciously relaxed, waiting for another memory to drift to him. One did, causing him to chide, "And you didn't help."

They found the motorbike they had hidden at some distance from the minefield, and they mounted it, eager to make their escape. Torn between fear, mortification, and amusement, they hadn't exchanged a word since leaving the Germans.

His body felt like it would start vibrating when she climbed onto the motorbike with him. Her breasts pressed against him through his jacket, her thighs cradling his bottom...His erection, barely subsided despite his extreme embarrassment, now hardened with renewed vigor.

"We have to get away from here," he said hoarsely.

She nodded silently, her face brushing his neck. She was trembling. He could feel it.

His blood was pounding so hard that his arms shook as he tried to steer the bike. His vision seemed foggy, his reflexes sluggish, his attention riveted on the womanly body pressed up against his.

Before long, her hands crept forward, from their proper position on his waist, to stroke his stomach, his thighs, his...He screeched to a halt.

"You do that again," he told her, "and the Nazis won't need to kill us, because we'll become a traffic fatality."

She kissed him. He kissed her back. Their position was so awkward, the bike fell over, taking them with it.

"Ow," he said.

They nearly made love right there, on the side of the road, before he came to his senses and put a stop to it. With great difficulty. And without much conviction.

He didn't want to take her to his grubby little shed in back of Didier's café, so he suggested her cottage. She knew of a closer place, though, and since every mile was agony now, he followed her directions.

"To this barn..."

"That's right," she said. "Where you ripped off my clothes before we even made it to the loft."

"You ripped mine off, too, as I recall."

"And you didn't let me get dressed again until the following day."

He remembered now. How could he have forgotten? Seeing her naked for the first time. Watching her look at him naked for the first time. Touching her everywhere, kissing her all he wanted...Her mouth all over him. Her hands everywhere. The two of them delirious with passion, giddy with happiness. Making love...

"How many times?"

"I don't remember," she admitted. "A lot."

Afternoon blurring into evening into night into dawn...They would talk, nap, wake up, make love again...and again...

"I'm amazed we could walk the next day," he murmured.

He was hungry, sore, exhausted, and too weak to stop her when she finally put on her clothes after about eighteen straight hours of this. There was nothing here but a pump, and water wasn't enough to replenish their strength after so much exertion. They walked up the hill and prowled the damp, tumbled ruins of her uncle's abandoned house, but there was nothing there either except some books, moldy furniture, and broken crockery.

So they were ravenous by the time they arrived at Didier's café. While the two of them devoured food and wine, Paul spun some vague tale about eluding an army patrol and getting stranded for the night. Didier didn't believe him, of course, but he had too much respect for Gabrielle's modesty to say so. The old romantic never even chided Paul for letting him worry all that night that they'd been captured while they were, in reality, mating like minks.

"And after that," Paul said, "I couldn't stay away from you."

He thought he remembered fretting about whether or not to marry her now or wait until after the war. "I thought you'd be in danger if I married you and then my identity was discovered."

"But you worried about me getting pregnant, since you couldn't control yourself when we were alone together—"

"Me? Hah!"

"And you wanted to make sure that I—and any child of ours—wouldn't be alone and abandoned if you died."

"Ergo the secret marriage, which I told the OSS about. So you'd have money, protection, even passage to America if you..." He suddenly sat bolt upright.

"Paul?"

He frowned, his mind whirling with some urgent memory he couldn't quite grasp. "OSS. Special orders. Straight from the top." His head was throbbing as he looked at her in puzzlement. "Poker?"

"Poker?" she repeated blankly.

"Fortress Europe. The Atlantic Wall....Utah..."

"Utah? Isn't that in America?"

"Neptune...Overlord..."

"Overlord?"

Their gazes locked. "Things we must do. And mis..."

"Miss?"

"Misinf...no. No, that's not the word."

"What word?"

"Disinformation."

"When you spread the wrong information," she said, "to fool the enemy?"

"I had a plan."

"A disinformation plan?" She gasped. "Paul! Did you get captured on *purpose*?"

He put his hands up to his head, which was throbbing viciously now. "I don't know. I don't..." His breathing was becoming harsh. "If I could just...remember."

He felt her hands urging him towards her again. "You just need rest. You just need to heal."

"No, we're in danger," he said with conviction.

Her expression closed and her posture stiffened. "What do you mean?"

"I don't know, I just..." He made a helpless gesture, his vision starting to blur as his head continued pounding.

"Danger from the Germans?"

"You said they let me go." He frowned. "Why? That doesn't make sense. Why did they let me go?"

"They thought you were dead."

"No, they didn't. I was still breathing, and they're not that stupid."

"Then they thought you would die any moment."

"Why release me? Why not just kill me?"

"Paul, they obviously knew you couldn't just get up and walk away."

"But they must have known someone might find me." He drew in a sharp breath. "Is that why they released me? They wanted someone to find me?"

She looked very distressed. "*Chéri*, maybe they decided they had arrested someone who really *was* just a bad businessman just trying to survive the war. They knew they had gone too far with you, beating a civilian almost to death—"

"There would probably be no repercussions for that," he argued.

"And they thought the best thing to do would be to get rid of you before you died, and hope for the best."

"Then why are you hiding me?" he demanded.

She looked upset and confused. "In case I'm wrong and they really do want you dead."

He tried to ignore the excruciating pain in his head. "You mean...letting me go might have been a mistake? Someone goofed?"

"Someone goofed," she repeated, still looking distressed. The American slang sounded funny in her French accent. "Or..."

"Or what?" he prodded. "Gabrielle?"

She clasped her hands and looked down at them. "Or maybe...Paul...Is it possible...Not that I think you normally would, but given how badly they hurt you, is it possible that you..."

"That I talked?" he supplied.

He was touched by how guilty she looked as she nodded.

"Honey, of course it's possible." When her appalled eyes flashed to his face, he continued, "I don't remember talking. I do remember being determined not to. I remember interrogation...and a lot of pain." He sighed, more worried than he wanted her to realize. "I pray to God that I didn't talk. Especially since I now have no idea what damage I might have done, because I don't remember what I know. Even so..."

"What?"

"If I talked, keeping me there to learn more would have made sense. Sending me to a prison or concentration camp would have made sense. Even killing me, if they were sure I'd said everything I was going to say, would have made sense. But letting me go? No, that makes no sense." He thought about it for a moment. "Especially if they didn't know about the amnesia."

"Maybe they did?"

"Even if they did, they'd have been fools to count on it being permanent. The moment my memory comes back, I'll know what they did or didn't learn from me." Then something dreadful occurred to him. "Oh, God."

"What?"

"If I told them anything about the invasion..."

"Yes?"

"It might be impossible to repair whatever damage I've done. It's a safe bet that it's too late for the Allies to change their plans for an operation involving hundreds of thousands of men."

Had he personally sabotaged the liberation of Europe?

It was a horrifying thought, one which made his head pound with almost blinding agony.

CHAPTER SEVEN

June 5, 1944

Rain was pounding insistently on the roof, battering hard at the edges of his consciousness. Paul could hear it all around them, smell it in the air, feel it washing a damp draft through the window.

He grunted irritably and burrowed closer to his wife's warmth. This damn cottage of hers was so drafty. Better than his miserable shed behind Café Didier, of course, but hardly the Ritz.

Heigh ho, the glamorous life of a wartime spy.

Still, he got glamor when it counted. He smiled sleepily as he nuzzled her hair. No man in the world had a woman as exciting as his. No caliph's harem was as glamorous a place as this humble little cottage when Gabrielle was here. And no place on earth was as exotic and erotic as this lumpy old bed when she was in it with him.

Where the hell was that draft coming from? It was practically a *gale* now. He curled his body around Gabrielle's, trying to get warm again. Something tickled and scratched him. He brushed it away and realized what it was: straw.

Oh, we're in the loft.

He grunted and pulled her closer, tossing and twisting a little. No wonder he was so uncomfortable; they were sleeping on rough blankets over straw, instead of in their bed. They must have come here last night after...What had they been doing last night? Examining coastal defenses? Planting explosives along railway lines? Sabotaging munitions dumps?

And to think Mom wanted me to become a doctor. Imagine all the fun I'd have missed.

Gabrielle sighed in her sleep and adjusted to his shifting and fussing. Her breath was soft and warm on his neck. Her breasts pressed lusciously against his ribcage, and one silken thigh rested across both of his. He could feel some sort of soft material around her hips, like she'd worn a half-slip to bed. He tried to remember last night, starting to feel confused, as he fumbled to pull the blanket more snugly over their bodies. He was naked, he now realized, and chilly.

"Close the window," she murmured.

"I can't. It doesn't close," he reminded her.

She didn't respond, evidently already back asleep.

His body felt achy and sore. It didn't help that the bed of straw was lumpy. He felt as if he were sleeping on a bad-tempered camel. A few particularly hardy stalks were poking him sharply. He didn't move, though, not wanting to wake her again. Her steady breathing, and the soft warmth of her cradled in his arms and pressed against

his body. They spent too many nights apart, and both woke up alone too many mornings. He just wanted to hold her for a while.

He inhaled the damp, barn-scented air...then smiled wryly when he felt his cock stirring. The first night they'd ever spent together as lovers had been right here, a frenzied marathon of sating hungers too long denied. They had come back here a number of times since then; and for the rest of his life, he was sure, the smell of straw in a dusty old barn would always give him a hard-on. He inhaled again, feeling warmth creep through his cold limbs as erotic images of his wife, making love with wild abandon in this very spot, flooded his mind.

They'd both been clumsy and frantic the first time together, but not at all shy. They were too eager and aroused for reserve—or rational thought, or conversation, or even coherent one-syllable words. He remembered buttons flying everywhere while he tore at her blouse, struggling to undress her while she was frantically trying to undress him. They were lucky they hadn't broken their necks climbing the ladder up here, since his trousers were down around his knees by then and he was reaching up to tug off her skirt as she ascended the rungs above him.

They didn't pause to make a bed of blankets up here that time. He kicked off his trousers, backed her into a pile of straw, fell down on top of her, and was inside her within seconds. He'd be ashamed of that gauche performance, except that she came within moments and he—with a superhuman effort that amazed him even now—held back long enough for her to come again.

Oh, yeah, he thought, inhaling the familiar scents again and feeling heat pool in his loins. *Every damn time.* It was a good thing he didn't have a farm to go home to when the war was over; how embarrassing that would get before long!

His erection poked eagerly at the blanket covering the two of them. The rough, impersonal texture was not what he wanted, so he fumbled for his wife's hand, which rested on his collarbone, and dragged it down to his groin.

Maybe I'll wake her, after all.

The shyness had come afterwards, of course, while they lay panting in post-orgasmic exhaustion, their arms and legs all tangled together as they stared at each other in amazement. They were happy and excited, but also stunned—and a little unsure of how to proceed. The newness of each other, of this hot intimacy between them, of giving into their feelings and also stirring up brand new feelings together...

We figured it out pretty quickly, though.

He rubbed his cheek against her hair and smiled when he felt her hand close gently over his erection. She stirred in her sleep. A little moan in her throat, a flexing in the fingers which cradled him.

They had talked, and looked, and touched, and then made love again, much more slowly and deliberately the second time. The third time, the fourth time...He didn't really know how many times. Enough, anyhow, to make the climb back down the

ladder, the next day, a precarious enterprise on wobbly legs. Heads light, stomachs empty, hearts full – and loins rather sore.

They had belonged to each other ever since. He'd known without question or pause that he wanted to spend the rest of his life with her. He only hesitated for a while about marrying her because of the danger it might expose her to while she remained in occupied France.

And their wedding night...They had no honeymoon, since the marriage was secret. Of course, they'd planned to spend the night together...but then he had to leave right after nightfall because of an emergency.

War really is hell.

Now he groaned as he felt Gabrielle start toying with him.

"You awake?" he whispered.

She said nothing, but he felt her smile against his skin as she skillfully used her knowledge of what he liked.

It was here, that first night together, that they had started learning each other's bodies so well and with such frank, unabashed intimacy. Making requests and asking questions as they lay entwined, his body throbbing inside of hers: *Do you like that? Is this too rough? Harder? Deeper? With your mouth, maybe? What about this? On my back? On your stomach? Slower...*

"Slower," he whispered.

"I'm cold," she muttered.

"And you think doing that fast will make you warmer?" he asked skeptically.

She paused. "It's making *you* warmer."

"Ah. Huddle," he advised her.

She shivered and rolled over so that her back was to him, then scooted snugly against him again. He rolled on his side and spooned his body around hers, warming her chilly back with his chest and stomach.

"That's better," she sighed as his arms came around her.

She lifted one leg so that he could slide his cock between her thighs, then she closed them tightly, making him a captive in that delicious prison. He buried his face in her hair and hugged her as she slid her bare feet between both of his for warmth.

"Perfect," he murmured. "Let's just stay like this until the war is over."

"I wish we could."

The frail wistfulness in her voice surprised him. He lifted his head and opened his eyes to look at her in the dim light of the stormy dawn...and that's when it all came flooding back. His whole body went rigid with tension and frustration.

"Damn it."

She turned her head. "Paul?"

"Argh." He let his head fall back down to the blanket and buried his face in her hair again. "Damn, damn, damn..."

"What?"

He held her still as she struggled to turn to him. "No, don't." Having her wrapped in his arms like this, her smooth thighs cradling his swollen penis, was the only thing that made the crashing disappointment of the moment bearable.

"What is it?" she demanded.

"For a moment there...I forgot that I can't remember. That's all. Everything felt so normal for a few minutes."

"Oh, *mon amour*." She pressed her back against him for comfort, and raised one of his hands to her lips for a soft kiss. "But that's good, *non*?"

"No, it's not *good*," he said irritably.

"But, Paul —"

"What's *good* about it?"

"It means your memory is really coming back, a little at a time."

"Don't try to make me see reason," he snapped. "I don't *want* to be reasonable."

"Yes, I can tell."

"I want to indulge in my self-pity."

"You're doing well, then."

"I'm in a bad mood," he announced gruffly.

"It's thoughtful of you to warn me." She glanced at him over her shoulder. "I might not have guessed, otherwise."

A loud burst of thunder made him tighten his arms reflexively around her. She grunted.

"*Mon Dieu*, will this weather never pass?" Gabrielle muttered.

Paul felt his sense of proportion returning. "Maybe we should start building an ark."

"I have no intention of rounding up two of every kind of animal."

"Hmmm. And the Nazis would probably require a million permits."

"The war would be over by the time we filled out all the paperwork."

End of the war...

The liberation of Europe.

What do I know? What have I told?

He felt a sense of growing urgency, but he didn't know why. He could *almost* think of it. Almost...

He sighed, frustrated and disappointed.

She was right. He recalled things more easily when he was relaxed. Trying too hard didn't seem to do any good.

He nudged his chin past her shoulder so he could rest his cheek against hers. "I have remembered something important though."

She practically flinched. "What?"

"I've remembered how much I love you," he whispered.

She drew in a sharp, startled breath. "Yes?"

He heard the catch in her voice and realized how much strength this ordeal had required of her. "Beyond reason," he murmured. "It's stronger than I am."

"You really remember?" she asked anxiously.

"I remember a lot about us. Everything else is still...vague. Maybe a little closer to the light, but nothing clear or certain yet. I remember you, though. I'm not lying to make you feel better." This was too important. Lying about remembering her would be like lying about loving her. "I wouldn't, sweetheart."

"I know." He felt her start to shake. Heard a stifled sob.

"Gabrielle...*Ma mie*..."

"I'm sorry," she sniffled. "I don't know why..."

"Shhh...I'm so sorry I've put you through this."

She made a watery sound. "It's not your fault."

"True. But I'm sorry, all the same."

"Tell me something you remember," she insisted through her tears.

He was almost amused. "Are you testing me?"

"Yes!"

"Oh. Well...The day we got married, I had to leave before we could have a wedding night."

She gasped.

"Ah-hah!" he pounced. "You *did* think I was lying."

"Well..."

He pinched her, making her gasp again.

"I felt bad about that, so I bought you silk stockings while I was away," he continued. "But I got them on the black market, and they were confiscated by some soldier at a checkpoint outside of Rouen." Paul scowled and added, "The bastard probably gave them to *his* sweetheart."

She sighed. "A brand new bride, and I slept alone in a cold bed, like some nun, for the first two weeks of my marriage."

He was pleased her tears were subsiding. "It wasn't cold. We got married a year ago. In *summer*."

"It's cold right now," she pointed out. "Anyhow, I was speaking poetically."

"Figuratively."

"Poetically."

He grinned, then whispered in her ear, "Do *you* remember when I finally came home?"

Her thighs shifted, rubbing his cock. "Yes," she breathed.

He gave a shaky sigh and pressed his hips into her bottom, feeling the crumpled material of her slip against his belly as her thighs created a delicious, tight friction on his erection. She had helped him climb back up the ladder last night, while his head pounded and he obsessed about the things he couldn't remember. And she had lain beside him, comforting him, with the slip he had pulled down earlier now bunched around her waist and hiked up over her hips.

He tugged gently at it now and murmured, "Take it off."

"*That's* what you said the night you came home," she reminded him.

"So it is," he agreed, sitting up. He rolled her onto her stomach and stroked her back. "You were in bed. Sleeping on your stomach."

"And you crept in like a thief."

"I was trying to surprise you. Especially since I didn't have the silk stockings to surprise you with anymore."

"And when I heard someone in the room —"

"That was so impetuous of you —"

"I reached under my pillow —"

"—sleeping with a knife under the pillow."

"—and nearly made myself a widow."

"I thought my heart would stop," he said, still stroking her back. "I thought you had suddenly turned into Lizzie Borden."

"Who?"

"Or that you were a lot angrier than I'd ever suspected about my leaving on our wedding day."

"Well, really, Paul. Creeping up on a woman that way. What did you expect?"

He kissed her shoulder. "I expected a warm welcome from my eager bride."

"Which you'd have gotten, if you hadn't scared me to death the way you did."

He traced kisses down her spine, enjoying the way she sighed and seemed to melt beneath his touch. "And you were so tense, after that..."

"Of *course* I was tense."

"I thought we'd never have sex again. I thought you'd be pacing and shouting and waving that knife around —"

"No, you took it away —"

"—for the rest of my natural life." He pressed a slow, damp kiss into the small of her back. "I thought by the time you stopped quivering like an overstrung bow, I'd be too old to take advantage of the momentary lull."

"You're not that patient a lover," she pointed out.

"No, I'm not," he agreed affably, starting to roll her over onto her back. "So I made my move."

She giggled. "And I was so overwrought—"

"You poked me in the eye with your elbow. Actually, you were *all* elbows and knees and—"

"You had made me very nervous," she protested.

She laid on her back now, her pink-tipped breasts resting on her chest in round mounds that tempted his hands. He cupped them gently.

"So it seemed only fair," he said, "that I relax you."

"Yes," she agreed, her voice breathy and slow, "only fair."

He kissed each delicate nipple, listening to her sigh and murmur his name, just as she had done that night. Then he pressed his lips to her midriff, her abdomen...

"And this," he said, his hands closing around the crumpled folds of her slip, "was right about where I said..."

"Take it off," she urged him.

"Exactly."

She lifted her hips as he pulled the slip down over her thighs and past her feet, then tossed it aside. Their gazes locked in the dim light. Her eyes were dewy and half-closed. Her lips parted and trembled in anticipation.

"And then..." he said.

"Yes," she sighed.

He grinned wickedly. "Memory fades."

"What?"

"No idea what happened next."

"Paul!"

"If you could give me a hint," he suggested.

She sat up and poked him in the chest. "You have not forgotten."

He kissed her and breathed into her mouth, "Just a hint?"

She arched one brow. "You did something you once told me Frenchmen were famous for."

He snapped his fingers. "That's right! And the day I told you that...In fact, it was right here, wasn't it? The first night we ever spent together."

"Yes," she replied with exaggerated patience.

"You told *me* that, be that as it may, no Frenchman had ever done it for *you*. Which," he confided, "I thought was a national disgrace."

"One which you were eager to rectify," Gabrielle said dryly.

"One which I *have* rectified..." He kissed her mouth. "...on a regular basis..." Her neck. "...ever since." Her shoulder. "And me not even French." Her breast.

"You'd be admired for this sacrifice," she assured him breathlessly, "if anyone besides me knew about it."

"Very happy," he replied, pushing her gently down to the blanket again, "to oblige."

"As you did," she reminded him, "on our long-delayed wedding night."

"I think I remember," he breathed against her abdomen, "starting here?"

"Yes."

"And moving on to..." He kissed her thigh. "...here?"

She closed her eyes and nodded.

He grinned and rested his cheek against the fragrant curls between her legs. "And then I told you not to close your eyes."

"No, you didn't." She opened her eyes and looked at him.

"The next time I kissed you, it was..." He turned his head and buried his face in her. "Here."

"Yes," she said with difficulty, suddenly panting.

"What else did I do?" he whispered.

She made a frustrated sound. "You know what you did."

"It was a long time ago." He kissed the damp cleft, nuzzled it, and prodded, "Remind me."

"You..."

"Or tell me what you want me to do *now*," he invited.

"Mmmm..." She pressed her hips towards him, spreading her legs farther apart. "You know what I want you to do."

He nibbled on her inner thigh. "Tell me."

She reached down to touch his chin, her long elegant fingers urging his head down. "I want..."

He blew gently on her hot flesh, enjoying the way it made her shiver. "What?"

"Use your tongue," she whispered.

"To do what?" He kissed her mound, the crease of her hip, the delicate edge of her labia, listening to the surprised little moans she gave each time his lips touched her without giving her what she wanted.

"Paul..." She wriggled with impatience.

"Hmmm?"

"Please..."

"What do you want?"

"*Lick me*," she finally pleaded.

"Oh, is that what you want?" he teased.

"Yes!" Her voice was harsh with desperation.

"Why didn't you just say so?" he murmured.

"Now..." she begged.

"Now," he agreed.

He licked his way into her. Long and slow and languid. Taking his time as he entered the mysterious feminine territory which she opened to him in her passion and her trust.

"Yes, oh, *yes*, like that, yes, yes..." Her voice was breathless, feverish, thin and wispy enough to blow away if he didn't listen well.

She tasted salty and erotic, familiar after all this time and yet somehow always exotic, too, always a surprise to his swirling tongue.

"More," she pleaded, "more..."

He pulled her thighs over his shoulders, then seized her hips and tugged her closer, tilting her pelvis to make her more vulnerable to his invasion. She moaned as his panting breath tickled her, and her thighs trembled eagerly against him. He looked down at the darkly pink glistening secrets he was unlocking and felt his cock throb eagerly in response.

He lowered his head and started devouring her.

She cried out. Her back arched, and her legs clutched him, her heels digging into him. He grunted and kneaded her firm buttocks while he kept ravishing her. She bucked awkwardly, moving convulsively as he made love to her with his mouth. Her slick flesh welcomed him, pulsing and quivering against his tongue, almost as if kissing him back. She moaned and undulated jerkily beneath his ravenous plundering, breathing in frantic gasps. Her orgasm, when he finally drove her to it, was long and violent. She almost twisted away from his hold in her wailing, writhing frenzy. Afterwards, he barely let her catch her breath before he started again, feasting greedily on her lush body while she groaned and begged, demanded and pleaded, moving her hips eagerly in response to his hungry mouth. He licked and kissed, rubbed and sucked, nuzzled and nibbled, losing himself in the soft, hot, slick petals where he could give her so much pleasure that she screamed for him.

"That's a beautiful sound," he murmured, his face wet with her, his head spinning with the fragrance of sex as she came again. She didn't hear him, of course; she was lost in a loud climax while her fists tugged at the blanket in orgasmic fury.

He didn't wait for her to finish. He hauled her upright while she was still panting and groaning, pulled her onto his lap, and plunged his straining cock into her. Still gasping and making those high moans that he loved, she wrapped her arms around him and braced her feet against the floor as he rocked into her, hard and deep and slow.

When she started bouncing, he gripped her hips, stopping her. "No," he said raggedly. "Slow."

"Mmmm." She circled then, undulating on the fulcrum of his shaft, moving like some sultan's dancing slave girl while she held his gaze with heavy-lidded eyes.

"Kiss me," he said.

Her lips were soft, her tongue a damp velvet luxury inside his mouth.

"Again," he said, and she did.

Her breasts were shiny with perspiration, her face flushed and drowsy with pleasure. Her breathing, like her groans, told him she was ready to come again and was just waiting for him to want to climax, too.

"I love you," he told her.

She smiled, pleased, happy. "Paul..."

He moved with more urgency now. Ready. Overwhelmed. Unable to wait any longer.

"Yes," she sighed. "Yes, *mon amour*, my love, yes...Now, now, now..."

He was clutching her tightly, driving hard into her, gripping her hips and moving them the way he wanted. Yanking her to him in a suddenly frantic rhythm. Gripping....Thrusting...Her sharp grunts of pleasure...Gripping him inside, so tight and wet and hot...Moving on him....Moving inside of her...And coming in jagged shards of bright, hot, deep pleasure, crashing and burning and going to heaven in her arms.

"Ohhh...Oh, yeah..." He sagged weakly, still moving her hips as he desired, trembling as he reached for every last *frisson* of pleasure they knew how to give each other. "Oh, God..." His hips still pumping..."*Gabrielle...*"

They tumbled down to the blankets together, their arms wrapped around each other, their breathing harsh and fast and unsteady. She made a sound of mingled happiness and pleasure and rubbed her face into the hair on his chest. He stayed inside of her for a few minutes, relishing the closeness, the incredible feelings of peace and intimacy glowing between them.

After a while she chuckled and said, "Yes, that was more or less what our wedding night was like." She poked him and added, "Two weeks after the wedding."

CHAPTER EIGHT

June 5, 1944

A traitor among them. Didier had been right. It took a long time to figure out who it was, but now Paul knew. He blamed himself for not seeing it sooner. He supposed his mind had been too clouded by love to see what was right in front of him.

Then again, Didier had probably never known. Well, maybe at the last – it may even have been why he was killed – but prior to that, no. He'd evidently been fooled, too, even if he had vague, private fears he couldn't form into coherent suspicions.

Paul was a forthright man by nature, so confrontation was his immediate instinct now. However, espionage was not a business for rash decisions and unplanned acts.

The warmth at his side was suddenly gone. He rolled over in the bedding, trying to reclaim her.

And, please God, would this infernal rain never stop?

So he considered all his options, keeping his bitter knowledge to himself, not even thinking about it around anyone else, lest one single moment or glance give away the game. After all, if Didier had indeed died because he suspected or found out the truth, then Paul needed to operate on the assumption that the slightest misstep could give him away and send him to the exact same fate. Espionage was a business for caution and ruthless self-discipline – though love had shattered these things in him.

The rain...What would happen if the rain changed all their plans? Damn the weather!

Plans...Yes, he formed a plan. His superiors approved. Just as well, since it was too late for him to change it.

Keep playing the bluff. Use the traitor to concentrate Nazi attention on Calais.

He heard her rummaging around.

Disinformation...

We should have thought of this tactic in the wine business years ago.

Goddamn rain.

All they had to do was save the world...

Paul groaned, slowly climbing out of the depths of slumber and the chaos of his confused dreams...Thoughts? Memories?

He didn't reach for her again. He'd felt her leave his side, and he could now hear her moving around. That was probably what had woken him.

He opened his eyes, wondering how long he'd slept after they'd made love. The gray weather made it hard to guess the time of day. He got up and wrapped a blanket around himself—for warmth, this time—then climbed down the ladder in search of her.

"Oh, you're awake," she said as he reached the ground.

"Yes."

He turned and looked at her. She was wearing her dress and her shoes. Her hair was neatly combed. There was a small purse on the table beside her. "Where are you going?"

"Into Caen. We need food."

"And I need clothes."

"Yes, of course."

Something was wrong. He studied her, trying to figure out what it was. "We need to talk."

She froze. "You've remembered something else?"

He had, but it was too vague to put into words. Besides, that wasn't what he wanted to talk about. "We need a plan."

"A plan?"

"Beyond me hanging out in this barn while the war rages on."

"Well, I suppose so, but you're still injured—"

"If I'm well enough to keep making love to you, I'm well enough to get back to work," he pointed out.

"No!" Her vehemence surprised them both.

"I won't let the Germans see me," he assured her, "but I—"

"No," she repeated.

"—want to get out and see what's happening. It might help me remember more, and then—"

"Or it might get you killed!"

"And I would like to hear reports from other members of your group, find out what—"

"No!" She looked horrified now.

"Gabby, I should at least—"

"I'll do whatever needs to be done."

"While I do what?" He was getting annoyed now.

"While you get better. Get your memory back."

"There may be things—important things—that I'm just not going to remember sitting here—"

"You will," she insisted, picking up her purse. "The swelling is gone now. And every few hours, you remember a little more. Soon you'll remember everything."

He switched the subject. "You're not going out in this rain, are you?"

"It's just a mist right now."

"Gabrielle, I want to —"

"You can't come with me today, at any rate," she said. "You have nothing to wear."

"So you win. How convenient."

"Why are we fighting about this?"

"Because..." It clarified for him, like a wobbly note suddenly achieving perfect pitch. "Because there's something you're not telling me."

Her silence and physical tension were better than a confession.

He came forward and took her by the shoulders, searching her face. "What is it?"

She lowered her gaze. "I want to go to town while there's a break in the weather."

"Gabrielle."

"We'll talk about it later, when we have more time."

"Let's talk about it now," he insisted.

She stepped away, pulling herself out of his hold. "Rest now. Maybe you'll remember more when I get back."

"We're wasting time," he warned her, knowing — without yet knowing why — that they had no time to waste.

"Don't leave the barn at all while I'm gone," she instructed, heading for the door. "While I'm in town, I'll try to find out whether the Germans are looking for you."

"Why don't you bring someone back here to talk to me?" he suggested, already knowing she'd refuse.

She paused and looked over her shoulder. "Who?"

He shrugged. "Deschamps, or someone else from the —"

"No," she said firmly.

"Why not?"

She opened the door and looked outside, her movements stiff and lacking their usual grace. "What if there *is* a traitor among us?" she said at last.

His blood chilled. There *was* a traitor. He knew it. Before losing his memory, he had even figured out who it was. "Don't go," he said suddenly.

"I have to, Paul."

"Wait." Clothes...He suddenly remembered where he could get some clothes quickly. "I'll get —"

"I'll be fine."

"But —"

"You should stay here and rest."

"Just a damn min —"

"Please don't argue with me about this, Paul." She was halfway out the door. "Not right now. It'll be better if we discuss things after I get back. I'll know more then."

He watched the barn door close.

A traitor among us.

She was hiding something.

Jesus...

No. What he was thinking right now made no sense. It was impossible. He couldn't believe it.

No.

He remembered being so in love that he didn't trust his own judgement anymore. Remembered knowing that his thoughts had become clouded with her. Too much of his attention was fixed on protecting her while she resisted protection.

Gabrielle...

No, it made no sense. If she had – no, he couldn't even think it!

If it was her...

Oh, Christ, maybe it did make sense. Who was in a better position to betray him, after all? To let the Nazis know when he was most likely to have current and accurate information about the imminent invasion?

His memories tumbled over themselves as he opened the barn door to the damp day with its gloomy skies and low-hanging thunderclouds...*They walked up the hill and prowled the damp, tumbled ruins of her uncle's abandoned house, but there was nothing there either except some books, moldy furniture, and broken crockery...*

Sometime before marrying Gabrielle, Paul had started using her uncle's abandoned wreck of a cottage as a safe house. He occasionally hid someone there, and he kept items there which couldn't implicate Gabrielle in anything serious if they were discovered in a search: money, clothes, a bicycle...

He had never told her, because he wanted to ensure that her surprise was real and her denials convincing if she was ever questioned about the belongings he kept there.

Because he *was* secretive, just as she had said. Exactly as she complained about. There was so much he didn't tell her. He did it to protect her. Did she feel he didn't trust her? Had she wanted his trust for some reason other than love, other than the needs of a wife? Had she even made herself the woman of his dreams to try to win his trust?

No. She'd never had to play him like that. He'd belonged to her from the start. And he *had* trusted her, always, completely, without conscious decision.

Had he been a fool?

His mind raced as he walked uphill, wearing only the blanket, to take advantage of his hidden stash in the old house.

If Gabrielle was the traitor—*No, stop it!*— it could well explain why Paul had been released after days of beatings and interrogation. Maybe she had betrayed him in exchange for the Nazis sparing his life and returning him to her, damaged but not dead. There were any number of reasons she might have done it.

Paul entered the ruined house, went into the main room, pushed aside a heavy settee destroyed by damp, and pulled up the floorboards underneath its usual spot. The cubbyhole there was, he saw, untouched since his last visit. He reached inside and started pulling out the few possessions he kept there.

Money, clothes, a flashlight, boots...and a flask of Irish whiskey. He'd forgotten about that.

Thank you, he said to himself.

He dressed in the simple clothes while he considered a particularly appalling reason he might have been released: If the Gestapo couldn't make him talk, maybe they decided that a better alternative than simply killing him in failure was to see if his beloved wife could make him talk.

Paul's amnesia had been an obvious shock to Gabrielle, and was now a source of continued frustration to her. If the Germans had released him without realizing how badly they'd damaged his head, they might have believed—just as Gabrielle might have believed—it would take only hours of his wife's tender loving care for her to learn what they had wasted days trying to learn.

Even now, she might be on her way to report to a contact. To advise the Germans that she needed more time with him because they'd been so clumsy with their beatings that something had gone wrong with his brain.

Jesus, no! Please, no...

He couldn't stand the idea. He hated himself for even thinking of it in a moment of madness, let alone seriously considering it with deliberate reasoning.

Gabrielle...Ma mie...

He loved her more than he loved being alive. He would die for her. He'd *rather* die than discover she had betrayed him.

But although he'd gladly give his life to be wrong about this, he couldn't risk everyone else's lives just because he found the prospect of her betrayal too horrifying even to consider. A whole lot more than his personal happiness was at stake here.

So he was going to follow her.

He stomped his feet into his worn boots as he thought of the events of the past couple of days, which were much clearer to him than the vaguely-remembered nightmare of imprisonment and torture in the days preceding this strange idyll in the barn.

Gabrielle had asked him a couple of times if he remembered anything about plans for the invasion. He'd taken it for perfectly normal curiosity about the biggest impending event of their lives, the longed-for yet much-feared military assault upon

which their future—their entire world—depended. But had there been more than that to her questions? And, if so, had she thought he would tell her everything under the softening influence of mind-blowing sex? Is that why she'd gone down on him yesterday at dawn, when he was barely able to speak or think? Was he supposed to lose control and babble everything he knew about Operation Overlord to the woman who gave him such intense pleasure? Was the hot eroticism and warm pleasure they always shared in bed that coldly calculated on her part?

No, she loves me. I know she loves me.

The only thing in the world he was more certain of was that he loved her.

Ah, but history is full of men who just knew that the women they were obsessed with loved them...and who were wrong.

His heart hurt like someone was shredding it. He stuffed some money into his pocket, took a longed-for swig of whiskey, then replaced the floorboards, pushed the settee back into place, and went into the kitchen—where he found the bicycle he kept here for emergencies.

And suspecting your wife of collaborating with the enemy surely qualifies as an emergency.

He wheeled the bike outside, mounted it, and started pedaling. Gabrielle had a good head start, but she was on foot, so he would be able to catch up, going by road on the bike. He assumed she'd take the usual shortcut, walking cross-country, until she reached the main road junction. Whether or not she had told the truth and was going into Caen, she'd have to get to that junction to proceed on to any destination.

His blood was roaring in his ears. While acting on his suspicions, he kept his mind busy searching for other explanations and alternate possibilities.

However, he couldn't kid himself that she wasn't hiding something from him.

She said we'd discuss it when she got back. When she knew more.

Knew what? Knew what her new orders were in view of his amnesia?

Stop it. She said we'd discuss our situation when we had more time.

But there was no time. He felt more certain of that with every passing moment.

She might be trying to protect him from something. Or she might need to discuss something so complicated that the task seemed pointless until his memory was mostly or completely restored. These possibilities cheered him, as they were also consistent with her behavior, even if they didn't explain why he had been released alive.

Or do I just think these possibilities make sense because I desperately want to think so?

There was no one at the junction as he approached it. He slowed down and dismounted, wary of being spotted. He did a quick recon—no one in sight. He pulled the bike into the bushes opposite from where Gabrielle was most likely to emerge and then hid there, waiting.

Sure enough, she soon appeared. He saw her sun-bright hair above the rough line of a rocky hedgerow, then the rest of her as she climbed over it, athletic and graceful.

Her dress rode up over her thighs and hips, and he felt a moment of possessive lust for his wife's body. All of that beauty was his, given to him freely and with joy.

He'd been telling the truth this morning. He loved her beyond reason. His feelings for her were stronger than he was.

Gabrielle straightened her dress, and wiped her muddy shoes on the ground. Her ankles and calves, he noticed, were also splattered with mud. All this rain had made a mess of the fields. Then she started walking down the road. His chest ached with momentary relief: She was going in the direction of Caen. At least she was telling the truth about that.

Paul stayed where he was, waiting for her to pull far enough ahead of him that he could risk coming out of hiding.

She walked fast and purposefully, her high, tight buttocks moving rhythmically under the cotton of her dress. He watched her with miserable longing, knowing he couldn't quit now. He had to know the truth.

He remembered being so in love he no longer trusted his own judgement.

But I don't remember not trusting her.

On the contrary. He remembered trusting her, believing in her, more than he'd ever trusted anyone.

Was that the judgement that was questionable?

No...He'd valued her life above all else. Had struggled with his desire to choose her safety and well-being over her duty, even over his. He had no memories of doubting her, the woman she was, or the love they shared. Only memories of doubting his ability to work and to lead effectively while she remained here, in danger, and under his command as a member of the Resistance.

The noise of a car engine intruded on his thoughts. His heart pounded with renewed dread as Gabrielle, also hearing the engine, turned around. Her posture was tense. Her body language suggested she was trying to identify the car as it approached.

Paul was relieved to recognize both the driver and the vehicle as they passed him. Not a German. The old but well-maintained car belonged to a local farmer, an old man who'd lost an arm and an eye in the Great War. He was an absolute menace on the road, steering and shifting gears with his sole arm while not necessarily seeing obstacles ahead with his sole eye.

No, Gabrielle, no...

Paul forgot everything else for a moment as he watched his wife wave down this death trap and request a lift.

Oh, for God's sake, have you lost your mind, woman?

He watched in appalled fury while Gabrielle climbed into the car. He would kill her for this! That old man's driving was practically a national scandal! She'd be lucky if *she* wasn't missing an arm and an eye by the time they reached the center of town!

Planning all the absolutely cutting things he would say to his wife about this...if she didn't turn out to be a collaborator...Paul gritted his teeth and waited until it was safe to emerge from his hiding place. Then he climbed back on the bicycle and started pedaling after them. It was at least a blessing, he supposed, that the old man didn't drive so fast that Paul would lose sight of the vehicle before it reached town.

Once they were in the narrow medieval streets of Caen itself, Paul's bicycle would have the advantage over any motored vehicle, in terms of his ability to pursue Gabrielle without being seen. It helped that she assumed he was stranded naked back at the barn—Had she denied him clothes for that very purpose?—and therefore wouldn't be looking for him or expect to see him. Still, a spouse was all too easy to identify, even unexpected and at a distance. Paul hung far back as he followed the car into Caen, knowing he must be careful now.

* * * * *

Gabrielle was so tense she felt like she'd shatter into a thousand sharp pieces if someone so much as touched her.

Paul was healing much faster than she'd expected, based on how close to death he had seemed when she'd collected his body at the gates of the chateau. He was now restless, impatient, edgy. Ready to act, to engage. She knew him well enough to know that by tomorrow—perhaps even tonight—he would insist on leaving the barn and pursuing his duty...even if he couldn't remember it.

Fear flooded her. Even once he knew the truth, she wasn't sure he'd remain in hiding. Besides, what *was* the truth? Things looked very bad for him. She even feared...Yes, she hated herself for thinking it, but she feared that his memory of his imprisonment remained so vague because he didn't *want* to remember what had happened there.

Well, no, what mind would want to remember what they did to him there, after all?

She had wept uncontrollably upon seeing the results, and couldn't bear to imagine what the process must have entailed. So surely it was natural that Paul's mind would block it out, even if he had nothing to be ashamed of?

And even more natural if some part of him knows that he betrayed us and is ashamed.

Desperately, bitterly ashamed. Paul would rather die than betray people dependent on him. So if, in fact, he had betrayed them rather than die...

Gabrielle shuddered. Maybe he couldn't bear the memory. And if he did remember it—

No, no, no!

—maybe he'd want to die now.

She must have made a distressed noise. The old farmer giving her a lift into town asked what was wrong. She shook her head and said nothing, just staring out the window at the rain-drenched landscape as they approached Caen.

She'd struggled with her appalling choices ever since discovering that Paul couldn't remember anything. Should she tell him what everyone suspected? What if he was so appalled it made him worse? He seemed to plunge into a spiral of pain and confusion when he tried to summon memories of his imprisonment. She didn't want him to lose ground in his mental recovery, which was what seemed to happen when she pushed him. Or what if, even worse, upon discovering that her own cadre wanted to kill him, he tried to confront them, convinced he could talk them out of it?

She repressed a shudder, picturing him dead at their hands.

Until now, shielding and comforting him, trying to help him get well and recover his memory, had seemed her best option. However, based on the way he had behaved today, she knew she'd have to tell him everything when she returned to the farm later today.

Oh, God, please, help me, she prayed.

The one thing she knew for certain that he wouldn't do was run away. Part of her longed to convince him to do so, and the other part of her knew he wouldn't be the man she loved if he could do it.

The car slowed down as it approached the center of Caen. Normally, Gabrielle would have been terrified by the way her one-armed, one-eyed chauffeur carelessly whipped around blind corners, came within a hairbreadth of running down pedestrians, and careened through intersections without even pausing. Right now, though, she stared through the windshield with almost total indifference, her mind wrestling with dangers that scared her far more.

When they came to a stop outside Café Didier, Gabrielle thanked her escort, got out of the car, and walked into the simple stone building on legs weak with fear. As she entered, she passed Didier's fourteen-year-old nephew, Michel, who was sweeping the floor. The boy had loved Didier and insisted on becoming more active in the Resistance after his uncle's death.

Now children are our spies and soldiers, Gabrielle thought sadly as she nodded to Michel.

Jean Deschamps was here, sitting at a table in the corner, tuning his guitar and smoking a cigarette. He hit a sour note as he saw her enter, then put his guitar aside and rose to greet her.

"Chérie."

She didn't like him calling her that. Her brief affair with him had been casual, the product of loneliness rather than real affection. He'd been angry about her breaking off with him, and genuinely resentful of Paul—whom he had recognized as the cause of her sudden change of heart, even though it was another couple of months before anything happened between her and Paul.

Nonetheless, Gabrielle now let Deschamps use the endearment, take her hands, and kiss both her cheeks. He, after all, had been the one to tell her Paul was in the chateau. Who knew what would have happened if Deschamps hadn't warned her? And he had been surprisingly sympathetic to her horrified grief at the news, even though he was convinced Paul was betraying them.

Now Deschamps touched her cheek. "You look tired, *chérie*."

"I haven't been sleeping." She pulled away from the caress and walked over to the bar.

Didier's widow was there, a voluptuous woman in her late forties who had always, Gabrielle thought, had a slightly sour manner.

Gabrielle nodded. "Madeleine."

Madeleine Didier studied her. "Been crying over Paul, haven't you?"

Now that Didier was dead, Jean Deschamps and the priest who'd performed the service were the only people whom Gabrielle was certain knew about her marriage. But everyone knew that there was something between her and Paul, even if they had no idea how much.

"Yes," she admitted. "I've cried for him."

"A pig like that," Madeleine said with chilling contempt. "He's not worth it."

Gabrielle didn't reply. Instead, she glanced across the café to where the only two other customers at the moment sat: Arneau and Raine, both members of the Resistance. Arneau was fussy, effeminate, and very high strung. He was such a strange candidate for dangerous Underground activity that Gabrielle had wondered more than once if he might be a traitor. Raine was a tough, humorless man who seldom said much to anyone.

Gabrielle asked no one in particular, "Has there been any news?"

"There has indeed," Deschamps replied, reclaiming her attention. "Michel." He got the boy's attention, then gestured to the entrance. "Watch the door."

Didier's nephew, who often acted as their lookout, went outside where, Gabrielle knew, he would pretend to work on a bicycle repairs just outside the door and warn them if anyone approached the café.

Deschamps said to Gabrielle, "We've been wondering where you were."

"Watching the chateau," she mumbled.

"For Paul's body?" Deschamps asked.

She nodded. The others gathered around her.

"And?" Deschamps prodded, lowering his voice.

"Nothing," she lied. "I haven't seen it."

Arneau glanced nervously toward the door before saying, "There may be no body. Perhaps he's been sent to a concentration camp."

"Or perhaps he's still inside the chateau," Deschamps suggested quietly, "telling everything he knows."

Gabrielle said, "There's no proof —"

"Now Le Blanc has been shot, too," Madeleine said, keeping her voice low, too.

Gabrielle gasped. "When?"

"Day before yesterday."

"That makes six of us," Deschamps said, "murdered or arrested since Paul was taken prisoner. *Six*, Gabrielle."

"He is not a traitor."

"Will you still believe that," Madeleine said coldly, "when the Gestapo come for you?"

"Didier thought there was a traitor among us before Paul ever came here," Gabrielle reminded them.

"Don't you bring my husband into this!" Madeleine snapped.

"Shh." Deschamps reminded her to keep her voice down.

Gabrielle said, "I'm just saying —"

"And when did Didier get taken?" Deschamps said. "After Paul was among us — and eager, I might add, to take Didier's place."

"He wasn't!" Gabrielle snapped in a furious whisper. "It's what Didier wanted. And you know that!"

"I know," Deschamps replied, "that it was certainly convenient for Paul."

She wanted to hit him. Instead, she forced herself to take a calming breath and ask, "No other news?"

"Besides the little matter of Le Blanc's death, you mean?" Madeleine said icily.

"My God, do you think I'm not sorry he's dead?" Gabrielle exclaimed. "Do you think I'm not afraid of being next? I am! But I don't agree with you that Paul is responsible for what's happening to us!"

"Be realistic, Gabrielle," Arneau urged. "He's a good man, I'm not denying it. But the Gestapo can make anyone talk."

Because she feared it was true, she said nothing. Having failed twice to elicit the information she wanted for Paul's sake, she tried one more time to find out if the Germans were looking for him — without giving away to her associates that he was now free. "What about other activity? Are there any round-ups? Any house-to-house searches?"

Deschamps shrugged. "Apart from killing or capturing all of *us* with remarkable efficiency, the Germans seem to spend most of their time gazing across the Channel."

"Waiting for invasion," Raine added gruffly, surprising Gabrielle by the mere act of contributing to the conversation.

"They're not *that* worried about it," Arneau opined. "Rommel went home yesterday."

"Home?" Gabrielle repeated in surprise.

"Tomorrow is his wife's birthday," Arneau explained.

"Not a decision which stinks of military urgency," Deschamps agreed, "but the Germans are jumpy, even so."

So that was the situation, then. Her comrades were still being picked off one by one, and still convinced that it was Paul who had exposed them, telling everything he knew under torture. Meanwhile, the Germans evidently weren't looking for him. No one but Gabrielle knew that he was free. He was still safe for the moment...but she could tell these people would kill him if he couldn't convince them he wasn't responsible for what was happening. And how could he, if he couldn't remember? Besides, what if he *had* talked?

Lost in these tumultuous thoughts, it was a few moments before she became aware of a crawling sensation on her skin and looked up. Madeleine was staring at her with a coldly suspicious expression.

Feeling uneasy, Gabrielle rose from her seat. "I should be going."

Deschamps eyed her. "Back to the chateau?"

She nodded.

"I'm surprised you've left it for so long," Madeleine remarked.

Gabrielle said, "I must eat, sleep, and change clothes sometime."

"Without asking anyone to watch in your place?" Madeleine prodded.

Realizing she hadn't covered her tracks well enough, Gabrielle lied, "If they throw his body outside the gates while I'm gone, it'll still be there when I return."

"Not necessarily," Madeleine said. "Seems to me that by being here, you're taking the risk of never being sure, if his body never turns up."

Does she know?

No, she was guessing. Prodding to see if she got a response.

"You're right," Gabrielle agreed. "I'm so tired, I wasn't thinking clearly. I should go right back."

"I'll take you," Deschamps offered.

"You don't have a car."

"I'll walk you there."

"No, it's too long a walk," Gabrielle protested.

"I don't mind."

She knew that additional protests would only draw more of Madeleine's unwanted attention to her, so she agreed. "Thank you, I appreciate the offer."

Damn, damn, damn.

Wondering how she'd get rid of him, she let Deschamps escort her out of the café.

CHAPTER NINE

June 5, 1944

Paul waited outside the café, hidden in a doorway across the street. The familiar surroundings were making him recall things, but his head was nonetheless a bewildering jumble of fragmented memories and half-formed knowledge.

He recognized Didier's nephew, Michel, and knew that the boy's working on his bicycle right outside the café meant there was an impromptu meeting occurring inside among people who didn't want to be seen or heard.

So Gabrielle was meeting her Resistance comrades at Didier's café. It relieved Paul's mind considerably, already making his earlier fears seem as absurd as they were appalling. Nonetheless, he was still puzzled. What was she hiding from him?

He withdrew deeper into the doorway when he saw her exit the café. Accompanied by—

Jean Deschamps.

Paul knew who he was within an instant of seeing him. And with the knowledge, a chaotic flood of memories poured into his consciousness.

Deschamps knew who Paul was, and knew about his marriage to Gabrielle. And he resented Paul.

Gabrielle had an affair with him.

Paul had realized early on that Deschamps wanted her and resented him, even before he'd become her lover. What he hadn't known, until Gabrielle had one day confided it to him, was that Deschamps had briefly been her lover. Paul had never seen anything in Gabrielle to suggest tender feelings for Deschamps, and he believed her when she said that sheer loneliness had prompted the short-lived fling. Ever since breaking off with Deschamps, in fact, she had avoided him, since she felt awkward, aware that his feelings for her were more intense than she had realized and that he'd rekindle the affair in a heartbeat if he could.

So what's she doing walking arm in arm with him now?

Wondering what Gabrielle was up to, Paul followed them.

* * * * *

"You're not really going to the chateau, are you?" Deschamps said, holding her arm hard against him.

Her heart skipped a beat. "Why do you say that?"

Does he suspect?

"He's not worth it, Gabrielle."

Momentary relief flooded her. "He's my husband."

"He doesn't deserve you."

She was tempted to bite his head off, but she was trying to focus on what mattered most: Getting rid of Deschamps, then going to her cottage to gather supplies to bring back to Paul. And doing it all without arousing Deschamps' suspicions.

"You think I've made a mistake, don't you?" she said.

"Marrying him?" He nodded. "You know I do. You know I...wanted things to be very different than this."

They were approaching the street which eventually led to her cottage at the edge of town. She let him lead her past the street, then paused, as if suddenly changing her mind. "You know...I've just *got* to lie down for a few hours. I know Madeleine was right, but I—"

"Madeleine is a bitter bitch who was just trying to upset you." He raised her hand to his lips. "Which is unkind, because anyone can see how much you're tormenting yourself already."

She put a hand up to her forehead. "I want to go home for a bit."

He patted the hand he held and turned back to lead her down the right street. She gritted her teeth with impatience, wanting to walk much faster than this—and wanting, above all, to get rid of him. However, she knew she had to be careful.

"Paul didn't belong in charge," Deschamps said. "Didier had no business naming an American as his successor."

"Only you and I knew his nationality," she reminded him.

Deschamps knew because he'd liaised with the OSS before Paul's arrival. Gabrielle had known Paul's identity from the start, too, because she'd acted as his courier after his arrival; Didier had insisted that a good-looking young woman with an established community of art school friends in Paris could travel back and forth to the capital without arousing suspicion, and he was right. The others all thought that Paul Finley was Paul Fouquet, though, because Paul and Didier both believed that everyone was safest if no one knew more than they needed to know.

"Yes, he can pass for French," Deschamps admitted as he and Gabrielle strolled down the street, "but Didier knew he wasn't a Frenchman. And I," he added, getting to the crux of the matter, "should have been Didier's successor."

"So now that Paul is gone," she said, wondering just how far Deschamps might have gone to get the position he felt was his due, "does that mean you're in charge?"

"In reality, yes. Officially," he shrugged, "nothing permanent has been decided yet."

"Well," she mused, "you're the obvious choice, aren't you?"

Deschamps had wanted Paul's position in their Resistance group, and he'd wanted Paul's wife. As Deschamps tucked Gabrielle's hand more tightly into the crook of his arm, she wondered if he had believed that getting Paul out of the way would make both things available to him.

* * * * *

Paul knew where they were going. He just didn't know why Gabrielle was bringing this man with her. Or why she was glued to his side like that.

Wanting to get to the cottage ahead of them, Paul slipped down a side street, then ran along a parallel street, cut through the grounds of the old abbey, and got to the back door of his wife's cottage while she and Deschamps were still meandering at some distance from the front door. He let himself in, then moved to the front of the rough stone cottage, where he opened a window slightly so he could hear them talking even if she didn't invite Deschamps in.

And she'd damn well better not.

Paul would *definitely* have something to say about his wife inviting an ex-lover inside for a cozy chat while he himself was supposedly stranded alone in that drafty barn of her uncle's.

He flattened his back against the wall next to the window as he heard their footsteps approaching the door. He'd have time to hide in the next room if Deschamps was going to come inside with her.

Hide in the next room, he fumed. I'm her husband, for God's sake!

"I don't know," Gabrielle said, "perhaps I did make a mistake, Jean. But even if I did..." She gave a sigh. "It's too late to do anything about it now."

Paul frowned, listening.

"But, at the risk of sounding harsh, it's a problem which the Nazis have solved for you, *chérie*."

"You can't ask me to *want* him to be dead, Jean."

"I know you had feelings for him..."

Had? *Had*? The nerve of that guy!

"...but wouldn't it be better now if he were dead?"

Oh, as if she'd suddenly want you just because I was dead, you no-talent whiner.

"If Paul were alive..." Deschamps continued.

She hasn't told them I'm alive?

"...then he'd have to suffer the consequences of what he's done. And could you really face that?"

"I...I..." She sounded on the verge of tears. "You're saying you'd have to kill him."

Paul risked a glance out the window and was appalled to see Deschamps caressing Gabrielle's face.

Hey, buddy, don't forget which one of us she fell in love with and married.

"I'm saying," Deschamps told her, "*we'd* have to kill him. Your life is at stake, too, Gabrielle. He has betrayed us all. We must all act together in this."

"You don't know that he's the one —"

"Six of us arrested or murdered since he was taken prisoner, Gabrielle! It can mean nothing else, and you know that."

"He's my husband!" she wailed, perhaps overdoing the helpless despair just a touch — not that Deschamps would notice.

"No one knows that besides me and Father LeRoy," Deschamps reminded her.

"I know."

"You'd be wise to forget it. Whether he's dead or alive right now."

"It seems so wrong. I loved him."

Loved? *Loved?* Now that was just great.

"People do insane things during wartime," Deschamps said, doing his best to sound worldly wise.

Paul leaned his head against the wall and closed his eyes, finally understanding. This was bad. Very bad. The local Resistance thought he had betrayed them and would kill him if they knew he was alive. The fact that he'd been released made it look even worse, as if he'd offered the Gestapo whatever they wanted in exchange for his life.

It was a dangerous situation, and he had no idea yet how he'd deal with it. Nonetheless, he was flooded with relief, even happiness. So *this* was what Gabrielle wasn't telling him. She was protecting him from her associates in the Resistance.

"I don't know what to think, Jean," she was saying now, "what to do."

"Let me help you," he urged.

I know what you want, you bastard, and it doesn't involve helping her.

Deschamps continued, "We can get away. I can arrange it. Right now."

"What do you mean?"

"I have contacts. We could escape. Get out of the way of the coming invasion."

"But our duty —"

"We've done our duty since France fell, Gabrielle. Time to be practical. Things are over for the Resistance in Caen. Paul has seen to that."

"Just leave?"

"The Gestapo will probably shoot or arrest both of us any moment. Even if they don't, the Allies will tear France apart when they try to invade. How likely are we to survive that?"

"They won't be shooting French people," she argued.

"They'll be bombing and shooting everything in sight," Deschamps insisted. "This is *war*, Gabrielle."

"I don't know. This is so sudden, Jean. I need to think."

"Come away with me. Now," Deschamps murmured.

Paul glanced out the window again. Now Deschamps was trying to embrace her. Gabrielle was fluttering nervously, trying to make it difficult for him to put his arms around her without actually rejecting his overtures. Paul longed to open the door and punch the jackass who was putting moves on his wife, but he supposed that would just add to his problems, so he restrained himself.

"I need time," Gabrielle murmured.

"Of course," Deschamps agreed, now trying to back her towards the door of the cottage.

"Time to think."

"Chérie..."

"Time alone," Gabrielle said more emphatically, making Paul grin.

"I understand," Deschamps said, finally accepting that he wouldn't get any further with her right now. "You're distressed."

Sensitive and observant, Paul thought dryly. He'd started wondering if Gabrielle would have to fake an attack of nausea to get rid of this jerk.

"Thank you for seeing me home," she said.

"We'll talk again. Very soon."

"Yes," she agreed.

Paul heard her turn the doorknob. He moved silently to stand beside the door. As soon as she was through it, he clapped a hand over her mouth, shouldered the door shut, and whispered, "It's me."

She stiffened and choked on a gasp, but recognized his voice and did nothing else.

"Don't say a word," he whispered into her ear. He released her and moved to the window again, watching until Deschamps was well away from the cottage before finally speaking to her. "What the *hell* is going on?"

"What are you doing here?"

"You were practically in his pocket!"

Her eyes widened with horror. "You didn't come here *naked*, did you? Paul!"

"Holding his hand, encouraging him..."

"Where did you get those clothes? Why aren't you back at the barn where you're supposed to be?"

"And getting into that car with that lunatic driver!" he continued, enjoying the release of bad temper and frustration. "What were you thinking?"

"I was thinking," she snapped back, "of getting here as fast as possible so I could get back to *you* as fast as possible. Why didn't you wait, the way I told you to?"

"Why didn't *you* tell me that they think I've exposed them and am responsible for the Gestapo picking them off?"

She fell back a step. "You know?" She gasped. "You were listening to us!" Her face flushed with anger. "You were *spying* on me!"

"Were you going to wait until the war was *over* to tell me about this?"

She balled her hands into fists and made a furious gesture. "How dare you! Paul! How *could* you?"

"How could *you* keep something like this from me?"

"Because you weren't yourself!" she shouted.

Since that was irrefutable, he said nothing. They stared at each other in stunned silence for a moment.

Then, realizing she'd done what she had to do, he nodded.

"I was going to tell you today." Her voice was resentful, but calmer. "When I got back."

He nodded again, realizing that was true. "I couldn't tell you whether or not I had talked, and whenever you pressed me to remember, I only got worse."

"Yes."

"And you kept hoping I'd remember the truth so we'd know what to do—" He made a vague gesture to encompass the whole situation. "—about this."

"Yes." She hugged herself. "It's the Resistance I've been hiding you from, more so than the Germans—who aren't looking for you, based on what I can find out."

"And you've been wondering if I really did betray you all."

Tears flooded her eyes. "I know it's not in you to do it, Paul. But I also saw you when they released you. Saw what they had done to you." She was crying now. "They could have broken you. Arneau is right, they could have broken *anyone*. You might not even have known you were talking by the time you talked. You..."

"Oh, *ma mie*." He came closer and took her in his arms. "Don't hug yourself, hug *me*."

She did, weeping against his shoulder. "Paul, I don't care what happened there! I love you! I won't let them kill you! I won't let *you* let them kill you!"

"Shhh...It'll be all right."

She clutched at him. "We have to get away," she said urgently.

"No, we—"

To his surprise, she hit him.

"Ow," he said mildly.

"I *knew* you would say that!" she cried. "I just knew it!"

He sighed. "Then is it too much to hope that we don't have to waste time arguing about it?"

She started crying again. "What are we going to do?"

"We're going to pull ourselves together and sort this out," he said reasonably.

"Paul, Paul..."

"It's all right," he assured her.

"Do you remember?" she asked despairingly.

"Not everything." And he suspected he would never remember his days in the chateau completely. Too many blackouts, too many hours barely conscious, too much mind-numbing pain. "But the plan is pretty obvious, don't you think?" Now that he knew more of the pieces, the whole puzzle was taking shape.

"What plan?" she mumbled miserably.

"Well, not obvious to you," he conceded, "because you weren't there. But one thing I do –"

"These are *your* clothes," she said suddenly, pulling away from him. "I remember them." Her jaw dropped. "You *did* come here naked!"

"No, I kept them in your uncle's house. But that doesn't really matter right now."

"And why did you come here? Just to spy on me?"

"No...Um...Well, actually," honesty compelled him to admit, "yes."

"Paul!" She had rarely sounded more annoyed with him.

He tried to explain. And since there was no acceptable way of telling his wife that he'd briefly suspected her of being a collaborator, it came out badly and made her angry all over again.

"How *could* you?" she raged.

"Well, you've been thinking that I may have betray –"

"Under torture!" She was shouting again. "Crazed with pain, half dead, your brain –" She waved vaguely at his head. " – injured!"

"And there *was* something you weren't tell –"

"Whereas *you*," she hurled furiously at him, "thought that I was betraying you and everyone else for.. *what*? Just for fun? Just for some silk stockings? Money?"

"Well, your doing it in exchange for them not killing me was my favorite answer, though I'll admit it wasn't a –"

"Oh, sometimes you really are just the most *awful* man."

"I know," he agreed. Since that took some of the wind out of her sails, he prodded, "Would you have tried to find out what I know and tell the Germans if it was the price of keeping me alive?"

She started crying again. "I don't know..."

He held her again. "I love you," he whispered.

"I'm not forgiving you for suspecting me," she warned him. "I'm *not*."

"Not right away," he agreed.

"Not ever," she insisted. "Well...not soon, anyhow."

"You can punish me for a while," he offered. "You're entitled."

"It will be a very *bad* punishment," she assured him.

He grinned. "Dare I hope it will involve being tied up and tormented?"

"No. It will involve things like putting a new roof on the cottage and taking care of the garden and getting me lots of black-market coffee." When she noticed his hands wandering down her back towards her bottom, she added, "And we will never ever have sex again."

"That's a little harsh," he suggested.

"I'm in a very bad mood."

"That much is clear."

"No fondling," she warned him as his hands moved exploringly over her bottom.

"Not even a little petting?"

"Not even any kissing," she advised him.

"That's so cruel, it may be a violation of the Geneva Convention."

"I don't care, you deserve it."

He kissed her. "I do indeed," he breathed against her mouth.

"And don't ever touch my breasts again," she murmured.

"No?" He started backing her towards their little bedroom.

"No."

"So..." He moved one hand from her bottom and slid it up to cup her breast. "This, for example, is forbidden from now on?"

"Completely." She sighed when he started stroking her nipple through the fabric of her dress, coaxing it into a tender peak. "And never do that again. Don't touch the other one, either."

He grinned and did as ordered not to do. "My life will be a wasteland."

"Serves you right," she murmured, letting him push her slowly through their bedroom door, his hands kneading her soft breasts while her fingers toyed with his belt buckle.

He kissed her again, massaging her tongue with his, apologizing with his touch for thoughts which had wounded her. She slid her arms around his neck and moaned as she kissed him back, warm and eager and sweet. When the backs of her legs encountered their bed, she sank down onto it, pulling him with her.

"So," he whispered, pushing her dress up until it was bunched around her waist, "if I tried to put my hand between your legs..."

"I'd be forced to...*Mmmm...*" She closed her eyes and moved her hips against his caress.

"Forced to...?" He nuzzled her breasts, then opened his mouth and sucked on one taut nipple through the fabric.

"*Ohhhh...* Forced to...make you suffer..."

Her hand found his crotch and she fulfilled her promise, stroking him through his trousers until he couldn't stand it anymore, couldn't bear not being inside her.

He pulled her panties down and tossed them onto the floor. "I guess you'll never help me take off my pants again," he murmured, lowering his head to kiss her between her thighs.

"Never," she agreed shakily, sitting up to work on the buttons of his fly. "Because when I do that..." She pulled him out of his pants, thick and twitching and ready for her. "You're always like *this*."

He pushed her back down onto the mattress and slid his hips between her legs. Her fingers, gripping him warmly, guided him to the hot, wet entrance waiting to welcome him with tight, pulsing ecstasy. He thrust inside of her and closed his eyes, shuddering with pleasure.

She shifted her position and tilted her hips, helping him push as deep as he could. His arms were trembling. Her hands stroked his sides. He opened his eyes and looked down at her. Her lips were swollen and wet, parted and trembling. Her hair was a glorious tumble around her head, her eyes dazed with passion, her skin flushed and rosy.

Her hands came up to cradle his face. "It's this war," she whispered. "It's this damned war."

He held her gaze, wishing he could put her inside his head for a day so she'd know how much he loved her, how often he thought of her, how completely he needed her. "I'd have died if I wasn't wrong," he said. "I'd have wanted to die."

"I could lie to everyone to save you," she told him. "I *have*. Everyone. But I could never lie to you."

"Maybe I should have lied to *you* about...why I followed you. What I thought."

"No." She massaged him deep inside her body, contracting the mysterious feminine muscles that made him helpless with pleasure. "Every lie leads to another. You and I have to tell so many lies to everyone else. We must love each other with honesty. Without that..." She shook her head. "Without that, we wouldn't really have each other. Not the way we want. Not the way we do."

He sank down on her, letting her take most of his weight, and wrapped his arms fiercely around her. "I love you so much. If I could make you feel how *much*—"

"I do," she assured him, her voice breathless with emotion. "I do."

They didn't want to talk any more after that, didn't need to. They wanted only to worship each other with their bodies. To drench every sense, drown every sorrow,

indulge every desire. They were very slow and tender with each other, knowing the destination was there, but pleased to linger long and languidly on the journey. At some point, well after they had started and before they were ready to finish, they heard the rain come again, drumming mildly on the roof, falling musically on the ground outside. Only a light drizzle. The worst of the weather finally seemed to have passed.

The rain...

He knew.

Operation Overlord. Neptune.

He knew!

His wife was moaning softly, luxuriantly beneath him, undulating her hips as he rocked deliriously into her.

Calais was a fake, a bluff. The Allies would land in Normandy. Nearly half a million men in an all-out assault. The biggest military action in history. Airborne divisions would be dropped in the dark behind enemy lines. The landing beaches had code names: Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, Sword.

"Oh, my God," Paul said.

The fifth of June. D-Day.

Gabrielle was moving faster beneath him now, milking him, suckling his cock with her lush body "Mmmm....mmmm....mmmm..."

The rain! Now he knew why it bothered him so much.

Her moans turned to fevered whimpers as her hands dug blindly into his wounded back. "Yes, yes...Paul...Mmmm...Ah! Ahhhh....ahhhh..."

His blood thundered like cannon fire. His hips were moving with a will of their own now, his penis frantic with delight inside of her.

Last night...

"The last time I saw you was in May," she said. "You – "

"What's the date now?"

"June fourth. Almost June fifth, I suppose. It's nearly midnight." Feeling his tension, she prodded, "Paul? What is it?"

"I don't know." June...June...D-Day.

They should be here now. The invasion was scheduled for today. *Here*, in Normandy. It was supposed to have happened at dawn. But they hadn't come.

"Come," he urged his wife. "Come for me...Come, sweetheart..." He ground into her, pushing her over the edge of passion and into fulfillment.

Gabrielle arched convulsively off the bed and cried out...The skies should be thick with bombers right now...She came in long, shuddering waves beneath him... The beaches should be overwhelmed and devastated with heavy fighting...The delicious friction of his thrusting, the exquisite pulsing of her orgasm...Airborne divisions on the

ground should be capturing strategic bridges...She was destroying him, making him surrender everything to her, just as he wanted to...Destroying German supply lines...

"Oh, *God*..." he groaned.

He remembered!

And then he was coming, too, pouring himself into his wife's writhing, quivering body. Their bellies rubbed frantically together as they plunged and soared, locked together in love and passion, their whispers and groans as intimate as their carnal embrace.

He rested on top of her for a few moments, bonelessly sated and blank-minded with pleasure. Then he eased most of his weight to one side of her. If he'd had any breath, he would have laughed when he heard her gulp for air the moment she was free of his weight; but he was panting too hard to pause for laughter. Then her teeth chattered, and his heart contracted with love.

For a few minutes, there was no sound other than the soft patter of drizzle, the harsh gusts of their breathing, and the occasional chattering of her teeth in post-conjugal pleasure. Finally, she snuggled into him and murmured, "I love you."

"Didn't come," he mumbled.

She snorted. "Yes, you did."

"No, I mean—"

"Well, *I* certainly did," she said sleepily. "*Mon Dieu*, how could you not have noticed? I practically bucked you off of me, it was so strong."

He finally found breath to laugh. "I wasn't talking about us, *chérie*. But, yes, it was so noticeable I would think half of Caen knows you just came."

She made a French noise. "Then what are you talking about?"

"The invasion was scheduled for today. June fifth."

She sat bolt upright. "*What?*"

"Here. The beaches of Normandy." Caen was less than fifteen miles from the landing zone. The town would be in the thick of the fighting soon after the invasion began. Paul was supposed to organize the Resistance to sabotage German defenses in tandem with the attack.

"But they're not here," Gabrielle said. "There's no—"

"The rain," he told her. "They couldn't land in this weather."

She slid off the bed, started for the door, stopped, and turned back to him. "*Rommel*."

He rose, pulled up his pants, and started fastening his trousers and belt. "What about him?"

"He went home yesterday. Tomorrow is Frau Rommel's birthday." She watched him dress.

"He doesn't know," Paul said with satisfaction.

"And Deschamps and the others say there's no activity, no security alerts or troop movements." She suddenly laughed. "Paul!" She flung herself at him so hard he nearly fell over. "You didn't tell them!" She was still laughing as she kissed his face.

"I'm pretty pleased, too," he conceded. "That's what I was going to tell you – that I didn't talk about the invasion – before you showed me how we're never going to have sex again." She kissed him again. "The Germans don't know anything. Not even who I really am."

"What?"

"They spoke to me in French and German the whole time I was their prisoner. No English."

She gasped. "They didn't know you're American!"

"No." He remembered that much. Remembered the relief he'd felt about that, as well as the concentration he devoted to maintaining the fiction, to never uttering a word of English while he was a prisoner. "They knew I was in the Resistance, and they thought I was French."

"So they never even asked you about the invasion?"

"No. In fact," he led her out of the bedroom as he continued, "they didn't ask me all that much of anything. Oh, they interrogated me a little, but not enough to explain how much they beat and tortured me. I'm certain they didn't ask me any questions at all the final time." He went into the kitchen and found a bottle of water. "I think there were other times when they just worked on me without any questions at all, but I don't remember for sure. Maybe I never will." He poured water into cups for both of them.

She accepted hers. "So...you didn't tell them anything about our group? You're not the reason six of us have been killed or arrested in the past week?"

"No," he said with certainty. "The Gestapo never tried that hard to learn anything from me. I do remember that much now."

"Then why did they –"

"Because they wanted it to look like I was responsible for what's happening."

Her jaw dropped as she realized. "And that's why you were released alive, too!"

"You'd all assume that I'd talked in exchange for my life."

"And someone had told them you wouldn't talk easily. I, in particular, wouldn't believe it, but most others wouldn't either. So they had to come close to killing you."

"Yes. But it was important to make sure I was definitely alive when they dumped my body outside the gates. They had to make me look completely guilty. Every circumstance had to ensure that none of you would believe me even if I could talk or remember –"

"Remember. You think they injured your head on purpose?"

He shrugged. "They probably just got lucky. Amnesia's far too tricky to plan. But it's certainly possible they inflicted the head injury to make sure I couldn't think or speak well enough to defend myself when I was found."

"When you were found," she repeated urgently. "Paul, if someone betrayed you, then they might know you've been released."

"By now, yes, probably."

"Whoever it is will realize I took you to safety. They'll be looking for you. Knowing that I'll lead them to you if they watch me!"

"We've got to confront the traitor right now, Gabrielle. We've got very little time to prepare for the invasion."

"But if it was supposed to be today —"

"The weather seems to be breaking. It'll be tomorrow. The tidal conditions won't be right for much longer, and Eisenhower won't want to postpone until they're right again. It's becoming too risky. We've fooled the Germans this long into believing the Allies will land at Calais, but every day of delay is another day during which they might learn the truth." Paul nodded. "If it's at all humanly possible, the Allies will land here tomorrow at dawn."

CHAPTER TEN

D-Day Minus One

"What do we do?" Gabrielle asked, stunned by what her husband was telling her.

"We have to give everyone their assignments. It's our job to support the invasion from behind the lines. It's what the Allies need from the Resistance. Those are my orders."

"Yes, of course." Gabrielle had waited for this for a long time. She was simultaneously so excited and so scared that she wanted to have another fit of tears; but there was no time for that now. "Paul, what do we do about the others, though? How can you give them assignments if —"

"Don't worry," he told her, finishing his water and taking her arm. He led her quickly through the main room and to the front door. "It's going to be all right. I know who —"

The front door burst open and armed men came plunging through it. Gabrielle screamed and clutched Paul, terrified for him. For both of them. He stood still and slowly raised his hands.

Gabrielle recognized their assailants. "Deschamps! Raine!" Armed and pointing their guns right at Paul. She heard a soft whistle outside, then Arneau came through the door, too. Also armed. Within moments, six more people entered the room, including Madeleine Didier. Gabrielle realized that the whistle had been the signal that their quarry was indeed here.

We should never have stayed here.

She should have insisted Paul leave with her the moment she found him here. To think they were going to die now because they couldn't wait to make love until after they were hiding in safety somewhere! Nooooo, they had to do it here and now, despite the danger they were in. It made her feel very stupid.

And it was indeed *they* who were going to die. Because Gabrielle's comrades would have to go through *her* to kill her husband. She forced her way past Paul and stood in front of him, pressing her back against him as she glared at everyone.

"Hiding behind your woman?" Deschamps sneered at Paul.

Paul sighed. "Well, I could push her out of the way, I suppose. But you know how impetuous she is. She'd just push back. And then we'd start fighting. And we agreed when we got married that we hated husbands and wives who fought in front of other people."

Arneau gasped. "You *married* her?"

"You needn't sound so surprised," Gabrielle said huffily.

"You're married?" Madeleine blurted.

"Besides," Paul added, "if the two of us started wrestling over who gets to stand closest to the guns, you might just use the tussle as an excuse to shoot us both without talking first."

"We have no need to talk," Madeleine snapped. "You've done quite enough talking already, *cochon!*"

"All right," Paul said, "I occasionally put up with my wife calling me a pig, when she's particularly mad at me, but I don't have to tolerate that kind of language from *you*."

"They're *married!*" Arneau said in amazement to Raine.

"Yes," Deschamps said impatiently, "they're married. It's not important."

"No, it's not," Gabrielle agreed. "What is important, you bastard, is that you betrayed my husband to the Nazis, who beat and tortured him, and then you set him up to be condemned by the Resistance for your crimes against us!"

Deschamps scowled. "What are you talking about?"

"Um, Gabrielle?" Paul said.

She shook off his restraining hand and continued, "You've resented Paul ever since he came here! You couldn't stand it that I loved him and not you!"

Deschamps looked appalled. "I would hardly turn a man over to those butchers in the Gestapo just because —"

"Gabrielle?" Paul repeated.

"And you hated that Didier left him in charge and not you!" She added to the others, "He told me so today. When he urged me to run away with him and leave you all here to die!"

Now the others started looking at Deschamps with dark interest.

He protested, "They're free to run away, too, if they want to!"

"So when Paul found out you were the traitor in our midst whom Didier had suspected..." Gabrielle continued.

Paul said, "Gabrielle."

"I am not a traitor!" Deschamps said furiously. "I have devoted my life to fighting the Nazis since the fall of France!"

"Yet," Arneau said, "you told Gabrielle only today that you want to flee?"

"Fighting the Nazis is one thing," Deschamps snapped. "Sitting around waiting to be picked off like ducks is quite another. Le Blanc knew it. Remember? But he waited too long to flee and they got him. Besides, do *you* want to be here when the Allies start dropping bombs?"

"Yes, I do," said Raine, surprising everyone by speaking. "I want to be here when the Nazis are finally driven out of my homeland."

"It's about to happen," Paul announced.

"How do you know?" Madeleine challenged. "Did the Gestapo tell you?"

"No."

"Oh, for God's sake," Deschamps said, "he knows because he's OSS."

This stunned everyone but Gabrielle.

"OSS?"

"What?"

"A Frenchman?"

"He's not French," Gabrielle said. "He's an American. And...And..." And Deschamps had always known that. "And..." She choked on her own breath, realizing what that meant. "The Gestapo never spoke to him in English."

"There, you see!" Deschamps said. "If I had betrayed him, they would have known he was American, and they'd —"

"Have used English," Gabrielle said, recognizing her mistake. "They'd also have known he was OSS, and they'd have asked him about the invasion."

"That's what I was trying to tell you," Paul muttered, "when you went off half-cocked like that."

"So before you go making wild accusations like that," Deschamps said angrily, "accusations which could get a man *killed* in this jumpy crowd, I suggest —"

"Oh, who cares what accusations she makes?" Madeleine said. "She's just trying to protect her lover. Husband. Man."

"Better," Paul said, "than you protected yours, Madeleine."

"It's not my fault they got him," Madeleine snapped.

"Isn't it?" Paul replied.

"It's *her*?" Gabrielle asked.

"Yes," he said. "She's the traitor. Didier didn't look close enough to home when he was trying to figure out who it was. And she was, of course, careful and clever. Just as *this* plan was careful and clever."

"Now you're just trying to distract us," Madeleine said coldly.

"You were tortured, Paul," Arneau said, "we understand that. If it were up to me."

"It's *not* up to you," Madeleine snapped.

"No, it's up to *me*," Deschamps said. "And I want to hear what Paul has to say."

"Oh, now that *you're* in the clear," Madeleine said, "suddenly these two are full of interesting ideas!"

"I'm in the clear because Gabrielle, though impetuous, is an honest woman," Deschamps said. "She herself withdrew the accusation when she realized that Paul's captors didn't know the things about him which I certainly would have told them had I betrayed him."

"You have only his word for that!" Madeleine protested. "The word of a traitor and a—"

"I know him better than you do," Deschamps said. "I don't like him, and I have no idea what Gabrielle sees in him. But he is ..." Deschamps grimaced with the effort the next few words cost him. "An honorable man. And as dedicated to fighting the Germans as I am."

"And a man with everything to lose now," Madeleine pointed out. "And everything to gain if he can shift the blame elsewhere."

"My judgement is sound," Deschamps said testily. "He will not be able to shift the blame elsewhere unless it belongs there."

"Let him speak," Arneau suggested. "Paul deserves that much."

"No!"

"Why not?" Gabrielle demanded of Madeleine. "Why are you so afraid?"

"I'm not afraid! I'm *not*. But only moments ago you had everyone ready to turn on Deschamps. I don't want to be next."

"So that's it, then?" Gabrielle said. "We kill Paul without hearing him out because you're afraid of not being able to prove your innocence if we listen to him?"

"You would gladly see any innocent person die if it would mean saving him!"

"No, I wouldn't. I won't let you kill him, but I won't let an innocent person die in his place, either," Gabrielle said.

"That's fair," Raine said.

"Yes," Arneau agreed. "Let's hear Paul's thoughts."

"Accusations, you mean!" Madeleine said.

"Yes," Paul agreed. "Accusations."

"Well?" Deschamps prodded.

Everyone in the extremely crowded room looked at Paul with riveted attention.

"Gabrielle," he said, "you're standing on my foot."

"Oh! Sorry."

He set her slightly away from him and began, "I followed up on Didier's suspicions, and I had a few of my own. I could never discover the traitor, but I became increasingly convinced that he was right, there was indeed one within this group. Someone who didn't take any risks, though, and was therefore very hard to catch." He nodded and repeated, "Someone who didn't take risks."

Paul continued, describing how he had only discovered Madeleine's connection to the Nazis because he made secret late-night forays to his wife's cottage. Madeleine wasn't quite as good at secrecy as he was, so he discovered one night, when he was returning to his shed behind Café Didier before dawn, that she was returning to her apartment above the café then, too.

"At first, I thought she, like me, had been off meeting a lover. It made sense. A good-looking widow. Lonely. Certainly still young enough to miss the attentions of a man." He shrugged. "But then I started wondering. She seemed to go to this lover far too seldom for it to be a satisfying affair. And it bothered me that he let her come home alone, on foot, in the middle of the night when the streets were completely deserted. That's not the behavior of a decent, or even sensible, man. Not the behavior of a lover. It only made sense if keeping the meetings secret was more important than anything else, including her safety on the streets that late."

"What I do at night is no one's business," Madeleine said hotly.

"Having a lackluster lover who's too lazy to escort her home is not proof of collaboration," Deschamps pointed out.

"True," Paul said. "So the next time she went, I followed her."

Gabrielle glanced at Madeleine. The woman's expression was stony now.

"She went to meet two men in a ruined church on the other side of the River Orne." "Two?" Gabrielle said nastily. "Why Madeleine, and I always considered you so respectable."

"Oh, shut up!"

Gabrielle said to Paul, "And you *watched*?"

He gave her a quelling look. "They all talked for about twenty minutes, then went their separate ways. I followed one of the men, that night and for a few days thereafter, and found out who both of them were. One of them was on Von Rundstedt's staff—an intelligence liaison. The other man was Gestapo."

Deschamps looked at Madeleine. "Is this true?"

"No, of course it's not true!"

"Why," Gabrielle demanded of Paul, "didn't you tell me any of this?"

"Because I didn't know why Didier had died. I still don't. I couldn't risk that you might reveal any knowledge or suspicion to her, however unconsciously or inadvertently. If you did, you could be next. Even if she didn't get rid of you the way she'd gotten rid of him—"

Madeleine cried, "That is an outrageous accusation!"

"—she might bolt if she knew she'd been exposed."

"You had a *duty* to expose her," Arneau protested,

"There was nothing to expose!" Madeleine insisted, sounding panicky now.

Arneau continued as if she had not spoken, "You had no right to leave a traitor roaming free among us, Paul. To expose us to betrayal and—"

"*He* is the traitor!" Madeleine shouted.

"Don't shout," Deschamps ordered. "All we have so far, Paul, is your word against hers."

"Unfortunately," Paul admitted, "that's all I have. I know they were paying her. If we had more time, we might be able to find the money."

"But why would I do what you suggest?" Madeleine challenged. "Why?"

Paul shrugged. "Why does anyone do it? Didier talked sometimes about how dissatisfied you were with your life together. Both lonely after losing your lovers during the Great War, you tumbled into bed together giddily when Armistice was declared, and found yourself married on impulse a few weeks later. Didier tried to make you happy, but when he was drunk enough, he would admit that he thought you were disappointed with the way things had turned out—married to a man of no background and modest means, running a provincial café which is humble by any standards. He thought you regretted marrying him."

"I wouldn't have become a collaborator because of a disappointing marriage any more than Deschamps would have done it because Gabrielle preferred you to him," Madeleine said coldly.

"Then maybe you did it because you knew that being in the Resistance, or married to it, was a death sentence if the Nazis stayed in power. And you've always been a pessimist. You've always expected them to stay in power, haven't you?"

"If any of this were true," Madeleine said, "then why didn't you expose me to the others?"

"Disinformation," Paul said. "I had a plan. The British and Americans have invested tremendous effort in..." He smiled strangely. "The biggest bluff in history. I fed you information that I wanted the Nazis to have. My superiors liked the plan. I was supposed to keep it going right up until the invasion, then take you into custody after the assault."

"While how many more of us died like Didier?" Arneau demanded.

"The invasion was imminent when I found out about her," Paul said. Then his shoulders sagged and he admitted heavily, "But it was a terrible mistake. I know that now. Six of you have died or been arrested because I didn't expose her to you as soon as I knew the truth. Their deaths are my responsibility, too."

"You didn't know what would happen, Paul," Gabrielle insisted.

"That doesn't make it any less my mistake," he replied sadly.

"How touching," Madeleine sneered.

He glanced at her. "I'm not sure if Madeleine knew I had discovered her secret, or if she just didn't like me living so close to her, in that shed out back. She must have known how risky it was, having me there." He nodded. "In the end, maybe that's the only reason Didier died. It was too risky for a collaborator to have the local Resistance leader living in her house, even sharing her bed. And she doesn't take risks."

"So you're accusing her of turning you in to get you out of the way?" Deschamps asked quietly.

"Oh, it was a much better plan than that," Paul said. "The Gestapo threw the Resistance in Caen into disarray when their second leader in seven months was arrested. Me, in other words. Then they leaked the information that I'd been taken —"

"How *did* you know?" Gabrielle suddenly asked Deschamps.

His lips parted in surprise. "Madeleine told me."

"How did *you* know?" Gabrielle asked her.

"I heard German officers talking in the café."

No one looked very convinced by that brusque reply.

"At first," Paul continued, "I thought they'd seized me because I was an OSS agent returning to Caen with my final orders for the invasion. They took me on my way into the shed, behind the café, late at night. But—to my surprise and my relief—they never asked me a single thing about the invasion, and didn't even know that I was American. They did, however, know that I was in the Resistance. But they scarcely asked me anything during the interrogations. Mostly, they just beat and tortured me."

"Meanwhile," Gabrielle said, "they used all the information Madeleine had given them to start destroying us."

"But she was safe from any hint of suspicion," Paul said, "because it looked like the information was coming from me."

"Then they threw his body outside the gates, still alive," Gabrielle said, all the horror of that day coming back to her again.

"So that we'd be certain you had talked," Deschamps acknowledged. "So that you couldn't possibly convince us, in fact, that you *hadn't* sold us out in exchange for your life."

"And he had such a bad head injury that he couldn't speak much or think straight for a day after I found him, either," Gabrielle said. "By the time he started getting better —"

"He'd have been dead," Arneau said, "if we'd found him first."

"And as we kept getting killed and arrested after that," Deschamps mused, "we'd assume the Nazis were still acting on information given to them by Paul while he was their prisoner."

"We'd never look for the living traitor among us," Arneau said. "Before long, we'd all be dead or in a concentration camp, never knowing the truth."

"This is nonsense!" Madeleine cried.

"But Madeleine evidently underestimated Gabrielle's determination to protect me," Paul said. "Perhaps because we kept our relationship as discreet as possible. Perhaps Madeleine thought Gabrielle would do what she herself would have done to a disgraced lover—abandon me."

"But Gabrielle found you before Madeleine knew you'd been released and could inform us," Deschamps concluded.

"Listen to yourselves!" Madeleine shouted.

"And Gabrielle hid me," Paul said, "until I could remember what happened. And who the traitor is."

"You don't really believe this garbage, do you?" Madeleine demanded.

They all looked at her.

"Who figured out," Paul asked them, "that Gabrielle must be protecting me? Who suggested she was lying to you all?"

Their gazes remained riveted on Madeleine, leaving no doubt about who had instigated their discovery of Paul here.

"After Jean left the café with Gabrielle," Arneau said, "Madeleine disappeared for a while."

"To make a phone call to your contact Madeleine?" Paul prodded.

"And when I returned to the café," Deschamps said slowly to Madeleine, "you suggested that we come back here. Armed. Ready to confront Paul, who you were convinced was alive and free. Gabrielle would lead us to him, you said. I didn't believe it. But then we saw him through the window, and I thought what a smart woman you were."

"It wasn't that hard to figure out!" she insisted, her eyes glassy with fear.

"Jean," Arneau said to Deschamps, his expression distorted with grim confusion. "What do we do now?"

"Kill him!" Madeleine raged. "Kill him!"

"Lock her up," Paul said, "until after the invasion."

Gabrielle felt the balance of opinion shift in his favor, almost like a physical force.

Deschamps looked at Madeleine, waiting for her to say something.

"He's a traitor!" she cried.

They all stared at her in silence.

"I don't have to put up with this!" She made her biggest mistake then: She tried to leave.

Raine blocked the door. Two others trained their weapons on her. No one was pointing a gun at Paul anymore.

"No!" Madeleine shrieked.

"Oh, no," Deschamps suddenly muttered.

"What?" Gabrielle looked at him worriedly.

"It finally occurs to me," he said.

"What occurs to you?" Gabrielle prodded.

"Le Blanc. Shot the day before yesterday."

"Well?"

"He was frightened by what was happening. Stopped going home at all a few days ago. Came into the café and told us he was thinking of fleeing. Meanwhile, he was going to lie low. He'd just discovered an ideal hiding place. Told us we could join him there if we wanted to. The crypt of St. Cyr."

Arneau gasped. "Yes, that's where they got him!"

"Paul was in prison when Le Blanc told us about the crypt," Deschamps said, looking at Madeleine. "He couldn't have known."

"It means nothing!" Madeleine screamed.

Deschamps pointed his gun at her.

"No!" Madeleine cried.

"Don't," Paul said quietly to Deschamps.

"Are you telling me you have doubts?" Deschamps demanded.

"No, I'm telling you that everything's about to change."

Arneau pounced, "The invasion!"

"Let's lock her up somewhere safe," Paul said, "and deal with her after liberation."

"No," Deschamps said.

"I'm still in charge," Paul reminded him.

"You're not even French!" Arneau objected.

"Four dead, Paul," Deschamps said. "Five if we count Didier. Two more arrested recently, perhaps dead by now."

"Executing a woman..." Paul's expression was strained.

"This is war," Deschamps said.

"And this is our business, not yours," Raine asserted. "She is one of us. You aren't. She has betrayed us. You have no say in this, Paul."

Deschamps looked around the room. "I say she dies. Is there anyone here who disagrees?"

Gabrielle knew she had the right to speak up, but she didn't. This woman was responsible for all the crimes Deschamps had just listed. She was also responsible for what had happened to Paul. She had even tried to get his own associates to kill him. Gabrielle touched Paul's hand to attract his gaze. He looked troubled as their eyes met, but he didn't try to influence her to protest the execution.

"It's settled, then," Deschamps announced. "We do it now."

"*Cochons!*" Madeleine howled. "You think the Germans won't punish you for this? You think you can just kill me and not suffer for it?"

Gabrielle looked at her in horror. Panting with hysterical hatred and mortal terror, struggling against the men who held her, lashing out with her feet, savage in her rage.

"They know who all of you are!" Madeleine screamed. "They will know who did this to me! They will hunt you down one by one and butcher you! They know your names, where you live—"

She choked when Deschamps stuffed a handkerchief in her mouth. Her muffled cries continued, a terrible sound of desperate venom and angry fear.

Raine spoke again. "I'll see to it."

Deschamps nodded. Raine exited the cottage, along with a struggling Madeleine and the two men hauling her along to her death.

"The Germans won't have time to hunt you down," Paul told the remaining people. "The invasion will almost certainly be at dawn."

"What?"

"Here, in Normandy."

"What?"

He had their full attention once again. While he explained everything he had already explained to Gabrielle, she sank shakily into a chair, briefly overcome by the traumatic events of the past few days, culminating in the terrible scene which had just taken place in her normally quiet little cottage.

She listened while Paul gave everyone in the group their assignments, told them when and where to strike at German supply lines, and advised them of the signs which would indicate the invasion had begun. They established a primary rendezvous point for twenty-four hours from now, and a secondary rendezvous point for forty-eight hours from now. Paul would issue further instructions then. He also warned them that Caen might well be devastated in the fighting to come.

"But this," Deschamps said, "*this* I will not flee. This day is the reason I have stayed in occupied France as long as I have. I never stopped believing this day would come."

"You wanted to flee it a few hours ago," Paul reminded him.

"That was when I thought I could take your wife with me." Deschamps shrugged. "If she's staying here with you, well, I suppose I might as well fight Nazis, eh?"

Paul smiled wryly and shook his hand. "Good luck."

Gabrielle rose to wish him good luck, too. Instead of accepting the hand she offered him, Deschamps chided, "Is that any way to send a warrior off to battle? Come, *chérie*, one little kiss. It's perfectly respectable, your husband's standing right here."

Feeling generous towards him for listening to Paul, Gabrielle permitted herself to be embraced and kissed. It was not exactly a chaste kiss, but he didn't push his luck.

Even so, Paul said, "All right, you've had your fun. Hands off my wife now, or the Germans won't *need* to shoot you."

Deschamps sighed, shook his head, and left. Arneau and the others followed one by one, each shaking Paul's hand and exchanging wishes of good luck. When the last of them was gone, Paul closed the door, leaned against it, and let his breath out on a *whoosh*.

Their eyes met.

"There was a minute there," he said, "when I thought they wouldn't believe me. I thought they'd shoot me, and then you'd make them shoot you, and it would be all over."

She crossed the room and slid into his arms, pressing him up against the door. "I was so afraid," she murmured. "And then I was so horrified. Paul, do you think..."

"No, I don't think you should have spoken up to spare her. I had to, but you didn't, *ma mie*."

"You don't like them killing a woman."

"I don't like execution without trial, either." He sighed. "But I understand them doing it. War really is...hell."

She nodded and tightened her arms around him. "What do we do now?"

"Now we eat something, pack some supplies, change clothes, and go to our first position. We've got a few roads to sabotage." He kissed her forehead and added, "Work, work, work."

She smiled, rubbed her forehead against his cheek—and then gasped as she realized.... "Oh, my God!"

"What?"

"Paul!"

"What?"

"That horrible scene. Our lives at stake. They might have shot us."

"I know, sweetheart—"

"And if they had," she said in mortification, "then they'd probably have found out."

"What?"

"I'm not wearing any underwear." He'd taken her panties off in the bedroom, and she'd been so astonished by his news of the invasion that she'd forgotten to put them back on.

He laughed.

"*Mon Dieu*. All those people in my house, and me with no underwear on."

"You're really very bourgeois for an artist, you know."

"Yes, well, you're wearing all *your* clothes," she pointed out.

"We could fix that," he suggested.

She met his gaze doubtfully. "Don't we have to go—"

"Yes, but given what the next few days will probably be like, I think we could spare a half hour right now for each other."

His words reminded her of what they were facing. "It will be very dangerous for everyone, won't it?"

"Yes," he whispered.

"I'm afraid."

"So am I," he admitted.

"Will we be all right?" she asked foolishly.

He was honest. "I don't know."

"If we aren't," she said, "I want you to know –"

"I do know, my love."

"Meeting you..." She smiled. "It was worth the war to me."

"And the rest of my life with you," he replied, "is worth everything I have to do now to earn it."

They kissed.

She nuzzled his neck. "A half hour, you said?"

"Come into the bedroom," he whispered.

When he tried to move away from the door, she pressed him against it again. "Don't you even want to check and see if I'm telling the truth about the underwear?"

He grinned and started pulling up her dress, ever so slowly.

"I should change your bandages before we go," she murmured, breathing deeply as his hands moved along her thighs.

He shrugged. "My back doesn't hurt that much now. Everything feels much better."

"Even so..."

"Shhh...Not right now..."

"Mmmm..." He was right. It could wait.

He carried her into the bedroom as the sun set on an occupied nation praying for liberation. All their hopes and dreams, the only future in which the two of them wanted to live, and every sacrifice they had made, now all depended on what happened tomorrow. There would never be another night like the one they faced together now, so full of mingled hope and fear. There would never be another dawn like tomorrow's, when all they had to do was save the world.

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