

Madeleine Dupont shook out a wet sheet, throwing it over the clothesline. She felt like a machine- constantly wringing and hanging, folding and smoothing onto the beds of guests who would never know what lurked beneath them.

She shuddered, despite the spring warmth. On days like today, when she stood alone in the courtyard, she became convinced that the world could read her thoughts.

“Madeleine!”

She leapt a foot in the air, clutching a damp pillowcase to her. Her breathing slowed as she saw Antoine darting into the courtyard.

“Antoine LeClair, one of these days you’re going to make my heart stop.” She placed the pillowcase on the line, groaning at the wetness on her bodice. “What is it?”

Antoine ran across the courtyard, pressing a finger to his lips until he reached her.

“I trust you’re well?”

“As well as one can expect. Business is good.”

“Madeleine,” Antoine said solemnly. “You don’t have to pretend with me.”

Her lip trembled. “Have you- have you heard anything?”

He shook his head. She swallowed hard, blinking furiously.

“You know I wouldn’t be here unless it was important. I understand you’ve had your share of grief, but I’m here today to beg for your help.”

“What do you need?” When Antoine was silent, she froze in the act of hanging a towel. “No. I told you, I’m done with that.”

“*Maddie...*”

“Antoine, my husband was deported for giving bread to a Jewish boy. You will understand if I’m unwilling to take additional risks.” She spat out the words as if they were poison. “What would you have me do?”

“This will be the last one. I swear to you, Madeleine, on my mother’s life, before *Dieu*: after this I won’t ask you to open your doors again. But I have four children hiding in cellars and annexes across Paris, and I implore you to consider them. They’re in grave danger; at the very least, they need somewhere to hide.”

Madeleine shook her head. “Absolutely not.”

“Maddie, I’m *begging* you.” Antoine clutched her arm desperately. “They’re *children*, who will die if the Germans find them. Their families are dead or hundreds of miles away. They’re afraid; they’ve experienced terrible grief. If there is goodness in your heart, I beg you to reconsider.”

She hesitated, her gaze transfixed on the fluttering sheets. Jean-Georges had chased her through these rows of linens countless times, his hands brushing her waist, her cheek.

“*My brave Maddie. My beautiful fleur.*”

“Children?”

Antoine nodded. “Yes. The youngest is seven, the oldest, sixteen.”

Madeleine sighed. “I’ll do it. But this is the absolute last time.”

“Christa, hurry!”

Liesel’s voice was raw; it seemed as if she’d done nothing but shriek at her younger sister since they’d fled the safe house, urging her to run faster even in their exhaustion.

There was one thought that kept Liesel going as they sprinted up the hill.

Female prisoners to Ravensbrück. Female prisoners to Ravensbrück.

Neither she nor her sister would survive one morning in a camp. At fourteen she could care for herself, but Christa was only ten. It was that thought that made her grab her sister’s hand and pull her, shaking, up the side of the mountain, to France on the other side. Their parents had murmured of France, of the country that had accepted socialism when the Germans had not.

Even if the French did not accept them as communists, perhaps they’d accept Liesel and Christa as orphans whose parents had been hanged.

“Come on, Christa, hurry up.” She tugged her sister’s hand.

Liesel heard the roaring *crack* as if from miles away. The sound burned in her ears as she turned to see her sister crumple, redness spreading across her chest.

She ran for her, falling to her knees. There were shouts in the distance but she didn’t care: it didn’t matter if the man with the gun was coming, only that her sister was turning cold in her arms.

“The border,” Christa rasped. “You have to make it.”

“I’m not leaving you.” Liesel’s voice was choked with tears, her hands trembling as she stroked her sister’s hair. “What did I promise Mama?”

“It doesn’t... matter. Liesel, *run.*”

She shuddered, limbs stiffening, and was still.

The rawest of screams was ripped from Liesel’s throat. She could not breathe; as she stood, her legs shook.

The man with the gun was running towards her.

Liesel did not dishonor Christa by running- instead, she stood tall, shutting her eyes as the gun clicked.

But no bullet came.

Her eyes flew open to see the Nazi hitting the barrel of the gun with an almighty fury.

He’d run out of bullets.

Liesel sprung into action. She had no weapon, but as she rummaged in her bag her hand made contact with a metal object.

The flashlight she’d grabbed from the safe house.

When the Nazi ran at her, she was ready. Quick as lightning, she swung the flashlight and made contact with his head, beating furiously until he fell to the ground.

She dropped the flashlight and ran to her sister again, almost vomiting at the sight of her glazed eyes.

“I’m so sorry, Christi,” she whispered, pressing her lips to her sister’s cold brow for the last time. “*Ich liebe dich.*”

I love you.

With tears running down her face, she removed the red plaid scarf from around Christa’s neck and tucked it into her bag- a vestige of her last family member.

And then, Liesel Gerst did what she’d always done best.

She ran.

If any industry had become obsolete in the midst of war, it was that of newspapers.

For the last year Dorian Bonnaire had stood on train platforms, waving newspapers that printed only German-approved words. Needless to say, he'd sold few papers.

He shouldn't have minded- it was less coin in the pockets of the men who took precious goods from France- but it also meant that he had considerably less money to bring home to his mother and sisters.

Who might not even have Dorian's income for much longer.

It was a thought that flitted through his mind more frequently these days. The entire town knew he'd been kissing Tomas Beaulieu (and a good deal more than that) behind his family's barn for the last two years, and the entire town had seemed content to dismiss it.

Until last winter, when Tomas had been dragged off by the Nazis.

No, it was clear that the Germans wouldn't be willing to dismiss a boy who kissed other boys- and that Dorian's days were numbered.

He pushed the thought from his mind, instead waving a newspaper above his head.
"Bonne nouvelle!"

The travelers walked by. It was clear to everyone that the concept of breaking news no longer existed- only tales of more suffering, more death.

A woman passed him, three children clinging to her. She glanced at him with a sorrowful look on her face.

It was a look that Dorian saw more often nowadays, and one that made him reconsider how he'd protested when the St-Nazaire resistance had approached him. He had a family to think of, the Nazis were already watching him, he was only sixteen- but now, with more people going hungry... what did he have to lose?

There was shouting from behind him, and his heart froze.

Marching along the train platform in tight form was a group of German soldiers, their gazes fixed forward. Dorian pulled to the side of the building, blending into the shadows.

They were coming for him. There was no other reason for them to be here.

His heart thudding frantically, he edged along, trying to move away from the Nazis.

They were thirty feet from him, twenty feet ...

His heart was in his mouth.

Ten feet, five feet...

At that exact moment a train pulled into the station, doors sliding open. A crowd surged through the doors: elderly men hunched over, women in tattered shawls.

A blonde-haired girl, no older than fourteen, who clutched a red scarf as though her life depended on it.

Dorian watched as a man jostled into her, the scarf jolted from her hands. Her foot made contact with it and twisted in the fabric, sending her flying through the air and crashing to the ground.

He winced at the sound her head made as it hit the pavement, and the obvious *crack* of broken bone.

As the soldiers murmured to each other, Dorian seized his opportunity, dropped the papers and ran.

He ran until his lungs were burning and the train station had disappeared. When he finally reached the road that stretched from the edge of town to his house, he stopped, bent double, as he tried desperately to catch his breath.

It didn't matter that he had outrun them – they'd come for him again, whether it was a knock at the door or a grab of his arm the next day. One thing was for certain, however: they would come.

Many things would be said about Dorian Bonnaire, but no one would ever say that he'd gone quietly.

The streets of St-Nazaire were illuminated by candle-lit lanterns, as a measure to conserve electricity. An idea blooming in the back of his head, Dorian climbed on top of the stone wall that ran along the side of town, reached up, and removed the lantern.

He didn't know where his legs were taking him until he was there, staring up at the doors of the Hôtel-de-Ville. The Nazis sat inside, eating and drinking and writing battle plans to cut the feebly-beating heart of France further from her chest.

His hands trembling, Dorian raised an arm- and threw the burning lantern through a window.

“Aishe! Come here!”

Aishe Gelderari drew her shawl tighter around her shoulders, running to join her mother in the caravan.

“The boat leaves in thirty minutes.” Her father climbed in behind them, gesturing for Aishe, her mother and all three of her brothers to pull in closer. “We won’t be able to take the caravan. We have five minutes to pack.”

Aishe felt a pang of sadness as she gazed around the caravan- at the colorful fabric hangings on the walls, at the furniture pressed too tightly together. The wagon, however much it had isolated her family, had been her home her entire life.

While her brothers fought over which toys to bring, Aishe looked over her books, worn volumes purchased secondhand. She could only take two of them, if she wanted to fit her warm clothes- from what her parents had said, England would be cold.

Aishe selected her favorite book, *Les Filles du Lac*, and a volume of poetry that her father had given her for her tenth birthday, which she tucked at the bottom of her bag.

She wouldn’t mind going to England - it would mean leaving home, yes- but it would mean her family wouldn’t be jeered at in the streets, not have their caravan broken into, and, especially, not have Nazi breathing down their necks at every moment, waiting to round up every single Gypsy in France as soon as there was a signal from Berlin.

“Time to go.” Her mother led her gently from the caravan, Aishe looking over her shoulder at the cramped caravan one last time.

“We’ll have a new caravan in England,” her father said as they started down the street. “One that’s larger.”

Aishe nodded, squeezing her mother’s hand. In the distance, she heard shouting- and the crackling of flames.

Her father turned over his shoulder in worry. “Faster,” he urged them, lifting her brother Durril onto his hip. “If the fire spreads...”

The port was ahead, but the noise was getting louder, as if they were nearing the commotion. Aishe’s family ran faster, the ocean in sight...

And then Nazis ran into the street.

“Halt!”

They ran faster, Aishe’s legs burning. They couldn’t be caught fleeing, not when so many of Aishe’s people had been rounded up already...

“Filthy Gypsies!”

But coupled with the shouts was the roaring of fire, and as Aishe watched, she saw the glow of flames against the sky, smelt the smoke on the air.

Another soldier sprinted down the street. “The Hôtel-de-Ville! It’s ablaze!”

One Nazi swore loudly and turned down the street, the others following in his wake.

“Come on, everyone!”

Still reeling in shock, Aishe took off after her family. Whoever had set that fire...

When they reached the port she could hardly breathe, and it was difficult to climb onboard even with her father’s help.

The deck was crowded with at least two dozen passengers, and Aishe found herself pressed against the rail with people on either side. On one side was her mother, on the other, a small boy, no more than seven.

“*Tu parles français?*” She asked.

“*Un peu. Je suis polonais.*” He moved his jacket aside to reveal a yellow star sewn onto his tattered blue sweater.

“*Oh.*” She felt a chill run down her spine- the Jews had been beaten into the ground even worse than the Gypsies, and the Polish Jews worst of all.

“Are you parents with you?”

He shook his head, his upper lip quivering.

“We’ll take care of you.” Aishe’s mother leaned over, smiling. “What’s your name?”

“Jakub.”

They sailed for a while longer, the engine revving loudly in Aishe’s ears. They’d been told that in a few miles they would be stopped by the Germans, and everyone would need to cram belowdecks, but for now, Aishe tilted her head up to the sea breeze.

“Look! A shark!”

Jakub leaned out over the rail to point- too far- and Aishe reached out to grab him.

But he was already falling, and by grabbing him, she fell into the water too.

The cold hit her like an icy shock and she floundered in the water, grabbing for Jakub to keep him from sinking. Her parents were screaming, leaning over the railing.

“Turn around!” Her father bellowed. “We need to go back for them!”

The captain shouted something indiscernible, and even as Aishe paddled closer to the boat it sailed further away. On the dock her parents continued to yell, but it did no good, and before long the boat was a blip on the horizon, the sea dark and cold.

Three Weeks Earlier

“Is it a bunny, Papa?”

Tomek Miazga’s grinned, lowering his hands. “It is a rabbit, well done my lad!”

“Tomek, stop with the shadows and help me pack.” Jakub’s mother slipped into the room, a smile on her weary face. “Jakub, can you be good and pack your things?”

He nodded earnestly, grabbing his rucksack. He’d been carrying it for weeks, out of Poland to a place called Germany, and now finally to a strange country called France. His parents had been showing him their route on a map—he knew they were running from a man called Hitler, who disliked his family because they celebrated Hanukah and wore strange yellow stars on their sweaters, but to him, the journey had been an adventure— games of shadow puppets with his father, sleeping in strange houses.

“Will they like us in France?” He asked, placing his favorite bear in the bag and closing it.

His mother crouched in front of him. “They’ll love you, *serce*. Who wouldn’t?”

At that moment there was a banging on the door, and both of Jakub’s parents whirled around. Quick as lightning, his father grabbed him by the collar and swung him onto his hip.

“Be very quiet, Jakub,” he said, walking quickly towards the back door. “Adela, in front of me.”

“But...”

“Quiet!” He hissed.

As they slipped out the back door, Jakub glanced over his shoulder at the flashlight lying abandoned on the ground.

They arrived at the hotel quietly. Amidst the patrons complaining about the location of their rooms and the constant clamors for more food, no one noticed a Gypsy girl and a Jewish boy slip into the hotel buried in a laundry cart. No one noticed a German communist curled in on herself inside of a particularly large trunk- and certainly no one noticed a French homosexual lying beneath crates in the food delivery truck.

At exactly ten o'clock that night, Madeleine left her desk and began her rounds. Had anyone been watching her, they'd have seen her push a particularly large laundry cart down the basement stairs, shaking her head at the incompetence of the maids- did they not realize that laundry was meant to go to the washing vats downstairs?

The children were moved through the basement and into a storage closet, where Madeleine shoved crates of soap out of the way, then fiddled with the wooden floorboards. When the boards finally gave way to reveal a spacious cellar below, she stood.

Ordinarily she gave those she hid a lecture- rules on when they were allowed out into the storage closet, when their food would be brought to them- but when she looked at the children, every thought left her head.

The Gypsy held the Jew in her arms as though he was her child, despite the fact that she couldn't have been more than ten. The communist girl stood away from the group, her face bruised and bloody, while the homosexual stood tall, as if challenging everyone.

Madeleine drew out her handkerchief and passed it to the German girl, who took it gratefully and began wiping blood from her face. The older boy's eyes widened.

"You're the girl from the train!"

At this, she looked as if she might cry. Startled, the boy reached out and took her hand.

"You saved my life. Long enough to burn down the Hôtel-de-Ville, at least."

The younger girl whirled to face him. "You started the fire in St-Nazaire? You kept my family from being arrested!"

As Madeleine Dupont watched the children, alone and afraid but still smiling and hopeful, she felt her heart begin to mend.