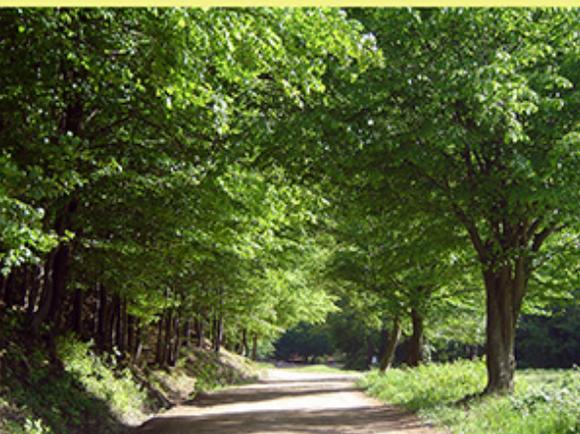


LOVE IS AN OPEN ROAD



Don't Read in the Closet 2015

THE SPY AND HIS BOY

Lyn Gala

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Love is an Open Road

An M/M Romance series

THE SPY AND HIS BOY

By Lyn Gala

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love is an Open Road* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

What Is Love is an Open Road?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love is an Open Road*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

Each year, a dedicated group of Volunteers from the M/M Romance Group work hard behind the scenes to bring these stories to you. Our Editors, Formatters, Proofreaders, and those working on Quality Assurance, spend many long hours over a course of several months so that each Event is a success. As

each and every author also gives freely of their time and talent, it was decided that all edits suggested may be accepted or rejected by the author at any given time. For this reason, some stories will appear to be more tightly edited than others, depending on the choice of the author.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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THE SPY AND HIS BOY

By Lyn Gala

Photo Description

A man in a suit with the neat beard holds the leash while a man in short hair with strong masculine features wears the collar.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

The Dom is old French aristocracy, the sub the son of a German tycoon. Very young, they met at a university and discovered their sexuality together and played, what they didn't know then was BDSM. They were separated during the long war where they both grew up and did their duty in different ways.

At their reunion they almost killed each other.

It was thanks to them that the war ended months earlier than expected. It is top secret, but maybe you have an idea what they did?

Dear Author, you can use any war since World War 1 or choose to let the story take place in an alternate reality, feel free to invent people, machines, places, events. Fighting and lots of action preferred.

Non-con, dub-con, twincest, m/m/m ménage, vampires and shape shifters ok, if you want. BDSM scene(s) welcome.

Please no zombies or ghosts.

Sincerely,

Bealevon

Story Info

Genre: historical

Tags: spies/secret agents, BDSM, first time, military men, POW, reunited, PTSD, hurt/comfort, angst, public activity, French resistance, World War II

Word Count: 13,311

THE SPY AND HIS BOY

By Lyn Gala

Part One

Jakob walked into the club, his heart pounding. This was a dangerous place, this hidden club that called itself *Cris et Chuchotements*, Shouts and Whispers. The whisper part came from the lack of any signs or advertisements. No one spoke of this sort of club other than in the most hushed and horrified of voices. In Berlin, many people talked about the natural expression of love between two men. One of the boys from his class had even talked about going to the Institute of Sexual Science where they tried to change males into females. Jakob liked his cock far too much for that, but those illicit whispers had led to such thoughts.

And now he was in Reims, where no one would recognize him. His German accent made him someone to distrust, but his wide shoulders and handsome face would overcome that. And since no one knew him, he could indulge in his darkest fantasies. Heinz might have told stories about men doing the unimaginable with each other, but Jakob wanted more.

He dreamed not of someone who would touch him like a woman, but someone who would use him—hurt him—help him feed the darkness that lived in his soul. Sometimes, early in the morning when he would stroke himself to fullness, he would use his left hand to dig his nails deep into his flesh so that the pain would give the experience sharper edges. He had thought himself damaged in some way—sadly unique in his appetites. But now he believed differently.

At the factory where he apprenticed as a master *machiner*, it was said that this place provided pain with the pleasure, shouts and screams with the moans of pleasure. Jakob never would have guessed that the French, with their finery and fussy manners, would hide such perversion. But it was only in Reims that he had heard whispers of others who shared his hunger.

And now he was here. French gentlemen in high-waisted suits sat at small tables drinking their wine or their spirits. But Jakob's gaze was drawn to the men farther back in the shadows. A workman with wide shoulders was laid across a table, his back crisscrossed with lash marks. Two others sat on a low bench, smoking and watching an older gentleman spank a youth who couldn't be more than eighteen or nineteen. He still had the gangly limbs of adolescence.

Jakob's breath caught at every pained whine, every echoing slap and soft sigh. That was where he wanted to be.

“What can I get you?” the barkeep asked. Jakob had been so distracted that he had not noticed that many of those nearby now watched him with sharp eyes.

“Bière Titan,” he requested. He had no taste for the French wines, and three months at his apprenticeship had not changed that. His father’s will had required him to seek training outside of Germany in order to receive his inheritance, and he had chosen France because he spoke the language. But he had underestimated the hostility that still existed from the Great War. Germany had lost, and suffered greatly for that loss, and yet the second these Frenchmen heard his accent, their disdain and anger turned into bitterness.

Like now. A number of men turned their backs to him. It was almost enough to make Jakob flee back to his small room where a large stack of books describing the internal gears of massive wool-making machines waited for him to study each intricate part. The only thing that kept him in place was the barkeep returning with his beer, and the pained grunts of the man being spanked. Jakob yearned for that so much that he would endure the attitude of these Frenchmen. If they disliked Germans that much, they should be happy to take a whip to one’s backside.

That was where the fantasy sometimes failed. How could he trust someone who hated him? Lost in that contradiction, Jakob moved to a corner of the room and sat on a bench where he could watch the room and nurse his beer.

The older man providing the spanking finished, and the youth went to his knees at the man’s feet. Tear trails marred his face, and Jakob could feel hot jealousy slice through his guts.

“Which are you imagining yourself as, the man with the warm hand or the boy on the floor?”

Jakob looked up at the cultured tones. It was a gentleman with a well-trimmed beard. He was young, but no youth. Dark haired and eyed, but fair of skin. He was beautiful. At another time or in another place, Jakob might have attempted some coy answer, but he was still breathless with wonder at this place and his honesty overtook his common sense. “I would be that boy.”

The man smiled and held out his hand. “Merle Dubois,” he introduced himself.

“Jakob Weber,” Jakob responded, and a half second too late, it occurred to him that he should lie. He had no way to know if Merle Dubois had provided

his real name, and unlike in Germany where people had a more liberal view of sexuality, the French still enforced anti-homosexuality laws. Jakob could lose his apprenticeship for such conduct, and he had no doubt the master would keep the fees he had already paid. He could ill-afford such a loss, especially since he had no access to his father's funds.

Merle smiled. "First time?"

Jakob narrowed his eyes and didn't answer. He was not so young that he could still be easily bent to new shapes, but this Merle had such amusement in his expression, he seemed to think otherwise. "Perhaps," Jakob eventually answered.

Merle laughed, slapped Jakob on the shoulder, and sat next to him. "A good answer. Now I would rather be the one providing the spanking, although I prefer a switch or even a good whip in my hand. Does that frighten you?"

Quite the opposite. Jakob could feel his cock begin to harden; however, he limited himself to saying, "No."

"You're a good German boy. No doubt you know how to endure stoically as your race does."

That cooled Jakob's ardor. "If you wish to find one more way to take some price from Germany, seek another. I find the French people unforgiving and cruel, and I have no interest in feeding that cruelty."

Merle raised his eyebrows. "Well, the little shepherd pup has teeth. What have the French done to inspire such an attitude?"

"They are poor winners and worse losers."

"Since we won the war, I imagine I don't know what sort of losers my people would be as a whole, but as for me, I am a gracious winner and an insufferable loser. I will hound my prey until it drops from exhaustion. Once I set my sights on a proper course, I will never look away. I am truly unwilling to lose, which saves everyone from having to endure my bad temper when I do." Merle's smile was so open and gracious that Jakob was not sure how to take that.

Jakob drank his beer.

"I am trying to decide if I am chasing you. After all, you would look so very nice with red stripes against that pale skin and tears in those blue eyes of yours."

Jakob nearly choked on his beer. Even after he managed to swallow it down, he could only stare at Merle.

“Oh, I am definitely interested in seeing you at my feet.” Merle reached up to stroke Jakob’s cheek with the back of his fingers.

That brought Jakob out of his stupor. He caught Merle’s hand. “Stop.”

“Why?”

The answer to that should be obvious, but Jakob couldn’t come up with one.

“I will wait for you in the shadows.” Merle stood and gave Jakob one last smile before he walked toward the back of the dimly lit space. He walked with a grace that suggested that he had never done hard labor. He looked more like someone who might spend all day on horseback—his trim figure would fill out riding gear quite well. Jakob was rather obsessed with watching the man’s ass.

And then Merle vanished into the shadows, and Jakob was left alone with his thoughts and his beer. And his cock, which was uncomfortably hard. He couldn’t get up and leave without embarrassing himself, and he couldn’t sit still without staring into the shadows and wondering what it would feel like to be under Merle’s control.

It was strange, because Jakob disliked anyone trying to tell him what to do. His father, a Russian, had seen trouble coming before the Bolsheviks had taken over the country. He’d fled Russia long before that revolution, landing in Berlin in advance of the Great War. He had all but ordered Jakob to leave Germany to seek his fortune elsewhere. Jakob had resisted out of a need to resist more than any great loyalty to Germany. He loved the fatherland, but the deep poverty and desperation would have driven him away—had his father not ordered him to go.

So, like the mule his father so often accused him of being, Jakob had dug in his heels and refused to step foot out of Berlin. He had suffered the food shortages, the violence, the ugly politics, and the petty crime. And then his father had died, and Jakob had only one way to claim his inheritance—go elsewhere.

Jakob resented his father for that.

But now he wanted someone to issue orders, to force him to yield. The urge was so strong that some days Jakob questioned whether he was possessed by some spirit. Until he’d come to France, he never even heard of the banned works of Donatien Alphonse François, the Marquis de Sade.

Now they were all he could think about.

A whip landed on flesh, and someone gave a muffled shout. Jakob startled so badly his beer sloshed over the side of his mug. He was prepared for the sound of the next hit, and he slowly placed his beer next to him on the bench as he listened to the beautiful suffering of some anonymous man.

He could walk out.

If he did, he would always wonder, though. Steeling his nerve, Jakob stood and walked toward the back. A few dim lights cast weak shadows. It was like walking into some great maw that threatened to swallow you alive, and while that should have frightened Jakob—while it did frighten him—it also excited him in ways he could not describe.

The men in this part of the club were in some state of undress. One man had soiled his trousers, and Jakob averted his eyes to avoid embarrassing the man who had clearly been unable to contain his orgasm. Near the back of the room, Jakob finally spotted Merle watching. A cigarette dangled from his fingers, and his foot twitched as though he could hear some inaudible music.

Keenly honed fear and desire warred as he made his way toward Merle. The man stood, and even his posture commanded attention. He owned the space in which he stood, and as soon as Jakob came near, Merle wrapped his hand around the back of Jakob's neck and pulled him close. Jakob was prepared for the pain of teeth biting into his lip. Instead Merle kissed him gently while running a hand over Jakob's shoulder. A shudder ran through Jakob. Even though this wasn't the pain he craved, the kiss possessed him in a way he couldn't describe. When Merle stepped back, Jakob rocked forward onto his toes before settling back.

The smirk on Merle's face made Jakob blush.

"Strip off your shirt," Merle commanded. Jakob's hands went to his buttons, but he didn't follow orders. It was as if he couldn't move his fingers.

"Are you disobeying, boy?" Merle gave Jakob a cold and evaluative stare, but slowly his expression softened. "Oh, I think my boy is dumbstruck. You are new to this, yes?"

Jakob swallowed. "Maybe."

Merle ran his hand over Jakob's chest and slowly pushed Jakob's fingers away from the buttons. Then he started to unfasten them himself. "*Mon joli garçon,*" he whispered. Jakob's skin warmed wherever Merle touched him. His

chest, his shoulders, and then as Merle worked his way down, the heat spread to Jakob's stomach.

When he had undone the last button, Merle pushed the fabric off Jakob's shoulders and let it fall to the ground. He grabbed Jakob's hard and peaked nipples through the undershirt, and Jakob gasped as pain and need and heat lanced his body.

"So responsive. I like that in a partner," Merle said. "Have you had sex with a man?"

Jakob blinked, struggling to reconstruct his thoughts after such an onslaught. It didn't help that the French felt like water sliding past him, the words just out of his grasp.

"I need an answer. Have you had sex with a man?"

This time, the words penetrated the fog. "I exchanged favors with a boy in my class."

"So, with hands?"

Jakob began to sweat as he thought of the other options that Merle might have in mind. Here was a man who had done what Jakob had only dreamed of. "Yes," he admitted softly.

"So an untouched boy with beautiful eyes and broad shoulders manages to wander his way into my life. I have clearly been blessed." Merle ran his thumb over Jakob's lower lip. Then he walked around to Jakob's back. When Jakob tried to turn, Merle kept him in place with a hand on his shoulder.

Several deep breaths stilled the trembling Jakob could feel in his legs, but then Merle kissed the back of his neck, and nothing could stop the earthquake that rocked him. Merle pulled Jakob's undershirt free from his trousers, and then his bare hands ghosted over Jakob's sides. Merle slid his hands around to Jakob's stomach and pressed against his back, hugging him from behind.

"I—"

"*Shhh*," Merle hushed him, and Jakob fell silent.

When Merle pulled on the bottom of the undershirt, Jakob lifted his arms and allowed Merle to strip him of it. The shirt was tossed aside—Jakob did not even see where. He was more focused on the dry kisses Merle placed on his shoulder and then up to his neck.

Where Jakob had expected brutality, Merle offered soft touches. It wasn't what Jakob had wanted, and yet he couldn't break away from those commanding hands. Then Merle slipped his hand into Jakob's trousers and grabbed his cock.

Jakob grabbed Merle's forearm. "*Holla die Waldfee!*"

Merle laughed, his warm breath stirring the hairs at the back of Jakob's neck. "I will take that as a good thing." He then walked away. Shock robbed Jakob of his words, and he was so hard he could not walk out onto the street without risk of arrest, so he stood mute. However Merle didn't go far. He stopped at a shelf at the back of the room and chose something before returning.

Iron shackles. He had heavy iron shackles. A hard shiver travelled down Jakob's spine. Somewhere along the way, Jakob realized he had stopped breathing, and his head was spinning. He sucked in air, forcing himself to breathe steadily as Merle locked each shackle around Jakob's wrists. The chain between them was short, and immediately Jakob felt trapped.

Merle could do anything, and the men watching would not stop him.

"Hush, my boy. I will only whip you a little tonight. We have many more nights to see how much of your soul I can claim," Merle reassured him, and then he led Jakob to a spot against one of the heavy timbers holding up the room. An old hook was set deep in the wood. Merle urged Jakob to step onto a small stool and put the center chain over this hook.

When Jakob stepped down, Merle removed the stool, and Jakob was truly trapped. He could not free himself, and the chains were unyielding. He expected pain, but Merle surprised him again by stroking his back.

"How do you feel, beautiful?" Merle asked.

Jakob had no answer, but he shuddered so strongly that the chain rattled.

"Do your shoulders hurt?"

"No," Jakob answered.

"Are you afraid?"

Jakob hesitated before he answered, "Yes."

"I have to ask, do you want me to free you or do you want the pain?"

The words stuck in Jakob's throat. He knew what a normal man would say, but he could not say it. If he asked for freedom, he would never again find the

courage to come back here. Before he'd stepped foot in the club, he had half believed the stories were mere legends told to foreigners so that they might make fools of themselves. But now that he knew the truth, he would never find this courage again.

"The pain," Jakob whispered.

"And are you offering your pain freely?"

Jakob wanted the questions to stop. He wanted to indulge in his darkness without giving voice to the wrong in his own head. But Merle stood still, waiting. If Jakob wanted this, he had to ask for it, which seemed the cruelest indignity of all.

"I'm offering it," Jakob whispered. He feared Merle might make him say it louder.

Instead Merle said, "And I accept."

Jakob couldn't seem to control his shallow breathing, but on the good side, he was remembering to take in oxygen. Merle had gone silent. He ran his hands over Jakob's back, sometimes gently, and sometimes while raking his nails down Jakob's skin. Each time he did the latter, Jakob's lust deepened until he was so hard that his cock provided all the pain he could want.

"I am going to enjoy this," Merle said. He walked back to that shelf, and Jakob was left on display for the other men. About half watched, some seemingly bored and others leaning forward eagerly. Jakob faced the post and rested his forehead against the cool, painted wood. When Merle returned, he had a flogger in hand and he let the leather tails brush against Jakob's side.

"The tenser you are, the more this will hurt," Merle explained, even as he kept the flogger's touch feather light against Jakob's skin.

"I am not too weak to withstand pain."

"The goal is not to withstand it but to enjoy it." Merle swung the leather, and it lashed across Jakob's pants. He yelled out of surprise, but it was little more than a dull sting. "Don't anticipate the feelings. Just feel them. Sink into them," Merle said, and his words made little sense. Jakob was vibrating so badly that he feared his spine might spontaneously fall apart like a child's tinker toys.

Merle brought the flogger down on Jakob's upper back, and for a second, it felt like no more than the first strike—a simple sting. Then the heat started to build. It sank into his muscles, and Jakob struggled against the chains.

The second and third strike added fuel to the fire, and Jakob panted as the pain settled into his bones.

“Ride the feeling,” Merle whispered. He pressed a fingernail against Jakob's abused skin, and that small point of pain felt like a knife slowly pressing into him, but Merle moved his hand and kissed the spot. The freedom from that one point of pain contrasted against the heat in his back did something to Jakob. His head spun, and he felt as though the world existed on the other side of a gauze curtain. Nothing was real except Merle's hands on him.

“You are such a good boy, a treasure.” Merle murmured the words and brushed his hands gently across Jakob's sides. It was heaven. Jakob was trapped in heaven. When Merle backed up a step, Jakob wanted to cry at the loss of contact, but then the flogger hit him, sending a cascade of hot prickles up and down his body. Merle fell into a pattern, alternating sides as Jakob swayed from side to side from the force of the hits.

It was pain, but it was more. Jakob was so hard that his cock throbbed. If Merle asked right now, Jakob would be willing to try so much more than a simple exchange of hands. But Merle didn't ask. He swung the flogger harder, once on Jakob's right shoulder and then on his left, before he began to work his way down Jakob's body with lighter strokes. The second some of the strands began to hit the fabric of Jakob's pants, he regretted having them on. He wanted to feel the bite of the leather, and the long lines of heat that itched and made everything feel brighter and better.

However, Jakob had long passed the point of being able to parse French words. Jakob closed his eyes and swayed with the music created by the slapping of the flogger against his skin.

Merle worked his way back up, and now the heat was more intense. Jakob was caught between twin desires—a need to get away and the need for more. When Merle stopped, it was as if Jakob had lost his balance. He clung to the chains to keep from falling down.

“You are a natural,” Merle said, his tone almost reverent.

Jakob opened his mouth, determined to get some compliment together even with his malfunctioning thoughts. However, Merle laid a finger over his lips.

Once Jakob closed his mouth, Merle let his hand trail down over Jakob's shoulder, and then he yanked at Jakob's left nipple.

Jakob yelled, the pain making his whole body flair with heat.

"Ah, perhaps this virgin skin is too sensitive yet." Merle reached for Jakob's other nipple, pulling more gently this time. It was the difference between scalding water spilled from a boiling pot and the heat of a long soak in a bath. This time Jakob's whole body became one massive ball of warm need. He groaned and arched his back.

"So beautiful." Merle placed a kiss on Jakob's shoulder. He stroked Jakob's chest, but every movement made Jakob flinch as he waited for the next onslaught with hungry anticipation. "I must say that as a selfish bastard, I'm thinking I may not want to share you."

One of the men watching answered. "He'll be back, and if you're not here, I'm sure he'll find someone to indulge his love of the whip."

"And then I'll take the whip to that man's back," Merle said fiercely.

"You are too young to be such a bastard," one of the others said.

"But that's why all the boys who love pain flock to him. But watch yourself, German, Merle's attentions can be fickle."

Merle pressed his body up against Jakob. "Ignore them. They are jealous. You are beautiful." With no warning, Merle shoved his hand down the front of Jakob's trousers and grabbed his cock. Jakob thrust wildly into Merle's grip twice, three times, and then he started to come, soiling his best trousers in the process.

Around them, men sighed appreciatively, and now that the fog of lust had lifted a little, Jakob blushed at being on display. With his hands bound, all he could do was hide his face in the crook of his arm.

"I can help you come," Jakob offered softly. He didn't want to be seen as the greedy partner.

Merle pressed his body against Jakob's hot and bruised back. "For me, control is the ultimate aphrodisiac—and that includes control over myself. I quite enjoy waiting, my beautiful. But I do hope that you will allow me to introduce you to a few other firsts."

"I..." Jakob let the word trail off because he didn't know what to say. He had expected something much different. He'd thought the point would be for

his dominant partner to come and leave him suffering. When Jakob looked around, none of the other men seemed shocked by Merle's actions, so perhaps his expectations were not realistic.

Merle chuckled, the puffs of air warm on Jakob's cooling shoulder. "Wait here, my boy." Merle gave him a slap on the ass and then walked away. Jakob watched over his shoulder as Merle disappeared into the next room, and he was alone—restrained—surrounded by men who enjoyed causing pain. Now that he had indulged in his lust, he could feel the fear begin. He was foolish for coming here. He had risked too much, and for what? An orgasm?

He was weak. If he found a way out of here, he would never return again. That was the thought that finally settled at the forefront of his mind.

But then Merle returned with a warm washcloth. He opened Jakob's trousers and gently cleaned his spent cock. He wiped out the worst of the mess Jakob had made inside his trousers and then buttoned him back up.

The tenderness confused Jakob about as much as his reaction to the pain.

"You don't need to do this," Jakob said quietly as Merle took a second warm, wet cloth and began to wipe him down.

"But I do enjoy it. If you are mine to control for the night, and you did offer yourself to me, then I shall enjoy bringing you both pleasure and pain. After all, if I do not tend you, then I have given up a chance to control you, and I very much enjoy that control." Merle finished washing Jakob's back and then moved to stand next to him.

Merle's trousers tented out from his erection, but he made no move to touch it as he stood and studied Jakob. "I am going to give you a paper with an address on it. It is mine. When you feel a need to explore more of what pleasures your body can hold for both of us, you are to come to my home before seven p.m. I will never do anything without a clear offer from you, but there are things beyond your understanding, and I can introduce you to each and every dark pleasure you have ever conceived, and many that have not occurred to you. Do you understand?"

Jakob nodded. "And if I do not come?"

Merle was silent for a time. "You will," he said with confidence. "It may take some time for your courage to overcome your fear, but you will. For now, stand here and be pretty so the others can enjoy looking at what they have not earned the right to touch. I am going to have a drink and a cigarette, and I will

release you afterward, unless you have some objection to that plan,” Merle added almost as an afterthought.

“No, no objection,” Jakob said. The disdain for Germans had vanished from the expressions of those men Jakob could see. They looked at Jakob with hunger and lust that made even his spent cock twitch. And when Merle retreated to a table, his gaze always on Jakob, then Jakob began to get hard again.

Part Two

Jakob had forgotten what Reims smelled like—the scent from the river drifting through streets filled with the fragrance of French cooking. His nose seemed to have a direct line to his cock because he could already feel the heat gathering. This was the home of Merle, the smell of it was intertwined with memories of Merle wielding his whip.

Three years Jakob had lived in this city and learned to build and tend the great machines of industry. He'd never expected that would make him a valued soldier. Fixing a machine gun or a broken mechanical loom had more similarities than most understood, more than Jakob had understood before he'd received his summons to join the army. But broken gears were broken gears.

He had not had as much call to use the lessons he'd learned kneeling at Merle's feet. Late at night when he would stroke his own cock in the silence of the barracks, he would think of Merle, but most of those thoughts he kept locked away. Jakob couldn't afford those sorts of indulgences now, not when he lived with other soldiers and could be turned in for acting against the natural order.

In the Fuhrer's new Germany, there were rumors that soldiers who lay with one another vanished. The thought made Jakob's guts tighten in fear.

Even if this trip was foolishness, Jakob could not stand to be so close to Merle and not hear his voice or feel his touch. He was a starving man willing to take any risk in order to earn for himself the food he required. He had been careful to slip away without anyone noticing, and if anyone questioned his absence, he would have a story of walking the river looking for a French girl. The soldiers often laughed about how they loved to teach some arrogant French girl a lesson about the superiority of the German people, so who would question such a story?

"Halt!" a voice called, and Jakob's hand fell to his sidearm. When he whirled around, he found another soldier standing in the shadows. But this was no common man. He had an arrogance in his gaze and a way of holding his body as though ready for a fight. He was trained, and the danger slid over Jakob's skin like oil.

"What business do you have here?" the stranger asked. For a fraction of a second, Jakob considered claiming he was out for a walk, but that was implausible in this part of town. These were the homes of those French who

had some money and power before the Germans came, and no soldier would walk alone through the dark streets the way someone might walk through the slums seeking a woman.

“I thought to take some revenge on a Frenchman I knew, an arrogant bastard who once told me Germany was too broken to ever rise again.” Ironically, it had been Jakob who had made that argument, and Merle who advised him to beware Hitler’s ambitions even back when he had been a local politician with dreams of greatness. Lord but Jakob had been young. The war had cured him of that flaw.

His words seemed to soothe the stranger some, and he stepped forward. “Does this arrogant French-man have a name?”

Jakob could not hesitate, and he did not doubt that Merle and his fondness for honesty had already brought him to the attention of the authorities, but it still made a small part of his soul die to say, “Merle Dubois. Unless something has happened, he has a house on this street.”

“He does.” So the authorities were watching Merle. Jakob should not be surprised, but it still made him want to throw himself on this monster and beat him bloody. He wanted to protect Merle, but he had no idea how he might do that. The Fuhrer’s bureaucracy was too efficient at writing down the names of all those they took an interest in. Killing this man would only bring more suspicion into Merle’s life. The bastard grinned at Jakob and pointed his chin toward Merle’s house. “You cannot do him any permanent harm, otherwise you will face charges, *Stabsgefreiter*, but have your fun.” From the way he said Jakob’s rank, it was clear he felt himself the superior. So Jakob treated him as such.

He came to attention and saluted. “Yes, sir. Are there other rules for how I must handle this French mouse?”

The stranger laughed. “No. Go on.”

“Thank you, sir.”

The stranger sank back into the shadows, and Jakob continued on his way. He could feel the other’s gaze following him, and he loathed keeping his back to such a danger. If he were a good German soldier, that man would be his ally, and he would not fear having a conversation with someone who was clearly from the more secretive of the Fuhrer’s armed forces.

He walked up to Merle’s door with the familiar carvings. There was still a small nick where they had tumbled home late one night, heavy with drink, and

Merle had slammed him into the door before kissing him senseless. The next morning, they realized that Jakob's boot had taken out the tip of a carved leaf. Jakob had been horrified at damaging such a beautiful work, but Merle had laughed. He clung to the memory of that laugh as he pounded on the door with a fist.

"Dubois! Open the door, little mouse." Jakob pounded again. It took a minute or so before the door came open, and Merle stood there in a half-buttoned shirt.

"Miss me?" Jakob asked with all the contempt and hatred he could muster, but all he wanted was for Merle to grab him and pull him away from the madness of life.

Merle looked him up and down and then leaned against the knob of his door. "Not really. And here I thought the one good thing to come out of this war was one less arrogant German to bother me. Oh, I have found many more arrogant Germans wandering the streets, but I have been grateful for your absence." The words were hateful, but Jakob saw the twitch of his fingers, and the way Merle leaned the tiniest bit forward. He knew he was being watched, and he played his part for the watcher.

"You owe me a drink and an apology, and if I dislike either, I may find a way to teach you your place," Jakob said before he roughly shoved Merle back inside. He stepped through the door and slammed it shut.

"More German arrogance. Lovely." Merle's words condemned him, but he raised his hand and cupped Jakob's cheek. The simple gesture was enough to send Jakob to his knees. He wrapped his arms around Merle's waist and held on tightly. The world had lost its mind, and if these few stolen moments were to be all he had, he wanted everything.

"Come," Merle said softly. Jakob had never disobeyed that voice, and he forced himself back up onto his feet when all he wanted to do was to lay his head on Merle's stomach and never move. They walked farther into the house, into the library. There was only one window, and it was heavily draped. "I believe we are safe to speak here."

"I was afraid I would find you gone."

"I fear that every morning," Merle said. He sat in the heaviest chair, and Jakob came to him and knelt. When Merle took Jakob's face in his hands, they were transported back in time.

“Someone is outside watching. I think he is from the secret police.”

“They often do watch. What did you tell him about coming here?”

The fear crept back in as Jakob described the conversation.

Merle smiled at him. “You have some talent at lying. I didn’t expect that. So, before you leave, you will need to beat me.”

“What? No!” Jakob jerked away, but Merle had caught him by the back of the neck and held him.

“Do you think I’m too weak to handle a few punches?”

The very thought made Jakob ill, but he could not call Merle weak. He had broad shoulders, and a hardness Jakob had not expected of a wealthy man. Merle insisted it came from working with unbroken horses. His hands never failed, never gave out. Even when he was spanking Jakob until Jakob’s ass was on fire, Merle never tired. “You’ve never been weak. You are stronger than I am.”

“You underestimate yourself, pup. But you’re right that I will survive a few bruises. However, if I don’t have some marks to show for your visit, we may both be in danger. Since I can’t take a whip to that backside of yours, maybe you can show me your loyalty another way.” Merle unzipped his trousers, and Jakob nearly trembled in need. Yes, his cock was beginning to harden, but more than that, he wanted to make Merle happy. He needed to do something to make up for the years of being apart, the pain, the sacrifice and the fear.

He took Merle in his mouth and slowly explored with his tongue. He moved the foreskin around and sucked gently, and Merle rewarded him with a low groan. Jakob’s cock twitched in response. Instead of grabbing himself, Jakob kept his hands on his thighs as he remembered each lesson learned at Merle’s feet. He’d gone from a man afraid of his own reactions to someone who embraced his own needs and took pride in doing the task of pleasure well.

Leaning closer, he took more of Merle’s shaft in his mouth and began to bob, his motions growing more and more aggressive. Merle clutched the arms of his chair and thrust up, and Jakob felt the cock press against the back of his throat. He brutally suppressed the urge to gag. The hint of pain, the need to control himself, to subordinate himself to Merle’s desire, all made Jakob’s cock grow harder. It pressed against his uniform pants, the seam digging cruelly into his hot flesh.

But Jakob ignored all that.

Merle was now grunting and thrusting his hips up, and Jakob slowly lowered his mouth until Merle's every thrust pushed against the back of his throat. Then Merle grabbed Jakob's head and shoved him down until Jakob couldn't breathe around the cock shoved deep into his throat. When Jakob started to get lightheaded, Merle pulled out.

Jakob gasped for air, and a line of spittle slipped free of the corner of his mouth, but before he could do more than get one lungful, Merle forced himself back down Jakob's throat. Merle thrust mercilessly, using Jakob, and Jakob's cock grew harder and harder until finally Merle came with a deep grunt.

Jakob sucked the salty juice from Merle, swallowing the bitterness that had grown to be an aphrodisiac. The first time they had met, Jakob had not understood why Merle had held off from coming, but now he knew the divine pleasure and pain of refusing to give in to his orgasm. That was one of a thousand lessons Merle had taught him, and Jakob treasured each one.

When Merle's eyes finally opened again, he had that sated look of a full predator. Jakob loved this moment when he saw past all Merle's masks into the man inside. Merle reached down and stroked his fingers along Jakob's close-cropped hair.

"I miss that shaggy mess of yours."

"The army disapproved of it." And just that quickly, reality intruded into their nest.

Merle sighed. "How did it get so bad?"

Jakob had no answer, and he remained silent.

"So, have you news of the front?" Merle asked, and the question was a little too sharp. Even still distracted by his hard cock and unfulfilled need, Jakob knew what Merle was really asking.

"My loyalty has always been with you, and it always will be. If I knew anything, I would tell you. But I have been stationed in Karlsruhe working on repairing equipment for the front lines. I don't have anything of interest to you or your people."

"My people?" Merle sat up.

Jakob was still on his knees, and he curled his hands around Merle's legs in supplication. "I know you too well to believe you would do nothing while your country was invaded. So if you have not tried to assassinate the Nazi

leadership, it is because you have some other plan. I know we argued about the Great War and the unfairness the German people suffered, but what the Fuhrer has done is madness, and I know I will be shot if I am heard saying that, but it's true. Men are afraid of their own children, afraid of their fellow soldiers. There are whispers everywhere.”

Merle took Jakob's face in his hands. “You can't talk like that. You have no idea what it would do to me if they caught you having such thoughts.”

“So instead I must worry about you?” Jakob demanded.

“If the Germans hold the town long enough, not much could save me. They already suspect I'm working with the resistance or they wouldn't be watching me.”

“Perhaps he is watching a number of people on the street,” Jakob said, but he knew better. The officer in the shadows had been too quick to recognize Merle's name.

Merle shook his head. “But perhaps you can tell me something. I know the supply routes go through there. Is there more food being moved to the interior of Germany?”

“The supplies largely go to the front.”

“Yes, but if you are in Karlsruhe, you must see grains from France, bread maybe, or cheeses and dried meats.”

“All of those,” Jakob agreed. Germany was stripping her neighbors bare to feed her soldiers.

“Jakob,” Merle said softly, “Millions of enemies of Germany are vanishing, sent, they say, to work camps. We know there is one in Natzwiller, but if so many are in custody, then surely they require more food. Is the army diverting any additional food into Germany?”

Jakob shook his head. “That's not possible. Millions?” Jakob could not even fathom what that number of people would look like. Berlin was a huge city, and it had only about four million. Now that the young men were gone to war, far fewer.

“It is millions,” Merle said. “And if they do not need to feed those moved to work camps, I imagine these poor souls will not work for long.”

Jakob hated what had happened to his fatherland, but his mind could not encompass what Merle was implying. “But Germans wouldn't do that.”

Merle looked at him sadly. “Did you not say that men are afraid of their own children?”

That was true. The schools taught children that to turn in a disloyal parent was a great honor. “I don’t understand my country anymore. I don’t understand any of this.”

Merle stroked his cheek. “None of us do. It seems that God has abandoned us to suffer from our own mistakes. But there is something we can do.”

Jakob took a deep breath. “Most of the soldiers are good men,” he said, and he wanted to beg Merle to not ask him to do some atrocity. If Merle asked him to poison the grain, Jakob wasn’t sure what he would do.

“I know,” Merle said gently. “But there is a man. He hopes to get the Nazis to listen to his intelligence reports, but that means that he must be seen as having good information.”

That was not the direction Jakob had expected this conversation to take. “What does this have to do with you?” If the Nazis suspected Merle of being connected to the underground, nothing he said would carry any weight with German officials.

“Do you have to leave soon?”

“Yes. I am being sent west to support the troops in France and reinforce the coast. My officers laugh that soon we will all be stationed in London itself.”

Merle did not comment on the odds of that happening. “We can come up with a code, a city and a time. You can tell people that you saw a man on a hill with a radio, and you chased him. And if this report comes after our man has sent a report of a spy in the area, then he will be closer to convincing these monsters to listen to him.”

This was the turning point. If Jakob did this, he could no longer call himself a good German. He was considering betraying his country, his fellow soldiers. Men he knew and liked might die because German intelligence officers believed lies.

But if he did not, Germany would continue to act as the hands for the mad Fuhrer, and sooner or later, Merle would die. That was a future Jakob could not endure.

“I’ll do it,” he said, and his voice cracked in the middle.

Merle pulled him close and kissed him gently. “I only wish I didn’t have to ask this of you.”

“You don’t have to ask. I’m offering.”

Part Three

Jakob was a shadow of his old self as he once again stood before the carved door that had once been such a refuge eight years ago, before the war or the Reich or Poland—and Jakob cursed all of them. He had not heard from Merle since a few prearranged coded messages after that last meeting. After the end of the war, he had believed Merle would come for him. As the days had turned to weeks and months, he had been forced to bury the dead and plant crops, to listen to British soldiers harangue him, but still no Merle.

The war had stolen his home and his strength, and now he feared he would find it had stolen his love as well. The Germans had discovered Merle's involvement and killed him. He braced for that reality. Five years ago, he'd walked out of this house with bleeding knuckles and a dying heart, leaving Merle behind. And now he would find that time had robbed him of the chance to make up for that.

Grief wrapped around his heart as he knocked at the great door, prepared to have some stranger answer. Jakob would have to make some excuse for his German accent and flee. The French would arrest him and return him to his work detail. Rumors had begun that they were to be sent to Russia to work, and as much as Jakob did not believe in the Jewry of the West as the Fuhrer called it, he did believe the Bolsheviks had no souls. He would die escaping before he would be forced to serve that master.

The door opened, and Jakob braced himself for the wash of pain, but then Merle was there, standing in the entrance to his home with his jacket unbuttoned and slippers on his feet. Pain still slammed into Jakob—the pain of not being good enough for Merle to come for, the realization that he was not the center of Merle's life as Merle had become the center of his. Jakob had sacrificed everything, including his own integrity, and Merle had abandoned him.

Jakob did not realize he was backing away until Merle darted forward and caught his arm. "Jakob." Merle whispered the word like a prayer, and now Jakob was confused. "Mercy me. I thought you were dead."

"I thought the same."

"That you were dead? Were you near death?" Merle studied him as though searching for some great gaping wound.

“I thought you were dead,” Jakob said. “I thought...” How could he admit that he thought Merle would come for him? While the *volkerchaos* of Americans and British and Australians had forced him to work at gunpoint, and to sleep with the smell of death in his nose as he buried the emaciated skeletons of dead prisoners, blaming Jakob for each sad victim, Jakob had thought Merle would come. Merle would tell them that Jakob had never wanted to be part of the madness. He would explain that Jakob had helped the French resistance at great risk of his own life.

How could he say any of that?

“Come, come inside,” Merle urged him. Suddenly Jakob didn’t want to. The man who had once walked into Merle’s home was gone. All he could remember of that man was the way his knuckles hurt after he had beaten Merle in order to satisfy the secret police of his hatred for all French, and for Merle in particular. He remembered his anger at having to hurt someone he loved, and that tangled with his fury at Merle’s abandonment. It robbed him of the ability to even speak because his emotions threatened to tumble out his mouth.

Jakob stepped into the familiar hall. The carpet was more worn, and paintings were missing from the walls, the darker squares of wallpaper evidence of the fading on the rest. “So, you took what you needed from me and then abandoned me?” Jakob demanded as soon as Merle closed the front door so they had some privacy.

“What? I would not—”

“Save your words. I came to find out how you had died, but now I see that you have cared for yourself quite well. It was only I that was left out in the cold.”

“Jakob!” Merle sounded shocked. Jakob had never managed to surprise him, but then Merle had been so much more worldly back in the days before the war. Jakob had grown up since then. He strode down the hall to the room where they had met the last time they had seen each other.

The library too had subtle changes. A few shelves were half empty; the serving set was missing. However, the rest was painfully familiar. Jakob had knelt on this carpet. He had come on that chair. But it wasn’t him. He wasn’t that student anymore.

“You said it all, back when I was doing my apprenticeship, didn’t you? Germany brought the grief upon herself. So is that why you left me to be forced

into work crews—because I brought the grief down by serving in the German army? Perhaps you want to call the authorities on me now?” Jakob curled his hands into fists. If Merle tried to make that very call, Jakob wasn’t sure what he would do. The anger was a living beast inside his chest.

“Work? Who were you working for?” Merle looked confused.

“The Americans. The British. Word was that men of my unit were to be sent to the Bolsheviks. Whoever held the weapons ordered us to do the work. That is what you abandoned me to once I had served your purpose and you no longer needed me.” Jakob took a step toward Merle as his hurt and fury grew. “Or perhaps you do not want your neighbors to see you with a dirty German. You do not want to be tainted with my smell, is that it?”

Merle turned deathly white. “What?” The word came out a whisper. “No. No, they would not have held you all this time.”

For a time, Jakob stared at Merle. Nothing he said made sense, but then Jakob was so soul-weary he wasn’t sure anything in the world made sense anymore. “What are you taking about?”

Merle took a step forward, but when Jakob backed up and brought his hands up in a fighting stance, Merle held his palms out as though in supplication. “I put your name on a list—a list of Germans who helped us. I was promised that if you were alive, they would release you. I was promised.”

Jakob stared at Merle, the words sliding past him like elusive fish he couldn’t quite grasp. “You didn’t forget me?” The question sounded pathetic.

“No! Never!” Merle threw his arms around Jakob. For one brittle second, the anger was there between them, and Jakob wanted to hurt Merle, hurt him until he wept the way Jakob had over the years. However, the touch shattered the rage, and all the pain bubbled up through the cracks. Jakob gave one single sob, and Merle held on so tightly that Jakob couldn’t breathe. Despite the discomfort of having his arms caught between their bodies, Jakob wanted the embrace to last forever. The fear and desperation that had clung to him over these last years began to flake off like old paint.

“I thought... when no one came...” Jakob stopped. Anything he said would make him sound like a child whining about mother’s attention.

“I would have come. I would have stolen a car and come. I would have stolen a horse to ride over the broken roads. I was promised they would look for you. I was promised that if you had been taken alive, that your name on the

resistance's list would protect you. They said—" Merle's voice broke. Suddenly he was gone. He whirled away and drove his fist into the wall. Lathing strips behind the plaster yielded to the force of the blow, and plaster dribbled down to the ground in a fine dust, leaving a fist-shaped crater behind.

Jakob flinched from Merle's anger.

"I'm sorry." In a moment, Merle backed away, and only then did Jakob realize he had brought his fists up. He lowered them again, and Merle spoke softly. "I'm sorry. I'm not angry with you. I'm angry that after all you risked, they could not be bothered to find you."

After sinking down onto the couch, Jakob rubbed his hands over his face. He felt a thousand years old, and this was the one reality he had not expected to find. "Did it help? Did any of it help?" Jakob feared the answer more than he could say, but he didn't know what he feared more. If his deception helped the resistance, then he was responsible for the deaths of men he'd served with, respected, liked.

Merle moved close enough to rest his palm on Jakob's cheek. It was a familiar gesture that Jakob no longer knew how to accept. Once it would have made him slip to his knees at Merle's feet, but now Jakob was simply confused. After a pause, Merle continued. "It may have been the most important mission in the war. Whatever you did, you convinced the Nazis that they had a spy in the area that only our man knew about. It put Arabel on the path to be the Nazis' most trusted spy, and he worked for us, for the Allies."

"One man... surely one man could not have done much."

"One man convinced Hitler that Normandy was a distraction, and that a larger force would land near Pas-de-Calais. One man made sure that the Allies faced as few enemies on the beaches as possible, and even then, the number who died..." Merle looked away. "I am sometimes ashamed that I sat home while others did the dying. When I was told you were dead, I..." Merle's voice broke, and he sank down on the sofa next to Jakob.

They sat in silence, two men wrecked by a war they hadn't wanted. Jakob slipped off the couch and to his knees, resting his head on Merle's leg. For a time, they were both still, but then Merle rested his hand on Jakob's head and began to stroke it. "Hitler gave Arabel an Iron Cross."

That made no sense. "Those are for frontline fighters, not spies."

"Hitler himself signed off on the exception." Merle sounded amused. Jakob understood his pleasure in such a serious tactical mistake, but he had known too

many who died to be amused. Worse, he had seen what happened to his fellow soldiers when they'd been force-marched into the camps to clean up what the Fuhrer had done. So many who had insisted that the Fuhrer was a bringer of an age of greatness had fought against the truth. But the bodies, the pain, the starved children and hollow eyes condemned all their efforts. Some days, Jakob thought those who had died in the field were the lucky ones, the ones who never had to know what their loyalty to the fatherland had created.

“One of my officers said he wanted to put me up for a medal,” Jakob said. At the time he had been horrified, but now he was simply ashamed that they had thought so highly of him. If all the soldiers had refused to fight, they could have stopped Hitler, and they did not.

Merle continued to stroke his head. “You are brave enough. You risked everything to support Arabel’s claim there was a spy, and whatever you did, the Nazis were convinced.”

Jakob felt the familiar warmth of Merle’s approval. “I invited a girl out to the countryside with me. I pretended I saw something, and then I yelled for her to get help, and I ran off through the woods. When the officers found me, I said I had seen a man working a radio, and the girl was so excited about being in the middle of the action, she agreed with every word. She imagined him having dark hair and a degenerate look, although I claimed I was watching my footing and was not able to identify the spy.”

“And they believed you?”

“I had slipped chasing the spy. I broke my collarbone and arm. They called me a great hero for running toward danger instead of running away.”

Merle chuckled as he moved his hand down to rest against the back of Jakob’s neck. “You are brave and wonderful.”

“I don’t feel like either,” Jakob said softly.

“You are. You helped win this war, and perhaps no one will ever know, but you know. You know you did the right thing. We have never been about public fame, you and I.”

Jakob turned his head so his cheek rested on Merle’s knee. For a long time, there was only silence between them. Jakob waited for the condemnation and guilt to creep into the empty spaces, but he felt only the warmth of Merle’s presence. Jakob could have lived in the quiet forever, but eventually Merle whispered, “It killed me to send my beautiful boy into such danger.”

“I was a *stabsgefreiter*. The Fuhrer put me in danger; you gave me a choice of which side to fight for,” Jakob said. “But I doubt many Germans would see it as such. The Bolsheviks now hold Torgau, and much of eastern Germany. I do not believe they will leave easily.” Jakob feared that Germany would have to fight to free herself from the Bolsheviks, but after what he had seen, after what his fellow soldiers had learned of Hitler’s true plans, he could not see his countrymen being willing to fight again so soon. Besides, they were a broken people. Jakob didn’t know how they would survive.

“Time will heal wounds, and the Allied forces will want to go home to their families. It will not stay bad forever,” Merle promised. “But you don’t have to worry. You’re here now. Let’s get you fed and rested, and then I’ll get some of my friends in government to get you papers. Perhaps the Brits and Americans didn’t care that your name was on our lists, but we French will not forget, just like we won’t forget which of our countrymen helped the occupiers.” Merle’s voice had a hard edge.

Jakob no longer knew how to have a conversation. Words were nothing. They were air. They counted less than a hangnail to a soldier. Worse, Jakob had seen them twisted and seen them twist the truth too often to trust them. So he hid in silence.

“Come, I don’t have fine food, and the wine has long since been sold to buy bread, but I do have enough simple fare for us both.” Merle stood and pulled Jakob to his feet. This last burst of emotion seemed to have drained Jakob, and he moved where Merle directed him, to a chair in the kitchen where Merle presented him a large bowl of stew made with potatoes and vegetables Jakob could not identify. He ate two bowls before Merle led him upstairs to a bedroom.

“You can bathe later, but right now you look as though you might fall over. Sleep. I’ll check on you later.” Merle went to leave, but Jakob caught his hand. He didn’t want to be alone, not now. For weeks now, he had drifted through the woods, avoiding barbed wire and people. His German accent made him an enemy to anyone who heard him, and he had suffered for the isolation.

Merle looked at him. “I could lie down with you.”

“Please,” Jakob asked.

Merle’s mouth twisted into an unhappy line, but he sat on the edge of the bed.

“If you’re busy...” Jakob stopped. He didn’t want to manipulate Merle into staying, but he couldn’t bring himself to say he was fine alone.

“I don’t want to bother you,” Merle said gently. He stroked Jakob’s cheek. “When I’m in the room, you never seem to tend to your own needs, and you look so tired.”

“It’s not lack of sleep that has worn me out,” Jakob said. “A group of soldiers camped near a cave where I had sheltered for the night, and for almost a week I was trapped inside with nothing to do but sleep.”

Merle ran a finger under Jakob’s left eye, and then down his nose. Jakob closed his eyes.

After a second, the bed tilted as Merle stood, and Jakob tamped down an urge to run after him and grab him. Instead he lay on the bed stiff and silent until Merle began to unbutton Jakob’s shirt. Then he opened his eyes. Merle stood shirtless, his chest hair thinning until it became a narrow line that led to his navel. And he slowly unbuttoned Jakob’s shirt, revealing the pale and dirty skin below.

Jakob didn’t know how to be Merle’s lover anymore. “You—I—”

“Hush,” Merle ordered, and Jakob only knew to obey. Leaning close, Merle kissed Jakob’s collarbone and then his shoulder as he pushed the fabric of his shirt back. “Up,” he ordered. When Jakob sat up, Merle stripped him of his shirt, and then urged Jakob to lie back down with a gentle push.

Merle’s hands usually demanded—commanded—with lash marks and shoves. Now they were whispers against Jakob’s skin as he urged Jakob down onto the bed and guided him closer to the center. He tenderly unbuttoned Jakob’s pants. The trousers were the only part of the uniform Jakob still wore, but without the boots, and with the patches and various stains, one would be hard pressed to recognize them as such. Jakob had shed the rest of the uniform as he traveled, swapping it for whatever clothing he could find in abandoned houses or hanging from some laundry line.

Now Merle stripped him and knelt between Jakob’s knees. “I am so very sorry. I never would have discarded you.”

“I think I knew that. I’m just...” Jakob ended his statement with a sigh. He didn’t know what he was. Angry. Guilty. Afraid, furious, sad, ashamed, hopeless. He couldn’t even put names to some of the darkness that sometimes threatened to engulf him.

Merle stroked his cheek. “For once, let me take care of you.”

“You don’t need to. Just being here is enough.” Jakob had been running for weeks, maybe more than a month, so to lie in a bed felt decadent. He didn’t need anything more.

Merle stretched out next to him and then arched his back so he could slide his own pants off. “If you don’t want my touch, tell me. But caring for you is never a chore. The war stole you from me, but I never gave up on getting you back.” Jakob had bent one of his knees, and Merle reached down between his legs and stroked Jakob’s perineum with a knuckle. “Are you asking me to stop?”

“No,” Jakob said softly. “I want you. I have missed your touch. Some nights... all I can remember is the feeling of my knuckles aching as I beat you.”

“Hush. You did me a favor. The beating was enough that when I appeared to back away from my political allies, the Germans thought you had frightened me into compliance. It helped me to keep Arabel’s secret. So forget that.” Merle brought Jakob’s hand up to his lips and kissed the knuckles.

“I need...” Jakob stopped.

“What do you need?”

“I want to feel you,” Jakob whispered. He closed his eyes as Merle cupped his face, his thumb stroking the corner of Jakob’s mouth.

“I’m here. I will stay here,” Merle promised.

“I want to feel you in me,” Jakob said.

“Ah.” Merle smiled. “I am more than happy to indulge my boy.”

“I’m no boy, not anymore.”

“You are my boy, and you always will be.” Then Merle quieted him with a kiss. Merle reached for something on the bedside table, and then he rolled back toward Jakob. When he reached down between Jakob’s legs, his fingers were slick with oil. Merle traced figures on Jakob’s perineum and circled his hole. Jakob leaned his head back against the pillow and tried to relax. It had been a lifetime since Merle had touched him this way, and Jakob had never trusted anyone else with such intimacy, especially not after the Reich had made it clear that homosexuality was an abomination worthy of prison. Merle pressed against Jakob’s hole.

Jakob grabbed Merle's broad shoulders. He bore down to help loosen the ring of muscle, and Merle's finger slid easily inside. Then Merle looked down at Jakob before kissing him senseless. Without breaking contact, Jakob hooked an ankle behind Merle's thigh, pulling him closer.

However, Jakob could do little else. He was now pinned under Merle's weight as Merle took control of the kiss. He kissed the way he made love, hard and brutal with little flickers of kindness that sent flashes of need and lust through Jakob. Teeth clacked, and Merle fisted Jakob's short hair, but then he gentled his kiss so it was featherlight against Jakob's lips. Moaning happily, Jakob started squirming his encouragement, thrusting his hips up. When Merle pulled back, Jakob threw his head back and tried to grind down onto Merle's finger. Merle continued to stroke just a little too lightly to set off the sparks of pleasure that Jakob felt so tantalizingly close. It was torture through pleasure, and Jakob's body knew this dance. He'd thought it would feel wrong after so many years, but this was the most familiar place he'd found in forever.

"Are you ready?" Merle asked as he curled his finger, and the slight extra pressure made Jakob shiver.

"Please," Jakob begged. He bore down as Merle pressed two fingers inside. While Jakob knew he could handle much more, even that brought back a familiar sting as his body struggled to remember the steps to this dance. Merle hovered over him, propped up on one elbow, and Jakob kissed Merle's neck since that was all he could reach. Tiny stubble prickled his lips as he trailed kisses up to the underside of Merle's jaw. Finally Merle looked down at him, and Jakob lay back, his lips parted slightly in invitation.

Merle ravaged his mouth again, even as the fingers inside Jakob stretched him. The feeling of being used sexually pressed all the dark emotions to the back of his memory. For a bright moment, Jakob existed only in the now, and now was like a hundred other times when he'd been younger and more innocent, when a sprinkling of gray hadn't marked Merle's hair, and their lives hadn't been so complicated.

Jakob tilted his head back and gasped as Merle added a third finger. It hurt now, and Jakob panted through the pain to find the pleasure just on the other side. His cock certainly had no objections, as precum began to gather at the tip. He trembled with a need to thrust—or to be thrust into. He needed more.

Merle pulled his fingers out for a moment, but then Merle pressed one finger back in slowly enough to leave Jakob groaning and tightening his muscles in a vain attempt to regain the feeling of fullness.

“You are tight. Do I assume you have not been with men for a number of years?”

“Since you,” Jakob said. Merle was silent for a long time. Then he pressed against Jakob’s shoulder. “Roll onto your stomach. It will make this easier,” Merle said hoarsely. Merle guided Jakob onto his stomach, and Jakob tucked his forearms under Merle’s pillow. It smelled like him. Jakob closed his eyes and breathed deeply. Merle had pressed his fingers back inside, and Jakob groaned in need.

When Merle pulled out, Jakob pressed his face to the pillow and swallowed the complaints he wanted to voice. He knew what happened when he complained during sex. Actually, he didn’t. Jakob doubted that either of them would be as comfortable with restraints and whips now that they’d seen the use others made of those tools. Jakob was in danger of losing himself to his memories when suddenly the pressure at his ass was larger, duller.

Jakob felt the head of Merle’s cock press inside in one swift motion. It had been too long because the muscles screamed, and Jakob started to tense. However, Merle ran his hands over Jakob’s back.

“*Shhh*. You’re okay. Just breathe,” Merle told him. Jakob slowly relaxed, and only then did Merle begin to rock back and forth. Merle slowly pressed farther and farther into Jakob’s body, impaling him a fraction of an inch at a time. Jakob groaned as the pressure built. Then Merle ran fingernails down Jakob’s back, digging rows of fire into his skin, and Jakob nearly launched himself off the bed as pleasure and pain washed through him until he shook with need.

Jakob pushed himself up to his knees. Merle tightened his hands on Jakob’s hips as he thrust in harder than before, wringing a shout of surprised pleasure from Jakob.

“Yes!” Jakob shouted.

Merle pulled back and slammed in again, and now Jakob started squirming for real. Merle’s groan sent a shiver through Jakob. That one moan said everything. Jakob fisted the sheets, and Merle’s punishing thrusts pushed him forward.

Merle reached around and grabbed Jakob’s cock as the sex degenerated into uncoordinated thrusting and moaning and cursing and straining. Jakob rarely pushed Merle to the point where he lost control, but he could feel the wild and

uncontrolled need as Merle pounded him. Jakob felt his orgasm tear through him, shredding every dark memory until all he cared about was this moment.

Merle was coming at the same time, his cock buried inside Jakob's body as he jerked and dug his fingernails into Jakob's arms. A half second later, Merle collapsed onto him. The weight was as effective as a form of bondage, and Jakob wondered at how comfortable he felt under Merle. For years he had spent every moment trying to figure out how to defend himself, but now he had Merle. He felt safe.

He wasn't. The world was still out there, and he was technically a fugitive, but Merle had contacts, and Jakob had trusted himself to Merle's care.

"I want things I should not," Merle whispered.

Jakob sucked in a quick breath as a dozen fears all rose up at once.

"Calm yourself," Merle said as he stroked Jakob's shoulder. "I just see how much you've suffered. I see how much pain you carry, and I want to keep you." Merle captured Jakob's hand and kissed his knuckles. "I want to lock you in this house and keep all others away. I want you naked in my bed so that I can tend you. I want things I should not want because you are a grown man. I should not want to take over your life."

Jakob thought of all the mistakes he had made. He had been so sure as a young man, and since then he had tumbled from one mistake to another. Jakob gave his master the only answer he could.

"You don't have to ask. I'm offering."

"In return, I offer you the love we both feared so much when we were younger. I was a fool for letting you leave without saying that I felt that way about you."

Jakob was silent for a time. He remembered the train station, and Merle standing silent near the back of the crowd. "I think I knew. I loved you, so how could I fail to recognize the expression in your face?"

Merle kissed his shoulder. "Then we were both fools for not holding on to each other. I can't offer you what I could have back then. My money is largely gone to the cause, and while that will bring me political favor, I fear we will both have to work hard to keep this house, or perhaps sell the house to an American in return for money to live."

He couldn't help it—Jakob started to laugh.

Merle shifted onto the bed, next to Jakob. “Are you unwell?” he asked cautiously.

Jakob looked at his lover. “You remember my father?”

“He’d left Russia as a young man to avoid the revolution, and his will would not allow you to inherit without training outside of Germany. Yes, I remember the story.”

“He had a lot of money, which is why the Bolshevik Revolution frightened him. So in Germany, he bought many factories. He had great wealth, and enjoyed success for decades, even through the Great War. But something frightened him. He sold his empire and put the funds in Switzerland with a stipulation that I leave Germany to claim it. I think he hoped I would stay out. The old man might have been psychic, if one judged him by his ability to escape trouble.”

Merle frowned. “What are you saying?”

“Money is the only thing I don’t worry about. If I have papers saying I am free from arrest for being a German soldier, I can claim my fortune. But the money that mattered so much to me in my youth matters little now. You can’t imagine what I’ve seen.” Jakob closed his eyes and fought back the memories.

“No matter,” Merle said, and he kissed the end of Jakob’s nose. “Sleep. I will rest here with you, and tomorrow we will begin to settle the rest.” Merle pulled a sheet over them and pressed close. Despite his claim that he hadn’t been tired, Jakob found himself drifting off to sleep. When he was on the edge of slumber, he heard Merle whisper, “Everything will work out, my love. Now that I have my boy back, everything will work out fine.” That promise followed Jakob into his dreams, and for the first time in years, he slept without nightmares.

The End

Author Bio

Lynsey “Lyn” Gala started writing in the back of her science notebook in third grade and hasn’t stopped since. Westerns starring men with shady pasts gave way to science fiction with questionable protagonists, which eventually became any story with a morally ambiguous character. Even the purest heroes have pain and loss and darkness in their hearts, and that’s where she likes to find her stories. Her characters seek to better themselves and find the happy (or happier) ending.

When she isn’t writing, Lyn Gala teaches history in a small town in New Mexico. Her favorite spot to write is a flat rock under a wide tree on the edge of the open desert where her dog can terrorize local wildlife. Writing in a wide range of genres, she often gravitates back to adventure and BDSM, stories about men in search of true love and a way to bring some criminal to justice... unless they happen to be the criminal.

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