Outlandish Peoples:

Zazous and Romani in Occupied Paris

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Statement of Authorship

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Anthony Thompson

13 August, 2021

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Abstract

The critical component of this PhD thesis examines the performative nature of cultural identity and the manner in which stereotypes and tropes develop in print.

The creative component of the PhD is a novel for teenagers entitled *Hey Zazou*. It is the story of Charlie, a teenage jazz musician trying to manage life in Paris during German Occupation in the 1940s. One of the supporting characters is a young Romani woman named Rosa. In depicting her, I was keen to avoid the usual 'Gypsy' cliches but found this to be more difficult than I anticipated. Thus, in the critical component, I examined these tropes and stereotypes in a range of literary sources. Beginning with the depiction of Romani guitarist Django Reinhardt in jazz criticism, I traced the performative notion of the 'Gypsy musician' back to Franz Liszt's famous treatise on Hungarian music and Bela Bartok's early twentieth-century response. To establish the lineage of the term 'Gypsy,' I looked at Tudor laws concerning the Romani people and the 'rogue' literature that developed in fifteenth-century England. My belief is that William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* conflates the Queen of Egypt's 'Egyptian' identity with that of the English Romani and further enshrines a series of enduring tropes and stereotypes. Since this continues to influence perceptions of these people, it is imperative to develop a way of writing about the Romani people that avoids a set of archaic tropes. This thesis is an attempt to demonstrate how this might be achieved in a literary work.

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Hey Zazou

Tony Thompson

Paris 1943

Chapter One

Charlie couldn't see the large red and black flag that hung over the small square, but he could hear it flapping in the cool evening breeze. The only light was the dull blue of the painted-over streetlamps and the occasional sliver that escaped from beneath heavy blackout curtains in the apartments over the shops. He had emerged from the Metro station to find that the rain had become a fine mist that felt cool on his face and hands. His heavy shoes slid on the greasy cobblestones and he gripped the handle of his guitar case, ready to protect it with his own body if he fell.

The small apartment he shared with his mother was nearby, across what once had been the busy street of Rue Claude-Bernard. Now it was silent. The Germans forbade the use of personal vehicles so only their own armoured cars were driven in Paris now. Charlie stepped out onto the road without a glance. On the corner of Rue Broca, his street, was a large building with barbed wire around the perimeter, nets on the windows and sandbags around the entrance. The locals had many theories about it but most agreed that it had something to do with the Gestapo. They also agreed it was not a place they would like to visit.

To fill the silence, Charlie hummed a tune he had heard on Radio London, a BBC station that was as popular as it was forbidden. The song was called 'Cow Cow Boogie' by Freddie Slack and Charlie had been trying to play what he could remember of it on guitar. They didn't play a lot of jazz on the station. Mostly they played songs about resistance and old songs that had been popular when his parents were children. But sometimes in the evening, there might be a few jazz songs. Usually, they weren't the sorts of songs that Charlie liked. He had no interest in Glen Miller's music, for instance. Too bland and predictable. He liked Benny Goodman, though, and, in particular, Benny's guitar player, Charlie Christian. He liked him so much he had changed his name to Charlie from Charles, which was what his teachers still called him

Charlie Christian played furious little licks filled with blue notes and bends. The problem with people like Glen Miller and Lawrence Welk was that they didn't sound convincing when they played the blues. For Charlie, the blues was jazz, and jazz was the blues. He

had no interest in anything that pretended otherwise. So, 'Cow Cow Boogie' sounded good, if a little strange.

It was completely dark when Charlie heard the truck. The whine was faint at first – the truck was probably making its way down the large boulevard he'd just crossed. But then the noise got closer, and the truck slowed down. He wasn't worried until the street lit up in the glare of headlights. He stepped up on the small footpath. Was the street even big enough for one of their trucks? It was a winding lane made for horses and people, not armoured troop carriers. Charlie flattened himself in a dark doorway, hoping he wouldn't be seen or, worse, run down. He held his tattered guitar case to his chest as the truck moved closer. As the truck passed, the man in the passenger seat looked Charlie's way. He was wearing a uniform that Charlie recognised with a chill. This wasn't the usual German soldier. This was the Gestapo.

It felt like blood was draining from Charlie's hands and feet. The sound of the truck's engine and his accelerating heartbeat pounded in his ears. He let himself breathe as the truck continued on and out of sight. Perhaps it was just a patrol.

But then the engine noise stopped. Charlie wondered how far down the street the truck had travelled. With some difficulty, he lowered his guitar and peered into the darkness. He could hear voices and the lights of Tremblay's Café revealed the back of the truck in the shadows. The Gestapo officer stepped into the light and Charlie drew back, listening to two or three voices yelling their harsh language back and forth. For a horrible moment, he wondered if the café owner, Monsieur Tremblay, was about to be arrested. He was a friend, and the café was like a second home for Charlie and Maman. Closing his eyes, he tried to imagine himself away from the street, the city, and the Germans.

There were pins and needles in his legs when he bent his knees slightly to alleviate the damp chill creeping through his body. He started to make deals in his head: *Please God, I know I don't go to church and think about guitar playing in the chapel at school but please let it not be Monsieur Tremblay under arrest.*

A new voice – angry, frightened – drifted towards him.

'I am a citizen of this country and I am not getting in that truck!'

Charlie peered out again. He could make out three men: the Gestapo officer, a German soldier and another man, kneeling on the ground.

'You will do as you have been told,' said the officer.

'I want to speak to a lawyer,' said the other man.

Charlie squinted, trying to make him out. It was, he realised with a start, a man who lived in the building over Tremblay's café. Charlie didn't know his name, but he was a musician. Tremblay let him play guitar sometimes and the man had talked to Charlie about music. He'd said he always dreamed of playing classical music, but had to learn more popular styles to make a living. The last few times Charlie had seen him, he asked Charlie about jazz. Down the street, the Gestapo officer spoke again.

'There is a plan, a plot, something big – that's what we have been told,' he hissed at the musician. 'We have been told that you are part of it. We would like to hear more.'

'I don't know what you are talking about,' said the man. 'I am a musician, a nobody.'

Charlie watched the officer take out a gun and hold it at the musician's head. Some words were exchanged but then the gun went off with a snapping sound and the musician collapsed. Charlie snapped back against the wall and closed his eyes, tears pushing through the clenched lids. He heard the truck's engine start again and felt its vibration on the door he was huddled against.

A terrible decision had to be made now. If Charlie stayed where he was and the Germans saw him, he would be arrested or shot. They might not see him, but Charlie felt as though they already had. If he ran and was seen, they would shoot him for sure.

The truck reversed slowly and noisily toward him. He had to act but he couldn't. He was sweating and cold at the same time as though gripped by a fever. The bullet would hit him in the head. Would it hurt? Would he hear the gun?

He opened his eyes. The rear lights flashed on the cobblestones. The truck would surely stop soon, but instead, it was passing him and the officer was staring at him, smiling cruelly. He had a strong jaw and a heavy forehead. Charlie watched in horror as the man drew a finger across his throat and shook his head. But the truck kept on

reversing. It continued away from him as he remained frozen against the door expecting at any second to be dispatched by the officer's pistol.

Only when he heard the truck's clutch drop at the top of the street, was he able to take a small step forward and look towards the large road which it now seemed he had crossed centuries earlier. The truck lingered for a second before the engine roared and took it away. Maybe the officer had got out and was now coming for him, but he couldn't see or hear anything.

There were voices behind him now. He swung around to see Tremblay and some of the other people who lived in the street standing where the musician had been shot. There was no body, just the spot where he had fallen. Charlie stepped out from the doorway, his pants and shirt soaked as though he had fallen into the river. Every part of his body ached as he began to walk.

Tremblay saw him and seemed to guess what had happened. He put a finger to his lips and shook his head. Charlie nodded and kept walking until he reached the group. A man who lived in Charlie's building regarded him with rheumy eyes.

'Watch out, boy, they're shooting musicians today.'

'Yes,' said Tremblay. 'Fools tomorrow, so beware.'

Charlie laughed out loud before putting his hand over his mouth.

'How dare you!' said the man.

Tremblay ignored him and approached Charlie.

'Say nothing,' he whispered. 'The man was involved in some kind of plot. They will be looking for anyone who they think knows anything.'

Charlie nodded again. The light rain was already washing away the man's blood on the cobblestones. Charlie thought about the man's guitar, sitting in its case in his apartment, never to be played again. When did he last take it out? Did he have any idea that it was the last time? It occurred to him that not knowing could either make everything very important or totally pointless. The Gestapo might return to shoot Charlie because he was a witness. All the hours that he spent practising guitar would be wasted. Or would they? If he knew that he would be shot next week, would he stop playing

because it was a waste of time? No, he decided, he would do nothing but play until they arrived.

'They saw me,' said Charlie.

'If they thought it was important, they would have shot you too. What would you do anyway, call the police? They have nothing to fear from anyone who simply witnesses their crimes,' said Monsieur Tremblay quietly.

Tremblay was a few years younger than Maman, but had a large unrequited crush on her. When they first moved to the street at the beginning of the war, he looked after them, making sure they knew where everything was and, more importantly, who everyone was in the neighbourhood. The café was two doors away from their building. It was dimly lit with tattered tablecloths, peeling paint on the walls and a selection of dishes severely limited by the food shortages. The paper menu was nothing more than a curiosity. Lunch was a breadstick and pate or cheese on the rare occasion he could find some. Dinner was soup. Charlie and Maman ended up there most nights. Tremblay had stopped charging them at some point even when Maman protested. 'I'm keeping an account,' he would say. 'I'll put it on your tab.'

Usually, when everyone else had left, Tremblay would pour three glasses of wine, one for each of them, and talk about the time before the war. Charlie remembered that time, of course, but it seemed more like a dream every day. He couldn't remember the last time he had eaten anything besides soup for dinner. Lately, he had been trying to hear Papa's voice in his head. He could picture him, standing in their old apartment telling a funny story or imitating a work colleague, but it was hard to capture his voice.

Papa was in a prison camp somewhere in Germany. He had been drafted into the army as a war photographer because of his job as a journalist. When the country surrendered, many of the soldiers who had gone to the border to defend the country ended up in prison camps. Charlie always felt an aching in his chest when he thought about Papa but it could have been worse he told himself. As far as he knew, his father was alive. Because the two countries were now allies, supposedly, the prisoners were well treated. Or at least that's what Maman had been told by the Red Cross. Stories about some of the Germans' other prisons were too frightening to even contemplate.

‘Come inside. You need some food,’ said Tremblay.

Charlie sat at his usual table near the kitchen and started eating the soup Tremblay put before him. Tremblay always left books on it for him. They were usually books about music with pictures of musicians or instruments on the cover. Like every other adult in Charlie’s life, Tremblay wanted Charlie to read. But he couldn’t. The time when kids learned to read had come and gone without Charlie. He tried sometimes but it just gave him a headache when the words and letters began to move around the page. Maman was a teacher and Papa had been a journalist but neither had been able to help him. Tremblay tried to find books that he might be interested in, but it was no good. Charlie couldn’t read and nothing helped.

A young man in a leather jacket came in and spoke to Tremblay in loud whispers. He could hear words like ‘now’ and ‘before they do’. Tremblay asked Charlie to watch the restaurant while he went outside with the man. Charlie watched them through the window. They spoke briefly before going into the doorway next to the café. They were going up to the musician’s apartment.

Fifteen minutes later, Charlie was still waiting for them to come back. return so he could go home and practice guitar or listen to his records. He heard voices outside before the door opened and the restaurant owner and the other man came in. Tremblay was holding a large envelope. They both went into the kitchen and returned empty-handed. Charlie knew better than to ask. The other man smiled at him.

‘Michel,’ the man said, putting out his hand. His knuckles were bumpy and bruised. Were they broken?

‘Charlie.’

‘What’s in there?’ Michel asked, pointing to Charlie’s guitar case.

‘A guitar.’

The man nodded and smiled. He looked like a boxer, thought Charlie. He wasn’t tall but he was well built and his nose was crooked. And that would explain his knuckles.

‘You’re right,’ said the man seeming to read his thoughts. ‘I used to box.’

‘Michel is a musician too, Charlie,’ said Tremblay.

‘Were you a friend of, you know, the guy?’

Michel looked around quickly.

‘Yes, a friend. Tremblay tells me you might have seen something.’

‘I didn’t see anything,’ said Charlie, not quite telling the truth. ‘I heard it.’

‘What did you hear exactly?’

‘The man yelled something before they shot him. He said, ‘I’m a musician, a nobody.’ It was awful.’

Charlie suspected that not only was Michel not the man’s friend but that he may have never met the man. Nothing in his expression changed while Charlie talked. Sometimes it surprised him how easily people gave themselves away.

‘What could they possibly learn from that?’ said Tremblay, holding up his hands.

‘A puzzle has to have pieces,’ said Michel.

Charlie liked that one and filed it away.

‘What do you play?’ asked Charlie.

‘Bass,’ said Michel

‘Jazz?’

‘Sure. You like jazz, don’t you? You’re a Zazou.’

Charlie never knew how to respond when people noticed that he wore Zazou clothes. The real Zazous were the kids who hung out on the café terraces in the city in tailored suits. Charlie had long hair hanging over his eyes and wore one of Papa’s old suit jackets. His pants were baggy and drew tightly around his ankles over the large heavy shoes he had bought second hand in an outdoor market. Zazous loved jazz and ran all-night parties at secret locations. Charlie saw them around the city and like everyone else, saw the cartoons in the Germans’ newspapers about them. They were the ‘scourge’ of decent young people and degenerates, according to the cartoons. They listened to decadent music and dressed like dandies. To Charlie and plenty of other kids in the city, it all sounded pretty good. He based his look on the cartoons that were meant to make

fun of the Zazous before he actually saw a real one. He was always happy when someone noticed.

'Yeah, I guess so,' said Charlie. 'I like jazz, that's for sure.'

'This kid lives and breathes jazz, Michel,' said Tremblay. 'He says he can't read but he knows every record Benny Goodman has ever released and all the musicians on them.'

Michel looked as though he was considering this carefully. Charlie had a good memory. He sometimes thought it was because he didn't read that he could remember so much. He had to, after all. There was no way to write anything down. Often at school, new teachers assumed that he was one of the top students until there was a test or an assignment. They told Maman that he was well-spoken and knew all kinds of things but failed every test and essay. Charlie had decided to be a musician when he had first started to play guitar. Nothing else mattered now.

'Are you any good on guitar?' asked Michel.

'I'm alright, I guess. Nothing special,' said Charlie.

Michel and Tremblay exchanged a quick look but neither said anything. Tremblay walked into the kitchen and Michel followed, leaving Charlie standing by the table. He reached for his guitar.

'See you, Charlie,' said Michel. 'Keep playing.'

'Yeah, okay,' he replied, waving.

Out on the street, Charlie looked for the musician's blood, but the rain had washed it all away. He wondered about Michel but pushed the questions from his mind. Since the Germans had arrived, everything was so much more complicated than it seemed. Once, he and Maman were ice skating and her hat had blown off. A German officer had picked it up and returned it to her. She thanked him and then burst into tears when he skated away. Charlie had been completely confused but she wouldn't explain, instead just saying she was tired. Nothing made sense, except maybe jazz. Yes, jazz made sense.

Chapter Two

Charlie walked up to his apartment and used his key to let himself in. Maman was sitting by the window reading.

‘They just shot him, Maman,’ said Charlie, feeling tearful.

She stood up and put her arm around his shoulder.

‘You shouldn’t have to see such things,’ she said.

She motioned him to speak quietly as he told her what he’d seen. She shook her head and went to the window to look down at where it had taken place.

‘We shouldn’t talk of it anymore,’ she whispered.

Before the occupation, Maman had been an English lecturer at a teacher’s college, but the Germans had banned English as the language of the enemy, so she was now tutoring students in their homes. They paid her in cash but sometimes they weren’t home or cancelled their lessons at the last moment. Most of her students were anxious to leave France for America. The rumour was that a person could be turned away if they couldn’t fill out forms or answer questions once they reached New York.

‘How was school today?’ she asked brightly while they drank tea to keep warm.

‘The usual,’ said Charlie, trying not to think about the musician lying on the wet cobblestones.

‘Are you reading any books at school?’ she asked hopefully.

‘No,’ he said. ‘We’re not doing anything. I don’t know what’s going on. The art teacher resigned last week so the headmaster comes and watches us draw. I don’t think he cares. A lot of teachers have left.’

Maman smiled grimly.

‘Try to do some reading, Charlie.’

‘Yes, Maman.’

Maybe playing guitar would take his mind off things. He took it out of the case and started playing 'Stardust' – or at least a version of it that he'd seen a man play on six-string banjo in a city street a few days earlier. Though Charlie had taken lessons when he was younger, he mostly learned by watching musicians on the streets and by listening to records over and over. For some reason, once he saw someone play something, he could play it too, like the banjo guy. He also found if he closed his eyes while listening to a record, he could see the music. It didn't make any sense and he had never been able to explain it but the music itself created a picture of the guitarist's fingers on the fretboard. Eddie Lang's fingers still moved quickly in his mind but if he could slow them down and make the same shapes with his own hands, it was there forever.

He had asked the banjo man if he would show him how to play it but was shooed away. So, he waited until the man played it again and watched carefully. In his head now, he followed the man's fingers up and down the fretboard.

'That's lovely, Charlie,' Maman said. 'But I have to go out. I'm tutoring another Jewish woman who is trying to get to America. Her English is still weak and if she is sent back, she will end up on a train.'

'But you can't go out tonight, it's dangerous,' said Charlie. 'Those men…'

'I'll show them my meanest teacher face. The police won't bother me.'

'They will if you tell them where you are going.'

They were silent for a second.

'Oh, Charlie, they are all so frightened. This woman was nearly hysterical when I spoke to her on the phone at Tremblay's.'

'But why are the Germans rounding them up?' asked Charlie.

'You know the answer, Charlie. There is no answer. They have murdered them in Germany and now they want to murder them here.'

His mother put a finger to her lips and pointed next door. The old lady and her daughter were Jewish. It made no sense to Charlie. He had grown up with Jewish kids and played with them in the neighbourhood. They looked like him, spoke like him and

went to the same schools. No one had even mentioned their religion until the Germans arrived.

'I'll come with you,' said Charlie. 'You can't go alone.'

'I'll be fine.'

'I'm coming,' he said, thinking it was the kind of thing Papa would do. Maman shrugged and put on her coat.

The woman lived in the Marais on the other side of the river with her husband and two small children. It wasn't far, so Charlie and Maman decided to walk. When they first got outside, Charlie went to point to the spot where the man had been shot but Maman shook her head. They made their way up the now-empty market street of Rue Mouffetard towards the Marais.

The woman's apartment was on the main street of the neighbourhood, above a shop with a German sign. Maman said that the family had probably owned the shop at one time, but it was now illegal for them to run a business. The Germans were using Jewish shops as places for their soldiers and civilians to shop and eat.

The woman who answered the door said he was a good boy for bringing his mother. She was young and pretty, but tired looking, thought Charlie, as she led him to a large sitting room filled with books and old furniture.

'You are welcome to take as many books as you like,' she told him. 'We will have to leave them here when we go.'

She looked up at the overflowing shelves sadly. He smiled and thanked her, wondering what he would do for an hour.

The bookshelves rose to the ceiling and Charlie scanned them, hoping there might be an art book to look at or something with photographs of musicians. On a shelf near a large window, he spotted a row of records in slipcovers. They were neatly placed on the shelf but dusty. He looked around for a player, expecting to find an old Victrola somewhere in the room. He couldn't see one but decided to look at the records. It would pass the time.

He sat down in a large comfortable chair with the records in his lap. The one on top had something written in another language on the label. Maybe from an opera. He was used to seeing records like this in tattered boxes at markets. The next one underneath was a Louis Armstrong recording. He squinted at the red label. Reading was worth it when it was records, he always told people. Scanning the letters slowly he realised that it was West End Blues, something he had heard on the radio. He wished there was a player in the room. The next one was by King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band, a name he knew from a Jazz program he sometimes heard on the BBC late at night. It was called 'Krooked Blues.' It sounded like a song worth hearing, he thought. He kept flipping through them. Another Louis Armstrong. Fletcher Henderson. Bix Beiderbecke. There was nothing new like Benny Goodman or even Count Basie. The jazz fan, whoever they were, must have stopped listening in the 1920s. Still, thought Charlie, it was a good collection, and he would love to hear some of them.

He placed the records on the floor in front of him and stood up to see if he could find any others. On one shelf, there were framed pictures of the family, some of the men wearing the traditional religious outfits that he remembered from when he was younger. It occurred to him that he didn't see them much anymore. Everyone knew this was happening, but no one talked about it.

'Okay, Charlie, time to go,' said Maman, poking her head in the door. Charlie was looking at a book of photographs of South American Indians. He closed it and stood up.

'Put everything away, okay?' she told him.

Charlie was replacing the records when the woman stepped into the room behind Maman. She watched Charlie for a moment and he wondered if he had done something wrong.

'Do you like music?' she asked.

Maman rolled her eyes.

'Charlie loves music more than school, more than me, more than anything. This kid plays guitar more than he eats.'

The woman laughed, a little sadly.

‘My oldest brother was the same. He played trumpet and listened to those records all the time. He played in a group in the early thirties. They played with Louis Armstrong once when he was here.’

‘Wow,’ said Charlie. ‘I’d love to meet him.’

Something in Maman’s expression stopped him.

‘I’m sorry,’ said Charlie. ‘I didn’t…’

She looked away.

‘We don’t know where he is. He just disappeared about a year ago. I had to sell the Victrola. I…’

‘I’m sure he’s okay. Papa…’

Charlie stopped again. It wasn’t the same.

‘Take the records,’ she said, kindly. ‘Take them all.’

‘But your brother…’ said Charlie.

‘You’ll look after them for him. He would like that. If he were here, he would insist that you borrow them. That’s how he was. I have a box you can put them in.’

Charlie didn’t know what to say.

‘Charlie will take good care of them for your brother,’ said Maman, quietly.

When they left the apartment, she put her arm around him as they walked.

‘This is going to end, Charlie. It’s not forever.’

‘But her brother isn’t coming back, is he?’

‘No, Charlie. He isn’t, but the Germans in this city are going to suffer too.’

‘But how?’ asked Charlie, knowing she wouldn’t answer.

Charlie held the box of records to his chest and looked back at the dark shop and the apartment above it. There was still a light on. He thought about the woman’s brother. If the Germans hadn’t come, he would have been there listening to his records. But then, thought Charlie, Maman would still be teaching at the university and he would be at the technical school. Papa would be at their old apartment. He tried to stop

thinking but couldn't. Did the musician know what would happen this morning when he put on his socks? He must have known that he was in some danger. Why didn't he hide?

'Maman?'

'Yes,' she said, as they walked.

'Do we get to choose what happens next or does it just happen?'

'That's a big question, Charlie. Some people think it's all set out, but others say it is a story waiting for you to write it.'

Charlie considered these possibilities as he looked around at the empty dark streets.

'What if someone else is writing the story?'

'What do you mean?'

'Well, we're here tonight and I got these records because of the Occupation. I only came with you after what happened to the musician. So, are we writing the story or are the Germans?' he asked.

'I don't know, Charlie.'

Chapter Three

Charlie was trying to will a girl to turn around. He noticed her as she entered the large theatre. She had long red hair pulled back. He could only see the back of her head and her shoulders in her blue school uniform and was talking to her friend. *Turn around,* thought Charlie, *turn around*. He started to hum a melody that he had been working on. He would call it 'Redhead'. It was a fast blues. No, better to slow it down. Yes, he imagined his guitar, now saxophones, a pause with just the drummer keeping time–

'Shhhhhh!'

A male teacher he didn't recognise was pointing at him and frowning. The teacher cupped one ear and pointed to the stage where the squeaky-voiced man who'd been talking the last time Charlie had taken any notice was still droning on about some parade.

After watching him absently for thirty seconds or so, Charlie went back to his song, trying not to hum as loud. The girl with red hair still hadn't turned around. If he was braver, he would drop something so that everyone, including her, would look at him. Instead, he kept watching her.

They were in the Opera House. It was an enormous building and students from several schools were crammed inside. Charlie wondered what it would be like to play music there. Enormous chandeliers hung from the high ceiling and a three-story arch framed the stage.

Paris, the man said, was to have a new chief of the Occupation police. The old one was being recalled to Germany for failing to subdue the growing Resistance movement. The man went on, something about 'the city's dogged determination to resist', but did so in a sad tone that made it seem like there was no point and hung in the air uncomfortably before the man continued.

'The new commander is 'The Colonel',' he said. The Colonel, Charlie knew, was very close to Hitler and had been chosen especially because of his reputation for efficiency. Charlie pictured again the musician falling to the ground and had a sick feeling

about Paris being run by these people. He tried to concentrate instead on the girl or music, but the musician's murder was filling his mind as though someone had turned on a tap and walked away.

A woman was speaking now. The hall had grown warmer, and the students were noisily restless. Some were playing cards and others were chatting openly. The microphone crackled and fed back while the woman spoke. Teachers shushed students from the aisles and removed anyone who wouldn't behave.

Charlie's felt the twinge of a headache and he longed for fresh air. He closed his eyes and pictured Charlie Christian playing guitar with Benny Goodman. They were playing 'Seven Come Eleven' and Charlie was in the audience. Benny suddenly pointed to him and invited him up on stage. He stood up slowly.

'…Zazou fashion will not be tolerated at the parade.'

Charlie's eyes snapped open. Had he heard that right? The students were laughing and shouting 'Zazou! Zazou!'. The woman told them to be quiet.

'These people are traitors,' she said, 'and they are a disgrace to Paris, and to France. I hope there are no Zazous here today but if there are, she said, they have been warned.'

Charlie slid down in his seat, hoping no one would notice him. Two boys in the aisle with military haircuts were pointing at him and making snipping motions with their fingers. A girl behind him squealed, 'I see one!'. All the students stared at him.

Charlie heard a voice: 'Go Zazou!' and the students laughed as the voice chanted it like a jazz song. 'Go Zazou, go, go, go, Go Zazou, go, go, go!'

Charlie laughed and tried to spot the singer. The woman on the stage was pointing at the offender.

'Stand up!' she cried into the microphone.

Charlie was astounded as a boy in the third or fourth row got to his feet. Everyone went silent, curious about what would happen now. He couldn't see the boy's face but the haircut was just like Charlie's. The jacket was a 'Canadian', a checked and baggy affair. Charlie was wearing one too. It was strange looking at the boy as though he

was looking at himself. Except that Charlie never would have done what this guy was doing.

'Why are you dressed like that?' said the woman, her voice booming around the Opera House.

It was impossible to hear what the boy said but the woman laughed condescendingly.

'Oh, you are having fun and living the sporting life. May I remind you that there is a war going on.'

The audience waited to hear the boy's response. The boy said something and the first few rows were filled with gasps and nervous laughter. The boy's words were being repeated and passed back.

'What did he say?' Charlie asked the girl in front of him.

'He asked which side she was on.'

Charlie was filled with admiration for this fellow Zazou or whatever he was. It was exactly the right question. The speakers all seemed to be talking about the parade as though it was the students' patriotic duty to attend. How could waving a foreign flag at a parade be patriotic? It didn't make sense and Charlie thought that even the speakers knew it wasn't quite logical. That's why the boy's question was perfect.

'How dare you?' said the woman, visibly upset. 'You have no right.'

Charlie could tell she was on the verge of tears. The students were all looking at the boy, but he said nothing, continuing to stand and stare at the woman. On the stage, the speakers looked at each other. No one wanted to say anything more. The assembly was finished. The squeaky-voiced man stood up.

'So, everyone is expected at the parade. If you are not there, your parents will be contacted and, okay, just attend the parade.'

He sounded deflated. The students started to stand up and stretch. There was laughter but there was also conversation. The girl in front of him turned around.

'Do you know that guy?'

Charlie shook his head, blushing slightly.

‘But you’re a Zazou,’ she said.

Charlie shrugged and reached down for his guitar case. He was looking forward to fresh air at last. The theatre was musty and warm, and sounds seemed to be bouncing off every surface. His mind was filled with words and noise and he needed to get out of there. But the students were moving slowly as the theatre emptied.

He felt a hand on his shoulder, and he turned, but before he knew it, a sudden movement engulfed his vision, and his world was pain.

‘That’s for being a traitor, Zazou.’

The blow cut through him. Charlie instinctively raised his hand to his head as he turned around to find a tall boy with cropped hair staring at him, angry and disgusted. The boy was wearing a school uniform, but it was obvious he was a member of the Loyal Youth. Before Charlie could react, the boy clipped him again, this time higher up near his eye. Charlie stepped back, stunned.

‘Stop it,’ said a girl standing next to Charlie. ‘He hasn’t done anything.’

‘He is a traitor,’ said the boy. ‘And so are you for defending him.’

Charlie stepped between the boy and the girl.

‘If you want to fight, we’ll do it outside. Not here.’

The boy looked surprised. He was taller than Charlie and much bigger. But Charlie had learned over the years that it was best to deal with people like this quickly. Have the fight, finish it. When he was much younger, kids had teased him because he couldn’t read. One boy tormented him for months until finally Charlie lost his temper and shoved him. The boy suggested they fight after school and Charlie accepted the challenge. The boy had beaten Charlie badly but never said much to him after the fight. Charlie had since made a habit of challenging anyone that bothered him. He wasn’t a fighter and rarely threw a punch out of fear for his hands, but it was better to suffer a few bruises than have to listen to a bully day after day.

‘You think you can win in a fight with me?’ said the boy, laughing.

‘No, but you want to fight and that’s fine. Just not in here. I want to get outside.’

The boy looked around as though hoping someone would explain this unforeseen course of events. Charlie knew he had confused the boy, so he turned around and started walking quickly. The girl beside him was smiling and shaking her head.

‘He’s going to beat you black and blue,’ she said.

‘What did I do? To be so black and blue,’ said Charlie, quoting a song he’d heard once. ‘Yeah, probably.’

Outside, the cold fresh air felt good on Charlie’s face. His heart was racing as he took deep breaths. Without looking behind, he kept walking hoping that the boy would not see where he went or just lose interest. Charlie knew he should run. He would never see the boy again and there was nothing to be gained from getting beaten up by him. The square in front of the Opera House was filled with students so it was easy to get lost among them but hard to move quickly. It was three in the afternoon and the evening chill was already noticeable. Charlie tried to find the path through the crowd.

‘Hey, Zazou!’

He froze.

‘Hey, Zazou!’

There was nowhere to escape, no place to hide. Charlie’s chest tightened as he turned around slowly.

‘Hey, Zazou!’

It was the guy that had stood up and challenged the speakers. He was standing about three meters away, smiling at Charlie. They were almost identically dressed and to his surprise, the other boy was holding a saxophone case. Charlie was caught between curiosity and fear. He wanted to meet this guy but he also wanted to get out of there quickly. He waved then turned to walk away.

‘Wait!’ said the other boy. ‘Where are you going?’

Charlie turned back and shrugged. He didn’t know the kid, didn’t owe him anything. He just wanted to be far away from the theatre.

‘Hey,’ said the Zazou, catching up to him. ‘Where ya going?’

‘I have to go home,’ said Charlie, coldly, hoping to put him off.

‘Let’s see your guitar. Can you play?’

Charlie stopped and looked at the kid. His hair hung over one eye and he had a cigarette hanging from his lips.

‘Look, I have to go,’ said Charlie.

The square was thinning now as students rushed to catch trains. Charlie hoped that the Loyal Youth kid from inside had gone home. He looked around nervously. The Zazou was smiling at him.

‘I’m Eddie,’ he said, putting out his hand.

‘Charlie.’

Eddie crouched down and opened his sax case. He lifted out the shiny instrument and began to put it together, smiling and nodding.

‘Let’s jam, Charlie!’ he said playing a short riff after screwing on the mouthpiece.

It sounded good to Charlie, but his instincts told him to get away from the theatre.

‘No,’ said Charlie. ‘There’s no way. I have to go.’

Charlie rarely played with other musicians. The whole idea was ridiculous right now when he was about to be jumped by a Loyal Youth member.

Eddie started to play something that Charlie realised was a Count Basie song, ‘One O’clock Jump’. He was surprised at how well the other boy could play.

‘You sound like Lester.’

The other boy stopped and smiled. He looked at Charlie.

‘Get your guitar out!’

Charlie was tempted, if for no other reason than to hear what the two of them would sound like together. Kids passed them in the square, some slowing down out of curiosity.

‘Play something!’ shouted a boy in a dark blue school uniform.

Charlie stepped closer to Eddie and leaned in.

‘Some Loyal Youth kid is looking for me. He started up with me inside. I should just go,’ whispered Charlie.

‘Was he alone?’

‘He was when he shoved me, but I don’t know,’ said Charlie.

Eddie looked around at the kids, who were now standing in anticipation and the crowd was growing.

‘These kids want to hear music. If you’re playing, anyone who tries to stop it won’t be very popular.’

Charlie looked at Eddie for a second before reaching down for his guitar case. If nothing else, he thought, Eddie seemed like a person he’d like to get to know. No one Charlie knew played an instrument or knew anything about the music he liked. This guy could be a friend. It wasn’t that Charlie didn’t have friends. There were always a few kids at school he could sit with at lunchtime or who would invite him to play football. He wasn’t a particularly popular kid but no one seemed to actively dislike him, except maybe some of the Loyal Youth types. But Charlie always felt as though he was missing out on the kind of friendship that happened in movies or among his favourite musicians. Maybe this Eddie would be that friend.

As Charlie as he took out his guitar, Eddie smiled and sat down on top of the case. They tuned up and Eddie began to play ‘Seven Come Eleven’. Charlie joined in, playing the opening riff along with Eddie. The other boy’s eyes widened and the kids standing around clapped. As Charlie started to play the chords, Eddie played Benny’s clarinet section. Charlie then launched into Charlie Christian’s guitar solo. He had spent six months learning to play it and this was the first time he had ever played it for another person, let alone a whole crowd. It was a pretty wobbly attempt and Eddie had some trouble keeping the beat, but Charlie liked the way it felt. They kept playing and it came together more and more as they went along. When Charlie played the solos, Eddie either played a simple progression or tapped time on his sax case.

The crowd grew as they played in the dimming afternoon light. Some of the girls were even dancing. Where Charlie might have thought that kids would laugh or sneer at two Zazous playing jazz together, it was the opposite. Charlie felt like everyone was happy that someone was doing something that had nothing to do with the war or the Germans.

A kid called out for 'Honeysuckle Rose'. Eddie looked at Charlie who nodded. Eddie began to play the melody and Charlie played the chords. They were playing it quickly, the way Django Reinhardt did it. Charlie was playing the rhythm percussively, the pompe-style favoured by Django's sidemen. Again, they weren't always in sync, but the kids around them didn't seem to mind and cheered when they finished.

Charlie and Eddie were trying to decide what to play next when an adult's voice cut through. It was the man with the squeaky voice from the theatre.

'You are all to go home,' he said, pushing through the crowd.

The man's face opened up in disbelief when he saw at Eddie.

'You again.'

Eddie smiled at him.

'Put your instruments away and go,' he said.

'Why?' said Eddie. 'This isn't private property and school is finished. And by the way, who are you again?'

The kids laughed. Surely the man would get angry, but he didn't. Instead, he dropped his voice.

'The German police don't like crowds like this, you know that, especially in front of public buildings like this one. They don't need any excuses these days.'

Charlie wondered what Eddie would say and was surprised when he just nodded and opened up his sax case. It seemed to satisfy the man, though and he started walking away. The kids booed after him then turned their attention back to the boys, pleading them to keep playing. Charlie wanted to, but Eddie said, 'We'll be playing some shows soon. Come and see us play.'

The kids drifted away. A few said thanks. Charlie heard a boy whistling 'Honeysuckle Rose' as he walked towards the nearby main street. He loved the idea that he had put that tune in the kid's head. The idea that he had just played music for an audience made him feel almost dizzy. Nothing he did ever worked. He couldn't read or write but he could play guitar.

'So, we're playing some shows soon?' he said to Eddie.

The other boy laughed and lit a cigarette. It was almost dark and had grown colder. Only a few kids remained in front of the theatre. Charlie put down his guitar and took out his gloves.

'I've been playing on the street up at the flea market,' said Eddie. 'It's hard work on my own. If you came, it would be like a band. Where'd you learn to play like that?'

'Just listening to records and playing along, I guess,' said Charlie.

'That's what I do with the sax, but it doesn't sound like that!'

'Well,' said Charlie. 'I sort of picture the guitarist's fingers on the fretboard.'

Eddie looked at him curiously and shook his head.

'I really don't know how you do that.'

Three figures were approaching. One of them was the bully from the theatre and Charlie's heart sank. The boy's two friends were pretty big, too. Charlie looked at Eddie who was also watching them approach. They didn't stand a chance against these three. The bully stopped walking and glared at Eddie.

'You were being a real mouthpiece in there, Eduoard,' said the boy. 'You better be careful. The Germans don't like Americans much.'

Eddie put his index finger under his nose, imitating Hitler's moustache, and saluted the boy in the Nazi-style with the other hand. The boy looked at his friends and sighed.

'I think it's haircut time for the Zazous,' he said.

The Loyal Youth were supposed to hold Zazous down and shave their heads if they found them. There were a lot of cartoons of this in the German newspapers, but

Charlie had heard that it was a myth and that most of the time, the Loyal Youth came away second best when they messed with Zazous. Charlie wondered now how Eddie knew this guy.

‘Rene,’ said Eddie. ‘We both know that you are not going to do anything like that. You’ve impressed your friends, now leave us alone.

Rene stepped forward and Eddie just glared at him. Charlie was impressed. Eddie wasn’t anywhere near as big as Rene but there wasn’t a trace of fear in that stare. Rene looked around, scanning for a way out, and Charlie knew he would back down. Bullies often got themselves into these messes. Charlie had seen it at school so many times. They started something they couldn’t finish then tried to get out of it. Eddie must have been able to see it too.

‘C’mon Rene,’ said Eddie, in a friendly voice. ‘I’ll let you win a swimming race sometime.’

‘You’ve never beaten me yet, Eduoard,’ said Rene, stepping back and sounding relieved. ‘You don’t have to let me win.’

‘Is this your friend, Rene?’ said one of the other Loyal Youth, clearly not satisfied by the lack of violence.

‘Of course not,’ snapped Rene. ‘But he goes to my school. He’s a joke. Not worth the trouble.’

‘What about the other one?’ said the other boy, looking at Charlie.

‘Just another loser. They’re not even real Zazous,’ said Rene. ‘Let’s go.’

They started to walk away, across the almost dark square. Rene was in front, followed by the two others.

‘Hey, Rene,’ called Eddie.

‘What?’ said the boy, stopping and turning around.

‘When this is all over, they’re going to hang you and your friends from the nearest lampposts.’

‘Yeah,’ said Rene. ‘We’ll see.’

‘Yeah,’ said Eddie. ‘I just want you to know something because we’re old swimming friends.’

‘Yes?’ said Rene.

‘I’ll pull the rope quickly so you don’t suffer too much.’

Eddie was outlined by the blue lamplight. So much anger, Charlie thought. Rene was about to say something but just walked away with his friends. Eddie smiled at Charlie.

‘Let’s jam again on Saturday. Is two okay? We can meet in St Michel at a café. I’ll write down the address.’

‘Okay,’ said Charlie. He’d have to get someone to read it to him.

Chapter Four

Charlie was going to get on the train but decided to walk instead. It was only a few stops and Maman wouldn't be home until much later. He picked up his guitar and started towards his neighbourhood.

Boulevarde St Michel was crowded with students and older people on their way home from work. It was getting cold and Charlie picked up his pace to keep warm. Across the street, there was a large group of German soldiers. They were drunk and singing a song in their own language. The faces of the passing locals were expressionless as they tried to ignore the singing. It was hard to remember that there'd been a time when the Germans weren't here, but that was almost three years ago now. Charlie was just starting high school then. Papa came to mind and, for the hundredth time that day, Charlie hoped that he was okay.

Later, when he arrived at Tremblay's, it was empty but there were voices in the back room.

'…part of it, there's no other choice. Think about it,' said someone.

'I will,' said Tremblay.

Charlie wondered what they were talking about it but had grown used to secrets and whispers in the occupied city. He scraped a chair against the floor to let them know he was there. The voices stopped suddenly and Tremblay's frowning face appeared from behind the curtains that led into the kitchen.

'Charlie!'

He walked out smiling and indicated that Charlie should sit down. Charlie heard the back door of the restaurant click shut.

'Your beautiful Maman is teaching tonight?'

'Yes,' said Charlie. 'She said that I could eat here.'

'You are always welcome, my friend,' said Tremblay.

He was a good guy, thought Charlie.

‘I’ll bring you some carrot soup and a much-coveted piece of bread,’ he told Charlie and disappeared back behind the curtain.

As Charlie waited, a woman came in and sat at another table. It was awkward, just the two of them. Charlie focused instead on the peeling wallpaper and the slightly stained tablecloths. Tremblay was always saying that the place needed work but there were no materials available.

Tremblay brought out the soup and sat down across the table.

‘And how was Charlie’s day?’

Charlie told him about the assembly at the Opera House. The older man shook his head.

‘A whole school day spent talking about a parade. And another for the parade itself, I suppose.’

‘Friday,’ said Charlie. ‘These fools,’ said Tremblay, looking around. ‘We should be able to destroy them. They are just paper tigers in fancy uniforms. They hold parades and put their hateful flags everywhere.’

The woman glanced at them. When she looked away again, Tremblay leaned forward and whispered, ‘You know, when they first arrived, they came into the city on motorcycles. Can you believe that they got lost? One soldier was surrounded in Montmartre by a group of Parisians. He started firing his pistol in the air until his friends found him. They are all cowards and clowns.’

Charlie nodded. He didn’t like the Germans but he tried not to let it consume him the way it did with so many people. He did hate the Loyal Youth, boys his age pretending to be like the Germans, roaming the city like wolves, looking for disloyal Zazous to beat up. The local police frightened Charlie a little, but his mother had told him that most of them hated the Germans and were trying their best to be uncooperative.

‘Do they ever come in here?’ asked Charlie.

‘They have,’ he said. ‘I just tell them we are out of everything they want. I think some of them work in that building on the corner. They might be Gestapo. I have to be careful.’

‘Yes, of course,’ said Charlie, as the musician came to mind. He dropped his voice to a whisper. ‘Hey, have you heard anything more about the musician?’

Tremblay shook his head slowly and looked around the restaurant.

‘Let’s not speak of it.’

Charlie shrugged and ate some more of his soup.

‘I met a kid like me today,’ he told Tremblay although he doubted the man would be interested. ‘A Zazou type who played saxophone. We played in front of the Opera House and people were dancing.’

Tremblay had a funny look on his face as he nodded.

‘Really?’ he said. ‘That’s great. What was his name?’

‘Eddie. Why?’

‘Just wondering. Does he go to your school?’

‘No, I think he might go to that Lycee near the Sorbonne.’

Charlie thought it was strange that Tremblay was asking these questions but put it down to boredom. Despite a foreign army occupying the city, most days nothing much happened.

When Charlie finished his soup, he said goodbye and made his way back to his building. He looked up and down Rue Broca as he got his keys out, but the street was empty. The concierge did not look up as he passed by.

His mother wasn’t home, so he made a cup of tea and got out his guitar. He started to play the songs that he and Eddie had played. He worked out better chord shapes for ‘Don’t Get Around Much Anymore’ so that he could really play the pompe, the pulsing down strokes favoured by the Roma musicians, like Django. Charlie had never seen him play but he had a few of his records and he had seen Roma street musicians at the flea market in Saint Ouen.

Django's jazz didn't sound like Benny or The Duke. It was fast and there was something sort of French about it. The Roma players themselves wore large black Italian hats and dark suits. They played so effortlessly, music pouring out of them like a story they were desperate to tell you before they forgot it. What would it be like to see Charlie Christian play or any of the American players? Now that the Germans were at war with America as well, it was hard enough just buying jazz records, let alone seeing a real American jazz band. Some friends said that local jazz wasn't the real thing, and that Charlie would never be a famous musician because he wasn't American. He didn't understand that at all. Django was famous all over the world and he would be too.

Chapter Five

The day before the parade, Charlie woke up with the familiar feeling of school-day dread. Of course, there were more important things to worry about now that the city was occupied, plus Papa was in a prison camp somewhere. But still, nothing could stop that little flutter in his chest when Charlie realised it was a school day.

He was seven or eight when he realised that the other kids had begun to read, and he hadn't. Numbers weren't any easier. He still had no idea how to add or subtract. A teacher had told him once that music was all about mathematics. He supposed that was true and he had learned to read music although it was very difficult. Most of the time he just memorised a song. It was easier.

At first, his parents told him that it was just a matter of time and that he would catch up with the other kids. When that didn't happen, Maman began to spend time with him after school trying to teach him to read. Then they went to see a man at the university who had written a book about kids who found reading difficult. The man asked Charlie a lot of questions and gave him reading and numbers work to do. They went back a few days later and the man spoke to Maman while Charlie waited in the large hallway, watching university students walk by. He was ten years old then and the war was still a couple of years away. Maman came out of the room wiping her eyes but wouldn't tell him why.

A few days later, Papa took him to a music store on one of the quays. He told the owner that they wanted a guitar. Charlie loved music but had never thought about playing an instrument. He would have preferred a Meccano set if his father was buying presents, but a guitar was purchased, and Charlie started lessons the following week with a woman who lived a few blocks away.

Maman told him later that the man at the university had recommended that he study the piano but that she and his father couldn't afford to buy one, so they decided to start him on guitar instead. The teacher was a woman who had recently left Germany. Her name was Madame Benjamin and she had once studied guitar in Spain with Segovia.

She told Maman and Papa she'd been a bit dubious when she realised that Charlie couldn't read or write but had been startled by the quick progress he had made.

'This boy has something special,' she said. 'He has an ear for music, a special ear.'

Afterwards, Papa always referred to him as 'Ear 'or 'The Ear' but both of his parents seemed happy for him.

Madame Benjamin, with some assistance from Papa, escaped to Spain when the war began. The last they heard, she was safe in New York. She sent Charlie a newspaper advertisement for Gibson guitars that he pasted up beside his bed and a small playbill for a Benny Goodman concert at Town Hall that he still carried in his wallet. She had never liked jazz much and had sighed loudly when, at 12, he had discovered that it was much more fun to play on the guitar than the classical pieces they had been learning. But she didn't discourage him and even helped him to transcribe a complicated Lester Young sax solo for guitar.

Unfortunately, nothing much changed at school for Charlie. When he reached high school, he was excited that music was on the curriculum. Finally, a subject he might actually be good at. On the first day, the teacher had told him that he must play trumpet, not guitar, but he had a go and it sounded okay. But then they were then given a written assignment about music that he couldn't do. He was taken out of music and put in a class with other kids who couldn't read. His parents tried everything to get him back in the music class, but the headmaster stood firm.

One of his new classes was metalwork. On one of the first days, he scorched his left hand while welding. It frightened him so much, the idea that he would not be able to play guitar, that he simply refused to go back to that class. The headmaster expelled him, and he didn't go to school for the rest of the year.

What he did do was play guitar. All day, he listened to records and the radio and played along. At the end of the year, his parents bought him a new guitar on the condition that he went back to school. They found one nearby, near the Pantheon, that had a reputation for dealing with 'different sorts of kids'. It wasn't great but he began to make friends there. The idea was that when he was old enough to go to the Lycée section of the school, he would instead attend a technical college.

Then the war started and nobody, not the teachers, his parents or anyone else, cared whether he was doing any schoolwork. Nothing was ever said about the technical college and he simply continued to attend school with his classmates.

It didn't stop the sinking feeling in the morning, though. He still had to go to a place where everyone else could follow what was going on while he looked out the window or made up songs in his head. His classmates thought he was weird or dumb or crazy. He was now old enough to leave school if he wanted to, but he'd probably end up in a work camp or worse, conscripted into some kind of junior militia.

He pulled on his baggy pants and tucked in his white shirt, noticing that his pants were loose again. The wartime diet of soup and more soup meant that he had lost a lot of weight while at the same time shooting up in height. He ran his finger across his top lip, hoping that there had been some progress on the Clark Gable moustache he was trying to grow. The Zazous on the terraces in the city all had them and Charlie desperately wanted one too. So far, there was only what Maman called 'peach fuzz' and it didn't look that great.

He slicked back his hair, which was getting so long A stubborn bit fell into his eyes.. His checked 'Canadian' jacket reached almost halfway to his knees but not so far that you couldn't see the chain that hung down on one side. His shoes were large, heavy brogues that he had bought from a guy on the kerb in the northern flea market. They hurt his feet, but they looked great. 'Pure Zazou,' he said to himself.

His first class that day was mathematics. The teacher wasn't there again so someone else, a civics teacher that Charlie vaguely recognised, took the class instead. The teacher was reading an announcement about the parade when Charlie noticed a boy called Pierre motioning to him from three desks away. Pierre looked like a Loyal Youth member. He had mostly left Charlie alone until now. Pierre, Charlie realised, was making snipping motions with his fingers.

'Ready for your haircut, Zazou? You're gonna get one at the parade,' he hissed.

The class went silent and the teacher stopped reading.

'Why?' asked Charlie. 'Is there a float for barbers?'

‘You’ll find out. Expect a good beating too.’

‘Excuse me,’ said the teacher to Pierre. ‘Stand up.’

Pierre rose slowly, making sure his chair scraped the wooden floor. He stood with his head cocked at the teacher.

‘You do not threaten other students here. Is that clear?’

‘Yes, comrade,’ said Pierre, dropping his voice for the second word.

‘What was that?’ said the teacher.

‘I said yes comrade,’ shouted Pierre. ‘You teachers are all communists, aren’t you?’

‘How dare you! You will leave the room at once and report to the headmaster’s office.’

Pierre kicked his chair backwards and began to walk towards the teacher’s desk. He was a big kid. What would he do?. The teacher was a small man, but he stood up as Pierre reached his desk and said, ‘I learned a thing or two in the trenches. Would you like to find out what a real soldier is capable of?’

Pierre stood for a moment but then moved away towards the exit.

‘You’re a traitor,’ he screamed at the teacher, before walking out and slamming the door.

The teacher sat down, crossed his arms on the desk and put his head down. No one moved. Some kids were shaking their heads at Charlie as though it was his fault. He looked down at the blank sheet of paper in his notebook and waited for class to end.

He told Maman and Tremblay the story that night while they were eating dinner in the café. Tremblay shook his head and said that nowhere in the city was a refuge from politics, not even school. His mother laughed ruefully.

‘They are political places at the best of times but now it’s all out in the open. Teachers are being turned in by their students, students are being turned in by teachers.’

Tremblay took away the dishes and reappeared with a bottle of wine and three glasses. He poured a little less into Charlie's glass and winked at Maman as always. They sipped their wine quietly. Only the sound of the pipes clanking in the building and the occasional voice could be heard. Charlie looked out into the dark street, remembering the musician.

'I'm not going to the parade,' he said.

Maman looked at him. Tremblay went to say something but stopped himself, waiting for her to speak.

'If the teachers take attendance,' she said, 'your absence will be noted.'

'I don't care,' said Charlie.

Maman studied him. She leaned towards him and lowered her voice.

'I don't want you to go. I don't want anyone to go, but I don't want you to be in any danger either.'

'It might be more dangerous for him there in those clothes,' said Tremblay.

His mother looked around the restaurant. An old woman sat eating her soup in the corner but otherwise it was empty.

'To the parade we will have when we have driven them back to their own miserable country,' Maman whispered, raising her glass.

Charlie sipped the wine and imagined a time without the Germans. He could barely picture it. The Occupation was a heavy burden that all of the residents were trying desperately to carry. He imagined everyone floating around and smiling at each other. It was a ridiculous image, he knew, but it always came to him when he thought about the end.

In the morning, it was pouring rain. Charlie cheered as large raindrops struck the living room window. He hoped the rain would wash away their stupid parade forever. Maman had already left and the apartment felt cold and damp. He pulled Papa's old woollen jumper over his pyjama top and turned on the radio. Moving the dial slowly, he was able to pick the faint then stronger signal from the BBC. He couldn't understand what the commentator was saying but the talk soon gave way to music.

It sounded like the house band. They were playing Benny Goodman's 'Stompin at the Savoy'. It was okay but a bit stilted. Charlie grabbed his guitar and found the right key to play along. He planned to stay home and practice all day. He imagined himself in this band. They needed to swing harder – anyone could hear it. They sounded like human metronomes. The drummer was keeping time but was a long way from Gene Krupa. The trumpet player wasn't bad, and Charlie could hear him stretching out a bit. He wondered if the bandleader was shaking his head at him.

The music ended and there was some kind of news break that Charlie couldn't follow. When the music returned, it was classical. He turned off the radio and ate some bread and honey that his mother had left out for him, daydreaming about playing with a band.

A knock on the door brought him back to the cold apartment. He stood up and walked over to the door.

'Who is it?' he asked before starting to unlock it.

'Message for Charlie Martin.'

He opened the door and found a very wet boy about his age holding a damp envelope.

'Thanks,' said Charlie, taking it.

The boy shrugged and started to walk away.

'Wait,' said Charlie. 'I lost my glasses. Can you read it for me?'

Charlie always used this line. The boy turned around and came back. Charlie slit the envelope with his finger and withdrew a small piece of paper. He handed it to the boy who flicked it open.

'Hi Charlie, if you aren't at the parade today, could you come to my place at about 1? Thanks, Jean.'

Papa Jean, thought Charlie.

'Tell him I'll be there,' said Charlie.

‘Like he doesn’t know you’ll be there. C’mon pal. This is Papa Jean we’re talking about.’

Charlie smiled and waved goodbye to the boy as he walked away. Papa Jean had summoned him. It was time to get dressed.

Papa Jean owned a bar near Place Pigalle. It was surrounded by other similar places but was popular with German soldiers and locals alike. Bands played on a large stage that overlooked a dance floor. It had a certain reputation, as Tremblay once said. Information was exchanged and deals were made in the dark booths there.

Papa Jean was from Haiti. He was extraordinarily tall and powerfully built. There were, of course, many rumours about him. The long scar running from his left eye to his mouth didn’t help. Some people said that he was a former pirate; some said that he had been in the Foreign Legion; some said that he’d fought in Ethiopia against the Italians. Naturally, everyone agreed that he’d killed a few people in his time.

Charlie met him through Tremblay a few months ago. When it started to get cold, Maman had worn her coat to a government office to get some documents stamped. She’d taken it off in the stuffy waiting room and it had been stolen from right beside her while she was reading. Coats, warm ones, weren’t easy to find with the Germans in charge. A woman who lived on Rue Broca had offered to make her a new one but would need material, something else that was tricky to acquire.

Tremblay gave Charlie an address on the north side of the city and told him to ask for Jean. The neighbourhood was crowded with German soldiers, but Charlie found Jean’s bar and was told to go around to a side door in the laneway.

When he knocked on the door, he was surprised to find it opened by a young woman not much older than himself. She asked him what he wanted, and he couldn’t answer. She looked like a movie star. The appearance of the large Haitian man behind her did little to bring him out of the spell.

‘I see you met Monique,’ said the man. ‘My name is Jean. How can I help you?’

Charlie watched Monique shrug and walk away. He explained the coat situation to Jean who invited him in and gave him a cup of coffee. The back of the bar turned out

to be a large warehouse filled with crates. Near the door was a makeshift living room with a large slightly worn purple couch and several chairs around an old coffee table.

Jean smiled at Charlie as he sipped his coffee. He had enormous hands with rings on several fingers. He was wearing dungarees and a floral shirt with tight sleeves that strained against his biceps. Charlie smiled back.

'What kind of world do we live in where someone would steal another's coat in the winter?' he asked.

'Desperate times, I guess,' said Charlie.

'Call for desperate measures,' said Jean, looking intently at Charlie. 'Do you believe that?'

'Yes, well no, not if it means stealing a coat but I suppose that sometimes…'

'Are these desperate times, Charlie?'

'I guess they are,' said Charlie, a bit cautiously.

'I should say they are!' boomed Jean, smiling. 'My own country, Haiti, was so inspired by the ideas of this country that we asked them to leave so we could be truly free. I came here expecting a place of freedom only to have it overrun by these beer-swilling buffoons in fancy uniforms!'

It wasn't often that someone talked like this aloud. Everyone thought these things, but few people said them in anything louder than a whisper, and then only to people they trusted.

'Don't worry, Charlie. We can talk here. But let's find some material to keep your maman warm.'

Charlie followed Jean through the warehouse to a large table among the high shelves. On it, there were piles of fabric. Jean filed through the layers until he found something that he pulled out from under the pile. It was navy blue, which his mother had requested, and looked very warm. Charlie asked how much it cost and Jean named a reasonable figure. It was so reasonable that Charlie was suspicious.

'It's real wool, isn't it?'

‘From a real sheep!’ said Jean. ‘Don’t worry, Charlie!’

While Jean was folding the fabric, Charlie noticed another piece. This one was chequered with black, red, white and orange squares. It looked like the jackets the older Zazous wore on the Champs-Elysees on Saturdays. He was wearing Papa’s old suit jacket. It was okay but a checked jacket would make his look. Unfortunately, he didn’t have the money. Jean must have noticed him looking at it.

‘For a Zazou, this is mandatory,’ he said.

‘Yes,’ said Charlie.

‘Most of the older ones have a bit of money. I sell a lot of clothes and records to them.’

‘Yes,’ said Charlie, still looking at the fabric, wondering how he could buy it.

‘Take it, Charlie,’ said Jean.

‘No, I couldn’t. I can’t afford it.’

‘What if you buy now, pay later?’

‘That’s really kind, sir,’ said Charlie. ‘But I would never have the money.’

Jean looked at him for a moment.

‘How well do you know the city?’

‘I’ve been riding my bike all over it since I was a kid,’ said Charlie, sensing an offer was coming.

‘What if you pay me for the wool, take the Zazou fabric and keep in touch. I might ask you to do something for me sometime.’

‘But,’ said Charlie. ‘Would it be against the law?’

Jean frowned.

‘Are you suggesting that I am involved in criminal activities?’

Charlie shook his head, terrified he had offended the man.

‘No, no, it’s just…’

Jean patted him on the shoulder and smiled before lifting the two fabrics and walking back towards the door.

Charlie paid him and started to leave. He turned to Jean.

‘Who was, you know, that, you know?’

‘Girl?’ said Jean, smiling. ‘Monique. Yes, a great beauty. She works at the bar.’

‘Okay,’ said Charlie. ‘Just wondering.’

Maman had her coat made and somehow talked the seamstress into making one for Charlie out of the checked material for half the price. Charlie kept expecting to hear from Jean but didn’t, almost to his disappointment. He definitely wanted to see Monique again, and was curious about Jean. Tremblay had told him a few things when pressed but seemed nervous talking about the man.

And now this morning’s message. Charlie put on his baggiest Zazou pants, a white shirt, his checkered jacket, and some two-tone brogues. His hair was combed up high but hung over his eyes at the front. If he was going to see that girl again, he wanted to look good. He put on Count Basie’s ‘Jumpin at the Woodside’ and looked at himself in the mirror. Hey Zazou!

The tyres of his bike slipped on the wet cobblestones as he rode to Jean’s place. On the pavement, people passed with grim expressions. They clearly didn’t want to go to the parade but felt that they couldn’t risk it. That was always the problem, thought Charlie. Fear. No one wants to go, but everyone does because they’re scared of being the one who didn’t. It had to be everyone who stayed home or no one. And who wanted to be the person setting themselves apart, organising it so that no one went? Charlie had seen enough bodies on the streets, people who *had* set themselves apart, to understand why people went. He was scared too, but he was more scared of going to the parade. It was always fear.

Some people said that the parade was the last desperate attempt of the Germans to hold on to Paris. The new commander was known to be a monster. Why send a monster if everything was going as well as the local newspapers said? This man had already used terror and torture to stop the resistance in two or three other cities.

He was someone, they said, who knew how to destroy a movement. People were so frightened of him, but Charlie saw it differently. The Resistance is a problem that the Germans need to solve. It must be going badly. There was hope, he thought.

By the time he reached Montmartre, the crowd are thinned and the hilly streets were quiet, except for the sound of his tyres on the wet cobbles as he turned corners and stood to pedal up the steep hills.

Not too far from Jean's place, he turned a corner and came face to face with a German army truck. It was just like the one from the other night. His heart began to pound as he slowed down, hoping to simply pass it.

A soldier was standing on the pavement, looking at a map, while two others sat inside the cab. Charlie didn't want to attract their attention. He pointed his bike at the narrow gap between the truck and the doorway of a small shop.

'Hey, kid,' said the soldier with the map. 'Stop.'

Charlie braked, his hands shaking, and said the first thing that came into his head.

'I'm picking up my little brother. To go to the parade.'

The soldier shook his head and said something in German to the other men. The passenger door opened and a younger soldier stepped out. Charlie felt sick. Should he just take off as fast as he could? The young soldier smiled at him.

'We have a problem,' he said in almost perfect French.

'I'm going to the parade, I'm just…'

'We're lost,' said the soldier.

You sure are, thought Charlie, but didn't say it.

'My friend here went to visit a local girl before the parade. But now we are going around in circles in these streets trying to find our way out.'

He had virtually no accent and spoke softly. He was looking at Charlie intently.

Charlie thought for a second.

‘You need to head downhill. There’s no other way to explain it. Just keep taking the road that goes down and you’ll get where you’re going.’

‘A topographical solution!’ said the soldier. ‘Thank you, my friend.’

He put out his hand, but Charlie stood still.

‘It’s okay,’ said the soldier, looking slightly hurt.

Charlie watched him get back into the cab and say something to the other men. The engine started and the truck moved forward slightly. The passenger window came down and the young soldier leaned out and waved.

‘Thanks again, Swing Kid!’

The truck pulled off, noisily changing gears as it headed away from Charlie. He thought about the soldier. *Swing Kid*. Was it Tremblay who told him there were Zazous in Germany called Swing Kids and that many of them were sent to the camps? Imagine how they’d be treated there. But the tone of that soldier’s voice: he sounded almost happy that Charlie was a Zazou. It was all so complicated sometimes.

Everyone had this problem. Some of the soldiers were bullies who treated the locals badly. It was easy to deal with them, you just ignored them as much as possible. The friendly ones were the problem. Once, when Charlie and his mother were ice-skating, her hat had come off. She had gone to pick it up, but a German army officer had got to it first. He had smiled and offered it to her. She snatched it out of his hand and skated away, leaving him standing, stunned on the ice. Charlie had never seen his mother behave like this and didn’t know what to say. They kept skating but his mother had gone quiet and said little as they went around the rink.

Charlie reached the main square and spotted Jean’s bar. It looked closed.

In the lane, Charlie leaned his bike against the side of the building and knocked on the rough wooden door. The young woman, Monique, opened the door and his heart stilled, but she was frowning at him.

‘What do you want?’ She was so beautiful.

‘Is Jean around?’

‘Who’s asking?’ she said suspiciously.

Charlie blushed and tried not to look at her. She didn’t remember him.

‘I’m Charlie, he told me to come by.’

She shut the door and Charlie stood rocking back and forth on his heels. The door opened again, and it was Papa Jean, holding a beer bottle.

‘Charlie!’ he said. ‘Come in, my friend!’

Charlie walked into the warehouse and Jean pointed to the couch. Charlie sat down and was presented with a Coca-Cola. He couldn’t believe it. Nobody had seen a bottle like this for years. The drink fizzed in his mouth and he closed his eyes.

‘See, Michel,’ said Jean, causing Charlie to reopen his eyes. ‘This is a man who enjoys a drink.’

A man stepped out from behind a large crate and Charlie nearly choked on his Coke when he saw who it was.

‘Michel Dupont,’ said the man holding out his hand to Charlie.

‘Charlie Martin. We’ve already met. Remember? That night when…’

‘Yes, of course,’ said Michel in a tone that suggested there was no need to revisit that evening.

Monique stepped back into the room.

‘I think you’ll remember Monique,’ said Jean.

Charlie smiled and waved. She nodded as though she was already bored by everything about him.

‘Thank you for coming, Charlie,’ said Jean. ‘We’ll talk business later. Relax and tell me about school.’

‘I don’t really like school,’ said Charlie.

‘Well, we won’t speak of it then. Another Coke?’

Charlie smiled and nodded.

He didn't know what else Jean did besides run the bar and sell things on the black market, but he looked like he might do anything. His Haitian accent was still strong though he had lived in the city for more than twenty years. Tremblay usually turned an imaginary key on his mouth when Charlie pressed for more information about the man.

'Are you busy today, Charlie?' asked Jean, handing him the Coke.

'Got lots of time,' said Charlie.

'You might miss the big parade, though,' said Michel, laughing.

'You might too,' said Charlie.

'Ah well,' said Michel. 'I'll see them all in hell one day.'

'Michel is a musician, Charlie,' said Jean. 'He has been out in the country but is now living in Paris.'

Out in the country. Charlie wondered if Michel was part of the resistance.

'You play bass. I remember,' said Charlie

'Yes, I played with Sidney Bechet once.'

'Wow!' said Charlie.

'But just once!' said Michel, laughing. 'I am okay, but Bechet has played with the best. You are a musician, too, I seem to remember.'

Charlie looked nervously at the girl reading a magazine in a large overstuffed chair.

'Sort of, yes, but I'm not much, you know.'

Papa Jean got up and walked out, returning a minute later with a guitar case and a large bass on a cart. Charlie sensed that this had been planned. It felt like an audition but for what, he didn't know.

'There will be music!' he said, 'And I will play a little piano.'

He handed Charlie the guitar case and pulled a dusty sheet from a small upright piano in the corner of the room. Michel played a quick run on the bass and nodded approvingly.

‘This is a very nice instrument, Jean. Where did you get it? Perhaps I don’t want to know,’ said Michel.

‘Perhaps not. And Charlie? Will you be able to play this guitar? I hope so because a German officer is going to give me a lot of money for it if he ever comes back to claim it.’

Charlie felt like a cat near the stove. It was an American guitar, a Gibson, the one Charlie Christian used. He shook his head in disbelief as he lifted it out of the case. It looked brand new.

Michel played a basic pattern and Charlie joined in with some chords. As Jean joined in on piano, the music morphed into something like a basic Louis Armstrong blues number. The Gibson was amazing – the strings were like silk and all of the notes rang out as he played.

‘A jam session!’ cried Jean. ‘We should play in the bar.’

Jean began to play ‘After You’ve Gone’ a little hesitantly and Charlie picked up the tempo on guitar. He even played a short solo over Michel’s bass notes. It sounded pretty good. Charlie noticed that Monique was watching him closely with much more interest. He wasn’t sure why. Maybe she thought he was showing off.

They played a few more songs until Michel announced that he had to leave. Jean led him to the door and they conferred in hushed tones. So many secrets, thought Charlie.

After Michel left, Charlie reluctantly returned the Gibson to its case and handed it back to Jean. Monique stood up and smoothed down the front of her dress.

‘Bye, Charlie. Come again some time,’ she said, before heading towards the bar.

Charlie sat stunned. Papa Jean watched him, amused.

‘There are two kinds of men, Charlie. Musicians and everybody else. Women know this fact and most of them prefer the first group.’

Charlie blushed and stood up awkwardly.

‘I should go, I guess, Jean. Thanks for letting me play that guitar. And for the Cokes.’

‘That’s okay, my friend, but I didn’t just ask you to come for a jam session.’

‘Oh right, said Charlie. This was when he would start to pay off the jacket.

‘Charlie, I wonder if I could ask you a favour.’

‘Sure,’ said Charlie. ‘Do you want me to deliver something?’

‘Yes, but this is a very sensitive and important job. It’s a small business venture but the person I have been using up until now has not been, I have discovered, entirely honest with me. So, I have a vacancy. We can discuss the terms later, but I will give you some money today. Are you interested? You are most welcome to refuse.’

‘But isn’t this to pay off the coat?’ Charlie asked. ‘You don’t have to pay me.’

‘The coat is yours now. I want to pay you for this because it is important, and I want you to know that it is important.’

‘But, um, will I get into trouble if I get caught?’ What was he getting into?

‘Charlie, my friend, I would never put you in any danger. This is, we might say, something personal though perhaps not entirely in line with the Occupation policy. These are just some documents…’

‘I can’t read,’ said Charlie, feeling foolish.

‘I beg your pardon?’ said Jean.

‘I have a problem – I can’t really read so I guess I’m no use.’

Jean was silent, probably wondering how he’d ended up with such a hopeless kid, but then he smiled.

‘Well, this might work rather well. Surely, you can’t get into trouble for carrying documents that you can’t read,’ he said.

‘I guess not.’ He still had the job.

‘Now, let’s see your bicycle.’

They walked outside and Jean pulled one of the worn rubber grips from the handlebars.

‘Wait,’ he said.

He returned with a leather pair that he put on Charlie’s bike. The grips were tight, but Charlie could get them on and off by twisting them the way Jean showed him. Jean took a black tube out of his pocket and screwed it into one of the grips.’

‘The Vichy police always pull off the grips and look inside the handlebars. They never look inside the grips themselves,’ Jean said.

Charlie‘s heart raced at the mention of police.

‘Charlie, you strike me as someone I can trust and I can be very generous with people I trust,’ he said, as though he sensed Charlie’s sudden doubt.

‘I’d like to do it,’ said Charlie, overwhelmed at the idea of money and records that he could buy with it … the Gibson he had played.

‘This is the address,’ Jean said, taking out a pad of paper and starting to write. Charlie sighed and shook his head.

‘Will you remember if I tell you?’

‘Have you been there?’ asked Charlie.

‘Yes, why?’

‘Describe how to get there from the river.’

While Jean told him, Charlie pictured the area and the streets. It was like a film.

‘It’s the third building in from the main street. It has a large black gate,’ said Jean.

‘I know it,’ he said and Jean looked surprised.

‘It’s the first door on the left when you reach the second floor.’

Charlie pictured himself walking up the stairs and turning left.

‘Got it.’

Charlie nodded and buttoned up his coat as Jean went back inside. Back on his bike, he rode downhill towards the Marais. The streets were still quiet, so the parade

was probably still going. The afternoon light was casting long shadows and Charlie wondered if he would get home in time for dinner. His mother wouldn't be at home that night but Tremblay would expect him at the usual time. He sped up, taking the corners quickly and riding on the pavement to avoid cobblestones.

By the time he reached Rue Beauburg, people were walking in large groups. The parade must be over. Charlie decided to use back lanes to get to the place Jean had described. As he turned off the busy street, someone yelled, 'Traitor! Zazou!'

Charlie glanced back. A bunch of Loyal Youth in uniform. He pedalled as hard as he could, taking as many corners into small streets as possible. When he stopped, he was panting so hard his chest hurt. It was quiet, though. He cautiously rode out of a lane and looked both ways. There was only an old man walking away from him.

He was on the street over from where Maman's student lived. The shops were closed, some of their windows smashed. There were yellow stars painted on the walls. He wondered if the person he was supposed to find would be there.

He crossed Rue De Roisiers to get to the apartment building. He found a laneway near Victor Hugo's house and rode along the cobblestones until he reached the large street. People were still coming back from the parade, heading towards the eastern part of the city. They didn't look happy, thought Charlie, remembering how much he had loved parades when he was little.

Charlie found the place as he'd seen it in his mind. He leaned his bike against a gate, just beyond where the concierge could see him. He looked around before removing the grip from the handlebars and unscrewing the tube. As instructed, he popped it into the small pocket inside his large jacket.

The concierge was an older woman who eyed him with irritation and suspicion. He mumbled something about visiting his uncle and she waved him up without saying anything. It was an old building, a bit like Charlie's, and the staircase was made of iron. On the second floor, he turned left and knocked. The door opened slightly. He could see part of a man's face. The door was suddenly wide open and there was a large knife at Charlie's throat.

'Who are you?' the man hissed.

He wasn't old but his face was lined. His shirt was unbuttoned, and it looked as though he hadn't shaved for days. His eyes were watery and speckled blue. Charlie breathed out, aware of the knife.

'Jean sent me.'

The knife dropped down slightly.

'Give it to me,' the man said.

Charlie handed over the tube and was given another in return. Then, the man just shoved him hard on the chest before slamming the door. Charlie, stood shaking on the landing. The concierge was coming up the stairs, waving a finger at him.

'I know what you are,' she said.

Charlie stepped back to let her pass, then ran down the stairs and to his bike. Once he had the tube secured in the grip, he got on and started riding as fast as could towards Jean's place.

He came home that night with more money than he had ever had in his life, even after spending some of it on a large pastry and a record from under the counter at a radio shop along the river. It was a Benny Goodman song, 'Flying Home', with a scorching solo by Charlie Christian. It wasn't particularly fast, but he found it difficult to picture what the guitarist was doing. It was blues, and he could make out some of the runs, but the stabbing minor notes were something else.

After a couple of hours, he could play a few bars slowly. He knew the notes and could see it all clearly in his head. If only his fingers would do what they were supposed to do.

After he had stopped taking lessons with Madame Benjamin, a friend of Papa's showed him some more complex jazz chords and a few tricky riffs. He also brought a record by the Nat King Cole Trio. It featured Oscar Moore on guitar. Charlie listened to the record so much that his parents finally hid it. An older kid at school had told him that Moore was only copying Charlie Christian. Charlie soon discovered that Christian was Benny Goodman's guitarist. Soon after, Charles became Charlie, and he rarely did anything but play guitar.

Papa's friend dropped by again about six months later and nearly choked on his wine when he heard Charlie play.

'He's better than me now!' said the man, shaking his head as Charlie played.

From then on, he played whenever he could and he was getting better. This was not what happened at school where he would no sooner learn something then forget it immediately. He lost count of how many times he had been taught to multiply. The guitar was different – there was progress and some return on his hard work. Before guitar, Charlie felt like everyone thought he was dumb. It was strange to suddenly be good at something. It didn't have any effect on his reading but the kids at school loved to hear him play. The 'dumb kid, Charles' became 'Charlie who plays guitar'.

But he was still failing at school and he could hear his parents arguing about it at night.

'But what will he do?' Papa would ask.

'He can use his hands,' Maman would answer.

'But without sums or reading, he will only be able to do the work for other people.'

It took a couple of hours, but he could play the first few bars of the 'Flying Home' solo almost note for note. He put the guitar down and went to bed, falling asleep listening to the BBC, turned way down so no one would hear it. He didn't understand much of the English but it was nice to think about a place where the Germans weren't in charge.

It was almost two am when he heard the door click close. He sat up, imagining the men who shot the musician creeping in to kill him. Then he heard the familiar sound of Maman sighing as she took off her shoes and he let himself breathe. He got up and peered out of the curtain. She had turned on the kitchen light and was eating something. Where had she been so late? She looked tired.

'Hi Maman,' he said.

'Charlie!' She put her hand to her chest. 'You scared me! You should be asleep.'

'I woke up when you came in. Where have you been?'

‘I was with my student. She had some bad news, so I sat up with her.’

‘But the curfew,’ said Charlie. ‘You could have been arrested.’

She looked at him, in surprise.

‘Nobody is getting arrested, Charlie. I know how to get home without being seen.’

‘I was worried.’

‘I know. I’m sorry, Charlie. She was just so upset. I should have come home hours ago. Don’t worry though. Now go to sleep, you must be tired after such an exciting parade.’

‘I didn’t go,’ he said, but she taking out the leftover soup.

Charlie fell asleep with ‘Flying Home’ in his head. He was meeting Eddie tomorrow. Now he had some money to spend if he wanted to have a coffee or a pastry. He started to think about having a coffee and a pastry with Monique. He wondered what his mother would say if he told her that he had a girlfriend who worked in a bar in Pigalle.

Chapter Six

Where the hell was this café of Eddie's? Charlie took out the scrap of paper he'd been given: *C-A-F-*. Charlie tried to sound it out the way he had been taught so many times. The letters had begun to move and change. It was pointless.

He wheeled his bike over to a small table in front of the fountains where a man was selling newspapers. He put his hand over everything except the name of the café and showed it to the man.

'Do you know this place?' he asked.

'Hmmm, Café Satchmo, hmmm, not sure. Hey, how about buying a newspaper, kid?'

'Sorry, can't read!' said Charlie, jumping on his bike.

As soon as the man had said the name, a small place came to mind. One with a picture of Louis playing trumpet on the sign. Yes, that would be the one and it was nearby. He couldn't remember ever passing it, but he must have, because the whole street was there in his mind. And there it was at the next corner.

Charlie parked his bike and pulled open the heavy wooden door under the sign. He immediately heard a sax. Eddie was sitting on a small stage playing 'Dinah'. Two people sat at the other end of the café, reading newspapers. Eddie smiled when he saw him but kept playing. Charlie sat beside Eddie and took out his guitar, tuning it as quickly as he could, then playing the pompe beat behind Eddie. The other boy started to play faster. It sounded good. He looked at the two newspaper readers and played a bit louder.

'Okay!' shouted Eddie, after they had played through it several times. 'Last time!'

They stopped. Eddie put down his guitar and stuck out his hand.

'Charlie, my man!'

Charlie told Eddie about 'Flying Home' and played what he could of it on guitar. Eddie had heard it on the BBC and began to play along. Charlie added some of the fills he had learned.

‘Wow, you can really play,’ said Eddie.

‘You’re not bad, yourself,’ said Charlie.

‘You’re better, I think.’

The played on and the owner of the café appeared and cheered. A few more people came in to listen. The boys ran through all of the jazz standards that they both knew and then started again at the beginning. By the time it got dark, Charlie's fingers were nearly bleeding. Then it was closing time, so they packed up their instruments and left.

‘Should we have something to eat?’ asked Eddie.

‘But where?’ said Charlie.

Food was a constant problem in the city under the occupation. Many shops and cafés had closed because the Germans were sending French produce to their own troops and citizens. Parisians had to settle for scraps. In particular, cheese was hard to find, and this was a city of cheese eaters. Charlie sometimes dreamed about cheese.

‘I’ll show you,’ he said.

Eddie had a bike too, so they rode across the river to the edge of the Marais where Charlie had been two days before. It seemed like a dream now. He thought about telling Eddie but decided that he would wait until he got to know him better.

They ate at a tiny restaurant run by an Italian man who had come to the city to escape the people who were now allies with the Germans. He made them pasta with a thin tomato sauce. It was a nice change from soup. Eddie asked for some cheese on top and the man laughed sadly.

‘We need to start a band,’ said Eddie while they were eating. He’d ordered a glass of wine and was sipping it at intervals while he gobbled up his food.

‘Might be hard to find people,’ said Charlie, thinking of Michel.

‘They’re around. We need a bass player, maybe some brass, a piano player maybe.’

Charlie laughed.

‘Why not a drummer and a vibes player?’ he said.

Eddie seemed to be giving this some thought.

‘I’m kidding,’ said Charlie. ‘We will never find a drummer who can swing.’

‘You can be percussion. That’s the pompe. Django doesn’t always play with a drummer.’

‘What kind of brass?’ asked Charlie, warming to the fantasy. ‘Trombone, maybe.’

‘Maybe a trumpet. I hear a trumpet.’

Charlie nodded.

‘Like Louis?’

‘Like Roy Eldridge.’

‘Okay,’ said Charlie. ‘I can hear it.’

‘I love Fletcher Henderson’s early stuff. That banjo pounding away while everyone solos over it. I want something like that but more like Django.’

Charlie chewed on his pasta and tried to imagine this band.

‘One time, I saw a group of Roma musicians at the market,’ said Charlie. ‘They had two guitars, a sax and a trumpet. It was great. The perfect combination.’

‘Yes, that’s it.’

‘Wait, and there was a violin. A girl played the violin.’

Eddie looked dubious.

‘I want to play jazz – violin’s not jazz. Yes, yes, Django has Stephane Grappelli but he’s one in a million.’

Charlie shrugged.

‘Let’s play the market together. Like I said, it’s fun,’ said Eddie.

‘How do the Roma feel about a gadjo sax player on their territory?’ said Charlie, smiling.

‘They don’t seem to care. They haven’t been playing as much up there. I guess they are trying to keep a low profile.’ said Eddie. ‘Anyway, let’s do it next Saturday.’

‘We’d have to practise.’

‘That will be our practice,’ said Eddie. ‘Which reminds me. Do you want to go to a jam tonight?’

Charlie’s eyes widened.

‘Where?’

‘Near Place Pigalle. It’s a Zazou party but it happens every weekend and they have a big jam onstage so people can dance.’

‘I’m not good enough,’ said Charlie, as the waiter took their plates away.

‘That’s nonsense. You think Django ever went around saying, I’m not good enough. You think Charlie Christian does? No way!’

‘But – I’

‘You’re coming, Charlie. It will be fun and it ends an hour before curfew so you’ll be home in lots of time.’

When Charlie paid for both of their meals, Eddie looked surprised but nodded in approval. They rode their bikes through the dark Saturday night of city’s north. A few people walked the streets with arms linked. The lack of cars and reliable electricity meant that people took to the streets on the weekend, wandering around, trading stories and complaints, or watching German soldiers and civilians drinking and dining in places they could no longer afford.

They were close to Papa Jean’s and it sounded like a band was playing. At the window, they stood up on their bikes to see in over the crowd. Charlie looked for Monique but couldn’t spot her.

‘I know the guy that owns this place,’ said Charlie.

Eddie looked surprised. ‘Really?’

‘Yeah.’

‘How do you know him?’

Charlie was silent and Eddie nodded. They listened to the musicians onstage playing an uninspired version of ‘Take The A Train’.

‘Terrible band,’ said Charlie, laughing.

‘You should tell your friend. Tell him to hire us.’

They got back on their bikes and rode a few blocks west. They pulled up in front of what looked like a deserted apartment building. Older Zazous were standing outside chatting. Charlie couldn’t believe how cool they looked. Their clothes were perfect. One was wearing a full zoot suit and his hair stood at least six inches off his head. He was holding an umbrella.

‘Join the jam, boys,’ he said, as they left their bikes and walked into the dark building. ‘No charge for musicians.’

Eddie smiled at Charlie as they came to a doorway that opened into a large hall with a dance floor. The band on stage was playing something that sounded like Benny Goodman’s ‘Sing Sing Sing’. It was pretty rough around the edges, but the dancers didn’t care. There were couples jiving and jitterbugging. Charlie couldn’t believe he wasn’t dreaming. There were Zazous everywhere, and girls!

‘C’mon,’ said Eddie, leading him through the dancers.

‘But don’t the police shut places like this down?’ said Charlie into Eddie’s ear.

‘Only if they can find them!’ he shouted back.

They put their cases down at the side of the stage and got their instruments out. There was a piano player, a bass player, a sax, a trumpet and a clarinet.

‘A guitarist! Thank God!’ shouted one of the sax players. ‘Tie this beat down brother!’

Eddie and Charlie sat down. Charlie tried to find the key, but Eddie was watching the piano player.

‘B-flat!’

Charlie looked around barely able to believe that he was on a stage with a band. They were still doing 'Sing Sing Sing' and he was able to start playing. It was loud and he was slamming his guitar pick down on the strings just to be heard above the roar. Eddie was smiling at him and playing along. Some of the dancers were clapping. Charlie wasn't sure why. He looked around.

'Needed you for the rhythm,' yelled the piano player to Charlie. 'Dancers are listening to you now.

The band would start on a song and it would take a few minutes for everyone to catch on. At first, Charlie thought that they had found their band, but it was soon obvious that most of the horn players were beginners. Just getting into the right key was a struggle, getting the rhythm down was impossible. Yet, between the piano player and Charlie, there was some kind of energy to the band and eventually, the songs came together. Once they did, they would play it until the dancers finally stopped dancing in exhaustion. Later, he was sure that they had played 'Stompin at the Savoy' for half an hour at least.

But Charlie didn't mind. He was exactly where he should be, playing guitar on the bandstand while people danced. The band wasn't any good and no one was listening to each other or even playing in time or in tune, but it didn't matter. It was the feeling of being up there with Eddie and the others who he hadn't even met yet. These were kids like him, brothers.

The trumpet player finally stopped the show at 10:30. Everyone in that room needed to be home before curfew. Eddie had told him that the parties often went all night but that there had been some raids and crackdowns in the last few weeks.

Charlie had never seen so many Zazous in one room. He could hardly believe there were so many in the city. The girls wore bright red lipstick, full short skirts and ankle socks. They stood in groups or with their boyfriends. A few had come up to talk to Eddie as they put their instruments away. One had asked about Charlie.

'That's Charlie Martin-o,' said Eddie. 'He's a guitar dynamo!'

They followed the crowd out the door and back into the street. The wind felt cold on Charlie's face after he had spent so long in the sweaty ballroom. He was hungry but he knew he had to get home quickly.

'Thanks, Eddie,' he said. 'That was great.'

'Next week, we play outside the market and come back here, maybe.'

'Sure,' said Charlie. 'I'll come to the café again.'

'See you there, buddy'

Charlie watched Eddie ride off on his bike, his sax case hanging on his back held by an improvised strap. Charlie got his guitar tied down and rode out along the cobblestones towards the river. When he reached Papa Jean's, he saw that the bar was still full. He would look to see if Monique was there. It would just be him casually glancing in on his way home from a gig. And he was!

A German soldier was chatting to a local woman on the street out front but they ignored Charlie as he looked in through the windows. He could see Jean at the bar, wearing a suit. The jazz band was playing a bland swing standard for the dancers. The tables in front of the stage were filled with German soldiers and police, mostly out of uniform but still recognisable by their haircuts and bearing. There seemed to be a lot of young local woman, but the men were almost all Germans. Charlie spotted Monique near the bar, lighting an officer's cigarette. She suddenly turned and locked eyes with Charlie. He felt ridiculous and could feel his cheeks reddening. She looked at him a bit sadly and waved with a weak smile. Charlie waved back as she turned to listen to something the soldier had said. He got on his bike and rode away.

The streets were crowded as people rushed home before curfew. Many were drunk and he had several near misses as people tumbled to the ground in front of him or veered close as he passed. He thought about Monique and wondered where her parents were and how she had come to work at Jean's bar. Surely, Papa Jean would protect her, but it still worried Charlie to think of her there with all of those German soldiers.

To save time, he rode across the bridge to the City Island in the middle of the Seine River. It was even busier, and he heard someone shout 'Zazou' as he passed Notre

Dame Cathedral. At St Michel on the left bank, the crowds around the fountain were too dense so he went down a small lane to one side. A large man who had been walking towards him stopped and blocked the way.

‘Gimme the bike, I need to get home.’

‘It’s my bike,’ said Charlie, backing up and hoping that he could turn around quickly.

‘Just gimme the bike,’ said the man, grabbing the handlebars. His eyes were made stupid by cheap wine.

Charlie could feel himself starting to panic.

‘My dad’s in a prison camp. We don’t have anything. Steal a bike from a German.’

The man looked at him blearily.

‘Your dad was a soldier?’

‘Is a soldier,’ said Charlie.

‘Sorry,’ said the man, letting go and stumbling away.

Charlie breathed out slowly. Bicycles were hard to get at the moment. He had been lucky.

His mother came into the apartment about two minutes after he arrived. Charlie was already in his pyjamas listening to the radio. She looked through the curtain and smiled at him. He wondered if he should tell her about his day. Maybe a few parts, but not too much, he decided. He fell asleep thinking about Monique’s face when she waved to him.

Chapter Seven

Maman told him, as she put on her coat and scarf, that she would return the next day.

'Where are you going?'

'To the country to tutor a woman. She has a visa for the United States and is leaving soon but speaks almost no English.'

'But why do you have to stay all night?'

'I might not make the curfew,' she said with a note of impatience.

'But…'

'Charlie, just eat at Tremblay's. I'll see you tomorrow.'

'Okay,' he said, looking away.

She had been looking tired lately. When he asked if anything was wrong, she had snapped at him. He wished that Papa would suddenly appear. He was supposedly waiting for processing in a prison camp. His mother had bribed a Vichy government official for information, and he had said that it could take a year or two. There had been reports of disease and death in the camps, but they had decided that no news was probably a good thing.

Charlie distracted himself from Maman's trip, imagining all of the things he could buy with the money Jean had given him, all the records, the new clothes, but deep down, knowing what he really wanted was a new guitar. He hid the money behind his bed and went to school. In class, when the teacher wasn't looking, he drew the Gibson he would buy when he'd saved enough.

After school, he rode straight home to practice the songs he and Eddie had played at the café and the dance. Eddie said that he wanted to play 'White Heat' by Jimmie Lunceford. Charlie didn't have the record, but he knew the song and thought he could work out a rhythm part. He sat on his bed and sang the melody while he played. He closed his eyes and imagined himself on a big bandstand playing with an American band in New York. Monique was there standing by the stage and Benny Goodman too,

pointing him out to Teddy Wilson and Lionel Hampton. The clunk of footsteps on the stairs interrupted his daydream and he stopped playing.

Whoever it was, they were on the landing now. There were three doors they might knock on. The man next door, Monsieur Bernard, never seemed to go out. He'd fought in the war, the first one, Maman had said. Whenever he saw Charlie, he shook his head and didn't seem very friendly. There was a family on the other side. Madame Levy had lived alone until her daughter and her daughter's baby had come to live with them. The daughter's husband had been taken away. The concierge told Maman that it was dangerous having them in the building. Maman had told the concierge that it would be dangerous for the concierge if anything happened to them.

The knock never came. Instead, Something was slipped under the door and he heard footsteps descending the stairs. On the floor was a note folded in half. Charlie picked it up knowing that he wouldn't be able to read it. Even by the usual standards, the message didn't make any sense, just a jumble of numbers and letters.

Charlie opened the door but no one was there. He ran down the stairs to the gate. The concierge was sitting behind the tiny window, smoking a cigarette and reading. She looked up at him and frowned.

'Did someone come in?' he asked.

'I don't know and I don't care. I saw no one. I don't want to be involved.'

'Involved in what?' asked Charlie.

'Involved in anything I don't want to know about.'

Charlie shrugged and went back upstairs. He put the note on the table and picked up his guitar but found he couldn't concentrate. Something was wrong. It was a message for Maman maybe but left by someone who didn't want to be seen by Charlie. He thought about showing it to Tremblay but knew he shouldn't. Maman always said that no one could be completely trusted with the Germans in charge. Everyone was in danger and everyone could be bought or threatened or even tortured. It was best to say nothing.

When he walked into Tremblay's, his friend handed him a Count Basie record.

‘Papa Jean came in for lunch today,’ said Tremblay with a funny look on his face. ‘I haven’t seen him for months, but he said he had business over here. He left that for you and said that he would see you on Thursday after school.’

‘Right,’ said Charlie, looking down at the record. ‘Thanks.’

Tremblay looked at Charlie for a few seconds, then leaned forward.

‘Charlie, you must take care around Jean,’ he said, quietly.

‘But why?’

‘He is a good man, I think, but he is also a very dangerous man who is playing some dangerous games.’

‘I’m just helping out in the warehouse,’ said Charlie, hearing the lack of conviction in his own voice.

‘Ok, Charlie,’ said Tremblay, smiling sadly. ‘Just be very careful.’

Charlie nodded and watched his friend return to the kitchen. Jean must want him to make another delivery. Which might mean more money. Maybe, he’d buy that Gibson from Jean and pay it off doing deliveries. And maybe he’d see Monique again. Oh, but that stupid wave he’d given her on Saturday night. What was he thinking? What should he do? Charlie had never had a girlfriend. There were one or two girls at school he liked but most of the time he was too shy to talk to them. Maman said that he was a very handsome boy, but he figured all mamans had to say such things.

Chapter Eight

Pierre, the bully, never returned to school but neither did the teacher. Charlie remembered his weary face the last time he'd seen him. Just like Maman's. The replacement was a young woman. When Charlie asked about the other teacher, she shrugged and said nothing. And there was something else. Teachers weren't giving out any new work, just letting students sit there, chatting or playing cards. Except if someone from the Vichy Government showed up – then work would be given out hastily.

One of the few teachers who could be bothered asked the class what they thought about the Occupation and let the discussion run itself. Someone said that the Germans had brought order to the city, and a few of them booed. Then someone else said they liked the uniforms and a quiet boy shook in rage.

'They are murdering Jews and gypsies in the camps,' the boy said through his teeth.

Everyone went quiet. There were rumours about the people they were rounding up, but who knew what was true anymore? The German newspapers and radio were filled with lies. A girl in the class started to protest.

'Nobody knows that for sure.'

'You all know it's true,' the boy continued, looking around the room, with tears in his eyes. 'But you pretend that it isn't.'

Charlie thought about the musician. The boy was right. Or had been right. He would stop coming to school too one day.

On Thursday, Charlie rode his bike up the old Roman road and through the narrow streets to Papa Jean's warehouse. He was hoping he could play the Gibson again. He parked the bike against the wall and knocked on the door. Again, Monique answered.

'He's not here,' she said.

Charlie wasn't sure what to do. He nodded and stood to one side as though he would wait there. He stole a glance at Monique. She was wearing makeup and a different dress. Her hair was pinned up and she looked like a film star.

‘But, wait, you can come in. He’ll be back soon. He’s expecting you,’ she said.

Charlie smiled and walked through the door into the warehouse. It was empty.

‘I’ll get you a Coke. Sit down,’ said Monique.

He was going to sit in the chair but decided instead to sit on the couch. Maybe she would sit with him. With two bottles in her hand, she did indeed sit beside him. He took the Coke and sipped it slowly.

‘Were you at school today?’ she asked, looking at him and smiling.

He felt like a little boy. She was probably close to his age, but she seemed decades older.

‘Yes, we didn’t do anything, though,’

‘I hated school,’ she said.

‘Don’t you go anymore?’

She laughed and touched his shoulder. It felt like she had placed a live wire there. A charge went through him.

‘No, Charlie. I don’t usually get up until it’s almost finished.’

‘Oh,’ he said. ‘But don’t your parents…’

‘They live in the country. I ran away. I hate country people. The men are horrible.’

Charlie didn’t say anything. She’d had a hard time already, he decided. He wondered if there was any way he could make her life happier.

‘What were you doing on Saturday night?’ she asked. ‘You were out late.’

He had hoped she wouldn’t mention it. He felt his face reddening.

‘Sorry, I was just…’

‘It’s okay. It was nice to see you,’ she said, smiling.

‘I played a gig.’

‘Great!’ she said. ‘Where? At a club?’

‘Sort of. It was a party. A Zazou party.’

‘You’re a Zazou, aren’t you?’ she said, nodding.

‘I guess so. I told a guy in my class that I was more like a Jazzou.’

She laughed and he felt pleased that he had made that happen.

‘The local police who come to the bar complain about Zazous sometimes, but you know what? So do the communists,’ she said.

‘The communists? Why?’

‘I don’t really know,’ she said. ‘But there is a friend of Jean’s who I think might be in the Resistance. Jean calls him Red Rum because he likes to drink. He complains that the Zazous aren’t doing their part.’

‘What is he doing?’ asked Charlie. ‘Besides sitting on Jean’s couch complaining about Zazous.’

‘Good question,’ she said, smiling again and looking at him closely.

‘You are a very good looking boy, Charlie,’ she said. ‘The girls at your school must not leave you alone, especially when you play guitar.’

Charlie blushed even more and looked away. She moved a bit closer.

‘You’re beautiful, too,’ he said, turning back to her.

‘I’m a bad girl, Charlie,’ she said, before kissing him quickly on the mouth.

She stood up and smiled at Charlie who was sitting stunned, holding his Coke.

‘I must get ready. Jean will be back soon.’

Charlie watched her walk away, still feeling the kiss on his mouth. What had just happened? Would she be his girlfriend maybe? He thought he might ask Eddie about it when he saw him on Saturday.

‘Hey jazz man!’ said Jean, coming through the door and taking off his coat. ‘Did Monique welcome you with a Coke?’

Charlie nodded and Jean laughed.

‘Musicians, I tell you. Women can’t resist them. Okay, I need you to do the same thing you did last week. Can you do that for me, Charlie?’

‘Yes, sure,’

‘Great.’

As Jean swapped the handlebar grips, Charlie felt a shot of confidence and asked, ‘Papa Jean, what are these little packages?’

But Jean frowned and said, ‘Don’t ask, you don’t need to know – and you don’t want to know.’

For a brief moment, before he smiled again, Charlie could see how frightening Jean could be if crossed. He nodded and rode off down the laneway without looking back. He started to peddle hard, anxious to get back as soon as he could.

But just as he was crossing one of the larger boulevards, two local policemen stopped him.

‘Papers,’ one said.

Charlie tried to read their faces. Was this a random stop? He got his student forms out of his jacket and handed them over. The younger of the two studied them.

‘I know your school. It’s full of troublemakers and Zazous,’ he said, reading the name from the forms.

‘No sir,’ said Charlie.

The officer snorted.

‘Well, you are a Zazou, my friend, unless you are dressed like a clown because you want to join the circus. Are you a troublemaker too?’

‘No sir,’ said Charlie.

‘Where are you going?’

‘Home.’

‘You’ve taken the long way around,’ said the older officer, looking at him closely.

‘I went to see a friend in the north,’ said Charlie, regretting it immediately.

‘Who?’

‘From school.’

‘Name?’

‘Jacques.’

‘Jacques, eh? Does he have a last name?’

‘Le Clare,’ said Charlie using the first name that came into his head.

The police officer stood for a moment looking at Charlie’s bike.

‘Go home, Zazou.’

‘Okay,’ said Charlie, his heart thumping as he rode away.

He found the apartment block in the Marais and went in. The concierge waved a finger his way but didn’t stop him. The man again took the package and gave him a similarly sized one that he screwed into the grip as he walked down the stairs.

A sudden fear that he would run into the same officers made his chest tighten. He went first to the west and cut back past Sacre Coeur. When he got to Jean’s he was tired and it was dark. He knocked on the door and Jean answered.

‘Thank god! Is everything ok?’

Charlie told him about the police and why he had taken so long. Jean listened and nodded.

‘You did well. Just bad luck but they obviously didn’t suspect anything.’

So, there was something to suspect? But Charlie didn’t want to ask any more questions about the job. Jean gave him even more money and another Basie record. Charlie was hoping Monique would be around, but he could hear that the bar was open – she was probably working.

‘Is Monique a waitress?’ asked Charlie.

‘Something like that,’ said Jean, smiling. ‘I’ll tell her you said hello.’

‘No don’t, or yes, that’s okay,’ he said, blushing.

Jean laughed and clapped him gently on the shoulder.

‘You’re a good fellow, Charlie. Be careful not to get that big heart broken too soon.’

Charlie looked in the window of the bar as he passed but couldn’t see Monique. He rode home quickly wondering what Jean had meant. Too soon? Did that mean it was just a matter of time before Monique broke his heart?

Chapter Nine

He met Eddie at the café on Saturday and the two of them headed north on their bikes. Their destination was the old flea market at Saint-Ouen, which dated back to the previous century when street sellers were banned from Paris for drunkenness. The tipsy stallholders packed up their things and moved north, just outside the forbidden city. You could get your hands on all kinds of stuff at the market. There were expensive shops selling antiques, but there were also ratty blankets on the ground, where poor families sold their last few things. Beyond the market was 'the Zone'. Here, the Roma, who'd been kicked out of the city the same time as the stallholders, sold baskets, musical instruments, trinkets from all over. And best of all, musicians busked on every corner. Maman and Papa had taken Charlie lots of times when he was little and he still visited sometimes on the hunt for records.

It was too crowded to ride so they parked their bikes and carried their instruments through the market, eyes scanning the things for sale on the blankets and rough wooden tables by the side of the road.

'Why are they selling all of this? Nobody has anything these days – it must be the last of their stuff,' said Eddie.

'Maybe that's the point,' said Charlie. 'Not much supply and plenty of demand.'

Eddie turned and looked at him, smiling.

'You're pretty smart for a Zazou. Are you going to go to university?'

'No chance,' said Charlie.

Charlie suggested walking up to the Zone to look for records and see if any buskers were playing. The Zone, according to Maman, was in grave danger. In Germany, the Roma people had been the Nazis' first victims. No one was saying much but it was clear that they intended to empty this city of the Roma too.

Eddie found a table with several piles of records. He and Charlie began to go through them slowly, hoping to find some jazz.

'Just junk,' said Eddie. 'I don't know any of this stuff.'

‘Some old musette records here,’ said Charlie.

‘Yuck,’ said Eddie, ‘I hate accordions.’

Although Charlie had trouble reading the names of the songs, he could usually recognise the names of the artists that he liked. And there was no mistaking label designs – he usually knew straight away if a record was worth listening to by the colour and design of the sleeve. He flipped through Eddie’s bin and pulled out a Lucky Millender record.

‘Hey, you missed this,’ said Charlie.

‘What is it?’

‘Rock Me by Lucky and his band. The guitarist is a woman called Rosetta Tharpe. She plays the blues, man. You should buy it.’

‘No, you get it,’ he said. ‘I don’t have any money.’

The Roma man sold it to Charlie for a good price after a bit of haggling.

It was a cool but sunny day. *A perfect winter afternoon*, Papa might say. Charlie looked at all the faces as people walked by. Maman said that everyone looked hungry and she was right. No one was starving but no one was getting quite enough to eat either. Off-duty German soldiers mixed with the crowd, but people stayed away from them and the traders treated them with a thin-lipped contempt.

Charlie bought some bread from a table on a side street. The seller offered him cheese, but it was too expensive. He bought some butter instead. The two boys sat on the kerb eating with their cases as tables.

‘I met this girl,’ said Charlie.

‘Oh, here we go,’ said Eddie.

‘No, she’s nice. She’s…’

‘Special?’ said Eddie.

‘Yes. Do you have a girlfriend?’

‘I did,’ he said, looking ahead. ‘But she sort of disappeared.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘We were supposed to meet up one day, and she didn’t show. I went to her house and no one was there.’

‘But, maybe…’

‘No one was there, Charlie. The whole building was empty. She lived in the Marais.’

‘Is she Jewish?’

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘And if anything has happened to her, I’ll join the Resistance and start shooting the bastards.’

Charlie looked around, remembering the German soldiers nearby. Eddie sat quietly for a second.

‘Okay, let’s find a place to swing,’ Eddie said, getting to his feet.

They started heading back through the Zone when there was the distinct, heart-pulling sound of a violin playing jazz. There was a small crowd around a group of buskers. Charlie and Eddie pushed through the crowd. There were three guitarists. Two were playing pompe rhythms and the third, the eldest, was playing the melody at high speeds. They were all dressed in black suits and had Borsalino hats tilted over their eyes. The violinist was at the back. Beside Charlie, Eddie had gone still, as if frozen, as he watched her. She was about their age and stood leaning back slightly with her long dark hair falling heavily on her shoulders.

Maybe this was the little girl he had seen playing here a long time ago while wandering the market with his parents. Her playing soared above the other musicians. The tone was urgent and, at times, sad. She played like Lester Young: long plaintive notes followed by lightning-quick runs. Blue notes appeared along with those from scales he couldn’t even imagine. Usually, when Charlie listened to another musician play, he picture where his fingers might fall on the fretboard. Not this time, it was too much to take in.

‘Now I’m in love,’ said Eddie into Charlie’s ear. ‘I mean really in love.’

‘I’ll take you to the hospital after you tell her father.’

Eddie laughed and the small group played on. Charlie put some money in the open guitar case and the guitarist smiled at him. They both watched the girl on violin but could not catch her eye. It was as though they didn't exist. When the group stopped playing, the crowd applauded. Charlie looked back and saw several German soldiers out of uniform watching. One looked familiar but he didn't know why.

'Give me some money,' whispered Eddie.

Charlie handed him some coins, assuming he wanted to put them in the case too. He held them up instead.

'For the violinist!' Eddie cried.

'Careful, gadjo,' said the lead guitarist, laughing. 'Her father…'

'See, I told you,' said Charlie.

The girl walked forward and accepted the money.

'Thank you,' she said, without smiling.

'What's your name?' said Eddie as she turned away.

'Rosa.'

'I'm Eddie,' he said but she seemed to ignore him.

The musicians started playing again. Eddie continued to stand, transfixed by Rosa.

'Hey, weren't we going to play?' said Charlie, pulling him away gently.

'I'm not sure I can now,' he said as they walked. 'Did you see her?'

'Yes,' said Charlie.

'I think she liked me.'

'Yes, she was throwing herself at you. It was almost embarrassing,' said Charlie.

'Shaddup.'

They found a spot at the southern end of the market. A young woman had been playing accordion there but was packing up to leave. Eddie asked how she'd gone. She

said that she had made a bit of money, but it was hard work for not much pay, as far as she was concerned.

‘Something should be done about the Roma musicians taking up space in the market,’ she said with a scowl. Charlie and Eddie didn’t say anything, so she just finished packing up and left.

‘It’s always someone else’s fault, isn’t it?’ said Eddie. ‘This whole country has been taken over by these Nazi animals and she blames the Roma because people don’t put money in her accordion case.’

They started with ‘Dinah’, playing it over and over until they had tuned up together. A small crowd formed, and small coins began to gather in Charlie’s case. They played ‘It Don’t Mean a Thing’ for a while and Charlie noticed the same group of German soldiers watching them intently. The guy that Charlie had recognised earlier was particularly attentive. He was singing along and miming a trumpet part as his friends grew impatient. They started up ‘Minnie The Moocher’ and the guy shook his head in happy disbelief. He was clearly a real fan. It was hard to imagine Germans as jazz fans but Charlie remembered it had been popular there, too – before everything.

Then he knew where he had seen him before. Of course, he was the passenger in the armoured car that had stopped to ask directions. ‘Swing Kid’ guy. The one whose hand Charlie didn’t shake when it was offered. It was silly but it still bothered Charlie. He hoped the guy didn’t recognise him and wouldn’t come up to talk. There was nothing to say.

They played for another hour, going through all of the songs they had practised and taking a request or two from the crowd. Eddie knew hundreds of songs, it seemed to Charlie. They did ‘White Heat’ a few times. People came and went but the young German stayed.

‘Hey look!’ said Eddie while they were tuning up for another song. Charlie glanced up to see Rosa and a little boy walking past.

‘Quick, that Betty Boop song!’ said Eddie, launching into ‘The Old Man of the Mountain’.

Charlie didn't know it that well, but he found the chord progression. Then Eddie began to sing. Charlie smiled. The singing wasn't the greatest but Eddie sure did a passable Bing Crosby lazy-voiced impression. It had the desired effect. Rosa stopped and watched. When they finished, Eddie pointed at her.

'For you, Sweet Rosa.'

She frowned and walked away. Some of the crowd laughed.

'Good work,' said Charlie. 'She was very impressed.'

'One more song,' said Eddie, shaking his head. 'We have to eat and get to the party.'

They played 'After You've Gone' and thanked everyone for watching. Charlie hoped the soldier would go but he just stood watching them as they packed up. He stepped forward.

'Hello again, Swing Kid,' he said.

Eddie looked up, confused.

'You know this one?'

'Not really,' said Charlie.

'You gave me directions and they were good ones, which isn't always the case here,' said the soldier.

'Well, you can get lost now,' said Eddie, snapping his saxophone case shut.

'I really enjoyed your show,' said the soldier, ignoring Eddie. ''White Heat' sounded great. I wouldn't have thought of it with a guitar and a sax, but it worked.'

'I thought you threw all the jazz fans in jail back home,' said Eddie. 'Learn a few things while you were torturing them?'

Charlie felt a bit bad for the soldier who was trying to be friendly, but he supposed that Eddie was right. There was no reason to be polite under the circumstances. The soldier said nothing but kept smiling and nodding.

'Have you heard any of Goodman's stuff since the war started?' he asked.

‘No,’ said Charlie. ‘It’s impossible to get. Have you?’

‘Surprised to hear you talking about an enemy of the state. Goodman’s Jewish, you know,’ said Eddie.

‘I have some records, I would love to play them for you,’ he said, ignoring Eddie again.

Charlie was curious to hear whatever the guy had in his collection. He would have access to things they couldn’t get, and it would be a treat to hear something new.

‘Look,’ said Eddie, stepping close to the soldier. ‘We aren’t doing anything wrong. We are not your friends, and we don’t want to hear your records. Now get lost before I lose my temper.’

Eddie stood firmly in place and Charlie’s heart raced at the idea that Eddie might hit him. People had been executed for less. The soldier looked at Charlie and then at Eddie. Charlie saw a sadness in his expression but was determined not to feel sorry for him. The soldier turned and walked away without looking back.

‘What was that all about?’ said Eddie.

‘I think he just wanted to talk about jazz,’ said Charlie.

‘Well, he can do it with his own murdering bastard Nazi friends.’

Chapter Ten

Charlie woke up and Maman was sitting in the living room, smoking and looking out the window. She was still wearing her coat and her hair looked as though she had walked through a thunderstorm. Charlie put on his dressing gown and stepped out into the room.

‘Maman?’

‘Good morning, Charlie. I just got home,’ she said, smiling at him.

‘Yes, I can see that. What’s going on?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Why are you staying out all night?’

‘I told you, I’ve been tutoring someone out in the country.’

Charlie could see soot in his mother’s hair and mud on her shoes. Her hands were dirty. She noticed him looking.

‘Oh, my umbrella blew away and I had to chase it through a park. I got filthy.’

It was such an obvious lie that Charlie felt vaguely hurt. He couldn’t read but he wasn’t dumb.

‘Can we go skating today?’ he asked, hopefully. It was something that they had done a lot when he was younger.

‘The rink is full of Germans. I couldn’t stand it,’ she said, sourly.

‘Maybe we could just walk in the park.’

‘I’m just too tired, Charlie. I have to sleep. I’m sorry. We’ll do something next weekend. I’ll give you some money. You can go skating.’

‘No thanks,’ he said.

‘Don’t be angry,’ she said. ‘I’ve been very busy.’

‘Is that what the note was about, the one that came under the door?’ asked Charlie.

‘Charlie, that’s not any of your business. Forget about that,’ she said, sharply.

She was asleep when he came out of the bathroom a few minutes later. He decided he would go skating after all. They played good music at one of the rinks and he liked the idea that Monique would suddenly appear and that they would skate around together.

She wasn’t there of course but he met some kids from school who invited him for hot chocolate. When he got back to the apartment, his mother had gone out again. He listened to the Lucky Millender record and played along on guitar until he fell asleep.

The next day at school, they were all called into assembly. The principal told them that the Germans had executed one of the teachers. There were gasps the room fell silent. Charlie felt he was going to be sick. The principal explained that the man had been working for the Resistance and had been caught with explosives in his bag. The Germans hadn’t tried him but simply put him against a wall and opened fire. The students looked at each other in shock.

Charlie thought about the musician. Now they had murdered a teacher at his school. No one in the city was safe. There were no rules, no idea about right and wrong. The Germans were like the bad guys in a comic strip. They just murdered people because that’s what they did. They pretended that they were here at the invitation of the puppet government, but they were just here to do bad things. Charlie tried not to think how easy it would be for them to shoot him if he was ever caught on one of Jean’s errands.

Some students were crying, others were shaking their heads angrily. The principal continued, ‘I would like to pay tribute to my fallen colleague. I knew he was a courageous man and a person of integrity. It turns out he was braver than I ever imagined. He is a hero, and we are all fortunate to have known him.’

The hall went silent again. What was the principal saying? Charlie had never heard anyone speak out loud like this or say the things he was saying.

‘He was a traitor!’ yelled one boy with a brush cut. ‘The Loyal Youth condemn all traitors to the homeland!’

‘You are the traitor,’ shouted the principal. ‘They have taken our country and you are helping them. You have traded your allegiances. That’s what traitors do. A time will come when you will boast to people that you knew this man who died and you will pretend that you were his great friend and supporter. You will stand in his light because the light you are standing in now will be extinguished!’

The theatre erupted in applause, and Charlie stood up and so did the kids near him. The principal wiped tears away from his face and began to sing the national anthem. It was banned, of course, but the students sang while the boy who had shouted about traitors walked out. A few others followed him but everyone else sang at the top of their lungs while tears flowed down their faces.

Chapter Eleven

Charlie wanted to tell Maman about what happened but she did not return that night and only appeared in the morning just as he was wheeling his bike out through the front gate.

'Maman!' he yelled when he saw her.

She put her fingers to her lips and pointed towards the concierge. When she reached him, she kissed him on the cheek.

'Have a lovely day at school dear!' she said, breezily as she headed towards the staircase up to their flat.

When he turned around, she was nodding at him and making a talking motion with her hand. He turned and headed out onto the street, relieved that she had turned up but annoyed at the same time. He had gone to sleep worrying about her and woke up panicked when she wasn't there in the morning. It wasn't even nine and he felt tired. He rode sluggishly to school and fell asleep briefly in his first class.

After school, as he rode home, he spotted her – Monique walking among the crowds on the Pont Neuf. He didn't believe it and had to double back to check. But it was her. She was wearing a long coat and a hat. She looked like a famous actress Charlie couldn't remember which one. He rode along watching her until she finally turned. He waved and she stopped.

'Are you following me?' she said, sullenly.

'No, of course not. I just saw you walking on the bridge,' said Charlie, taken aback at her tone.

She raised her perfect eyebrow

'You just happened to see me?'

'Yes,' said Charlie, sorry that he had ever stopped now.

'Okay, Charlie, I'm sorry. It's just, well it's…'

'I know,' said Charlie. 'It's everything with the police and the soldiers.'

'What do you mean by that?' she asked, in an irritated tone.

I'm not doing very well here, thought Charlie.

'I mean, getting stopped by them sometimes,' he said, 'that's all. What did you think I meant?'

'Nothing, I don't know.'

Charlie thought this might be a good time to have a coffee and pastry with Monique. He had some money with him.

'What are you doing now?' he asked.

'That's none of your business,' she hissed at him, leaning in to make the point.

Charlie was so surprised that he felt tears coming. He needed to get out of there. He started riding off.

'Charlie!' she called after him.

When he looked back, she was gone. A light rain started to fall. It felt good on his hot face. He felt like he was going to cry but stopped himself. It was ridiculous, he decided. I don't even know her. She kissed me to make fun of me. She and Jean probably think it's funny. Well, thought Charlie, see if I ever go near that place again.

When he got home, Maman was getting ready to go out.

'You're home early,' she said.

'Yeah,' said Charlie. 'Too bad, you could have avoided me for the whole day.'

His mother looked up.

'What do you mean?'

'Well, you seem to only come home when I'm not here. That's fine. You don't want to be a maman anymore, that's fine,' said Charlie, barely knowing what he was saying.

She walked towards him, shaking her head.

'No, no, Charlie.'

'It's a man, isn't it?' said Charlie, though it was the first time he had thought of it. 'So that's it. Papa isn't coming back and you've found some new guy.'

She slapped him. His cheek stung and once again that day, tears started to flow. Maman put her arms around him. She felt thin and frail beneath her coat.

'No, no, that's not it. There's no man, Charlie. I'm teaching.'

'That's not true and we both know it. Who teaches in the middle of the night?'

'Charlie, you need to believe that I am teaching. Someone may ask and you need to say that I am teaching without even thinking that there may be another possibility.'

Charlie stepped back. She still looked tired, but she had a strange look on her face.

'What do you mean?' he asked.

'I am teaching in the evenings and that is what you know, nothing more. It will keep you safe.'

'From what?'

She said nothing and turned to pick up her purse. He stood staring at her, barely able to take in what she was saying. Maman was in the Resistance. There was no other explanation. He sat down on one of the kitchen chairs and looked at her.

'You'll be shot, and I'll be alone,' he said, quietly.

'No one is getting shot,' she said, putting her hand on his shoulder. 'Don't say such things. I have said nothing to you. You think you know the truth, but you don't have any proof. That's important, Charlie. When they ask.'

Charlie felt like someone had opened a window. His face felt cold.

'Who is going to ask?'

'Nobody, hopefully. I'm sorry, I must go. Tremblay is expecting you. Talk to him, Charlie. He's a good man and he likes you.'

Maman walked out, closing the door behind her – a completely different person. She had been his friend and now she was like a stranger. Monique had acted the same way on the bridge. Maybe it was something about him. He caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror. His hair hung down over his eyes and his pants hung low on his hips. He'd either lost more weight or grown a bit taller.

Tremblay brought him his soup and talked to him at the small table by the kitchen. A few other diners appeared, including two local police. They didn't pay and Tremblay didn't mention it. He looked at Charlie with concern.

'Another message from Papa Jean. Thursday,' he said. 'Charlie, you must be…'

'I'm not going,' said Charlie.

Tremblay looked up in surprise.

'What?'

'I'm finished with him. I don't want to go up there anymore.'

Tremblay leaned back, taking a breath, and then leaned forward.

'Charlie, you don't say no to men like Papa Jean.'

'I don't care,' said Charlie. 'My father defended this country while Papa Jean stole things and filled up his bar with liquor for the Germans. He can go to hell.'

Tremblay looked surprised.

'Charlie, you should go.'

'No.'

Tremblay smiled.

'You know, kids like you are going to save us all.'

Charlie didn't know what he meant. He was sorry to refuse Papa Jean, but he didn't like being told what to do and he didn't want to see Monique again. Or least that's what he told himself.

Chapter Twelve

Charlie was putting his schoolbooks on the back of his bike for the ride home when he heard a voice from behind him.

'You have an appointment, my friend. Don't forget.'

Charlie turned around to find a small man with a long scar on his forehead.

'I don't know who you are or what you are talking about,' said Charlie, starting to move away with his bike.

The man reached forward and gripped Charlie's wrist. Charlie bit back the cry and gritted his teeth instead.

'Hard to play guitar with a broken wrist, eh?'

'Who are you? What do you want?' said Charlie. Was anyone watching?

'I just want you to be on time for your appointment with Papa Jean this afternoon.'

The man relaxed his grip. Charlie breathed and put his other hand around his wrist protectively.

'Okay, I'll go right now,' he said quietly, his voice trembling.

'Yes, you will. Don't waste any more of anybody's time or your broken wrist will be the least of your problems.'

Charlie got on his bike and headed straight to Jean's place. His heart was racing and he could feel tears forming in his eyes. He was in trouble. What would Jean do to him?

He was so scared by the time he reached Jean's place that he had to get off the bike and steady himself. He stood up, still dizzy, and put out a hand to support himself against the wall. He tried to breathe normally and knocked at the side door. He prayed that Monique wouldn't answer. But she did and she looked terrified.

'Hi Charlie!' she said, not meeting his eye.

'Hi.'

Jean was standing behind her, frowning. Charlie thought he might throw up.

'You don't look so well, my friend. A Coke? Come in, sit down, sit down.'

Charlie nodded, making his way across the room. Monique handed him a Coke as he lowered himself onto the couch. Papa Jean sat across from him. Charlie tried to read his expression but could only see darkness in his large eyes.

'Now, I'm glad you came today, Charlie. I understand that Monique did not treat you with kindness when you ran into her the other day on the bridge.'

Charlie looked at Monique. Her eyes seemed to be pleading with him.

'No, that's not it, at all. She was fine.'

'I'm glad to hear it, Charlie, but then I am confused by your reluctance to continue with our arrangement. It's very important to me, you know. And I trust you. I don't trust many people, but I trust you.'

'I want to know what I'm doing and why,' he said in a rush. 'I don't want to get shot by the Germans for something I don't even know about.'

'I'm trying to protect you by not telling you too much.'

'Everyone is trying to do that,' said Charlie, shaking his head. 'I feel like I'm part of some movie where I only get to see a bit of it every ten minutes or so.'

'Life's a bit like that, I'm afraid,' said Jean, in a warmer tone. 'But if you insist, you are taking papers, forged papers to a man who is trying to get people out of the country before the Germans send them to their deaths. You are doing an important thing, Charlie.'

Charlie thought about this for a moment.

'But you are making money.'

'Yes, a lot of money, but I am also risking everything. If the Germans traced the forged documents to me, I would probably be shot without a trial. Now, can I trust you, Charlie? You can say no and leave here with no consequences. I'm not a thug.'

Charlie looked at Monique and then at Jean. He was a good person to know, and she was, well, she was still so beautiful. He couldn't imagine not seeing her again.

‘You can trust me.’

He smiled and handed Charlie the handlebar grip. Charlie took it and stood up to leave. Monique followed him out the door to his bike.

‘Charlie?’ she said, quietly.

‘Yes?’

‘Do you hate me?’

‘No, of course not,’ he said, turning around to face her.

‘I’m so sorry about Monday. I don’t know why… it’s difficult. I’m sorry.’

‘It’s okay. I’m sorry too. I shouldn’t have bothered you.’

‘You don’t bother me. Don’t say that.’

‘Okay,’ said Charlie. ‘I should go.’

‘Charlie?’

‘Yes.’

She leaned against him and kissed him slowly on the mouth. He could feel the weight of her body against his chest. He touched her shoulders. They felt soft under his hands and he began to tremble.

‘Thank you,’ she said, stepping away.

He rode through the cobblestone streets, all of the fear from before blown away by, by a kiss, by love. Is that what this was? So many songs talked about it and this is what they mean, he decided. It was like what had happened the week before, but that had just been a kiss. This was something more. He had to force himself to concentrate so he didn’t run into anyone. Monique’s warmth against him lingered as he rode, even as he made his way to the Marais, past the cranky concierge and did the handover with the man.

When he returned to Jean’s, he could hear that the bar was open. He guessed that Monique was working but didn’t ask. Jean had handed him an envelope with money

and food tokens along with a Cab Calloway record. He patted Charlie on the shoulder as he let him out.

‘Let’s make it Thursday, every week. You are doing a noble thing, Charlie. Dangerous, maybe, but certainly noble.’

Charlie wasn’t sure what to say.

‘Hey, who was that guy at my school?’ he asked.

‘A person you don’t want to see again, Charlie,’ Jean said, smiling thinly.

Charlie rode off into the cold night, hoping Maman would be there when he got home. These jobs for Jean could end badly, he decided. He just wasn’t sure he cared anymore.

Chapter Thirteen

It was an explosion for sure.

Charlie and Maman looked up from their card game.

It was distant but he was certain. Besides, they'd both looked up at the same time and Charlie was pretty sure he'd felt it too. He was trembling. Then sirens sounded and there were voices in the street.

'Bomber planes?' he asked. Why was Maman so calm?.

'No, Charlie, not planes,' she said, quietly.

Voices on the staircase drifted up to their apartment. Maman stood up and walked to the door.

'We should be seen,' she said, blandly.

What did she mean? He placed his cards facedown on the table and followed her to the door.

'England has invaded!' said the man from the second floor as he passed their apartment. 'Thank god!'

Charlie and his mother followed him downstairs then joined a group of residents who were talking excitedly. Some were convinced that the Russians had arrived. Another said that the mythical headquarters of the Resistance had been discovered and destroyed. A narrow-faced man holding a loaf of bread said that he hoped the Communist Party office had been bombed. Some of the others looked at him in surprise.

'Ask her,' said the concierge, pointing at Maman. 'She'll know.'

Everyone went silent, partly out of embarrassment and partly out of a reluctance to join such a conversation.

'I'm not sure I know what you mean,' said Maman in a tone that was breezy and ever so slightly threatening.

She and the concierge were glaring at each other. Maman didn't like this woman and she certainly didn't trust her. Concierges were famous snitches, she had told him.

Charlie already knew this but wasn't ready to say too much about his arrangement with Papa Jean.

'A bomb went off in the Fox Cinema!' said an older man with a large white moustache. Charlie recognised him as a man who lived across the street.

'Was anyone hurt?' asked a woman from upstairs.

'On the radio, they said that some people had died.'

Everyone looked unconvinced. The local radio was nothing more than propaganda now. The Fox had once been really popular but was now closed to all but the Germans and the people who worked for them. The reporting of an attack like this one would be handled very carefully by the Germans and their local helpers. There was always the danger that they could appear vulnerable. They knew they were despised and that they probably no longer had the means to control a large insurrection. The war with Russia was draining the Germans of weapons, soldiers, and food. The illusion of power had to be maintained.

'What do you say, Madame?' said the concierge to Charlie's mother. 'A success?'

Maman clicked her tongue dismissively and turned away. People began to drift back to their apartments. The Occupation was frustrating and infuriating but it was also, for most people, unbearably dull. A bomb in a cinema on a Friday night was something to talk about, to think about in the face of an ice-age length period with no end in sight.

'Maybe it's the Americans,' said Charlie as they walked up the narrow curricular staircase.

That's what he hoped anyway. He pictured Benny Goodman and the rest of the band marching up the main street and playing in the park as the Germans were driven to the border. They would be playing 'Flying Home' and Charlie Christian would be sitting down the front, firing off those little guitar riffs that Charlie spent so long trying to imitate. People would be dancing. He would be holding hands with Monique.

'No, Charlie. I don't think so,' she said, once they were inside their apartment. 'Turn on the radio so we can listen to the lies.'

Charlie turned it on to hear a frantic voice explaining that a movie theatre in the centre of the city had been blown up by the 'enemies of the state', the very people that the Germans were helping to save Europe from. Maman started laughing. She laughed until tears ran down her face. Why was she laughing like that? She was scaring him.

'There aren't any enemies of the state left!' she said, shrieked. 'How could they blow up a theatre?'

Charlie looked at her.

'You knew?'

She put her fingers to her lips and then pointed around at the walls.

'I just guessed,' she said. 'It would have been filled with Germans on a Friday night.'

'And now they are all dead,' said Charlie, looking at the floor.

'They wanted to come here. Now it is here they will stay.'

The next day, Charlie rode out to meet Eddie but there was a roadblock near the end of his street. The Germans and local police were checking everyone's papers walking up and down the line, looking over the queuing locals. A man in a grey uniform stood and stared at Charlie then finally moved on. Charlie's heart raced and he wished he'd never left the apartment. There wouldn't be any music in the market today, he decided and stepped out of the line.

He played guitar quietly while Maman read by the window. She didn't go out that night and they had soup at Tremblay's restaurant. The conversation among the regulars was about life before the Occupation instead of the bomb. It was as if everyone was deliberately avoiding the subject. Tremblay opened a bottle of wine and poured everyone a complimentary glass without mentioning why.

Later, Charlie and Maman played cards again and listened to the BBC. There was a slightly muddled but more or less accurate report of the bombing followed by a speech from the Leader in Exile, General Charles de Gaulle. He claimed it as a victory for his forces. 'The Resistance is fighting for a free and democratic nation. Soon the Germans

will be defeated, and we will take our rightful place again as a friend of our allies in England and America.' Maman snorted.

'Enjoy your English scones, my friend,' she said. 'We'll do the work.'

Chapter Fourteen

On Sunday afternoon, the winter sun had begun to fade as Charlie made his way towards the market. The city was quiet again after a day of sirens and loudspeaker announcements. The locals, annoyed by the restrictions of the previous day, were out in great numbers. Charlie passed by a young couple holding hands and felt a twinge in his chest. What was Monique doing?

He had stopped by Eddie's café but it was closed. He had no idea where Eddie lived or even what school he went to. Eddie had never said one word about his family. The café was his only connection. Charlie knocked on the door hoping the owner would appear, but he didn't.

Conversation at the market was more frantic that afternoon – there was something new to talk about. Charlie pushed his bike through the crowds knowing that he would never find Eddie unless the other boy was playing music. Why had he come at all? The dimming light of the day threw long shadows. Out of habit, he looked for records amid the dizzying collections of items for sale.

There were chipped china plates, coffee mugs with reattached handles, faded children's clothing, worn out shoes, sun bleached curtains and redundant military uniforms.

Thus the market was only one in name and instead was a place where people could wander and chat with friends. The local police were visible but it still felt less restricted than the streets in the city. Off duty German soldiers wandered among the crowds, shunned but also enjoying its chaotic freedom.

He found a pile of records on an old man's blanket and began to study them optimistically. There were mostly old classical and opera. The man, a Roma, smiled at him with yellowed teeth and deep lines around his mouth. He lit a cigarette and reached into the pile producing a record with a name that Charlie struggled to make out. The old man seemed to understand and said the name of a movie star who had been popular when Charlie's parents were young. The man laughed and mumbled the name, 'Django'. He handed Charlie the record with the title, 'Griserie'. There seemed to be a list of

musicians under the name of the song. Charlie tried to work out what the man meant but it was too difficult. The words were already moving.

‘I can’t read them. I can’t read.’

The man, who seemed to only speak the Roma language, said one word.

‘Banjo.’

Charlie looked down at the record again and found the word. He slowly moved his eyes to the name of the player. It was Django Reinhardt. This was his first recording when he was only a bit older than Charlie.

‘Wow!’

The man laughed and patted him on the shoulder. Charlie was a Zazou and the man had found a record for him. He handed over the first amount the man named without bothering to haggle. The record went into his guitar case where it would be safe.

Eventually, he heard the band that he had seen with Eddie. They were playing among the caravans in a large field. Charlie wasn’t sure that he should go any further. He already felt as though he was intruding by wandering through their part of the market. No one bothered him or said anything but some of the children were pointing at him. He walked a bit further and stopped at a place where he could hear. There was a fire going and they were playing at one end of it. There were even more musicians this time and the music was strange but wonderful. He wished he could get out his guitar and play with them.

And then, like a snake weaving its way through the heavy rhythm of the guitars and the horns, was the violin. Rosa! He wondered if Eddie would just walk up and sit down with his saxophone. He looked again and decided that even Eddie would be slightly intimidated by this scene.

And then Rosa was walking towards him. She was beautiful, he thought, and then felt guilty because of Monique.

‘You can’t stand here,’ she said.

‘I’m sorry,’ said Charlie. ‘I’ll go. The music was just so wonderful and I…’

‘No,’ she said, smiling. ‘They want you to come and play. A musician does not stand around and let others do the work.’

‘I can’t play very well.’

‘That’s not true. I’ve heard you. Remember?’

Charlie followed Rosa to the large group sitting and standing around the fire. She said something in their language and turned to him.

‘Your name?’

‘Charlie.’

‘Hi Charlie!’ said a man with a moustache sitting nearby. ‘Let’s hear you play.’

Charlie slowly took out his guitar and started to work his way into the music. The song they were playing wasn’t exactly jazz, but the guitarists were playing the pompe rhythm and Charlie was able to figure it out by watching one of the others. He could hear Django’s music in what they were playing but this was faster and rougher.

When it was his turn to solo, he played some of the notes in the chords and bent up to a few blue notes. There was a cheer when he finished, and Rosa was smiling at him. Eddie wouldn’t believe this story when he heard it.

It was dark and Charlie had no idea how long they had been playing. He was tired but content. The musicians seemed happy to have him there and it made him wonder about all of the things people said about them. No one had tried to rob him or trick him. They had demanded nothing and instead seemed intent on offering him food and drink. He finally knew that he had to go and at the end of a tune, stood up. The other musicians shook his hand and patted him on the back before resuming the music. He waved to Rosa and started to walk away.

‘We’ll take you back to the market,’ she said, waving a little boy to her side.

‘It’s okay,’ said Charlie but it was clear she intended to walk with him.

She looked even more lovely in the faint light as they walked. She was tall and walked slightly in front of him as they headed for the lights of the market.

‘Did you enjoy playing music with us?’

‘It was brilliant,’ said Charlie.

‘This is a difficult time for us,’ she said, quietly.

‘Difficult time for everyone,’ said Charlie.

She looked at him sadly and nodded.

‘We can’t travel, and it is dangerous here in the city.’

‘I wish I could help,’ said Charlie. ‘I know someone if you ever need anything.’

She laughed.

‘Thank you, Charlie,’ she said, touching his arm.

Then she was gone. He watched her and the boy walk back towards the bonfire, waiting until he was sure she was there. He walked through the still busy market and found his bike.

He rode back to the café where the owner knew Eddie. It was open by now and Charlie left a message for his friend. He got the owner to write out the name of his school and instructions that Eddie should meet him at the front gates after school on Monday or Tuesday. The café owner said he wasn’t sure he’d see Eddie, but if he did, he would pass on the message.

Chapter Fifteen

Eddie showed up at school on Wednesday. There he was, leaning on the gates in his long Zazou jacket, smoking and smiling at the girls who passed by him.

'Hey Charlie,' he said, 'What's up?'

Charlie told him about going to the market on Sunday and meeting Rosa.

'No way!' said Eddie. 'She barely even looked at us that day we first saw her. I suppose she's going to be your girl now.'

'No, of course not. She asked about you,' said Charlie. It was sort of true.

'Really?'

'Sure!'

'Okay, well we've gotta go up there on Saturday. I think I found a bass player. I was playing at the café on Saturday and a guy came in with a big bass. We played a few songs. He's good. He said he knows you.'

'What? Really? What's his name?'

'Michel or something,' said Eddie.

Charlie's guts churned. This wasn't good. Charlie leaned closer to Eddie.

'I'm pretty sure that guy is mixed up in stuff.' Kids from his school were walking past them, glancing their way.

'We're all mixed up in stuff,' said Eddie, looking closely at Charlie.

Yes, thought Charlie. He was probably right.

'Anyway, Michel says he can get us some gigs if we practice up.'

More gigs would be amazing. Maybe Michel wasn't so bad.

'Plus, we still need another horn. A trumpet player mainly.'

'Piano?'

'No, I want to be able to play on the street,' said Eddie. 'A trombone would be nice.

‘I better get my bike,’ said Charlie.

They walked to the fence where other kids were retrieving their bikes.

‘Hey Eddie,’ said Charlie. ‘Where do you live?’

Eddie didn’t say anything for a minute. He looked around.

‘At the café. The owner knows my dad.’

Charlie considered this for a second.

‘My dad’s American but he’s lived here since the last war. They – Dad, Maman and my little sister – were in England when the Germans came.’

‘But they’re okay?’

‘I hope so. I’m sure they’re fine but I haven’t heard from them since.’

‘Why weren’t you with them?’

‘They went for a year. I’d had trouble at school, and they didn’t want to take me out. They arranged for me to live with a relative, an older cousin of Maman, but she split as soon as the occupation started.’

‘But everyone knew it was going to happen. Why didn’t they send for you?’

‘They did but I didn’t go. The train station was packed in those weeks. I couldn’t get near any train. So, I lived at her place for a while, but the concierge said she was going to report me to the authorities because I wasn’t supposed to be there. I had been hanging around the café because the owner has a great record collection. I started washing dishes for money and doing some odd jobs for him and he lets me sleep on the floor in the café.’

‘Wow,’ said Charlie. ‘So, do you go to school?’

‘Sure, they might report me if I stopped going. I don’t even get into trouble much anymore. It’s too risky. I don’t want to end up at some work camp somewhere.’

‘The guy at the café said he didn’t know where you lived.’

‘Well, he’s got a full-time security guard sleeping on his floor and someone who can help out when his waiters don’t turn up. He keeps it pretty quiet.’

‘Sure. Does he give you any money?’

‘Sometimes. I do a bit of other work on the side and the busking brings in a bit of money. That’s why I want to get this band up and playing. The clubs are packed at night. Michel says that they need bands badly just to keep people dancing and buying drinks. Some of those guys in the Zazou band are starting to work a bit.’

‘Any brass guys?’

‘No, that’s a tricky one but you’re right, we need one.’

Charlie and Eddie started walking towards the river.

‘What do you know about Michel?’ asked Eddie.

‘Nothing really. I just sort of know him. I sometimes see him at a place where I buy things. You know, records and clothes and stuff.’

Eddie nodded. Charlie knew he would understand that he had met Michel somewhere on the black market and that there wasn’t anything more to say. Charlie wondered again why Michel wanted to play with them.

They agreed to meet at the café early on Saturday to work out what songs they were going to play and make sure that Michel knew them. A guitar, a sax, and a bass. That was going to be a lot of bottom end. They needed something up top, thought Charlie.

Chapter Sixteen

Papa Jean told him he didn't have to worry about the concierge at the Marais building anymore. Nothing to worry about now, he said, and when Charlie reached the building, the concierge was not there. Maybe Papa Jean had paid her off, but on his way out, Charlie peered through the little window to her office. The curtain was closed but he could see that her chair was upended and there was a half-eaten stale looking sandwich and a half-drunk coffee on the desk. The concierge had left quickly, he thought, before it dawned on him that she hadn't left voluntarily. Papa Jean wasn't kidding around when he said not to worry about the concierge.

Something bad had happened to her. After the last delivery, he'd told Jean what she had said and how she had waved her finger at him. Now she was missing, possibly even dead. Charlie swallowed hard. He was responsible for someone being murdered.

Back at the warehouse, he asked Papa Jean what he'd done. The large man smiled and put a finger to his lips. He paid Charlie double and gave him some extra food tickets and a Louis Armstrong record from the 1920s called 'Willie the Weeper'. Charlie rode home not knowing what to think. The money and tickets were heavy in his pocket. And would he ever get the concierge's face out of his head?

*

The bass sounded good behind them. Charlie could solo a bit now without being drowned out by the sax. Michel told him he was 25, which made sense – his jazz was mostly an older Louis Armstrong-style. Charlie and Eddie played 'Flying Home' for him and he got it eventually, though they sounded more like King Oliver than Benny Goodman.

Michel said he could play with them in the afternoon, but he had things to do that evening so he wouldn't join them at the Zazou party.

'Not my scene, anyway,' he said, as they rode the train north to the market. Michel didn't have a bike, so they all took the train together.

Charlie studied him as they rolled through the dark tunnels underneath the city.

'Do you still box?'

‘No, not for years,’ said Michel, pushing his damaged nose to his face and smiling. ‘I wasn’t very successful, to be honest.’

‘So,’ said Charlie. ‘What do you do? For a job, I mean.’

‘I’m sure you can guess that one. Remember where we met?’

Charlie nodded, wondering how much Michel knew about him.

‘Since you’re so curious, Charlie, I’ll tell you this: I was in Spain in ‘38, in Barcelona.’

He’s a Communist, thought Charlie. Probably in the Resistance, too. Charlie felt like asking him if he knew what Maman was doing at night, but didn’t, of course.

‘But I’ve always loved playing music most. After that day, at Jean’s place, I decided that it would be fun to play in a band again. I know that guy who owns that café where Eddie lives, and he told me about you guys. I was so surprised that it was you.’

Sure you were, thought Charlie. It was too much of a coincidence, but he was a good musician, and it was starting to feel like they were a band. Eddie was gazing out the window. Charlie suspected he was thinking about Rosa.

Michel’s bass certainly brought the crowds. When they played ‘White Heat’, a large crowd stood around and some couples even began to dance. They kept the song going as long as they could and when they finished everyone cheered.

After a couple of hours, Michel demanded a break. He went off to find coffee while Charlie and Eddie counted the money people had thrown into the cases.

‘Take my share,’ said Charlie. ‘I’m just happy to play.’

‘Are you nuts?’

‘No, I have money. Don’t worry.’

‘Okay, but I’m not telling Michel, he’ll want to split it down the middle!’

They were doing a slightly shaky version of ‘Caravan’ when Charlie noticed some familiar faces in the crowd. Rosa with her ever-present little brother at her side. She was smiling and tapping her foot. It had never occurred to Charlie that the song was probably

inspired by Roma and their rhythms. He wished they were playing it better, but she seemed to be enjoying it.

‘Four’o’clock, Eddie. She’s here,’ he said, as they played. Eddie looked up and immediately lost his place. Charlie played something approximating the melody while Eddie recovered. Rosa was giggling and smiling at him.

The other person he recognised was the young German soldier. He was standing off to one side, watching them intently. It had been Eddie who had sent him packing but Charlie still felt slightly bad for some reason. He had seemed genuine when he approached them. Hopefully, he would keep his distance today. Charlie imagined that Michel had little interest in befriending a German. It was likely that Michel was in the opposite business altogether.

Rosa waited until they took another break then invited Charlie and Eddie to come and play music with her family the next day. Next to Charlie, Eddie shuffled around. It wasn’t often Eddie was anything other than confident.

‘So, what school do you go to?’ Eddie mumbled.

‘I don’t go to school,’ she said, smiling at him.

‘Right,’ said Eddie. ‘That’s good. I don’t like school much.’

They all stood awkwardly.

‘Are you playing in the market today?’ asked Charlie.

‘Yes, I better go back, actually. My little sister is playing my violin. She’ll be getting tired. Maybe I’ll see you two tomorrow?’

‘Oh, you will, for sure. Well, you’ll see me. And Charlie,’ said Eddie, his face getting even redder.

She patted Eddie’s shoulder and walked away into the crowd followed by her little brother.

‘I made a complete fool of myself there,’ said Eddie.

‘Not a complete one,’ said Charlie.

Michel came back and they played for another hour until it started to get dark. The German soldier stood watching them the entire time. Sometimes he smiled and sometimes he looked as though he was trying to work something out. He caught Charlie's eye a couple of times and nodded encouragingly. Finally, Charlie smiled back at him hoping that Eddie didn't notice. When they finished, he waved and left without speaking to them.

'Did you see that German guy?' asked Eddie, while they were packing up.

'What guy?' asked Michel.

'He's a soldier. He watches us every Saturday. I don't think it's any big deal. He seems to be a jazz fan.'

Michel went quiet as though he was trying to remember something.

'He gives me the creeps,' said Eddie. 'It's bad enough having them all over the city without having one here watching our every chord.'

'Or chords when Rosa turns up.'

They all laughed.

'Nice looking lady,' said Michel, nodding. 'Roma, right?'

'Yes.'

'Bad time for those folks,' said Michel.

'That's what she said last Sunday,' said Charlie. 'What's going on?'

'I hear they're being rounded up here and sent east, on the trains.'

'Like the Jews?' said Eddie, alarmed.

'Yes, that's what I'm hearing,' said Michel. 'Some scary stories.'

'Those bastards,' said Eddie. 'I'd like to round them up and send them east, back to their own miserable Oompa country.'

'Their time is coming,' said Michel, looking away and drawing on his cigarette.

It was dark when they parted from Michel back at the café.

'I'm going to try to get us a club gig,' he said before he left.

‘Are we good enough?’ asked Charlie.

‘You saw those people today. They were dancing. If we can get them moving stone-cold sober on a stone-cold Saturday afternoon, think what will happen when they’ve had a few drinks. They just want a beat and we’ve got it.’

‘We need more musicians,’ said Eddie. ‘Charlie’s guitar might not be loud enough to solo in a club unless we mike him up somehow. That means I’m playing all the solos. I’m not that good!’

‘I’ll see if I can find someone. It’s not easy though. Listen, I’ll meet you guys here next Saturday morning. We’ll play the market again for coins and hopefully, I’ll have something for us soon.’

They were standing in front of the large fountain near the river. The two boys watched Michel disappear down the street that ran alongside the water.

‘I wonder what he’s up to tonight,’ said Eddie. ‘I wouldn’t mind tagging along with one of these Resistance guys one night.’

‘Don’t be silly,’ said Charlie, shivering slightly. ‘It’s not like school. You don’t get shouted at – you get shot.’

‘But shouldn’t we be doing something?’

‘We are,’ said Charlie. ‘We’re playing jazz and reminding people how to have fun. Those people dancing today, we gave them some fun. They can’t afford to go to a club.’

‘I wonder if that’s enough though,’ said Eddie.

Chapter Seventeen

They went to a restaurant called Le Tour D'Or that was popular with the Zazous on the north side of the city. The place was full of them and Charlie and Eddie ended up sitting at a table with a guy called Benny and his girlfriend, Claire. Benny was wearing a Canadian jacket. His ornate umbrella was leaning against the table and his long hair fell across his face as he talked.

'They called Johnny Hess the 'king of the Zazous' in the newspaper last week. He's worried now.'

Johnny Hess was a Swiss bandleader who lived in the city. Charlie thought his music was a bit soft, but he had written a song about the Zazous.

'There was a cartoon that showed Zazous dancing with hook-nosed bankers. It said, 'Welcome to a Swinging Europe'.'

'Sometimes I wonder why they're so scared,' said Charlie. Everyone looked at him.

'What do you mean?' asked Benny.

'He's right,' said Claire. 'If they are as powerful as they pretend to be with all of their parades and flags, why are they scared of a bunch of kids who just want to listen to jazz?'

The food arrived. It was mostly shredded carrots. The real Zazous were vegetarians, and this dish was a favourite.

The party was in a different building that night. Someone had found an abandoned warehouse and decorated it to look like a ballroom. They had even improvised a stage in the middle of the dance floor for the band. The organisers were older Zazou guys who approached Eddie and Charlie at the restaurant to make sure they were coming. They had showed them a list of songs that the other musicians who were coming could play. Eddie quickly said that they could play all of them. The Zazous offered them a cut of the door price. It wasn't much but Charlie felt like he was becoming a professional musician.

The rest of the band turned out to be a clarinet player, a bassist and a piano player who could play serious boogie-woogie. They started with a sort of improvised blues thing that got everyone dancing. They slowed it down with a slightly rough version of 'It Don't Mean A Thing' before going back to a frantic 'Stompin' at the Savoy'.

They'd been playing for about an hour when Charlie noticed some people rushing back from the door. The piano guy stopped playing and someone started screaming. The German police were storming the place, along with some soldiers and local police. It all happened so fast. Charlie saw a Zazou tackled by a big soldier right in front of the stage. He and Eddie looked at each other and packed their instruments away. A German policeman in a long coat and cap stood in front of them.

'Leave the instruments,' he said. 'You are all under arrest.'

'For what?' asked Eddie.

'Illegal gathering. Stop asking questions and come with me.'

But the Zazous were fighting back. There were a lot of them, and the crowd was surging. The policeman was knocked to the ground by a Zazou struggling with another policeman intent on arresting him. Eddie and Charlie grabbed their cases and ran away from the crowd.

'There must be another door,' said Eddie, heading away from the main entrance.

A shot rang out and the two boys dropped to the floor.

'You will all stop resisting!' said a loud German voice. 'Everyone on their knees, hands on heads.'

'Go to hell!' someone shouted.

Eddie and Charlie got up again and ran towards some dusty shelves next to the dance floor. Another shot rang out as they reached another part of the warehouse and looked desperately for a door. There were footsteps behind them, and Eddie put his finger to his lips. A local policeman stepped from behind another shelf. Eddie hit him full in the face with the back of his saxophone case and knocked him out. In the darkness, they felt along the wall, desperate for a door. Instead, they found a goods lift. There

were more footsteps behind them as they got in and frantically pressed buttons. The door closed and the elevator went down.

‘We have to get out and hide,’ said Eddie. ‘If I get arrested, I’ll be picking potatoes in a work camp somewhere by Tuesday.’

Charlie’s heart was racing. The doors opened and they ran into the darkness. Charlie slammed into a large pillar. He didn’t have time to think about any pain. Thankfully, Eddie lit a match. They were in another large room like the one upstairs, filled with crates. They moved away from the elevator, but heard German voices nearby and saw the beam of a flashlight. Eddie dived in between two crates but Charlie was caught by the flashlight.

‘Stop, you, stop. We will shoot you!’ someone shouted.

Charlie threw his guitar on top of a crate and put his hands up. The soldiers ran up behind him and pushed him to the ground. One kicked him hard in the ribs.

‘Get up, Zazou.’

Charlie stood up slowly. The beam was in his eyes.

‘Where’s your friend?’

‘Upstairs, I guess,’ said Charlie. ‘I was just dancing and…’

‘You weren’t playing guitar?’

‘Do I look like a musician?’ asked Charlie.

‘You look like filth,’ said one of the soldiers before punching Charlie hard in the stomach.

They took him upstairs in the lift. In the main room, armed soldiers were leading Zazous outside. Two guys held Charlie. The senior officer asked him how old he was and whistled when Charlie told him.

‘You are a little Zazou. Where are your parents? Why are you out at night?’

‘My dad’s in a prison camp.’

The younger soldier frowned.

‘Jewish?’

‘No, soldier.’

At that moment, a group being led out broke away and started dancing.

‘Zazou, Zazou, Zazou!’ one of them shouted.

The soldiers who had been holding Charlie ran over to help stop them. In that moment, no one was at the exit and Charlie ran over there as fast as he could. He heard shouting behind him and hoped they wouldn’t fire at him. He turned sharply when he got out on the street and ran as fast as he could along the cobblestones. When he looked behind, he saw a truck with some of the Zazous on the back. He turned and ran as fast as he ever had in his life, taking the first laneway, then a second, then a third before stopping to catch his breath.

His side stung where he had been kicked and his stomach was tender to the touch. He knelt carefully, breathing hard. He was worried about Eddie. Should he go back? He had lost his guitar and probably his friend. Rising to his feet, he walked along the lane until he reached a wide boulevard. It was quiet and he knew that he had missed curfew. If Maman was home, she’d be sick with worry but he couldn’t risk going home after what had happened. If those two soldiers found him again, they would beat him senseless. The street didn’t look familiar, and he now wasn’t sure which way he had come. He could find the warehouse again if he could find a street he knew. There were the bikes, as well. They would be stolen if they were left out all night. What would Eddie do in this situation? Would he go back for Charlie or would he just wait until morning?

He walked on until he spotted Sacre-Coeur was visible in the distance – he must be somewhere in the northwest of the city. If he walked towards the church, he’d be fine. He’d go to Papa Jean’s and tell him what had happened. He’d know what to do. There was also the possibility of seeing Monique, but Charlie felt so scared that even that didn’t make him feel much better.

By the time he reached Jean’s place, it was very late. He was exhausted and his ribs were hurting more and more with every footstep. The bar was still open, and he crept up to the window. Jean was behind the bar and Monique was nowhere to be seen. It was filled with German soldiers. Charlie shivered and wondered if any of them that

had been part of the raid. He wasn't sure what to do and there was no way he was walking through the soldiers to talk to Jean. He stepped back and went to the side door in the laneway. It was locked so he knocked gently, not expecting anyone to answer.

To his surprise, the door opened slightly.

'Who is it? What do you want?' came a man's voice from within.

'I need to talk to Jean.'

'He's busy.'

'Can I wait inside? It's important.'

The door closed and Charlie's heart sank. He would be out in the cold all night. His head spun slightly as he leaned on the wall. The door opened again. A large black hand grabbed his sleeve and pulled him inside.

'Charlie? You crazy kid! What are you doing? Do you want to get arrested?'

Charlie burst into tears and Jean led him to the couch and sat him down. It was dark in the room as Charlie told him about what had happened.

'No, you were wise not to go back. If your pal is smart, he is still there hiding. It sounds like they had their hands full. They might not have gone back downstairs. You are very lucky, my friend. If they had realised that your pal had knocked out a policeman, they might have shot you on the spot. The first German soldiers that arrived were reasonably well trained, but these new ones are too young, and too stupid most of the time to know what to do. They, in turn, are lucky your Zazou friends didn't murder all of them. It sounds like a risky operation for them. And pointless.'

Charlie was trying to keep his eyes open.

'I have to get back to the bar,' said Jean. 'Go to sleep and we'll figure out a plan in the morning. I'll try to send someone down to your place first thing to let your maman know you are okay.'

Chapter Eighteen

When Charlie came to, it was dark in the room, save for some light drifting in from the back of the kitchen. He was under a heavy blanket and someone was standing over him. He started and sat up, a sharp pain exploding in his ribs. It was Monique. She lit a small candle and sat down.

'Poor Charlie. Are you okay?' she asked, pushing his hair back from his face. 'Jean told me what happened. I'm so glad they didn't catch you. I wouldn't have been able to bear it.'

In the candlelight, she looked like a movie star. He didn't know what to do. She blew the candle out and knelt down and kissed him on the mouth. He watched her take off her shoes and climb under the blanket with him. This couldn't be happening, he thought.

'Just hold me, Charlie,' she said, before kissing him again.

He could feel her small form pressed against him and her arms were around his neck. Could she feel him trembling? But, no, she was falling asleep. This was the strangest night of his life, he decided. He had played a paying gig, been chased by soldiers, got lost in his own city, missed curfew, and was now lying on a couch in a dark room with a beautiful woman under a blanket. Monique murmured something just before Charlie drifted off.

When he woke again, it was morning, and the room was filled with light. Monique was gone and Jean was sitting on the couch across from him reading a newspaper. He lit a cigarette and looked at Charlie.

'Good news, I think. I sent someone to check the warehouse. It was empty. Your friend's bike was gone too which suggests to me that he waited till first light and rode home with your guitar. I could be wrong but that's how it looks. The bad news is that the same guy went past your apartment and your maman is furious. Especially when he told her that you were fast asleep under a big blanket with a lovely girl called Monique.'

Charlie's eyes widened.

'I think he left that detail out. Relax. You are still going to get a hiding though!'

Charlie sat up stiffly. His side ached and his mouth was dry.

‘Thanks, Jean. I better go,’ he started to stand up.

‘Nonsense, you need some food. Wait here.’

Jean came back with bread and a large coffee in a bowl. Charlie devoured the bread and sipped the hot coffee. He felt better, even though he was worried about his mother. He was a bit worried that Eddie would be angry, too.

‘Where’s Monique?’ he asked almost without meaning to.

‘Asleep in her apartment, I guess. She lives nearby but she didn’t quite make it back last night, I noticed.’

‘Nothing happened,’ said Charlie quickly.

‘I’m sorry to hear that, my man!’ said Jean laughing out loud.

‘Yeah, I guess so. Okay, I better go,’ he said.

Jean laughed.

‘Your mother will be a bit angry but more likely just relieved. These are difficult times, she will understand.’

Charlie wasn’t so sure as he rode through the streets to the river. A group of German soldiers passed by him and he dropped his head, just in case. He had never particularly worried about them before but now there were at least a few of them who would recognise him. His Zazou clothes made him even more obvious, and he could feel their eyes on him as they passed. He pedalled faster.

It was a sunny Sunday morning and people were wandering across the bridge with their children. So much had happened, but he only wanted to think about Monique. He wasn’t even sure that had been real. Had she really kissed him and lay on the couch with him? Maybe the pain had made him delusional.

The café had just opened when he arrived. Eddie was sitting at a table, playing sax. Charlie was relieved to see him. They hadn’t known each other for very long but in a way, Eddie was his best friend.

‘Eddie,’ said Charlie.

Eddie's jaw dropped.

‘Wow, I can’t believe it!’ he said. ‘How did you get out? Did they put you in a cell?’

Eddie thought he’d been arrested. Charlie breathed out and told him the whole story – including the bit about Monique.

‘So,’ said Eddie, ‘while I was freezing my butt off in a dark basement surrounded by hungry rats, you were in the arms of a beautiful woman.’

‘Well, yes,’ said Charlie.

They both laughed.

‘You were smart not to come back. They were wandering around the building for hours. Maybe they thought it was where the Resistance kept its weapons or something. They opened tons of boxes. I was sure I was as good as caught and I had no idea what time it was. Then it was quiet for a long time, so I came out. I saw your guitar and grabbed it. It’s here. Boy, am I ever glad you’re safe. I felt like I should have tried to deck those guys who grabbed you, but it was just too risky.’

‘Don’t worry, I felt bad all night.’

‘You were feeling something pal and it don’t sound too bad to me! Go home and get cleaned up and come back so we can go up to Rosa’s.’

Charlie had completely forgotten about Rosa’s. He told Eddie that he wasn’t sure his mother would let him go out again after what had happened. Eddie shrugged.

‘If you aren’t here by two, I’ll just go. You can always come on your own if you’re late.

When Charlie got home, Maman wasn’t there. There was a note on the table with just ‘Tremblay’ written on it. He went downstairs past the sneering concierge and into Tremblay’s, expecting to see his mother. Tremblay was behind the counter and looked up when he came in, motioning him into the back room.

‘Your maman was very worried about you but she understands that you just got lost and were worried about the curfew.’

Charlie realised that Jean's man had told her only a little bit of the story.

'She's not angry but she wants you to be very careful from now on.'

'Where is she?'

'This is the thing, Charlie. She had to go out of the city for a few days and she wanted to tell you about it this morning but, of course, you weren't there. She'll be back on Tuesday. She said that you can come here for meals or if you need anything.'

When he got back to the empty apartment, Charlie felt let down for some reason. He had been prepared for Maman to be angry with him and thought that maybe they would have a serious talk about everything that had been going on. But now she wasn't even home. He decided to have a bath and go back to Eddie's place at the café. He could play guitar with Rosa's family again and maybe even go by Jean's and see Monique. He felt grown up. This was his apartment now. Maybe, Monique would come and live here with him. They could get married and sleep in his bed at night like they had on the couch.

Chapter Nineteen

As Charlie wheeled his bike out, the concierge held up a newspaper. It had a picture of a Zazou with his arms behind his back being pushed into the back of a truck. 'Zazou Communist Resistance cell broken' said the headline. Charlie shrugged.

'Good for them,' he said, and rolled out onto the street. His side still hurt as he rode but for some reason, he felt pretty good.

He met Eddie and they rode past the market to the Zone. Some of the Roma men looked at them suspiciously but most people smiled or nodded. Charlie pointed out the caravans where he had played the previous week. There was no fire and no music.

'Looks pretty quiet,' said Eddie, slightly nervously. 'Maybe they cancelled it.'

'I don't think they work that way,' said Charlie. 'We should try to find Rosa.'

'You mean go over there, to the caravans?' asked Eddie.

'Yes.'

'Are you sure it's okay?'

'Last week, everyone was very friendly. Don't worry.'

Charlie leaned his bike against a light post and started to walk with his guitar. Eddie sighed quietly and followed.

'Last night, we nearly got arrested by the German army. Tonight, we will be kidnapped by the Roma,' said Eddie.

'That's just a story and besides, there's one Roma who you wouldn't mind being kidnapped by.'

'Her little brother would probably come along, though.'

'I think he is there to protect her honour.'

'What?' said Eddie. 'What do you mean?'

'I don't think they like the idea of a young woman on her own so they send the kid.'

'What would he do?'

‘Who knows? But it’s sort of nice,’ said Charlie.

‘I guess, but when does the brother stay home.’

‘After the wedding?’

Eddie laughed and shook his head. They reached the edge of the spot where the caravans were gathered. There was no one around.

‘Hello!’ said Charlie. ‘Rosa?’

They stood for a moment before the door of one of the caravans opened. Rosa stepped out onto the ground, followed by an older woman.

‘Hello Charlie, hello Eddie,’ she said, smiling at them. ‘This is my grandmother. She only speaks our language.’

They both waved to her and were greeted with a toothless smile. The old woman turned around and went back into the caravan.

‘Wow,’ said Eddie. ‘She looks old! Is she really your grandmother?’

‘I think she is my father’s grandmother, or maybe his grandmother’s grandmother. It doesn’t matter. She’s a grandmother,’ said Rosa, smiling.

‘Where is everyone?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘You told us to come and play music with everyone today,’ said Charlie.

‘Today, later, tomorrow. There will be music.’

‘But where is everyone?’

Rosa looked at Charlie.

‘Talking.’

‘Oh.’

‘They want to move us away from here.’

‘Who?’ asked Eddie

‘The government, the Germans, the gadjo.’

‘But the Roma have always lived in the Zone,’ said Charlie.

‘Things are changing, said Rosa, sadly.

Rosa was almost his height and was wearing a long dress and another colourful scarf over her hair. Her eyes matched her hair. He glanced at Eddie who was staring at her with his mouth open.

‘So, should we leave?’ asked Charlie.

‘Why? Don’t you want to play some music?’

Eddie and Charlie looked at each other.

‘Well, yes,’ said Eddie. ‘But…’

‘Wait here,’ she said and disappeared back into her caravan. She emerged a few seconds later with her violin. Charlie and Eddie got out their instruments and sat down on a rough bench alongside a neighbour’s vardo.

‘Play something,’ she said.

They launched into ‘Dinah’ and within a couple of seconds, Rosa began to play the melody on violin. Then Eddie took a solo while Charlie played rhythm. Rosa then went into a kind of variation on the melody that was so good that both boys stopped playing when she finished.

‘Sorry,’ she said. ‘Was that wrong?’

‘Rosa, that was anything but wrong!’ said Eddie, laughing.

They started playing again and kept going with ‘Dinah’ until Charlie started playing Django’s song ‘Ultrafox’. Rosa played the violin part note for note and Eddie played the melody. Charlie couldn’t believe how good they sounded. Rosa started up ‘Minor Swing’ and they played that one for a while. When they finished, Rosa’s grandmother appeared with hot drinks. Charlie took one and drank deeply. He wasn’t sure what it was, but he noticed that his side didn’t hurt as much after he finished it.

They were still playing when the other Roma began to reappear. Slowly, guitarists sat down, and accordions and fiddles came out. The music moved back towards the unfamiliar rhythms, but Charlie and Eddie kept playing, even though Eddie

couldn't keep his eyes off Rosa, but she seemed to like it – smiling and giggling whenever she looked back at him. Charlie also noticed that a man with a moustache and a large hat was watching Eddie carefully. Charlie wondered if he was Rosa's father.

When it started to get late, Eddie and Charlie said goodbye and put their instruments away. Rosa smiled at them and waved. Eddie stood staring before Charlie finally pulled him away. They were about halfway across the dark field when the man with the moustache caught up with them.

'Uh oh,' mumbled Eddie.

'Thank you for joining us,' said the man. 'My name is Joe.'

They shook hands with him.

'I am Rosa's father.'

'We understand,' said Charlie. 'We aren't…'

He waved away Charlie's words.

'We are in danger here,' he said. 'We do not usually ask the gadjo for help, but you are good boys, I can see this.'

They nodded.

'I don't want anything to happen to my daughter and I may need to ask for your help someday. Will you help?'

'Of course,' said Eddie. 'Anything, anytime.'

'Thank you,' he said and turned and walked away.

'That was odd,' said Eddie. 'Not what I expected!'

'They are frightened,' said Charlie. 'I think something must be going on.'

'A war, Charlie, we're all in danger.'

'No, they are private people. Something must be seriously wrong if he is asking us to take care of Rosa. These people just don't ask things like that.'

The two boys walked in the darkness. They could hear the music behind them as they loaded their instruments on to their bicycles, Rosa's violin rising about the other instruments.

They were about to get on their bikes when Charlie decided to go to Jean's. He announced that he had to drop something somewhere in the north of the city.

'Just don't drop your guard, buddy!'

Eddie went quiet and stared back towards the zone. He shook his head and looked up into the sky.

'I think you're the one dropping his guard,' said Charlie.

'We don't need a clarinet player,' said Eddie.

'Why? What do you mean? Have you found one?' asked Charlie, anxious to be on his way.

'No, we don't need a clarinet in the band.'

'I don't know, Eddie, we need another melody instrument. We might get away with a trumpet player but wait a minute, what's the sudden set against clarinets? Benny Goodman plays one. Artie Shaw…'

'I know who plays clarinet. Artie Shaw, Charlie? C'mon, we're Zazous, not zzzz's.'

'He's okay,' said Charlie.

'Anyway, that's not the point.'

'What is the point?'

'We need the violin. I don't know why I've never thought of it before. Sax, violin, bass, guitar, maybe a trumpet player. Perfect.'

Charlie thought about this for a second.

'Sure, but where do we find someone who not only plays violin but plays jazz and is desperate to play with two Zazous and a slightly suspicious older guy? I have a feeling that person doesn't exist.' But then he knew she did.

‘Rosa,’ said Charlie and Eddie nodded. ‘She can’t I mean, she’s amazing, but we can’t risk it. You heard her Dad just now. We can’t have Rosa hiding with us under the crates at the warehouse when the German forces burst in.’

‘We are not going to play Zazou parties anymore. Michel is going to get us a club date.’

Charlie just couldn’t see it.

‘She is not going to play a Pigalle jazz club, even if we do get a gig, for German soldiers, resistance fighters, criminals, and all the other people drifting around those places. C’mon, Eddie. You think she’s going to bring her little brother everywhere?’

‘I’ll look after her,’ said Eddie. ‘Besides, they need money. We’ll give her our share. It’s worth it. She’s a secret weapon. Django will steal her away for his band if he hears her now that Grappelli is in England!’

‘Let’s talk to Michel about it on Saturday and ask her to sit in for a couple of songs,’ said Charlie. ‘I still can’t imagine it. She lives in a very different world, Eddie.’

‘I wouldn’t mind spending some time there, myself!’

‘Well, there’s that too.’

After leaving Eddie, Charlie rode towards Jean’s bar. At the top of a hill, he stopped, puffed. His side ached. He was in front of a bar not unlike Jean’s place, filled with German soldiers and local girls. The girls sat at the tables and poured drinks and lit cigarettes for the soldiers. This is what Monique does, thought Charlie. It made him sad to think of her having to put up with these people, the same ones who attacked him and his friends the previous evening.

It was only last night, thought Charlie. Maybe he shouldn’t go to Jean’s tonight. Monique would be busy lighting cigarettes and Jean would be behind the bar. He went back to the main road and followed it to the river, realising suddenly that he was starving.

Tremblay seemed preoccupied when Charlie asked him about Maman. He knew there was no point asking too many questions, but he wanted to know if Maman was

angry with him for not coming home. Tremblay assured him that she wasn't but didn't seem to want to talk about her.

Charlie finished his soup and walked back to the apartment. The concierge didn't look at him but made a flat, dismissive sound as he walked by. He climbed the dark circular stairs and let himself into the flat. Maman had tidied up. There was a note with his name on it. It was hard to read but he worked out the words 'don't worry' at the bottom. He put it in a box he kept under his bed. In the box were some photos of Papa. There was one of the three of them at a beach just before the war. Papa was smiling and Maman was laughing. Charlie was standing in front of them, smiling into the sun, looking calm. And safe.

He tried to recapture that day in his head. Papa had taken some time off from working as a photographer for the newspaper and it was summertime so Maman wasn't teaching. They took the train to a small town in Brittany and stayed in an old hotel. Every day, they went to the beach. He and Papa swam and built sandcastles while Maman read her books.

He felt a tear brimming and moved the picture away so it wouldn't get wet. What would Papa be doing right now? Was he was thinking about Charlie and Maman? In the picture, Papa looked tall and strong. Charlie had seen some of the soldiers who had come back from the camps. None of them looked strong. Maman looked so young in the picture and Charlie wondered what would happen to her. Maybe she was in even more danger than Papa.

He put the picture back in the box and slid it under his bed. He got out his guitar and lay back on his bed, thinking about the idea of having Rosa in the band. He listened to it in his mind. Michel's bass chugging away, now his rhythm guitar, Eddie takes a sax solo – the song is 'Some of These Days', he decides – now Rosa. It sounds good, yes. He and Michel are pounding the rhythm out and Rosa has started to play furiously. Charlie's eyes opened wide. Yes! He could hear it clearly and it sounded very good. But would Rosa join their band?

Chapter Twenty

Charlie was sitting in literature class only half listening to Monsieur Bonnaire talk about a poem that Charlie hadn't, and probably couldn't, read when the assistant headmaster came in and whispered something to the teacher. Charlie knew before they even looked his way that it had something to do with him. Bonnaire looked worried and was shaking his head. The assistant headmaster held his hands out as if to placate the teacher. Charlie went cold. Had something happened to Maman?

'Charles, come outside of the room please,' said the assistant headmaster.

The other students all looked back at him, some concerned, some smirking. A girl touched his arm as he walked past her. He looked at her in surprise. They all seemed to think it was something serious.

'Charles, there are two policemen to see you,' said the assistant headmaster, once they were in the hallway.

'Charlie,' said Bonnaire, who'd followed them out. 'You don't have to say anything to them. Be polite but deny everything.'

'I'm not sure that's the right advice. Charles must tell the truth.'

'The only truth, sir, is that these men are traitors and have no right to come here and interrogate our students,' said Bonnaire.'

'This is dangerous talk,' said the older man. 'Go to your class, I'll bring the boy back when they have finished.'

Bonnaire turned to Charlie.

'You are a tough kid. Don't let them win.'

The assistant headmaster hustled Charlie away, leading him down the hall.

'Just be polite, Charles,' said the man. 'And tell them what they want to hear. I'm sure they have no business with you.'

Charlie wondered what they would ask. About Papa Jean? Michel? The party? Maman? Rosa?

They walked past the secretary who looked terrified and into the office where two policemen in their dark blue uniforms were waiting. The older pointed to a chair in the middle of the room. Charlie was trembling as he sat down.

‘Did you enjoy the party on Saturday, Charlie?’ asked the older officer.

‘Party?’ said Charlie. At least it wasn’t Maman.

The man lifted Charlie out of the chair and slammed him against the door.

‘The name of the organisers who paid you to play. Now, please. We are busy.’

‘This is highly irregular,’ said the assistant headmaster, attempting to step in between the officer and Charlie. The other officer backhanded the man across the face, knocking off his glasses.

‘How dare you?’ he said. Charlie had never liked the man but now was in awe of his courage. ‘You have no right…’

The man holding Charlie pulled the assistant headmaster away from the door. The other officer opened it and threw the man out, slamming the door behind him.

‘Nice teacher, eh Charlie? He will be shot perhaps, unless you help us.’

Tears rolled down Charlie’s face, but it was anger driving them.

‘You can cut me into little pieces and shoot everyone I know, if you like. You’re like rats, filthy shit-eating rats. You are dumb sheep who do what you are told by the dumb sheep Germans. Fuck you!’

‘Brave words, little Charlie. I hoped this would be easier,’ said the older man.

He punched Charlie in the temple, sending him crashing to the ground. It was a hard punch and Charlie’s hand went to the side of his face. He saw spots of light as they hauled him up to his feet.

‘You will come with us, now.’

They marched him out of the office, ignoring the protests of the assistant headmaster and the secretary. When they walked out of the building, Charlie heard people calling out. The officers stopped and turned around. Students from several classes had opened the windows and were booing and hissing. Someone started singing

the national anthem and a few kids joined in as Charlie was put in the back of a large car and driven away. He sat silently, looking out of the windows at the quiet streets. This was the end, he figured. And he didn't even know who had organised the party so they would torture him and probably shoot him or send him east to a prison camp. Maybe it would be the same one that Papa was in. He felt sad that he would probably never see either of his parents again. If for some reason they let him write a letter, he wouldn't even be able to do it. He pictured his guitar and all his records in his bedroom. It was strange to think he would now never go back there.

They took Charlie to a building that had once been a government office of some kind, and dumped him in a small room.

'Last chance, Charlie,' said the officer. 'Give me those names and you can walk out of here.'

Charlie shook his head, and the door was slammed and locked. There was no light except for a small beam that crept under the door. Charlie found a wall and sat down on the floor.

At some point, he fell asleep and when he woke up, he had no idea what time it was or how long he had been there. There was still light under the door. How long before anyone noticed he was gone? Maman – they didn't have a phone so someone would have to go to their building, and Maman wouldn't probably not be home. They'd tell the concierge who would then tell Maman when and if she reappeared. Would anyone tell Jean? Monique? He felt sad, thinking about Monique. She would be sad. How sad? Eddie would find out then from Michel. If they didn't shoot him and he somehow survived, he would try to find Monique and the rest of them someday. Monique would get married. Eddie would be a famous musician. He wondered what Rosa would say. He didn't have the same feelings for her as Eddie but there was something warm about her, like a good friend who cared about you. He felt sad that he had finally met some friends and now likely would never see them again. Then the door opened and Charlie shielded his eyes against the sudden flood of light. Someone pulled him to his feet.

‘I have no idea why but suddenly you are no longer required here,’ said the voice that Charlie recognised as the older officer.

Charlie’s eyes adjusted. The police officer stood staring at him.

‘The information we needed was given to us by one of the other musicians, as if any of you can be called that, in truth. He won’t be playing anything for a while. I have been instructed by my senior officer that you are to be set free. This is not my decision, and I am looking forward to seeing you again soon. You are garbage, degenerate garbage,’ he said before driving his fist into Charlie’s mouth so hard that it sent him flying back against the wall.

Charlie slid down with his mouth in his hands, blood already pouring out, his front teeth loosened. The pain was dull and large. His body felt heavy.

‘Try playing your horn now, Zazou.’

Charlie said nothing, silently thanking God that the man hadn’t broken his fingers. He was pulled to his feet, dragged down the same hallway he had seen earlier and taken to the front door where the officer picked him up and threw him out on to the street.

‘See you again, scum,’ said the man, glaring at Charlie.

Charlie got to his feet slowly as the door slammed shut. An old couple passed by, looking at him then looking away. Charlie touched his swelling mouth and ran his tongue over loose teeth.

‘Are you okay?’ It was the old man. He’d come back.

‘Yes, thank you,’ said Charlie.

The old man laughed.

‘I do not think so, come to our place, we live nearby.’

Charlie followed the couple to a small street near the river. They climbed a staircase to the third floor and entered a tiny apartment. Charlie sat at a small kitchen table. The wife did not seem quite as enthusiastic about helping Charlie and mumbled

something as she emerged from the bathroom with a small basket. She told him to sit still while she cleaned up his mouth with something that stung.

‘Owwww!’ said Charlie

‘Hold still!’ said the woman who had a surprisingly firm grip on his chin.

‘Those animals,’ said the man. ‘A boy.’

‘At least they didn’t shoot him,’ said the woman.

Charlie suddenly felt tearful and exhausted. These people were being so nice. He wished he could stay in their apartment forever. He looked around at the family photos that hung on the walls.

‘Thank you,’ he said through his sore mouth.

‘Hold still!’

The old woman got the bleeding to stop and told Charlie to hold an old towel soaked in cold water against his mouth. They led him to a small bed and told him to lie down.

‘What time is it?’ he asked through the towel.

The old man pointed to a clock on a shelf. It was a quarter past three. Charlie had been there most of the day. He should go back to school and get his bike and tell his teacher that he was okay, he thought, sleepily.

It was dark outside when he woke up. The room was lit dimly and the clock said it was nearly eight. The towel had been taken away and his mouth felt swollen and sore. His head ached and he was hungry.

In the living room, the man was reading and the woman sewed. When they saw him, the man smiled but the woman frowned.

‘You should go,’ she said. ‘We took a risk bringing you here.’

‘Nonsense,’ said the man. ‘He’ll have some soup first. It’s cool now and it won’t hurt your mouth.’

Charlie thought he should just leave but he was so hungry, he accepted the offer and ate the whole bowl of soup in seconds. The man laughed and gave him some more. He devoured it.

'I don't know how to thank you,' said Charlie. 'My name is Charlie…'

'No need for names,' said the man. 'We are friends now, that will come later.'

Charlie walked backed to school wondering what the man had meant. It was dark on the empty streets and his mouth ached. He just wanted to be back in his apartment with Maman and his guitar and Papa. This was all too hard. Saturday night had been scary enough but then he thought he was going to be turned over to the Germans and shot today.

The school was dark, and he was pleased to see that his bike was where he left it. He began to ride home, avoiding cobblestones as much as possible. By the time he got back to his street, he was pretty hungry, so parked his bike in front of Tremblay's, hoping to get some soup and maybe a cup of tea.

'Charlie! Are you okay?' Tremblay came flying out the door. 'The concierge had a letter from the school that said you'd been arrested. I took it to Papa Jean who said he would handle it.'

Charlie breathed in slowly. Of course, it was Papa Jean who got him out. But how?

'He must have paid a fortune,' said Charlie through his swollen mouth, his heart sinking a little.

'They drink in his bar. He gets them things they can't get anywhere. I don't know. Men like Jean see it all as a business. The only side they take is the profitable one. He must have felt that it was worthwhile calling in a favour on your behalf. You are a lucky boy. Lucky or perhaps useful, I don't know or want to. You'll have to be very careful now. They will be watching you.'

Charlie nodded, remembering the older officer's threats. He shuddered at the idea.

‘Come in,’ said Tremblay. ‘Let me get you something to eat. Your mother will be furious with me. I’m supposed to be looking after you!’

Charlie laughed.

‘Good luck.’

‘Yes, you seem to be able to find trouble wherever you go these days. Please, please be careful Charlie.’

Charlie sipped his soup. It was made with tomatoes, which stung the cuts in his mouth. It felt good in his stomach, though. He remembered thinking that he would never sit in Tremblay’s place again and chat. Tears started to roll down his face. Tremblay patted him on the shoulder.

‘You’ve had a terrible experience, but you’ll feel better tomorrow, Charlie.’

Chapter Twenty-One

When Charlie woke up the next morning, his mouth still hurt, and his stomach was in knots. He'd had one nightmare after another and woken up covered in sweat. He wished Maman was there. Lying in bed, he thought about taking the day off school but decided that the best thing to do was just go and try not to think about it.

It was a sunny day and despite his sore mouth, he was buoyed by the thought that, if nothing else, he'd be pretty well known at school now. When he arrived, he noticed kids pointing at him and whispering. He waved at a group from his class, but they just stared. He thought it was odd but shrugged it off.

When he walked into class, the other students stopped talking and stared at him. The teacher had an odd expression too as he began the class. A girl put a note on his desk that had come from somewhere in the room. He opened it but couldn't read the word. It started with T.

'What are you looking at, Charlie?' asked M. Bonnaire. 'I'd like your full attention.'

Charlie was a bit surprised at his tone.

'Nothing,' he said.

A girl burst out laughing.

'He can't even read it!' she squealed.

Charlie breathed in slowly. It had been a long time since anyone had made fun of his reading. The boy beside him snatched the note off his desk.

'It says, 'Traitor' sir,' said the boy in an officious tone. The class laughed.

'That's enough,' said the teacher. Everyone went quiet again. Charlie was stunned. It didn't make any sense.

'Who'd you give up?' another boy yelled from across the classroom.

'Stop it,' said the teacher.

Charlie looked at the boy smirking at him.

‘I didn’t give up anyone. They let me go.’

The class roared with laughter. Charlie stood up, uncertain of what to do.

‘Sit down, Charlie!’

‘Careful, sir, he might turn you in!’

The class kept laughing. Charlie thought he might cry so he decided to just leave. He left his books on the desk and started to walk towards the front of the room. The teacher shouted at him to sit down and told the class to be quiet. Charlie put his head down and kept walking.

‘That’s right, traitor, go and snitch on all of us.’

The class whistled and hissed as he opened the door. He walked into the hall, his heart racing. The teacher shouted once more at the class and followed him out. Charlie turned to him.

‘I didn’t. They threw me out the door. I would never. I thought I was going to die,’ said Charlie, tears forming.

The teacher looked at him.

‘I think they were just surprised you were back so soon. I must say that I…’

‘You think I gave someone up,’ said Charlie. ‘You think I snitched.’

‘I don’t know what to think, Charlie.’

Charlie turned and began to walk away. M. Bonnaire grabbed his arm and Charlie shrugged it off. He walked down the stairs, remembering that just yesterday the German officers had dragged him down them. At the front door, he turned and looked at the empty corridors. School had been a nightmare for him when he was little as everyone else learned to read and write while he drew pictures in the corner. Then it was just boring, a place to sit quietly in as the hours passed. He had never made any real friends here and the teachers had just shaken their heads – and washed their hands, as Maman said. Now, he was leaving and would never come back. School was finished for him, he thought as he walked towards his bike. Someone yelled ‘Traitor’ out a window, but he didn’t respond. It was over, he would never have to look at a blackboard that made no

sense, never stare at words on a page he couldn't read again. He was a professional musician now, he decided.

Maman was asleep on the couch. Her woke her up and she hugged him and cried for what seemed like hours. He kept trying to say something, but she shushed him. Finally, she put her hands on his shoulders and looked at him.

'My poor, poor baby,' she said. 'I would shoot the man who hit you. I will shoot him.'

Charlie felt a slight chill. She sounded serious.

'Wait a minute,' she said. 'Why aren't you at school?'

He told her what had happened, and she began to cry again.

'They are so stupid. That teacher is a fool, he shouldn't be teaching. They are the traitors, they are doing exactly what the Germans want us to do, to regard each other with suspicion. The kids are fools, but their stupid parents are worse, going about their business pretending that we aren't at war with these animals.'

Maman looked exhausted again. She was thinner too, and her face looked harder somehow.

'I will find another school for you, Charlie. I know a teacher at that school near the gardens. He's…'

'No.'

'What? You don't want to go to that school? Ok, what about the one in Montparnasse? The one that the boy you used to play with…'

'No, Maman. No more school. I'm not going back. Ever.'

'Okay, Charlie. It's not a good time to talk about it. We'll talk about it later.'

'Never,' said Charlie, going towards his room.

Maman looked at him.

'What will you do?'

‘Tomorrow, I’m going to busk on the Champs. The Germans throw money and food tickets, they say.’

‘Oh Charlie,’ his mother said. ‘You don’t have to do that.’

‘Just until we get the band together.’

‘What band?’

He told her about Michel and Eddie’s idea of getting Rosa to play.

Maman laughed, and said, ‘That’s some band! I will talk to the girl’s father, if you like?’

‘That might work,’ said Charlie. ‘Thanks.’

She had somehow managed to buy some fish in the market near their house so, for the first time in a long time, Charlie had something other than soup to eat. His mouth hurt a bit while he ate but it was worth it. They sat at the small table and Charlie played records. After dinner, they went to Tremblay’s and played cards with him and his sister in the empty restaurant. Tremblay brought out a bottle of wine and gave everyone, including Charlie a glass.

‘To the musician!’

Chapter Twenty-Two

The next day, he left Maman in the apartment and rode his bike across the Seine and along the other side until he reached Place Concord at the top of the Champs Elysees. Most of the buskers played in the gardens that ran alongside the large boulevard nearby. He rode past two or three accordion players who were already busking until he found a quiet spot with a bench. He put his guitar case out and began to play 'Dinah'.

A few people smiled at him as they passed by. A middle-aged man threw some coins in the case and winked at him. A group of German officers passed by without seeming to notice him. Charlie worried that they might recognise him from the Zazou party.

By lunch, he had played every song he could think of but hadn't made much money. He sat on the bench eating the crackers with butter Maman had wrapped up for him. A man in his forties with an accordion came towards him. He looked like something from the last century. He wore a large floppy hat over a mess of curly hair and a big coat.

'You took my spot!' he said, not in an unfriendly way.

'I'm sorry,' said Charlie. 'No one was here.'

'It's okay,' said the man, sitting down. 'It's not a great spot anyway. You need to get a bit closer to the offices and shops. You have to come early for those spots, though. Some of those folks get a bit nasty if you are too close. I guess they're hungry. Say, what kind of music do you play?'

Charlie studied the strange man, wondering if he was dangerous in any way. It was impossible to say how old he was, but Charlie could see something like sadness in his slightly watery blue eyes.

'Jazz,' said Charlie.

'I should have guessed. You look like a dreaded Zazou!'

They both laughed.

'What do you play?' asked Charlie.

‘Mostly Bal, polkas, tango, waltzes, that sort of thing. The German soldiers love it. They feel like they’re really here in Paris. Jazz just confuses them, although there was a guy who used to play sax here and he did alright.’

‘What happened to him?’

‘Hmmm, I think he lit out for the territories, as they say,’ said the man, touching his nose. ‘Maquis, Resistance, that sort of thing. You jazz musicians are all the same. Trouble!’

Charlie decided he liked this guy. There was something warm about him. Most people that he met these days were cold and suspicious.

‘I’m Charlie,’ he said, standing up.

‘Francois, or Frank for you jazzmen.’

Charlie offered him some of his lunch. The man took a biscuit and gobbled it up quickly.

‘Let’s team up,’ said Frank. ‘I’ll show you the ropes before the Germans show us all the rope.’

‘I don’t know how to play that stuff,’ said Charlie.

‘That’s what all you jazzers say but we both know that you can. It’s in your blood!’

‘Okay,’ said Charlie, ‘but you will have to shout out some chords.’

‘I only play the easiest of songs and the ones I can remember the words to, so don’t worry.’

Frank started to play an old Bal Musette tune that Charlie remembered hearing when he was little.

‘It’s in A, Zazou!’

Charlie struggled at first but then found that he could hear the changes on the accordion quite easily and was able to follow Frank. Together they made a fair bit of noise and attracted quite a bit of attention. Some money started to fall into the case. Frank turned out to be a powerful if not always tuneful singer who told all kinds of jokes

in between songs to keep people watching. If someone put money in, he played a little snatch of a melody no matter what song they were doing. People loved it. Frank later explained that it was a form of conditioning. Charlie had no idea what he was talking about but could see that it worked.

When it got dark, they divided up the money. Charlie insisted that Frank take more because he was doing most of the work, but the man wouldn't hear of it.

'I will, however, buy you a coffee and a pastry at one of these overpriced cafés along here.'

'No, you need the money!' said Charlie.

'And you need something in that mouth other than a fist.'

Charlie touched his still swollen mouth and smiled. They walked up to the shops and sat down outside a busy café. It was filled with German soldiers and government people.

'They are all doomed, sadly,' said Frank.

'What do you mean?'

'The German soldiers will die or live in disgrace back in their own country and these Vichy government people will be hanged by mobs.'

'When?'

'Well, that's the question, isn't it?' said Frank. 'When the Americans arrive, I guess, with their friends, the British, and our man in London, de Gaulle.'

'What did you do before the war, Frank?' asked Charlie.

'I was a lecturer at the university. A man who probably wanted my job correctly identified me as a man with communist sympathies and I ran. Some of my colleagues thought they were perfectly safe. Now they are perfectly dead.'

'Is Frank your real name?'

'It is now,' he said, looking at Charlie. 'And what's your story?'

Charlie told him that he had left school to become a musician, and nothing more.

‘A noble but slightly mad endeavour, particularly under the circumstances. I’ll say this, though. You are a very good guitar player.’

‘Thanks, you’re a good player too.’

Frank laughed.

‘I’m a clown. I was a clown as a lecturer and I’m still making people laugh.’

‘But it’s a good act.’

‘When it’s an act!’

They sipped their coffees and picked at the pastries so they wouldn’t eat them too fast. Along the street, people hurried home from work and German soldiers in casual dress began to appear, ready for a night on the town.

‘Tomorrow?’ said Frank, as they got up to leave.

‘Sure,’ said Charlie.

He walked back to his bike and put his guitar on the back. It wasn’t quite what he had in mind, but it was fun working with Frank and he had made a lot more money in the afternoon than he expected even if he still felt like it should be Frank’s money.

While he was riding his bike home, he suddenly froze and stopped. If the police had found him, surely, they had found Eddie, too. He felt bad because he hadn’t even thought of Eddie. He turned around and rode back to Eddie’s café.

Once again, he ascended the stairs and was relieved to find the other boy sitting at a table, playing saxophone.

‘Hey, Charlie! I’m glad you came by. Some kid from your school told me what happened.’

Charlie suddenly felt defensive.

‘I didn’t rat anyone out.’

Eddie looked surprised.

‘Of course not. I never would have even thought of it until the kid said it. He won’t repeat it, if he is ever able to talk properly again, that is.’

Charlie breathed out in relief. He told Eddie the whole story. And then told him about playing with Frank on the Champs Elysees.

'That sounds like a hoot but don't get too used to it. We are going to be playing clubs soon. You're not going to believe this but yesterday, Michel and I went up to the Zone and talked to Rosa and her father. It was a bit unnerving with her grandmother giving us the evil eye, but her father agreed. But get this, you have to be there at all times. He can see right through me and he sure as hell doesn't trust Michel but you, well he says you are an honest boy.'

'That's incredible!'

'It was Michel's idea, and he was pretty good talking to the father. We more or less promised to give her half our pay but I don't mind really. It will be worth it to have that violin in the band.'

'Yes, for sure,' said Charlie.

'So, stay out of trouble!' said Eddie.

'I hate to say this, but do you think you are in danger, Eddie?'

'No, they got you because you wrote your full name down on the envelope for the money. One of those bastards must have given up the envelopes or else they found them in the raid. I was going to tell you not to but forgot. I wrote 'Donaldo Duc'. I wonder if they will find him somewhere.'

'They found me pretty quickly.'

'Have you ever been stopped by them and shown your student papers?'

'Sure, a few times.'

'The Germans are great filers of information. They even have machines that do it. Your name is on a big list somewhere that says, 'Zazous, high school students', or something like that at the top. That's why they got you at school and not at home.'

'I wish they had got me at home. All those kids think I'm a snitch.'

‘No they don’t,’ said Eddie. ‘They just know that you didn’t wet your pants when the police turned up like they would, so they turned on you. You’re a cool customer, Charlie, and they know it.’

‘I’m not really.’

‘Anyhow, we still need another player so keep your ears open for the real traitors while you play tangos down there on the Champs.’

‘There used to be a sax player apparently, a jazz guy. He went off and joined the Maquis, Franks says.’

‘I knew that guy,’ said Eddie, a shadow passing over his face. ‘He was a good player, but he’ll end up dead. He went to my school. We used to jam a bit.’

‘Too bad he’s not still around to join the band.’

‘Yeah. Anyway, I want a trumpet player.’

The next day, Charlie met up with Frank and spent the day busking on the Avenue. It was a cool but sunny day, and they made more money in the morning than they expected. A large group of German soldiers watched them for so long that they both started to get nervous.

‘Some memories to take away to the Russian front, fellas,’ said Frank at the end of one song. The soldiers who understood him frowned.

Another group of younger soldiers appeared in the afternoon and with them was the guy who kept trying to befriend him. He was watching Charlie and smiling.

‘Play some swing, Swing Kid!’ he yelled at one point.

‘How ‘bout a swinging waltz from ol’ Vienna?’ said Frank.

‘Chicago, please!’ yelled the soldier.

Frank looked at Charlie who just shrugged. They continued to play, and the soldiers drifted away.

‘Do you know that guy?’ asked Frank.

‘He’s always watching this jazz band I play with at the market. He seems a bit different from the rest of them. He knows jazz pretty well.’

‘Just be careful,’ said Frank.

‘We just ignore him.’

When they were packing up, the man with the scar appeared. Charlie’s heart raced for a second, thinking he’d done something to annoy Jean.

‘Papa Jean needs you to do some work for him tomorrow. Come in the morning, around ten.’

‘But I’m playing here.’

The man with the scar just looked at Charlie, wearily. Frank watched this exchange with interest.

‘Go Charlie,’ he said. ‘I can’t make it tomorrow anyway. I was going to send someone else.’

Charlie looked at the strange man standing in front of him.

‘Tell him I’ll be there.’

‘I don’t need to,’ growled the man, before turning to leave.

‘A real gentleman that one,’ said Frank. ‘You have some interesting friends. Who is Papa Jean?’

‘You don’t want to know, do you?’ said Charlie.

‘No, I guess not,’ said Frank. ‘Take care with those people, Charlie. These are dangerous times. Sentiment doesn’t go far at the moment.’

Chapter Twenty-Three

The next morning, Charlie was at Papa Jean's place by ten. He was hoping to see Monique, but it was Jean who opened the door and gave him a big hug.

'You are a tough guy, Charlie. You wouldn't talk and you called the officer a dumb sheep and a rat!'

'I'm sorry about all of that, Jean. I want to pay you back for anything you did to get me out of there. I'll work here, I'll give you all my busking money. I don't care, I thought I was dead and then they let me go.'

'You are lucky in a way. They got the information they were looking for from someone else, plus a fellow down there needed something that I was in a position to provide. The hard part was getting Marcine to pick you up. She's a tough old bird. She said, 'I don't want any Zazous at my house!''

Charlie's eyes widened.

'The old couple?'

'They are very effective because they are the sort of people no one notices. They are both over eighty, you know. The police would have been watching you go but they barely registered those two. I use them occasionally and pay them handsomely, of course.'

Charlie shook his head in disbelief. It had never occurred to him that the two old people had come to get him.

'So, what do you need me to do today?' asked Charlie.

'Well, I'm afraid that you did so well under arrest that you are now in my elite team.'

'What?' asked Charlie.

'There are few men who wouldn't have collapsed in the first thirty seconds of what you went through. I am told that you showed no sign of fear.'

'I was terrified, Jean. Petrified even.'

‘Of course you were. Who wouldn’t be? But you didn’t show it and that’s the difference. Michel had a feeling you were a tough guy.’

‘Michel seems like a tough guy.’

Jean laughed and patted Charlie on the back.

‘True. You will never have to worry with that lad around!’

‘And today?’ asked Charlie, a bit nervous. ‘You don’t mind that I’m kind of dumb?’

‘What?’

‘I can’t read or write, remember?’

Jean looked at him as though he was joking for a second, then seemed to consider this information.

‘I need courageous men, not literary ones! It must have been hard at school. And Charlie?’

‘Yes?’

‘In my line of work, I have to make a lot of very quick judgements about people. You are a very smart boy. It’s in your eyes.’

Charlie thought about this for a moment.

‘So, today, you are going ice skating with Monique. How does that sound?’

Charlie smiled.

‘That sounds great!’

‘Yes, you will have a bag with you. Another couple will be skating, too. When the woman falls, you will go to her assistance and while you are helping her up, she will place something in the front pocket of Monique’s bag. You will skate for another ten minutes or so before leaving. You will then have a hot chocolate at the Café Dome next to the ice rink. That will be a signal that you have received the package. You will then get back here as fast as you can without making it obvious you are in a hurry.’

‘That sounds easy enough,’ said Charlie. ‘How will we recognise the other couple?’

‘Charlie, that’s where you come in. I have this instinct that you will know who they are long before they make contact. See if I’m not right.

‘Okay. I guess I might be able to spot them.’

‘Try your best. This shouldn’t be too difficult either way,’ said Jean. ‘However, if you are searched and the German soldiers see the contents of the package you will almost certainly be shot unless you give them my name which you won’t because if you do, you will wish you had been shot.’

Charlie noticed that Jean wasn’t smiling.

‘I’m sorry, Charlie, but I try to be honest with people. That way, everyone knows where they stand. I will pay you for this, of course.’

‘Jean,’ said Charlie. ‘Can I ask you something? Since we are being honest, are you in the Resistance?’

Jean smiled at Charlie and looked around.

‘I am a businessman, Charlie, and a good businessman looks for opportunities. This war, the Occupation, the Resistance, this whole situation is filled with opportunities.’

Charlie tried to read Jean’s expression, then asked, ‘But you wouldn’t take the opportunity to give up someone in the Resistance if it paid, would you?’

Jean frowned slightly but then smiled again.

‘That’s a good question, Charlie. But let me put your mind at ease. The Germans will leave here soon. I don’t know how or when, but I don’t believe that the Occupation will last another five years. Again, there will be vast opportunities, but only for those on the right side of history. So, I am on the right side, not out of loyalty but for money. And that, Charlie, is something you really can trust. Loyalties can shift, money is money.’

Charlie sensed that there was a good argument against what Jean was saying but he let it go.

‘Monique will arrive soon, and I will give you the bag,’ said Jean. ‘There’s Coke in the fridge there. Grab one whenever you want. You’re part of the family now!’

He walked out into the kitchen behind the bar and Charlie went to the fridge. It was filled with soda, beer and champagne. He took a Coke and went back to sit on the couch. It was the same couch where he and Monique had slept that night. Charlie leaned back, warmed by the memory.

‘Hello, Charlie!’ said Monique herself, a few minutes later when she appeared from the back of the warehouse.

‘Hi,’ said Charlie, blushing.

She walked up and put her arms around his neck.

‘I was almost sick when I heard you were arrested. I told Jean to get you out of there or there would be serious trouble.’

She kissed him on the mouth before stepping back and looking at him.

‘You’ve had a rough week! Hopefully, we can improve things a bit!’

Charlie looked at her. She was wearing baggy pants that came tight around her waist and a loose white shirt under a leather jacket. A small hat was pinned to her curly blond hair. Movie star, thought Charlie. I’m going ice-skating with a movie star. Those boys in my class at school are getting hot under the collar looking at their Delphines or Joans in their woollen skirts while I skate around with the most beautiful woman in the city.

Jean came back in, holding a black purse. He sat down and opened it up.

‘Okay, Monique, this is like the kind you’ve used before. As soon as the package is in there, slip it into the false bottom. If you are caught by young soldiers, there is an outside chance they won’t find anything. You both need to kneel down to help the woman. Her partner will too, which means she should be able to put the package in without anyone noticing. If no one falls in front of you within the hour, just get out of there and go to the small church across the street. Someone will meet you there.’

When they got outside, there were two bikes next to his. They weren’t new but both were much better than Charlie’s.

‘This is your work vehicle, Charlie. That old thing you ride never looks like it’s going to make it to the river,’ said Jean.

They rode down through the narrow lanes to the river. Monique was an amazing rider. When they stopped at a busy street, he turned to her.

‘You ride as good as any boy!’

She leaned against him and whispered in his ear.

‘I’m no boy though, Charlie.’

His hair stood on end slightly and had to shake himself a bit to follow her out into the traffic. He noticed men looking at her. Two German soldiers whistled as they passed and he briefly considered stopping to beat them senseless. He was part of Jean’s family now. Some people said Jean was a gangster, so Charlie decided that he was a gangster too, like Bogart or Cagney. And no one whistles at my girl, see? He smiled at the idea as he watched Monique ride ahead of him, snaking around pedestrians and other bikes.

When they reached the ice rink, he was almost out of breath. She laughed and grabbed his hand. He saw other men looking at him enviously and realised that he had never held hands with a girl before. She kissed him on the cheek after they had paid the entrance fee and picked up their skates. They put them on beside the rink on a small bench.

‘The big place was the best for ice-skating, but the Germans are using it for god knows what now,’ said Monique. ‘Wait a minute, you can skate, can’t you?’

‘Yes, of course. I used to come here a lot with my… girlfriend.’

‘Not your maman?’ said Monique, smiling at him while he blushed some more. ‘C’mon, we better get out there. Now don’t panic when the woman falls. Just go to help her like you would anyway.’

‘Have you done this before?’ asked Charlie, not just talking about the skating.

She smiled and grabbed his hand. They moved out on to the rink and began to go around in the same direction as the rest of the skaters. A small band played waltzes on a stage at one end. Charlie wondered what Frank was doing that day. Monique was as

good skates as she was on the bike. She twirled around on one foot and skated backwards with ease. It seemed like every man on the rink was watching her.

They had been skating for about twenty minutes when Charlie spotted them. In his mind, he could see the whole rink and everyone they had skated past. There was only one couple it could be, and they were skating closer. He steadied himself.

It happened quickly. The young woman went over backwards right in front of them. It was so convincing that Charlie, for a second, couldn't believe it was faked. He went over to her and knelt on the ice. Monique crouched down too. Her partner who had been about ten feet away skated up.

'Help her up,' he hissed at Charlie.

Charlie helped the woman to her feet while Monique dusted her off, smiling and chatting to her. She had a pretty face, thought Charlie but looked slightly weary and hard, like Maman. The guy shook hands with Charlie, thanking him before skating off. Charlie didn't see the drop take place, but Monique's smile as they skated again told him it had happened. He saw the couple once more before they seemed to disappear. Charlie and Monique skated around for another twenty minutes or so before Monique announced loudly that she was tired of skating and that it was time to go.

In the café, they sipped hot chocolate. It seemed as if there were uniformed Germans everywhere and Charlie felt like throwing up every time one passed by but Monique seemed utterly relaxed, just talking on about clothes and movies.

'I just love Chaplin, don't you?'

'Yes,' said Charlie.

'Wait, is that why you call yourself Charlie? It is, isn't it?'

'No, actually it's because of Charlie Christian,' said Charlie. 'He's Benny Goodman's guitarist.'

'Of course, it's a jazz name,' she said, squeezing his hand.

It was amazing by how cool she was. First with the drop, and now with the bubbly conversation. Where did the act end? Was she kissing him and holding his hand just to make it all look real? Charlie felt weary suddenly. Everything he thought he knew

shifted and morphed. Maman might be in the Resistance, Jean could be anything, and Monique might just be pretending that she liked him. The whole world was a theatre. He felt lost. But then, for some reason, he thought of Rosa. She was real.

'Time to go, Charlie Christian!' said Monique.

They left the café and walked back to where they had parked the bikes. Two local police officers walked by and tipped their hats to Monique. She responded well, thought Charlie. Just the right amount of friendliness so as not to offend them but not enough for them to stop and chat. Another great performance, he concluded glumly.

During their ride back to Jean's place, Charlie hardly dared breathe. What would happen if they were stopped? Monique, on the other hand, seemed buoyed by the whole experience, riding back even more recklessly than she had before. She challenged him to a race when they reached Jean's neighbourhood. She bent over the handlebars like the riders in the Tour. She was fast but he was better at hopping over kerbs and using the pavements instead of the cobblestones. He won – just.

She rode up, huffing and puffing.

'You are the king!' she said. 'Nobody can beat me on these streets!'

'You need to learn to hop over kerbs,' he said. 'I'll show you sometime.'

'Deal!'

They walked in and handed the purse to Jean.

'Any troubles?' he asked.

'None,' said Monique.

'Good news. I'll need you in the bar in a couple of hours. Have something to eat and take a rest. That was good work. Both of you.'

Charlie smiled at the praise, feeling like he hadn't done anything. Jean handed him an envelope that he zipped into his inner pocket.

The deal over, a weight lifted from him. He ate lunch with Monique in the kitchen and they chatted to the cook, a Vietnamese man called Kwa.

'Kwa is going back to liberate his country when this is over,' said Monique.

Kwa laughed and sat down.

‘Vietnam has been a colony long enough.’

‘I’d like to visit Vietnam,’ said Charlie.

‘You will be my guest!’ said Kwa. ‘And Miss Monique will accompany you, of course.’

‘I hope so!’ said Charlie, blushing.

After lunch, Monique said she was going to have a rest before work. Charlie started to say goodbye – not wanting to.

‘I thought you might like to join me,’ she said.

Charlie trembled slightly and his face flushed as she led him back into the warehouse behind all the crates and shelves to a door that she opened with a key. Inside was a staircase that led up to a landing and another door. She opened it and took him into a small brightly decorated room with a chair, a tiny sink, and a large bed. There were posters from stage plays on the walls, a large pile of books against one wall and there in the corner, records and a player.

‘Put something on,’ she said.

He flipped through her records. It was a good collection, he thought. He took out What a Little Moonlight Can Do, a Billie Holiday one and put it on the platter. He turned on the player and lifted the needle onto the record.

‘I adore her,’ said Monique, as she took her hat off and hung up her coat. ‘Don’t you?’

‘Yes, very much. She always has great musicians. That’s Lester Young on tenor saxophone on that one,’ said Charlie.

‘She’s so sad,’ said Monique. ‘Now get that coat off. I don’t think I’ve ever seen you without it on.’

Charlie took off the jacket, hoping that the white shirt he was wearing was not too dirty. She pulled one of his suspenders and touched his chest.

‘You’re more powerful looking without the jacket on. Look at those shoulders.’

She was standing very close to him.

‘You’re shaking,’ she whispered.

‘I’m cold,’ he said, unconvincingly.

‘Time to get under the covers then,’ she said.

Once under, she put her head on his chest. He didn’t know what to do, but touched her back gently.

‘Yes, that’s nice,’ she said in his ear.

They began to kiss and Charlie wondered where it was all leading. He was so inexperienced, he thought. She must know. He reached under her shirt which had come untucked.

‘Easy there,’ she said. ‘Slow down.’

‘Okay, I’m sorry,’ he said. ‘I’ve never…’

‘And you’re not going to today,’ she said in his ear.

He felt disappointed but also a bit relieved. They kissed for a while longer and she let his hands wander a bit before announcing that she was having a nap. He felt tired too all of a sudden and they drifted off to sleep together in the afternoon light.

When he woke up, she was wearing a dressing gown and putting on her makeup in a large mirror that she had placed on the small table by the window. He watched her for a moment before saying anything.

‘Hi,’ he said.

‘Hi, you’re cute when you’re asleep.’

‘But not when I’m awake?’

‘Even cuter, then,’ she said, smiling. ‘Now scoot. I have to get dressed and finish my make-up and hair.’

Charlie watched her for a moment.

‘What do you do in the bar?’ he asked.

She frowned at him.

‘Why? What do you think I do?’

‘I don’t know, that’s why I asked.’

‘I fill up their glasses, light their stinky cigars, tell them how manly they are and let them pat my behind. How does that sound?’ she said, thinly.

A sting of anger, or was it jealousy, cut through.

‘Jean shouldn’t let them touch you.’

‘Well, no, but it’s business, as Jean would say.’

‘You should quit. It’s terrible.’

She didn’t say anything but kept putting on her make-up. Charlie didn’t know what to say.

‘I could marry you and then you wouldn’t have to work here.’

She stopped and looked out the window for a second.

‘You are a sweet boy,’ she said.

Charlie was annoyed with her and with himself.

‘I guess I better go,’ he said.

She put down her eyeliner pen and stood up.

‘Don’t go away mad, Charlie. You are my friend. I trust you. Let’s see where things take us.’

She kissed him on the mouth and held him close. She pulled him back against the door. He put his hand inside her dressing gown, and she didn’t stop him. They kept kissing until she pushed him away.

‘Whoa! Down boy!’ she said, laughing. ‘You better go now before the whole place catches fire!’

He left and rode his bike furiously down through the winding streets until he reached the river. There, he stopped and sat on a bench breathing heavily and shaking his head.

Chapter Twenty-Four

On the Elysée, Charlie and Frank had been playing for an hour or so but something wasn't right – Charlie could tell that Frank's heart wasn't in it. He was missing notes and silent between songs. Charlie put down his guitar and asked him what was wrong.

'I just don't think I can play anymore today. Sorry, Charlie,' he said. 'My head is filled…there are stories about what's happening in the camps in the east. Terrible stories.'

'I've heard,' said Charlie. 'My dad is in a camp somewhere.'

'I'm sorry to hear that, Charlie,' said Frank. 'I hope he is nowhere near the camps I've been hearing about in the last few days.' Charlie gave him all the money they had made that morning. He tried to give him even more, but Frank wouldn't take it.

After Frank left, Charlie ate his biscuits trying to decide whether he should keep playing or not. He decided that he might as well. He would play the rhythm parts of the band songs and sing, even though he wasn't much good as a singer.

He was singing 'All of Me' when the young German soldier arrived. There were other people listening, but they left when the soldier stopped to watch.

'You're scaring away my audience,' said Charlie.

'Don't be unpleasant,' said the soldier. 'Your friend isn't here and there is no reason to be rude. I don't mean you any harm. I like your playing and I like the music your band plays.'

'Okay,' said Charlie. 'Good. Thanks'

'My name is Dieter,' he said, putting out his hand.

'Charlie,' he said without offering his own.

'Okay, Charlie. You don't want to shake hands this time either. Okay, fine, but the offer to hear some brand new jazz records is still there if you are interested.'

'That's okay,' said Charlie. 'No thanks.'

'You don't want to hear Benny Goodman's Sextet with Charlie Christian.'

It was ridiculous even considering the invitation from the enemy but there was something about this guy. He didn't seem dangerous.

'Sure,' said Charlie. 'But where are we going to listen to records? Should I pop by the barracks some afternoon?'

'Ha! I don't think that's a particularly good idea at the moment. I have been keeping my records at a quiet café where I go and listen to music when I've had enough of…'

'Shooting traitors?'

The soldier looked pained.

'Look, I don't want to be here, and you don't want me here. That's clear to everyone. But we are both jazz fans and there is no reason why we shouldn't listen to some records together.'

'There are plenty of reasons, but okay,' said Charlie, not sure why he'd agreed to this or whether he'd go through with it.

'Good!' said Dieter. 'It will be a genuine honour to listen to music with a real fan. Bring your guitar. I have something else that will surprise you.'

'Okay,' said Charlie, now vaguely wondering if this was some kind of elaborate trap. 'Monday?'

'Sure, the café is near here. It's called Café Vert. Do you know it?'

'I think so. It's a little place, isn't it? Just near the arch.'

'That's it. Come down when you finish busking.'

'Okay. Listen, sometimes things come up. If I don't turn up, it's because I'm busy doing something, not because I decided not to come.'

'There's no obligation, Charlie. Come when you come,' said Dieter.

Charlie looked at the German soldier. He was slightly taller than Charlie with a slight build. His hair was short but slicked back. There was nothing about him that looked like the man who had shot the musician on his street. He couldn't imagine how this guy ended up in his city.

‘I have to go,’ Dieter said suddenly.

‘What do you guys do all day?’ said Charlie.

‘Go on long patrols to keep the streets safe from dangerous Zazou insurgents,’ he said, smiling.

Charlie just looked at him blankly.

‘A joke, Charlie.’

‘Yeah,’ said Charlie.

‘Okay, gotta go. See you tomorrow in the market.’

Charlie looked alarmed.

‘Don’t worry. I won’t say anything with your friend there.’

‘Eddie’s a bit sensitive about you guys.’

‘You all are. Why wouldn’t you be?’ said Dieter before turning and walking back towards the city.

An old man who had been watching Charlie talk to Dieter came over.

‘They are all murderers.’

Charlie nodded and strummed a chord on his guitar.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Charlie met up with Eddie at the café and they rode their bikes to the market. Michel had arrived early to secure their spot and Rosa was there with her inevitable little brother.

'Hi Rosa,' said Eddie. Charlie wondered if he sounded this nervous with Monique. Probably.

Rosa smiled at his friend and continued to tune her violin.

'Did you look at the list of songs?' Eddie asked.

'No,' she said.

'Why not?' he said.

'I can't read.'

'Neither can I!' Charlie cut in.

Eddie looked at him in surprise, Michel too.

'Well,' said Eddie, recovering. 'No use writing up a setlist, then. We'll just see what happens.'

They started with 'Some of These Days'. Would Rosa be able to keep up? The bass tended to keep things tied down and maybe Rosa wouldn't be able to find the beat. But he needn't have worried. In fact, he found it hard to take his eyes off her as she played. She was wearing a long dress and another ornate scarf over her flowing hair. There were rings on every finger and bracelets that danced with her movement. With every song, she seemed to find some kind of space within its structure to fill with all kinds of colourful patterns and tunes. This must be what it was like to play with Django or Charlie Christian. He and Eddie and Michel could play – they kept the beat and added some flourishes – but Rosa was something that they could barely imagine. The crowd grew and grew as they played. Michel kept running forward to clear the money that was being thrown in their guitar cases.

They took a break and sat down on some crates that Rosa's father had brought, along with tea.

‘Rosa, you should be in New York playing with Ellington,’ said Eddie.

She laughed and sipped her tea.

‘That was fun,’ she said. ‘And my father will be very happy with the money.’

‘Rosa,’ said Michel. ‘I don’t think you realise how well you play. You are like a professional musician. You’re better than most of them.’

‘I’ve always played,’ she said. ‘My mother played very well and she taught me when I was little. After she died, I just played and played.’

They all nodded sadly. Nobody knew Michel’s story, but the absence of parents was on Charlie’s mind. Charlie wondered what he would do if he lost Maman. Would he just play guitar?

‘I have a surprise,’ said Michel, suddenly.

They all looked at him.

‘We can play a matinee at Jean’s place later today. I spoke to him yesterday. He has bands play from four, and one of his regular groups broke up or something. It’s just an hour or so. It will be regular if we’re any good, he says.’

‘Who’s Jean?’ asked Eddie.

Michel and Charlie exchanged glances.

‘He’s a big Haitian guy that owns a club. He’s okay. Charlie knows him.’

Charlie nodded. This all seemed too easy. He sensed that Michel had something else in mind but couldn’t figure it out.

‘He was a bit worried that we didn’t have much of a horn section,’ said Michel. ‘It’s a pretty noisy club, lots of Germans drinking and dancing. We’ll have to play loud.’

‘We need brass,’ said Rosa. ‘I’ve listened to jazz on the radio. Lots of brass. Even Django says the future of jazz is brass.’

‘And the past mostly,’ said Eddie. ‘We have to find someone.’

‘These places can get pretty rowdy,’ said Michel. ‘We’ll have to keep close to Rosa.’

‘Don’t worry about me,’ said Rosa, producing a long nasty looking knife from her sleeve.

‘Wow!’ said Michel. ‘Know how to use it?’

‘Yes,’ said Rosa.

As they began to set up again, Eddie came up behind Charlie.

‘Armed and dangerous, this is a woman,’ he whispered.

They played one last set to an even larger crowd. A bunch of German soldiers cheered, and Charlie spotted Dieter among them, shaking his head in disbelief after another of Rosa’s solos. Michel called the last tune so they would have time to get to the club and tune up for their set there. The crowd eventually thinned and Michel counted out the change, with Rosa’s dad watching him closely. Rosa’s dad took the half he’d been promised and shook hands with all three.

‘You will take care of my daughter at the club?’ he said to Charlie.

‘We all will,’ said Eddie.

‘I know you will,’ said the older man, ‘but I want to know that this boy will be there.’

‘Yes, of course, sir,’ said Charlie.

The man put his hand on Charlie’s shoulder and smiled.

Jean came out to meet them as they rode up, laden with their instruments. Rosa was on the back of Eddie’s bike, giggling as she held him with one hand and her violin with the other. Michel had already arrived by train.

‘A band on bicycles!’ said Jean, walking towards them.

‘Hi Jean,’ said Charlie. ‘These are my friends, Eddie and Rosa.’

Jean took in Rosa. Charlie tried to read his expression but couldn’t. He shook Eddie’s hand.

‘Come inside!’ he said, then walked back into the club.

Eddie lifted his saxophone case from the basket on the front of his bike and leaned in close to Charlie.

'That's not a man I'd like to cross,' said Eddie. 'How do you know him?'

'Long story. But he is not a guy to cross. It's true.'

Eddie looked a little apprehensive as they made their way in. Rosa smiled at Charlie and shook her head.

'My father…'

'I know,' said Charlie.

Charlie had never actually been in the bar. There was the section at street level with tables and chairs where Charlie had seen Monique that night. Behind that, a series of descending levels, each with large round tables, led to a dance floor and a raised bandstand. It was fancy but not overly formal, thought Charlie. Jean had told Charlie that he tried to create a bar where everyone could feel comfortable.

They started setting up on the bandstand and Michel tapped Charlie on the shoulder.

'Here, you can use this.'

He held up an archtop Epiphone guitar with a pickup and a small amplifier. Charlie couldn't believe it.

'But I've never played an electric guitar,' said Charlie, lightheaded.

'It's no big deal,' said Michel, plugging in the amp.

Charlie took the guitar, holding it as though it was an instrument he'd never played. Michel switched on the amp. Charlie strummed a D7 chord. It was so loud he nearly jumped out of his chair.

'There is a volume dial on the guitar,' said Michel.

Charlie's mouth gaped in wonder as he began to play. The sound cut through him – it was incredible. The others watched him, amused.

'Now you really are Charlie Christian,' said Eddie.

Charlie couldn't talk. He just shook his head as he played gently, tentatively trying some fills. This was where he wanted to be, he decided. Monique would appear at some point and he would be playing an electric guitar on stage with a band.

At four, people started arriving. Charlie felt lightheaded, loose legged. It was one thing playing on the street or at a party, but this crowd wouldn't throw a coin and keep walking. Here, if they didn't like the band, anything could happen.

'Are you okay, Charlie?' asked Rosa while Eddie was at the bar getting water.

'Yes. No. A little nervous. Are you?'

'No…oh, maybe a little,' she said. She had changed into a dress and tied her hair back. It was her father's idea that she should not look too much like a Roma here. Eddie had laughed and said to Charlie that she would have to wear a mask not to attract attention. Her eyes, thought Charlie, seemed to be from another world. His father had once told him that the Roma had come from India in the middle ages. When he looked at Rosa, it was easy to believe.

'Let's go,' said Michel.

Charlie sat in a chair at the front while Michel stood behind. Eddie was centre stage with Rosa to one side. Every man in the place was already staring at her. Eddie called 'Flying Home' and launched into it on sax. They were playing fast, and some couples got up to dance. Charlie was sweating two bars in. People were yelling stuff at the band, but it was mainly in another language. The sound was thin with so few musicians – and it looked like the crowd agreed. But then Rosa started to play.

Some of the dancers stopped and the yelling stopped. She was demanding their attention, Charlie thought. She has grown up, playing in crowds and on the streets and around the campfire. This is nothing to her. The notes came down like a river and the crowd was hers. When Eddie picked it up again, they went back to dancing. Charlie turned around when they finished to Michel shaking his head in disbelief.

They played some songs that Django had recorded and the crowd loved it. Charlie almost expected the man himself to walk in and hire Rosa on the spot.

When they finished their set, the crowd cheered, and Jean came over and asked them to play another song. They finished with 'It Don't Mean a Thing' and got more cheers from the crowd.

'Not bad,' said Jean, smiling, as they were packing up. He looked at them for a few seconds before turning and heading back to the bar.

The next band was starting to set up and nobody, including their musicians, thought they were going to top that set. Charlie was checking the electric guitar over when a local guy in a suit walked up to the stage and gestured to Rosa. She ignored him and he turned to Charlie.

'Hey, guitar kid. I need to talk to the dame.'

'Of course, you do. I'll pass on the message.'

The guy looked at Charlie, Eddie and Michel and seemed to decide against making a scene. He leaned against the stage and whispered in Charlie's ear.

'Tell her that I am rich and will drape her in sable and diamonds.'

'Okay,' said Charlie.

He turned to Rosa:

'Guy says he will drape you in sable and diamonds.'

'Tell him I already have the stars, who needs diamonds? What's sable?'

Charlie turned back to the man.

'Not interested, pal.'

The man shrugged and walked away. But then, as they packed up their instruments, two or three German soldiers came over, clambering for her attention. It was clear that they weren't going to be put off as easily. As the band tried leave, the young men blocked their way.

'We would like the lady to have a drink with us,' said one of them for the third time.

'She doesn't drink,' said Eddie. 'Now, get out of the way.'

One of them went to grab her. Before Charlie and Eddie could even react, Michel had hit the guy so hard that he was on his knees, holding his face. Charlie and Eddie put down their instruments as the other two stepped forward.

'Get back!' It was Rosa, and she lunged forward with her knife outstretched. The men flinched with eyes wide. Then Jean arrived.

'Enough,' he said, quietly.

The German soldiers faded back into the crowd. Jean pulled Michel aside and was speaking in his ear and shaking his head in disapproval. He walked away, leaving Michel looking annoyed.

'That was a good gig. Those goddamn pigs. What are we going to do? We can't fight off the audience at the end of every show,' said Eddie once they were all outside.

'What does Josephine Baker do?' asked Rosa.

They all looked at her in surprise.

'That's a very good question, Rosa,' said Michel. 'But none of you are quite old enough to hear the answer.

They stood on the street with their instruments until Jean appeared, his good humour apparently restored.

'I've spoken to those young men, Rosa, and they have apologised for their behaviour,' he said, smiling.

'It was no big deal,' said Rosa.

'It would have been if you used that knife,' said Jean, shaking his head.

He gave them an envelope filled with money that they divided up. Rosa took her half and Charlie gave his share to her, too.

'Next Saturday?' said Jean.

They all nodded. Charlie caught Jean as he was going back inside.

'Um, Jean. I was wondering where, you know…'

'Where Monique is? She starts work at seven. I'll tell her you said hello.'

Charlie and Eddie took Rosa back to the Zone. She sat on the back of Eddie's bike as they rode in the darkness. Charlie tried to hang back. He could see they were chatting.

They had a cup of tea with her father and headed back to the café for dinner. Eddie said he hadn't heard anything about a Zazou party that night.

'We should still see some music tonight, though,' said Eddie. 'Django's brother plays a residency on the north side. It's a pretty quiet place. It will be fun.'

They rode their bikes back up to the northside and used the money they had made that day to pay the entrance fee of the club. Eddie told the maître d that they were musicians and had played Jean's bar that afternoon. He looked at them dubiously but allowed them in and even gave them a small table. There was no dance floor. This was a place for listening. It was dark and all of the rough wooden tables faced the tiny stage. Eddie ordered a bottle of wine and poured a glass for each of them. Charlie felt like a grown-up.

Then, Benny and Clare came in. Benny spotted them and walked over to their table.

'Bad scene last weekend,' he said, crouching down. 'Some of the Zazous who were caught have been sent to workcamps in the country. Still can't believe it happened.'

'How did you escape?'

'I wasn't there,' said Benny. 'I wasn't feeling well and left just before they arrived.'

'That was lucky,' said Charlie.

'That's all it was, too. A few of the guys were a bit suspicious this week. I've risked my life to help some of these people over the years.'

'My mother says that they want us to be suspicious of each other. Divide and conquer. The people who point fingers without any evidence are the real traitors because if we can't trust each other, we're lost,' said Charlie.

'Your maman's a smart lady, Charlie. That's exactly right. Hey, I heard you guys got a band with some Roma heartbreaker and a communist,' said Benny.

‘That’s about it,’ said Eddie. ‘We played Papa Jean’s bar in Pigalle this afternoon and nearly started a war. Wait a minute, there’s already one.’

‘I heard about that too. Let me know when you are playing, fellas. I’ll bring some of the Zazous down to even things up a bit.’

Benny went back to sit with his girlfriend when Joseph Reinhardt walked up on stage. There was another guitar player and a guy on trumpet. Charlie stared at the guitarist’s fingers trying to file away some of the things he was doing. Every so often, he’d look at Eddie and they’d shake their heads at each other. It was fun, thought Charlie, having a friend. He had never really had a good friend and he had always wanted a big brother. Eddie was sort of like both.

‘I don’t know what I’m going to do about Rosa,’ said Eddie when the band took a break.

‘What do you mean?’ said Charlie, worried that he was talking about the band.

‘She’s so hard to figure out.’

‘I think all women are,’ said Charlie.

Eddie raised his glass.

‘To women!’

Charlie told Eddie a bit, though not all, about his day with Monique. The other boy’s mouth dropped when he told him about going to her room.

‘Wow! That’s something else.’

‘I guess so,’ said Charlie, ‘but I always feel like there is something going on just past the corner of my eye. The whole thing doesn’t make sense.’

‘You’re paranoid, pal, but then we all are. She likes you but she’s taking things slowly. That’s okay. It sounds like a car race compared to things with Rosa. I’m not going to get anywhere with her for a long time.’

‘After the second baby, maybe, when you’ve got a big moustache and a hat, sitting on the step of your caravan.’

‘Ha! Maybe. You know, I could do that,’ said Eddie.

‘Do what?’

‘Marry Rosa and become a Roma.’

‘I don’t think you just become a Roma. It’s not like joining the chess club at school.’

Eddie sipped his wine, deep in thought.

‘My mother would sure be surprised!’ he said.

They went up and spoke to Joseph Reinhardt for a couple of minutes while he was tuning up. He smiled at them when they said they had a band with a Roma girl playing a violin.

‘Be careful of Roma girls, boys,’ he said. ‘They know what you are going to do before you even do.’

They went back to their table. Eddie looked confused.

‘Was that the old fortune-teller thing he was talking about?’

‘No idea,’ said Charlie, ‘but I can see what he means. Rosa always seems one step ahead of us.’

‘To Rosa!’ said Eddie raising his glass.

Chapter Twenty-Six

When Charlie got to the Elysée, Frank was already playing, so he joined in, toning down the heavy pompe rhythms to suit the waltzes. It was a warm day, maybe the first of the year, and people, both locals and Germans, seemed a bit happier. They didn't drop any more money, but they seemed to enjoy the music. An old couple danced for a while and then chatted to Frank while Charlie changed a broken string.

Charlie was still in two minds about meeting up with Dieter. Part of him was curious, not just about the music but about Dieter himself. He had watched these people in his city for more than two years, but he had rarely spoken to them – except, of course, to show his papers. Dieter was only a couple of years older. Was he like them back in his own country? On Friday, he'd said that he wasn't wanted there. That certainly wasn't the message on the radio. Maman always said that the most irritating part about it all was the expectation of gratitude. They will fail, said Tremblay, when they begin to believe their own fairy tales. Dieter didn't believe in them, but Charlie felt like a traitor even considering spending time with him. Dieter was the enemy, the same one that was holding Papa prisoner and threatening everything in his life.

'Ready to play, Plato? You seem deep in thought,' said Frank.

'Do you ever wonder about the Germans?'

'Yes, quite often. In what sense?'

'Well, if they are people like us.'

'Their humanity, you mean. It's a tricky question. Sometimes I look at their faces when we are playing. They are mostly young men, like you, and I can see joy, sadness, homesickness sometimes when we play the waltzes. But I can also see the kind of stupid loyalty that means that their counterparts in Poland can behave like monsters without thinking too much about what they are doing.'

Charlie watched a young couple play with their toddler in the park nearby. He thought about his parents taking him out on Sundays to play. It was just life where now everything was a game, a trap, or an opportunity. He never felt like those people these

days. He looked at them again. They were probably terrified too and today was just an attempt to give their child something like their own childhoods.

'Are you married, Frank?'

'I don't know. I don't want to talk about anything like that now,' he said, looking down.

'I'm sorry, I'm just curious,' said Charlie.

'Of course you are, why wouldn't you be? Let's play some music and stop philosophising!'

They started up again and attracted a good crowd, mostly locals but a few Germans here and there. Frank sang songs, told jokes and stories, and danced around with his accordion – the shadow of the other day completely gone. But Charlie now knew there was a terrible sadness behind of all this showmanship.

They finished up as the shadows lengthened, and Charlie had to make a decision. His instinct was to go and find out something about this Dieter. It wouldn't be such a bad thing to have a contact among the Germans. Jean probably did and he was no traitor. Yet, he knew that he was going to have to surrender his hatred if he was going to be civil and he wasn't sure he could do it or even if he wanted to do it.

He said goodbye to Frank and tied his guitar on to the back of his bike. He rode towards the arch wondering just how big a mistake this would turn out to be. Locals walked along the street and Charlie felt guilty, as though he was thumbing his nose at their suffering.

When he walked into Café Vert, an unfamiliar Benny Goodman song was coming from a small record player on the counter at the back of the room. There was Dieter with eyes closed, moving to the music. He was wearing a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up and baggy trousers.

'Hello,' said Charlie.

'Listen to Lionel on vibes! Listen to him! He's calling out Krupa! What have you got, Flash?! Now here's Krupa answering him. This is what I got, Hamp, what can you add to that? And here's Benny! Settle down boys!'

Charlie was laughing. It was like Dieter was calling a boxing match while he listened to the record. But it was also the way Charlie listened. Music was like a conversation, a story told by a bunch of people. Maman was always trying to get him to read novels but he always said that the same things happened in a great song. They go on an adventure and all kinds of things happen.

'Is Charlie Christian going to join the game soon?' asked Charlie.

'Well, one Charlie has! Hello, my friend. I'm glad you came.'

Charlie was about to say that he wasn't Dieter's friend, just on instinct, but stopped himself. He would seem churlish to show up and be unpleasant.

'That's a great record,' said Charlie. 'Is it new?

'Six months old maybe.'

'But how?'

'Look,' said the other young man.

He held up the record. Charlie couldn't read the words, but the label was wrong. It was a local label and there was no way that they had Benny Goodman music.

'They put old labels over the originals. They smuggle them in somehow. It's a local guy, close to Django. He gives them to me.'

Charlie thought he knew the man Dieter was talking about and was surprised that he would have anything to do with a German soldier. He was in the Resistance so it may have been part of a game. As always, something hovered just outside of his field of vision. There was a picture forming but it was still dark in most places.

'Sit down,' said Dieter. 'A coffee for my friend!'

The owner appeared a few minutes later with coffee. He regarded Charlie with an odd suspicion. Meanwhile, Dieter played record after record on the small turntable. Goodman records, Basie, Ellington – Charlie couldn't believe some of the stuff he was hearing.

'I'll tell you something that a friend of mine at home told me,' said Dieter. 'Your friend Charlie Christian has been playing in Minton's, a little place in New York, with guys

like Dizzy Gillespie from Cab Calloway's band, and they are playing fast and hot. Small bands, lots of improvisation.'

'I would love to hear that stuff.'

'I don't know if anyone has made a record yet, but everyone is doing small combos. And people like Coleman Hawkins are changing things a bit. The big bands won't last.'

'Oh c'mon!' said Charlie. They've been around forever, since the twenties!'

'I think something new is happening and, do you know what? I think your band is a good example. That sax player improvises sometimes and the violin player is out of this world. You guys think you sound like Goodman, but you are going in a whole other direction.'

Charlie considered this for a second.

'What direction is that?'

'The next chapter! Where jazz stops being just dance music, where people like Coleman and Pres and Charlie get to explore music without some bandleader shouting at them.'

Charlie had no idea what he meant although he could see in a way what he was saying about dance music. He didn't mind Artie Shaw but people like Glenn Miller left Charlie cold. It was fun to dance to if you liked dancing but there wasn't anything to it. Charlie liked music with substance.

'Listen, you've got your guitar. Let's play some music.'

Charlie looked at him for a second.

'What do you play?'

'Trumpet.'

'Really?' said Charlie.

'You can't believe that a German soldier plays an instrument? Lots of us do.'

‘Okay,’ said Charlie, reaching for his guitar case and thinking that Dieter would be a beginner at best.

Charlie tuned up and began to play the chords to ‘Marie’. Dieter came in and played the melody with clarity before starting to solo. Charlie was surprised. He kept playing and could hear Dieter swinging the melody the way Roy Eldridge did sometimes.

‘Wow!’ said Charlie, laughing when they stopped. ‘You can really play. Did you play in a band at home?’

‘Yes,’ said Dieter, and for the first time, Charlie saw something like a shadow pass his face.

He started to play ‘Dinah’ and Charlie joined in. He couldn’t help but hear what it would sound like with Eddie and the others. He could hear Michel providing the bass while Rosa conversed with Dieter and Eddie. If only they had someone like him to play trumpet.

The next song they played was ‘Summertime’. It was an old song but Papa used to sing it to Charlie as he went to sleep. Dieter played it perfectly and it sounded so good that even the sullen café owner came out and clapped. They played a few up-tempo things and Dieter seemed to just get inside the song and find it. He wasn’t like Rosa who reinvented every song she played but more like a smooth player that you might find in someone’s band.

‘Not flashy,’ said Dieter reading Charlie’s mind, ‘but cool, that’s how I like it.’

‘Do you think Rosa is flashy? She’s the girl who plays violin.’

‘Yes, but she can get away with it because she’s got the chops to back it up. You’re like me, you know what you can do well, and you don’t try to pretend you can do stuff that you can’t.’

‘But you have to try new stuff, or you don’t get any better,’ said Charlie.

‘But it’s about mastery, not tricks and gimmicks.’

‘That’s the problem with your country and why nobody can play jazz. It’s all about tricks and gimmicks!’ said Charlie before he could stop himself.

Dieter looked at him for a second and then laughed.

‘The jazz is terrible in my country, you’re right. I’ll tell you a funny story. The government, before the war, decided that they wanted to prove that we could play better jazz than the Americans, so they held a contest on the radio. They didn’t say anything about who was in the band, they just had them play a standard. It went on for days and days. Hundreds of bands were involved and people had to write in to say who their favourite was every night.’

‘Who won?’ asked Charlie.

‘Well, it was almost all local bands except for an amateur group of American exchange students. Now guess who won.’

‘Oh no!’

‘Oh yes! The people’s choice over scores of professional local bands. The government ordered the station to stop the competition before they announced the winner.’

‘How did you find out?’

‘Oh, everyone knew. It was hilarious.’

Charlie laughed.

‘You’re not terrible though,’ said Charlie, apologetically. ‘I mean, your playing isn’t terrible.’

Dieter nodded and lifted his trumpet to his lips. He started playing ‘Please Don’t Talk About Me’ and Charlie joined in. Again, he was amazed at how good they sounded together. When they finished, he put his trumpet back in its case and went back to the record player.

‘One more thing to play for you before you go. This, my friend, will change your life. Remember that I mentioned a guy called Dizzy Gillespie?’

Charlie watched Dieter drop the needle onto the record. The rhythm sounded odd to Charlie. Was it Latin? The melody seemed to start from nowhere. It didn’t sound like anything he’d ever heard but the more he listened, the more it grabbed him.

‘You couldn’t dance to this,’ said Charlie.

‘Who cares?’ said Dieter. ‘Isn’t it brilliant?’

‘It’s unbelievable. Who is this guy?’

‘He used to play with Cab Calloway, but they got into a fight one night and Dizzy pulled a blade on him.’

‘Wow,’ said Charlie.

‘I heard that he was playing with Earl Hines, but I don’t know.’

The record continued and Charlie felt like he was changing his mind about everything with every bar. He wanted to try playing along with it and he wanted Eddie to hear it. He imagined the band doing it. What would Rosa make of it?

‘What’s it called?’

‘‘Night in Tunisia’.’

Chapter Twenty-Seven

‘No way,’ said Eddie. ‘I don’t care how good it is, I don’t want to listen to it with one of those bastards.’

Charlie had spent the day busking with Frank but decided to drop in on Eddie on the way home and tell him about the Dizzy Gillespie record.

‘Can’t he just lend it to you for a couple of hours?’

‘He won’t let it out of his sight and I think he’s hoping we’ll come around and listen to it. The poor guy loves jazz and doesn’t have anyone to talk to about it.’

‘The poor guy? He could have stayed home and talked about jazz all day with his own people.’

‘He plays the trumpet. He’s good.’

‘Great,’ Eddie deadpanned. ‘He can join the band.’

‘It’s too bad, really,’ said Charlie. ‘He’s what we need.’

Eddie shook his head.

‘Come and listen to the record at least – Monday, by the arch,’ said Charlie.

‘I’ll think about it.’

On Thursday, Jean had another mission for Charlie and Monique. They were to take a leather satchel to the large park on the other side of the river, not too far from Charlie’s apartment. It was a sunny day and they sat on the bench. Jean had told them to pretend that they were two young lovers, winking at Charlie, so they held hands and kissed occasionally. Monique was wearing a spring dress and had tied her hair back. She looked great, thought Charlie, and he was enjoying sitting with her on the bench. A voice in his head kept nagging him though. What were they doing? He felt as though they were like actors in a movie that someone was directing. Was any of this real?

After about half an hour, Charlie saw a bicycle rolling towards them. The man on the bike was in his thirties and looked like a soldier. When he asked for a light, Charlie realised that he was American. He smiled at Charlie’s surprise.

‘Nice lookin’ dame ya got here,’ he said, as he started to get back on the bike.

‘Thanks,’ said Monique who had changed the bags so quickly that Charlie hadn’t even seen her do it.

‘How’s Benny Goodman doing?’

‘He’s okay, kid, but his guitarist died. Sad, that guy could play.’

The American smiled at Monique and rode off. Charlie fell back on the bench.

‘Charlie Christian died?’

Monique put her arm around him and her face close to his so that he could smell her perfume.

‘It’s terrible Charlie. I’m so sorry.’

‘I can’t believe it,’ said Charlie. ‘He must have only been about 22.’

They made their way to Jean’s place and handed over the other satchel. Jean was surprised that the man had spoken to them.

‘He must be mad to reveal himself as an American!’ said Jean with concern. ‘They think they are protected by some greater force. It’s dangerous sometimes.’

Monique invited Charlie up to her room again and they lay on the bed, kissing.

‘Monique,’ said Charlie. ‘Do you like me?’

‘You are the sweetest boy I have ever known.’

‘Do you love me?’

‘Do you love me?’ asked Monique.

‘I think I might,’ said Charlie, his chest hurting with emotion.

She kissed him hard on the mouth and moved under him. Charlie touched her leg and started to push her dress up as they kissed.

‘Slow down there!’ said Monique.

Charlie stopped, breathing heavily and feeling lightheaded. She unbuttoned the front of her dress and drew his hands inside.

‘That’s all for today, mister!’ she said, after a few minutes.

She buttoned up her dress and rolled over with her back to Charlie. He held her gently and they both fell asleep.

When Monique woke Charlie up, she was dressed and on her way to work. He smiled at her shyly and she put a finger to his lips.

‘I’ll see you soon,’ she said.

Charlie rode home realising that he couldn’t tell anyone about Charlie Christian without raising suspicions about he found out such a thing. Instead, he went home and listened to all the records the guitarist had played on.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

His mother had gone away again, for a few days this time, so he was eating dinner with Tremblay.

'Are you still playing at the markets on Saturdays, Charlie?'

'Yes, and we have a gig afterwards at Papa Jean's,' said Charlie, then telling him about their first gig there.

'And this Rosa is a Roma?' asked Tremblay.

'Yes,' said Charlie. 'Why?'

'I think life is going to get difficult for them. More difficult than ever. The local government is starting rumours – putting stories in their newspapers about thefts that might have involved the Roma. There were at least three in that ridiculous newspaper yesterday about the so-called 'Roma problem'.'

'I don't think they steal more than anyone else,' said Charlie.

'The Germans are moving all of our artwork to galleries in their own country, but the local government is worried because some official's bike went missing.'

Charlie nodded, thinking about Rosa and her family. Sometimes, they seemed like the only honest people left in the city. Everyone else in his life seemed to be hiding something.

'Just be careful up there,' said Tremblay.

'They'd have to shoot all three of us to get to Rosa,' said Charlie.

'That's what I'm afraid of.'

On Saturday, while they were setting up to play in the market, Michel told them that Jean wanted them back. The new head of the German police, the Colonel himself, had been there the other day and enjoyed their music, particularly Rosa's playing, and wanted to hear them again. Jean was particularly anxious to make this man happy and would pay them well. The Colonel also told Jean that no soldier would ever bother Rosa again. He had made an example of the offending men.

Charlie felt a shiver. Why was this man at Papa Jean's watching jazz?

‘It doesn’t make sense,’ said Charlie. ‘The Nazis hate jazz.’

‘They might but this guy is a major fan with an extensive record collection. He has personally ensured Django Reinhardt’s safety.’

Rosa shook her head but said nothing. Charlie thought about the irony of missing the man’s welcome parade only to have him watch Charlie’s band a few weeks later.

‘Okay,’ Eddie said. ‘But what if this Colonel wants Rosa to have a drink with him?’

‘I made it clear to Jean that we had promised to look after her and there was to be no confusion on that count. Jean, ahem, seemed to feel that the General’s interests were not in that direction.’

‘Maybe you’ll be having a drink with him, Eddie,’ said Charlie.

‘Then I will have something to say,’ said Rosa.

Eddie blushed. Charlie had noticed that there was more between them and wondered if they had been seeing each other during the week.

The band played a long set on the street and drew a large crowd. People were dancing and coins rained into the guitar cases. Charlie spotted Dieter in the crowd and smiled at him. Dieter waved and gave him the thumbs up. Eddie looked at Charlie, but Charlie ignored him. When they finished the set, Eddie was telling Michel about the record Charlie had heard.

‘You sat and listened to records with a German soldier?’ said Michel. ‘You are a funny kid, Charlie.’

‘I’m just here to listen to music,’ said Charlie, annoyed. ‘Everything else can go to hell. Resistance, Occupier, it’s all the same. Lies and tricks. I heard something special on Monday and you need to hear it too.’

‘That’s dangerous talk,’ said Michel. ‘I’d like to hear it, but I don’t think any of us can afford to get close to an enemy soldier.’

‘You don’t get it,’ said Charlie. ‘He’s not the enemy. He’s just like us.’

‘That’s nonsense, Charlie,’ said Eddie. ‘He’s not like us at all.’

Rosa looked at Charlie with concern.

‘I’d like to hear the record, Charlie,’ she said.

‘Oh, no way,’ said Eddie.

Rosa looked at him in surprise.

‘I do whatever I like. Don’t forget that, Eddie.’

Everyone went quiet.

‘It’s no big deal,’ said Charlie, quietly. ‘I’ll try to get him to lend it to me.’

They started to play again, everyone avoiding each other’s eyes for the first part of the set. A few songs in, Eddie smiled at Charlie, nodding and shaking his head. They were friends again.

The gig at Jean’s went much more smoothly that evening. It was instantly clear who the Colonel was from the stage. He had a table right in front of them, in front of the dancefloor, and was surrounded by bodyguards on all sides. He clapped after each song and toasted the soloists. Jean came over to the table several times and the man spoke excitedly to him, pointing at Rosa and Charlie.

When they finished their first set and Charlie was tuning the electric guitar, he took the opportunity to get a better look at the man. He was in his forties with short greying hair and a black uniform with a high collar. He suddenly looked up at Charlie and smiled. Charlie’s heart froze but he managed to smile back. It was always so strange. This man loved jazz as much as he did and was enjoying the music they were making. Why was he an enemy and why did Charlie’s heart start to race whenever he glanced towards the man?

While the rest of the band stood outside getting some fresh air and talking, Charlie went to the bar and asked for a glass of water. He suddenly felt dizzy as he stood waiting. His brain was placing image after image.

Something was wrong. He remembered meeting Michel that night. There were too many coincidences. He thought about all of the people in his life now: Jean, Monique, Eddie, Rosa, Michel. Who were these people? Jean came over and put a hand on his shoulder.

‘Everything okay, chief?’

‘Yes,’ said Charlie, ‘fine’

Jean looked at him for a moment as though he could see some doubt.

‘Try not to think too much, Charlie.’

Was that advice or a threat? Charlie wondered before Michel called to him for the second set.

They began with ‘Summertime’, which the Colonel enjoyed enormously. He clapped and cheered as he lit cigarette after cigarette. Charlie felt sick. It was as though the song would be spoiled forever.

Around the room, Germans sat at tables with local girls. Charlie couldn’t help but picture Monique in their place. How could she do it? It was a sleazy place, he decided, but then again, he knew that all of his heroes had played places like it and worse. He tried not to look at the Colonel.

When they finished their set, the man stood up, bowed to them, and left, followed by his men. Charlie saw Michel watching carefully, as though he was taking notes.

‘That’s a scary man,’ said Michel. ‘One wrong note and we all might as shoot ourselves.’

‘He clearly enjoyed himself.’

Michel seemed not to hear, and Charlie had the feeling that he was just talking while thinking about something else. Jean approached with their money.

‘You got a good review, though, he believes, as I do, that one more brass instrument is needed,’ Jean said, before turning and heading back to the bar

‘Oh great, now he’s a jazz critic and our music director,’ said Eddie to the rest of the group. ‘I wonder if he’ll buy us uniforms like his.’

Michel snorted.

‘He might offer us a tour of his country. They say that he is pressuring Django to tour there.’

Charlie felt his heart flutter.

‘This gets better and better,’ said Eddie.

‘I think we better find a trumpet player,’ said Michel. ‘This is a great gig.’

Eddie shook his head.

‘This ends here. I’m not playing for that monster ever again,’ he said. ‘We all know what’s going on in the east.’

Rosa said nothing and Charlie decided to stay quiet.

‘C’mon Eddie,’ said Michel. ‘This is easy money, and the band sounds great. We’ll find a horn player.’

Eddie shook his head but just picked up his guitar case and jacket and started for the door. Michel watched him go.

‘You need to change his mind, Charlie,’ said Michel tensely.

Charlie laughed.

‘It’s no joke. We are playing this gig.’

Charlie looked at Rosa. Her expression was, as always, difficult to read but he saw a flicker of recognition.

‘Get him back, either of you,’ said Michel, slightly too forcefully.

‘Or what?’ said Charlie, his heart racing.

‘You’ll find out,’ said Michel, waving a finger in Charlie’s face and walking away.

‘There’s something wrong here,’ said Rosa.

Charlie nodded and was about to reply when Eddie came back.

‘Sorry, I’ll calm down,’ he said.

‘Nothing to apologise for,’ said Charlie.

‘These Resistance guys like Michel think they are the only ones who hate the Germans. Probably none of us has more reason than Rosa,’ said Eddie.

She shook her head.

‘Let’s go, Eddie, you can take me home.’

Chapter Twenty-Nine

On Monday afternoon, just after the sun had begun to set, Eddie, Rosa and Michel appeared on the Avenue. Charlie and Frank had just begun to play a Waltz in the local style and Rosa, who had her violin, joined in. It seemed to move in another direction – a sad Viennese waltz – and Charlie couldn't find the groove anymore on guitar. He let the other two carry on. Then Rosa started to play something much faster that sounded like some kind of folk music. Frank played accordion better than Charlie had ever heard him and tears began to roll down his cheeks as they played. The crowd was transfixed, and Eddie glanced at Charlie, looking as perplexed as Charlie felt.

When they finished Frank gave Rosa a gentle hug and waved goodbye to the others. They began to walk towards the café to meet Dieter.

'What was all that about?' asked Eddie.

'He played a Jewish melody and I played it too, so he started to speed it up.'

'That's funny,' said Charlie. 'I wonder where he learned to…'

Rosa was looking at him, smiling. Charlie thought about Frank. A part of him wondered if he would return the next day.

As they walked into the café, Dieter burst out laughing in surprise. He came forward and put out his hand.

'This is Eddie,' said Charlie, gesturing to his friend.

Eddie shook hands with Dieter and Michel did the same. Michel was friendlier with the German than Charlie expected him to be. Something seemed to pass between them. Charlie tried to recapture it. It was impossible but it was as though they knew each other. Rosa smiled and offered her hand that Dieter took.

'Alright, let's hear this record,' said Eddie.

Dieter smiled and asked the owner to bring coffees. He went behind the counter and took the record out of the sleeve. The needle fell and the song started. Eddie frowned at first, then began to smile. Rosa smiled knowingly and Michel tapped his foot as though trying to work out a bass part.

‘Well?’ said Charlie, mainly to Eddie.

‘Okay, it’s pretty good. Play it again, Dieter.’

They listened to it again. When it finished, Rosa took out her violin and began to play the melody. Charlie quickly opened his guitar case and started to try to find the chords. It was tricky. Eddie hummed along with the saxophone. Rosa had found the rhythm and was finding exotic notes within its already slightly exotic structure. Suddenly, Dieter chimed in with his trumpet. They all looked up at him. Michel beat time on a table while they played. It sounded right and they could all hear it. Dieter’s trumpet was the perfect foil for Rosa’s violin. Charlie had known it the first time he heard it.

‘Play ‘Limehouse Blues’,’ said Eddie. ‘I want to hear this .’

They played it. Dieter weaved around Rosa’s violin while she gave him room when he needed it. Eddie sat shaking his head and laughing. Michel had stopped tapping on the table and appeared to be deep in thought.

The coffees appeared and they stopped playing. They all sat silently. Charlie realised that they had a real problem and a real solution at the same time.

‘There’s no way,’ said Eddie.

‘I’m sorry?’ said Dieter. ‘No way what?’

‘There is no way that you can join our band.’

‘I have enjoyed playing with you today, but I didn’t imagine that I would be playing with you at the market,’ he said, laughing.

‘Why not?’ said Michel. ‘I thought you were being encouraged to interact with the locals. Why couldn’t you play some music with us?’

‘Oh, c’mon Michel,’ said Eddie. ‘There is no way on earth.’

‘But why?’ said Rosa. ‘Dieter can play the trumpet. He knows our music well.’

‘This is the enemy, Rosa,’ said Eddie.

Dieter put his hands up.

‘It’s fine. I’m not sure I would be allowed to do such a thing.’

‘Why not?’ said Michel. ‘Your writers write in the newspapers and attend events with our writers. Painters, sculptors. Picasso receives German soldiers at his painting studio.’

‘It’s collaboration, Michel,’ said Eddie, gravely.

‘I don’t think so.’

Eddie thought about this for a moment, then said, ‘Listen, Dieter, you seem like a good fellow so please don’t get angry, but your people have invaded my country, shot my countrymen and made prostitutes of the local women. I’m sorry but I don’t want to play music with you. It’s nothing personal but I don’t even want you in this city…’

‘Eddie, stop!’ cried Rosa. ‘This is a person!’

Dieter said nothing. They all sat quietly.

‘I’m sorry, Dieter. Maybe this wasn’t a good idea. We should go,’ said Charlie.

‘Eddie,’ said Dieter, steadily. ‘I want to tell you something. Not because I want to play music with you or be your friend. I want you to know something about me.’

Eddie looked at him with curiosity.

‘Okay,’ Eddie said, quietly. ‘Listen, I’m sorry. This is a difficult situation and…’

‘I understand very well how you feel. I do,’ said Dieter.

‘How could you possibly…?’

‘Listen to him, Eddie,’ said Rosa.

Dieter took a breath and began:

‘Three years ago, I was part of a group of kids in my city called the Swing Kids. We were just like you. We listened to music, we made magazines, we put on concerts and dances, learned to play instruments, dressed like Americans and had a lot of fun. There were quite a few of us in the city and the dances we put on were pretty big sometimes. My best friend, Karl, and I had a small combo. He played guitar, another boy played drums and I played trumpet. We played in cafés and at parties. We couldn’t imagine why anyone would think there was anything wrong with what we did but of course, the

government there found a lot wrong with us, with jazz, with anything that wasn't part of their narrow idea of society.

We were okay for a while until they established the youth wing and insisted that everyone join. None of the Swing Kids did, of course, and it was then that they began to see us as a serious threat. They started raiding our dances and finding excuses to arrest us. The youth wing was encouraged to beat us up and harass us as much as possible. Karl was beaten so badly one night that he could barely walk the next day. Our drummer finally got so frightened that he cut his hair, gave me all of his records and joined the youth wing. Karl and I refused to back down. We kept running dances, kept playing music and kept dressing in our swing gear.

One day, a friend of mine told me that Karl had been arrested. I went to his girlfriend's house and she was frantic. They had been walking home from school and a car had pulled up and two men had jumped out and arrested him. When he refused to go with them, they beat him until he was unconscious. She was screaming and one of them slapped her and told her to shut up. I went to the police station and couldn't find out anything. Eventually, two officers from the secret police came to my house. They told me that they suspected Karl of being a member of a group that was plotting against the government. He had been turned in by a boy at our school. My name had been mentioned too. It was just nonsense and I told them so. They told me to keep my mouth shut and join the youth wing as soon as possible. I tried to find out more about Karl but there was nothing. His parents had been threatened. They kept saying that he was away with his cousins in another city.

There was so much pressure then. I was told not to come to school until I joined the youth wing, and my father was told he would lose his job. I had a kind of breakdown and ended up in a hospital. When I came out, I was given the choice of either joining the military or going to the camps. I just couldn't handle any more of it, so I joined the army. I thought I would end up on the eastern front and die. That's what I wanted to do. Instead, I ended up here with all my memories among a whole city of people who hate me.'

Everyone sat quietly, not know what to say.

‘And your friend?’ asked Rosa.

‘Hung for treason,’ said Dieter. ‘They sent his girlfriend to a prison camp.’

‘What are you doing here? I mean, what is your job here?’ asked Michel.

‘I do patrols. I work with the local police. We are supposed to exchange information. I’m a nobody. I just sit in a jeep for a few hours every day while we drive around the perimeter looking for the British army. It’s pointless and dull.’

‘Can we trust you?’ asked Michel. ‘If we do this, we have to know that you won’t be watching us too closely or reporting to anyone on us.’

‘No way,’ said Eddie. ‘I’m sorry for your troubles, Dieter, but this can’t work.’

‘That Colonel wants a trumpet player. Dieter is a trumpet player,’ said Michel.

‘I can’t see how I can,’ said Dieter.

‘I think they’ll permit you. Somehow, they still think they can win us over with charm,’ said Michel.

‘But it could be dangerous for him,’ said Charlie, feeling as though this had all been rehearsed. Dieter was always going to join the band. He could feel it, but it didn’t make any sense.

‘Dieter?’ said Michel.

‘I don’t care. I’ll ask. If I’m to be shot, let it be for wanting to play jazz one more time.’

They said goodbye to Dieter and started walking down the dark avenue. Charlie was trying to sort out the whole thing in his head. Rosa was walking silently, and Eddie was arguing with Michel.

‘What are you playing at, Michel?’

‘What do you mean? I want that gig at Jean’s place. This means we’re there as long as we want.’

‘Not only will we be in danger with the Resistance groups…’

‘Don’t worry about that,’ said Michel. ‘I will make sure our position is clear. This was imposed on us. And don’t think that there aren’t Resistance people working closely with German people all over the city.’

‘Are you going to try to turn him for the Resistance? Is that what this is about?’ asked Eddie.

‘No, Eddie. Drop it and don’t ask questions like that.’

‘Okay, okay,’ said Eddie.

Michel left them when they got to the centre of the city. They rode back to the Zone with Rosa on the back of Eddie’s bike. After they dropped her, they walked their bikes for a while.

‘Charlie, what are we doing? This crazy band will have a Resistance operative, a Roma, a black-market bag man, a high school student with no family, and a German soldier,’ said Eddie.

‘The thing is, Eddie,’ said Charlie, ‘is the sound. It sounds good. I want to make good music. I don’t care about the other stuff.’

‘You are real Zazou, Charlie. There’s no doubt about it. You say jazz is more important than any war.’

‘I think Dieter feels the same way.’

‘I know,’ said Eddie. ‘I’m worried we’re going to get him killed by his people while he gets us killed by ours.’

‘You know what I think, Eddie?’ said Charlie as they stood on a dark corner.

‘What?’

‘I think the whole thing is a setup.’

‘What whole thing?’

‘The band.’

‘What?’

‘I think Michel is up to something. I don’t know or even want to know what it is, but I think there is more to all of this than we think.’

Eddie looked at him for a moment.

‘That’s crazy, Charlie. I met Michel by accident. You met Dieter by accident.’

Charlie nodded in the darkness.

‘That’s one accident too many, don’t you think?’

Eddie thought for a second.

‘But what’s the point? And why would Michel let a German soldier get so close if he is using the band to cover himself?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Charlie. ‘but something isn’t right.’

Chapter Thirty

It was a different band that played at the market that Saturday. They started with a long version of 'Dinah' and Dieter didn't miss a note, thought Charlie as he blasted through the familiar chords in Django's style. The German was a listener and a watcher. He listened to Eddie and Rosa and found space between them. It was remarkable. The crowd responded enthusiastically. Some people stared intently at Dieter trying to decide if he could possibly be what they thought he might be, but like the band itself, they were won over by the music. Couples danced and everyone cheered the solos.

Eddie had spoken to Rosa's father who wanted to meet Dieter. He arrived early while they were setting up and was introduced.

'What do you think of him?' he had asked Charlie quietly.

'I think he's okay.'

'Me too. He has sadness.'

Charlie pondered the idea for a moment, hoping that they weren't making some colossal mistake. When he had mentioned it to Jean, the older man had been unfazed. 'It's business. Don't think so much,' he said in a refrain that was starting to worry Charlie.

It had been a strange week for him. He hadn't seen Monique on Thursday – Jean had just shrugged and said she was busy. He delivered some packages for Jean and busked on the Champs with Frank as usual but went home to an empty apartment every night. Maman still wasn't home. Tremblay said he knew nothing of her whereabouts but tried to assure Charlie that she would be back soon.

Charlie tried not to think about it while he played. It was a sunny day and the band sounded great. It was funny to have Dieter with them on the pavement rather than in the crowd giving him the thumbs up. They played for almost two hours before finally taking a break. Dieter refused to take any share at all of the money.

'You worked hard. Take it,' said Michel.

'I get fed and housed. Playing with this band is enough payment for me. Divide it up among yourselves.'

They sat on crates and ate the bread that Dieter had brought and drank the tea supplied by Rosa's father.

'Should we try Dizzy's 'Night in Tunisia'?' said Charlie.

Dieter smiled and nodded.

The crowd didn't know how to react. Some Zazous had shown up and they seemed to like it but the older people shook their heads. It was a difficult song and Charlie wasn't sure that they were even playing it right. Dieter was doing these crazy little runs on the trumpet followed by Rosa. Eddie just laughed and played the rhythm notes until Dieter started shouting at him to solo. He played something that sounded odd to Charlie's ears but seemed to work. Dieter was ecstatic and started to blow even faster and crazier. Rosa followed him every step of the way. Charlie was shouting the chords out to Eddie and Michel. Charlie couldn't tell if the crowd was cheering or booing by the end. It didn't matter, he decided. They were doing what all the best jazz musicians were trying to do, creating something new and exciting.

'Might skip that one at Jean's,' said Michel later when they were talking about it. 'There's the jazz that people dance to and then there's the jazz that gets you shot!'

The jazz fans in the crowd might have had mixed feelings about the Dizzy Gillespie song but the consensus was that Dieter had completed the band and they had never sounded better.

The bar was already packed when they arrived, and they set up in front of an audience eager to hear them. The Colonel was in the same seat as last time, sipping a glass of wine and chatting to his bodyguards. He caught Charlie's eye and waved. Charlie smiled, feeling chilled to the bone.

Dieter sat down beside Charlie with his back to the audience.

'That, my friend, is a very dangerous man.'

'So we were told. He's a big fan and he was anxious for us to add a brass player.'

Dieter looked uncomfortable but smiled.

'This,' he said pointing at his trumpet, 'nearly got me killed once. Let's see what happens this time.'

‘Just don’t do any of the crazy Dizzy Gillespie stuff or we’ll all get shot!’ said Eddie, sticking his head in.

By the time they started, Jean’s place was filled with German soldiers and civilian staff. Some locals were there too. They played a fairly conservative set to start with but started to let loose a bit in the second as the crowd warmed up. Again, Charlie could hear the difference with Dieter.

The crowd was so enthusiastic that Jean asked them to play a short encore set. They launched into ‘Stompin’ at the Savoy’ and the dance floor filled up immediately. It was during their last song that Charlie spotted Monique. At first, he wasn’t sure it was her. She was wearing an evening gown and flashy jewellery, and her face was covered in make-up. She was sitting with an older German officer. He had his arm around her and it looked to Charlie like they were together. He had to fight to keep playing as his heart beat harder. What was she doing? It didn’t make any sense. He tried not to look but couldn’t stop. The German was whispering in her ear and she was laughing. They were at the back of the bar and weren’t watching the band.

The roar when they finished must have caught her attention because she looked up and caught Charlie’s eye. She blinked in disbelief and then smiled and waved. Charlie waved back slowly. The set was finished, and the rest of the band began to pack up.

‘Ahem, Charlie, you might not want to flirt with officer’s girlfriends,’ said Eddie.

‘That’s Monique,’ said Charlie, choking on the words.

‘Oh,’ said Eddie. ‘Well, it’s probably not as bad as it looks. These lowlifes pay quite a bit just to have pretty girls sit with them.’

‘But why would she do that?’ said Charlie.

‘Money, why else? She’s not there for his charm.’

‘I’m going to talk to her,’ said Charlie, standing up.

‘That’s a bad idea,’ said Michel, with a hand on Charlie’s shoulder. ‘You don’t want to start trouble.’

‘My girl is sitting with some guy,’ said Charlie.

‘She’s working, Charlie, that’s all,’ said Michel. ‘Surely you knew.’

‘Knew what?’ said Charlie, standing up and looking closely at Michel.

‘Let’s get out of here,’ said Eddie. ‘I hate this place.’

Charlie didn’t look at Monique as they walked out with their instruments. He didn’t care if he ever saw her again. They stood on the pavement in the darkness. He stepped away from the group and looked up at the evening sky.

‘What’s wrong, Charlie?’ said Rosa, from behind him.

‘Nothing,’ he said.

‘I watched her as we left. She loves you, Charlie, but she is in a difficult situation. I could see it in her eyes.’

Charlie turned to Rosa.

‘What do you mean?’

‘There is desperation there. She was very upset that you didn’t meet her gaze.’

‘I just don’t understand anything.’

‘Just listen to your feelings, to that voice inside. There is no other truth.’

Eddie left with Rosa, and Dieter said goodbye, but Michel stood looking at Charlie with something between scorn and pity.

‘You don’t get it, do you?’ he said.

‘No, I don’t,’ said Charlie. ‘Why was she with that guy like that?’

‘That’s what she does, Charlie. I thought you would have understood that.’

‘What does she do? Are you saying she’s a prostitute?’

‘Not exactly,’ said Michel.

‘Not exactly? What do you mean?’

‘I mean that she goes on dates and flatters these old bastards but she’s not standing on street corners.’

‘It’s horrible.’

‘Jean and I thought you knew.’

‘I thought she worked at the bar and lit their cigarettes and refreshed their drinks. I didn’t think she went out with them.’

‘Charlie, she’s a tough girl who’s had a hard life. Jean takes care of her. It is difficult for everyone in this situation but particularly difficult for young women without families to support them. You don’t have any right to judge her.’

Charlie was surprised by Michel’s tone.

‘I’m not judging her, I just thought…’

‘That what? She was your girlfriend like a girl at school. C’mon Charlie. You knew that wasn’t what was going on.’

‘What was going on?’

‘She likes you because you aren’t one of those guys, because you are a gentle fellow who treats her nicely. Don’t make a mess of it now. She is a beautiful girl, and she likes you! What more do you want?’

Charlie held his head in his hands.

‘We’re all going to have to answer for the things that we do after all of this is over,’ he said, patting Charlie on the shoulder. ‘Let’s have some dinner and a glass of wine.’

Chapter Thirty-One

Charlie woke up the next morning feeling deflated. He had slept deeply, waking up from a dream where something was wrong but there was nothing he could do to fix it. With his head on the pillow, he lifted his guitar from where it sat next to his bed and started to play a slow blues, the kind of thing Charlie Christian might play. It sounded good and he kept it going coming back to the main riff. He thought it must be something he had heard but it wasn't. Charlie had written a song. He sat up and heard the whole thing in his head. He kept playing as he got out of bed and walked into the living room. He found some paper and sketched out the arrangement, the way he used to do when he was first learning to play guitar. There was a guitar part, a sax solo, a trumpet part and a violin part. It was all in his head. The band would do it, he decided. It needed a title. He called it 'Monique'.

On Monday, he and Frank had been playing for about an hour after lunch when Charlie noticed that there were at least fifteen Loyal Youth members watching them. It was a public place and they had stopped before but never in these numbers. Usually, they just yelled 'Zazou' or 'traitor' as they passed by but the Youth were deeply unpopular with the locals and there were usually enough of them around to discourage any more than a few insults.

Today, however, was different. They were moving closer and closer. Locals sensing trouble had begun to drift away. Charlie recognised one of them as the boy, Rene, who had approached Eddie the first day they had met in front of the Opera. The leader was bigger than the others and slightly older. He stepped forward.

'We don't like seeing Zazous and their friends playing Jew music on our streets.'

Charlie was about to answer but Frank cut in.

'We'll go. We don't want any trouble,' he said, putting his accordion in its case.

'Give us the instruments and you can go,' said the leader.

Charlie laughed.

'Is that funny, Zazou?'

'Just let us go. You don't have any need for our instruments.'

‘We don’t want you polluting the air here anymore.’

He moved closer to Charlie and a couple of them moved over to Frank.

‘Give them what they want, Charlie.’

‘Good idea. Charlie,’ said the leader, laughing.

‘No.’

‘What?’

‘No, I’m not giving you this guitar. You can beat me up and take it but I’m not handing it over.’

The leader stood looking at Charlie.

‘Let him go,’ Charlie said, pointing to Frank.

‘With his accordion?’

‘Yeah, let him go.’

The Loyal Youth leader looked around at his friends.

‘You remember what they told us,’ one said. ‘We’re not supposed to bother adults, just Zazous.’

The leader nodded and Frank picked up his accordion.

‘I’m sorry, Charlie.’

Charlie said nothing and kept staring at the leader.

The first punch came from the side. Charlie never got a chance to even throw one himself. He fell to the ground as they started to kick. The main thing was to protect his hands. A boot was on his neck pushing his face into the dirt. He saw them open his guitar case and take out his guitar. He struggled but couldn’t move. It broke into pieces with the first hit on the ground. Charlie thought about the day Papa bought it for him and how he had slept with it on the other side of the room so that it would be the first thing he saw when he woke up. The pieces were on the ground now. One of the Youth stomped down and snapped the neck. The strings were still attached as they threw the

pieces at him. He was having trouble breathing but suddenly the boot was off his neck and someone was shouting. It was Dieter.

Charlie rolled over to see Dieter, in uniform, shouting at the leader and pointing at Charlie.

‘You have made a serious mistake here. I will be speaking to your senior officer. You cannot simply break the law because you don’t like the look of someone.’

Charlie was surprised to see the leader putting his hands up to apologise.

‘He was playing music with a Jew.’

‘And where is this mysterious Jew?’

‘He left.’

‘The Jew left, and you beat up your countryman. You are not very clever, are you? What is your name?’

The leader backed away and signalled to the others. They retreated and slowly disappeared along the Champs. Dieter stood breathing in and out. Charlie tried to get up. He knew he would be sore the next day. His neck hurt from having a boot held on it and one of his knees throbbed where one of them had stomped on it. Dieter was looking the other way, silent.

‘Dieter…’

‘This was what it was like in Berlin, Charlie. Every day.’

He turned and helped Charlie to his feet. They both looked at the pieces of Charlie’s guitar. Charlie felt a lump forming in his throat.

‘We’ll get you a new guitar, Charlie.’

‘It won’t be that one.’

‘No, it won’t be. Take the pieces and keep them forever. They will remind you of the kind of world you don’t want to live in,’ he said, spitting on the ground. ‘I realised when I was halfway here that I didn’t have my holster on. It’s good because I would have killed all of them.’

‘I don’t think you would have, Dieter, but you sure would have scared them.’

Charlie felt like he was in shock. He was dizzy and shaking as he put the pieces of the guitar into the case. Part of him felt lucky that they hadn’t broken his hands or shaved his head, but another part wished that he could simply turn back the clock a few hours.

‘Wait a minute,’ said Charlie. ‘Did you just walk by? How did you know?’

‘Your friend. He must have run the whole way. He came to the café. Luckily, I had just got back and dropped in to tell them when I would be by later.’

‘Poor Frank.’

‘We better go back. He was so upset I could barely understand what he was saying.’

‘He’s a good guy. I couldn’t let them hurt him.’

‘Is he Jewish, Charlie?’

‘I don’t know. I can’t figure it out and he doesn’t like talking about himself.’

Charlie stopped and looked at Dieter.

‘Why, what difference does it make?’

‘A lot,’ said Dieter, shaking his head. ‘If he is Jewish, he needs to get out of this city immediately. You have no idea what these people are doing.’

‘What people?’ said Charlie, still shaking. ‘Your people? The Germans.’

Dieter looked at Charlie.

‘Yes, my people but the Nazis are not my people any more than those thugs who broke your guitar are your people. You have to understand that, Charlie.’

Charlie felt more confused than ever, and his knee was throbbing.

‘I think I do,’ he said. ‘Let’s get going.’

Charlie got his bike and they walked to the café. When they got inside, Frank jumped up from a table and hugged Charlie.

‘I’m so sorry. I should have stayed.’

‘You did exactly the right thing, Frank. No use both of us getting beaten up. And your accordion would have been hard to replace.’

‘Not as hard as you, my friend,’ said Frank with tears in his eyes. ‘I thought they were going to kill you. Luckily, everyone on this street knows about your friend and his trumpet so it wasn’t hard to find him.’

‘I’ll give you money for another guitar,’ said Dieter.

‘It’s not the money, it’s that they are so hard to find.’

The rest of the band appeared at Dieter’s café. Eddie was horrified by what had happened. When Charlie told him that he had recognised Rene, Eddie said it was the last time anyone would recognise him. Frank said that he would bring an old banjo for him to play in the park the next day. Rosa hugged him and cried a bit.

They practised anyway; Charlie was still feeling dizzy but managed to teach them his song using the piano in the café. Everyone liked the idea of playing an original and they spent a long time working on it. Charlie couldn’t wait to hear it with his guitar. After they finished practising, Frank and Rosa entertained them on violin and accordion while they drank wine that Dieter ordered for them.

When they all went home, Charlie rode slowly back to the apartment with his broken guitar. He pushed it under his bed and lay down feeling lonelier than he ever had in his life.

Chapter Thirty-Two

The next morning, he was every bit as sore as he thought he might be but managed to ride to the park. Frank was waiting with an ancient banjo mandolin. Charlie spent a few minutes working out some basic chords on it then joined Frank for their usual repertoire.

'What if those guys come back?' asked Frank.

'Somehow, I don't think they will, but you should be careful, Frank. They knew you were… you know.'

'They think they know something. They don't. It was my wife and my son. I don't want to talk about it.'

Charlie looked at Frank. He wondered how old he was and whether or not he might be quite a bit younger than Charlie thought. There was something about him that was beaten. He heard it in his voice the day before. Charlie promised himself that he wouldn't let that happen. He was trying not to think too much about his guitar. What was a guitar when the man beside him had probably lost so much more?

The small instrument was okay for the day, but its thin sound made Charlie mourn his guitar even more. He realised that not one day had gone by in the past five years when he hadn't played it for even a half-hour. He pictured the guy who broke it. If he ever saw him again, he wasn't sure that he would be able to help himself.

That night, he ate at Tremblay's and went home. He felt restless without his guitar and listening to records didn't help. He sat on his bed and thought about where he could find another guitar. Rosa had said she could find him one, but Charlie knew it would probably be old and warped. It would do but it wouldn't be any fun to play. He drifted off to sleep thinking about Charlie Christian.

He wasn't sure how long he had been asleep when he heard a quiet knock on the door. It was so gentle that he thought it might be for one of the neighbours. He got up to answer the door but then stopped. Who would it be in the middle of the night? He grabbed his housecoat and pulled it around him as he moved slowly towards the door.

'Who's there?' he whispered.

'It's me,' said a voice. It was Monique.

Charlie opened the door to her outline in the darkness.

‘Come in,’ he said, wondering if he was dreaming.

He stepped back and she came into the small kitchen. She was wearing a dark trenchcoat and carrying a guitar case.

‘Turn on a light, Charlie,’ she said.

He walked into the living room and switched on a lamp. She followed him in. They stood looking at each other. Monique handed him the guitar case.

‘I can’t stay but I wanted to bring you this,’ she said.

‘I can’t take it, Monique,’ he said.

‘Yes, you can and yes you will,’

He took the case from her and laid it on the floor. He flicked open the latches. It was the big Gibson he had played that day at Jean’s when he first met her.

‘But this is…’

‘Yours. I bought it for you from Jean.’

‘You shouldn’t have done that, Monique. It’s too much.’

‘You really made me mad the other evening at the bar, you know.’

‘So you bought me a guitar?’

‘It was like you were ashamed of me.’

‘No, I was just surprised, I guess.’

She took off her coat. She was wearing a thin floral dress and a cardigan. She sat down on one of the kitchen chairs. Charlie couldn’t get used to the idea of her in the apartment.

‘Well, play something for me,’ she said.

He strummed a couple of chords, amazed at how they rang out and hung in the air. He started to play the melody he had written and played through the entire song.

‘That was lovely,’ she said. ‘I don’t think I know that one.’

‘You don’t. I wrote it.’

‘Really? Gee! What’s it called?’

‘‘Monique’.’

She stood up with her arms out. He put the guitar gently back into its case as she moved towards him. He felt her arms slip inside his housecoat as she kissed him hard on the mouth. His head tingled as he held her shoulders through the thin material. She pushed him back to his bed and they fell onto to it kissing. Her dress rode up and he ran his hand along her leg. He felt her pull back after a minute or two.

‘I have to go,’ she said.

‘But the curfew,’ he said. ‘Don’t go.’

‘I don’t think it’s a good idea for me to stay.’

‘I think it would be a very good idea.’

‘I have to know I can trust you, Charlie. I don’t want to get hurt.’

‘I’m not going to hurt you, Monique.’

‘You were angry.’

‘No, just confused.’

‘I think I’m falling in love with you, Charlie.’

‘I’ve already fallen.’

She kissed him again but pushed him away when he reached for the buttons of her dress.

‘Soon, my lover.’

After she left, Charlie couldn’t sleep. He finally got up and played the guitar until he dropped into a deep sleep just before dawn.

Chapter Thirty-Three

The next few weeks passed by quickly. Maman would return for a few days before disappearing again. He kept playing with Frank, and the band rehearsed at Dieter's café on Mondays. They had their usual spot at Jean's on Saturdays, but he gave them all of Tuesday night as well. It wasn't busy at first, but word spread and it was almost always standing-room only by the end of the first set.

There was talk about recording, but they were still waiting to hear. Very few records were being made and the guy who had suggested it had to find enough shellac to make a couple of hundred records. The band sounded better and better to Charlie's ears.

Eddie and Rosa were always together, and Charlie only ever saw his friend when the band played now. He was starting to spend time with Dieter after busking. Dieter still managed to get in new records and, actually, Charlie enjoyed his company. It seemed funny now that he had ever been so suspicious.

Things moved slowly with Monique, though. He usually saw her on Thursdays when he worked for Jean and afterwards, they might spend time in her room. He had suggested that they go out some evening, but she usually had to work. He avoiding thinking about her job, and slowly got used to the idea.

It was after a Tuesday night gig that Dieter confirmed the rumours about the Zone.

'They are going to clear the area. I don't know why or when exactly but there has been a lot of talk about it, and I get the feeling that it will happen soon.'

'What do you mean by 'clear the Zone'?' asked Eddie.

'I mean they are going to round up all the people who live there and send them to camps.'

'Like the camps outside of the city? Many are already there,' Rosa asked.

'At first maybe, but then to camps in the east.'

They were all quiet.

‘Rosa, there are already plenty of Roma in those camps. The Roma were in there before anyone,’ said Dieter, very quietly. ‘I wish it wasn’t true. I hate…’

‘I know,’ she said. ‘It’s not you, Dieter. You have a good soul.’

‘Well,’ said Eddie, after a few seconds. ‘You can’t stay there, Rosa. I’ll find you a place to stay.’

‘I have to stay with my family,’ said Rosa. ‘I can’t just leave them.’

‘They have to get out of there,’ said Dieter.

‘But where will they go?

‘Dieter,’ said Eddie. ‘You have to find out exactly when they are going to start. If we have some warning, we might be able to do something.’

‘Problem is,’ said Michel, ‘is that it isn’t just the Occupation, it’s the local government.’

‘They are the worst bastards,’ said Charlie. ‘The Roma have been in the Zone forever. Django himself lives there sometimes.’

‘They don’t care. Petain and his cabal are just as bad as the Germans when it comes to the Roma.’

‘I’m going to start staying up there,’ said Eddie. ‘Rosa’s father lets me stay sometimes. I’m going to move up there.’

Rosa was shaking her head.

‘And what are you going to do when they come?’

‘I’m not going to let them take you,’ he said.

Later in the week, Charlie helped Jean unload a truck filled with crates of wine. While they worked, Charlie told Jean what Dieter had said.

‘They make it hard on themselves,’ said Jean. ‘They are not the most approachable group of people and they don’t trust any of us and for good reason. And many of them don’t read so the whole thing of forged documents is tricky. I would be happy to help if I could but it’s not always easy.’

‘Rosa won’t leave her family.’

‘Would you? I know she is your friend and a member of your band, but do you really expect her to simply abandon her family. Remember that they don’t even recognise governments or borders. Her family is her country and her religion.’

‘Eddie is staying up there to keep an eye on her, but I don’t know how long that will last.’

‘It’s risky for him, too. They won’t hesitate to put him on a train east if he causes a problem. None of us is safe, Charlie. The man that used to take the envelope from you in Marais was arrested. They interrogated him for days and he didn’t give up anything, not me, you, or anyone else. They finally shot him.’

Charlie pictured the man’s nervous face in the doorframe. He would have been able to describe Charlie in detail but apparently hadn’t. Charlie looked at the floor.

‘It’s terrible but you know that he helped thousands of people escape,’ said Jean.

‘Then you helped them, too,’ said Charlie.

‘No, I just sold them the documents. I’m no hero, just a businessman.’

Charlie considered this for a minute. What did that make him?

‘I have a treat for you tonight, Charlie. I am sending you and Miss Monique to a small club near here to listen to some jazz and do a small task.’

‘Picking up a case?’

‘No, this is a bit more involved, I’m afraid. You, as I recall, have a pretty good memory.’

‘I guess so,’ said Charlie. ‘I had to remember a lot of stuff at school because I couldn’t write it down.’

‘How much can you remember? And how accurately?’

‘A lot, I guess.’

‘A man is going to tell you a list of five items. They will be words, places and numbers. Do you think you will remember them?’

‘Yes, it will be easy. Maman used to get me to memorise more than that when she sent me to the market. But she would make it into a story.’

That night, Charlie and Monique walked out into the spring evening. It was warm and they held hands as they walked along the cobblestones. It was what Charlie had always wanted, an evening out with Monique.

‘It’s lovely to be out at night,’ said Monique, pressing against him as they walked. ‘I’m so tired of noisy bars.’

‘Which is where we are going, of course,’ said Charlie.

‘Oh well. Let’s walk slowly then. And it will be fun because it’s with you. I don’t have to light your cigarette and tell you how handsome you are.’

‘Yes, you do!’ said Charlie.

‘Okay, but at least you really are handsome! But you can light your own cigarettes.’

They reached the club and were shown in by the doorman. The band was made up of guys that Charlie recognised from another band that played Jean’s bar. The sax player waved to Charlie.

‘You’re a famous musician now,’ said Monique. ‘I’ll have to fight off your female fans soon.’

‘I think you’re safe for a while. It’s Eddie they all are in love with, and he is only interested in Rosa.’

‘She is so beautiful,’ said Monique. ‘I don’t know how any of you play with her so close.’

‘Not as beautiful as you,’ said Charlie.

A waiter brought two glasses of wine to their small table. Charlie wondered how he would be contacted. There were already several German officers at various tables and one or two people who might be local police. It seemed like a dangerous place to pass on information except that Jean always said that the best place for drops was right under the nose of the enemy. ‘They just aren’t looking,’ he said.

The band started playing ‘Marie’ and the room filled with the sound of clarinet, piano and drums. There was a guy on guitar, but Charlie didn’t recognise him.

‘They’re nowhere near as good as your band,’ whispered Monique, squeezing his arm.

She was leaning against him while she sipped her wine. Men kept stealing looks at her, clearly wondering why she was with him. He looked at her and wondered the same thing himself. She looked like she should be in magazines. It still didn’t make sense.

After a couple of songs, still no one had approached them. Had something gone wrong? At least one man who appeared to be an undercover officer for the local police was watching them intently. It was making Charlie nervous. Maybe they were about to be arrested. Just as he was thinking of telling Monique that they should leave, the clarinet player called him up to the stage.

Charlie wasn’t sure that he’d heard him right and pointed to his own chest.

‘Yes, indeed, it would be an honour, sir, to have you on stage. This fellow’s band is the talk of the city.’

‘Get up there,’ said Monique, squealing with delight.

Charlie walked towards the stage and took the guitar from the band member.

‘Are you sure this is okay?’ he whispered to the guy.

‘Sure, I need a drink anyway.’

Charlie sat down and tuned the guitar, looking around at the other musicians.

‘‘Ain’t Misbehavin’ 25 west,’ said the piano player in his ear.

The band started and Charlie found the key and began to play. ‘Ain't Misbehavin’ 25 west? What was 25 west? Maybe a code for the key and tempo? A code. Charlie kept playing. At the end of the song, he leaned towards the piano player.

‘‘Please Don’t Talk About Me’ north 63,’ said the musician.

And so it went until the band took a break. Charlie was thanked and applauded. He returned to Monique.

‘Let’s finish our drinks and go,’ he said, still conscious of the undercover police officer who was watching them.

‘But…’ said Monique.

‘All done here, I think,’ said Charlie, hoping she’d catch his meaning.

‘Okay,’ she said, smiling.

They walked back out into the spring evening air. Monique lit a cigarette and took Charlie’s hand. He was about to say something when he was wrenched back by his shirt collar. It was the undercover guy. Monique started shouting.

‘Shut up or you’re both going in. Now hand it over.’

He had his forearm against Charlie’s throat and held up a police identification card. The wall behind him felt jagged on Charlie’s back.

‘Hand what over?’ coughed Charlie, trying to breathe.

The cop started going through his pockets but came up with nothing. He stepped back and looked at Monique.

‘Give me your purse.’

‘This is ridiculous,’ said Monique, handing it over.

He looked through it and looked over Monique.

‘You’re obviously not hiding it anywhere in that dress.’

‘Pig,’ she said, quietly.

‘No,’ he said. ‘You are the pigs working for Farmer Jean. Now you were handed something tonight.’

‘Did you see anyone come near us?’ said Monique.

‘No, but…’

‘That’s ‘cause no one did. We came to watch the band.’

‘Yeah, right. Okay, tell Jean we’re watching.’

‘And what? He needs to pay you more?’

‘I’ll ignore that,’ he said, walking away.

‘C’mon,’ said Charlie. ‘Let’s go.’

They walked along the empty street and turned down a lane that would take them to Jean’s place.

‘But when did you get the...’ said Monique.

‘The piano player.’

‘Ha! Only Jean!’

When they got back, Jean got Charlie to repeat the codes while he wrote them down.

‘That’s a lot of information, Charlie. This is good work, valuable work. You have a rare talent. Most people can only remember three things. You’ve remembered at least ten with no context whatsoever.’

‘It was the songs. I remember them because of the songs. It was only a matter of time when not being able to read would come in handy, I guess.’

‘You have so many talents, my friend. Your honesty alone makes you more valuable than a hundred others.’

Jean laughed when they told him what the cop had said.

‘Don’t worry,’ he said. ‘That will be taken care of immediately.’

Monique had the night off and invited Charlie up to her room. When they got inside, she closed the door and kissed him slowly in the dark. He reached for her, but she stepped back.

‘Wait,’ she said, before lighting a candle and putting on her Billie Holiday record.

They danced together without talking. She held him close as they moved around the room. She then drew him near her bed and kissed him again. He slowly unbuttoned her dress and pushed it off her shoulders. She undid his shirt and reached inside. Again, Charlie felt himself beginning to shake.

‘I’m going to get ready for bed. You can stay but we aren’t going to do anything.’

‘Why not?’

‘You’re too young.’

Charlie felt crushed.

‘But you’ve let me…’

‘That’s just fooling around. It’s okay.’

‘Can we fool around?’ asked Charlie.

She laughed.

‘Get in bed and we’ll see.’

Charlie woke up the next morning to an empty room. He hadn’t heard Monique leaving. He wondered where she was but got up and got dressed. There had been some limited fooling around but not much else. Charlie felt vaguely frustrated. He wondered if this is what everyone felt like in this situation.

Downstairs, Jean was working on something and waved when Charlie walked by.

‘Where’s Monique?’

‘Not sure,’ said Jean.

Charlie got his bike and rode home. He would get his guitar and join Frank for the afternoon. He tried to get Monique out of his head, but it was getting more difficult.

Chapter Thirty-Four

When Charlie arrived at the market on Saturday, Dieter and Michel were sitting on wooden crates in the usual spot but there was no sign of Rosa or Eddie.

'They've closed off the Zone,' said Dieter. 'We're just trying to decide what to do.'

'What do you mean?' asked Charlie.

'They've put fences around the whole area, and they aren't letting anyone in or out,' said Michel. 'Maybe you two should go up there. I'll stay here with the instruments. I think the local police know me.'

Dieter and Charlie walked through the market. It was quiet without the Roma and when he heard the accordion up ahead, Charlie knew what was coming.

'Too bad,' said the accordion player, as they got closer. 'No more vermin. You've lost your fiddler.'

Charlie walked over to her. She stepped back slightly as he approached and stopped playing.

'Leave it, Charlie,' said Dieter quietly behind him.

Charlie upended her accordion case with his foot causing the change to spill out. It wasn't the kind of thing he normally did but he felt like he had to do something to stop himself from hitting her over the head with her accordion.

'You pig! Go into the Zone, that's where you belong!' she screamed, as Dieter pulled him away.

'There's no point with people like that,' he said. 'They just live their lives in blissful ignorance and believe everything they hear. My country is filled with those people.'

'What happened to the Roma in your country?'

'Nothing good, my friend,' said Dieter. 'They were first. People will forget this but everything that is happening was rehearsed with the Roma. No one said a thing.'

When they reached the fenced-off area, there were crowds of people on either side, and it was obvious that the police did not have full control of the situation. People were trying to get in and out. The officers had their guns drawn and were warning people to stand back.

'This could be very dangerous,' said Dieter.

Charlie spotted Rosa and Eddie on the other side of the fence. He looked furious. He saw Charlie and threw up his hands in frustration.

'We'll wait,' shouted Charlie. 'Don't do anything crazy!'

It was hard to be heard over the noise of the crowd, but Eddie nodded. It was turning into a riot. One of the police officers fired his pistol above the crowd. Everyone ducked but immediately bounced up and began shouting. The problem was they had closed off a large part of the market and many of the traders and their customers couldn't get to their usual spots. Some people were trying to reason with the police, but weren't being heard.

Suddenly there were two large troop trucks behind the crowd and German soldiers were pouring out. People were shoved out of the way and hit with rifles as the soldiers made their way to the front.

'Here they come,' murmured Dieter, pulling his hat down over his eyes.

Charlie watched the soldiers confer with the officers. The highest-ranking soldier looked at both groups. Someone handed him a megaphone.

'We will let women pass through the fence but no men. This is a security issue!'

Charlie looked at Dieter who raised his eyebrows.

'The art of improvisation,' he said, smiling.

Charlie once again found Eddie and Rosa in the group on the other side of the fence. Rosa was shaking her head, but Eddie was pointing at the gate. Finally, she turned and came through. Charlie ran to meet her under the eyes of a large soldier.

'What's going on?' said Charlie.

'Eddie sent me out. He'll try to get through when it quiets down a bit.'

‘He has to be careful. He doesn’t have proper papers.’

‘I know. He had his name taken as a Roma last night. He made up a name on the spot.’

Charlie looked at Rosa. She looked worried and tired.

‘What’s going on in there?’

‘They’ve been coming around and getting us all to stand in front of the caravans while they take our names and search through our things.’

‘But what’s the point?’

‘They say we are going to be relocated.’

They played a few sets in the market but it wasn’t the same without Eddie. Charlie did his best to fill out the rhythm and play a few solos. Rosa’s violin was wonderful as always, but Charlie could hear that there was something muted about her playing. The crowd was appreciative, but the mood of the market was tense, and no one stayed around for long.

At four, there was no sign of Eddie. When Rosa went back, she was turned away and came back in tears.

‘They won’t let me in,’ she said. ‘They said they are sealing the area for at least twenty-four hours. What will I do? My family is in there. Eddie is there.’

‘We’ll play the gig at Jean’s and come back,’ said Michel. ‘We might be able to get you back in when it’s really quiet around here. Surely there isn’t much point to keeping Roma out.’

‘We can’t play the gig without Eddie,’ said Charlie. ‘There’s no way.’

‘We have to play the gig,’ said Michel.

‘Why?’ said Charlie. ‘They can get another band to fill in.’

‘We are playing the gig,’ said Michel, firmly.

Charlie again glimpsed something in his mind’s eye, a story, a fragment.

Everyone went quiet. Rosa looked at Charlie.

‘It’s up to you, Rosa,’ said Charlie, not looking at Michel. ‘It’s not his band and we aren’t his employees.’

‘It’s fine,’ said Rosa. ‘We can play. I’ll play some of the melody parts that Eddie plays. We’ll get through it.’

The bar was packed when they arrived. Charlie felt sick when he looked at the locals, drinking and laughing while the Roma were being rounded up. The Germans looked even more evil to him and he tried not to look at any of them while he tuned his guitar.

He missed Eddie. It was his sax playing that started the whole thing. Charlie felt like something had been stolen from him. He kept looking at the door, hoping Eddie would appear. He wondered why his friend didn’t just tell the police the truth and get out of the Zone. But then he looked at Rosa and understood.

They opened with ‘Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight’. Charlie could hear the gaps that Eddie’s sax would have filled but the crowd didn’t seem to notice. Couples danced on either side of the Colonel’s large table. It occurred to Charlie that the first time they had played, there’d been no table in the middle of the dancefloor. It was strange that the Colonel would demand to sit among the dancers but who’d argue with him? There was a rumour that the Colonel was a musician and liked to be close to the band so he could watch them carefully. Dieter had shrugged when Charlie had asked him about it.

‘Germans of that type always believe they are artists at heart,’ said Dieter.

He was certainly watching them carefully that night. As they played ‘Everybody Loves My Baby’ and couples jitterbugged around him, he watched Charlie’s hands intently. Maybe he played guitar, thought Charlie feeling chilled by the idea. When they finished a song, he caught each musician’s eye and clapped in their direction.

They played Louis Armstrong’s ‘Willie the Weeper’, a song the Colonel seemed to enjoy very much. He smiled and spoke to the men at his table, pointing at the various instruments. Dieter was particularly good at imitating Louis Armstrong on trumpet and the Colonel clapped furiously after each solo. They were doing well, thought Charlie, considering Eddie wasn’t there. Rosa was playing all of his parts on violin. A group of

young men positioned themselves on the floor in front of her, waving and cheering for her. She barely seemed to notice. Charlie scanned the crowd for Monique but couldn't see her.

They finished their first set with Duke Ellington's 'It Don't Mean A Thing', promising to come back after a short break. The crowd cheered and the dancers headed for the bar. It was more crowded than Charlie had ever seen it. He sat on the edge of the stage, retuning his guitar. A waitress brought him a Coke.

'Something's funny in here tonight,' came Rosa's voice behind him.

She was right. All night he had felt like there was something just out of reach that demanded his attention.

'Yeah, I agree,' said Charlie. 'But maybe it's just because Eddie's not here.'

She smiled but he could see he hadn't convinced her any more than he had convinced himself. She patted him lightly on the shoulder and knelt beside him.

'Are you okay, Charlie? You seem, I don't know, haunted by something.'

Charlie was about to answer but was interrupted by two soldiers who wanted to talk to her. She said something in a language that Charlie didn't understand.

'Is she Greek?' asked one of the Germans.

Rosa was nodding.

'Yes, Greek,' said Charlie. 'Can't understand a word of English.'

'Tell her she is beautiful and I would like to marry her,' said his friend.

'I don't speak Greek,' said Charlie.

They walked away and Rosa laughed.

Just before they started playing again, Michel brought them together on the stage.

'I'm going to bring a friend up to play sax with us for a few songs. It's no big deal, just act normal.'

'But,' said Charlie, 'we don't him or how he plays or anything.'

Charlie looked at Dieter for support, but he looked uninterested. Rosa shrugged as though it didn't matter.

'It doesn't seem like a good idea,' said Charlie. 'We sounded fine.'

'He's coming up, Charlie. Don't worry about it.'

It was the second time since that afternoon that Charlie had heard tension in Michel's normally relaxed tone. He said nothing and turned back towards the audience to start the set. They started with 'Caravan', giving Rosa plenty of space to solo. The audience loved it.

When they finished, Michel said to the crowd, 'I like to invite a friend of mine, Gregor, up to play some saxophone with us tonight since we are missing our friend Eddie today.'

The audience clapped politely as a man with a saxophone case made his way up the small steps on one side of the stage. He didn't look much like a musician, thought Charlie. He was about twenty-five and heavily built. He looked like a sailor.

The Colonel's bodyguards didn't seem to like the look of him either. When he went to open his sax case, they motioned him away and one of them opened it instead. Charlie glanced over at the scene. A tenor saxophone, not a machine gun, he thought. What did they expect?

Then Charlie's mind filled with a strange notion. Chess pieces – they were all chess pieces and Jean was moving them around. 'There is a plan', that's what the German officer had said to the guitar player that night. There is a plan, thought Charlie. The room came to him from different angles as he watched Gregor lift the sax out of the case all wrong. He wasn't a sax player or even a musician.

In slow motion, the man leaped towards Charlie and reached into his guitar case. It was a small pistol and Charlie suddenly realised what was about to happen. Before he could react, Dieter had pulled him roughly out of his chair. His guitar clattered to the floor as Gregor pointed the pistol at the Colonel and shouted, 'For France!' before firing it point-blank at the man three times.

Dieter was pulling Charlie and Rosa off the stage when the Colonel's bodyguards returned fire, killing Gregor instantly. The last thing Charlie saw was one of the bodyguards jumping up on the stage and looking at his guitar case. Charlie ducked his head and was pushed through a small door to one side of the stage.

'Run!' hissed Dieter.

They ran down some stairs into a dark basement. Behind a large box that Dieter moved without any trouble, was a passageway. When they were all in, he pulled the box back in place.

'Follow me,' he whispered as he turned on a small flashlight.

'Dieter,' said Charlie.

'We have to move,' he said.

Rosa looked frightened and nodded at Charlie. The tunnel was small, but they could stand up in it. The walked quickly and silently for about ten minutes before Dieter stopped. He pointed to a small trapdoor in the ceiling, just above their heads.

'You two are going to get out here. You should take a bicycle and go somewhere far away in the city. Maybe you know someone you could stay with. Don't go back to your apartment, Charlie, and don't go anywhere near the Zone.'

He handed Charlie a roll of money.

'Take a train somewhere, maybe.'

'Dieter,' said Charlie. 'What happened back there?'

Dieter looked at Charlie for a couple of seconds.

'Justice. Finally.'

'Where will you go?' asked Rosa.

'Don't worry about me,' said Dieter. 'I just want you two to be safe.'

The three of them stood in the dark tunnel surrounded by the shadows from Dieter's flashlight.

'It was fun, Charlie,' he said. 'You're a great guitar player and a nice guy.'

Charlie could only see part of his face. There was so much he wanted to know.

‘Maybe we’ll play again sometime,’ said Charlie.

The German laughed and shook his head.

‘Goodbye, Rosa. I am sorry for all of the misery my country has brought to your people.’

‘That’s not you, Dieter,’ said Rosa. ‘Don’t ever think that. You are a good man. Anyone can see it.’

Dieter pushed up the trapdoor and boosted Charlie up.

‘All clear?’ asked Dieter.

Charlie realised he was looking down a narrow laneway. It was dark but he could see a street at one end.

‘All clear.’

When Rosa was up, the trapdoor snapped shut and they were alone in the lane.

‘Charlie,’ said Rosa quietly. ‘Did you know?’

‘No, Rosa,’ he said. ‘I would never have put you in that situation.’

‘I know,’ she said. ‘But you knew something was wrong.’

‘Something was bothering me, but I couldn’t figure out what. It was just a feeling.’

‘Maybe you are a little bit Roma,’ she said, smiling slightly.

‘I think it is because I can’t read,’ he said.

‘I think you read very well, Charlie. Just not in the normal way.’

‘Michel knew, Jean knew, and I guess Dieter knew.’

‘He was pulling me away before the man got the gun out. He knew,’ she said.

‘Eddie?’

‘No,’ said Rosa. ‘No way.’

Charlie wondered why no one had told him.

‘We made it look real,’ said Charlie. ‘You and me and Eddie. Michel looked suspicious but we looked like kids. No one ever looked in my guitar case.’

Eddie thought about the electric guitar that he would never play again and the Gibson under his bed. Would he ever be able to go home again?

Suddenly there were voices at the end of the lane, German voices. Rosa pushed Charlie against the wall and began to kiss him passionately. There was laughter but the Germans kept moving. She stepped back and wiped her mouth with a handkerchief. Charlie felt embarrassed and a bit thrilled at the same time.

‘Good work,’ he whispered.

‘I hope you enjoyed it. Don’t tell Eddie!’ she said, before suddenly looking frightened again.

‘It’s okay,’ he said. ‘I know somewhere we can go.’

They walked out of the laneway. Rosa was shaking her head.

‘I left my violin there.’

Charlie knew how it felt to lose a prized instrument.

‘Was it old?’

‘Not really, my family wouldn’t let me take any of the really good ones to the shows but still.’

Charlie nodded and they walked along an unfamiliar street. Rosa took off her headscarf and tied her hair back in a bun. Her dress still marked her out as Roma, but she stashed her bracelets and rings in a pocket. She took his hand as they walked.

When Charlie worked out where they were, he knew they needed a bicycle to get to the Champs. It was too far to walk, and he wanted to see if they could catch a busker who knew Frank before it got too late. They couldn’t risk the Metro and it was too risky to go back for Charlie’s bike. They were going to have to steal one.

On a quiet street, they found a solid looking bicycle locked to a gate. There was no one around but the lock looked formidable.

‘Maybe we can break the lock with a rock,’ said Charlie, looking around.

‘Or perhaps just open it,’ said Rosa.

He watched her bend one of her bracelets around and push it into the keyhole of the lock. It opened immediately. He looked at her in surprise.

‘Don’t say it,’ she said, shaking her head. ‘Anyone can learn to do that. We’re not thieves.’

They got on the bike and started towards the river, keeping to backstreets as much as possible. Charlie could hear sirens and announcements being made from loudspeakers

Frank wasn’t there but he saw a Spanish woman that he and Frank sometimes chatted to between sets. She played guitar and sometimes accordion. Charlie had an idea. They rode up and Charlie asked if she knew where Frank lived. She was a bit surprised that he didn’t know but she got out a pencil and started to write.

‘Neither of us can read,’ said Charlie, ‘You better just tell me.’

She looked at them for a moment.

‘Roma?’ she said to Rosa.

‘Yes, and so are you.’

‘My mother.’

‘Yes,’ said Rosa.

She gave them the address and they rode away. He lived on the edge of the Marais.

‘But will we put your friend in danger?’ asked Rosa.

‘I’ll tell him what’s happened, he can decide.’

Charlie tried to avoid the big streets. He and Rosa were attracting enough attention as it was. Frank’s apartment was just off the main street of the neighbourhood.

‘Wait here,’ said Charlie, when they arrived.

He ran past the concierge and up the stairs to the third floor where Frank lived. He knocked on the door gently. Footsteps approached.

'Who is it?' whispered Frank.

'It's Charlie.'

The door opened.

'You're in trouble, aren't you? That was your band at the bar. I knew it. Come in quickly.'

'Rosa's downstairs.'

'Well, go get her, Charlie, quickly!'

Frank made them sandwiches which they ate hungrily. Rosa started to fall asleep while she was eating, and Frank showed her to a small bedroom that he said belonged to his son. Rosa lay down on the little bed and went to sleep almost immediately.

Back in the kitchen, Frank poured wine into two cups and handed one to Charlie. Charlie told him the whole story while Frank shook his head in wonder.

'We shouldn't stay here, Frank. I don't want to drag you into this.'

'I'm glad you came here, Charlie. You've been a friend for the last couple of months. They can do nothing to me now and they won't find me.'

'But the Spanish woman who plays…'

'She only told you because she knew you. I suspect she would die before telling them anything. Her own story is a sad one, too.'

Charlie suddenly wondered what he would do. It was the first time he'd stopped to think since Dieter had grabbed his arm four hours earlier. Could he risk going to his apartment? Was Maman in danger?

'It will all work out, Charlie. Just try to rest. You've had a terrible shock.'

Tears formed in Charlie's eyes. The band was finished, and he was headed for prison, if not worse. Michel was probably already dead and who knew what had happened to Dieter. Eddie was in terrible danger and there was no way to warn him.

‘You are pretty safe here. Frank isn’t even remotely my real name. It’s just what I use when I’m busking.’

Charlie looked up at him.

‘What is it?’

‘Doesn’t matter anymore but the concierge doesn’t know anyone named Frank, nor does anyone in the building.’

Charlie felt weary.

‘You can sleep on the floor near your friend,’ said Frank. ‘There is a fire escape at the window. If they come in, you get out.’

Frank gave Charlie some blankets and a pillow. He went into the room and found Rosa fast asleep under a blanket on the bed. She looked like a painting, thought Charlie as he turned out the light and lay down on the floor next to the bed.

Chapter Thirty-Five

The next morning, Charlie woke to Rosa's face smiling at him from the bed.

'You were mumbling in your sleep,' she said.

She looked so beautiful that Charlie felt like kissing her. He felt guilty immediately – Eddie could be in prison or even dead by now.

'I feel better,' she said. 'I needed to sleep.'

'Yes,' said Charlie, still feeling uncomfortable at being so close to her.

'Close your eyes,' she said. 'I have to put my dress back on.'

Charlie blushed, realising that she was talking to him without her dress on. He closed his eyes and waited, hearing the sounds of fabric and buttons.

'Okay!' she said.

Frank had already left. There was a note on the table that neither of them could understand but Charlie figured that he was just telling them to eat and stay out of sight.

Frank's apartment was bigger than Charlie's. It seemed like every wall contained a bookshelf. There were some photos on the walls, but they seemed to be of old relatives. Charlie looked around to see if he could find one of Frank with his wife or his son but there were none. In fact, besides a piano, the old banjo mandolin and another smaller accordion, there was almost nothing personal in the place. Charlie thought maybe the books would tell him something about Frank, but he could only just make out some of the titles. The door to the main bedroom was closed and Charlie didn't go in.

'I must go back to the Zone today,' said Rosa. 'Papa will be sick with worry.'

'No, it's crazy,' said Charlie. 'You're safe here. You could get arrested. Nobody who ever saw the band probably remembered anything about me but you, well, you were the main attraction.'

'Charlie, you don't understand. I can't just hide here without telling anyone.'

'This is different, Rosa. They might think we were part of the plan, that we helped. They could shoot you. Eddie would kill me if I let something happen to you.'

‘You boys,’ she said, looking up at the ceiling. ‘I am not Eddie’s saxophone that you are taking care of, Charlie. I can walk out of here anytime I want to and if you try to stop me, I’ll cut you a new smile.’

Charlie put his hands up and she laughed.

They ate some bread and listened to the radio. The assassination was mentioned several times – the perpetrator, the newsreader said, had been arrested that morning.

‘Michel?’ said Charlie.

Throughout the day, it was the same report. When Frank returned from busking, he said he’d heard they’d arrested the killer.

‘It may be a trap, of course,’ said Frank. ‘Although, that would be far too subtle for the Germans. Usually, they just shoot everyone and then decide on a story. No one approached me, by the way,’

‘At least two of Jean’s people know that we busk together. Maybe someone will give you a message tomorrow.’

‘Was Jean the owner of the bar?’ asked Rosa.

‘Yes,’ said Charlie. ‘I worked for him sometimes. I got to know Michel through him.’

Charlie thought about meeting Michel that night after the musician had been murdered. He pictured Tremblay and wondered where he fit into the story.

‘That’s interesting,’ said Frank.

‘Do you ever feel like there is a movie playing but you keep missing parts of it? You know there are things going on that would make it all clear, but you never see those parts?’ asked Charlie.

Frank put his hand on Charlie’s shoulder and laughed gently.

‘Every day, Charlie, every day.’

‘We are playthings of the gods,’ said Rosa.

‘People say that the Roma have second sight. Does that mean you know more, Rosa?’ asked Charlie.

She laughed.

‘We know that we don’t know but we know that the gadjo think we know. So, we charge for the privilege.’

‘And here I thought you might read my tea leaves!’ said Frank.

‘I can read them,’ said Rosa. ‘And tell you exactly what you want to hear. That’s the trick.’

‘What do I want to hear?’

Rosa looked at him for a moment with a sad expression.

‘Another time, perhaps.’

‘Yes, of course. Sorry, Rosa, I realise that you…’

‘I know, Frank!’ she said.

‘So, you can’t really tell the future?’ said Charlie, smiling.

‘No, Charlie, only you can, and me, and Frank. We decide on our own futures,’ said Rosa.

‘Hmmm,’ said Frank. ‘In another life, I used to consider these questions quite deeply in my classes.’

‘You were a teacher?’ asked Rosa.

‘Yes, hence all of the books,’ he said waving his arms around.

‘Neither of us can read!’ said Rosa. ‘What can you teach us?’

‘I’m the student around here, I think.’

‘The best teachers are the best students,’ said Rosa. ‘We Roma always say that.’

‘While avoiding being the latter or dealing with the former!’

‘Yes!’

Chapter Thirty-Six

Charlie and Rosa spent the next day in Frank's apartment, drinking tea and talking. She told Charlie about travelling with her family when she was little, and he told her about learning to play guitar and how hard it had been at school.

'Have you really never been to school?' asked Charlie.

'Once,' she said. 'The local police wanted us to leave a small village somewhere in the south. They told our parents that the law said we had to go to school. So, the next day, all the Roma kids turned up at the local school. There was no room, and it was chaos. We had fun though, playing with the local kids and drawing on the chalkboards. The teachers must have said something to the police because they came to the camp that night and told us not to go back to school. We spent the rest of the season in that village without any problems.'

Charlie laughed and wished he had been born a Roma. He looked at Rosa. She sat so still, her large eyes looking at him. His mother said that his problems at school had made him shy. Rosa wasn't shy because no one had ever made fun of her for not reading and no teacher had ever shaken his head at her sadly. She was smart and beautiful and a great musician.

'Do you wish you could read?' said Charlie.

'Sometimes,' she said. 'I think we Roma get into trouble because we are so sure that nothing in the gadjo world is worth knowing about. I wish I could read all the law books so I'd know what was true and what wasn't. What about you?'

Charlie looked at all of the books on Frank's shelves and thought about all the years he'd spent sitting in classrooms, frustrated and lonely.

'Yes,' he said. 'Maybe more than anything.'

'But then you wouldn't be Charlie, or you'd be a different Charlie. You are a wonderful guitar player, you know. My uncles said that you played like a Roma. A big compliment! Maybe you wouldn't play like that if you could read.'

Charlie could imagine falling in love with Rosa as he looked at her smiling at him. He tried to push the thought out of his head.

In the afternoon, when the sunlight began to fade, Rosa started to talk about going back to the Zone. Charlie begged her to wait at least another day.

'You could put your family in great danger,' he said. 'The Germans sometimes execute ten people for every one of theirs after an attack. That guy was really important. Who knows what they'll do.'

Rosa went to say something but seemed to consider Charlie's point and nodded. Charlie wondered what he should do. He was trying not to think about Maman. She would be worried about him, but she was in danger. He wondered if she had known anything about the plan. No way, he decided. Maybe she was tricked too. He thought again about that night at Tremblay's when the musician had been shot and he had met Michel.

'I was the replacement!' he said, suddenly.

Rosa looked up at him.

'What do you mean?'

'They were putting a band together because they must have known that the Colonel was a jazz fan,' he said as the thoughts formed. 'I saw the Gestapo kill the first guitar player. He had asked me about jazz! They replaced him with me!'

'Slow down, Charlie,' said Rosa.

He explained how he had met Michel and Jean. He blushed when he told Rosa about Monique.

'Jean must have told her to pretend she liked me,' said Charlie, fighting back tears.

'Charlie,' said Rosa, taking his hand. 'Whatever happened, that girl was not pretending. I saw her face that day.'

Charlie hoped that was true, but it probably didn't matter now. If Monique were involved, they would have shot her. Charlie felt tears coming again. Rosa held his hand and he felt suddenly silly because her whole family, her whole world was in trouble.

'I'm sorry, Rosa,' he said. 'You must be so worried.'

‘I’m worried about Eddie. My family will be okay. We’re like rivers, we just keep flowing. The gadjo have tried everything. We’ve seen it all.’

Charlie nodded but wondered if the Nazis weren’t something different. Dieter said that the Roma had been the first in the camps. No one knew for sure what happened there but there were terrible rumours. Rosa must have known. She was reassuring herself.

‘Eddie will be okay,’ said Charlie. ‘He can take care of himself.’

Frank returned just after dark with some more bread for them. Rosa and Charlie made soup and they all ate together in the kitchen.

‘There wasn’t anything much in the newspapers today,’ he told them. ‘They are blaming the usual suspects and say they are going to execute one of the assassins tomorrow. There has been no mention of the band or anyone else.’

‘It must be Michel,’ said Charlie. ‘I thought they might execute a whole bunch of people.’

‘This is just a guess,’ said Frank. ‘But I think they are a bit worried. The rumour is that the war is going very badly for them and they might even have to leave sometime soon. I guess they don’t want a massacre. I don’t know. Something is shifting. They don’t seem as confident. A year ago, there would have been serious reprisals.’

That night, although Frank begged them not to go, Rosa and Charlie left the apartment to see what was happening in the Zone. Rosa sat on the seat of Charlie’s bicycle while he rode. The streets were very quiet as usual, but they had to listen carefully for patrols. They had some time before the curfew, but they didn’t want to get stopped.

When they got to the market, Charlie locked the bike and they continued on foot. It was quiet and Charlie watched Rosa’s face. She could see what he saw. There were no Roma, just a scattering of Parisians selling their things on the pavement. He could hear the accordion player up ahead and hoped she wouldn’t recognise him. They passed her quickly, but she saw Charlie and drew her finger across her throat as she played. He shook his head at her.

‘Rosa,’ said Charlie. ‘I think we should go back. There’s no one here.’

‘I know,’ she snapped. ‘I just want to make sure.’

Charlie didn’t say anything but kept walking. As they got closer, they could see caravans but there were no voices or light. Charlie followed Rosa into the dark paddock.

‘There’s no one there, Rosa. We should go.’

She said nothing and continued to walk. When they reached the camp, they could see that all of the caravans had been emptied and everything of value had been taken. There were piles of clothes and broken crockery in front of the caravan where Rosa had lived with her family. She knelt and picked up a broken cup. Charlie put his arm around her shoulders. She started to cry.

‘We should go,’ said Charlie. ‘It’s not safe here.’

Almost as the words came out of his mouth, he looked up to see beams of flashlights moving across the paddock. He drew Rosa to her feet.

‘Where can we hide?’ he asked, his heart pounding.

She grabbed his hand and pulled him into the caravan before the lights reached them. On the floor of the wagon, she pushed away and old rug and opened a hatch. There was a space under the floor and they both lay down in it, only barely fitting, before drawing the lid over them. Rosa held his hand tightly.

‘It was that accordion player,’ whispered Charlie.

Rosa was silent and they could hear voices getting closer. Charlie wondered if they would shoot them both on sight. He tried to slow his breathing down by thinking about playing scales on guitar.

A footstep on the steps into the caravan and then someone was walking over the hatch. Charlie held his breath, and he could feel Rosa doing the same thing. The person stopped for a second and then left quickly. They both breathed out slowly.

And then the hatch opened and there were lights in their eyes.

Chapter Thirty-Six

That accordion player is going to pay, thought Charlie, as he sat quietly in the back of the truck. He was handcuffed to a bar above his head. When they pulled him out of the hatch, he thought they would shoot him, but it turned out to be the local police and they weren't at all interested in her.

'Who is she?' a voice had snarled as they blinked in the lights.

'Nobody,' said Charlie, 'She was just here, and she tried to hide me.'

'You better get away from here, Roma,' said one of the voices.

'Go!' yelled another.

Rosa ran and disappeared into the darkness.

'Charlie Martin?'

'I don't know him,' said Charlie.

'You are him and you're in a lot of trouble.'

Charlie said nothing as they dragged him through the paddock and cuffed him into the back of the truck. He was scared but there was something in their manner that made him wonder if this was as bad as it seemed. He still couldn't believe they let Rosa go.

They took him to a small police station and locked him in a cell. He sat on the bench. He hadn't really said anything, and they hadn't asked him any more questions.

He was asleep when someone shook him roughly.

'Come with me.' It was one of the men who'd arrested him.

Charlie rubbed his eyes and stood up, his heart racing. Maybe they were just going to shoot him or at least turn him over to the people who would. That's why they weren't that worried about him. They knew he was going to die anyway.

The man led him into a small room with a table and two chairs. They were joined by an older man in a uniform who indicated that he should sit down. When they were both sitting, the man looked at Charlie and began to speak.

‘We have a problem. The German police found plans, letters and orders from England in the lining of your guitar case. We should simply turn you over to them but quite frankly, you wouldn’t last two minutes if they started to interrogate you.’

Charlie wasn’t sure what to say. He thought about his guitar case and the plans. It didn’t make any sense until he realised that the man was talking about his new guitar. The one Monique had given him. He tried to control his reaction.

‘We know that you didn’t know they were there, and we don’t think you helped to plan the assassination. But you do know some of the people who were involved, and we don’t want those names given to the Germans.’

Charlie’s mind was reeling.

‘You mean Jean?’ he said.

‘I mean we don’t want you talking to the Germans, but we need something to prove you weren’t part of this and hadn’t read the orders from England.’

Charlie burst out laughing. The officer frowned.

‘Is that funny? This isn’t funny.’

‘I can’t read.’

The officer looked at him.

‘What do you mean?’

‘I didn’t read any orders because I can’t read. Ask my teachers.’

The officer sat quietly for a minute, obviously thinking. He reached around and banged on the door. The younger policeman came in and motioned to Charlie to stand up.

‘We’ll talk again,’ said the officer.

Nothing happened for almost a day. Charlie pretended he was playing guitar between the unappetising meals. He walked around the cell singing and making up guitar solos.

Finally, he was taken back up to the small room where the officer was waiting.

‘Scary day for one of your teachers. The German police confirmed that you can’t read. They looked through your records. You’ve never passed anything.’

Charlie sat quietly, resisting the urge to laugh.

‘So, they figure you’re not worth the trouble. They want that German soldier who was in your band. You don’t know where he went, do you?’

Charlie shook his head.

‘The truth is that they don’t like this story much. They can’t have their top brass being murdered by a rogue soldier and some kid who can’t even read. They have the Resistance guy. He fired the shots. I think they’ll execute him and let it go.’

Charlie imagined Michel, blindfolded against a wall.

‘Where’s Maman?’

‘Okay,’ said the officer. ‘A question from Charlie. The truth is I don’t know, and I don’t want to. She’s a dangerous woman, particularly for movie fans.’

Charlie thought about the day the bomb went off and how Maman knew what it was immediately.

‘Another good reason not to let them get hold of you.’

‘I don’t understand,’ said Charlie. ‘Aren’t you working for them?’

‘Sure,’ said the officer, smiling slightly. ‘but we are also managing a difficult situation.’

Or Jean’s managing it, thought Charlie.

‘So, can I leave?’ asked Charlie.

The officer snorted.

‘No, I think you need a haircut and some fresh air. There is a farm outside of the city where you’ll be very happy until all of this ends. Your buddy Eddie is there.’

Charlie was relieved that Eddie was okay, but a farm was most likely a work camp, and he really didn’t want to end up at one of those.

‘You’ll be safer there,’ said the officer. ‘The Germans have got a lot to worry about at the moment, but you need to be far away from them.’

Charlie spent another couple of days sitting in his cell, sometimes furious with Monique for giving him the guitar with the documents in the case and sometimes wondering if she knew. He also laughed a bit about how not being able to read might have saved his life. It was enough for the Germans to lose interest in him anyway.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

Charlie spent another week at the police station. Every day he dreaded being taken to the work camp, but it never happened. No one said anything to him, the guards just shrugged, and he never saw the senior officer again.

One day after lunch, a guard came to take his cup and plate. He looked at Charlie for a minute and left without locking the door. Charlie stared at the open door. Was the idea that he would leave and be shot escaping? Or perhaps this just saved everyone the trouble of releasing him. He put his jacket on and walked out into the corridor.

The cells were in the basement of the police station. The door at the top of the stairs was open and when he reached the top, he couldn't see anyone.

'Hello?'

No one answered. The front door was open too, and no one appeared as he walked towards it. He still wondered if he was suddenly going to be shot or, worse, arrested by the German police. His knees shook as he stood. Outside it was sunny and he could feel something of the cool breeze coming through the door. Fresh air. He approached the doorway and looked out at the quiet street. An old couple was passing by and Charlie suddenly realised it was the same one who had appeared the last time he was released by the police. He walked out onto the footpath. They ignored him but he followed them up the street, still bracing himself.

The old couple turned on to a larger street where there was a long queue outside a bakery. The couple stood in line and the old man caught Charlie's eye for the first time, and Charlie knew he should join them and took his place beside them.

'Go home,' hissed the woman.

'But is it safe?' asked Charlie.

The woman shook her head as though in disbelief.

'Jean's instructions.'

Charlie left the queue and walked towards the river. He remembered that he had left the stolen bike on the edge of the Zone the night he was arrested. He would have to

get another one and wondered where he would ever get the money. Surely, the Germans had found the cash he'd hidden in his apartment. They had probably smashed the guitar and his records, too.

Charlie hadn't played guitar for more than a week. There was almost an ache in his hands to pick up a guitar as he walked along the large avenue. He wondered if it would ever be the same. That moment on the stage when Michel shot the Colonel flashed in his memory. Was that it? Would he never play in a band again? It made him angry thinking that it had all been a rouse to lure the Colonel to the club and let him think he was safe. They had played well, and people had liked the music, but no one would ever hear that band again.

A group of boys his age walked past him muttering about Zazous but leaving him to continue on his way. Maybe Frank was right, things were changing. He hoped so.

When he reached the river, he had a sudden desire to head down the large boulevard on the off chance that Frank would be busking. He had worried the whole time that he had been in the police station that somehow Frank had been arrested too but the last thing he wanted to do was mention his name to the police. He also hoped that Frank would have some news about Rosa.

He could hear Frank's accordion as soon as he got close to the boulevard. But he could also hear Rosa's violin. A sudden feeling of need to see friendly faces overcame him and he began to run.

Frank smiled when he saw him and for a moment, Charlie was confused. The violinist who was also smiling wasn't Rosa, except that she was, because no one else played liked her. The girl playing had bobbed hair and glasses. She was wearing a slightly old-fashioned dress and make-up. He looked again. It was Rosa. He shook his head as they finished the song and let the audience drift away on the street.

'Rosa. You look…'

'You mean Marie. I'm Frank's niece from Brittany. I don't know this Rosa.'

Charlie laughed.

'The playing gives you away.'

‘I’ve told her!’ said Frank. ‘I said that she has to play like a girl who had lessons from a dull and not very talented teacher in Brittany.’

They all stood smiling for a few moments.

‘They let me go.’

Rosa and Frank exchanged looks.

‘We spoke to your, ahem, friend, Papa Jean as soon as we could after Rosa turned up. He was, to say the least, very worried about you being turned over to the German authorities. He paid the police to stall as much as possible. Of course, when they found out you couldn’t read, they lost interest. It is their greatest failing. They see the world so narrowly that they couldn’t imagine a boy who wasn’t an excellent student doing anything so audacious as killing one of their colonels.’

‘Well, I’m glad they didn’t,’ said Charlie.

‘Me too, but it is amusing. They didn’t even notice Rosa. There was never any mention of her in any report about the assassination. A Roma involved in a sophisticated plot? Impossible! This disguise is just insurance in case anyone makes the connection. They’ve blamed their own man, your friend Dieter, and poor old Michel.’

‘Is Michel dead?’

‘No, they seem to be waiting for some reason. Maybe they want to catch Dieter first.’

‘I think Dieter must have known something about the Colonel. He must have known how much he loved jazz.’

‘Perhaps. It did seem to be personal.’

‘What about Jean?’

‘Well, that’s the question, but my guess is that the Resistance paid him in some way to let them use his bar,’ said Frank. ‘In any case, he certainly didn’t want you giving them his name.’

‘But why did Monique put the documents in my guitar case? Was she part of it?’

‘I think she might have been, Charlie,’ said Frank.

Charlie couldn't believe this was true, but it made sense. He wondered if Michel and Monique were a couple, and he felt a surge of jealously and anger.

'She still loved you, Charlie,' said Rosa.

He shrugged.

'Charlie, I was very worried about you. We both were. Rosa was frantic when she came back that night.' said Frank. 'I can't believe you're here.'

'I think Jean paid them to let me out. I got a message from these two old people that I'm supposed to go to Tremblay's place. That's a café near my apartment.'

Frank frowned.

'Are you sure that's a good idea?'

Charlie was surprised.

'Sure. It will be fine. Tremblay is a friend.'

Rosa had a strange look on her face as she looked intently at Charlie.

'Maybe you should wait, Charlie,' she said.

'No, really,' he said. 'It will be okay. Tremblay is a friend of my maman.'

'Okay,' said Frank, 'if you're sure.'

'Yeah, I better go. I'll come by your apartment after it gets dark.'

'You do that, Charlie,' said Frank, 'Please be careful.'

Chapter Thirty-Eight

It took him nearly an hour to get to home on foot. He was going to go up to his apartment but remembered the police had taken his keys and he didn't want to talk to the concierge. He stood looking up at the flat wondering if Maman was there. There was no one he wanted to see more but the lights were off, and he had a feeling that no one had probably been there since the German police had found the documents.

It was getting dark but there was light coming out of Tremblay's. Charlie walked towards it thinking that, if nothing else, his friend might be able to explain the whole thing to him.

The café was empty, so he opened the door and looked to see if anyone was there.

'Monsieur Tremblay?'

Charlie could hear movement behind the curtain at the back of the café. Who was there? Maman maybe?

'Hey, anyone here?' said Charlie, suddenly feeling nervous.

Outside it began to rain as Charlie stood in the doorway. He took a step inside and closed the door behind him.

'What's going on?' he said.

Tremblay stepped forward from behind the curtain. He had a strange look on his face and Charlie felt as though he was in a dream where no one was who they were supposed to be.

'Hi,' said Charlie. 'What's going on?'

Tremblay blinked at Charlie for a second and cleared his throat.

'Hi, Charlie!'

His tone sounded forced. Something was very wrong. Charlie started to back up towards the door. Tremblay shook his head.

'No, Charlie, don't go anywhere. You better stay. I'll get you some soup.'

‘I don’t want any soup,’ said Charlie. ‘I think I better go.’

‘Jean wants you to stay here. For your own safety.’

Alarm bells were going off in Charlie’s head. Tremblay’s words sounded dull and rehearsed.

‘Where’s Maman?’

‘Oh, she’s coming here to meet you.’

He was lying. Charlie heard enough. He turned to leave but the door opened, and someone came in.

It was Monique. Her hair was dripping wet, and she looked upset.

‘Charlie! You’re here already.’

Charlie stared at her, not quite believing she was there. He stepped forward to hug her, but she moved past him and walked towards Tremblay who had shielded his eyes and was shaking his head.

‘Did you know the plans were in the guitar case?’ asked Charlie. ‘I could have been shot.’

‘I had no idea they were there, Charlie. I never would have…’ she stopped and looked up at the ceiling. ‘I’m sorry Charlie.’

‘It’s okay,’ he said. ‘I didn’t think you knew.’

She shook her head and moved a hand up to her face to wipe a tear.

‘You are so innocent, Charlie. You had no idea what was going on. Jean used you and your friends to throw off any suspicions about the band. A couple of Zazou kids and a Gypsy girl. No one would notice. He put you in so much danger.’

‘I know,’ said Charlie. ‘But he got me out of the police station, so it doesn’t matter now.’

‘The problem is, Charlie…’

Her voice sounded different, and Charlie felt time slow down. It was like when Michel shot the Colonel. He could see the whole scene from different angles. Something was about to happen.

'The problem for Jean, Charlie, is that you know too much, far too much.'

'But I wouldn't say anything.'

'Jean can't be sure,' she said.

There were tears running down her face. What was she saying to him? Why was he here? The colours in the room seemed somehow deeper.

There was a slight change in the light, but Monique didn't seem to notice. He could sense someone coming in through the door behind him, almost entirely silent. Charlie could see confusion on Tremblay's face.

Then there was something like a hissing sound past Charlie's left ear. Monique's eyes widened in terror. Something heavy fell to the floor with a metallic thud and her hands went to her neck. Charlie blinked trying to understand what had just happened. Then he saw it. There was a large knife sticking out of Monique's throat. He swung around to see Rosa behind him and then turned to see Monique fall to her knees, making coughing sounds.

When he reached her, she fell against him, choking. Blood was pouring down the front of her white shirt.

'I'm sorry, Charlie,' she said, gasping. 'I love you.'

Charlie knelt and held her, trying not to look at the knife. His mind was still trying to put it together, but Rosa was there beside him, pointing to the floor. Charlie saw the German pistol that had fallen from Monique's pocket.

'She was going to shoot you,' said Rosa.

Monique looked at Rosa and then Charlie.

'I'm sorry, Charlie. I didn't want to…' she said, in a strained whisper as blood poured out of the wound.

Rosa looked at Charlie.

‘I thought your mother would get here first. Frank knows someone in the Resistance and sent an urgent message to her.’

Monique was coughing, her eyes went wide and glassy as her breathing slowed down and then stopped. Charlie lowered her to the ground and stood up to see Tremblay making a phone call.

‘Put the phone down,’ said Charlie.

Tremblay shook his head but then slammed the phone down as the door to the café opened and Maman stepped in, holding a gun.

‘You were going to let her shoot Charlie, weren’t you?’

‘No!’ said Tremblay. ‘I didn’t know what she was going to do. Jean told me to keep him here.’

‘Jean’s dead,’ said Maman. ‘He was part of the plot, but he was trying to shop all of us to the Germans. He thought he was bigger than the Resistance. He wasn’t.’

‘But you knew about the plan?’ asked Charlie, in astonishment.

‘The idea was that the band would appear one night with different musicians playing guitar, sax and violin, all of whom would be armed. I was assured a thousand times that you would not be there when it happened. You, Eddie and Rosa were going to be delayed one night and the assassins would go on instead. But Gregor was worried that the Germans knew about the plot and so he panicked and simply shot the Colonel.’

Charlie shook his head. He felt Rosa’s arms around him.

Charlie’s mother walked over to where Tremblay was standing and smashed his phone on the floor.

‘I would very much like to shoot you,’ she said to Tremblay, pointing the gun at his head.

‘But we already have one body in here. Maybe someone else will finish the job.’

They walked back out on to the dark street, leaving Tremblay protesting loudly. Charlie felt as though he was underwater. He heard his mother tell Rosa that she thought he was in shock.

‘How did you learn to do that with a knife?’ his mother asked.

Rosa smiled and shook her head.

‘How did you know Monique was going to shoot me?’ mumbled Charlie, still trying to make sense of it all.

‘The famous second sight?’ asked his mother.

‘No,’ said Rosa. ‘I looked in the window and it was clear that she was drawing something out of her pocket. As soon as I was sure it was a gun, I came in and threw the knife. I’m sorry, Charlie, but she was going to kill you.’

He looked at the wet cobblestones on Rue Broca, remembering the other guitar player who had died there. If Monique had shot Charlie, he would have died only a few feet away.

Charlie thought they were going to their apartment but instead, they went to another building and into the basement. To Charlie’s surprise, Frank was there with a small suitcase, sitting at a table with another man.

‘Claude is going to take all three of you to Spain. It’s far too dangerous for you here.’

‘But Maman,’ said Charlie. ‘What about you?’

‘I have work to do, Charlie. It will be easier if I know you are safe.’

‘I have people in Spain,’ said Rosa.

‘I was hoping you might,’ said Charlie’s mother.

‘I speak Spanish,’ said Frank, cheerily. ‘And Charlie can take guitar lessons from Señor Segovia.’

Charlie’s mother hugged him for a long time and told him that she would see him again very soon. He tried not to cry as Rosa took his hand and drew him away. Frank patted him on the shoulder. Claude motioned for them to follow him into the shadows.

The End

Critical Component
Fast and Loose: The Performative ‘Gypsy’

Introduction

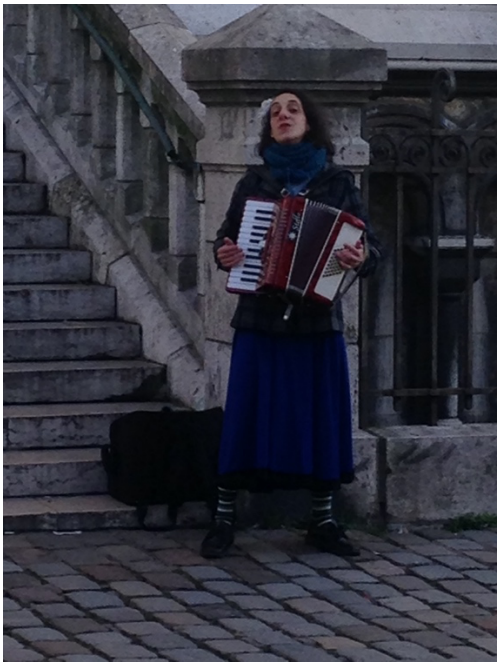
When I started writing my novel for young adults (YA), *Hey Zazou*, my interest was mainly in the Zazous themselves. I tracked down almost every available reference in English about these curious proto-Teddy Boys who defied the Occupation authorities by dancing to jazz. I even struggled through the only book ever written about them. It has never been translated and it's called *Les Zazous* (1977) by a writer named Jean-Claude Loiseau. It's written in a hep-cat style of French that makes for very difficult reading.

At a certain point, I decided that my main character, Charlie, would not be a Zazou as such, but a teenager who loves jazz and worships the Zazous from afar. He slowly gathers the right clothes and eventually makes contact with them. My cousin Tim and I had a similar relationship with the downtown punks in Toronto in the early '80s and I felt more comfortable writing from that position. Early on, I decided that Charlie would be a guitar player who also happens to be severely dyslexic. A book needs characters and a musician needs to play with others, so I brought together a disparate group of individuals. I wanted strange combinations and incongruous personalities in the tradition of any great band, musical and otherwise: Arthur's knights, Robin Hood's Merry

Men, Kelly's Heroes, The Avengers. There can be something exhilarating about assembling the team for an adventure.

The band, in its final configuration, was Charlie on guitar, his friend Eddie on sax, a resistance operative named Michel on bass, Dieter, a German soldier, on trumpet, and a young Romani woman named Rosa on violin.

Rosa was inspired by a woman that I spotted playing accordion down a side street near Sacre Coeur on a cold November afternoon in Paris. I was there to research my book, passing the church on my way to Pigalle to find inspiration for Jean's Bar, an important setting in *Hey Zazou*. Instead of descending Sacre Coeur's famous stairs like a typical tourist, I cut around to the right, taking a side street. I heard the glorious sounds of the Bal-musette accordion before I actually saw the musician.



I spoke to her briefly and discovered that she was Romani and lived in Paris. There was no doubt that she swung traditional French music very hard on her accordion in the tradition of Romani musicians. Her playing was subtle – and brilliant. In my dreadful French, I asked if she had recorded because she played so well. She gave me a slightly suspicious look and I felt embarrassed. I put some money in her instrument case and

walked back across the path where I could listen to her play. After a while, she seemed to decide I was harmless and smiled when I clapped at the end of her songs. Hundreds of tourists passed by without even glancing up from their phones, looking at the photos they'd just taken of the church. How could they not stop for this wonderful music? Occasionally someone dropped some change into her case, but most were in a hurry to get badly drawn portraits done in Place du Tertre or to check their Facebook at Amelie's Café.

Eventually, I started to think about a coffee myself. After thanking the accordionist, I headed past the art students and hustlers for a café au lait and a pastry in Pigalle. I made some notes, and the character of Rosa was born.

The day before, I had arrived in Paris from Amsterdam and rushed straight to the Saint Ouen neighbourhood to a small bar called La Chope des Puces. I was keen to catch a Sunday matinee of 'Gypsy swing' music. I took the Metro to Porte de Clignancourt and walked under an overpass, passing an ancient flea market to a small street called Rue des Rosiers. The bar was crowded with locals, tourists and Romani families. A local recording artist called Ninine Garcia and an older man, who turned out to be Ninine's father, stood on the makeshift stage in front of a large window that looked out to the street. They played jazz standards on guitars at breakneck speed as I ordered a glass of wine and sat with a Roma family at a large table near the stage.

I have to be honest here. A voice in the back of mind was telling me to keep an eye on my bag and my phone. I was surrounded by Romani people in a crowded place. Over the years, I had encountered them in train stations and on the streets all over Europe. On my first visit to Europe, I'd come to blows with a Romani pickpocket in Nice and once in Italy, an old woman had tried to hand me a baby while two kids went through my bag. But I saw these as isolated incidents. I understood that there were economic and social realities that put these people in my path, and I had no reason to believe that there was anything inherently dishonest or dangerous about them. After all, one evening in Rabat, someone had stolen my guitar and I didn't suddenly deem all Moroccans knaves. So why was I gripping the side of my bag under the table as I listened to the musicians?

Other hand on bag!

The music was riveting and I felt elated to be in Paris and, in particular, this venue – even after three exhausting days in Amsterdam and a long train ride. Still, the voice of my education, as DH Lawrence has it, was insistent. Watch your bag.

But as I watched the Romani people in the bar, I could feel something melting. I observed families moving through the front area to a dining room at the back. Young men gathered at the bar and two women sat at my table for a time, chatting furiously about something in a language that wasn't French. No one paid any attention to me. No one tried to take my bag or trick me into buying a worthless gem. The families were well dressed (certainly better than I was) and appeared prosperous. There is no question that Romani people are one of the most disadvantaged groups in Europe but that isn't the full picture, of course. I loosened my grip on my bag and reverted to the normal precautions I would take in any city.

Rosa was eventually transformed into a young violinist whom Charlie and Eddie encounter in the area around the flea market. I already had an accordionist character on hand as the voice of French racism during the Occupation, but the dizzying musical ability of the woman outside Sacre Coeur went to Rosa. In the 1940s, the area north of the flea market was still known as 'La Zona' and associated with the Romani in Paris. Django Reinhardt, the legendary Romani jazz guitarist, had grown up there and I was able to find some information and photos of the area from the early twentieth century. In the story, Charlie and Eddie watch her busk with her family there and introduce themselves in this scene:

> They were walking back from the Roma zone when they heard music coming from further up the street. There was a small crowd around a group of buskers. Charlie could hear the distinctive sound of a violin playing the Manouche jazz that Django had played in the thirties. Charlie and Eddie pushed through the crowd to where they could see the band. There were three guitarists. Two were playing 'pompe' rhythms and the third, the eldest, was playing melody at high speeds. They were all dressed in black suits and Borsalino hats down over their eyes. The violinist stood behind them. Charlie noticed that Eddie had frozen as he watched her. She was about their age and stood leaning back slightly with her long thick dark hair falling on her shoulders. An ornate scarf covered some of her head and her wrists were heavy with silver ornaments. Charlie looked at her dark eyes and shivered. She wore a long elaborate dress and shoes that didn't look like any he'd ever seen before.
>
> Charlie realised that this was in fact the little girl he had seen playing here a long time ago while wandering the market with his parents. Her playing had been good then but now she just soared above the music. There were hints of middle eastern music in her playing and some Spanish touches. It was all wrapped up in a jazz package though and that's what both boys found so surprising. She was a real jazz player. (Thompson 100)

I used my own memories of watching buskers playing flamenco music in Spain here, but I recognised that I was entering dangerous territory in creating this character. The debate around voice appropriation and the deployment of cultural tropes is no minor issue in contemporary writing. But I somehow felt, at this stage, that as long as I was using real sources – photos, recordings, my own memories – I was not relying on stereotypes. My view came to change. In an earlier novel, I had featured a 'Gypsy' fortune teller (*Summer of Monsters*, 2014). She was based on numerous accounts I'd read of travelling fairs in the early nineteenth century. And yet, it began to occur to me that perhaps this portrayal was, at best, lazy writing, and at worst, racism.

As the new novel grew, Rosa became an increasingly important character. I started reading about the fate of the French Romani during the Occupation. Though very few ended up in the death camps, they were rounded up and sent to sites within France. Their property was seized, and they were treated as criminals. If the war had continued, it is likely that many of them would have followed their Eastern European and German counterparts into the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

I decided that I could use Rosa to raise some awareness about these people and their suffering at the hands of the Nazis. I continue to feel that more people should be more aware of the Porajmos.

Any investigation of the Roma in France during the Second Word War inevitably leads to the most famous of all Roma musicians, Django Reinhardt. I tracked down two books by Michael Dregni. One was a biography of Reinhardt and the other a more general history of the genre that the guitarist is now closely associated with, 'Gypsy jazz'. It was here that I discovered that the complexities of creating an authentic Romani character went much deeper than I had expected. In fact, the act of 'creating' a Romani character was inherently problematic as it involved a distinction between 'Gypsies' and 'Romani', something that continues to elude even well-meaning critics.

Hey Zazou grew out of my experiences as a music fan, a reader, and a traveller. What follows is the journey I took to better understand the implications of creating a Romani

character. The inclusion of more formal elements along with personal reflections is an attempt to integrate the research and the novel.

Django the 'Gypsy'

Some books on my desk

The Rough Guide to Jazz by Ian Carr, ed. (2008)

This is a serious and painstakingly compiled guide to jazz music. Yet, the entry on Django Reinhardt opens with this sentence: 'Django (Jean Baptiste) Reinhardt was born in a caravan in a shantytown, the son of a gypsy entertainer.' (*Carr* 531-2) The author seems to feel that the guitarist's cultural identity constitutes permission to present a wildly imaginative version of his birth. Reinhardt was not born in a shantytown, if such a thing even existed in Belgium in 1910. His father played violin but only ever semi-professionally.

Django Reinhardt by Charles Delaunay (1962)

Charles Delaunay was a close friend of Reinhardt's who had helped to promote his music and manage his career. Still, he cannot resist statements like the following: 'Up until he was twenty, Django had never worn a proper suit; he had never lived in a house; he had stayed a typically primitive, medieval gipsy, whose archaic beliefs, superstitions and mistrust of the 'benefits of science' are reminiscent of the mentality of the peasants who fled in terror at the approach of the first railway trains.' (Delaunay 14)

Django Reinhardt, at 13, in a suit.

In fact, Reinhardt grew up in Paris so was no doubt familiar with trains. In a Catholic country such as France, his cultural beliefs were probably no closer to superstition than

the average French citizen's. If he never lived in a house, it was because landlords were reluctant to rent properties to the Romani.

Django by Michael Dregni (2004)
Michael Dregni is an authority on Django Reinhardt and a highly respected music writer. His books on the guitarist and 'Gypsy jazz' are considered definitive. In his 2004 biography, he reports that the guitarist was, 'born in a caravan at a crossroads in the dead of winter' (Dregni 1)

'The crossroads' is an old and mildly racist blues trope to explain the extraordinary talents of African-American musicians. It is likely, though not verifiable, that he was born in a caravan. January is indeed the 'dead of winter' in Belgium.

The Illustrated History of Gypsy Jazz by Michael Dregni (2006)
This is a wonderfully illustrated and thoroughly researched book that takes in both the jazz genre in question and the history of music in Paris generally. This doesn't stop Dregni from starting with a proposition that is both racist and demonstrably wrong: 'From the beginning, it was vagabond music. Gypsy jazz was born on the move…' (Dregni 7)

Dregni then spends the next hundred pages examining the deep Parisian sources of this supposed genre. If it was 'born on the move', it was moving only between several small venues in Pigalle.

Viking Jazz

Like Reinhardt, Jan Garbarek is a renowned jazz musician who is not American. He is Norwegian. *The Rough Guide to Jazz*, which emphasises the distinctly exotic nature of Reinhardt's birth, opens with this sentence in its entry on the Norwegian: 'Jan Gabarek, who is self-taught, wanted to play saxophone after hearing John Coltrane in 1961' (Carr, Fairweather & Priestly 225). The article continues, predictably, to outline his influences, his career, his style of playing, and his recordings. The final sentence is, as follows: 'His

music is an affirmation and it is full of resonances from the past – echoes of Nordic folksongs, old church music, half-forgotten things from long ago' (225). It is the only fleeting reference to his origins in Norway that appears in the article. Reinhardt's is littered with phrases like: 'That year, back in his caravan, he received a cable from Duke Ellington…' (532).

(Jan Garbarek plays 'Viking Jazz')

To be fair, Jan Garbarek is sometimes identified with a vague genre known as Nordic Jazz. However, 'Nordic Jazz' suggests a regional affiliation instead of something like 'Viking Jazz'. And no one makes wild claims about the influence of his heritage and its influence on Garbarek's music. *The Penguin Guide to Jazz on CD* makes the slightly questionable but mild point that, 'If you know it is Garbarek, it will evoke Nordic landscapes…' (Cook & Morton 556). Rarely, if ever, is Reinhardt's music accorded anything so gentle. Dregni writes that, 'Gypsy jazz was born from a Romani violin, the fire of a flamenco guitar, the Parisian *apache*'s accordion and Louis Armstrong's trumpet.' (Dregni 7) There is no evidence to suggest that Reinhardt had any interest in flamenco, and nothing in his playing points in that direction. The 'Romani violin' in Reinhardt's famous Hot Club Quintet recordings of the 1930s was played by the young French musician Stephane Grappelli. There is, as Dregni acknowledges, the lingering influence of the Bal 'apache' accordion style in Reinhardt's playing but the reference to Louis Armstrong is closest to the truth. According to Charles Delaunay, Reinhardt's first biographer, when Reinhardt first heard the trumpeter, he exclaimed, 'Mon frere!' (Delaunay 47). Much like Garbarek with Coltrane, Reinhardt was a self-taught European musician who decided to play jazz upon hearing a famous American player. The difference in the depiction of these two is at the heart of how Romani people have been understood and depicted in print since their arrival in Western Europe during the Middle Ages.

The primitive 'Gypsy'

At the beginning of her essay 'Genre, Ethnoracial Alterity, and the Genesis of Jazz Manouche', Siv B. Lie writes that, 'One fruitful area for exploration of these issues has been jazz scholarship that foregrounds the social and political contexts in which jazz has taken shape' (667). To fully understand what differentiates the depiction of Django Reinhardt from Jan Gabarek, it is important to understand one of the fundamental drivers in jazz criticism. In an essay on the French jazz writer, Hughes Panassie, Tom Perchard quotes from a memoir written in the 1970s. Panassie, who knew Reinhardt well, says that he was not black but was a 'natural musician' nonetheless (Perchard 34). He quotes Panassie directly: 'He was a primitive, in the good sense of the word. He was a gypsy, he had their characteristics' (Perchard 34). The word 'primitive' is very significant.

At the beginning of her 1988 study, *Primitivist Modernism*, Sieglinde Lemke acknowledges that the term 'primitive' is a difficult one. She writes that, 'in the racist discourse of the nineteenth and twentieth century, it was infused with negative connotations and indiscriminately applied to peoples and objects worldwide (as well as African Americans, of course).' (4). It is an idea that, in the developed world, probably dates back to the Age of Discovery and the beginning of colonialism. Certainly, Rousseau's sense of the 'noble savage' made a significant impact on nineteenth-century romanticism. However, in his 1972 study of primitivism, Michael Bell suggested that Wordsworth had shifted his gaze inward in search of the primitive and this represents a break with Rousseau and early notions of 'the primitive':

> The emphasis, then, has shifted from primitivism as a conventional location such as the rural retreat or the Pacific paradise to primitivism as a mode of sensibility. And one of the implications of this shift from outer to inner is that the new sense of the relation to external nature or to the instinctual self no longer requires a chronologically remote or pre-civilised world for its realisation. Indeed, rather than implying an absolutely opposite alternative to civilisation the primitive can be manifest as a suffusive quality of feeling within the civilised identity (Bell 59).

This then sets the stage for the perimeters of Lemke's book. Her core idea is that modernism and the style of primitivism that begins, roughly speaking, with the interest among Europeans in African sculpture and masks in the years leading up to the First World War, are one and the same. 'Pablo Picasso's encounter with African sculptures might be the best documented example of the fermenting effect that the cultural other can have on the transformation of style' (6). This stage in the artist's career is generally seen as one of the starting points of modernism and Lemke's thesis is that meetings with the 'other' shaped the aesthetic of modernism.

It's a troubling relationship. Toni Morrison's contention in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992) is that through the development of an African other white people explore their own desires and fears. In the preface to that book, Morrison relates a story from Marie Cardinal's memoir where the young Cardinal experiences her first anxiety attack at a Louis Armstrong concert. She runs into the street and takes some comfort in a white camellia. Later in the memoir, her panic attack is partially explained by her identity as a French person raised in Algeria but Morrison is struck by the symbolism implicit in her fears:

> In Cardinal's narrative, black or coloured people and symbolic figurations of blackness are markers for the benevolent and the wicked, the spiritual (thrilling tales of Allah's winged horse) and the voluptuous; of sinful but delicious sensuality coupled with demands for purity and restraint (Morrison *ix*).

Lemke's book on primitivism includes a chapter on music called 'Whiteman's Jazz'. It's an ironic title that alludes both to the manner in which jazz was first understood by the general public and the fact that a white musician called Paul Whiteman played a significant and telling role in the music's development. In 1924, Whiteman performed what was known at the time as 'symphonic jazz' in a New York show that was advertised as the 'First American Jazz Concert'. It included 'Rhapsody in Blue' by George Gershwin, along with some early jazz standards like 'Livery Stable Blues'. It was well received by the

critics who generally agreed that Whiteman had found a way to create art from the raw noise of jazz as it had been played hitherto (67-8).

The 'first' jazz concert, 1925

Buddy Bolden Band, 1905

The idea that it was the 'first jazz concert' is absurd when one considers that Louis Armstrong had already recorded and toured widely with King Oliver and Fletcher Henderson. 1925 was the year Armstrong began to make his 'Hot Five' recordings. Both Count Basie and Duke Ellington had already made their first records. Five years earlier, Mamie Smith had a smash hit with 'Crazy Blues'. By 1925, jazz was already in transition from its earliest forms. As Lemke points out, jazz had, before Whiteman, been the subject of a widespread fear campaign.

> Among the disdainful commentary was a curious article that reports a study on the origins and impacts of jazz by 'ethnologist' Walter Kingsley and Professor Williams Morrison Patterson of Columbia University. The essay, 'Why Jazz sends us back to the jungle. A Broadway ethnologist tells the savage origin of this delirium tremens of syncopation' was published in 1918 in Current Opinion (Lemke 62).

The conclusions are predictable. Jazz 'could unleash 'deep-seated' desires. It must remain dormant lest the sophisticated listener go back to the jungle, so to speak' (62).

The mythmaking impulse that subjugates black jazz musicians to the role of 'other' is most blatant in the critical obsession with the music's African sources, something that was fashionable in the immediate postwar period but hasn't really gone away never disappeared entirely. In Rudi Blesh's *Shining Trumpets* (1946), an early and influential history of the form, a chapter on 'the blues' opens with an extraordinary contrast. He suggests that human endeavour is driven primarily by 'spiritual need'.

> When the spiritual need is permanence, man leaves gigantic pyramids on the face of the earth. When the need is ideas distilled into truth, he writes a Phaedrus, when it is momentary perfection of shape or movement to be made timeless, he builds a Parthenon, carves a Winged Victory. If his need is practical, yet visionary, he plots the paths of uncountable stars, composes symphonies, builds cathedrals and skyscrapers like towering ladders into the sky (98).

The references build a fairly routine picture of the achievements of western civilisation. 'But if his need is movement unhampered, unlimited, a free institutional flow, a spiritual flight as unconcerned with galaxies as it is with the counting of coins, he builds no architecture. On the ground under the open sky, he sings and dances' (98). After a few more sentences of lyrical hyperbole about the 'other' that doesn't build things but instead sings and dances, the reader is told:

> He is the Negro come from Africa to America, and this form which directs movement in space, spins out sequential time and gives to tone a soaring pattern, like the processional of the stars, is the humble and profound music we call the blues (98).

Leaving aside the obvious complication that the pyramids were built by 'Negroes' in Africa, there is a distinct line drawn here between the rational and materialist impulses

of western civilisation and the irrational world of 'Africa'. In his 1991 journal article, 'Constructing the Jazz Tradition', Scott DeVeaux contends that Blesh 'narrowly identified the music with a romanticised notion of folk culture' (529). Blesh's book is filled with florid passages that highlight the otherness of African-American life. Even the landscape of Louisiana is rendered strange and primitive in the chapter on New Orleans. 'A flat mysterious region, this, where water seems, in an indefinite flux, to become land, and land water, as if this were happening in an earlier age when even the elements were not firmly mixed' (Blesh 151). It sounds like most alluvial regions on earth but is pronounced 'mysterious' by Blesh as an appropriate stage for the origin story of jazz in North America.

The reference to Genesis is clear: 'And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters' (Genesis 1:6 KJV). He continues the creation story until jazz finally appears in the arbitrary year of 1870, perhaps in the wake of the recently ended Civil War. 'Then the swift notes poured out, a black, calithumpian music, and the first jazz had fallen on human ears' (98). 'Calithumpian' refers to an ancient English practice of dancing and clowning following a public hanging, so it is difficult to know what he means. Blesh does explain his insistence on it being 'black' music in the next sentence. 'It was black music because it came, at first, from the black ex-slaves and not from their lighter and more elegant cousins in the Old [French] Quarter' (98).

The nod to primitivist modernism is clear in this instance. Jazz must be the music of the 'other'. The word 'elegant' is a stand-in for 'civilised'. It also points to the subtext of evolution in his book. Jazz began somewhere and evolved. Though it is never stated in these terms, it is difficult to escape the spectre of social Darwinism in his writing. The suggestion that only African Americans were capable of making this primitive music contains the implication that they themselves are primitive people, unspoiled and innocent.

David Chinitz suggests, in an article called 'Rejuvenation through Joy: Langston Hughes, Primitivism and Jazz', that, 'The need for such an Other [in America in the 1920s]

produced a discourse in which black Americans figured as barely civilised exiles from the jungle, with – so the clichés ran – tom toms beating in their blood and dark laughter in their souls' (61). That need seems to have also produced a discourse where Django Reinhardt's 'Gypsy' identity is as important as the music he made and in fact has retroactively recreated it as folk music instead of jazz. 'From almost the beginning, some of the most influential writings on jazz manouche ['Gypsy jazz'] have advanced a race-based, essentialist notion of the idiom' (Givan 13). This is certainly true of the genre that Reinhardt is supposed to have created but, as Givan makes clear, Reinhardt was initially regarded as a jazz musician only.

Reinhardt's early years – real and imagined

It is likely that Reinhardt's earliest musical experiences were listening to members of his family sing and playing folk songs associated with the Sinti (Romani) people of northern Europe. However, as will be discussed, Romani music is not easy to define and does not conform in any manner to the rules of an identifiable genre. As with so much in this discussion, there is also a considerable difference between the actual musical practices of the Romani and the popular idea of 'Gypsy music'. Writers, as will be shown, have drawn on a range of tropes and stereotypes to suggest that this 'genre' is anything more than their own creation.

Reinhardt's earliest performances and recordings were in the popular Parisian form Bal-musette. Though it has come to signify French culture, it was actually the arrival of Italian accordion players, who slowly displaced the popular Auvergnat pipers, that established this style of music (Dregni 18-25). Early in the twentieth century, the banjo appeared in Paris. Reinhardt had been busking with one in the streets before joining a well-known accordionist named Vertese Guerino to play Bal-musette for dancers in large halls. He was twelve. His age is important because he had almost a decade's experience playing in the Bal style before he turned to jazz in his early twenties. In his biography of Reinhardt, Dregni comments on Reinhardt's banjo style in the four 'Valse Musette' recordings that he made with French accordionist Jean Vaissade in 1928. 'On these sides, Django played with power and assurance belying his age. When he hit on-the-beat

rhythmic chords to bolster the accordion's melody, he strummed his banjo with a piston's punch driving the beat' (32). Dregni goes on to note that, 'soon, he was adding a strummed half note accent after the beat' (33). This is almost exactly what was later described as the 'pompe,' the highly percussive style of rhythm guitar that Reinhardt and others used when playing jazz. But sixty pages later, Dregni states that, 'The basic pompe was then accented by syncopated half-not fills and rhythmic triplets like strummed versions of the Gypsy flamenco rasquedo, which flamencos played with a quick unfurling of fingers across the strings' (91). Something that Reinhardt developed in his playing as a teenager, entertaining in French dance halls, becomes an expression of 'Gypsy' music, in this case flamenco, a style with deep roots in southern Spain. The rasquedo and the 'pompe' share something in the 'on-the beat' percussive aspect but the effect is quite different. No evidence is offered here or in any other account of Reinhardt having ever used the rasquedo technique or having shown any interest in flamenco. The association is based exclusively on Reinhardt's cultural identity and a clear example of writer going so far to contradict himself in his invention of a 'Gypsy'.

Dancing to Bal-musette, not 'Gypsy' music

By the time Reinhardt made his first jazz recordings he had absorbed the early records of Louis Armstrong and become a lifelong jazz fan. But Dregni insists that the music is still somehow 'Gypsy'. 'He no longer wanted to play Gypsy music, yet his jazz bore his Romani signature' (91). It was Bal-musette that Reinhardt no longer wanted to play, as Dregni outlines in the previous chapter. This erroneous point is reiterated by David Hajdu in an otherwise very thoughtful 2010 article about Reinhardt and 'Gypsy jazz' in *The New Republic*. 'Once he discovered Armstrong and American jazz, in the late 20s, Reinhardt veered away from the Gypsy material in his repertoire' (Hadju 2). Even in a

piece that seeks to separate Reinhardt's heritage from his music, the author imposes an essentialist narrative on Reinhardt's story. Both Dregni and Hadju seem captivated by the idea that he was playing flamenco songs around the campfire until he discovered jazz. That he had been a professional musician since childhood is too banal, perhaps.

This is a common problem in music writing that concerns a marginalised group. In his book about African-American rural blues artists, *Escaping the Delta*, Elijah Wald attempts to separate the myths about the legendary Mississippi blues player Robert Johnson from the reality of his life as a musician. His main point is that Johnson was not a gifted amateur who had 'sold his soul' but a professional musician who had worked hard to acquire his skills. He was not a 'folk' singer but someone who performed for money and therefore was not restricted to the 'blues' in his repertoire. 'Any working musician was thus expected to play a range of music that would surprise modern listeners who are used to the idea that classical musicians play classical, country musicians play country and jazz musicians play jazz' (Wald 44). There is simply no evidence that Reinhardt ever played 'Gypsy music' on stage. Siv B. Lie addresses this point in her recent article: 'Despite the fact that Reinhardt considered himself a jazzman, with little if any stylistic influence from his Manouche [French Roma] origins, critics have tended to project ethnoracial qualities onto his music and persona' (Lie 669). In other words, to write about Reinhardt is to invent a 'Gypsy' persona for him.

Gypsy (or) Jazz

One common misunderstanding of Reinhardt's music stems from the instrumental line-up on his most famous recordings. The violin is no longer a typical jazz instrument and drums have replaced the rhythm guitarist. In general, piano, brass and woodwind have defined the sound of jazz since the early 1940s but this wasn't always the case. Listeners who are not familiar with jazz in the 1930s and hear something 'Gypsy' in Reinhardt's Hot Club Quintet recordings might be surprised to hear the work of American duo Eddie Lang and Joe Venuti. Their guitar and violin sides were almost certainly the inspiration for Reinhardt and his violin player at the time, Stephane Grappelli (Givan 9). Similarly, Oscar Aleman, an Argentinian guitarist who was a friend of Reinhardt, also recorded

with a violinist. His version of 'Limehouse Blues', also recorded by Reinhardt, features many of the qualities that critics like Michael Dregni label 'Gypsy'.

Something that is too often ignored is Reinhardt's later career. The period that produced his best-known music was reasonably brief. The Hot Club Quintet recorded many times but in a short period in the late thirties. The band was on tour in the UK when the Second World War broke out. The violinist, Grappelli, opted to remain in England and did not record or play with Reinhardt for another eight years. He was replaced by a clarinet player and a drummer was added to the band (Givan 9). It's hard to discern any 'Gypsy' influences in the recordings he made in the early 40s. With clarinets and saxophones, along with his guitar work, it sounds more like the small group recordings that the American bandleader Benny Goodman made with guitarist Charlie Christian in the late 1930s than anything approaching exotic or folk. After the war, Reinhardt toured the US with Duke Ellington where he played electric guitar. In fact, he played electric guitar on most of his later recordings and while his style was elegant, it was also less frantic than earlier works. The speed that is often cited as a 'Gypsy' quality in his playing was no longer present.

In his lifetime, he was regarded as a jazz musician and mentions of his cultural background were rare. He recorded with American jazz musicians such as Benny Carter and Coleman Hawkins in the 1930s. As Givan points out, two thirds of his recordings from that period are not with the Quintet and are not generally considered part of the 'Gypsy jazz' canon. Both Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington believed that he was an important and influential jazz artist. He was profiled in English and American jazz periodicals like *Downbeat* not as an exotic throwback but a serious guitarist. As Siv B. Lie says, 'discursive connections between Reinhardt's ethnoracial origins, his persona, and his music intensified precipitously from the 1950s (after his death)' (Lie 680).

Reinhardt's war

If race had been a discussion point in jazz before the Second World War, the Nazis made it a matter of life and death. In Germany under Hitler, jazz was never formally banned

but radio stations were forbidden to play it and it was certainly frowned upon by the authorities. The 'Swing Kids', German teenagers who attended illegal dances and dressed in flamboyant clothes, were hunted down and sent to work camps. The Germans took music as a propaganda tool very seriously (Zwerin 80) Thus, they saw the danger in improvised music that signified freedom. It was also music that was associated with African Americans and Jews. The Nazis couldn't very well prosecute their antisemitic policies if the population was dancing to the Benny Goodman Orchestra. The idea was that racial superiority would be under serious threat if it was believed that African Americans and Jews were the inventors of jazz and were among its finest players. (Zwerin 35)

When the Nazis came to power in 1933, there were already laws on the books concerning the Sinti (the northern European Romani group) and the Roma residents of Austria and Germany. Laws concerning where they were permitted to camp went back to the 1880s and under the Weimar Republic in 1926, the 'Law for the Combating of Gypsies, Travellers and the Work Shy' came into effect in Bavaria (Lewy 7). Their treatment by the Nazis was horrifying. Though evidence suggests that they were the victims of genocidal policies, this has never been fully accepted and remains a point of contention for many writers. Guenther Lewy's otherwise informative book *Persecution of the Gypsies* (1999), outlines the terrible story but concludes, rather mystifyingly considering the evidence of the previous 200 pages, that the actions taken by the Nazis, 'do not constitute acts of genocide' (223). His argument is that they were not targeted as a group though he does acknowledge that 'the resort to murder presupposed the belief that the Gypsies constituted an inferior group of people whose lives were fully dispensable (Lewy 222-3). Everything in his book points towards what he defines as genocide. 'In order to establish the commission of the crime of genocide, an intent to destroy a group 'as such' [sic] in whole or in part must be present' (222). His own unwillingness to see the Nazis treatment of the Romani in this light seems to be his only evidence against genocide. His book is well researched and well written but is undone by a conclusion which only obscures what should be beyond question. It should be noted that Romani historians have strongly objected to Lewy's book. The British academic, Ian

Hancock, calls the book 'dangerous' and suggests that it 'seeks to exclude the Nazis' Romani victims from the holocaust' (Hancock 228).

An earlier study by Donald Kenrick and Grattan Puxon, *Gypsies Under the Swastika* (1972), concluded that from the beginning, Nazi policies regarding the Romani were genocidal. As early as 1934, the German Romani were placed in camps. Lewy suggests that the Nazi practice of forced sterilisations included Romani in the mid-30s. They were among the earliest victims of Nazi policies and were part of the original deportations to camps outside of Germany. Ian Hancock has written extensively about both the 'Porajmos' – the Romani name for the Holocaust – and the controversy. He notes that 85 per cent of the German Romani population were put in concentration camps and that only 12 per cent of that group survived. That means that roughly 90 per cent of them were murdered between 1933 and 1945 (Hancock 227).

Django Reinhardt was in a very complicated position in the occupied city. In the midst of a world war he was playing guitar for rapturous audiences filled with German officers representing a regime that was systematically murdering Romani people. Meanwhile, his song 'Nuages' became something of an anthem for Parisians looking forward to a German defeat. If that wasn't enough, two of the most important French jazz critics were claiming him as an example of how this music could be played by someone who was neither Jewish nor African American. While the Romani people were dying in concentration camps, Reinhardt was being hailed as a 'white' man who played jazz at the highest level. As the writer Andy Fry observes in an essay called 'That Gypsy in France', 'Vichy France is of course one of the most freighted periods in living memory' (185). It certainly was for Django Reinhardt.

Considering that today Reinhardt's cultural identity is at least as important as his music, his depiction during the Occupation is fascinating. Two critics had different motives but agreed that Reinhardt was French and, more importantly, white. The first was Charles Delaunay who would later repudiate virtually everything he wrote during the war about jazz (Fry 186). Delauney was operating the Hot Club of Paris, a lucrative enterprise that served a number of purposes during the war. It was a business that employed musicians

and writers. It was also an excellent cover for Resistance activities, something he was later arrested for by the Occupation authorities. However, jazz attracted unwanted attention from the Vichy Government, so he felt that he had to somehow move the music away from its African-American origins.

Jazz, according to Delaunay, was not African-American music or even American music. It was French. Drawing an outrageously long bow, he pointed to its supposed origins in New Orleans, once the key city in French North America. Even the word jazz, which has as many origin stories as it does tellers, was from the French verb 'jasser', to chatter (Fry 186-7). But, as Andy Fry points out, Reinhardt's group, the Hot Club Quintet, was his best card. He quotes Delaunay as writing that Reinhardt was 'an incomparable artist who truly represented French grace and genius' (Delaunay, in Fry 187). Twenty years later he wrote a biography of Reinhardt, referring to him as a 'primitive gypsy' (Delaunay 12) and recounted numerous stories about his eccentric 'Gypsy' ways. 'It was likely convenient for advocates of French jazz to describe Reinhardt, the most vaunted jazz musician France could lay claim to, as white and thus as a legitimate representative of French ethnonationalism' (Lie 2019).

The Vichy supporter and French fascist writer Andre Coueroy, whose 1942 *Histoire Generale Du Jazz* insisted that jazz was always 'white' music. Ironically, Django Reinhardt was a key component of his argument. He used numerous examples of syncopation in classical music to make his case and suggested that the African-American involvement was 'by chance' (Fry 189). His enthusiasm for Reinhardt was boundless. His music demonstrated the 'European spirit' and was a 'victory for whites' (Coueroy, in Fry 189). It is unclear whether Coueroy simply didn't realise that Reinhardt was Romani or chose to ignore it.

France began to crack down on its Romani population before German Occupation. Once the war began with Germany, their movement around the country was restricted. (Kendrick & Puxon 65). When the Vichy Government took charge, internment camps were set up almost immediately. The conditions in these camps were extremely poor. Although the number of deaths is unknown, it is suspected that there were many among

the 30,000 Romani who ended up in these places (Dregni 169). Towards the end of the Occupation, plans were in place to begin to transport the Roma to concentration camps in Germany and beyond (Kendrick & Puxon 70). It was probably only the D-Day invasions that saved them from the fate of their fellow Romani in Eastern Europe and Germany. Sadly, the French did not immediately close the camps. Some French Romani remained interned until 1948 (71).

Reinhardt was certainly aware of this situation but was afforded some protection as a working musician. He was very popular with the civilian Occupation staff and the German soldiers who came to Paris on leave. Reinhardt's biographer, Michael Dregni, suggests that that he 'flourished' in this period (Dregni 169). 'Just as the Germans permitted jazz in Paris, they allowed Romani musicians to continue to play – and paid to come hear them every night.' (169). Ronald C. Rosbottom notes the following in his book about the Occupation, *When Paris Went Dark*, 'Amazingly, the *Wegleiter*, the German guide to Paris, repeatedly printed advertisements for cabarets featuring 'Gypsy' music and bands. As the Romanies were being murdered in eastern Europe, their compatriots were entertaining SS troops in the City of Light' (139).

Michael Dregni, to my mind, seems to imply that Reinhardt was collaborating in some manner. 'Django, meanwhile, continued to play his guitar. As the most famous jazz musician in Europe, he was trapped in the spotlight and could do little but play his music – or not play. Django may have been enraged by the Germans but he was not engaged in the resistance' (182). This statement would describe most Parisians at the time, yet it does not capture the seriousness of Reinhardt's situation. It's worth noting because Dregni's writing tends to overplay Reinhardt's cultural identity, except in this instance. 'Following the Kommadantur's demands that he tour Germany, Django, Naguine and Negros [Reinhardt's wife and young son] slipped out of Paris in September or October 1943' (182). Reinhardt made several extremely perilous attempts to escape into Switzerland. On the final one, he was turned back as the Swiss did not believe that he was in danger. 'There was no way of getting around the regulations: Reinhardt was neither a negro [sic] nor a Jew' (Delaunay 116). The implications of those regulations while the Romani were perishing in German concentration camps tell their own story

but neither Charles Delaunay nor Michael Dregni choose to explore it. Nor does either writer explore Reinhardt's motives for refusing to tour Germany or why, when he was wealthier than he had ever been and a huge star, he was making dangerous attempts to flee into the uncertainty of exile. Both writers employ the full range of 'Gypsy' tropes in their depictions of Reinhardt but are curiously silent on how their subject's cultural identity may have come into play during a period that saw somewhere between half a million and 1.5 million Romani people murdered. It is my contention that this gap is indicative of the difference between the creative notion of a 'Gypsy' and the lived experience of the Romani.

The ‘Gypsy’ performer

The Teatr Romen

In her essay, ‘Hot Blood and Black Pearls: Socialism, society, and authenticity at the Moscow Teatr Romen’ (1996), Alaina Lemon relates a story of a visit to the theatre that demonstrates the central paradox of Romani identity. The Teatr Romen was founded in the 1930s as part of a Soviet plan to draw the Romani into the socialist fold. It remains a popular venue for music, dance, and theatre.

> In 1991, one of the Russian directors at the Teatr invited me backstage to witness the audition of a young Romani woman from Siberia who spoke little Romani. She was asked to sing, to recite a poem of Pushkin, and then to dance. She protested, ‘I don't know any Pushkin.’ ‘Shame!’ Several actors chastised. She danced well (‘with temperament’ as one performer whispered to me): ‘I like it,’ finally conceded the director, though stopping her. ‘Well, that's enough for us, thanks.’ He dismissed her: ‘You put me in an unpleasant position – you are absolutely not ready. Come back in two years, and learn both Pushkin and the Gypsy language in the meantime.’ (491)

The mention of Pushkin is important as his poem ‘The Gypsies’ is part of the Russian literary canon and, to some extent, has informed Russian ideas about the Romani. But Pushkin was not Romani and the story is an entirely fabricated scenario featuring a young Romani dancer Zemfira, a stereotypically eroticised ‘Gypsy’ woman. She is auditioning but cannot ‘play’ the role of the ‘Gypsy’ to the satisfaction of the director. The story thus speaks to performative aspect of Romani identity and the difference between Romani and ‘Gypsy’.

In *Bodies that Matter* (1995), Judith Butler defines performativity as ‘a discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names’ (Butler 13). She uses the biblical example ‘Let there be light’ to illustrate how a ‘phenomenon is named into being’

(Butler 13). But she makes the point that performativity's power is not in creating but in reiterating. She quotes Jacques Derrida:

> Could a performative utterance succeed if its formulation did not repeat a 'coded' or iterable utterance, or in other words, if the formula I pronounce in order to open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage were not identifiable as conforming with an iterable model, if it were not then identifiable in some way as a 'citation'? (Derrida, in Butler 13)

Butler goes on to suggest that a function of performativity is that it conceals its 'citationality' to project the sense that what is merely performative constitutes a fact. She notes that the performative aspect of naming conceals its theatricality because any historicity is concealed.

'Gypsy' is an utterance which indicates that the speaker is creating an idea of 'Gypsyness' using established ideas about what that entails. The young woman in Lemon's story resisted or defied the performative nature of Romani identity. She could not perform 'Gypsy' to the satisfaction of the director who presented his notion of what constituted a 'Gypsy' while concealing its clearly subjective nature. Her own cultural identity as a Romani wasn't as credible to him as his own ideals of 'Gypsy'. Indeed, Butler writes that a 'performative 'construction' operates though exclusionary means.' (8). I will show, the creation of 'Gypsy' is predicated on exclusion. In the first section I demonstrated that Django Reinhardt's 'Gypsy' identity, along with the genre of 'Gypsy' jazz, were creations of critics and biographers. In this section, I will look at the manner in which 'Gypsy' music was created in the nineteenth century and continues to be created in the twenty first.

Liszt vs Bartok

The phrase 'Gypsy jazz' is performative in that it cites, and at the same time, conceals a set of ideas about 'Gypsy music' in general. These ideas gained currency in the mid nineteenth-century as music writers responded to new levels of national consciousness

and cultural identity based on political borders. But, of course, 'Gypsy music' itself was based on a performative idea of 'Gypsies,' in general. In particular, the composer Franz Liszt's influential theories on the 'Gypsy' nature of Hungarian music employed established stereotypes about the Romani. Sixty years later, in the early twentieth century, Bela Bartok took issue with Liszt's ideas, but he too used the language of 'gypsy' tropes to counter the earlier composer's opinions. In neither case, does the actual Romani emerge. This reliance on performative notions represents, as I will show, a form of erasure where the Romani are concerned.

In the previous section, I noted that Michael Dregni equated the 'pompe' style of rhythm guitar with the Flamenco rasquedo style, a stretch by any measure. Though it is far more likely that Reinhardt developed this approach while playing Bal-musette – something asserted by Dregni earlier in his book – it presents an irresistible opportunity for Dregni to identify what is 'innately Gypsy' about Reinhardt's playing. In doing so, Dregni is entering an old and contentious debate about the exact nature of 'Gypsy' music. At the beginning of his book *The Gypsy Caravan* (2004) David Malvinni writes:

> Thus one major area for exploring the idea of Gypsy music is the very notion that there is a set of identifying characteristics that distinguish Gypsy music from any other, no matter what the host country might be. If we accept the statement that aspects of Gypsy music could be found in nearly every national music of the European tradition (this is what is at stake in studying appropriation), are we essentialising or reducing Gypsy music to a set of identifying traits that are fictional? (4)

The term 'Gypsy' has little to do with the actual Romani and yet throughout Malvinni's book there is some confusion as to whether he is talking about the performative construct of 'Gypsy' or the musical practices of the Romani. While he is correct in the sense that the phrase 'Gypsy Music' is more or less meaningless, he stops short of acknowledging that the word 'Gypsy' is itself a tool for essentialising a group of people.

In an essay called ''Gypsy Music' and DJs' (2009), Iaona Szeman refers to 'Balkanism', 'a specific discourse that the historian Maria Todorova identifies as, 'grounded in Western travellers' discoveries of the exotic yet not so distant part of Europe known as the Balkans' (100). Elsewhere, this is referred to as 'nesting orientalisms' (100). In the article, Szeman suggests that 'Gypsy music' is an example of an orientalist discourse within Europe. She writes that the Romani 'function as projective mechanisms' (100) for idea that within Europe there are spaces, like the Balkans that are, 'wild, passionate, and free.' (100) The sense in which the idea of 'Gypsy' musicians and their music are 'projective mechanisms' is compelling when one considers the depiction of Romani people as 'Gypsies' in the debate about the source of Hungarian music.

In her essay, 'Liszt and the issue of so-called Gypsy music' (2013), Anna G. Piotrowska makes the point that Franz Liszt's 1859 book, *Des Bohemians et de leur musique en Hongrie* (known in English as *The Gypsy in Music*), was the first major work to discuss the role of the Romani in European music (129). As outlined in her own book, *Gypsy Music in European Culture* (2011), the Romani appeared in Central Europe sometime in the thirteenth century (36). Their origins in India remain the subject of much discussion and speculation but one can trace their journey to Europe by accounts of their arrival in Persia and then westward through Constantinople. What these accounts tend to have in common is an association with music and performance. Some historians have speculated that the Romani were originally a caste of musicians and entertainers who left India in the wake of the Moghul conquest. Whatever the truth, it's not surprising that a group migrating west from city to city would find ways in which to establish themselves and earn an income. The entertainment market was a space where the exotic and the novel would have been welcome. The Romani are certainly not the only marginalised group to establish themselves within a dominant culture as entertainers.

Liszt's book has little to do with the Romani and everything to do with reiterating the performative notion of 'Gypsies'. The prose is vividly purple and the argument expansive. His basic point is that Hungarian music is 'Gypsy', something he illustrates in a variety of ways. He is on reasonably solid ground when he makes reference to early instances of Romani musicians in Hungary. 'In 1599, when Michael the Woywode of

Wallachia made his entry into Karlstadt in Transylvania with Asiatic pomp, the procession was headed by ten Bohemians [Romani] playing a triumphant march' (256). Things deteriorate quickly when he tries to characterise the musicians:

> Always ready with feigned respect for the police which in different counties were like the religions all one to him, ready also with the same submission to all sovereigns as to the god of every nation, the Bohemians [Romani] never troubled about his victims because they were always dupes of their own passions. If he exploited the vices of some it was because incited thereto by the covetous insinuations of others, of if he had occasion to press one it was always to satisfy another. He was never at a loss for fabrication, a love-charm, a magical promise, a tempting prediction – anything for money; for as long as people asked for these things he clearly wanted them for business (242)

Several potent stereotypes are contained in these sentences. The association with crime, as will be shown, was centuries old by the 1850s. He notes that practices such as fortune telling, the sale of love charms and magical promises are ways in which the Romani trick innocent people into parting with their money. Liszt clearly doesn't buy the idea that the Romani have access to actual supernatural abilities and yet, elsewhere in the book, he invokes magic and enchantment extravagantly. In a chapter about the legendary Romani violinist, Janos Bihari he writes, 'The tones sung by his magic violin flow on our enchanted ears,' (Liszt 339). He goes on to describe the experience of hearing Bihari play:

> We have not only retained an impression of his inspiration but they must have distilled into our soul like the essence of some generous and exhilarating wine; for, in recalling his performances to mind, it seems to us that the emotions which we then experienced must have been rather like the effect produced by one of those mysterious elixirs concocted in their laboratories by the bold, almost demoniacal alchemists of the middle ages… (339-340)

In his book, *Gypsy Music: The Balkans and Beyond*, Alan Ashton-Smith writes: 'Liszt's assertion that gypsy music can 'move the soul and electrify the heart' is not too far removed from the association between gypsies and magic; it is evoking spiritual rather than cerebral or logical responses to the music' (58). Christopher Goto-Jones, in his article 'Magic, Modernity, and Orientalism: Conjuring representations of Asia' (2014) writes, 'At various times in Western history, magic has been differentiated from religion (especially from Christianity), or it has been contrasted against the rise of modern science' (1452). Though Liszt makes it clear that he does not believe in 'Gypsy' magic, he uses supernatural imagery to express the 'otherness' of the Romani. Art, for the Romani, says Liszt 'is not a science which one may learn or a trade which one might practise' (297). It is, instead, a 'mystic song – a language which though sublimated is clear to the initiated' (297-8). The reference to language is intriguing because what is truly sublimated is an actual discussion of the Romani outside of a small set of tropes. 'In the modern period, the idea of magic has also become intertwined with powerful political and cultural discourses around the existence of the 'Other'' (Goto-Jones 1453). In the post-Enlightenment period, magic also signified the childlike instinctiveness of a people uncorrupted by rationalism.

Over and over, Liszt's book emphasises the primitive nature of the 'Gypsy' musicians. They do not read or compose music (despite the fact that Janos Bihari left nearly one hundred compositions) and they play odd intervals. 'The civilised musician is so astounded by the strangeness of intervals employed in Bohemian [Romani] music that he can find no way of settling the matter in his own mind than that of concluding the dissonances to be, quite frank, faults of execution' (209).

Liszt's depiction of Romani musicians is, as so much writing about Reinhardt demonstrates, enormously influential.

Judith Butler writes: 'Performativity is thus not a singular 'act', for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition' (12). Liszt's reiteration of these 'set of norms' about the Romani to characterise their

approach to music provides the tropes by which Romani musicians continue to be depicted.

Apparently, this extended far beyond his views on music. In her book on 'Gypsy' music, Anna Piotrowska quotes letters from Liszt where he plans to 'run off with the Gypsies' (37) and claims to be 'one half Gypsy'. 'Liszt's fascination with Gypsy culture also manifested itself in non-musical decisions such as the ordering of a luxury caravan that operated by day as a salon and by night as a bedroom' (37). All of this points to the distinct possibility that his entire thesis that equates Hungarian music with 'Gypsy' music has little to do with the actual musical practices of Romani people. Instead, Liszt is simply employing the norms associated with term 'Gypsy' for a particular rhetorical purpose.

Liszt's book was written as a companion to his famous 'Hungarian Rhapsodies' which are a musical response to his ideas about the centrality of 'Gypsyness' in Hungarian music. David Malvinni, the author of *The Gypsy Caravan: From Real Roma to Imaginary Gypsies in Western Music*, suggests that Liszt is making a connection between what he terms the national and the rhapsodic (Malvinni 89). Thus 'Gypsy' becomes equated with the 'primitive' emotional instincts. Malvinni suggests that the real motive in both the book and the music is a statement about what distinguishes Hungarian music from the dominant German variety of the period. He writes that, 'Liszt composed his Hungarian Rhapsodies as a 'fundamental argument against Germanness, the opposing realm, in which improvisation, virtuosity and emotion are, if not banished, carefully subordinated to the grand intellectual design' (89). Essentially, the word 'Gypsy' in Liszt signifies 'not German' and has little to do with the musical practices of the Romani in Hungary.

One might have expected Bela Bartok's 1931 essay, 'Gypsy Music or Hungarian Music' to have poured cold rational water on Liszt's warm dreaminess to untangle the threads of Hungarian music. To some extent, this is what he does in the essay. He explains, with reference to his own extensive field work, that Liszt's scope did not include rural Hungarians. He writes, 'Yet, there is real gypsy music too, songs on gypsy texts, but these are known to and sung by the non-musician rural gypsies only, the regular gypsy

bands never play them in public. What they do play is the work of Hungarian composers, and consequently Hungarian music' (252). Bartok, according to Piotrowska, was influenced by 'both the liberal and nationalist currents. After 1904, he became a sort of eccentric radical; he stopped going to church and his friends called him an anarchist' (50). His obsession with the music of the Hungarian peasant was arguably as idealistic as Liszt's views on 'Gypsies'. Inspired by post Romantic European agrarian ideas and perhaps a sense of rural Hungarians as the foot soldiers of the revolution, he sought to emphasise the importance of their music in Hungarian culture.

His essay is dismissive of the Romani. According to Bartok, the music they play is of no consequence. 'The music that is nowadays played for money by urban Gypsy bands is nothing but popular art music of recent origin. The role of this popular art music is to furnish entertainment and to satisfy the musical needs of those whose artistic sensibilities are of a low order' (Bartok 241). His assessment of their role in Hungarian music is well within the scope of the performative norms of the time about the Romani. Bartok judges their contribution to be on par with the fortune teller's crystal ball or a fake love charm. They are nothing more than entertainers for people with poor judgment.

He does, in the essay, skate extremely close to suggesting that the Romani pose a threat to the 'purity' of Hungarian music:

> In the folksong, text and music form an indivisible unity. Gypsy performance destroys this unity because it transforms, without exception, the vocal pieces into purely instrumental ones. This alone suffices to prove the lack of authenticity in Gypsy renderings of music, even with regard to popular art music. If a person were compelled to reconstruct our popular art music with the aid of Gypsy bands alone, he would find the task impossible because half of the material is lost in the hands of the gypsies (252).

The 'Gypsies', in Bartok's terms, disrupt the 'unity' of Hungarian music by removing the lyrics. His contention is as sweeping as it is dismissive. It pits the 'authentic' culture of

the rural Hungarians against the corrupting influence of the Romani. This, as we will see, is in line with some of the earliest European legislation enacted to deal with the Romani. If Liszt is eager to turn over the key to Hungarian music to the 'Gypsies', Bartok doesn't allow them any role at all, despite Romani musicians like Janos Bihari that had contributed to the development of Hungarian music in the nineteenth century. If the 'Rakocsi March', the unofficial national anthem, was not written by Bihari, it is his melody that is commonly played. Liszt uses the Romani in a performative sense: to represent an ideal of musical endeavour to be pitted against the German, and perhaps Jewish character, of mainstream European music. Bartok so idealises the Hungarian peasant that any Romani input is unacceptable. Neither depiction sheds any light on the musical practice of the Romani or their lives in Hungary.

In *Orientalism* (1977), Edward Said writes that, 'the orientalist makes it his work to be always converting the Orient from something into something else: he does this for himself, for the sake of his culture, in some cases for he believes is the sake of the Oriental' (67). As Ioana Szeman points out, orientalism, as applies to the case of the Romani, results in 'erasure of the Roma in 'Gypsy music'' (114)

'Gypsification' and Erasure

In an article called 'Jewish Spaces and Gypsy Spaces in the Cultural Topographies of a New Europe: Heritage re-enactment as political folklore' (2013), Monica Ruethers looks at two annual festivals in Europe: the Jewish Culture Festival in Krakow, Poland and the Saintes-Maries de le Mer Festival in the Camargue region of southern France. The Jewish Culture Festival takes place in the summer and celebrates Jewish history and culture with concerts, exhibitions, readings and markets. Saintes-Maries de le Mer is a saint's day festival that goes back to the middle ages. It has been associated with the Romani since the 1930s when someone had the idea of honouring the 'Gypsy saint', Sarah, as part of the festival. The tradition involves a statue of Sarah being taken to the waters of the Mediterranean before being returned to the old Catholic church which gives the town its name. Over time, the 'Gypsy' component of the festival has become the main drawcard. The two festivals are extremely popular with tourists and are part of the

marketing of both places. This raises questions about the cultural space that they occupy. Are they for the Jews and the Romani or are they simply an example of what Judith Butler calls citationality?

Both festivals, according to Reuthers, 'are associated with notions of history and tradition. They are viewed as historical 'places' of Jewish and Gitan [Romani] history: they are not just re-enactments but also claim to be authentic' (682). The festival in Krakow offers themed cafes which replicate the pre-war meeting places of Krakow's Jewish community alongside the cafes and restaurants operated by Jews who have returned to the city in an attempt to reclaim something of their heritage. In Saintes-Maries, Romani dress in traditional outfits and arrive in horse drawn caravans. Ruethers notes that music is an important component of both festivals but 'both Kleyzmer and Gypsy music are performed by non-Jews and non-Gypsies thus blurring the boundaries' (683). Those sorts of boundaries are indeed blurry when a cultural festival becomes part of the local economy. If Krakow and Saintes Maries employ the festivals to generate tourism and income, then the rituals become spectacles. 'In those spaces Jewishness and Gypsiness are performed' (Reuthers 684).

Ruethers suggests that in the wake of 1989, there was renewed interest in what constituted European identity and that this led to considerations of who represented the 'other' in a new Europe. 'Jews and Gypsies were the Orient within,'(685) she writes. Her contention is that they represent liminal European identities and thus were part of the new folklore of the continent in the wake of major political change.

Of course, both festivals are now taking place in a Europe where anti Romani laws are being enacted by governments and antisemitism is once again on the rise. As Carol Silverman observes in her essay 'DJs and the Production of 'Gypsy' Music (2015): 'The current popularity of Balkan Gypsy music has an ironic resonance; a rising tide of xenophobia and anti-Gypsyism has swept Europe precisely at the same time that Gypsy music has become a 'hot' commodity' (6). Django Reinhardt would have recognised that 'ironic resonance' immediately. 'Gypsy' Jazz began to rise in popularity at the precise moment that nationalism began to incorporate the idea of racial purity in Germany.

Among the culprits is the doublethink that allows people to disassociate the idea of 'Gypsies' from the Romani themselves. This, I believe, further demonstrates the distance between the racialized discourse of the 'Gypsy,' and the Romani themselves. When 'Gypsies' are on stage playing music, they are 'wild' and 'exotic'. In the train station or on the streets, the Romani are, at best, 'a nuisance', and, at worst, 'undesirable'.

Silverman outlines the process by which even the Romani musicians, so popular at 'world music' events, disappear along with any possibility of a more nuanced understanding of Romani life. 'World music' is an awkward category for all sorts of reasons, not the least of which is the double-sided blade of 'hybridity'. The discourse that the 'world music' boom of the last forty years has been an opportunity for the sharing of ideas and resources is a common one. The WOMAD festival, running since 1980, states on its website that, 'we aim to excite, to create, to inform and to highlight awareness of the worth and potential of a multicultural society' (WOMAD). But as Silverman suggests, 'in celebrating diversity, we shouldn't confuse the flow of sounds with the flow of power relations' (12). The music of groups like the Romani becomes a commodity which is traded according to the rules of the very markets which shut out marginalised groups. African-American musicians know all too well the danger of 'hybridity'. A key component in the history of popular music in America has been of the appropriation of Black music for profit, what Eric Lott famously called 'love and theft'. Music is always an exchange or a conversation but rarely a balanced one.

Silverman looks specifically at Shantel, the German DJ who has made his name in European clubs sampling 'Balkan' beats and collaborating with Romani musicians. He is a good example because his efforts to popularise this music and promote the artists would suggest a respectful attitude. But his career has been controversial, and he has had to regularly respond to charges of cultural appropriation and outright theft. His responses have generally been of the 'it's all music, man' variety but Silverman believes that it is simply another example of theft masquerading as hybridity. Shantel argues that Romani themselves are the 'true inventors of sampling' (22). This picks up Bartok's argument that the Romani do not play their own music but instead borrow, or perhaps steal, from

others. The phrase, 'true inventors of sampling' seems uncomfortably close to the trope of 'Gypsy thieves'.

In the same interview, he opines that, 'there is no Gypsy music' (22), a statement that is meant to underline his 'original samplers' theory but could also suggest erasure. In any case, this does prevent him from employing the idea of 'Gypsyness' in his music. DJ Shantel's best-known song is 'Disko Partizani'. The emphasis is clear:

> My baby came down from Romania,
> She was the queen of Transylvania,
> But now we live in surburbia without any friends in Bosnia.
> Tiganizatia, tiganizatia
> (Come on, baby, this one to me)
> Tiganizatia, tiganizatia
> (Everybody dancing who needs me)
> Tiganizatia, tiganizatia
> (Come on, baby, this is one to me)
> Tiganizatia, tiganizatia
> Disco disco partizani
> (Hey hey hey hey)

'Tiganizatia' translates as something like 'Gypsyfication' and he uses that word when he performs it in English-speaking countries. Szeman describes one of his shows: 'At Shantel's gig at Koko, a club in London, there were no 'authentic' Romani musicians but there were certainly Romani songs and plenty of mentions of Gypsies. Shantel played with the Bucovina Club Orkestar and the lead singer, Vesna Petkovic, sang many songs in Serbian about Gypsies' (112). Silverman outlines the issue in economic terms. The Romani music is being sampled by DJs who 'claim they are helping Roma by broadening audiences' (21). This is an ancient defence put forth by those who help themselves to the music of marginalised groups. Music has always been the result of meeting points and conversations. Authenticity in music is best understood as an authentic exchange of musical ideas between individuals and cultural groups. This is complicated by the

commercial interests of a music market and the question of renumeration. Paul Simon did not properly compensate the South African musicians who played on his million-selling album, *Graceland* but has always taken credit for popularising the popular music of Soweto. He regularly claims to have invented the genre of 'world music' as well. Clearly, he pioneered the financial arrangements. The fact is that there is no evidence whatsoever to suggest that DJ Shantel's use of Romani music has contributed in any way to the sales of Romani brass band music or concert tickets (Silverman 21-22).

DJ Shantel

What it has contributed to, according to both Silverman and Szeman, is something that appears always to be an element in the depiction of Romani musicians. These images leave little room for a productive discussion of Romani people or their actual musical practices. 'Shantel accesses the 'authentic' music local people listen to and makes it available for Western consumption, but at the same time he reiterates some of the problematic stereotypes' (Szeman 114). Szeman refers to the 'erasure of the Roma in 'Gypsy' music' (114). The erasure is evident in Lemon's story of the young woman auditioning at the Teatr Romen in Moscow. There is a sense that Romani people cannot co-exist alongside of the idea of 'Gypsies. The 'Gypsy' is simply too attractive and too useful as a colourful 'other' to allow any room at all for the actual experiences and voices of Romani people.

The ‘Egyptians’ in England

Athinganoi, Egyptians and Gypsies

The invention, in English, of the ‘Gypsy’ can be traced back to the particular historical context of England in the time of King Henry VIII, not long after the Romani appeared in England. The language of the laws pertaining to the Romani in England in that period and the ‘rogue’ literature that drew on the language of those laws had, I will show, a profound influence on Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*. So far, I have looked at the manner in which Django Reinhardt has been depicted both in biography and jazz writing in general. I have queried the idea of ‘Gypsy music’ that developed in Hungary in the nineteenth-century, and in the twentieth-century response to those ideas. What is the connection between Liszt’s book about ‘Gypsy music’, the early French jazz critics and modern music encyclopedias? What is the connection with my YA novel written over the past few years? My contention is that Shakespeare drew on the language of the laws and rogue literature to, in Butler’s terms, reiterate a set of norms about Romani, now reduced to the genre ‘Gypsy’. Shakespeare did not invent these stereotypes but did, with Cleopatra, establish an enduring character who has contributed to the popular idea of a ‘Gypsy.’

Like so much in the Romani story, the word ‘Gypsy’ itself has a complicated and a contentious background. Today, most Romani groups discourage the use of the word but it remains widely used by the *gadje* (non-Romani people). Its source is, not surprisingly, based on something of a misunderstanding.

In Byzantine documents from the late middle ages, it becomes clear that certain references to ‘Egyptians’ are probably not describing people from Egypt. As Angus Fraser points out, the Romani had originally been known by the Greek word ‘Athinganoi’. ‘The German Zigeuner, French Tsignaes, Italian Zingari, Hungarian Ciganyok and similar forms

in several other languages all derived from this Byzantine name' (Fraser 46). But this term too was second hand. The original Athinganoi were a heretical group that was wiped out in Byzantium in the ninth century (46). The link with the Romani was that 'both groups enjoyed a similar reputation for fortune telling and sorcery' (46). In the European mind, Egypt has a long association with magic that is evident in Victorian and Edwardian literature but stretches back to the middle ages. Angus Fraser, in his 1992 study *The Gypsies,* suggests that the first recorded instance of the Romani being called 'Egyptians' in Constantinople was in an edict prescribing five years of excommunication for anyone consulting 'Egyptian women for fortune telling or those who bring a soothsayer to their homes to practise sorcery upon them when they are ill' (Fraser 47). He contends that the word must have already been supplanting the term Athinganoi by this point. Certainly, by the time that the Romani begin to appear on the record in Eastern Europe, the association with Egypt is accepted and the name has stuck. In England, 'Egyptian' morphed into words like Gypsion or Gypsen before settling as 'Gypsy' sometime in the late sixteenth century (Fraser 48).

Outlandish People

According to Fraser, an early mention of the Romani in England is in Thomas More's *A Dialogue with Thomas More, Knight* (1529). In the course of a description of a 1514 murder case, More makes reference to a 'Egypcyan' woman who 'could tell marvellous things simply by looking in a person's hand' (Fraser 112). David Cressy, in his book *Gypsies: An English History* (2018), lists a number of entries in the accounts books of nobles for payments to 'Egyptians' and 'Gypsions' (62) for dancing and music between 1504 and 1530. He notes that these begin to appear not long after the Romani were expelled from France in 1504. Within thirty years, however, they were regarded as criminals. 'No longer well received, the Gypsies were charged with idleness, immorality, falsehood, and crime – a reputation that continues internationally today' (62).

In 1531, English Parliament passed a law, 'An Act Concerning Outlandish People Calling Themselves Egyptians'. It is here that, in England, the invention of the Romani appeared in print. The statute opens with the following:

> FORASMUCH as before this time divers and many outlandish people calling themselves Egyptians, using no craft nor feat of merchandise have come into this realm, and gone from shire to shire and place to place in great company, and used great, subtil, and crafty means to deceive the people, bearing them in hand that they by palmistry could tell men's and women's fortunes, and so many times by craft and subtilty have deceived the people of their money, and also have committed many heinous felonies and robberies, to the great hurt and deceit of the people that they have come among (Cressy 116)

The heinous felonies and robberies are almost an afterthought to the specific details like palmistry and the use of 'craft and subtlety' to 'deceive' people. The depiction is powerful. The Romani are figured as dishonest and fiendishly clever. The reference to palmistry as a means to defraud gullible people of their money will become emblematic.

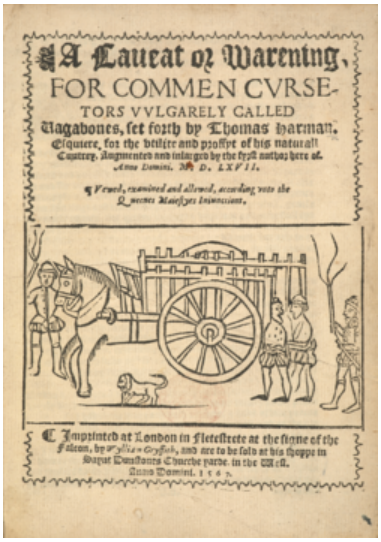
This law appeared during one of the more dramatic moments in English history. Henry VIII was in the process of breaking with the Roman Catholic Church. Three years later, Parliament would pass the Act of Supremacy, putting Henry at the head of the Church of England and effectively ending England's membership in Catholic Europe. 1534 is considered the starting point for the English Reformation but it is also a possible beginning point of England's national consciousness, something which comes into sharper focus in the Elizabethan period. It is no coincidence then that laws aimed at particular groups were passed at the same time thus legislating their 'otherness'. The Indian critic, Ania Loomba, writes, 'A wide spectrum of work has identified similar processes of English identity formation through the negation of other 'outsiders' whether they belonged to far-away lands, such as various 'Indians' and 'Moors' or lived in closer proximity, such as the Irish; whether they wandered like the Gypsies, or were hard to define, like the Jews' (151). It needs to be noted that Loomba does not place the

word Gypsies in inverted commas though it is just as much an invention of Elizabethan England as 'Indians' or 'Moors'.

The law was meant to rid England of the Romani but a 1537 letter from Thomas Cromwell to the Bishop of Chester suggests that this did not eventuate. Cromwell, possibly the most powerful person in England at the time aside from the King, writes about 'a company of lewde personnes within this Realme calling themselves Gipcyans' (Cressy 117). Henry VIII had apparently pardoned a group of Romani accused of murder and now Cromwell was reminding the Bishop that there was a law forbidding these people to remain in England.

Cromwell is using the notion of the Romani now codified in law to create his 'Gipsycans' in the letter. The 'poor subjects' of England are robbed and, more notably, deceived by them. Cromwell points out that despite this, officials are ignoring their duties to the king by allowing the Romani to 'linger and loiter'. They are also practising 'their falsehoods, felonyes and treasons unpunished', which raises again the notion of trickery and deception. Cromwell's creation is similar to the picture that will emerge in a form of popular literature in the Elizabethan period. 'Rogue' literature, which appeared in pamphlets and short books, was not dissimilar to today's true-crime podcasts and television shows. The stories emphasised the seedier side of life in England and popularised the idea of criminal gangs and practices.

Thomas Harman, a Kentish administrator, published *A Caveat or Warning for Common Cursitors* **in 1567. It**is addressed to his patron, 'the good Lady Elizabeth Countess of Shrewsbury', and is a highly entertaining run-down of the various flavours of 'rogues' in England at the time. He has a section on each and presents 'quotes' from victims and witnesses. At the end of the document, he presents lists of what appear to be actual people who fall under each category and a dictionary of 'cant' terms. The prose is comically overwritten and his use of alliteration is admirably extensive. It's not difficult to see why it was so popular at the time or why it was influential.



A Laueat or Warening,
FOR COMMEN CVRSE-
TORS VVLGARELY CALLED
Vagabones, set forth by Thomas harman,
Esquiere, for the vtilite and profite of his natural
Countrey. Augmented and inlarged by the first author here of.
Anno Domini. M. D. LXVII.

¶ Viewed, examined and allowed, according vnto the
Queenes Maiesties Injunction.

¶ Imprinted at London in Fletestrete at the signe of the
Falcon, by William Griffith, and are to be sold at his shoppe in
Saint Dunstanes Churche yarde. in the West.
Anno Domini. 1566.

While the 'Egyptians' are not given their own section, they are reduced to a series of familiar tropes, although the cover illustration appears to be a reference to them. They are, however, mentioned in the introduction:

> I hope their sinne is nowe at the hy|ghest, and that as short and as speedy redresse wilbe for these, as hath bene of late yeares for the wretched, wyly wandering vagabonds cal|ling and naming them selues Egyptians, deeply dissembling and long hyding and couering their depe deceiteful practises, feeding the rude common people wholly addicted and geuen to nouelties, toyes, and new inuentions, delyting them with the straungenes of the attyre of their heades, and practising paulmistrye to such as would knowe their fortunes.

Harman picks up on a number of themes. The sense that the 'Gypsies' are somehow cunning enough to easily fool the 'rude common people' draws from the 1531 statute. The idea that they use trinkets (novelties, toys and new inventions) to fool people will be seen later in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. Palmistry and fortune telling complete the picture. Harman also mentions their head covering. As the Romani are being created by lawmakers and writers in this period, an idea of their appearance becomes increasingly emphasised. The 'strangeness of the attire' underlines their otherness.

In 1608, the dramatist Thomas Dekker goes into more detail in his pamphlet, *Belman of London*. Where Harman's depiction is predictable and couched in theatrical language, Dekker's is vicious. 'They are the idle drones of a country, the caterpillars of a commonwealth, the Egyptian lice of a kingdom...Egyptian grasshoppers that eat up the fruit of the earth' (Cressy 40). What's most interesting about Dekker, however, is that he rejects any actual connection to Egypt: 'If they be Egyptians, sure I am they never descended from the tribes of any of those people that came out of the land of Egypt. Ptolemy, king of the Egyptians, I warrant, never called them his subjects; no, nor Pharaoh before him' (40). He also says that they are 'a people more scattered than Jews, and more hated; beggarly in apparel barbarous in condition, beastly in behaviour, and bloody if they meet advantage' (40). The reference to the Jews might be the first time that the two are compared. It is significant because, as Loomba makes clear, this was the point at which 'Englishness' was being defined in the wake of Henry's break with Rome. There were Jews in England at the time, the descendants of those who were forcibly converted during the Spanish Inquisition and lived in England as Christians. According to Loomba, there were debates at the time as to whether they could ever truly be Christians. She quotes James Shapiro who suggests that these debates are, 'substitutes for what is really being fought over, the nature of Englishness itself and who has the right to stake a claim in it' (Shapiro, in Loomba 156).

The Right Gypsy

In her essay on William Shakespeare's 1605 play *Antony and Cleopatra*, CM LaPerle writes: 'The association between Egypt and gypsies is an exceptionally glaring error of etymology and lineage, but one doing plenty of work in Shakespeare's depiction' (LaPerle 228). This association proved irresistible for Shakespeare who utilised the existing 'Gypsy' tropes to create a memorable character in Cleopatra and a template for many of the literary 'Gypsies' that followed.

Shakespeare's emphasis on the 'otherness' of Egypt means that this play is today both relevant and controversial. Casting Cleopatra has become a matter of great importance.

JG Singh's *Shakespeare and Postcolonial Theory* (2019) devotes considerable space to the question of who can play this role and what it means. Her conclusion is that:

> Cleopatra's 'encoded associations with orientalism' have become even more complex in terms of her role in popular African-American culture and other racial constituencies. In popular culture, in films and other media, on the stage, and in literary scholarship, she is constantly appropriated within varying and complex racialist discourses. But a singular finding I hope we can arrive at is that Josette Simon's Cleopatra should serve as an inaugural moment (like that of Ira Aldridge) when all future Cleopatras should be played by actresses of colour. (118)

While noting the increasing complexity of Cleopatra in the current climate, Singh dismisses the 'Gypsy' aspect earlier in the essay. Singh notes that Shakespeare's audiences would have made no distinction between Egyptians and Gypsies. However, by the time that this play was written, the Romani had been in England for at least a century (Cressey 15) and Dekker's depiction in 'Belman of London' would suggest that no one seriously believed that that Romani were actually Egyptian, though versions of the name remained.

The word 'gipsy' works as a simile in *Antony and Cleopatra* because of the ambiguity. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Mercutio jokes that, compared to Juliet (or perhaps Rosalyn), Cleopatra is 'a gypsy' (II,iv). If, as Singh suggests, there is no distinction between the Romani and Egyptians, this line makes no sense and has no comic effect. Shakespeare's audiences understood the difference and Shakespeare, who clearly relished such ambiguities, employs it to great effect.

The major difference between Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and earlier theatrical versions of the story is significant. As LaPerle points out in her 2016 essay, 'An Unlawful Race: Shakespeare's Cleopatra and the crimes of early modern Gypsies': 'Prior to Shakespeare's barge-decorating, cross-dressing, love-scented spectacle, Cleopatra is represented as a pious wife' (230). This Cleopatra is Shakespeare's invention and La Perle presents several examples where Cleopatra is certainly Egyptian but in no manner

identified with the Romani. Shakespeare, not for the first time, employs an element of the familiar in the exotic. In his play, Cleopatra is at once the ancient queen of Egypt and the contemporary 'Gypsy' stereotype of the Romani thus emphasising the alterity of the Romani people in England.

There are a number of specific instances in the play where it is clear that Shakespeare is conflating the two notions of 'Egyptian', but it could be argued that the play is essentially about Cleopatra as 'a distracting Gypsy' (LaPerle 230). The opening speech from Philo, one of Antony's soldiers is, as follows:

> Nay, but this dotage of our general's
> O'erflows the measure: those his goodly eyes,
> That o'er the files and musters of the war
> Have glow'd like plated Mars, now bend, now turn,
> The office and devotion of their view
> Upon a tawny front: his captain's heart,
> Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
> The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper,
> And is become the bellows and the fan
> To cool a gipsy's lust. (Act 1, Scene 1)

The 'tawny front' establishes Cleopatra as the 'other'. Stage makeup was certainly a feature of the Jacobean theatre but young men or boys playing female roles were generally made up with white makeup to look paler, a signifier of femininity at the time. Shakespeare emphasises her skin colour in the script perhaps to offset the white-faced actor. In any case, she is identified as a 'gipsy'. The audience, as I have shown, would have understood that gipsy and Egyptian were not interchangeable. Shakespeare chooses the word gipsy to create a Cleopatra who is not only the Queen of Egypt but also a representative of the 'other' within their own city.

Cleopatra is likened to a 'gipsy' only twice in the play but the implication is clear. She has drawn him away from his duties. The scene that follows is slightly comic and involves a

messenger trying to deliver a missive from Rome to Antony. He refuses to hear it and is only interested in Cleopatra. The sense in which the Romani distract or somehow cast a spell on unsuspecting and otherwise productive citizens echoes both the 1531 law and Cromwell's letter. Later in the act, when the story moves to Rome, Caesar reports on Antony in Egypt: 'This is the news: he fishes, drinks, and wastes/The lamps of night in revel' (I,iv). Cleopatra is the catalyst for a life of idle decadence. Back in the opening scene, Antony says: 'There's not a minute of our lives should stretch without some pleasure now' (I,i). The focus is not on Cleopatra but the effect she has on Antony.

The description of Cleopatra's barge too relates to the idea of theft. Enobarus reports that, 'When she first met Mark Antony, she pursed up his heart, upon the river of Cydnus' (II,ii). The verb 'purse' had the connotation of hiding something and was associated with theft in Shakespeare's time. Theft is a key trope in the depiction of Romani people, but it is generally theft associated with a secondary distraction. The victim is 'enchanted' by a trinket or somehow tricked out of their money. Enobarus describes the appearance of the Queen's boat:

> I will tell you.
> The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne,
> Burn'd on the water: the poop was beaten gold;
> Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
> The winds were love-sick with them; the oars were silver,
> Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
> The water which they beat to follow faster,
> As amorous of their strokes (II,ii).

The boat is 'burnish'd', suggesting that it has been polished so as to shine. He underlines this, stating its reflection 'burn'd on the water'. The effect is brilliant, but it is designed to draw attention. The purple sails suggest royalty, but Shakespeare adds that they were perfumed so that 'the winds were love-sick with them'. This is an allusion to Antony who is similarly smitten with Cleopatra. The song of the flutes has a similar effect on the water. The image is of a boat that mesmerises not only anyone who looks at it, but the

elements themselves. The overall theme is distraction. The next lines suggest that its mere appearance draws the city folk away from their work:

> From the barge
> A strange invisible perfume hits the sense
> Of the adjacent wharfs. The city cast
> Her people out upon her (II,ii)

This includes Antony who, 'enthroned i' the market-place, did sit alone, whistling to the air; which, but for vacancy, had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too' (II,ii). Whistling to the air suggests idleness and his inclusion in this scene is significant. The opening speech by Philo makes clear that Antony is 'distracted' by Cleopatra. The laws and the depiction in rogue literature suggest that the Romani's primary crime is distraction. The 1531 law, Cromwell's letter and Harman's pamphlet all mention deception, as well. The Romani cast as 'Gypsies' aren't highwaymen or a criminal gang who rob people by force. Instead, they deceive their victims. Harman writes about, 'the rude common people wholly addicted and given to novelties.' The barge is described mainly in the effect that it has, fancifully on the wind and the water as well as on the city folk and Antony. Shakespeare might be talking about an Egyptian queen, but she is also the 'Gypsy' woman who uses deception and trinkets to control her victims.

Cleopatra's identification with the Romani becomes even clearer as the play develops. Late in Act III, Antony expresses his regret at having become involved with Cleopatra and not staying home to have 'lawful' children with his wife:

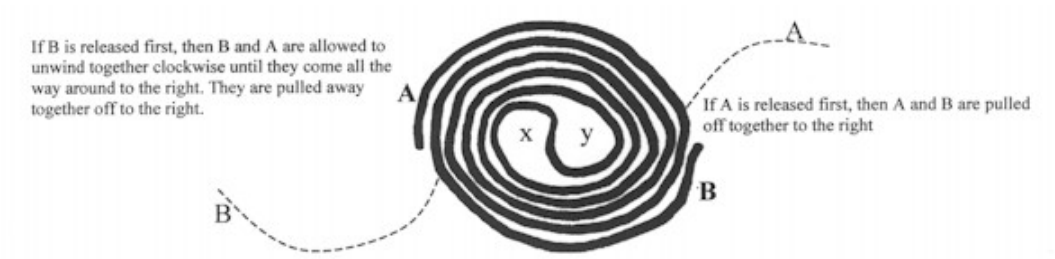
> Have I my pillow left unpress'd in Rome,
> Forborne the getting of a lawful race,
> And by a gem of women, to be abused
> By one that looks on feeders? (III, xiii)

The Romani were not, according to several statutes by Shakespeare's time, 'lawful'. Cleopatra is the queen of 'feeders' a word that referred to servants but also to those considered parasites.

In the next act, there is the second reference to Cleopatra as a 'gipsy'. Shakespeare's intentions are clear:

> Like a right gipsy, hath, at fast and loose,
> Beguiled me to the very heart of loss. (IV,xii)

'Fast and loose' is one of those phrases mistakenly attributed to Shakespeare. It was, in fact, something akin to a shell game employed to relieve the gullible of their coins in the market.



If strap A is released first, the 'x' loop holds Fast; if B is released first, the strap turns inside-out—'y' is Fast.

The punter would place his or her forefingers in the loops, marked x and y. They would bet on which would be fastened and which would be loose once the ends of the rope were pulled. Like a shell game, there was a trick which meant that the house always won. Clearly, in Shakespeare's time, it was strongly associated enough with the Romani for him to use it in this play. Throughout, the suggestion has been that Cleopatra is deceiving Antony and distracting him from his duties.

I have shown that by the early 1600s, the Romani were no longer regarded fancifully as 'Egyptians' but remained a separate 'race' in England. They thus become, in Maria Todorova's terms, part of the 'orient within'. The lived experience of these people disappears as they become a convenient other by which the dominant culture can define

itself. For the next four-hundred years, they are despised, feared, fetishised, celebrated, studied and persecuted. Most of all, though, they are invented and reinvented by writers, musicians, painters, and politicians for a broad range of purposes.

Conclusion

In 2018, I did a DNA test and discovered that I was not entirely Irish, a great shock after half a century of green attire on March 17 and regular visits to the 'homeland'. The results instead pointed in several other directions. The most interesting was a Romani one. It was only a small part, but I decided to investigate. What I found, after hours on Ancestry.com, was series of telling details. Evidence emerged of ancestors in an impoverished area of Liverpool making their living selling baskets, caravans given as place of abode, names that turn up on 'Gypsy' registries.

I wear a necklace engraved with a small Romani flag. It's not a claim on Romani identity but a reminder to myself that this is now part of who I am. Not long after the DNA test, I was in Jerusalem when two Domari (Romani) children approached me with bags of popcorn for sale. I hate popcorn but they were friendly kids, so I told them I was really hungry and bought all the bags for the grand sum of four Australian dollars. Because they were hanging around the Lion's Gate, it became something of a daily ritual for me to come by and clean them out of popcorn on my way to the Mount of Olives, or wherever I was heading that day. Sometimes, before they saw me, I would watch them approach other tourists. The children were treated very badly. One American man on a noisy Via Dolorosa tour was so rude to them that I came very close to giving him a fuller experience of suffering than he might have expected. I don't know why I was surprised. I found out later that many guidebooks – I don't use them – identify the Domari as 'gypsies' and warn of the dangers in that part of the old city. My anger with tourists like the American isn't anything new. The funny thing this time was that it felt a bit personal.

What does one do with this sort of information? There is a Canadian writer called Joseph Boyden. He is exactly my age and grew up in the same neighbourhood that I did in Toronto. We didn't know each other but had a lot of mutual friends through the small

suburban punk community in our part of the city. He had a 'mohawk' haircut, something slightly ironic considering what came next.

When he was in his thirties, he began to write stories about Native Canadians. His childhood summers had been spent on an island in Georgian Bay where he had befriended a native family. His uncle was a sort of Grey Owl figure who sold 'Indian artefacts' at the gates of Algonquin Park in Northern Ontario. Apparently, there was some possibility of Native heritage in the family story, but it was vague.

He struck it big. He wrote critically acclaimed novels about Native characters and was nominated for prestigious literary awards. He won The Giller Award in 2008 for one of them, an award for Aboriginal writers for another. His books were added to Canadian literature courses and he became something of a spokesperson for the Native community in Canada. It was then that some whispers about the veracity of his claim to Native identity grew louder. A particularly damning article in 2016 by a Native journalist appeared and his career dissolved. His books were dropped from courses and taken off the shelves at libraries. His next book has never been published and he has disappeared from view almost entirely. On a podcast called 'Canadaland' he was a declared by the millennial host to be 'just another sensitive bro-dude from Willowdale'.

As something of a 'sensitive bro-dude' from Willowdale myself, I am fascinated by Boyden's story on all sorts of levels. When I created a Romani character for my novel, *Hey Zazou*, I had a very straightforward problem. I had to somehow avoid stereotypes and depict her in a plausible and respectful manner. My first novel, *Summer of Monsters*, was about a teenage girl in the early nineteenth century. I worked hard to create a believable character in the young Mary Shelley and, although the novel was not a bestseller and not widely read, no one ever questioned my depiction of Mary or suggested that I was stepping over a line by imagining the voice of a young woman. A young woman did ask me about it at a writer's festival. I said, if the character works it is because I based her character on my own. Je suis Mary!

But Rosa was not Mary Shelley. The Romani are a marginalised, persecuted group who have suffered, as I have shown, from centuries of stereotyping that has drowned out their own voices and seen them suffer terribly under regimes both notorious and seemingly benign. I had no desire to add my character to the long series of 'Gypsy' heroines and antiheroines that stretch back to the fortune tellers of Constantinople. The obvious solution was to simply rework the character into a young French woman. To be honest, it wouldn't have made a huge difference to the story. But now I felt like she had to be in the story because the Romani were now part of my story. In particular, the Romani experience of the Second World War, both the Holocaust and their treatment in occupied France, were, in my view, underplayed in the public imagination. I wanted to tell that story and now it was personal. On the other hand, I didn't want to become the next sensitive bro-dude unmasked in the public sphere.

I wasn't about to claim that I could now write about Rosa with authority. I was not recasting myself as a 'native informant'. It was more a matter of feeling as though it was now imperative that I included her in the novel and that I got it right.

The problem is simple, the solution is not. I want to create a Romani character, not a 'Gypsy'. I researched Paris during the Occupation and took note of any mention of the Romani. In the 1940s, many lived in caravans just north of the market which remains in Saint Ouen, just outside of the city's periphery. It was called La Zona and there are photos of the caravans in this area during this period.

I imagined that she belonged to a family of musicians. These families certainly existed in Paris in the 1940s and, as I discovered, they remain active to this day. I encountered some of them during my visit to Les Chopes Des Puces.

In one of the final scenes of the book, Rosa throws a knife. If I am to be honest, this scene is based on a moment in the 1973 film *The Sting* where Robert Redford's character is walking towards a woman that he does not realise is about to kill him. From behind him, a man shoots the woman dead. In *Hey Zazou*, Rosa throws a knife at the young woman who is about to kill the main character, Charlie. If I am to be really honest, the idea also came from Bob Dylan's song, 'One More Cup of Coffee' and the line, 'he taught you how to pick and choose and how to throw the blade'. This song is a litany of tropes and stereotypes. The Romani girl can't read, she prefers wandering to love, etc, but it is irresistible.

Caravans, music, knife throwing. Now add at least one florid description of her 'mysterious' eyes and what I imagined to be a vaguely sub-continental-style outfit for performing and I am getting pretty close to the writers I have critiqued in this essay. She does decline to read someone's fortune late in the story but the fact that she is even asked is problematic. If the depiction of the Romani seriously concerned anyone, I could imagine a Twitter storm of righteous fury about this litany of stereotypes. So, what was the solution? What did I do?

The paradox is that in creating a Romani character, I am doing just that, *creating a Romani character*. My main character, Charlie, is dyslexic. I 'show' this at several points when he finds it hard to read. How to 'show' that Rosa is Romani without turning it into *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*?

<u>Tchangalo</u>

In the mid 1990s, I saw a fascinating documentary called *Latcho Drom* which, without narration or titles, traced the Romani journey from Rajasthan to Spain in a series of musical performances. It was electrifying and I watched it again recently. The director is French of Romani heritage named Tony Gatlif. It occurred to me that he had, in *Latcho Drom*, neatly avoided the limitations of language in which to depict the Romani by simply not using any and letting the music and images speak for themselves. 'You really

have to want to live to resist centuries of persecution and hardship,' notes Gatlif. 'I wanted to make a film the Rom people could be proud of, not something to exhibit their misery. I wanted to produce a hymn to this people that I love' (Moirer 2). This 'hymn' is a rare example of a text that does not 'represent' the Romani using clichés.

Most of Gatlif's films are fictional narratives, though he does employ non-actors and often shoots village scenes in situ. He has made many films and most of them involve Romani characters and themes. I was curious to see how he managed the obvious pitfalls in depicting these people and whether I could find some sort of answer in his films. After some research, I decided to watch his 2006 feature, *Transylvania*. A review by Louise Doughty in the *Guardian* convinced me: 'A movie like *Transylvania* is long overdue. From my experience of writing novels about Roma people and my own English Romani ancestry, I know the frustration of seeing works pigeonholed by their characters' ethnicity' (Doughty).

The film has a simple premise: A young woman named Zingarina, played by Asia Argento, travels to Romania from France in search of a man she loves, a Romani musician. She is pregnant and he has been deported from France, or so she believes. When she finds him, he is not interested in her and says that he left of his own accord. Instead of returning to France with the friend she came with, she makes her way deeper into the region of Transylvania. There she meets Tchangalo, a travelling merchant who buys antique jewellery from locals in rural Romania to sell in Germany. They form an attachment and the films ends happily as he decides to join Zingarina and the baby.

Having spent the last few years looking at examples of texts where the Romani were depicted through stereotypes and tropes, I think Gatlif evades this very effectively in this film by not offering the viewer anything performative about Tchangalo's Romani identity. Thus, we come to understand him as an individual first without making a series of assumptions based on his cultural background.

I was intrigued to read a journal article titled 'Gypsy Fetish: Music, dirt, magic, and freedom' by Florentina C. Andreescu and Sean P. Quinn that was predictably critical of

Gatlif's portrayal of the Romani in *Transylvania*. I understand their position because it is similar to my own on the topic of Django Reinhardt's in jazz criticism and biography. They are alert to what they consider 'Gypsy' tropes and stereotypes. However, I think their argument is undone by a fundamental error at the beginning of the article.

> In her wandering path, Zingarina meets the traveling trader Tchangalo, played by Birol Ünel, with whom she seems to experience a Gypsy lifestyle that is portrayed as a special, romantic, untouchable, and blissful joy of life on the margin of society. Through their Gypsy lifestyle the two *Gadjos* [my italics] seem to have access to a form of enjoyment that belongs exclusively to the mysterious Gypsies (276).

The problem, as I view it, is that Tchangalo is not a 'Gadjo' (non-Romani). My sense was, from the first time we view him haggling over the price of some silver jewellery with an old woman, we are meant to understand that he is Romani. The trade he is involved in is a traditional Romani occupation rather than a trope. His name, Tchangalo, is typical of the nicknames the Romani use in place of their real names. It is revealed later that he speaks Romani, something that would be highly unusual for a 'Gadjo'. In the course of the story, Zingarina dresses in traditional Romani clothing and is misread as 'Gypsy' by several minor characters. Gatlif seems to constrast Zingarina's adoption of the role of Romani with the understated fact of her companion's actual cultural identity. The effect is subtle but powerful. The viewer has to come to terms with a Romani character who is not painted as such in any familiar manner. The irony for the two authors of the article is that in their haste to draw out the 'Gypsy' fetish elements in the film, they have themselves proven their own point. Tchangalo, a character who does not fit into any of the obvious 'Gypsy' stereotypes is declared, in their article, a 'Gadjo'.

I found this helpful. Tchangalo is Romani but he is not a 'Gypsy' in any performative sense. This provided at least a partial solution. I wasn't prepared to go quite as far as Gatliff and simply be silent on the matter of a Romani identity for Rosa. It was important to me that the book addressed their experience in the Second World War, and it was, after all, a YA novel. I couldn't assume that the reader would pick up the clues when the

two critics mentioned above didn't pick up the clues in the film. But it gave me an idea that might be framed as 'less is more' when writing about the Romani.

To test this theory in a print text, I looked at a recent Young Adult novel that deals, at least in part, with the Romani holocaust. While *Transylvania* was illuminating, I wanted to look at an example that was closer to my own work.

Danny Cohen's 2015 YA novel, *Train*, tells the story of a group of young Germans, all targeted by the Nazis for a variety of reasons. Marko is Romani but is also gay and involved with Alex who is Jewish. Marko's sister, Tsura, is a political dissident, involved in resistance operations. *Train* is, like *Hey Zazou*, essentially a thriller involving teenagers and young adults. The story is told in alternating sections that focus on the various characters. I was particularly interested in how the Romani characters were introduced, as this seemed like the point at which, in an effort to 'show not tell' writers fall into the predictable traps that I have outlined.

Thus, I was impressed with the introduction of his character, Tsura, in the opening scene as she presents false papers to two young German soldiers outside of a train station. It works because her name is clearly not German like her false one, Greta. The reader is alerted to the fact that she is in some danger but the tension isn't dissolved by an awkward explanation of her ethnic background.

A few sections later we meet Marko, Tsura's brother. "Opening a compartment on the side of the heavy bag, Marko almost cheered when he found an old wristwatch. Straight away, he put it on. He'd never worn a watch before. Marko laughed to himself. If the kid hadn't pulled out a knife, Marko would've felt sorry for the scrawny wretch" (Cohen 13). He has just stolen a bag from another thief and, briefly, I thought that perhaps I was wrong about Cohen's light touch. However, it turns out to be an opportunistic crime committed by someone living on the fringes of German society. It isn't stolen in the cunning manner of an experienced criminal. There is nothing resembling the 'gypsy thief' trope about Marko in this scene, just a desperate young man in difficult times.

With Kizzy, Tsura and Marko's younger cousin, Cohen also finds a way to avoid using performative language directly. When their guardian, an older German woman called Professor Duerr becomes ill, it is left to Kizzy to take her to the hospital. She plans to leave her so as not to attract the attention of the police but is questioned nonetheless. Kizzy claims not to know the old woman but unfortunately Professor Duerr suddenly stirs and addresses Kizzy:

> Professor Duerr let out a feeble cough. "My Kizzy," she said again. And then she mumbled something else before closing her eyes. The tall policeman squeezed Kizzy's shoulder hard.
> "What did she call you?"
> He asked not because he hadn't understood but because he wanted to humiliate Kizzy even more.
> "I don't know," Kizzy lied.
> The policeman raised his gloved hand and brought it down onto Kizzy's face. She was too shocked to make a sound.
> "What did she call you?"
> Kizzy stood with her mouth hanging open, unable to speak. He lifted his hand again.
> "Zigeunerchen," Kizzy repeated. She called me her little Gypsy girl (Cohen 54)

One of the shortcomings of telling a story employing the free indirect speech style of narration that Cohen and, indeed I, use to tell a story is how easy it is to create a spectral didactic voice that qualifies and explains. This is extremely fraught, particularly when one is writing about cultural identity. In this instance, Cohen raises the issue in a realistic manner that, again, does not interrupt the narrative. The confused woman uses a questionable term of affection which alerts the police. The reader is presented with the gravity of Kizzy's cultural identity in Nazi Germany but Cohen sidesteps any of the obvious tropes. I found *Train* very instructive as I set to work, scrutinising the language I was using to build Rosa's character.

I went through the manuscript of *Hey Zazou*, focusing on the sections involving Rosa and the other Romani characters. Starting with her first appearance playing violin with her family in the market, I considered ways to avoid the obvious traps and tropes and not invent yet another print 'Gypsy'. It turned out that the simplest way was to remove anything that overplayed the performative elements in the character's cultural identity. Below, I have provided three examples of where I made changes and explain my reasoning:

Example one:

> 'Hey look!' said Eddie while they were tuning up for another song. Charlie glanced up to see Rosa and a little **Roma** boy walking past. (Thompson 103)

This is only a minor example, but it is clear that in my first draft I am heading down a predictable road. Rosa's little brother is just a little boy with his sister. The reader is already aware that Rosa is Romani. There is no need to underline her brother's cultural identity so sharply here. Simply removing the word Roma doesn't make any real difference to the sentence but it moves the characters slightly further back from the stereotypes. Honestly, I have no idea what the reader was supposed to picture anyway.

Example two:

> They were walking back from the **Roma zone** when they heard music coming from up ahead on the street. There was a small crowd around a group of buskers. Charlie could hear the distinctive sound of a violin playing **the Manouche** jazz **that Django had played in the 'thirties**. Charlie and Eddie pushed through the crowd to where they could see the band. There were three guitarists. Two were playing pompe rhythms and the third, the eldest, was playing melody at high speeds. They were all dressed in black suits and Borsalino hats down over their eyes. The violinist stood behind them. Charlie noticed that Eddie had frozen as he

> watched her. She was about their age and stood leaning back slightly with her long **thick** dark hair falling on her shoulders. **An ornate scarf covered some of her head and her wrists were heavy with silver ornaments. Charlie looked at her eyes. They were dark featured and seem to have come from somewhere far away. He had heard that the Roma were originally from India. It was easy to believe. She wore a long elaborate dress and shoes that didn't look like any he'd ever seen before.** (Thompson 100)

The area I am depicting was called La Zona. There is no reason to call it the 'Roma Zone'. In the second sentence, I took out 'the Manouche' and 'that Django had played in the 'thirties' to avoid the trap of consigning the music to the narrow and somewhat elusive box known as 'Gypsy jazz'. A group of Romani musicians playing jazz in the market is more than enough information for the reader. I've left in the pompe rhythms because that is a feature of the era's percussive jazz guitar style. I also decided that the Borsalino hats and black suits could stay too. I am describing the outfits worn by Romani jazz musicians of the time based on photographs from the era, but it is not a depiction that screams 'Gypsy'. The reader's introduction to Rosa, an important character in the book, however, does just that and needed some attention.

The description is based on notes that I made after meeting the Romani accordion player outside of Sacre Coeur. But I'm drifting into dangerous territory here. The silver ornaments weighing down her wrists was an attempt to give Rosa a slightly Indian aspect in the reader's mind. The Romani do indeed originate in India, but she now appears to me as far too exoticised in the description. I give the game away when I suggest that her eyes came from 'somewhere far away' and that her shoes were completely unfamiliar.

Of all of the passages that I have tried to tone down, it is this one that made me most uncomfortable when I reread the novel. I tried a couple of other approaches but decided to simply remove it:

> They were walking back from the La Zona when they heard music coming from up ahead on the street. There was a small crowd around a group of buskers. Charlie could hear the distinctive sound of a violin playing jazz. Charlie and Eddie pushed through the crowd to where they could see the band. There were three guitarists. Two were playing pompe rhythms and the third, the eldest, was playing melody at high speeds. They were all dressed in black suits and borsalino hats down over their eyes. The violinist stood behind them. Charlie noticed that Eddie had frozen as he watched her. She was about their age and stood leaning back slightly with her long dark hair falling heavily on her shoulders. (Thompson 100)

Example three:

> Charlie realised that this was in fact the little girl he had seen playing here a long time ago while wandering the market with his parents. Her playing had been good then but now she just soared above the other musicians. **There were hints of middle eastern music in her playing and some Spanish touches. It was all wrapped up in a jazz package though and that's what both boys found so surprising. She was a real jazz player.** (Thompson 100)

I'm drifting into Michael Dregni territory by injecting Spanish music into her playing. I take it a step further and continue the 'exotic' theme by suggesting 'middle eastern' hints. Even suggesting that there is something notable in the fact that she is playing jazz is questionable. I thought a lot about what I was trying to accomplish here. I wanted the reader to hear someone who was good, maybe better than anyone they'd ever heard. There was no need to use it as another opportunity to underline Rosa's cultural identity. The point was her virtuosity, not that she was a so-called Gypsy, and since the reader is seeing her through Charlie's eyes, it makes more sense for him to be taken with her playing rather than her cultural identity.

> Charlie realised that this was in fact the little girl he had seen playing here a long time ago while wandering the market with his parents. Her playing had been good then but now she just soared above the other musicians. The tone was urgent and, at times, sad. She played like Lester Young, thought Charlie. Long plaintive notes followed by lightning quick runs. Blue notes appeared along with those from scales he couldn't even imagine. When Charlie listened to another musician play, he could usually form a picture of where his fingers might fall on the fretboard of his guitar. Not this time, it was too much to take in (Thompson 100)

Once I worked out a couple of basic questions – 'Why am I emphasising the 'Gypsy' aspect here?', 'What do I really want the reader to learn?'– it wasn't that difficult to reset the rest of the descriptions of Rosa in the novel. I decided to leave in the knife-throwing scene because the knife had already appeared a few times in the story and Chekov's dog was barking. In the pantheon of 'Gypsy' tropes, it seems like a minor one. I did try rewriting it so that Rosa fired a gun but I couldn't find any good reason why she would (a) have a gun, and (b) be able to fire one accurately. I left the scene in. For now.

It would be easy if the answer to the Romani's many troubles was simply a matter of writers rethinking their depictions and avoid the obvious tropes. The Romani are, by some distance, the poorest, unhealthiest and least literate ethnic group in Europe. They have been persecuted for centuries in Romania. At the moment, they are the target of a right-wing government in Hungary and neo-Nazi groups in Bulgaria. Only ten years ago, the French government under Nicholas Sarkozy attempted to deport them. In England, they are hounded by local governments and even, in some instances, held responsible for the spread of Covid-19. Meanwhile, 'Gypsy' brass bands and 'Gypsy jazz' remain essential components of any summer festival in Europe. The television show, *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding,* held the Romani up to a level of ridicule and derision that would be unimaginable with just about any other ethnic group. Not only did the show portray the people as dishonest and infantile, it added poor taste in everything to the ever-growing list of tropes.

But it is not all bad news. In 2018, I visited the small Domari (Romani) centre in East Jerusalem. It was a friendly, low-key place, run by volunteers. I got lost looking for it and finally phoned them. A young woman walked out on the street and waved. I was in the middle of one of the oldest and largest refugee camps on earth. Out of place doesn't really capture how I felt wandering around asking people to direct me to the centre. But once inside, I was handed a cup of tea and welcomed like a long-lost friend. We had no language in common, but it wasn't hard to get an idea of the pride they took in representing their small community. Israel is the most complicated country I have ever visited and by the time I got to the Domari Centre, I was exhausted by the endless contradictions and the weight of history there. It was almost surreal, after darting back and forth between Jerusalem and the West Bank, to find myself drinking tea with two Romani women. The small displays were dignified, and the Romani flag was proudly hung in the window. We all smiled and nodded, and it occurred to me that if nothing else, the Romani are resilient. Rosa would survive and no matter what slight missteps I took with her depiction, if I created a survivor, I would get it right.

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