

Chapter One

The Sky over Occupied Brittany, June 1943

The Lysander's engine roared and its airframe vibrated noisily as the flaps were lowered and the aircraft began its final descent towards a hastily arranged landing strip amidst a woodland near Rennes. In the thundering cockpit, communication between the two airmen had been difficult to maintain throughout their flight, now it was entirely suspended.

Moonlight still illuminated the early morning sky, rendering it clear enough for navigation, and clear enough to expose them as an easy target for enemy artillery. This had been brought home by the terrifying flack over Normandy that had glanced the aircraft's fuel line but which, miraculously, had failed to ignite the contents of the large tank located precariously under its cockpit. Although relieved to survive the maelstrom of artillery, the pilot and his crew of one now contemplated an aborted mission or capture by the enemy. The Lysander had been leaking fuel for over an hour and was now flying on fumes.

Just minutes away from their destination, the aircraft's engine began to splutter and cough and as the last droplets of aviation fuel were consumed, its roar finally extinguished. Now, with only the sound of the wind cascading over the aircraft's wings, the Lysander glided eerily over occupied France. The moonlight cast a fleeting shadow of its approach on the countryside below as the scale of every feature marked their descent and the ground sped ominously towards them.

Flight Sergeant Douglas Baxter hunched his tall, muscular frame into a semi-brace position over the stick and instructed his navigator to prepare for an emergency landing. Mercifully, he could now make out the burning torches in the clearing below that was to be their makeshift runway and he adjusted the aircraft trim accordingly.

Baxter was an old hand with an impressive log of missions to his name but for nineteen year old Jack de Garis, this would be his first foray into enemy held territory after gaining his wings a few weeks earlier. His role had been to photograph enemy defenses as they flew over the Normandy coast, but German bullets had destroyed the specially adapted camera mounted on a bracket outside the cockpit. Jack, nicknamed 'Digger' in his Channel Island home, was somewhat in awe of his pilot and his anxiety about the landing was only slightly greater than his desire to keep face in front of him. As the aircraft descended,

Jack feared the worst and contemplated that in a few moments he might be torn apart by the twisted wreck of this aircraft or shot dead by the enemy. His pulse was raised and he realised that he was breathing heavily. 'Pull yourself together', he told himself; chastised himself. Despite their airspeed, and the frantic reporting of danger from each of his senses, his brain went into slow motion. 'Think of Mum and Dad. If it ends now, they'll be there to meet me in heaven. Oh, I wish they hadn't died; I wish they'd stayed in Guernsey. The bloody Luftwaffe; the bloody evil blitz. Now it could be my turn: all over before my life's really begun.'

The altimeter whirled in an anti-clockwise direction as they descended rapidly towards the field.

"Brace yourself Digger we'll be down in a couple of minutes. Remember, as soon as the rotor stops, get out and get clear of the aircraft. We'll have to abandon it, we've no more fuel and anyway I wouldn't risk a take off without knowing the damage. Hopefully, our French friends will be there to whisk us away but if anything goes wrong, stick with me."

The young airman responded and as stoically as he could muster. "Yes sir, no sign of Jerry by the looks of things."

Douglas picked up the nervousness in the young airman's voice, despite the cacophony of signals competing for his attention. He remembered his first mission and the knot in his belly when they landed in occupied territory. But that flight hadn't suffered the flack they had just survived, and the landing had been pretty straightforward. 'Young Digger must be scared stiff.'

"Good, let's hope they haven't seen us but if they're there, they'll be keeping well out of sight for now Digger. We'll know soon enough. Hold on now!"

The Lysander was just a few meters above the tree tops now and soon branches were scraping on its undercarriage, threatening to entwine themselves on the aircraft's fixed wheels like giant tentacles. As they cleared the tree-line, two figures holding burning torches to guide them into the field spreading out before them, waved frantically towards a comrade at the far end of the field. The Lysander bumped onto the ground and shuddered and thumped its way towards the fainter light in the distance. Every muscle in the airmen's bodies and every rivet and bolt on the Lysander, now vibrated at fever pitch, making it all but impossible to focus on that final, flickering light. But for Jack, the fear was gone; replaced by a fatalistic resignation.

Finally, after the hours of assault on their senses during their flight, all motion

suddenly ceased and silence engulfed them. They were down in one piece and for a precious moment, safe.

But the moment was short lived. Douglas quickly opened the canopy and commanded Jack, still unbuckling his harness, to get out and make for the figures waving urgently and running towards them.

Misjudging the distance of the steps attached to the fuselage, Jack stumbled into the hay field, now harvested and with only stubble remaining. He regained his balance and ran after Douglas until the two met their reception party half way across the field. Gesturing that they should make for the cover of the tree line, Douglas tried to explain their predicament to the young french woman and decidedly gruff looking older man who tried to question them in the little English language he could muster. "What are you doing? Why did you stop the engine? You should have taxied around for take off. Have you got the weapons?"

Although relieved to be told the weapons were on board, they were decidedly unimpressed to learn that the aircraft couldn't leave.

A younger man who had been holding the final torch at the end of the field, now ran to join them. He was breathless, but equally inquisitive. "Where are the guns? You can't stop, it's too dangerous you have to go. Quickly now; the guns!"

The girl spoke urgently in her native tongue to the young man. It took a few moments for the news to sink in, during which time his expression remained confused and anxious. Then he looked to his comrades for a clue as to how they should react.

The older man shrugged his shoulders. "Je ne sais pas, Yvette." He muttered towards the girl. At first hesitant, Yvette now turned towards the airmen and explained their concern in broken English.

"If the Boche find your avion; which they will, they will know you here. We all are in danger. But that's how it is now. We must get him unloaded and under cover, quickly!"

That night seemed certain to end in disaster, yet somehow they managed to drag the Lysander to the cover of the trees and offload its small, but vital cargo of explosives, guns and ammunition. Had they known just how narrowly they had missed the German patrol scouring the area a few miles to their north, they may well have abandoned the Lysander and its cargo in the middle of the field. The German soldiers quickly located the field, the debris from the broken tree tops, and tracks from the wheels leading to the aircraft at the edge of the woods.

A full scale search was underway less than an hour after the fugitives had scrambled out of the woods on the outskirts of Rennes. Between them they had hauled their cargo on an old tarpaulin, through a path in the woodland to a clearing, close to the road. They hadn't spoken throughout, partly to attune their senses to the warning signs of the enemy; the sounds of commands being ordered, the flash of a torch or headlights, and partly because of the unfamiliarity of this fugitive group. Nobody had expected this, to be thrust together this way.

Charles, the older Frenchman, was the most senior of the group by age but not authority. He was a brave and willing volunteer, although the willingness was often concealed behind a grumpiness he felt obliged to display; but he was a farmer, not a soldier. He was also a proud Frenchman and found it hard to accept that it was the English who were now fighting to liberate his country. It was England that now hosted his beloved General de Gaulle. Americans he could take, they were not ancient neighbors with the multitude of petty, and not so petty, rivalries that punctuated the history of Anglo-French relations. But however deep felt these frustrations may have been, they were of almost no consequence when compared to his loathing of the German occupation force. The sickening feeling every single day when he was forced to acquiesce to yet another dictate from the Boche. Diverting his gaze to avoid eye contact, bowing his head, crossing the street, all in an attempt to blend inconspicuously into the background. He was no longer young or strong, but nevertheless terrified that with the slightest provocation, his inner rage would explode uncontrollably and only one result was certain. So, to the best of his ability, he kept a lid on his emotions, just as he did now. He spoke little and was content for Yvette to make the decisions, even though this was the first time she had been required to do so. All their earlier missions had been led by Jean De La Tour, the station master at Rennes during the day, and at night, the commander of the local Resistance. But Jean was being watched and there was a very real risk he had been betrayed to the Gestapo. Strangers would become too familiar with him at the station and there always seemed to be someone lurking nearby, their attention distracted in another direction if he appeared to notice them. He knew that if he lay low, there was a chance the Gestapo would wait for the opportunity to cast their vile net wider. Why bring in a single fish when the shoal must be close by?

So operational control of the unit passed to Yvette, or rather she assumed it in the absence of anyone more assertive. Jean was also responsible for all communications with the free French and the nearest Resistance units in the line that helped allied airmen to escape through occupied France. It was through his contacts that the local cell received their instructions about when and where to prepare a landing strip and who, or what would be the cargo. His

source had passed the information about the rendezvous that night just a few days before it was realised Jean was under surveillance and although the details had quickly been relayed to Yvette and Charles, there was always a risk their security had been compromised.

Now, parked behind a disused water tower in a field on the outskirts of the city, an old pick up truck offered the fugitives a means to be transported away from the landing strip. But first their valuable cargo was to be unceremoniously discarded in a sack, wrapped in the tarpaulin, and secreted in a false floor underneath the tower.

Luke and Yvette carefully concealed all traces of the flattened undergrowth that revealed their trail to the tower. Everything had been meticulously planned and having had the foresight to load the truck with bushes and scrub from another forest, they were able to cover their retraced steps some way back into the woods. The two then took another, more conspicuous track, that led back out of the woods to the road, where they waited.

Charles started the truck, moved it cautiously onto the road and returned to the clearing where, assisted by the airmen, he concealed the tire marks with more brush.

A few minutes later the three men returned to the truck and Charles drove it slowly along the lane, until the two figures of their comrades appeared from the shadows.

As soon as the old Renault pulled over, Jack opened his door and jumped from the cab. He gestured to Yvette. "You get in, I'll ride in the back."

For the first time, in that moonlit lane, with the atmosphere charged full of frustration and danger, they made eye contact. It was a fleeting moment, but each held their gaze just a fraction too long and on each of their faces, the tiny muscles around their eyes fluttered almost imperceptibly.

Yvette accepted silently and climbed into the cab. As she pulled the door closed, she half turned her head back towards him. It was as if she wanted to confirm whether the butterflies she now felt were a response to the danger or to this young stranger.

It took just half an hour for the truck to meander through the tiny lanes of Brittany to Charles' farm. He parked inside a barn and switched off the engine. As silently as they could manage, all five of them left the vehicle and gathered at the entrance to the barn. They waited and they listened.

No one needed to explain why; they all knew. As they willed their ears to capture the slightest giveaway sound of pursuit, each face was locked in concentration. Each that is, except for Jack. His gaze was fixed hypnotically on Yvette. From his position, a little behind the others, he explored the fine contours of her face, the tiny part of her neck just visible above the collar of her rain coat. Her brown hair captured, but bidding for freedom from a head scarf. Tied at the waste, her coat could not hide her shapely figure anymore than he could disguise the fascination that so completely distracted him from the threats outside. She was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

An owl called from its vantage point, high in an oak tree. Somewhere, further away, its partner responded. There was a streak in the undergrowth not far from the barn. But no sound of an engine.

The tension subsided and the group turned to one another awkwardly.

Yvette took charge.

The young Frenchman, Luke, was told to go to his home across the fields. Luke was seventeen and quite lanky. His mop of brown hair had a habit of unoblingly dropping across his face like a curtain, creating the impression he was hiding. In truth, he was a shy young man, but behind his sensitive dark eyes, a passion was concealed. A passion for Yvette. She was beautiful and, certain his secret love was unsuspected, he noticed every move her slender body made, every casual flick of her hair, every nuance of the tiny muscles around her deep blue eyes. And so, the arrival, but more importantly the lack of departure, of the two British airmen, was not at all welcome. Luke was far less concerned about discovery by the Germans, than the competition for Yvette's affection.

Before leaving the barn, he smiled at Yvette and nodded towards Charles. Then he mouthed the words '*Rappelez-moi*' in the general direction of both. Their expressions solemn, the two responded, '*Oui*'.

With Luke gone, Yvette spoke quietly to Charles about the airmen. There was clearly some disagreement about what should be done but she asserted her temporary authority and Charles shrugged his shoulders as if to say, 'OK, if you think that's best'. She turned to the airmen.

"You must come with me, it will be easier to hide you for now."

Douglas turned to her. "How long is 'for now'?"

"I don't know Monsieur, this is a big surprise for us. All we can do is try to make you safe tonight and tomorrow we'll think again." Careful not to mention any names, Yvette explained that her commander was absent and that she hadn't been briefed on what to do in this situation. Somehow, she would need to get help but, for tonight, the important thing was to get them to safety.

The airmen waited as Yvette kissed Charles on his cheek and whispered a private farewell into his ear. Charles simply nodded and watched as the three left the barn and hurried along a farm track, wet with the early morning dew.

They moved silently through the early hours, keeping close to hedgerows and woodlands wherever they could, to avoid the conspicuousness of open ground. Yvette also knew that a direct route across the fields might leave an easy trail for tracker dogs to follow, and so, with their feet already wet from the dew, they waded into several streams and ditches.

An hour later, as the sun began to rise in the sky, casting long shadows across the countryside and creating wisps of cloudy condensation in the damp fields, a farmhouse and outbuildings appeared in the distance.

"We're nearly there." She reassured them.

"You see that pointed building, over there by the trees? That is where you'll hide for now."

Yvette led the two airmen around a large wheat field, across a meadow and through an apple orchard until they finally approached a brick built Oast House. They entered the dark building with just a beam of light from the roof to guide them. At ground level, the remains of a charcoal burner and several hessian 'pokes' were scattered around the floor. These were the sacks used for freshly picked hops. The building clearly hadn't been used for sometime but the aroma of hops still permeated every fibre of the pokes and filled the atmosphere with their rich scent.

Yvette guided them to some wooden steps that led to the floor above. This floor was slatted and covered with a horsehair mat.

"This place was built by my grandfather, a long time ago, but she isn't used now. You can stay here and later I will come to you. It's not very comfortable." She looked into their faces. "I'm sorry."

Douglas replied quickly, "Don't you say sorry my dear, you've been brilliant."

We're very grateful, aren't we Digger?"

Her eyes looked for his reaction and she blushed.

"Yes, of course we are. Brilliant, yes, you are amazing." He realised this might sound a little gushing and his face also began to redden. Awkwardly, he reached out, took her hand and shook it vigorously. "Yes, thank you. Thank you very much."

"Alright Digger, put her down." Douglas joked, and they all grinned widely as Jack retracted his hand, somewhat embarrassed by his own exuberance.

"Until later then." She spoke quietly and left into what little remained of the early morning dawn.

Chapter Two

Several miles to the North of the Oast House, German troops were examining the Lysander and tracking the path out of the forest. It did not take them long to conclude that the aircraft had been disabled by their own artillery and must consequently have been abandoned. Neither was it long before they reached the roadside without realising they had followed the false trail.

But the young Oberleutnant in charge was in no doubt that at least one fugitive British airman was now at large in his area and it was his duty to capture him and the locals who no doubt came to his aid. He ordered a few of his men to conduct a quick scan of the immediate area but he was sure they were further away by now. The marks on the lane revealed where a vehicle had pulled over and subsequently departed in a southerly direction. For this reason, a detachment was left behind to follow the road on foot, whilst he and his driver, took their commandeered Citroen back to headquarters in Rennes.

Within a few hours, roadblocks were set up and a search of all country properties was underway. A small army of informants in the city were put on alert for any information about British airmen and suspected safe houses were raided.

The surveillance of Jean De La Tour was also stepped up but the Gestapo made it clear they now wanted to bring him in for interrogation and their patience was running thin.

Chapter Three

The Oast House

The two men stretched out across the slatted floor opposite each other and tried to sleep using the hessian pokes for pillows. They had been awake for hours; the events of the past twenty-four hours had exhausted them. But sleep was elusive. The sounds of an unfamiliar countryside and the excitement of their predicament ensured that the most they could accomplish was a series of short naps. Even these were frustrated as, just when Douglas began to drift, Jack would attempt semi-conscious conversation and when he succumbed to sleep, Douglas would do the same.

The topics centered on how they could evade capture and return to England, how long it would be before the Germans found their aircraft, and Douglas could not help but mention how Jack seemed to have fallen for Yvette. The latter wasn't a topic that Jack was at all comfortable discussing and he changed the subject whenever Douglas pried or taunted him.

"She is rather pretty, but I'd rather think about what we're going to do sir, if you don't mind. Have you a plan?"

"Listen Digger, this is a bit of a mess. It sounds like the lovely Yvette isn't usually in charge and may not even have access to the escape line. Jerry will be onto us pretty soon, I'm sure they'll find the aircraft and maybe even the arms stash. That'll trigger a major search; so we can either sit tight and hope it blows over or make a break and take the chance that they haven't stumbled across our dear old Lysander yet. It's risky either way."

"If they find us, what will happen to Yvette and the others?"

"You don't want to know that Digger."

"Then surely we have go sir?"

The two looked at each other through the gloomily lit hop drying room. A beam of light flickered down onto Douglas' face, at the same time illuminating dust particles now rising as the heat of the day set in. He was about to answer when the door below squeaked open, jarring their nerves and riveting their sprawling bodies to the floor. They looked into each other's faces with alarm.

"It's only me." Yvette called from below.

"I've brought you some food and clothes."

The airmen dropped down to the floor below and gratefully accepted the bread, cheese and milk that Yvette had brought them. They pulled up an old bench to

allow them to sit in the open door whilst Yvette perched on an upturned wooden barrel.

"I also have some news." She told them as they ate.

"Luke has been into the village and he says the Boche are everywhere. They are searching all the farms and setting up road blocks. We must stay alert. The talk is they are looking for one British airman. They say it might be two but they think it would have come to take a passenger away."

"Have they found the arms?" Jack asked.

"We don't know; maybe. But we can't return to check until things quieten down and Jean is free of his watchers.

"Here, I've brought you a change of clothes. I had to guess your size so they may not be too flattering."

Douglas looked serious. "Thanks Yvette, but I don't know if we should take them."

A puzzled Jack interjected. "Surely we'd be safer in civies sir?" He looked down at his conspicuously blue RAF uniform.

"That depends. We have more chance of escaping but if we're caught, the consequences are worse. To put it bluntly, we could be shot as spies if we're out of uniform, whereas under the Geneva Convention, they must take enemy soldiers as prisoners of war."

"He is right." Yvette averted her eyes and spoke solemnly. "As soldiers, the Boche can deal with you and, although the Gestapo will question you, they have to treat you less harshly. You will be sent to a prison camp, probably the transit camp in Rennes. Spies, on the other hand, like the Resistance, are handed over to the Gestapo.

"They murdered both of my parents and would certainly kill all of us after they have extracted everything we know with such brutality, you can't even imagine." A tear began to form in her eye.

Jack got up immediately and went over to be by her side. He tentatively put his hand on her shoulder. "I'm so sorry to hear that, it must have been terrible for you. It must still be."

She sniffled and took a deep breathe. "It is still very raw. I can't explain how I miss them.

"But I have to be strong and I don't want anyone else to die the same way."

Seeing Yvette this way, emotional and vulnerable, touched him deeply. His feelings for her were growing every time he was with her.

She took his hand, squeezed it and stood. "Thank you for your sympathy." She smiled warmly at him and spoke directly to Douglas.

"You have to decide or you may not have the time to choose. You are in command, the senior officer, I think?"

Douglas wished he wasn't as a safe outcome was uncertain with either option.

"How far is this village Yvette, how long before they come here?"

"We can't be certain, but the Boche can be predictable. They always seem to work outwards methodically; we don't know how many are being deployed but I would guess they won't be here before nightfall."

"And what are our chances of avoiding them if we make a run for it?" Douglas continued.

"Again, it's difficult for me, but if you go towards Rennes, they will be most likely to see you. If you go west, you might avoid them, but they will have told all the units in the vicinity to look out for you. I just wish Jean was here, he would know the best way. He could send you through the line."

Douglas considered for a few minutes then spoke decisively. "We will split up but stay in uniform. Just an overcoat if you have one Yvette.

"Digger, you are to remain here until morning. I will leave now but when far enough away, I'll make sure I'm seen in uniform to draw them away from here. If they catch me, then hopefully I will be treated as a prisoner of war, and if they don't, I'll make for the Normandy coast."

Jack was concerned for him. "But sir, that sounds too dangerous. If you're seen, they might easily catch up with you. Shouldn't we stick together in case one of us gets injured, and surely four eyes are better than two?"

"That's my decision Digger, if I get caught at least it's only one of us and they'll assume I was flying alone. Don't worry, I'll choose the time and place carefully to reveal the uniform. Nowhere near the Jerries themselves. Lay low here until morning. Yvette, what can you do to give him more cover?"

Yvette beckoned them to follow her up to the first floor of the Oast House. The room was circular with no apparent entrances or exits other than the one leading in from the steps, and the cowl chimney. "Do you know about these

places?" She asked them.

"We have one in Guernsey." Jack replied.

Douglas looked puzzled by her question.

"They would bring the hops up using the stairs, and lay them here for the heat from the charcoal burner below to dry them. Bigger enterprises would have had a separate cooling room but grandfather didn't have the money to build it, so he compromised and left them to cool in here, once the burner was out. It was anyway small scale because hops are not traditional in this part of France.

So, when they had cooled a few days later, they would rake them out into out them in long sacks. Look here."

As their eyes once again adjusted to the dim light, they saw that the room wasn't perfectly conical. There was a small extrusion on which some of the hessian sacks had been placed for Jack's pillow.

Yvette pulled the sacks away to reveal a trap door below them.

"This hatch is where they would rake the dried hops. There's a steel ring just inside on which they would hang the pockets - large sacks, nearly three meters long by two when full. Grandfather built the outside wall around where the sacks would hang to keep them dry in bad weather, so it just looks like part of the building. There is just an opening at the bottom where they were pulled out when full, but that is now covered by undergrowth.

If the Boche come, you could hide in there and I doubt if their dogs would pick up your scent amidst the smell of the hops."

Jack peered down through the hatch. It was just over eight feet to the ground below where glimmerings of light filtered in through the undergrowth. He decided to test the hideaway and lowered himself, holding onto the steel ring and wedging his back against the side.

"It's perfect." He concluded. "Just close the hatch, will you?"

This made little difference to him and a few moments later, he pushed it open again and clambered out.

Douglas suggested keeping the sacks on top of the hatch so they would conceal it when closed, maybe even attaching them, to be sure.

"Maybe we should also set up a pocket on the ring for you to climb into, they smell very much of the hops?"

Douglas thanked Yvette for the idea and, satisfied they had done the best they could, he explained that he should leave and the three made their way back down to the door. It was Yvette who first noticed the sound of footsteps approaching outside.

"Quickly, both of you hide!" She whispered urgently.

But it was too late; moments later, with the airmen still ascending the wooden stairs, the door squeaked open.

"Yvette, it's me, Luke."

"Luke, you scared me to death! Come inside, I didn't expect you."

"I thought I should warn you they are getting close and almost all the roads are blocked. They should come with me now to my cousin's place, we can still get across the valley."

Douglas once again insisted that he alone would go. But Luke was equally adamant that no one should try to make it through unfamiliar countryside on their own.

"It's not only you I worry for Douglas. If they catch you, we are all in danger and we won't be prisoners of war."

"Alright Luke, but we'd better get going now." He held out his hand to Jack and instructed him to keep safe and make his way back as soon as possible. He then thanked Yvette and strode out carrying an overcoat over his arm.

Luke once again whispered the words '*Rappelez-moi*' to Yvette, who nodded in his direction and then he too disappeared into a nearby cornfield.

Chapter Four

Jack and Yvette stood in the doorway of the Oast House, acutely aware that they were now alone together for the first time.

"Try not to worry, Luke has lived all his life here. He knows the area very well."

"You seem very close." He probed gently.

"Ah yes, he's like a younger brother to me. He was a huge support when my parents died."

Jack dragged the bench outside into the sunlight and they sat together, leaning back against the Oast House wall.

"Forgive me, I couldn't help but notice each time he left, he said '*Rappelez-moi*',"

what did he mean?"

"Oh that, it's a long story." She looked away across the fields.

"Should you go?" He asked, hoping she would say no.

"Soon, but not just yet. I can stay a little longer, Grandfather is looking after the animals."

"Is it just you and him?"

"Yes, grandmother passed a long time ago and my brother 'Renee' is fighting with the English Army in Africa. I miss him very much.

"But tell me about you. Don't say anything about your service life, just in case. Tell me where you come from, and that name 'Digger', it's a, how do you say, familiar name, yes?"

"A nickname, yes. My real name is Jack de Garis."

"It sounds French, Jacques?"

"Nearly, I'm from Guernsey in the Channel Islands. Unfortunately, 'Digger' comes from there. But it's worse at base because there are a number of airmen from Jersey there and they call anyone from Guernsey, a Guernsey Donkey. So Digger is the lessor of two evils."

"The English are mad, why not just call you Jack? I think I shall call you Jacques, or no, better still 'ane'. It's donkey in French!" They laughed and for the first time since he arrived Jack felt relaxed.

"And what should I call you?"

"Yvette, of course." She smiled broadly and once again he was transfixed by her deep blue eyes. Her smile seemed to emanate from those eyes.

Yvette got up and tightened the belt of her coat. "I should go now, but you must tell me more about Guernsey when I come back. Please keep your eyes and ears alert, I will be back in a few hours, Ane." She smiled mischievously.

"*Rappelez-moi*" He replied.

Suddenly, the atmosphere changed and her expression became serious.

"Please don't say that."

Jack was taken aback completely, it had been a light hearted comment. His face must have shown his dismay.

"Listen Jack, or Ane, or whoever you are," She was smiling again. "It's something he says, Luke that is. It means a lot to him, and to me.

"When we heard what had happened to my parents, and all the others taken by the Gestapo, we made a pact. You see, the Gestapo enjoy inflicting pain and they enjoy killing. If our people are taken, they will be tortured. Even after everything they know has been extracted, they continue, until they are barely alive. Then they are shot.

"It is better to be killed than to be taken, because we die anyway. So Luke and I agreed that we must do whatever we can to take our own lives, or each other's, if capture becomes inevitable. '*Rappelez-moi*', '*remember me*', this is our way of keeping that pact alive. God willing, we will never need it."

Jack was stunned; what could he possibly say to this beautiful woman that wouldn't now sound like a platitude. He decided nothing. He walked over to her and, with both hands on her face, he kissed her passionately.

She responded intensely, blowing away his fear that this was not how he should react. There were tears again welling in her eyes, but this time the emotion behind them was confused. He pulled back slightly and looked into her face, then kissed the tears. She sniffled and smiled. "You must think me a mess."

He kissed her again and again, her soft lips welcoming every advance. Then he embraced her and his strong arms pulled her to his chest. "Yvette, I could never think you a mess. I know this sounds stupid, we've only known each other for hours, but I can't stop thinking about you."

This time she kissed him, and then withdrew her head. "I had better go now.

"Until later, Ane."

She turned and walked briskly towards the farm, then stopped and glanced back over her shoulder, saw he was still looking, smiled a teasing smile and blew him a kiss.

Once she knew she was out of sight, her walk transformed into a skip, something she hadn't done in the years since her childhood. But then she hadn't felt this happy since her childhood either. The farmhouse was now before her and outside, her grandfather filled jugs from a corrugated steel tank in which rain water was collected. She remembered when this man was younger and her grandmother was inside cooking with her own mother next to her. Her father and Renee would be at work in the fields when she returned home from school. She was always excited to tell her mother what she had done that day; her mother was always so interested. Then the men would come in to eat and

Renee would pick her up off her stool and squeeze her.

"Have you broken any hearts today Eevee?" He would jest.

How she longed for those days. But in a strange way, some of this feeling she had for Jack came from the same place. He evoked in her a sense of background, even though theirs had been so short. He exuded the same decency and love she had grown up with in her family; the tenderness of her mother, the strength of her father and the playfulness of Renee.

But her feelings for Jack were more than just a sense of security or nostalgia; there was a strong physical attraction, excitement, there were butterflies and there was a growing passion to be close to him. She felt warm and secure next to him, but she was also shy, and she had never been shy. She hardly dared think of it, especially as he must surely leave soon, but she knew how deeply the attraction was growing.

"Bon l'apres midi, Yvette!" Her grandfather called sarcastically.

"It's not that late, grand-pere, is it?"

"No, no, Yvette, it's not that late. Come on inside, you haven't eaten today have you? I won't ask what you've been up to."

"You know I can't say, grand-pere, but for a little while, can you stay away from the Oast house?"

He smiled at his grand daughter knowingly. "Another fugitive eh? No don't say. Everyone in the village is talking about this airman. You be careful."

"What are they saying, grand-pere?"

"Only that his aircraft was found in the woods and the Boche are searching everywhere for him."

Yvette knew that if the village was talking, the Boche would hear it. She pondered her grandfather's words; 'Searching everywhere for him', people seem to think it's a lone airman.

Prompted again by her grandfather, she ate the meal of boiled egg, cheese and bread, placed before her. There was no more talk of her activities.

It was customary for Yvette to take fresh eggs into the village each morning and although it was now midday, she decided to place a few dozen in the basket of her bicycle and pedal the few miles to keep up appearances. Her lateness would be noticed, but less so than complete absence. The trip would also provide the opportunity to observe the progress of the Boche. She contrived a

suitable excuse for the nosier of her neighbours, and set off down the farm track towards L'Hermitage village.

It was just a few minutes into her journey and less than a mile from home that she noticed the familiar blue Renault truck belonging to Charles, speeding in her direction with a cloud of dust emanating from the wheels. Peering out over the steering wheel, he quickly recognised Yvette and skidded to a halt.

"Quickly, put your bicycle in the back!" He announced through his open window. "The Englishmen are with you, I suppose?"

"Just one." Yvette, replied hurriedly as she pitched her bicycle onto the truck, sending eggs everywhere. The sunlight glinted off the windscreen of an approaching vehicle some distance away.

She climbed into the cab and Charles pushed the accelerator to the floor.

"It's the Boche. I overheard them in the village, they're searching your farm next. That's them behind."

Yvette looked over her shoulder but her view was now obscured by the cloud of dust.

"Do they know?" She asked.

"I'm pretty sure it's just routine. They way they spoke, there was no urgency, then I heard the name of the farm and they walked casually to the car. But there is also a lorry with a dozen or so troops in it. You say you just have one airman?"

They pulled into the farmyard and Yvette jumped out.

"We'll speak later Charles. Put my cycle in the barn would you. Grand Pere should be inside. I'll be back soon." She was now shouting over her shoulder as she ran as fast as her legs would carry her to the Oast House.

"Ane, are you there!" She shouted as she swung the door open.

There was no sign of him.

She turned to check outside and there he was, strolling towards her, seemingly without a care in the world.

"I didn't expect.."

"There's no time Ane, quickly the Boche are coming!"

Jack bolted towards the Oast House and as she followed him up the wooded

stairs, they heard the sounds of car doors slamming and orders being shouted.

He lowered himself into the pocket and gripped the steel ring until he found a tiny ledge in the uneven surface of wall where he could wedge his boots. The smell of hops saturated his senses. In a swift movement, Yvette closed the hatch and covered it with sacks. She looked around.

"Merde, Ane un moment!"

On the opposite side of the floor, Jack's RAF tunic and a bag containing clothes lay perilously conspicuous. She gathered them in her arms, opened the hatch, and dropped them onto Jack's lap before once again closing and concealing his hideaway.

Moments later, she was outside and rushing into the cornfield. She could hear the footsteps of soldiers and dogs barking as she circled to approach the farm from the direction of the chicken coup. Over the corn, she could now make out the distinctive helmets of a group of around four soldiers, they seemed to be heading up the track towards the Oast House. She closed her eyes for a moment and ordered herself to be calm. "It won't help him if I panic." She whispered.

In the chicken coup, she gathered a few eggs and walked towards the farmhouse, praying that Charles or her grandfather would not have said anything to contradict what she was about to say.

The kitchen door was open but just inside a soldier stood guard over the two men, his rifle pointing ominously towards her grandfather's head. There was the sound of jackboots on the floorboards upstairs, doors slamming, furniture being overturned. The young Oberleutnant entered the room from the hall just as her shadow fell into the open doorway.

"And you must be the granddaughter." He suggested nonchalantly.

Yvette looked at her grandfather; he and Charles shared the same look of disdain but tempered by their impotence under the threat of the rifle. She turned to the officer. "Yes, I'm Yvette, what do you want? Why are you wrecking our home?" She decided indignation would cast the least suspicion.

"You know why. You are hiding the enemy."

Her throat dried as her heart began to beat more frantically. But she remained outwardly cool. "What enemy, what are you talking about?"

He searched her eyes for the slightest hint of deceit. There was none he could detect, only that often seen contempt the French so often displayed towards

their occupiers. But she did have very blue eyes. She was also very pretty; he moved closer towards her.

A shiver ran down her spine as he positioned himself just inches in front of her, she could feel his warm breath on her face. He searched her eyes. 'Was this fear, or was she hiding something?'

"Where were you?" He demanded. "Where did you just come from?"

Yvette showed him the eggs. "I came off my bicycle and broke the eggs, so I went to fetch some more." The room fell silent as the Oberleutnant looked to the sentry. He nodded. "We found some broken eggs and a bicycle."

Once more he examined her, but his expression was changing from suspicion to lust.

Her grandfather could bear it no longer.

"Leave her alone, you thug!"

Immediately, the sentry turned his rifle and raised the stock above the old man's head. Yvette screamed at the sentry, "No!"

Four soldiers, two of whom held the leads of Alsatian dogs, rushed along the track towards the Oast House. The dogs were yelping but showing no signs of discovered prey. The sergeant unceremoniously kicked the door open and ordered the dogs to be unleashed. They sniffed in every orifice of the lower floor then one jumped towards the stairs, but they were too steep and it fell back at the first attempt. Rallying itself for a second attempt, the handler intervened and instead climbed the stairs to the upper floor himself. He stood half in the room, half on the stairs and looked around. The dappled light showed only a disused and dusty circle of wooden floor. He examined the walls, they appeared much the same shape as the floor below. To confirm this, he descended a few steps and looked again at the lower floor. Then up again; it seemed the upper floor was empty, just a few discarded and, no doubt, very dusty sacks.

Once the Oast House had been checked, they ran further along the track until they reached a wooden gateway that led onto the road. The sergeant pulled out his binoculars and scanned the countryside, there was nothing. They turned back towards the farm.

Inside the pocket, Jack could hear everything, the scurrying of the guard dogs, the clomping of jack boots all around. This was the closest he had come to the enemy and he was terrified. But he stayed calm, forced himself to think of more pleasant experiences so that his breathing would be quiet, and he silently

prayed that his wedged position would hold. Any noise, and he would be captured or worse. Less than a few minutes of his young life, but it felt like hours.

They left but he waited. He couldn't be sure how far away they had gone, whether a single enemy lurked outside, armed and ready to shoot on sight.

When the group marched back past the Oast House, with the dogs again on leads, one of the dogs suddenly picked up a scent and veered off into the cornfield. Yvette's trail was soon trampled back to the chicken coup and the approach to the farm.

In the farmhouse, a brutal German sentry looked to his officer for the approval to cave in the old man's head. But it did not come. Instead he simply shook his head, faced Yvette again and placed a finger on her lips. "We could be friends. You see, I can be a powerful ally."

Yvette felt as though she would faint any moment. "If you are my friend, then please, no more of this."

Outside, the rest of the soldiers had mustered and the sergeant now entered the farmhouse. He saluted his superior and distracted him from the rising tension. To the great relief of the three locals, the Oberleutnant turned to sentry. "Not now."

He was now impatient to move on, but not without leaving an indelible message in young woman's memory. Reaching up, he gripped Yvette's chin, stared coldly into her eyes and issued a final, chilling warning. "If I find you have helped the enemy or lied to us, I will be disappointed in you Yvette, as will my friends in the Gestapo."

Outside the farmhouse, the sergeant reported that all was clear. There had been a trail through the cornfield but it simply led back to the farmhouse and that had been thoroughly searched. The order was given and the troops climbed back into their vehicle. The officer looked back towards the farmhouse, he'd seen something he liked, but that would have to wait for another day.

The moment both vehicles were out of sight, Yvette rushed from the farmhouse. "I'll be back soon!" She called over her shoulder.

Charles shrugged his shoulders and sighed. "I hate to see your granddaughter risking so much."

Chapter Five

The next few weeks passed without incidence on the farm. They had decided,

that day, after the search, that it was too dangerous for Jack to make a break for it.

Yvette had rushed to the Oast House and held open the hatch as Jack extracted his slim but muscular body from the pocket. They had embraced and joked that he smelt terrible. They had kissed and they had lain together, each wrapped in a layer of clothes that masked their beating hearts.

Every morning, Yvette attempted to restore her familiar routine by visiting the village with eggs to trade for whatever was available in these difficult times. The Boche had not been around. First they had extended their search area further afield, then they had returned to Rennes. Every afternoon and evening, Yvette spent with Jack.

The summer days were hot and long, as was the passion between them. They would sit by the Oast House door, so that he could quickly retreat to his hiding place, and talk for hours. She told him about her life and her ambitions if the war ever ended. He talked about his island home and the wrench it had been to leave when he enlisted.

They spoke reverently about the loss of their parents and the pain they still felt. They talked of the occupation of their homelands, their deep resentment and their desire for liberation. Both committed to do what must be done to rid their lands of the occupation forces.

Yvette often talked with affection about her brother and her grandfather. They had been the greatest comfort in her many hours of need. Hours alone in her room weeping silently over the loss of her parents.

But their time together was mostly happy, as if the war had been suspended. As if the outside world no longer had a role in their lives. They joked and teased and played. They swam in the icy water of the mill pond, and they leapt upon each other in the hay barn. So often these games led to a tender and passionate embrace.

One afternoon, the pleasure in each other's company was interrupted by the familiar drone of Charles' truck. Yvette kissed Jack on the cheek and ran to the farmhouse to greet him.

The news was mixed. Luke was back and it appeared all had gone well. They had travelled together as far as Dinan, not far from the coast, before parting, Luke had watched from a nearby hill as Douglas skirted around a hamlet, clearly visible in his blue RAF tunic. A young German soldier had seen him and raised the alarm, but Douglas had escaped and as Luke grinned widely, high up in his vantage point, he saw Douglas jump onto a freight train headed for the

port of St Malo.

But the other news was heartbreaking. Jean had been arrested and they feared it was only a matter of time before he would be handed over to the Gestapo. They were all now at risk. There would be no further operations for the time being.

Yvette burst into tears at the news. Her grandfather came over to see what had happened and she threw her arms around him, squeezing him tightly. "Grande pere, I'm so sorry, I've brought danger to all of us." She wept.

"Non mon petite, you haven't done anything except serve your country. Your parents would be so proud if you. I am proud of you." He kissed her forehead and Charles directed a knowing glance in his direction. He gently nodded in return.

"You see, Yvette it is not just you who has brought danger to our door. There are other things, other operations, that you don't know of. Let us say no more."

She raised her head and looked into her grandfathers eyes. "I should have known!"

"No, you should definitely not have known."

It was agreed that Charles should leave straight away and for the time being, he and Luke should stay clear of the farm. Jack should leave as soon as possible.

Yvette walked the short track to the Oast House with a heavy heart. A few hours ago she had been blissfully happy, now she, and everyone she loved, were in mortal danger.

Jack watched her approach, at first his heartbeat and his mood lifted, but then he realised all was not well. He threw his arms around her and whispered, softly. "Tell me."

"Oh Ane, it's so bad. They have taken Jean."

Jack tried to assimilate the news. "You mean they know about him, about all of you? Yvette, are you in danger?" The urgency in his tone increased as the news sunk in.

"We don't know, we just know they have him. But there must be a reason. Oh Ane, if he is handed over to the Gestapo, they will do what they did to my parents."

"Will he talk?" Jack knew the answer to his own question.

"Of course.

"But there is some better news, Douglas got away. Luke saw him jump onto a freight train headed for the coast. The Germans saw him, but he got away."

Jack thought for a moment, and in the silence, exposed to imminent danger, the depth of their love became palpable.

Yvette turned away, so he could no longer look into her eyes. "You'll have to go now." The tears rolled quietly down her cheeks.

He reached out for her and turned her towards him. "Not without you, I can't leave you. You know I can't, you know I, I love you."

She touched his cheek. "I know you do and I love you, but I can't go. I can't leave Grande pere."

"Then I'll stay, I can hide again if they come. I'm not leaving without you."

"But the war, you must get back."

"I don't care about the war, I can't leave you." He paused. "Not like this."

Her mind began to race. 'Could he stay? Why not stay in the Oast House, he could hide again if they came? Grande pere and Charles were quick to say he should leave, but maybe that would be more dangerous. Maybe that would be worse for everyone?' Convincing herself wasn't difficult, but she knew her grandfather wouldn't agree. 'Did he need to know?'

Jack too, had been thinking.

"You know, if the Jerries saw Douglas get away, they probably think that's the end of it. They probably have no idea about me. His plan must have worked! Maybe the local lot returned to base and left those closer to the coast to search for him."

"But why take Jean now?" Yvette looked puzzled. "If they thought he knew something, why not take him before?"

They were both now ready to believe the Jean had simply committed some minor misdemeanor. Something the Boche, or even the police could deal with.

That night Yvette left a note in her room for her grandfather and silently left the farmhouse. That night she gave herself to Jack and their love was sealed. They lay together as the first rays of sun splintered the tiny cracks in the Oast House roof. He held her so tightly their heart beats joined in a slow and steady rhythm, so close that they could barely tell them apart. She was asleep now but

he had awoken to the morning chorus of a blackbird in a nearby oak tree.

He looked down at her face, the tiny lines around her eyes where she was still smiling from the pleasure of their night together. Her sweet smelling hair was ruffled and her clothes strewn carelessly across her. He had covered her when she succumbed to sleep just a few hours earlier. His mind was drawn again and again to the rapture they had shared. Jack had never felt this way before.

It was an hour before she woke and her arrival into the morning was marked only by the slight shuffle of her legs, a gentle and contented groan, and the kiss she laid upon his strong chest.

"I should go, grande pere will worry."

"I thought you left a note?"

"I did, but he will still worry. It's not as if I've done this before."

He kissed her. "Of course, you must, but come back soon. I can't stand being apart."

"I will." She turned away from him to dress shyly. He watched her slender, awkward movements. As she turned, he turned his head away, not wanting to embarrass her, not sure if he could gaze unrestrictedly upon her privacy as she dressed.

He heard it first. Emphasized by the peace of the morning, an engine.

She looked at him in horror. "Grande pere, no!"

Frantic in her concern, she fled the Oast House and was half way to the farmhouse before Jack emerged partly dressed into the lane.

Luke was shocked to see Yvette running from the direction of the Oast House in the early morning, and even more shocked to see her followed by Jack, still struggling to cover his bare chest with his tunic as he ran.

Her grandfather emerged from kitchen, he had been up since five a.m. and was about to question Luke when the young man launched into a desperate warning. "They're coming, the Gestapo, they're coming."

Jack stopped in his tracks. She turned to him and then to her grandfather, nobody spoke.

Luke broke the silence. "Quickly, there's no time!" He turned and pointed towards his old Citroen and as he did, the butt of a Luger pistol pushed into his trouser waistband was revealed.

Across the fields dust now rose again from the lane leading up to the farmhouse. The sound of an engine roared. Her grandfather, suddenly younger, taller, in command, shouted instructions to Jack. "Get in the car, go!"

"What about you?" Jack yelled to Yvette, a yell that emanated from deep inside.

She confirmed her grandfather's instructions. "Go now, if you stay it will be worse for all of us"

Luke jumped back into the car and drove to where Jack was standing, he swung the door open and screamed to Jack. "Get in!"

Jack remained glued to the spot.

"We'll be alright unless they find you here!" Yvette knew this would shake him and he too launched himself into Luke's car. Luke floored the accelerator and the Citroen wheels spun as it headed along the track towards the Oast House and the far gate.

Jack looked over his shoulder as Yvette and her grandfather waited in front of the farmhouse for the approaching car.

They made the distance to the gate in less than a minute and Jack jumped out to open it. Luke jammed the car into reverse and sped around causing a further cloud of dust. Jack was stunned. "What the hell was he doing?"

The Citroen pulled up several yards from the farmhouse in a skid. The leather coats of the Gestapo were incongruous on this summer's day but the young Oberleutnant appeared at ease as he led Yvette and her grandfather to a second waiting car, flanked by several guards. She, her grandfather and the Germans looked up at the young man as he casually exited his vehicle and approached them.

Luke halted and, seemingly oblivious to the soldiers, stared directly at Yvette. She looked into his eyes and mouthed the words, "*Rappelez-moi*".

He pulled open his jacket, withdrew the Luger, and as the Germans raised their weapons, he shot the woman he adored in the head.

Chapter Six

In the hail of bullets that followed, Luke collapsed in a pool of blood, but he managed one further shot before he died. Yvette would not have wanted her grandfather to suffer at the hands of the Gestapo.

As Jack ran back towards the farmhouse, the terrifying explosion of gunfire assaulted his senses. He could now imagine what had been in Luke's mind as

he abandoned him at the gate. He was desperate, but he knew she would be dead, and already a cold shard of grief penetrated his entire being. The scene outside the farmhouse was mayhem. The Gestapo were screaming at the Oberleutnant to check for any signs of life. This was the last thing they wanted, they had been denied their prey. It was futile, all three bodies lay limp and lifeless.

Jack was devastated, but his grief weighed heavier than his anger, anger that would have ended his freedom, perhaps his life. His instincts shouted at him to tear into them, arms and fists flaying, to literally tear them apart limb by limb, but something inside gave him the presence of mind to take cover. All he saw was a green haze, but obscured by a large rhododendron, he fell to his knees and watched as the defiled body his beautiful Yvette was dumped onto the back of a German truck. He choked to hold back the primal scream emerging from his abdomen. Next, the frail old figure of her grandfather, dead but somehow undefeated, was tossed alongside her. And finally Luke, the young man who had ended their lives, was dragged unceremoniously to the truck, leaving a trail of blood on the farmyard. Jack wanted to hate him, but he couldn't.

Satisfied there were no further survivors, the Gestapo entered the farmhouse to conduct a final search for artifacts of the Resistance; perhaps a radio or code book, perhaps something to incriminate more of their covert army. Luke's action had cast aside any doubt that these people had something to hide. Jack slipped into the cornfield and paced lethargically away.

The sun was gaining height now as Jack estimated its azimuth and a north westerly direction to the only place in the world that might offer some relief from the torment he was now suffering, his island home of Guernsey.

Those first few hours, he was lucky to escape discovery. He plundered across the fields and lanes without regard for his own safety, so wrapped up was he in a sublime grief. His all consuming passion for Yvette had been torn, as physically as his heart, from his young chest and replaced by an intensity of pain he could never have imagined. So much pain that there were times he could no longer bear it and his entire being became cold and detached, almost robotic.

This detachment allowed him to survive, for as he clumsily as he waded across Brittany, at least he was covering the ground. He could barely think about navigating a route and so he simply shadowed the main road towards Saint Brieuc, from a safe distance and concealed by the hills and hedgerows. Still wearing his RAF uniform, he would have instantly be recognised as a fugitive, but he paced on and on through the heat of the day and into the relative safety of the night.

Refusing to acknowledge the tiredness of his weary limbs, Jack went over and over the trauma of the day. His memory played cruel games interweaving images of his lover, one moment in his arms, fragrant, innocent and beautiful in her sleep; the next her face white with death except for the bloody bullet hole in her forehead. Why hadn't he realised what she was doing when she persuaded him to go? Why hadn't he remembered the pledge she and Luke had shared? If he had been quicker getting back, quicker realising why Luke turned his car around; there were so many ifs, and they all found him guilty of failing the woman he loved.

There was no moon tonight, and the darkness concealed his route. He stumbled on in a trance, his feet catching on every unevenness in the terrain. Finally, he slumped, exhausted, into the undergrowth. He had marched for nearly seventeen hours, pausing only briefly to gulp water from the streams he passed along the way. Now his body refused to go on and as he landed on the soft grass, at the edge of a copse of young beech trees, sleep overwhelmed him.

Yvette kissed his brow as he fell into the darkness, still grasping her hand. They were dropping together into the depths of a cavern, arms outspread, faces looking towards each other. There was no fear, this fall was full of joy, but also uncertainty. She smiled at him again and the smile landed on his face, like a kiss. She called to him, "Ane, I love you Ane!". There was no sign of the bottom, the cavern seemed to go on and on. He felt they were flying as much as falling. An urge came to pull her towards him, it would be bliss to hold her tightly. But as he tried, she moved further away and he began to panic. He looked down, as if to check how much further they could go, and to his horror, the rocky floor of the cavern now hurtled towards them. Shocked, he pulled with all his might to bring her to him, but her grip was weakening and she was slipping away. His heart pounded, he pulled harder, she flew from him and her face changed. It was white, her eyes were lifeless and a grotesque red bullet wound adorned her forehead like an Indian bindi. She disappeared into the darkness and he continued to plummet alone into the depths, his spirit and will to survive, now taken from him.

As he hit the cavern floor, he awoke in the pain of awareness that not even sleep would provide a refuge. He lay, breathing deeply for several minutes. Then fitfully dozed in and out of a restless state, hardly sleep, hardly fully conscious. His limbs ached, his heart ached more, so overwhelmed by grief, but now finally coming to terms with his loss. He cried that night, like a child.

Chapter Six

When the first rays of morning sun splintered over the horizon, Jack stood and breathed in the fresh morning air deeply. His broken heart was now cold, but the merest flicker of spirit still burned somewhere inside him. He tried to take stock of his position. Yvette admired him, he would be failing her again if he caved in now. God knows why, but she thought him brave and resilient. He must steel himself and become determined to survive; for her sake.

His clumsy stomp across Brittany, the day before, had been careless, and he was lucky not to have met the enemy along the way. But now he must get a grip, not the least because along the coast there would be far more of them. He shivered, more from exhaustion than from cold, but this drew his attention to his clothing. His RAF uniform; he wouldn't stand a chance. Climbing onto the hedgerow he scanned the countryside. The dawn light revealed a distant town; he had no idea which it was. But it was due north of the railway and he needed to travel west to the coastal area of Brehat. Jack had spent many blissful days before the war, on his father's fishing boat, in and around the tiny port of Lezardiuex. It was a day sail from Guernsey and he knew the passage well. Although the Germans would be everywhere, this was his best chance of escape. The English Channel was at its widest off the rocky northern coast of Brittany and there was plenty of sea room to the west. Of course, he would somehow need to find a suitable vessel, but the more immediate problem was how he could get there without being seen, especially in his uniform.

Keeping the railway line in sight on his right, he strode out, adjacent to the hedgerow. After a few paces, his feet became painful. He was paying the price for his abuse of them the previous day. Blisters on both feet, aching limbs and a fiery thirst but he plodded on relentlessly. As the morning wore on, he could hear the sounds of activity coming from the north. In the distance, a steam train whistled and chuntered along the track. There was the clanging of couplings and the occasional screech of brakes as the engine and its haul of carriages slid to a halt along the track. His throat was parched and he was now ravenously hungry. So hungry, there was a constant cramp inside him.

Every now and then he monitored his position; his course along the field boundaries and hedgerows seemed to be taking him closer to the railway and a road that ran in parallel through the smaller hamlets and villages. Up ahead, he noticed a change from arable to grazing pasture. Cattle, sheep, even some horses. His mind began to race; wherever there are horses, water will be nearby!

Sure enough, just a five bar gate now separated him from a trough of clear, cold water. He raced forwards and clambered over the gate, focussing only upon the glistening reflection of the water. At that moment, nothing else in the world mattered to him as he plunged his head deep into the trough and gulped to

extinguish the fires in his throat.

His head, his neck and his tunic were soaked, and it was bliss. The water, not quite as clear as he'd imagined, nevertheless relieved his most pressing need. He stripped off his tunic and splashed the water over his chest and under his arms. The sweat and grime of the past twenty four hours washed away but with it the resilience that had held him together. His thoughts turned again to Yvette. Her fingers had stroked his chest, her touch had exited every hair follicle and as she moved, her soft brown locks had tenderly brushed across his abdomen. How could he enjoy the sensation of water on his body when her lifeless body would still be unburied somewhere, probably on a cold slab in Rennes. He didn't even know where.

Pangs of guilt began to attack him once more. It was all his fault, he was responsible for her death. If he had left the farm when he was supposed to, she'd still be alive. If he'd obeyed orders; for it had been an order, he now decided, he would have left the morning after Douglas. Yvette would be collecting the eggs for her grandfather. He was a coward.

Reluctantly, robotically, his hands moved down to water once more. A last drink before pushing his wretched body on.

He looked down into the trough, the glistening reflection of his face, and the two faces now looming behind him. Then nothing.

When he began to regain consciousness, before his eyes even opened, he felt the soaring pain in the back of his head. He blinked open his eyes, still completely disorientated. He was lying amongst the hay in the dappled light of a barn, his chest still bare. There was an old plough just inside two large doors, one slightly ajar. To his left on the ground was an enamelled jug and plate on which a roughly shaped loaf of bread had been left. He lurched forward to grab the bread and the pain shot through his head. He grimaced and swore at the pain but the hunger still overwhelmed him and he ravished the warm crusty texture of the loaf. As he did so, there was a call outside the open barn door. "Papa! Papa, il est éveillé!"

Jack was beyond caring. He gorged the bread and reached for the jug to quench the thirst that now returned. It was milk, it soothed and nourished his throat and as a feeling of fulfilment now displaced the pain in his head, his will was returning. But it was too late, the door swung open and three sturdy men were inside before he could move another limb.

They wore simple farm clothes and his first thought was, 'thank God, it's not the Jerries'. There were two younger men and one older, perhaps two brothers and their father. It was he, the older man who spoke first in broken English.

"I'm sorry my friend!"

Jack's relief was palpable. A small boy now appeared tentatively in the doorway. One of the brothers, signalled that he could come over, and he ran to him and grabbed his leg, staring all the time at Jack.

The older man continued. "It was Francois, he thought you were a communist. They have caused trouble for us lately. He didn't know.." Francois cut in.

"I'm sorry, I didn't see your tunic until after, after.." He gestured a clubbing movement with his arm.

Jack smiled at them. "Don't worry, it was worth it to get that bread."

"But what on earth are you doing here, you know there are Boche everywhere?"

Jack explained where he was heading to the attentive trio of men and the small boy, although it was clear that neither the other brother or the boy understood a word he was saying.

"I just need to get to Lezardiuex and find a boat. If I can make out to sea, I stand a chance."

The men looked thoughtful as Francois translated for his brother. Jean Paul was his name and like Francois, he was tall and sturdily built. Both men sported dark, closely trimmed beards, and their appearance was so similar, Jack imagined they were probably twins. Jean Paul became animated, his eyes excited and his gestures suddenly exaggerated, he spoke rapidly. Jack's heart sank. Clearly he thought, he must be angry and want him gone. The final gesture of upturned palms of his hands, seemed to leave a hanging question; "Are you saying we should risk everything to help this man?" At least, that was what Jack imagined.

They paused, exchanged glances, the little boy maintained his inquisitive stare at the foreign airman. Then the father spoke softly to Jack.

"It will be dangerous. You could be killed, and so could we. But, there is a way."

Jean Paul smiled at Jack and nodded as if he understood that his father was relaying his idea. The father shot a fast comment in his direction and Jean Paul just nodded again, enthusiastically, "Our bien sûr!"

"First we must get you out of that uniform, my wife will adjust some of the boys clothes, they would be too big for you."

Jack now knew only too well the ramifications of being caught out of his uniform, his treatment would be brutal, and almost certainly lethal. Nevertheless, he paid

attention as the old man continued.

"We can get you to the coast, not Lezardiuex but very close. My cousin is a fisherman. He may be able to help with a small boat, but you're sure you know how to handle a sailing boat at sea?"

Jack told them about the numerous times he had sailed from the island on his father's boat. He was confident about his ability, but less so about evading the enemy. Like any good sailor, he also held the greatest respect for what Mother Nature might throw at him. Bad weather and rough seas could easily swamp a small open boat in the exposed channel. But there were no safe options and he was determined to make it to Guernsey and from there back to England where he could rejoin the fight against the Nazis, a fight even more poignant now.

They listened intently and were relieved that he not only seemed to know how to handle a boat but was familiar with the passage to Guernsey. Francois moved closer and looked into Jack's eyes as if to underline the seriousness of his next question.

"And there is one more thing; you can swim, yes? You can swim strongly?"

The rest of the day was spent preparing for Jack's departure. He was taken to the farmhouse and introduced by Francois to his mother, Madame Le Clerc, who quickly took his measurements then disappeared into another room. Francois went over and over the escape plan with Jack. It all depended upon his cousin's cooperation.

Meanwhile Monsieur Le Clerc could be heard throughout the day, making frantic alterations to his truck in the barn. By evening they were ready.

Jack stood up straight in his new jacket, trousers and shirt. New to him, but distinctly worn in and very much in keeping with the shabby attire of the local farm workers. He would do, although as a new comer he would still be conspicuous and if he was required to speak, all would certainly be lost.

That night as much of a meal as their rations would allow was mustered and they sat together around a large wooden table

To say that the family was jovial would be an overstatement but neither did they seem overly anxious. Jack guessed that was for his benefit. Attempts were made at jokes and there was some genuine laughter although mostly at the misinterpretation of their respective languages. There was an almost palpable atmosphere of nervous anticipation. Madam clearly didn't relish the risk her loved ones were taking, but she was a true Bretagne and not given to yielding to her fears. All of the family also held Jack in respect for his tenacity to get back

and fight the Boche.

By ten in the evening the conversation was becoming more and more laboured. Madam made her excuses and left the room for bed, Jean Paul and Monsieur Le Clerc followed soon after.

Francois and Jack sat opposite each other across the table and Jack was also about to suggest they turn in when the Frenchman spoke quietly but intently to him. "You know of course this plan is madness?"

Taken aback by this statement, Jack's smile was nervous and awkward. He let Francois continue.

"Even assuming you get clear of the coastal patrols and make it out to sea, there will be enemy aircraft, and if you are lucky enough to evade them, you know the islands will be heavily fortified. There will be guards everywhere."

Jack leaned back in his chair and surveyed this new friend, this ally, so concerned for his safety. Everything that had passed between them so far had been good natured and even warm on occasions, but Francois's eyes now revealed something more, he cared very much about Jack's survival. But how could he, Jack wondered, when he cared so little himself?

The part of him that died along with Yvette was wholly responsible for his self worth. His determination lived on, but only to fulfil a desire to fight back. Revenge, not self preservation now motivated his actions. Still, Francois was clearly unaware of just how pitiful a creature Jack thought himself to be, and he deserved reassurance, even if simply ensure his continued cooperation.

"I have to try," He began, "I have to do my duty. And yes, I'm sure there will be many dangers at sea and back in the islands, but the passage is familiar to me and the coastline of my home is so deeply ingrained in my memory that I can visualise every rock and gully." He exaggerated, but Francois knew about the intimacy between mariners and the waters they frequently sailed from his own cousin.

"Just be careful my friend." He smiled, rose from his chair, and extended his hand in friendship. They shook and without another word, Francois walked out of the kitchen and as Jack heard the wooden stairs creak, he made himself comfortable on a mattress placed on the floor across the room.

Sleep came quickly but without solace. Again Jack's dreams played upon whatever weakness in his resolve they could exploit. This time the symbolism featured his denouement in front of the Le Clerc family, their confused disappointment in his cowardice as he stood by and allowed a young French woman to be gunned down. When the gentle coaxing to wake up surfaced in

his consciousness, the guilt remained with him.

It was still dark as he searched for disdain in Jean Paul's expression, but he found none. Instead, an urgency to rise and make ready for their departure to the coast. Little was said as the men consumed bread and a hot drink that Jack could only guess was nettle tea.

Madam stepped forward and kissed Jack's cheek. "Bon Chance." She whispered in his ear. It had been decided that Monsieur Le Clerc and Francois would accompany Jack, there was no point in endangering anyone else. Monsieur would drive and Francois would keep Jack informed if they encountered road blocks or checks.

Jean Paul and the boy stepped forward in turn to shake Jack's hand, they assumed this was the English way, they nodded. "Bon chance."

Francois led Jack out to the truck. He carefully lifted the floor boards from the open back to reveal the large metal cylinder bolted underneath. From the outside it looked like part of the petrol tank but when Francois slid open a panel on top, Jack was able to squeeze into the space inside. A large hole had been cut close to the position of his head which provided air and a means to communicate with the two in the cab, as it opened behind the passenger seat. With the floor replaced, the two men lifted a fishermen's storage pot onto the truck. Made of a wooden frame with stout netting covering it, it resembled a chicken run. But it was heavy enough to dissuade the less fervent German patrol soldiers and yet open enough to show that nothing seemed to be concealed on the back of the pick-up.

Dawn was breaking as the truck rambled its way along the farm track and onto the road leading away from this temporary haven, and towards the coast.

"Can you hear me Jack, are you alright in there?" Francois enquired.

"It's better now you are on a proper road, but I still prefer the mattress." Jack's mood had become lighter now that they were occupied again. His light-hearted comment about the mattress was designed to reassure Francois but on a deeper level Jack actually welcomed the discomfort of his temporary hiding place.

A few minutes passed before Francois spoke again. "We're passing through the village soon and so keep quiet, I'll tell you when it's clear again".

Jack mouthed a quick acceptance and resumed the foetal position wedged inside the container. The noise of the engine and drive shaft sent vibrations through his body. But as his eyes adjusted and daylight increasingly filtered through, he could see part way into the cab although much of the time his eyes

were closed to help him focus upon the inner world of his thoughts. This noisy steel drum took him back to the Lysander that started this nightmare mission.

He had left the special operations base in East Anglia full of anticipation and excitement. His friends were impressed that 'Digger' would be flying with Douglas although they knew nothing about his mission. Douglas Baxter was a bit of a legend in their close community of airmen. He began to reflect on how things changed so dramatically, the flack over Normandy, his camera being destroyed, and their forced abandonment of the Lysander. But as fraught as some of these experiences were, they were nothing compared to what followed. Jack remembered the first moment he saw her face, the line of her neck, heard her voice. Of course she had bowled him over instantly, but what began as a powerful physical attraction, soon transformed into a consuming passion.

Would it have been better, he considered, if he had never known her? At least then his heart would be intact. But it would be poorer too. Yvette had ignited a part of Jack he never knew existed, but then cruelly left him incapable of reliving what he now craved. These ruminations continued for around an hour as the truck made its way towards the coast. His absorption was such that he hardly noticed the passage of time, nor the apparent ease with which Monsieur Le Clerc navigated his through this occupied territory without the frequent interruptions by patrols the had anticipated.

The vibrations suddenly became less intense and the truck slowed.

"We are entering Paimpol." Francois explained, "It won't be long now but you must keep very silent, there will be Boche everywhere."

Jack responded that he would keep quiet. Soon after, the vehicle ace to a standstill and Jack could hear the voices of soldiers. He could just about make out the demand for papers. Francois and his father spoke quickly to confuse the soldiers, only one of whom spoke elementary French. Nevertheless, Jack's heart sunk when, following a demand, the engine was turned off. Jack peered through the hole into the cab. To his horror, the black tunic of a Gestapo officer was less than a yard from his face. Then his head ducked to examine the faces of the two men in the cab, and Jack's mind raced, 'If he turns a few inches, and looks down, he'll see me.' As silently as he could manage, Jack raised his own arm to block the hole with his sleeve.

They must have asked about their business here because the footsteps of their jackboots could be heard moving to the rear of the vehicle. Francois explained that the storage pot was for their cousin, he was a fisherman. They had made it for him on their farm. It must have sounded plausible because the voices remained calm. Then suddenly another German voice calling from across the street could be heard. There was a brief exchange, their papers handed back,

and the engine sprang to life again.

Their progress through the ancient town was slow and Jack remained vigilant until eventually their speed, and the vibrations, resumed their former rhythm.

"Just a few more minutes now Jack, we're clear of the town."

Francois was right, and two minutes later the vehicle turned off the road onto a bumpy track. Jack could hear squawk of seagulls and the smell of seaweed permeated his uncomfortable hiding place. The brakes of the truck were applied and it skidded to a halt. Again the engine stopped and Francois spoke through the hole behind his seat.

"Jack, you must wait a few minutes for my father and I to speak with my cousin. Don't try to get out just yet but we'll be as quick as we can." The doors opened, clanged shut, and their footsteps could be heard pacing away from the truck over a gritty terrain. Then a knock on a distant door could be heard, followed shortly by warm greetings. But this time Francois was wrong, a few minutes passed quickly, followed by several more. The metal container began to feel like a prison, his limbs ached to stretch, the midday sun beat down. Jack was thirsty, very thirsty; nobody had thought to provide water for him. He started to feel claustrophobic and impatient with his helpers. 'What could be taking so long? Perhaps his cousin was unwilling to help, or worse still, perhaps their plan had been discovered.' Jack could feel his chest tightening and he became desperate to kick out. His breathing began to race and panic was setting in when again he heard voices and a door close. Once more the footsteps, but this time approaching. He told himself, no ordered himself, to get a grip.

The door opened and once again the familiar voice of Francois soothed his nerves. "I'm sorry that took so long mon ami, but it was not simple to arrange and my cousin didn't want that you come into the cottage. There are too many eyes.

"You will need to be patient just a little longer. We must drive a kilometre further to a woodland close to the sea. Then you can get out and I can tell you what has been arranged."

What could Jack say? As frustrated as he was by this incarceration, he could see the sense in staying hidden until they were somewhere more secluded. He asked Francois if there would be some water to drink and when he was told there would, he was content to suffer a little longer. The engine started and once again Jack closed his eyes on the assault to his senses from the noise and vibrations.

The truck came to rest again ten minutes later and the Frenchmen immediately jumped out of the cab and together pulled the storage pot off the pick up. The

floor boards were quickly removed and Jack was helped out of the container. At first his eyes were dazzled by the shafts of sunlight that filtered through the tree tops and he could barely coax his legs to move. He stood momentarily by the truck and accepted the water bottle that was offered to him. With his eyes now functioning normally he looked around under the dappled light of the woodland. He held the side of the truck and stretched each leg before pacing out a few metres and returning only to start again. As he walked backwards and forwards he asked Francois to explain where they were and what had been planned.

"A few metres away is the coastal path and across it a beach. We are on the northern coast, just south of the Ile de Brehat. We have more water and a little food for you." Francois held up a bag and continued. "We've tried to make this waterproof because in a few hours you must swim to the island."

As they spoke, Monsieur Le Clerc maintained a constant watch to ensure nobody, especially the Germans, disturbed them. Francois explained that right now his cousin, Philippe, was preparing to unmoor his fishing vessel and head out towards the Port de la Corderie on the Ile de Brehat, towing a small wooden boat. It wouldn't look unusual or arouse suspicion as many such vessels would tow a dinghy behind them, especially if the main fishing boat was being left at anchor in deeper water because of the state of the tides. And these were spring tides, which fitted perfectly with this behaviour. Once near to the port, he would anchor close to a secluded gully, take the smaller boat to the shore and erect its wooden mast. Dusk and high water would be at around 8:00pm, at that time he would move his vessel into the port and go ashore where he would meet with other local fishermen under the watchful eyes of the Germans.

"Jack, you will have just a few hours to find the boat and get underway whilst the tide is heading north, after that it will set strongly to the west. Fortunately, our reliable south westerly winds will help you but the sooner you can get away from the coastal current, not to mention the German patrols, the better." Francois handed Jack a small wooden box. "Take this, you will need a compass to find the boat and to navigate to your precious Guernsey. The island is north, north east but you will need to steer a more easterly course to allow for the tides until you pass the Roche Douvres light house."

Jack took the compass and thought about the passage, usually there would be so much time to prepare and plan but with minutes ticking away, he needed to act quickly. "Yes, I remember the tides, even bigger than Guernsey. Roche Douvres is about half way, that's twenty miles, then a further twenty to St Martins Point on the south coast of Guernsey. If your cousin's boat is small, it could be tight but I'll do what I can. How do I get to the island?"

"That, mon ami, is the one small problem." On his way to the island, Philippe will stop at a small quay near here." He pointed to a gap through the trees. "It is just

through there. And we must help him take the storage pot out into the channel. When I say 'we', you must go in the water and hold the pot as he tows it, in case he gets stopped. He will leave it in the channel and you must swim to the island. It's too dangerous here, so close to the mainland, for you to set off in the small boat and we can't risk you being seen on Philippe's boat."

He reached into the cab and pulled out a small waterproof sack. "Put your compass in here, there is also some food and water. I will be on board Philippe's boat."

Jack instinctively turned towards Monsieur Le Clerc but Francois anticipated his question. "Don't worry, mon pere will nail down the floorboards on the truck and then drive back to Philippe's cottage to wait for our return."

Jack was deeply impressed that all of this could have been planned so quickly and carefully. But there was no time to deliberate and Francois ushered him towards the storage pot. Jack resisted and instead strode towards Monsieur Le Clerc, he reached out his hand but the older man placed both his hands on Jack's shoulders and drew him to his chest. "Bon chance mon ami."

"I don't know how I can ever thank you." Jack whispered in his ear, knowing the old man may not understand a word of it. He smiled warmly, and rushed after Francois.

Chapter 7

By four in the afternoon the two men had carried and dragged the storage pot into the sea next to a small stone quay. Only the top was visible above the glassy water and Jack was now also immersed up to his head and shoulders as the fishing vessel approached towing the dinghy that was to be his transport away from here. It was worryingly small. The small sack containing a few meagre provisions and the all important compass, was tied to Jack's waist and gently buffeted against him underwater.

Philippe could be seen in the small wheelhouse as he navigated the rocks closing the distance between them. One hundred metres, then eighty, then Philippe could be seen looking over his shoulder and moments later his engine spluttered to silence.

Jack appealed to Francois, "What's happening?". But Francois simply shrugged his shoulders. "Je ne C'est pas."

Then it became clear as a German patrol vessel rounded the corner in pursuit of Philippe's boat.

Jack's heart stopped. Should he attempt to swim ashore and dash into the

woods? Francois answered this unvoiced question, bowing his head away from the Germans. "Keep very still mon ami. If they come over duck beneath the pot and you must pray their stay is short."

The boats were alongside now and Philippe could be seen gesticulating to the soldier now pointing a machine gun in his direction. Then a further shock as Philippe pointed in their direction and the soldier turned to scan the quay where Francois now stood holding a rope that prevented the storage pot from drifting aimlessness into the channel.

'Had they been betrayed?' Even Francois momentarily allowed the slither of doubt to take grip, and Jack convinced himself that his bid for freedom would be thwarted before he had even put to sea.

There were further exchanges between Philippe and the soldier. Then Philippe turned back into his wheelhouse and restarted the engine. The vessel once again approached the quay. The patrol boat seemed to be holding its position, watching, scrutinising, and assessing the story they had no doubt been given.

It took just a few minutes before the unimaginatively named '*Poisson*' bumped against the granite wall of the quay. Philippe bore a striking resemblance to his cousin, although somewhat stouter and his face reddened by years at sea. "Just go through the motions as we planned." He instructed Francois, in their native tongue. "But tell your airman to keep low in the water on the starboard side of the pot. And, if he needs to be told, not to swim for the Ile until the patrol is well clear." This last remark may have sounded contemptuous had Jack understood it but stupid mistakes had cost lives before, and Philippe was now risking his for this unknown Englishman.

Poisson motored away from the quay with Francois maintaining a watch on the fragile rope that connected the pot, now pushing up a wave behind them as it was towed into deeper water. Jack clutched the heavy wooden and wire structure with both hands and pushed his feet against its bulk so that he could lever his head down into the water, out of sight. Several times he mistimed this ducking and swallowed a mouthful of the salty water. The patrol boat maintained a dispassionate distance, its engine still ticking over.

Several minutes later, the thrust of water rushing over Jack's face subdued until just the waves lashed as they had at the quay, although now choppy, out in the channel. There was a loud splash as the anchor stone and mooring rope were hurled overboard, plummeting the depths to nestle amongst the sand and rocks of the sea bed. The storage pot was secure. Francois deployed a small buoy on the rope that had towed Jack's Trojan Horse under the disinterested gaze of their enemy, and there was little to do but bid their farewell. They must not linger or suspicion may be roused, but this was not how Jack had

imagined he would part company with the man who had saved him. Neither was it Francois' idea of an affectionate goodbye. He stared down at the face in the water below and the two made eye contact. Jack emerged briefly from his watery hideout to mouth a heartfelt "Thank you, my friend. Goodbye." The Frenchman touched his brow in salute and boldly replied, "Not goodbye, au revoir." Philippe, turned *Poisson* away and, still towing the dinghy behind, motored out towards the sea.

Jack watched as his only life support system moved further and further away, until his attention was grabbed once again by the sound of an engine revving behind him. To his horror, the patrol boat was now speeding towards him.

Chapter 8

Clinging to the mesh surrounding the storage pot, Jack took a deep breath and submerged his entire body under its mass. Underwater, the engine of the approaching vessel sounded muffled but nonetheless menacing. As the drone became louder, he could see the underside of its hull cutting through the water at speed. Resigned to his fate and anticipating the sudden loss of engine pitch that would signal the vessel closing on his precarious hiding place, his heart pumped heavily, exaggerating the burning need for oxygen now overwhelming his chest. There was no point, he may as well swim to the surface and devour the precious air before his humiliating capture, at least that was the thought now bidding for supremacy in his frantic mind. Yet the pitch remained constant and grew louder as the hull sped through the water and Jack now saw that the track was not closing on him at all, unless they changed course, the vessel would pass several metres to the south. He galvanised his commitment to freedom and drew upon every last drop of strength to lock his jaw tightly against the insistent waters that threatened to prize his mouth open and engulf him.

The drone reached a crescendo and his fear of discovery waned as the patrol boat passed by without reducing speed. He knew that to rise for air too soon would be to risk discovery but he feared he would soon succumb to a watery grave if waited much longer. Like a spider crab, he clawed his way across the bottom of the storage pot so that his head would emerge behind it, that surely would give some cover? Those final moments underwater were enough and although he could not have seen the two German soldiers on board or known that one of them casually scrutinised the storage pot before turning his head away, when Jack's face broke the surface, the immediate danger had passed.

He could not gulp the air into his lungs silently, or avoid the accompanying splashes, but his enemies were content with the story given by a local fisherman and had no reason to suspect this lumbering, submerged storage pot was intended to conceal anything but succulent Bretagne crabs and Lobsters.

Jack rested a while, still clinging to the pot, and surveyed the scene around him. All around, dotting his near and far horizons his view was penetrated by pink granite rocks, rising like sentries out of the sea. Some ragged and threatening, some topped by a welcoming spread of grass and decorated with the dark wood of pine trees. To the North was the Ile de Brehat, the island he must now reach by swimming across the remainder of this tidal channel. The tidal stream was at its strongest a few hours before high water and he could tell by the way the storage pot was being pulled to the west, that this time had recently passed. The pot still tugged against its rocky anchor but there was no longer a strong flow of water around it as it resisted the stream. He would need to move soon.

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