

# ANGELIQUE'S

By: Claudia



*A big thanks to Syl & Maq for their helpful suggestions! For Mojo—I hope he suffers enough in this one.*

*This story takes place a few weeks after the Combat! episode entitled, "The Furlough."*

*< > Denotes foreign language being spoken (French or German)*

Lieutenant Gil Hanley rubbed weary green eyes as he pushed the chair back from his makeshift desk. Three days of unrelenting assaults on German placements in St. Montel had ended with an Allied victory. *Some victory.* A pile of dog tags lay in front of him on the old wooden table. Hanley sighed. *Another evening of writing letters home to wives and mothers. Letters that tell them that they will never see their husband or son again.*

First Squad had been hit the hardest. Wells, a young replacement, and Becker, a transfer from Love Company, had been killed. McCall had suffered a serious shoulder wound and been rushed to the field hospital. Saunders had been hit in the leg, but hadn't gone to the hospital as Hanley asked him to. The sergeant said the bullet had just grazed him. He would say little else. He'd stood in front of Hanley turning Wells and Becker's dog tags over in his hands. Hanley had seen Saunders react this way to losing men before. Now finally Hanley was able to give Saunders what he thought the sergeant needed—time. The squad was given forty-eight hours to try to rest and escape from the war.

Lieutenant Hanley rose from his chair and walked to a window, or rather, what was left of a window. Fighting had been concentrated in this part of town, and the shops and offices were heavily damaged from grenades and gunfire. However, the town was relatively large, and several businesses and a restaurant on the east side were untouched by the destruction. There was even a nightclub on the east end of town. A shop owner had reported that the Nazis had been very fond of *Angelique's* and used it as a second headquarters before being run out by the 361<sup>st</sup>.

Luckily, the townspeople had taken cover in the hills, having been forewarned of the Allied offensive. Most were remaining there until a larger American force arrived.

Hanley saw a familiar figure round the corner and turn toward headquarters. Even in the shadows of early evening, Doc's determined stride was unmistakable. The medic from First Squad knocked as he opened the broken wooden door. Hanley studied him briefly. Doc's face was lined with worry.

"Doc? Has McCall taken a turn for the worse?" Hanley asked with concern.

"No, sir. I left the field hospital about an hour ago, and he was doin' fine. The doctors said he should be okay in a couple weeks."

Hanley felt a momentary sense of relief at the good news, but tensed again when he looked at Doc's furrowed brow. "Well spill it, Doc. What's the problem?"

Doc hesitated, looking for the right words. "It's the Sarge, Lieutenant."

"What about Saunders? "

"He's at *Angelique's*, and well, sir, he's drinkin'," Doc replied.

Hanley shrugged and gave a slight smile. "Well, Doc, there's no regulation against NCOs having a few beers during down time. I was planning on heading that way myself."

Doc shook his head and stared into Hanley's eyes. "Lieutenant, I'm not talkin' about a couple of beers. I went to the house where the squad is sacked out to check on Saunders' leg. The other guys were all there, pretty much dead to the world. I had to wake up Littlejohn to ask about the Sarge. Littlejohn told me Saunders had just dropped his pack, told Caje he was in charge, and left. I looked all over town and finally found him sittin' alone at *Angelique's*. He doesn't look good. He looks like he's runnin' a fever, probably from the leg wound. He must've downed three drinks while I was standin'



there."

Hanley frowned. It wasn't like Saunders to try to drown his sorrows, and putting Cajé in charge now without telling Hanley was totally out of character. "Did you check out his leg?"

"He wouldn't let me. When I tried to get 'im to come with me, he just shook his head, held up a glass and said, 'This is all the medicine I need.'"

"All right, Doc. I'll talk to him. You go ahead and get some rest." Hanley swung his helmet onto his head.

Doc nodded and headed for the door. Reaching for the handle, he sighed and turned back toward his superior. "Lieutenant? I think the Sarge may need more than a forty-eight hour rest. He's been actin'... well, not like himself for a while now. Ever since his furlough in England. He's been pushin' himself too hard."

"Okay, Doc. I'll take care of it." Hanley watched Doc leave and walk wearily toward the squad's temporary barracks. Doc was a great medic and a huge asset to first squad. *And he has good instincts.* Hanley's concern about his friend and best NCO was growing.

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Lieutenant Hanley's footsteps echoed off the ruins of buildings along the street as he made his way to *Angelique's*. He had expected more of his men to be out enjoying their hours of R&R. He yawned and realized that the men were doing what he should be doing—sleeping. When was the last time he had a good night's sleep? *Must've been sometime in England before D-Day.* He, Saunders, and Cajé were the only three left of that original squad who took the farmhouse east of Omaha Beach. He tried not to think about the men who were lost. Right now he had to think of those who were still alive. *Especially Saunders.*

Hanley marveled at Saunders' ability to keep his men alive while getting the job done. Before his commission, Hanley and Saunders had competed with each other for the ladies. They had developed a friendship full of good-natured ribbing. But Gil Hanley had known all along that Saunders was a more experienced and proven soldier. He had mistakenly thought that Saunders hadn't been promoted because of his reported propensity for getting himself busted back down to private. Hanley soon discovered that Saunders had exaggerated all of that. Saunders didn't WANT to be an officer. He wanted to be with his men, keep them alive, and get them home as soon as possible.

The handsome lieutenant was gently pulled from his thoughts by the music of a saxophone. A feminine voice sang along with the horn and the two seemed to be floating in the night air. Hanley stood, captivated. *If that were a harp and not a saxophone, I'd think I had died and gone to heaven.* He began walking again and soon realized the music was coming from his destination—*Angelique's*.

The nightclub was positioned slightly below street level, with two apartments above it. Hanley spotted the dimly lit stairway leading to *Angelique's* and began to walk carefully down the five warped and rotting steps. As he reached the bottom, he found the door propped open with a stone in a feeble attempt to let in some of the fresh night air. The room itself was bathed in a thick haze of smoke. Two small groups of people were seated at the tables nearby, all eyes transfixed on the young woman who was singing on the small stage at the far end of the room. Hanley could understand why. Her voice wasn't extraordinary, but it was sultry and so compelling that the lieutenant found himself forgetting for a moment why he had come to the nightclub. A tug at his shirtleeve drew his attention.

"Lieutenant, I am glad to see you. My name is Jacques LeBeau. I own this club.

I have been waiting for an officer to come in. There is a soldier, a sergeant, over in the corner. He has been drinking heavily and does not look well. I tried to offer my assistance, but he resists."

Hanley gazed across the room to the dark corner and could barely make out Saunders. He was slumped forward over his table, with one hand on his forehead. His Thompson was propped against the wall next to him. Hanley turned back to the Frenchman. "Thanks Mr. LeBeau. I'll take care of the sergeant." He made his way to Saunders' table and without speaking pulled up a chair. Saunders glanced at Hanley but uttered no greeting. The lieutenant lit a cigarette and offered it to Saunders. In the brief flash of his lighter, he could clearly see the feverish sweat on Saunders' brow. The sergeant nodded and took the cigarette. Lighting one for himself, Hanley turned his attention back to the woman on stage. If Saunders decided to talk about whatever was bothering him, he would do so on his own terms. Hanley certainly knew that much about the man.

"So what do you make of her?" Saunders voice was shaky.

Hanley stared at the singer. From here he could see her more clearly. Her face was sweet and serene. She looked much younger than he would have guessed from her voice. Her hair was long and golden, held back with a barrette on one side. She wore a long black skirt and a blue blouse that accentuated her eyes.

"She's beautiful. She sings like a pro."

"Some locals claim she was friendly with the Krauts when they were here," Saunders proclaimed in a raspy voice. Hanley thought he saw Saunders shiver slightly.

"Well, a beautiful woman always attracts a lot of attention, Sergeant. They have any proof that she did anything wrong? Did she turn in any Maquis or local resistance?" Hanley asked.

"No, I haven't heard anything specific. Just that she was 'friendly' with the Germans." Saunders began to reach for his drink, but his hand was trembling so badly he stopped.

Lieutenant Hanley decided the situation called for a more direct approach after all. "Saunders, I've known you quite a while now, and I've never seen you turn to booze like this. I think you better tell me what's going on, starting with whatever happened in England during your furlough."

Saunders chuckled slightly and looked at Hanley. His face became sullen and dark. "The war followed me, Hanley." The Sergeant made another attempt to pick up his drink and this time succeeded in downing it. "It followed me all the way to an orphanage in a small town. There was a woman there. A beautiful woman named Anne. Anne Tinsley." He continued, speaking slowly. "And just... just when I started to think about what life could be like after the war...." Saunders reached up with his still trembling right hand and closed it into a fist, saying, "It took her... the war crushed her and buried her."



Shaking his head, Hanley's chin dropped to his chest as he closed his eyes. "I'm sorry, Saunders. I had no idea." The two friends sat in silence as the singer concluded her performance and was met with polite applause.

Recovering from the moment, Hanley attempted to offer some consolation and perspective.

"The war didn't follow you, Saunders. It was there waiting for you. What

happened would have happened whether you were there or not. Sure, we can take a furlough in a place where it's less likely we'll be in the thick of things, but there's not really any place to totally escape the war."

Saunders' speech was slurred, and he was visibly shaking. "All I know right now is I'm tired, Lieutenant. I'm tired of all of it."

Hanley was becoming more concerned. "Sergeant, it's time I got you back and had Doc take a look at you."

"No, Lieutenant," Saunders said softly. "I don't think I can go back."

Not allowing himself to consider the true meaning of the sergeant's words, Hanley stood and reached over to help Saunders to a standing position. "Look Saunders, you can lean on me or I can get a stretcher team if you need one."

Once forced to put weight on his injured leg, Saunders winced and groaned softly.

Suddenly, the roar of German 88s could be heard overhead. The building next to the tavern took a direct hit from the German artillery. The explosion blew waves of brick and mortar into the side of the apartments and down the stairway to the nightclub.

Lieutenant Hanley felt the building vibrate as the wall started to collapse. Saunders grabbed his Thompson, and Hanley pulled the staggering sergeant toward the other side of the room. He could hear screams as the trapped patrons began to panic. Many were moving toward the stairway. Hanley saw the cloud of dirt burst forth from the stairway door and shouted, "Everybody move to the stage!" Those who understood English tried to follow his advice, while others turned to look for the source of the order that they couldn't comprehend.

A loud groan emanated from the wall, as if the old building were moaning in pain, and then a cacophony of sounds rang out and half of the building fell in upon itself, burying most of the people and trapping the rest. As the dust settled, an eerie silence descended with it. Hanley held Saunders in a bear hug, his arms wrapped tightly around the sergeant's chest. He heard the Thompson crash to the floor and realized that he seemed to be supporting all of Saunders' weight. Sensing that the stage must be in front of him, Hanley moved forward with the sergeant and laid him down on an open area.

"Saunders?" He shook the sergeant's shoulders gently. There was no response. Hanley lifted Saunders' head and bent over him to check his breathing. He was relieved to find that Saunders was still alive. As he removed his hand from the back of Saunders' head, he discovered a warm sticky substance on it. *Blood.*

"Damn!" Hanley shouted to no one.

"Lieutenant?" A familiar voice came out of the darkness. "It is Jacques LeBeau. I am trying to find some matches behind the bar. I have some candles. Ah, here...." Hazy light filled the small space where the apparent survivors of the building's collapse looked at one another. Besides the two soldiers and the nightclub owner there was only the woman who had been singing. She knelt sobbing over the body of the saxophone player who appeared to have died when hit by a falling beam.

Hanley was shocked to see so few people standing. He looked at the huge pile of debris and shouted, "Hello! Is anyone else alive in there?" There was no answer. He began to frantically push bricks and pieces of wood aside, hoping that someone else would be found. LeBeau watched for a few minutes and then went over to Hanley. Putting his hand on Hanley's shoulder, he said softly, "Lieutenant, it is useless. There is no way anyone could be alive under this. Come, we must look after your injured sergeant."

Stunned, Hanley stood slowly and reluctantly gave up his search. LeBeau brought two candles over by Saunders and set them on either side of the still unconscious man. Hanley turned Saunders' head gently to one side and discovered the

head wound he had felt earlier in the darkness. It had stopped bleeding, but there was a nasty bump. Saunders' face was pale and sweaty. Moving both candles down to the sergeant's leg, Hanley discovered the bloody material around the bullet's entry point. Loosening Saunders' boot, he pulled his pant leg up revealing a swollen, red area and no exit wound. The wound was oozing blood. "What the...?" *Why didn't Saunders take care of this?*

"It looks like the start of a bad infection, Lieutenant. That bullet has to come out." The voice was that of the woman.

Lieutenant Hanley looked up to see her face. The dust and grime on her cheeks was streaked with her tears. "I am sorry about your friend," he said sympathetically, nodding toward the dead musician.

"Thank you, Lieutenant. He was a good man. Many good men have lost their lives lately." She looked sadly at the sergeant. "What about this one? Is he a good man too?"

"Yes he is, Mademoiselle. They don't come any better," Hanley replied, looking at his injured friend. "I've got to get him out of here."

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"INCOMING!"

The soldier's shouts and the whining of the 88s flying overhead rudely awakened First Squad. Each man grabbed his boots and helmet and took whatever cover he could, praying that there would be no direct hits on their little house. Doc looked around the room counting heads and looking for any injuries. Cajé, Kirby, Littlejohn, and Miller were all accounted for. *I sure hope the lieutenant got Saunders to the field hospital.*

Once the shelling stopped, the squad moved out of the house and made its way cautiously to headquarters hoping to find Lieutenant Hanley. When they arrived at the shop where Hanley was last seen they found it intact.

"Lieutenant? Are you in here?" Cajé shouted as he rushed inside. The building was empty.

"Oh great! We lose our R&R because the Krauts are mountin' a counteroffensive, and we don't know where our lieutenant or our sergeant is," Kirby grumbled.

"Take it easy, Kirby. They gotta be here somewhere. We'll find them," said Cajé.

"Hey, Doc, didn't you go to find the Sarge after you talked to me?" Littlejohn asked.

Doc was unsure how much of his conversation with the lieutenant he wanted to share with the other men. "Yeah, I talked to the Sarge and later the lieutenant".

"Well, where were they when you talked to them?" Kirby asked impatiently.

"Saunders was at *Angelique's*, and the lieutenant was on his way there when I headed back to get some shut-eye. Maybe Hanley took the Sarge over to the field hospital for the leg wound," Doc answered.

Cajé and Kirby shot each other knowing glances. They had sensed something was up with Saunders. The man had been acting strangely for several weeks. But there was no time for further speculation. The German artillery meant only one thing. German infantry would follow and try to retake the town. Cajé found a radio still intact. He checked with the field hospital, but there had been no sign of Hanley or Saunders there. Cajé then called Captain Jampel to report the situation. Once he completed the call, he turned to report to the squad.

"Captain Jampel hasn't been able to contact Hanley either. He says Second and Third Squads are already digging in north and west of town. Our orders are to find



Hanley and set up on the east end in case the Krauts try to swing around and flank us."

"But what if we can't find Hanley and Saunders?" Miller asked nervously.

"Then we'll have to do the job without them," Cajé responded, trying to calm the new recruit. "Now we'd better head over to *Angelique's* and find them."

Cajé led the men through the town with Kirby and his BAR in the rear. The squad moved slowly, skirting debris from bombed out buildings. As they approached the nightclub, their hearts sank. There appeared to be little left of the structure. A small group of old men had gathered outside what had been the door.

"My God. I hope the Sarge wasn't in there drinkin' when that thing got hit," Kirby said soberly.

Cajé approached the three old Frenchmen and asked if they knew if there were any people inside.

"Well what'd they say Cajé? Are the Sarge and Lieutenant in there?" Doc asked.

"That man over there claims he was in the club not long before the shelling. He said there were eight or nine people inside when he left. He says there was a sergeant in there. He doesn't know about the lieutenant. They are getting some shovels so they can try to dig."

"Well we gotta help them!" Littlejohn exclaimed. "The Sarge and the lieutenant could both be trapped in there."



"Use your head, Littlejohn. If they are trapped in there, it won't help them much to get them out only to be taken by the Krauts. I'll call Jampel and tell him what's going on. I'll ask for permission to help with the digging for awhile, but then we're gonna have to take our position on the edge of town." Cajé spoke with a confidence that belied his true feelings. He had had to take over for Saunders before but not under these kinds of circumstances. With

Hanley also nowhere to be found, the situation looked very grim.

Littlejohn nodded sullenly and grabbed a shovel from a wagon that pulled up next to the decimated building. As Cajé completed his call to Jampel, the rest of the squad joined the old men in digging.

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Sergeant Saunders woke to find Jeanine seated beside him, watching him with concern.

*An angel. I must be dead.* "Is this heaven?" he whispered.

"No, Sergeant, you are at *Angelique's*. Bosche artillery hit the building. You received a head wound and it looks like you also have a bullet in your leg. I am Jeanine, a singer here. We are trapped with your lieutenant and Jacques, the club owner."

"Is Hanley here, too? What about the squad?" Saunders tried to sit up but groaned in pain as Jeanine pushed him back down.

Lieutenant Hanley heard his friend talking and walked over to him. "How are you doing, Saunders?" Hanley offered the sergeant a lit cigarette.

"I've got a headache."

"Well, Sergeant, that's not too surprising. How about some water?" Hanley asked.

"Lieutenant, here is a glass of water for the sergeant, but I must tell you that there is very little water available. The main water line must have been broken in the

shelling," said LeBeau.

Hanley supported Saunders' head with his hand while the sergeant drank greedily. He studied Saunders carefully. The bullet in Saunders' leg was causing him considerable pain. It would only get worse until the bullet came out. He looked at the debris in front of the doorway. *There's got to be a way out of here.*

"Lieutenant, I know what you are thinking, but there is no other exit than the stairway or the street level windows, which are also buried. We are going to have to wait until someone digs us out." LeBeau spoke sympathetically and without any sign of fear.

"You seem to be pretty sure that someone will," Hanley answered.

"I was born in this town, as were my parents and their parents, Lieutenant. It is full of good people. They will not let us die in here," LeBeau assured him.

"That's if the Krauts don't show up and stop them from digging, LeBeau," Hanley responded. "In the meantime, we need to try to save ourselves. I suggest we try to make it through the nearest window. We can stack up these tables to climb on and take turns digging. You just need to help me figure out where the nearest window would be."

LeBeau rubbed his eyes, considering what Hanley said. "Very well, Lieutenant. There are two windows. The one by the stairwell is no good. I would suggest we try the other window, which is above the bar approximately five feet to the left of that mirror." LeBeau held up a candle and pointed as he spoke.

Hanley and LeBeau worked together and carefully stacked the three remaining tables so that they could climb up to window level to begin digging.

"I'll take first shift," Hanley offered. As he began to climb up, he heard a groan.

"The sergeant is getting worse!" Jeanine exclaimed. "We need to get the bullet out."

"Lieutenant, I will start the digging. You better listen to Jeanine. She has been trained as a nurse," said LeBeau.

Hanley climbed back down and went to Saunders' side. The unconscious sergeant was drenched in sweat. "LeBeau said you're a nurse. Is that true?"

"I was a nurse, yes. I haven't been working as a nurse for over a year, but I was a good nurse, and I helped with many bullet wounds working with the Maquis. I can get this bullet out," Jeanine said, looking Hanley in the eye. "If it does not come out, I believe he will die."

"The Maquis? Well you are full of surprises. We've heard rumors that you were consorting with the enemy, not fighting them."

Jeanine smiled and shrugged. "That was my 'cover,' Lieutenant. You know the old saying that you catch more bees with honey? Well, you can get a lot more information by pretending to be friendly." Jeanine again met Hanley's appraising gaze. "Now, you must decide quickly if you trust me enough to remove the bullet. There is no more time for discussion."

Hanley realized there was little choice. Even if they managed to free themselves, it wouldn't be in time to save Saunders. And there was something about Jeanine's ability to remain calm and confident that made Hanley believe she could do what she said.

"How will you do it? There's not much around here to use." Hanley frowned as he looked around at what was left of the dimly lit room.

Jeanine moved behind the bar and came back with a bag and bottle of cognac. She opened the bag and smiled sadly at the lieutenant. "I have kept this here for a long while. It seemed like the best place to leave it. No one pays much attention to a little bag left in such a public place. It has everything I need, except light of course. We will need Jacques' candles. The cognac will sterilize the knife."

Lieutenant Hanley collected all the candles from behind the bar, lit them, and



placed them around Saunders' leg. Jeanine busied herself sterilizing the knife, a needle, thread, and a glass to hold them. She used the cognac to clean the wound. Saunders moaned in pain and tried to move, making it necessary for Hanley to hold him down.

"I have a little ether that we can use to try to keep him sedated. It will not put him completely under. Jacques, come and help us! We will need all three of us to do this."

"Gladly!" LeBeau had been shoveling dirt down the side of the pile of debris that covered the nearest street level window. He began to climb down the stack of tables to join the others.

Jeanine efficiently directed the two men. "Jacques knows how to administer the ether, Lieutenant. I suggest that he handles it while you make sure the sergeant does not move during the bullet's removal."

For the next twenty minutes, Hanley watched as Jeanine removed the bullet from Saunders' leg, sewed up the opening, and bandaged the wound as if she had done this a thousand times before. There was very little ether, and Saunders had to be held firmly to prevent him from moving. Hanley was amazed that Saunders had that much fight left in him.

"Your friend is very strong, Lieutenant. He just might live," Jeanine said, smiling as she collapsed into a chair.

Hanley sat down next to her. "And lucky too. What are the odds of being trapped in a room with a nurse who can perform surgery and a bar owner who can administer anesthesia?" Hanley folded his arms across his chest and looked from LeBeau to Jeanine. "Now, suppose you two tell me your story."

LeBeau began. "Ah, Lieutenant, many strange things happen in war. I am Jeanine's uncle. My wife and I helped to raise her after her parents were killed when she was an infant. We lived in the United States for a time and Jeanine went to school there. We returned to our home here just before the Germans came. We opened this nightclub and named it after my wife, Angelique. She was a wonderful woman. She believed that love was stronger than any evil. She told me that the Germans would be stopped. Instead, Hitler continues to wage his war, and Angelique is gone—killed by artillery while visiting her cousin in St. Marie." Jacques paused, hurriedly wiping a tear from the corner of his eye. "After Angelique's death, I joined the Maquis, and Jeanine soon became involved in helping us, much to my dismay. I have tried to protect her as best I can. Her work here as a singer curtails the Germans' suspicions, but I fear every day that she will be discovered." LeBeau turned and shook his head. "I know that France will be free again, but the cost has been so high. My dear Angelique and so many of our friends have been killed."

Jeanine rose and walked to her uncle. Placing her arm around his shoulder, she leaned in and kissed him on the cheek. "Don't worry, Jacques. It will not last much longer. I can feel it."

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The evening breeze chased the clouds away revealing a bright half moon. Doc, Cajé, Kirby, Littlejohn, and Miller worked with the old men to dig their way into *Angelique's* in hopes of finding their leaders. Cajé looked at his watch and cast an anxious gaze at the men working before him. He knew what he needed to do, but that didn't make it any easier.

"We need to go and take our position now. It was an order."

"But Cajé, we're getting closer to the stairwell!" Littlejohn exclaimed.

"Order, shmorder, Jampel told us to find Hanley, didn't he? Those Krauts aren't gonna come in on this side of town. Besides, we'll hear the gunfire when Second and

Third Squad spot 'em," Kirby jumped in.

Suddenly, one of the Frenchmen near the back of the building began to shout excitedly and gestured toward the pile of wreckage near him.

"What's he sayin' Cajé?" Doc asked.

"He says he thinks he hears something. That there's someone alive down there."

Everyone moved over toward the excited Frenchman and stood silently listening. The faint sound of something hitting brick and rock could be heard from the other side of the debris.

"Cajé, ask them what part of the building was here," Littlejohn requested.

Cajé went to the men and began to question them about the building. He turned back to the rest of the squad and shouted, "They say that there was a street level window about there."

"Then I say we dig here and meet them halfway." Littlejohn grabbed his shovel and began digging at the new site.

"All right, you guys. Miller and I are going over to the church on the east end of town to watch for the Krauts. Doc, Littlejohn, and Kirby, you three stay here and keep digging. If there's any shooting, I don't need to tell ya to come running."

"Don't worry, Cajé. If there's shootin', I'll get there so fast you'll think I was shot from a cannon," Kirby replied with a smile.

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"You're still here." Saunders voice was faint and hoarse.

Jeanine sat up, startled. She looked at her blond patient, so pale and helpless. He looked like a young boy awakening from a bad dream. "How are you feeling, Sergeant?"

"I've felt better." Saunders lifted his head slightly, trying to look around. "What's happening?"

"I had to take the bullet out. You need to lie still or you may open the stitches and start bleeding again," Jeanine said with concern.

"Where's Hanley?" Saunders asked.

Jeanine nodded towards the makeshift ladder. "He and Jacques are trying to dig us out of here."

"Do you have any water?" Saunders moaned slightly as he laid his head back down on the stage floor.

Jeanine walked to the bar and poured a small amount of water into a glass. Returning to Saunders, she lifted his head gently and gave him a drink.

"Thank you," he whispered as she removed her hand from the back of his head.

Jeanine looked thoughtfully at the wounded man. "Sergeant Saunders, I have to ask you something."

Saunders turned his head to look at her, but said nothing.



Jeanine spoke softly but urgently. "Why didn't you seek medical care for your leg? You must have known the bullet was still there."

Saunders made no attempt to answer.

"You spoke of Wells and Becker when you were starting to wake up. They died didn't they? You spoke of her too... of Anne. You were afraid for her. What happened?"

After a long pause, Saunders answered. "She was killed in a bombing."

Jeanine sat quietly for a moment, her eyes welling up with tears. "I too have lost a love in this war. My Paul was so handsome and brave. He loved to laugh and dance. But he was shot by the Germans because he wouldn't be a traitor to his people." She wiped the tears from her cheeks and put her hand on the sergeant's. "Time will help you."

"At least I could feel the bullet," the sergeant answered, staring into the darkness.

Jeanine looked thoughtfully at Saunders. "I was numb for a long time. I seemed to go through life in a cloud. Gradually, it got better. I began to live again. And so will you, Sergeant."

From above them, Saunders and Jeanine could hear Hanley and LeBeau's laughter.

"I can hear digging outside! See, Lieutenant? I told you my people would rescue us!" shouted LeBeau.

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Captain Dieter and his squad had made their way out of St. Montel before the Americans broke through. *Fools! Why did they not listen to me when I told them we would need reinforcements to hold the town!* A career soldier in the German army, Dieter had worked his way up the ranks and repeatedly dealt with the incompetence of his superiors. This latest error he considered unforgivable. Half of his men had been lost taking and trying to hold the town, thanks largely to the Maquis. Once the German forces had taken over, the local resistance continually harassed them. The Germans' store of supplies and fuel were blown up.

And the singer... he had been so close to arresting her and her uncle. He had suspected them of being conspirators. The French prisoner from the resistance had explained how the Maquis had been so successful and confirmed Dieter's suspicions about the singer. The captain had known women like her before. She had spent too much time with the men, asking too many questions.

Now Dieter was ready for his revenge. The artillery had softened up the American soldiers in the town. They would have to spread themselves very thin to watch for German movement. They would expect an attack from the north or west. He would go in on the east end and use the tunnel the captured Frenchman had told him about right before Dieter had killed him. It would be daylight when they arrived.

<Back to St. Montel! > he ordered his squad. They entered the tunnel and made their way to the wooden stairs that led into the church. Dieter ordered Corporal Heinrich to continue ahead through the tunnel to the courthouse and check on American activity. <We will wait here for Heinrich's report. >

Twenty minutes later, Heinrich returned. <Three Americans are outside of *Angelique's*. They are digging through the rubble with some old Frenchmen, trying to get to survivors of the artillery barrage. There are other Americans on the far north and west ends of town, > Heinrich reported.

<Just as I expected. We will capture the Americans in town and look for members of the resistance, > said Dieter.

The Germans walked silently into the church. Reaching the vestibule, Private

Hoffman could hear talking in the next room. He reported to Captain Dieter, who smiled with satisfaction.

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"They're alive! If we can hear them digging it can't be that much farther!" Littlejohn shouted excitedly.

"Now take it easy, Littlejohn. We don't know if Hanley or Saunders are the ones diggin,'" Doc pointed out.

"Hey, the Sarge has survived a lot worse than this. He's alive down there. You can bet on it!" Kirby exclaimed.

The digging continued on both ends for another ten minutes, when a single gunshot rang out from Cajé and Miller's position.

"Did you hear that?" Doc asked looking at Littlejohn and Kirby.

"Yeah, but it was just one shot. Maybe Miller got skittish and shot at a shadow. He's pretty nervous yet," Littlejohn said, continuing to dig frantically.

"I think we oughtta check it out. I'll head over there," Kirby offered. "You two keep diggin."

Kirby walked carefully toward the church where Cajé and Miller were supposed to take up their position. He held his BAR at the ready as he paused at the corner of the building directly across from the church. He opened his mouth to yell for Cajé but stopped himself because of a very uncomfortable feeling in his gut. He slowly peeked around the corner when he found himself face to muzzle with a Schmeisser. The German private holding it gestured with his hand, instructing Kirby to drop the BAR. After frisking him, the German nudged Kirby forward and across the street to the church where Cajé and Miller had been standing watch. As he entered, he spotted Miller lying face down on the floor and Cajé bound and gagged.

Captain Dieter greeted him. "Your name, please."

"Kirby, William G., private, serial number...."

"That won't be necessary, Private Kirby. I do not want or need any other information from you."

Dieter walked over to where Cajé was seated and addressed another one of his men. <You can untie him and take the gag out of his mouth. We no longer have to worry about him shouting a warning. >

As the gag was removed, Cajé began to rub his mouth. Kirby was seated on the floor next to him.

"Is he dead?" Kirby asked, nodding toward Miller.

"Yeah, he's dead. He tried to jump one of these guys after we were captured. It was a stupid move." Cajé shook his head. "I can't believe we didn't see them coming."

"Don't feel so bad, Private LeMay. You couldn't see us coming because we used an old tunnel under the church. One of our prisoners from the resistance told me about it. So you see, you have not shirked your duty. You were merely 'outfoxed' as you Americans say." Captain Dieter smiled, seeing no reason to hide his enjoyment at having the upper hand. "Now we will go and capture the other two Americans from your squad. You see, we have been watching you. Of course, we don't know whom you are trying so hard to dig out of *Angelique's*. I can only guess it is one of your officers. And that is the prize I seek. Well, at least one of the prizes...I tend to be rather greedy, you see." Dieter gestured toward the door. "Shall we go?"

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"Hey, Doc. I can see them! I see the lieutenant!" Littlejohn was elated at the sight of LeBeau and his platoon leader digging toward him from the other end of the debris. When they were just arms-length apart, Littlejohn stopped and reached in with his considerably long arm, grabbing LeBeau to help the older man through the opening. Doc and one of the Frenchmen ran over to help LeBeau to his feet.

"Who else is alive in there?" Doc asked anxiously.

A voice boomed from behind the group. "Yes, LeBeau, who else is alive in there?" Captain Dieter stood with his squad. Their Schmeissers were aimed at the small group of rescuers. Cajé and Kirby stood in the middle of the Germans. Dieter continued, "Jeanine no doubt was with you, and I just heard that there is a lieutenant in there."

Dieter turned to his men. < Hoffman and Schmidt, take these old men and get rid of them! >

<Kill them, Captain Dieter? > Schmidt asked.

<Kill them, tie them up, just get them out of here and make sure they cannot get to the other Americans. Do it quietly, no more gunfire. >

The three old men were led away, begging to be let go.

Littlejohn lunged for his rifle, but was quickly restrained by Dieter's men. Doc turned to study Kirby and Cajé, checking for any injuries and wondering what happened to Miller.

Cajé guessed what Doc wanted to know.

"Miller's dead, Doc. He got it back at the house. They came in through a tunnel. We didn't have a chance," said Cajé.

"But you men do have a chance. The more you cooperate, the better your chance will be," Dieter interjected. Then he shouted into the hole where Littlejohn had been digging. "Lieutenant! Jeanine! Come out of there slowly with whoever else is down there!" he commanded.

Hanley had been part way to the opening when LeBeau was taken prisoner. He had intended to get another man to go back in with him to help him get Saunders out. Now he contemplated going back for Saunders' Thompson and making a stand.

As if reading Hanley's mind, Dieter shouted, "Lieutenant, I have four men from one of your squads out here. A poor decision on your part will result in their deaths."

*Talk about a rock and a hard place.* Hanley knew he had little choice. At least as prisoners of war, the squad had a chance of escaping. But Saunders... the Krauts would probably not bother to take a badly wounded man.

"Lieutenant?" Jeanine's voice drifted up from below. "I am sorry, Lieutenant. The sergeant did not make it. He has just died."

Hanley felt his stomach lurch. He could not believe it. *Saunders dead? Impossible.*

"Are you sure, Jeanine? He seemed to be getting better."

"I'm sorry. The blood loss was too great," Jeanine responded softly.

Hanley closed his eyes. There was no choice but to surrender.

"I'm coming out!" he shouted, and began moving through the debris into the early morning air.

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Jeanine crouched close to Saunders as she heard Dieter's voice outside. "Captain Dieter!" she said softly but with obvious distress.

Saunders looked around trying to determine a plan of action. "You know him?"

"He was one of the Germans here before your troops moved in. He is a very evil

man. I suspect he knows about Jacques and me," Jeanine answered.

"Jeanine, maybe you could hide. We could say you were killed when the building collapsed," Saunders suggested.

"No, it is too late for that. He has already shouted my name. He knows I am here. I will not allow him to find me hiding in a corner. But Sergeant, you have given me an idea."

"Jeanine, you have to try to save yourself," Saunders interrupted.

"Shh. There is no time to argue. You must play dead. I will put your weapon under the stage. If they believe me and leave you here, you will have a chance to get out once you have regained some strength."

Jeanine grabbed the Thompson and slid it under the stage. As she stood up, Saunders took hold of her wrist and looked intently into her eyes.

"Jeanine, don't give up," Saunders pleaded. Jeanine grasped his dog tags and pulled them from him, smiling.

"Exactly, Sergeant. Don't give up."

She left him and began climbing up the makeshift ladder, calling out the news of his death to Lieutenant Hanley.

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The squad waited anxiously while Lieutenant Hanley and then Jeanine emerged from the newly excavated opening.

When no others appeared their anxiety increased. "What about the Sarge, Lieutenant?" Doc asked, his brow furrowed.

Hanley looked into each man's eyes. There was no way to soften the blow.

"Saunders didn't make it," he said softly, fingering the tags Jeanine had handed to him.

The men stood in stunned silence. Seeing their reaction, Jeanine felt remorse at the necessary fabrication.

<Heinrich, Fritz, get the lieutenant's sidearm and then go down and check out the club for any others! > Dieter ordered.

Jeanine said a silent prayer. *God, please let them pass him by.*

"Lieutenant, you and your men will be going back with us to our lines for interrogation," Dieter announced.

"Captain, according to the Geneva Convention...." Hanley tried to protest, but Dieter cut him off.

"I am not interested in your rights, Lieutenant. You can complain to the SS," Dieter responded. He then turned to LeBeau and Jeanine. "And I will be dealing with you two myself. We will talk and then I will kill you both!"

After five minutes, Heinrich and Fritz came out of the hole and reported to Dieter. <There are no other survivors, Captain. >

<Very well. Take the prisoners to the church. >

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Saunders heard the two Germans climbing down into the club. They had a flashlight, which they moved methodically around the room. As the light fell upon him, he held his breath and became one with the other lifeless bodies. The Germans walked to the stage and nudged the body of the saxophone player. Then they moved over to Saunders and poked the sergeant's chest with a rifle. Satisfied that he was dead, they moved on and Saunders took a silent breath. He could hear bits of the conversation



coming from above and his heart began beating faster as he heard the German Captain say "SS."

After the German soldiers left the club, Saunders decided to move toward the opening. He gasped as he sat up and swung his injured leg over the side of the stage. Deciding he was not ready to try standing, he dropped to the floor and began to drag himself directly under the 'ladder' of tables that Hanley and LeBeau had created. He heard the group moving away. Realizing there was no time to recover any further, Saunders wormed his way back to the stage to retrieve his Thompson. He checked his clip, summoned his strength, and began a torturous climb up the makeshift ladder.

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Dieter's men led Hanley and the squad to the room in the church next to the vestibule where Kirby and Miller had been captured, and where Miller's body continued to lie face down on the floor. The Americans were ordered to sit against a wall, while Dieter and one of his men ordered LeBeau and Jeanine into another room. Hanley again tried to protest to Dieter as Jeanine was escorted away, only to receive a rifle butt to his stomach.

Doc watched with fisted hands. "Lieutenant, are you all right?"

"Yeah, Doc, I'll be okay," Hanley replied hesitantly. He looked at the squad of men who had been together for so long. *The men Saunders had managed to keep alive through so many missions.* Now Saunders was gone and it was up to him to keep them alive. But how?

"If only I'd pulled the Sarge outta *Angelique's* like I wanted to. He might still be alive," Doc said sullenly.

"Doc, there's no time for *if onlys*," Hanley shot back.

"You know what Sarge would say if he was here? He'd say 'just forget about it' and he'd move on," Littlejohn said soothingly.

A disconcerted Kirby looked around at the others. "Lieutenant, we gotta jump these Krauts while that psycho Captain is in the other room,"

<Silence! > Heinrich shouted, aiming his Schmeisser at Kirby.

Caje, who had said nothing since learning of Saunders' death, put his hand on Kirby's shoulder to calm him.

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In the next room, Dieter stood in front of LeBeau. "I want the names of the Maquis who sabotaged my men and our supplies!" he shouted.

LeBeau stood silently, his chin held high. Dieter, enraged by LeBeau's arrogance, struck LeBeau across the face. The older man toppled to one side and then righted himself and spat in Dieter's face. The German captain, consumed by anger, drew his Luger and killed LeBeau with one shot to the head.

Jeanine screamed in horror as she watched her uncle's lifeless body fall to the floor. As she tried to run to Jacques, Dieter grasped her arm and turned her face to him.

"You will not go so quickly, I assure you," he said smiling.

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An exhausted Saunders crawled out of the rubble and rolled onto his side, his Thompson firmly in his grip. He looked down at his injured leg and saw with no surprise that it was bleeding again. Reaching for his web belt, he pulled out a bandage and secured it on top of the now saturated bandage Jeanine had applied. He tried to orient

himself to determine which way the Germans had gone, when he heard a shot ring out. He stood unsteadily and moved slowly in the direction of the sound, leaning on his Thompson and dragging his wounded leg behind him. Saunders made his way into a house across from the church. His head and leg throbbed and his vision was blurry. He pulled a chair to an open window and used the sill to support the Thompson. He sat, rubbing his eyes and trying to focus on the scene unfolding before him. Through a church window he could see a German officer and a private with Jeanine. There was shouting and the sound of fighting from another room. The private went to check it out and the captain locked the door behind him. The captain was talking to Jeanine, appearing to threaten her. The German then raised a gun and aimed it at her.

Seething with anger, Saunders' adrenaline kicked in. He raised the Thompson and blasted the German captain across the chest and head. Watching the German fall, Saunders' strength was gone and he collapsed onto the floor. As he drifted into unconsciousness, he thought he saw Anne's face, smiling at him.

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The gunshot and scream in the next room distracted the four Germans guarding First Squad for only a few seconds, but it was ample time for the Americans to make their move. Kirby and Caje leapt from their seated positions and grabbed at the German weapons before they could be raised to fire. Littlejohn kicked out one of his long legs and knocked down the Kraut closest to him. Hanley wrestled the Schmeisser away from the German by him and used it to knock the corporal out. He then moved toward the door to the room where Dieter had Jeanine, but as he opened the door, the German private who had gone into the room with Dieter rushed through and the lieutenant had to tackle him.

Grabbing Jeanine's arm, Captain Dieter pushed the door shut and slid the bolt over, locking the door. Regardless of the outcome of the skirmish in the next room, he would not be denied his revenge. He released his grip on Jeanine's arm and looked at her with pure hatred in his eyes.

"Beg for mercy, Jeanine!" he commanded.

Jeanine met his gaze with calm defiance.

"Very well. Have it your way," he said coldly.

As he raised his pistol, Jeanine froze, steeling herself for the inevitable. In an instant, a spattering of gunfire from a Thompson rang out and Dieter fell to the floor, his pistol never fired.

Hanley used a German Schmeisser to shoot out the lock on the door. He burst into the room and took Jeanine into his arms.

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Second Squad grew restless on the north end of town. As Sergeant McCoy radioed Captain Jampel, several shots were heard coming from the east end. Jampel told McCoy that First Squad had set up in the church but had not checked in on schedule. Now they guessed at the reason.

"Let's move out!" McCoy ordered.

They moved quickly toward the church and ran into one German trying to escape. As the German raised his weapon, he was gunned down. Entering the church, Second Squad found First Squad and Lieutenant Hanley had the situation under control. McCoy approached Hanley and saluted.

"Glad to see you're still in one piece, sir," McCoy said smiling. "Looks like you

guys ran into some stragglers."

"Glad to be in one piece," Hanley responded, looking around the room.

"We found three old men tied up across the way. Looks like they'll be fine, Lieutenant. Captain Jampel just radioed that the main German offensive was cut off west of town. You want me and Saunders to have the men flush out the rest of these buildings in case there are more Krauts around?" McCoy asked.

"Saunders didn't make it, McCoy," Hanley replied sadly.

Jeanine, who was kneeling beside her uncle's body, looked up at Hanley with tear filled eyes. "No, Lieutenant, he is...."

"Doc!" one of McCoy's men shouted from the house across the street.

"Saunders is in here and he's hurt."

"Saunders?!" Hanley questioned.

"That is what I was trying to tell you, Lieutenant," Jeanine said. "Sergeant Saunders is still alive. I am sorry I had to lie to you, but it had to be convincing so that the Germans would believe he was dead." Jeanine looked anxiously at the lieutenant. "Please forgive me."

Hanley smiled slightly, watching Doc and the rest of First Squad rush to Saunders' side. "There's nothing to forgive, Jeanine. If it wasn't for you, Saunders wouldn't be alive now."

"Yes, Lieutenant. And if it weren't for the sergeant, I wouldn't be alive now either. You see, it was Sergeant Saunders who killed Captain Dieter. I saw him in the window," Jeanine explained.

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Saunders awoke to find himself lying on a cot looking up at Jeanine.

"Is this heaven?" he asked, repeating the same words he used while trapped in the club.

Jeanine smiled widely. "No, Sergeant, you are in a field hospital in France."

"How about Hanley and the squad?" Saunders tried to look around at the other beds.

"They are all fine. They have been taking turns checking on you for two days now," Jeanine explained.

"Two days? I've been out that long?" Saunders felt so tired, he couldn't believe he had gotten that much sleep.

"What about Jacques? Is he okay?" Saunders asked.

Jeanine's face clouded. "Dieter killed him."

Saunders closed his eyes for a moment and then looked sympathetically at Jeanine. "I'm sorry."

"He died doing what he believed was right, and he did not give Dieter what he wanted. I will always remember him with great pride. And great love."

Saunders took Jeanine's hand. "You are a very brave and very special woman, Jeanine."

Jeanine smiled warmly and rose to leave. "I am going to Paris this afternoon to stay there with friends for awhile, but I needed to see that you were going to be all right and to thank you. Thank you for saving me, Sergeant. I will never forget you." She squeezed his hand gently, and released it as he began to drift back to sleep.

As she walked away, Saunders whispered, "And thank you too, Jeanine, for saving me."

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