



She didn't see it coming

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First published July 15, 2018. New edition published May 2019.

Please note: story was updated in May 2019 because I wanted to improve I so if you read it before it has changed. Plot remains the same but has been extensively elaborated and full chapters added.

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About the story

Are we really sure Bones died a far too early death for such a charismatic character? Nah, don't think so. This is my alternative take on Season 3.

The story begins during the Bangladesh tour at the end of episode 5, when Bones has just been blown to pieces in front of 2 section at a garden party. I was very unhappy about the turn of events, so out of pure frustration I decided to have try at writing fanfiction. I anyway always have side stories about movie characters I like running in my head, so why not write them down.

The past is basically canon.

Credits to Tony Grounds and BBC for the characters, I just let them live another life for a while here.

The reason I updated eight months after first publishing it, was that at a re-read I realised I could do better and felt that my only full-length Bones & Georgie fic deserved as good as I got.

This is a hot story. if you don't like a bit of smut you may need to skip parts, but above all it is a love story. Happy reading!

/Miss P

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Chapter 1: Goodbye Bones

That evening it was dead quiet at barracks. None of the usual noisy chatter or banter was heard among the privates in 2 section, instead they all stayed together supporting each other in silence. Only Rab and Maisie were talking in low voices, and Georgie, who knew they secretly were a couple, guessed they would have liked to cuddle up close, though they were unable to here without being put up for charges or sent home for breaking Army regulations. Even Sergeant King, Kingy, moved his belongings to come and stay with the rest of the section, could not stand being alone in a situation like this.

They were still shell-shocked over the events that had passed earlier that day, could not quite believe or accept what had happened right in front of them. Their commanding officer, Captain McClyde, a.k.a. Bones, had been redmisted by an explosive device at a fancy garden party, a VIP reception in honour of their Brigadier hosted by a local general. It was like the setting where it had occurred made it all the more unbelievable. Bones had not been killed in the battlefield where it would have been less unexpected, instead the attack had taken place during a serene afternoon tea party, at an emerald green to perfection mowed Bangladesh lawn, where a string quartet only moments earlier had played classical music and 2 section, in immaculate uniforms and polished shoes had attended to the esteemed guests. Bones himself had done Her Majesty's Army proud, looking arrogantly dashing in dress uniform right before he was blown to pieces. It seemed too absurd to be true.

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Georgie Lane, the section medic, was now laying on her bed still dressed in uniform as she had not bothered to change after the section's return to barracks one man short. She found it impossible to sleep despite the unusual calm in the dorm and was staring at the ceiling where a large fan was spinning round and round doing little to ease the humid heat, her thoughts drifting. As soon as she closed her eyes, Bones appeared out of her memory again and again, the way she had seen him at some distance during his last moments on this Earth. Distance which he, running like a madman, had put between himself and the other party guests when he had discovered an IED hidden in a back-pack and as by spinal reflex chosen to sacrifice his life to save them. He had stared at her, standing there in a beautiful gazebo in the middle of the lawn, explosive in his hands. Then came the inevitable violent, deafening explosion followed by thick smoke, which when it vanished revealed that there was absolutely nothing left of Bones but dust. If Georgie had not found his bloody medals now lying without owner in the grass, ripped off by the blast, nothing would have been left to indicate Bones had been among them. Nothing but his heroic deed.

What had he been thinking those last seconds? Why had he not tried to get rid of the bomb and ran the other direction? He was the last person Georgie would have expected not to have the presence of mind to act and throw the bomb as far away as he could. She thought of his quick reaction in a similar situation in Nigeria, when the timer on a Boko haram suicide vest worn by a poor girl had started ticking down. That time he had saved them all and barely seemed affected by the presence of the lethal device. Today in the garden, when his eyes had met hers those last moments, his look had not really been one of fear either, more like he wanted to tell her something. Whatever it was she would never know now.

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Bones death today was not the only reason she was shaken, she admitted that to herself. Even if the setting was very different, it reminded her of another time, another man; Bones was the second man she had seen die of a bomb in little over a year. Even if she did not love this one or even liked him much, it was impossible not to grieve both over him and over Elvis. Such a bloody waste!

Bones had never allowed any of them to come close to him. He had chosen to keep to himself except when he tormented or insulted them, never socialized or partaken in the banter among the section members but stayed a distant officer. Over the months when he had been their replacement commander, since Captain James had been seriously injured during a training exercise in Belize, Georgie had been frustrated most of the time, furious at him on several occasions and even thought that she hated him every once in a while. Yet she felt strangely hollow now that he was gone. She had never wished for anything like this to happen, not to him not to anyone.

Suddenly and surprisingly it pained her when she reminisced an unexpected shared moment alone back in Nigeria. It was during that tour 2 section first came across Bones and the dislike was instant and mutual, long before he became their CO. She had been so sure he despised her, that she was completely taken aback when he one off-duty evening after driving her back to barracks from a bar, shamelessly and with a cheeky smile offered her to casually share a whiskey and his bed. She turned him down, trying to make a joke out of it and he did not seem to take the rejection hard. Bigger fish in the sea and all that, not that he said it, but she was sure he thought it, she had for sure only been a female body to him. What if she had accepted? Then another lover of hers would be dead by now instead of a fellow soldier she only knew superficially. But this was stupid, unnecessary

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thoughts as she had not even considered accepting at that point. She had found him attractive in a rough, impolite and annoying way, but her heart was still too filled with Elvis even for a one-night stand. Thank God for that as Bones by a twist of fate had become her commanding officer only months afterwards. It would have been totally awkward to serve under him if they had shared bed. Although he never mentioned it, she suspected he felt the same way and that he sometimes had been extra hard on her as a way to ensure her that the offer would not be repeated. As her captain he had been hard but strictly professional, not once touched her or come with inappropriate suggestions.

Georgie had never involved herself in a relationship with a commanding officer, and never intended to. Sure, Elvis had outranked her, a Special Forces captain just like Bones, but she had never served under him. She had crossed his path during a tour in Afghan and reluctantly fallen in love, but only once they were back in UK. Even if they were not in the same chain of command they had not dated until the tour was over and Elvis had had to apply all his charms and persuasion skills to make her agree to see him even then, though part of her had wanted it from the moment she met him. When she finally *did* date him, she had been lost of course, fallen fast and hard and for some time been the happiest she ever had been. It felt like those happy, carefree days were a lifetime away now, gone long before Elvis died.

Now her mind drifted to Captain James, who had been less professional than Bones in the aspect of crossing the line and getting too personal with someone in his chain of command. When the two of them were stuck alone in the Belizean jungle, him half delirious from pain and infection induced fever, he had made an incoherent declaration of feelings towards her. She had taken it for the gibberish of a close to

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dying man, but later when he was safe and sound he had sent her cryptical text messages which she had deleted without answering them. She was glad that she had made the boundaries of their relationship clear when she went to visit him in rehab in Warwickshire before going off on this tour and she had not heard from him since. *Nothing* would ever happen between them, over her dead body. Besides him being her superior officer, it was obvious that he and his wife, Molly, belonged together. They might be going through a rough time right now, staying together as an Army couple was not a walk in the park, but Georgie was convinced that they would make it. There was true love between them and they were fighters, she could not see them giving up on each other. She would never do anything to stand in their way and even if she respected him and loved him as a friend or a brother, she felt nothing beyond that. She and Charles James were not meant to be. Her heart still belonged to his best friend, even if Elvis' heart since long had stilled, never to beat again.

-OG-

A few days later a small ceremony was held before Bones' coffin was shipped to UK. As the medic, Georgie knew what the rest of 2 section did not; that the coffin was empty. Bones had been pulverised by the bomb to the extent that there had been nothing to put in there. In addition to 2 section, the Brigadier and some other army folks, a blonde woman and two boys accompanied the coffin. Georgie watched the crying woman and assumed it was Bones' wife and sons, feeling she had yet another reason to be thankful they had not slept together. She would have felt ashamed in this moment even if Bones would have been the cheater. Accompanied by a sad trumpet tapto, the flag covered coffin with the wrath of poppies on top was placed

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in a car, doors closed and that was the last any of them would see of Captain McClyde.

As they returned to barracks after the ceremony she walked next to Fingers.

"I still can't get my head around it, that he really is gone. Even if we didn't like him, it's all so sad", she said.

"I liked him."

"You did? Seriously? After he scolded you when you had tried out for the Special Forces?"

Fingers had since long nourished a dream of joining the SF, and a month ago he finally had tried out on Bones recommendation, but failed selection. Devastated and embarrassed he had returned to 2 section and joined them here in Bangladesh, but they had all welcomed him back without the usual piss-taking and let him know how incredibly pleased they were to have him among them again. However, they had all been sure that the SF officer Bones would have let Fingers know he was a sorry arse for not making it, especially as Bones was the one who had recommended him for selection.

"But he didn't. I think maybe he wanted everyone else to *think* that, but he did nothing of the sort. He was really supportive, tried his best to cheer me up talking about apples and oranges."

"What?"

"Yeah, told me how none of them is better than the other, just different. Said that it was great that I had tried, and I now should be proud to be here and focus on being the best I could be. It meant the world to me coming from him, to know that

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he was not looking down his nose at me at all. My take on Bones is that he just wanted to seem harder than he really was to push us to do our best, up our game. Think of it, we're in better shape than we ever were under Captain James' leadership. Bones was a pain in the arse, but I'm bloody sad he is gone."

They continued their walk in silence and Georgie thought it seemed like there had been more to Bones than he had chosen to show most of the time.

A memory from his last evening among them emerged from the back of her head. He had made a kit inspection, in preparation for the VIP parade next day and he had not been pleased. Cursed over Maisie's hair, Finger's breath, Rab's posture, Brains' uniform. He had ended up in front of her, staring down on her and maybe she had not been able to keep a flicker of disdain from her eyes.

"Don't you sneer at me, Lane", he had said in his deep, threatening voice, so low that only she could hear the words. "You save lives and I save lives, so I thought we were on the same side."

"We are, Sir."

She had been avoiding his gaze, looking at his pips instead but could not avoid looking up in that moment, to lock with those intensively blue eyes. His face was so close to hers that his breath made a few loose strands of her hair flutter. She had thought it strange how a situation could be threatening and at the same time almost intimate.

"When I look at you, I need to know you know what I'm saying. You will understand."

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“Yes, Boss”, she had said again but she had *not* understood what he was saying. Now it struck her as a foreboding. Had he had some kind of premonition that he would give his life for them already the next day?

She remembered the Brigadier's words just now, at the end of the ceremony and how they had made her flinch. He had said he would escort “the body” back to UK. It was tragic that this strong, courageous and vital man, who had not always been likeable but had saved many lives, now had been reduced to “the body”. He did not deserve that.

Chapter 2: An unwelcome reacquaintance

Later that afternoon the Brigadier summoned them before he was leaving for UK. Georgie had never liked him much and even less after his disrespectful comment during Bones' ceremony. There was something uncanny about him in addition to the superior arrogance that some of the top brass displayed. It was clear that he considered himself well above them and much preferred to hang out with his likes in ranks to wasting precious time on regular squaddies, but there was also something in the look of his eyes that she did not like. Maybe the way they actually never met hers but seemed to wander somewhere above and beyond her shoulder whenever he addressed them. Sometimes she wondered how he had raised to the rank of Brigadier. It could not be for his strategical skills, excellent leadership or bravery, because she had never seen proof of any of that, so she assumed it must be down to the right connections in high places and some serious brown nosing. She felt certain Bones must secretly have despised him and thought it ironic that the Brigadier would be the one accompanying him on his last journey home. Even if she had not warmed to Bones, she preferred him over the Brigadier any day. He had been an asshole, but at least one who did not mind get dirt on his hands if it was required to save lives.

“In my last conversation with Captain McClyde, he told me how proud he was to serve alongside you guys and how he wanted you to continue to help the Rohingya refugees.”

She wondered if Bones had really said that, or if the Brigadier just wanted to deliver an encouraging speech. Either way it did not work, because delivered with his

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monotone, dull voice anything he said was uninspiring. She tried to keep attention up as he continued talking.

“Your new commanding officer will help you in this. I was fortunate enough to persuade him not to take medical discharge”.

Georgie felt her body tense and her hairs stand on end from a bad premonition. Was it possible? She looked up and her fears were confirmed as the tall, dark man walking through the door was indeed a familiar face. One she had wished not to see again.

“Meanwhile I escort the body back to the UK I will leave you in the capable hands of Captain James”, the Brigadier continued, and she wanted to sink through the floor.

The rest of 2 section just barely refrained from high-fiving knowing the Brigadier for sure would have frowned upon such behaviour, happy and relieved over the return of their old commander, but Georgie almost felt nauseous, trapped, awkward and angry. Why had he not kept their agreement and stayed away from her? She had asked it of him straight out when she went to see him at rehab and she had thought he had agreed. Yet, here he was.

Work had been Georgie's lifeline, her way to keep it together, to stay sane, to have a purpose after Elvis died. She wanted and needed to keep work professional, not complicated by her own or anyone else's feelings but now *he* was here, and she was under his command. All she wanted to do in this moment was to escape but she would not know where to run.

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Over the next days she did her best to avoid being alone with Captain James. He had attempted to initiate a one to one conversation, but she had averted being alone with him, avoided to at all be in his presence to the extent she could and avoided to even meet the dark eyes which she felt were searching for hers. It was difficult though, he was her CO and they inevitably needed to interact, and she gritted her teeth in frustration that he had put them in this situation. She isolated herself somewhat from the rest of the section too, because she needed space and time to think the situation through and decide what to do.

She became increasingly convinced by the ever present and growing knot in her stomach, that the right thing would be to request a transfer. She hated the thought of leaving 2 section. She had come to see them as brothers - or sister in the case of Maisie. Funny to think how that girl had annoyed the crap out of her when Georgie first had been her mentor during the Nepal tour - and now she loved her. But Georgie felt she did not have any choice, serving under Captain James after his confessions about having feelings for her would not lead to anything good. She had not given him the opportunity to repeat them here, but just having his eyes following her around when she tried to avoid him gave her the creeps. She was not able to function as the professional soldier and medic she wanted to be under those circumstances.

During one of their frequent tours to pick up refugees crossing the Brahmaputra river, she informed Captain James of her intentions. Maybe it was a bit coward of her, but she thought she found the perfect moment there in the crowd, surrounded by all these people. Their presence made it impossible to cause a scene and yet very few of them understood English, so she could speak freely.

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"I have requested a transfer from 2 section, Sir."

"Why?"

Her heart was pounding, and she hated the hurt look she saw on his face when she allowed herself a quick glance at him, but this was the way it had to go.

"You should have kept your end of the bargain."

"What bargain was that Lane?"

"That you should stay away from me after blurring the lines. You were too personal and all I want is to stay professional. I can't work this way, I just can't. I take it you won't object to my transfer request because if you do I will have to tell people why I'm requesting it. I will leave either you like it or not."

He looked like he was about to say something more, but she turned in her track and strode off before he had the chance to utter another word. She was sure it was nothing she wanted to hear anyway, and she frankly did not care she was disrespectful to her CO, because he deserved it.

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The transfer was approved but would not be immediate. There was a second medic in 2 section, Ruby, but he had so little field experience that Georgie could not leave him hanging without her experienced support and would have to wait for another replacement medic to join the section in a few weeks. In the meantime, she buried herself in work at the med centre. Both because she wanted to avoid Captain James and because she wanted to be of as much use as possible whilst being here. The need of medical assistance was huge, and she spent nearly all her awake hours at the clinic. Many of the refugees were in such a bad shape and there were many

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cases of dysentery. She found she had to force herself to shut off her feelings not to drown from empathy.

As if infections and other illnesses were not bad enough, many of the refugees were seriously addicted to a drug called yabba. It seemed it was easy to access somehow in the refugee camp, and Georgie thought of how cynical and unfair it was to exploit these already weak and poor people. Like kicking on those already lying down.

Through her work with the refugees, she came to know one woman who touched her heart more than others, despite that she had tried to harden herself and stay detached. She was called Maya and was a sex worker and yabba addict. She was probably Georgie's age and one could see that she once had been beautiful with her long black hair and big brown eyes. Now her torn face appeared to be at least 15 years older than the medic and her eyes, filled with pain, seemed to belong to someone who had lived a hard life for an eternity. Unlike most of the refugees she could speak some limited English because once, a very long time ago she had gone to school. Georgie met her when was treating an infected wound that Maya had from the crossing the river. In the muddy water, rocks and tree branches and junk people had thrown away were hidden and many got hurt during the passage. From their previous conversations Georgie knew that she had passed the border all on her own, without anyone caring for her or protecting her. Sometimes Georgie felt alone, but she had her section and in fact the whole Army behind her and her family waiting at home. Maya's loneliness and exposure were in a different league entirely, because if someone tried to exploit her nobody would stand up for her, if she died no one would miss her.

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"Why are you using yabba, Maya?" Georgie asked whilst carefully cleaning Maya's wound. It broke her heart to see how Maya seemed to enjoy when she softly touched her leg in the process, as if it were long since someone had touched her in a comforting way.

"It helps me."

"Helps you?"

"Yes. Help me forget. Forget what people do to my family. Help me not remember sex."

Two pair of brown eyes met. Georgie suddenly felt hers glaze but Maya's were dried, no tears left as they all had been shed long ago.

"I had family. Man, children, but they dead. I need food, money. Men pay me. Not nice, need to forget. Only want to forget."

Georgie felt naïve, embarrassed and nauseous all at once. Who was she to judge? If *she* had lost her family, if *she* had been forced to have sex with unknown and uncaring men to make a living, would she not have wanted to drug herself too to forget and ease the pain? Christ, she could not even stand to be close to Captain James and all he had done was saying inappropriate things to her. It was bad enough, but very far from being forced into something physical against one's will, like Maya had.

"Who sells you the drugs? How do you get drugs?"

Maya cautiously looked around them and put a finger to her lips, looking wary.

"Hush! Inspector."

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“Inspector Chowdhrey?”

Chowdhrey was the very well-liked police officer they were collaborating closely with in the camp and his lovely wife worked in the med centre, doing an admirable effort to keep the clinic floating.

Maya just shook her head with lips tightly pursed. A group of people was approaching them, and it was clear that she would not say more. Georgie finished dressing the wound and moved on to the next patient, but she was distracted, and her mind was full of questions. Had Maya not wanted to speak because she did not want Inspector Chowdhrey to know who the drug dealers were? Or, did she mean that *he* was part of the drug trade? There was plenty of corruption here, so it was not impossible even if Chowdhrey had come across as a very decent man who would have been Georgie's last guess for being a corrupted cop.

She suddenly remembered the backpack she had seen someone handing Chowdhrey at the river crossing a few days ago. She had asked him what it was, and he had claimed it contained information about the refugees. What if it was something else? Maybe it had been drugs in that bag, maybe he got parcels with yabba every time he was at the river crossing. If so, he would have several opportunities weekly to bring drugs here. As his wife was running the clinic he would also have reason to be in contact with the refugees regularly there without raising suspicions, as well as in the camp where his job was to oversee things daily. Mrs. Chowdhrey might even be in on it too, things were not always as they seemed.

Georgie shook her head to herself. ‘Or, maybe I'm just going mental!’ She decided not to mention it to anyone, but anyway keep her eyes open and talk more to Maya to try to find out more. If there was a way to stop the drug trade, a small favour

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would be done to refugees even if not all of them would agree to that, addicted to the yabba as they were.

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Next day when Georgie returned to the clinic, she went looking for Maya and was immediately alarmed when she found someone else in that bed.

"Where is Maya?" she asked Salma, one of the local women working there.

"Who?"

"The woman who was in this bed yesterday"

Salma shrugged her shoulders.

"Gone, so we gave the bed to someone else this morning."

"But Maya! What happened to Maya?"

Maya's wound had been healing, looking fine so Georgie knew for sure that whatever had happened could not be related to an infection.

"Sorry Miss, it was yabba. She took an overdose".

"So, you had to move her?"

"Yes, we moved her because she died tonight. Maya is dead." Salma shrugged her shoulders, like it was a pity but something one had to count on happening.

It was true, refugees died here every day, but to Georgie this life was different.

Chapter 3: Not as you think

Leaving the clinic that day Georgie was still shaken. Could it really be a coincidence that Maya had overdosed so soon after she had mentioned the inspector in relation to drugs? Either way it was tragic, and this was one of these moments when the harsh reality penetrated the shield Georgie tried to maintain, and she could not keep her emotions at bay. She felt she needed some time alone and took a detour on the way back to barracks and sat looking at the river floating by, let tears run freely down her cheeks. It was a long time since she had allowed herself to cry like this, maybe not since Elvis' funeral where she had made a complete tit of herself. She was not sure if she now was crying only for Maya, or at the same time for all the other refugees, for Bones and for Elvis. For a while it felt like she had the weight of the world on her shoulders and she did not know how to carry it. Finally, she wiped her tears away and headed back, head held high for no one to notice her moment of weakness.

Upon arrival at barracks, Captain James, leaning in the door to his office spotted Georgie and called for her.

"Lane, I need a word."

"Now is not a good moment, Sir. Could we take it later?"

She never felt like talking to him, but now was a worse moment than ever.

"No, I need you now. My office." He jerked his head to indicate he wanted her to follow him inside.

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It was an order and she had to obey, so she followed him inside with tense shoulders, dreading what he had to say.

"Relax, Lane" he said. "Are you okay?"

Did he have to look so genuinely concerned? It made it more difficult to stay distant.

"Why wouldn't I be?"

"Well, I can see you're not okay, so I will ask once as an officer to one of the men in my charge and then I expect a response. How are you?"

"I'm a bit troubled, Sir. There was just a death at the clinic which got to me, but I don't really want to talk about it."

He gave a curt nod.

"Fine then, as you wish. However, there is something else I need to speak to you about. I have a feeling you have been avoiding me, both before and after you told me of your intention to transfer away from 2 section, but I need to tell you this so now you have to listen."

Georgie felt adrenaline pump through her body and sensed the taste of bile in her mouth. She was sure she did not want to hear this. She did not want to listen to words that would crumble the deep respect and platonic love she always had felt for this man, both in the capacity of an officer and as the friend of her dead fiancée. If he spoke there would be no turning back.

"Don't, Sir! I don't want to hear more!" she exclaimed.

Startled by the force of her outbreak, he paused to stare at her.

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“You have told me how you feel. I have told you I don't feel the same and I have requested a transfer to avoid this. Please respect that, otherwise I will have to report you for sexual harassment.”

The last thing she wanted was to have to report him, but she would have no more of this. She was trembling because she found the situation so uncomfortable. He should know better than to put her in this position.

“Georgie! Listen to me!” Harshly, he cut her off. “There will be no need to report me, because what I have been trying to tell you since I came here is not what you think. Now I need you to listen and you can consider that an order because after all I am your CO. Sit down.”

He pointed to the chair opposite to his and reluctantly she sat, grateful there was at least a desk separating them. For a moment his voice had been raised, an officer losing patience with a private but now his tone as well as his expression softened again. He sat down too, pulled one hand through his hair, pausing when it reached the back of the head, tugging his curls as if contemplating how to begin.

“I have been wanting to thank you for setting me straight when you came to visit me in rehab. That's what I want to say. I thought a lot, I mean a lot, about what you said and was starting to think you were right.”

He paused again and the eyes that met her were sincere. Georgie was holding her breath, waiting.

“Then Molls came down to see me. I tucked away my stupid pride and asked her to come to Headley and she stopped being so bloody stubborn and came. I was so fucking happy to see my wife, you know. I don't think I have been so happy about

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anything in my entire life. Well, that would be when we first..." His words trailed off and he cleared his throat. "Anyway, we talked for hours and hours and we set so many misunderstandings right. I think you may be right we are made for each other and just had gotten astray. In the end we love each other and want the same things. To make a long story short, we decided to keep trying, not give up on one another."

So many emotions went through Georgie when the words left his lips turned out so different from what she had expected; utter relief, restored respect and joy for him and Molly.

"I barely know what to say. I'm so absolutely chuffed to hear that!

"And relieved I guess?" he cocked an eyebrow and looked amused.

"Well, now I feel a little bit embarrassed about my outburst just now, but yes."

"Don't be embarrassed. I totally understand your reaction. I need to apologise for any discomfort I have caused you. I was totally out of line sending those texts."

"To be honest, you didn't say that much in them, but after what you told me in the jungle, about your feelings crossing a line and us being bonded... maybe I read too much into them."

"No, I shouldn't have texted you in the first place. Period. It is true that I feel a special connection to you because of Elvis, because we both were close to him. For a short while, when I was confused and desperate and sad, even suffered from PTSD if I'm to believe the psychiatrist I have been seeing, I mistook that for something else. On top of losing Elvis and being seriously injured myself, doubting if I ever would be fit for service again, I thought Molly and I were falling apart, and

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I couldn't handle that. I needed to find hope in something. What you said to me at Headley, made me "sober up", realise that it was in Molly and no one else I could find that strength.

He shook his head like he found it difficult to accept he had gone through that.

"I messed up and I find it hard to forgive myself, but I hope you can with the assurance that it will never be repeated. I will let you in on a secret. I accepted this posting because I was told what had happened to Bones right in front of you all and I did not want to put you through another, unknown CO stepping in after that. If that hadn't happened, the Brigadier would never had been able to convince me to return. Molly and I have decided to leave the Army, both of us. We need more time together and the last tours and the loss of Elvis have scarred both of us, not just physically. I have not been quite balanced lately, as you have noticed. This will be my last tour and then I will ask for medical discharge. I have just postponed it. Only you and Molly know it yet, so please keep it to yourself."

"Apology accepted, Boss. Not even you are perfect, and I know the last years have been difficult for you in so many ways. It is difficult to imagine you without the Army, though, or the Army without you. What will you do?"

"Don't know yet for sure. Get a proper house of our own... and maybe a baby. We are both longing for that actually. Right now, what I want and need as soon as this tour is over is to spend time with my wife, lots of it." He laughed softly, and his cheeks got a tinge of red. "Anyway, I want this to be a good tour without any awkward feelings between us. For the last time I want to do the job I'm told I'm bloody good at and have us all home before Christmas."

She didn't see it coming

"It will be a good last tour, we will make it a good one. No awkwardness after this", she said sincerely.

"Do I dare to hope you will cancel your transfer request?"

"I will" she smiled and felt terribly happy about staying with 2 section under his command.

"Good. Now feel free to double away."

"Thanks, Boss. I can't tell you how good it feels that we set everything straight between us."

"If you only had listened we would have weeks ago, but sometimes you are as headstrong as my wife, Lane", he smirked.

"I take that as a compliment."

"I don't know if you should."

- OG -

After leaving Captain James, Georgie felt the need to be alone again, so she left the gated barracks area again and this time walked in the direction of the town. Charles James would leave the Army and behind and try to get a baby! She knew he had a son from a previous marriage and regretted he had not more present when he was a toddler, but it was difficult to imagine this core Army man carrying around a baby, changing diapers and singing it to sleep. He would probably be brilliant at it like anything else. She questioned if she ever would be any good at that, that kind of life.

She didn't see it coming

If Georgie had married Dr. Jamie Cole a few years back, she would have left the Army and probably had a baby, or rather a toddler, by now... How would that have been? Not right, she answered herself, because she did not really love him, and she had not been ready to leave the Army. She had told herself back then that she did not have that strong maternal drive that so many other women seemed to have, but she knew that when she had been with Elvis, when that relationship felt certain and right, she had been able to picture herself with *his* baby. That would never happen. Suddenly she felt lonely. She wanted a family life too but that and being a soldier was not an easy combination to pull off and even more difficult would be to ever find someone she could imagine taking on the challenge together with. 'I will leave the Army when it feels right, when there is something, or *someone* out there pulling me more than being a squaddie does', she told herself.

Her thoughts occupied, she had not really paid attention to where her feet brought her. Suddenly she spotted Inspector Chowdhrey walking in front of her further down the narrow street. He was alone and walking with haste and she wondered where he was off to. Maybe this was an opportunity to get to know more about him, to find out if he could be involved in the drug trade. She knew it was probably not the best idea but could not resist the impulse to follow him. She did so at a distance, tried not to lose him in the crowd of the street, neither come so close he would notice her. For a while she followed him through winding streets, then lost him for a moment and moved faster, searching for him but he was nowhere to be seen. She stopped and sighed, obviously she had lost him and the best thing to do was to return to barracks before dusk.

Out of the blue, someone forcefully grabbed Georgie from behind, locked her arms in a crippling grip and covered her mouth brusquely with a large hand, so she

She didn't see it coming

barely could breathe, let alone let out a sound. She tried to fight against it but did not stand a chance against the strong unknown attacker and despite her resistance she was forced through a door. The door closed behind them with a resounding slam and she was alone with a stranger in a pitch-black room, held in a grip impossible to escape from.

She didn't see it coming

Chapter 4: Revelations

Darkness. Pain in her arms, bent and held hard behind her back. Pressure over her mouth. Panic.

“When I let you go, don't scream. Look at me” a voice hised in her ear. “I will just let your eyes get used to the darkness first”.

She heard her own heartbeats, fast from fear, while she waited for her vision to adapt to the little light that seeped in through cracks in the window shutters. Who the hell was this? Friend or foe? And what did he want with her? Her guess was that Chowdhrey had spotted her following him, but what did he intend to do with her now?

An eternity passed but then she could see in the faint light. “Okay, I will let you go now. Don't make a sound, just turn around.”

He let go, slowly, making sure her legs could carry her after the shock. She turned and gasped in shock when she saw who it was.

“Boss?!!!”

“In the flesh”, he smirked in his characteristic way, removing any doubt she might have had that it really was him.

“How? I don't understand! I saw you blow into pieces! Or not even pieces, there was nothing left...”

She didn't see it coming

In some miraculous way, Bones was standing in front of her. She held on to his arms to convince herself this was not imagination and maybe to steady herself too. After all, it was as close to seeing a ghost as she ever had been.

"You just thought you did" he said dryly, shook her hands off and took a step backwards.

"I will explain, but not here. You put yourself in danger following Inspector Chowdhrey. We need to move."

"Were you following me?"

"No, *him* - but then I spotted you. And someone else might have too. Please trust me and just come with me. We can't stay here, it's just some random house we crashed."

He had never given her any reason not to trust him. On the contrary, he had saved her life three times, but now she had just discovered this massive deception. That of him being dead. Even if she was glad that he was alive, she was not sure it was the wisest thing to go with him, but if she did not she would not find out what he had to tell. She just could not miss out on that because she had never been more curious. She silently cursed her adventurous side, knowing it usually led her to trouble.

"Okay, I will come with you", she said grudgingly.

"Good choice, Lane. Maybe you have half a brain after all."

Then he opened the door and checked the street. "All clear, let's move."

She didn't see it coming

They moved in quick pace but without running as they did not want to draw unnecessary attention to themselves. Bones was striding on long legs and she was annoyed over how she had to take twice as many steps to keep up with him, feeling like she was a chihuahua following a large greyhound. Out in the daylight she could see that he was not wearing any army uniform but regular clothes, t-shirt and trousers and resembled the mercenary he had pretended to be when she first met him, undercover in Nigeria. It suited him and fleetingly she wondered if this was his own style off-duty or if this was another undercover mission. Seeing since he apparently had faked his own death, the latter seemed more likely.

Suddenly the heavens opened, and a monsoon rain started pouring down. Everyone was running now to find shelter, so they ran too. They ran through winding alleys in a direction of the town where she had never been before, until he stopped outside a small door which he unlocked after glancing around them.

“Welcome to my place” he said, opened and let her through like the gentleman he far from was, followed and closed the door behind them.

“What is this place?”

She looked around curiously.

“One of my local connections set me up here after I had “died”. “Bones put his fingers up gesturing quotation marks in the air, as if it was not already apparent that he was very much alive. “His aunt owns the house and I can come and go as I wish in this part of the building, no questions asked. Suits me fine.”

The room was a small and sparsely furniture but clean and tidy. No personal belongings of Bones' were to be seen, but that was hardly a surprise under the

She didn't see it coming

circumstances. It was not like he had been travelling with any luggage when he abruptly left.

Both were soaking wet from the heavy rain. He shook his head at the sight of their clothes glued to their bodies. Their hairs and faces were dripping, and Georgie had started trembling of cold.

“What with being dead, I don't have that much clothes to offer as a change. Since I am a gentleman, I'm happy to lend you my only other t-shirt but I'm sorry to inform you that then you will have to stand me wearing only underwear” he smirked and did not look apologetic at all.

“I think I can handle that. I'm a big girl and have probably seen worse” she said, shrugging her shoulders. “Just give me the t-shirt. Please.”

He threw it to her, still smirking.

“And turn around!”

Surprisingly obedient he turned away and she turned her back to him, hoping he did not sneak peek. She peeled of the dripping clothes and put the t-shirt on, thankful it was some sizes large, so it was long enough to cover her knickers.

Despite that he had told her he would get undressed too, she was startled to find him only in his boxers when she turned. She made a mental whistle because disturbingly enough, he was seriously fit. He had never flaunted his bare upper body around barracks like some of the guys in 2 section proudly liked to do, walking around showing off abs and torsos more than she wished they would. However, judging only by his combat clad form and his obsession with keeping the section in shape, she had of course guessed he would be fit, but not like *this*. Obviously, he

She didn't see it coming

lived by the standards he had set for them when he was their commander; that they should all be “washboard soldiers”. His abs were the most washboard-ish ones she ever had seen and with drips of water trailing down the ridges like a skier over moguls, he would have suited in a commercial for a very manly aftershave.

She prayed that she was able to keep a poker face on and did not show any reaction, but the smirk which again appeared on his face indicated he knew exactly what she was thinking. Christ, she did not want to be like a school girl just at the sight of a half-naked man even if he was really, really handsome. Especially not one as annoying as him.

“Ah, my t-shirt looks better on you than on me” was all he said.

Consciously, Georgie pulled the t-shirt down with the vain hope to make it longer, because she felt oddly naked showing her legs in his presence, even if she had more clothes on than she would wear on a public beach on a sunny day.

“Okay, now tell me everything. I'm glad you are alive - but how?! And why did you fake your own death?”

“So, you are glad I'm alive? I thought all of you would be cheering after the way I beasted you”, he grinned.

“You agree you have been an asshole?” she said with surprise.

“I wouldn't stretch as far as an asshole, but I know I wasn't nice. It was for a good cause though and I was never here to make friends. Let me start from the beginning. About six months ago, just when we had returned to UK from Belize, I got summoned to a classified meeting.”

“Isn't all SF stuff classified?”

She didn't see it coming

“Well, yes, but this was more classified than usual. I was informed about an issue here at the border of Bangladesh. Someone was trading drugs, yabba, to the refugees and making good money from it. There were suspicions that local police were not only seeing through their finger but also were involved in the trade themselves. This would normally not have been our business, but there were indications that one of our own was involved.”

“What do you mean? Someone from the British Army?”

“Unfortunately, yes. However, there was no solid evidence and they wanted me to go here and get it. This was of course a sensitive affair, so I was to go here on a covert mission and 2 section were to join and be my cover. Without knowing it might I add. I realised though, that there may come a situation when I would need the help from you lot. Therefore, I have done all I can to get you all in the best possible shape and increase your skills. I know I was not Mr. Niceguy but you would never have improved as you have if I had not been pushing you. Okay, I admit that at first in Belize I may also have taken out my anger on being demoted on you, just a bit, but I swear the rest was because I wanted to spur you to be better”

Georgie listened attentively and tried to grasp all he said, from someone Army being involved in illegal activities here, to Bones part in putting and to it, to his reasons for being the worst commander 2 section had ever encountered. .

“Who? Who of our guys was suspected to be involved in the drug trade?”

“You are a smart girl. Who do you think?”

She went through the options in her mind and if she went by her gut feeling, then it all seemed clear.

She didn't see it coming

"The Brigadier?"

"I knew you were clever. Yes, he is the suspect."

"I thought you said earlier you were surprised I even had half a brain?"

"Maybe you should not believe everything I say seriously." He stared at her challenging.

"This is though, serious, isn't it?"

"Yeah, as serious as it gets."

"But why?! Why would the Brigadier do such a thing? Risk his reputation and career, not to mention the bad it does to the refugees we are here to help. I don't get it."

"What drives most crimes? Greed. Money. It makes people do strange things. Maybe you have noticed that he likes the "finer" things in life? Fine dining, expensive suits, spending time with posh people rather than the squaddies. At home he has a large mansion and a beautiful, high-maintenance wife. Met her once and never want to meet her again. Even if he earns more than the two of us combined, it is far from enough to afford such a lifestyle."

She shook her head in disbelief.

"Please, continue. Tell me more."

"I can only speculate, but when he was deployed here on a previous tour he was probably approached about a "business opportunity", saw a way out of his financial problems and took it. The investigations I have done whilst being here indicate that

She didn't see it coming

Inspector Chowdhrey may not be the good guy he is posing as and others in high positions may be involved as well. I have not secured all the needed evidence yet.”

“Do you have solid proof now that the Brigadier is involved or only circumstantial evidence?”

“Shortly before the stupid VIP reception to honour the Brigadier, I got some intel from my local connections which indicated we were on the right track. Simultaneously I found out that I had raised suspicion, somehow exposed myself and risked being assassinated before I could complete the mission. Then I decided to fake my own death, go even more under cover, both to avoid getting killed for real and to be able to finalise my investigations and get the needed piece of evidence. I would not want to accuse an Officer of the Her Majesty's Army of being a drug dealer without solid evidence, then it would be my career on the line instead of his.”

“But how did you do it? Survive the bomb? I was looking right at you when you stood there holding it. I saw it blow up and then there was literally nothing left.”

“Exactly. You never found that a bit odd? If I had had a spare hand or leg to leave there I would have.”

“I just thought the blast left nothing there.”

“That was what I wanted you to think, so you should not be too hard on yourself for buying it.”

“So, what was the trick?”

“The monk who placed the bomb there was one of my local connections disguised as a monk and he also triggered it at the exactly right moment. It was more noise

She didn't see it coming

and smoke than actual explosion power and while the smoke was there I just dived in to the bushes and disappeared. It wasn't more complicated than that."

"But your medals covered in blood? I found them"

"Well, I thought should leave *something* behind to make it more believable, even if I couldn't conjure up spare body parts. I managed to get an identical set of medals and dripped some blood on from a cut in my hand beforehand. Then I just threw that on the lawn before vanishing. I had a bloke waiting for me outside the garden with a motorbike, he drove me here and I have continued my work."

"You make it sound so easy, you really thought of everything... but how about your wife and kids? What a terrible thing to do, to trick them into believing you are dead!"

"My wife? And kids?" He looked utterly surprised, like she had said the last thing he expected. "I don't have a wife, or kids for that matter. Why would you think that?"

"The woman and two boys that came for your coffin? Who were they then?"

He burst into a wide grin again.

"Ah, that was my little sister and her sons. I agree, it was a horrible thing to trick them. I hated it and it was the most difficult part of setting all this up, but their grief needed to be real, so no one would realise... I didn't keep her in the dark for long though, I called her as soon as they got home. She was mad as a hornet first but luckily for me, she was even happier to find out I was alive, although she claimed she will kill me herself next time she sees me."

She didn't see it coming

They both laughed, and Georgie somehow felt relief that he had not been cheating on a wife when he hit on her in Nigeria and later brought another girl with him to his bed instead. He was not a cheating bastard, just a cheeky bastard who liked to enjoy himself when off-duty, much like the rest of 2 section. It seemed like she would need to revise her opinion of him... not an unfaithful scoundrel but a caring brother judging by his tone of voice talking of his sister; not an asshole who thought they all were idiots and pushed them for sadistic pleasure but because he wanted them to be prepared for the real deal. Now, when he did not need to keep up that pretence he was so much more relaxed, friendly and approachable. Who was this man, really?

She didn't see it coming

Chapter 5: While it was raining

Outside, the rain was still pouring down, and it was getting darker by the minute.

"I need to head back to barracks" Georgie said.

"You can't, not tonight. Not in this rain and also, you should not be out alone and unarmed in the dark. I can't come with you, even if I normally would walk a girl to her door after a date like a gentleman."

"You call this a date? Then you really are delusional", she snorted.

"No, I don't, and I don't call myself a gentleman either."

He raised a sardonic eyebrow and she suddenly felt the need to break eye contact.

He seemed to think for a moment, going through different options in his mind.

"Send a text to Maisie and say you were caught in the rain and a woman you know from the clinic offered you shelter", he finally suggested.

The idea of spending the night here in this room alone with him was in some way intimidating, but she realised it was the best option at this point and sent the text.

"Are you hungry?"

"Yeah, but I don't see a kitchen here?"

"Sorry, no but I have some fruit and water at least."

He brought it out and they ate sitting on the bed, as there was nowhere else to sit in the room. Georgie placed herself cross legged facing him, rather than beside him. She did not want to be too close to his half-naked body, even if he now had wrapped

She didn't see it coming

a blanket around his waist in sarong-like style. She wondered how they would sleep. The bed was quite narrow. Did he intend for them to sleep next to each other or would he gallantly offer to sleep on the floor? As he just had admitted he was no gentleman it didn't seem likely.

"How come you joined the army? he asked out of the blue. "If I had seen you in civvies it wouldn't have been my first guess that you were a squaddie."

She laughed and took a bite of an apple, chewed before she answered.

"That's just prejudices... Some army recruitment people came visiting my school and I was intrigued... I have always been this nice girl from a nice family and with good grades, even a scholarship for university and my path seemed so clear, all the stepping stones neatly laid out. I thought I would be a doctor like my dad, but when I heard about the army, I was all exited and it got me thinking. Everything I had done and planned to do seemed so predictable and a bit boring. Settled. I realised I wanted something more, wanted to go my own way. Sometime later I decided to join the RAMC, enlisted for basic training and then went on. My parents were horrified at first, especially mum, but later proud of my choice. I love my family, and in the end, they have been really supportive, even if I know they hope I will leave the army one day, preferably in one piece and settle in a nearby house and have a bunch of kids, you know."

While she talked he had looked like he was listening with genuine interest and now he nodded.

"So, this crazy profession was truly your own choice?"

"I guess so. It must mean I'm mad, though" she smiled. "And you, Bones?"

She didn't see it coming

She knew almost nothing about him. Would he tell?

"You can call me Jack."

"What?"

"My name, you can call me by my name - Jack. Bones isn't my Christian name if you thought so."

Of course, she knew that was just a nickname like the ones many of the soldiers had, but his seemed to fit him so well so she had never considered what else he might be called. She liked to think of him as Jack, this man she was scraping a little bit on the surface of.

"Why Bones?"

He was quiet for a moment, as if he hesitated to share it but finally decided to.

"You know the army slang '*bone*', meaning pointless or stupid? I picked that name to never forget that I need to prove every day that I'm not."

"Pointless or stupid? Of course, you aren't. You may not win any popularity contests but you're not any of those things. Surely you must know?" she said, confused.

"My father would disagree with that."

His expression was blank, but she noticed the clenched jaw and a flicker in his eyes, telling her they were on mined ground which he did not want to explore further, so she changed subject.

"Okay... Jack then, what about you? How did you end up in the army?"

She didn't see it coming

“For me it was almost the contrary... It has always been expected that I join the army, but I didn't want to. My family is... kind of well-off and a bit on the posh side.”

He registered the look on her face. “You could look less surprised you know...”

“Sorry, but you seem to be made for army life and you don't seem very posh, that's all. You said yourself, you're far from a gentleman.”

“I thought we had established you shouldn't believe everything I say. But true enough, most of the time I'm trying hard not to be... Jokes aside, we sort of have a family business and the tradition and expectation is that the eldest son takes over that, and the second son becomes an officer in the army. It has been like that for generations.”

“Really? Seems a bit old fashioned with so limited choices. Are you the second son then?”

“Yes, but unfortunately I wasn't ideal material for an officer. As a child and teenager, I was small and weak. I was often ill and had asthma. I grew out of that, but I was still this guy who avoided fights and if I was forced into one, I was always beaten up. Mostly, I liked to read, build model planes and hang with friends who were like me. My father and brother were not very understanding or supportive. Dad used to say that he longed for when I would start my officer training at Sandhurst, so they would make a man out of me. All I felt was horror, wondering how I would ever make it.”

The father again. It seemed like they had a complicated and far from loving relationship.

She didn't see it coming

“What happened?”

“My mother is the best” he smiled warmly. “She always understood and loved me the way I am. I was supposed to go off to Sandhurst directly after university, but she managed to persuade my father I should wait another year and go live with my uncle. He is also the second son, so naturally he is an officer too. He is great, very different from my father. Besides being an officer, he runs a farm. Not by himself of course, but it is his and he lives there when he is home. That's where I was sent, and he set me to work. Really hard physical work and at first, I hated it. Then I realised I was quickly growing stronger. He had me start training boxing and martial arts too and when I joined the army one year later I was up for it physically. I still didn't think I would like it but once I was at Sandhurst I sort of found my place. I found that violence was not the core of the army - serving our country and saving lives is. And I have made many of my best friends in the army. Surprisingly, I came to like it.”

“But why did you have to do like your father wanted? Why go through with all that just for some family tradition?”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“Hard to explain. It felt like I had to at that age. He is very authoritarian, and I wasn't so tough then. That's a shield I have worked on later I guess. It's different now. I feel I could leave if I wanted to, but as I said, I quite like it. It is also a great way to keep away from my father.” He smiled wryly. “I joined the Special Forces just to annoy him. I knew that was not the kind of officer he wanted me to be. He would have liked it if I was more like the Brigadier, minus the drug trade.”

She didn't see it coming

Georgie realised that before this evening she had not known him at all. It was difficult to picture this strong man who had often been so rough, as a small weak boy who preferred reading to anything else. She would sooner had guessed that he had never picked up a book. Prejudices again, now from her side.

He looked away, almost as if he suddenly felt he had revealed too much about himself and felt exposed. She sensed she wanted to give him something of her in return.

“My parents have never stopped me in my career, but I have felt that I didn't fulfil their expectations on my love life”, she offered.

“Your love life?! What do they have to say about that?”

“I have made some choices that maybe weren't for the best. You know I was with Elvis. They didn't have anything against him the first time around even if I know they would have preferred a husband that was not army. Then he dumped me on our wedding day... and they had to see me devastated. I won't go into details, but it wasn't pretty. Anyway, life went on, I scraped up the pieces and put myself together and after some time I met this doctor, Jamie and we started going out. My parents were thrilled of course and so excited when we planned to get married. The day I told them I had cancelled the wedding and wanted to stay in the army... the disappointment in their faces. In that moment I felt I had failed them, but I just couldn't go through with it.”

“Why?”

“Jamie was the sweetest guy and he loved me, but I felt like he never knew or understood *all* of me. When we first met he thought it was intriguing I was an army

girl but later on he just wished for me to leave the army and be his wife at home. Not a housewife maybe, but to be there for him always and not run off to the battlefield during some obscure deployment. He could never understand how I was drawn to it, how that could be more important than coming home to him every day. I knew I would feel captured and would have to pretend to be someone I'm not. I couldn't do that for him, or for my parents."

"I see... but what happened when you got back with Elvis? You mentioned your parents were less than thrilled?"

"When he came back into my life again, we were not a couple although he wanted us to be. First, I didn't want to have anything to do with him, but he persisted, showed me he wouldn't disappear again, and we gradually became friends. My whole family made it very clear they thought I would be a complete fool if I got back with him after what he had done to me. I thought so too, but there was just this undeniable chemistry between us. I'm not sure I ever really trusted him fully again, but I forgave him, and we reconciled just before he was killed in Afghan. I grieved him so much and maybe mostly what we could have been if he hadn't let me down the first time. After his death my family was there for me, but I felt they could not really understand it, understand how I felt. I think they felt he wasn't worth being heartbroken over a second time, you know, and that put some distance between me and them. Sometimes following one's heart means making choices that are not logical and not always for the best, but I had no choice."

Bones looked at her and there was nothing of the usual sarcasm or cheekiness to his expression, only attention and sympathy.

She didn't see it coming

"I think you are right, sometimes the right choice is clear only to yourself and no one else. It makes it harder, but you still have to make it.... "

"Exactly."

"How do you feel about Elvis now? It's nearly a year ago since he passed away, isn't it?"

"Yes, 11 months, 1 week and 3 days, not that I'm counting." She gave him a bleak smile. "I'm not sure how I feel. I guess I will always grieve him, but he is fading away. He feels like a promise never fulfilled, and truth be told we never got to pressure test our relationship the second time around. Maybe it would not have lasted long. I think it's time for me to move on but I'm not sure how. My life will never be the same again after that day, that much is for sure. Can I be happy again? I hope so, but I'm not sure it will be in the same way as before because I'm different."

"I think you can, if you allow yourself to be", he said sincerely.

To her own surprise a tear ran down her cheek. She had not spoken to anyone about Elvis like this, maybe not even worded her doubts about their budding second relationship to herself as it had felt like a betrayal to him. Saying it out loud now, she knew it was true. If he had lived she could not know if they would have been a couple now or if they had parted anyway.

"Sorry" she sniffled. "I don't mean to be such a mess."

"Don't apologise. I think you have been amazingly strong through all this and I think you will know when the time is right...to move on I mean. It would have been tough for anyone. I can't even imagine... I think I haven't even been in love for real."

She didn't see it coming

He confessed that with a hint of sadness and looked away. That and the fact that he was not judging her actions or feelings stirred something inside her. Driven by a sudden impulse, she reached out her hand and placed her palm on his chest, let it run down his flat stomach in a caress. He flinched from the unexpected touch and with cheeks heated from embarrassment she withdrew her hand.

"I'm sorry! I don't know why... I wasn't thinking... maybe I just wanted to feel that you're really real, not a ghost".

She knew that was not the reason.

He caught her hand in the movement and to her surprise laced his fingers with hers.

"I'm not sorry" he said with low soft voice.

When her eyes met his again, she saw something she had not seen there before, not even the time when he suggested that she would join him to his room. Desire combined with... longing... and a question. She knew her own eyes answered the unspoken question with a silent "yes". At the same time as she was thinking 'This can't be happening' she could not stop her whole body, which had somehow been asleep since the death of Elvis, from awakening.

The air between them suddenly seemed electrified and the distance between their bodies far too wide. He pulled her towards him, up on his lap where he was sitting on the bed. His hands felt warm and strong through the fabric of the t-shirt as he easily moved her. He hesitated when their faces were only a few inches apart to check if he had really read her right. For a moment they just stared at one another and she noticed how incredibly blue his eyes were, with a darker circle surrounding

She didn't see it coming

an iris blue as a clear summer day sky. Their breaths mingled and fell into the same pace and Georgie's heart was pounding so loud she thought he must hear it. Then she moved that last distance and their lips met. The first kiss was soft, exploring. The second one was more intense, getting eager.

What she felt next was a confusing but amazing mixture of emotions. She was like fire and jelly at the same time, like she no longer had control but at the same time was doing exactly what she wanted. It was crazy, and yet so natural and completely unstoppable. They kissed for what felt like half an eternity, making out like teenagers. Lips grazing softly and bruising hard, his tongue swivelling in her mouth causing the most exhilarating sensations. She ran her fingers through his dark hair which had grown into longer locks over the last weeks. She caressed him down the neck and his broad shoulders, pulling him towards her. He held her in a firm yet gentle embrace, let his hands nestle under the hem of the t-shirt but to begin with only to find her back, willing her to him. It had been so long since she had been with a man like this and even though she wanted it, she hesitated to take the next step and wanted to stay in this very moment. It almost seemed like it was the same for him.

She felt his lips smiling next to hers. He paused the kissing, seriously looked into her the eyes.

“Are you sure you want this? I mean, I don't want it to be any question of that... me being your superior and all that”, he asked with ragged breath, mirroring her own.

She did not say anything, but those words removed her last scrap of hesitation and she stroke down his chest, touched his muscular stomach down to the lining of his boxers and felt him shiver. She pulled her t-shirt over her head and for a second

She didn't see it coming

felt conscious about him seeing her more naked than he had before, but he let his gaze wander over her, now in only bra and knickers, and he pulled in a deep breath of air. When his eyes met hers again they were filled with awe as he raised his hand to gently touch her cheek.

"I wondered for so long... what you look like under those clothes... but you're even more beautiful than I could have imagined."

By that, her bashfulness over being nearly naked disappeared.

"I want you" she said. "You don't have to doubt that. I wouldn't know how to stop now."

It was true. She had not felt it before, but now she wanted him with every fibre of her body. There had always been tension between them, but when he approached her the first time, the timing had been wrong, and it had not really been serious either, just fishing to get laid from what she could tell. Later, he had been so distant and hard to them all. This new man tonight which she had not known before, she could not resist him. She wanted him to be hers.

He looked almost ridiculously happy at her words. He kissed her again, on the mouth, down her neck, softly touched her breasts, which made her giggle.

"What?" he breathed next to her ear.

"Nothing, just if anyone had told me yesterday you would be touching me like this today I would have said they were mental."

"And now?"

"Now I don't want you to stop."

She didn't see it coming

He did not, and she said nothing more, just allowed herself to respond to his touch and pressed herself closer to him, straddling him. The only sound was the rain outside and their breaths becoming shallower and more rapid. He lay down on his back, pulling her with him, on top of him. Continuing to kiss her, he unmade her hair and made her feel beautiful by the look he gave her when the dark strands fell down her shoulders. Both were only in their underwear, but now even that felt like one layer too much between them, which just had to be removed. Now.

Skin to skin and with eyes locked into each other, movements were first slow but quickly building up to a faster, intense pace and it felt so good she almost did not know how to stand it. Everything around them disappeared in a lovely, lovely blur and there was only now.

Chapter 6: A beautiful morning

She woke up to the light of the early dawn, first confused about where she was but then saw his sleeping form next to her and felt the comforting warmth radiating from him. She took in the sight of him, relaxed in his sleep as she never had seen him before. His perfectly toned body only partly covered by a blanket, the messy hair, the dark eyelashes resting on his cheeks, the impression one both of strength and vulnerability. Apart from a scar on the shoulder, his skin was smooth and tanned where it used to be exposed when he was dressed in combats and pale elsewhere. No tattoos to her surprise, despite that it almost was as standard among male soldiers as the uniform.

Jack McClyde, a so much more complex man than she had thought twenty-four hours ago... definitely more alive... and a better lover than she ever could have imagined.

"I didn't see this coming" she whispered to herself.

What would he be like when he woke up? Would he regret last night, thinking it had taken focus away from the operation? *She* was not regretting anything in this moment and hoped he would not make her by treating this as an insignificant one-night shag. What if he woke up, just got dressed saying 'This was nice babe, but now we need to move on'. She would be angry both with him and with herself for putting herself in a position where she would be vulnerable because she had come to care about what he thought of her.

She had just decided to close her eyes, pretend to be still asleep and let him wake up "before" her to see what he did, when he opened his eyes. It took a few seconds

She didn't see it coming

before he remembered the situation, took her presence in, then gave her a big grin and without any hesitation at all pulled her to close and pressed his lips to hers in the loveliest good morning kiss.

Making love in the rose golden light of dawn was a different experience from the night before. As intense, but slower, not driven by impulse but by conscious choice. He kissed every inch of her body. Started from the top and when he reached her belly, shifted to start over from the feet and moving upward... and upward... kissing and caressing the inside of her thighs. She enjoyed every second, but he was moving far too slow. It was like sweet torture and she arched towards him, moaning. He withdrew, teasing her.

“You shouldn't be so impatient, I want this to last”, his voice was hoarse, but he smiled.

He moved on, trailing a path on her skin with soft lips, then returned level with her and looked at her intently whilst letting his hand drop between her thighs and continued caressing her, oh so skilfully. He truly knew what he was doing, a knowing smile playing on his lips and she could see that he, with eyes trained on her face and expression, was taking pleasure in her pleasure, which she had no way of hiding as his fingers played her. She needed him to stop. She needed him to never stop. She needed more, needed him inside of her fully again and with one hand tugged at his curls to bring him to her, kissing him hard, whilst her other hand moved down to feel him.

Finally, he was over her, unable to restrain himself longer. Took hold of her hands, moved them above her head, clasping them, his hips moving rhythmically against hers, *with* her, their every instinct was to achieve him being as deep into her as was

She didn't see it coming

possible, and once again she was his and he was hers until they reached an almost unbearable, shattering pinnacle.

Afterwards they were laying breathless next to one another, heated through and through but slowly coming down. He touched her back light as a feather, softly traced down her spine, placed his lips at the end of it.

"I'm not sure what this is but I don't want it to end", he whispered

Georgie giggled softly and felt more light-hearted than in a long time.

"Me neither. Let's just stay in this room forever."

"That would be amazing. We would get hungry though, and thirsty."

She heard the smile in his voice even if she could not see his face when he was lying behind her.

"Especially as we are "exercising" so intensively. We would probably starve to death in twenty-four hours."

"Uhum, I'm impressed by your ardour."

"Well, that's because I had this pain in the arse commander who pushed me to get really fit."

"I should thank him when I see him then."

They laughed together, and everything felt natural, easy.

They talked about what had happened with 2 section and the outreach project in his absence and about the return of Captain James. She didn't mention the bumps their friendship had been through but asked:

She didn't see it coming

"Can you just explain why you hate Charlie so much?"

"You're 'Charlie' with your captain?"

She refrained from pointing out that he was "Jack" to her now, as that might have given him the wrong impression of her relationship with Charles.

"We have history together. I mean... we were never involved, but he was Elvis' best mate, it was actually him who always called him Charlie. The memory and loss of Elvis will always bond us somehow. I'm also friends with his wife, Molly... Now I feel I'm just rambling on, I don't have to explain to you why I call him Charlie."

"That was explanation enough, but you're right you didn't", he grinned.

"But you avoided my question..."

She turned to him and let her fingers run over his lips.

"I guess I did. ... I don't hate him, not anymore. Nowadays he just annoys the shit out of me. You already know we were at Sandhurst together. When the year there was coming to an end, I got to know that during the passing out ceremony I would be announced as the best cadet of my year and be awarded the *sword of honour*. As you can imagine, I was thrilled after having fought so hard to fit in at all. I called my mum and shared the good news, then went out to have a beer with some friends. They wanted to celebrate me, everyone was buying me drinks and I ended up totally pissed, happy drunk. Charlie-boy was on guard duty and saw me when I arrived back to barracks and reported me. Being drunk wasn't allowed by the way... Next day I got to know that it had cost me both the place as number one cadet and the *sword of honour*, both went to Charles instead. It wouldn't have been so bad if mum hadn't been so exhilarated that she already had shared the news with my

She didn't see it coming

father. The look of contempt in his eyes when he saw me next...It was the day of passing out and Charles was awarded that fucking *sword of honour* instead of me. Father even congratulated him, then walked past me and I realised I would never ever make him proud. I stopped trying then and have lived as I wanted since. So, in a way Charles freed me from my father, but it hurt so damn much that I couldn't stand him. Especially since he never really understood why it was a big deal and thought I was just being petty. To him being first in class was such a natural thing, like it belonged to him in the first place and it had just been a mistake to even consider me."

His voice was not upset when he spoke, any remaining feelings contained, hidden under the surface, but as he spoke Georgie instinctively snuggled up as close to him as she could, buried her face by his collarbone, wanted to support him if the memory still was painful. His dad really seemed to be a prize asshole.

"I'm really sorry for you, mostly about your dad. I doubt that Charles felt that way though, he is really fair and considerate", she now said.

"Yeah, maybe he is but I don't care really. Even if he just wanted to play according to the rules and didn't understand the consequences, I paid a high price. I hated him for that once, but the bitterness is gone since long and now I just dislike him. I know he is a good commander, but we will never be friends."

Knowing his story, she could understand that. She was glad he had confided in her as she realised it must have been a very difficult moment in his life and it felt like he had handed her another piece of the puzzle that was Jack.

Whilst they chatted, entwined in the bed, the dawn turned into early morning.

She didn't see it coming

"We have to get dressed now... otherwise I will not be able to focus", he said reluctantly and kissed her on the top of her head.

He was half joking but as he said it his expression shifted to become serious. "And we need to, focus I mean".

She felt the soldier in her wake up again, the one that had been dormant since last night when another woman seemed to have taken over her brain and body.

"What is the plan?"

"I will continue to work with my local connections which I know are clean, the special forces team; Spanner and Peanut, will also join in a day or two and we will find the right time to strike. Quite soon I'm sure. I need you to return to the others, pretend like nothing - and keep a low profile! That is not your forte it seems, but please try."

His expression was stern now, like the Bones she had known before.

"You don't want me to meddle with things."

"I don't want *anyone* to blow up the operation, and I don't want you to endanger yourself, so no Nigeria style off-piste please Plus, I can use your help when the time comes. I will send a message to you then and you can help brief James, so he can prepare himself and the section. If he hears it from you first I think he may respond more positively than if I just resurrect and tell him. The news about the Brigadier as a drug dealer may be something of a shock. Even if I don't like James, he is skilled, and I trust him to be completely uncorrupted, and as the captain of 2 section he is the one who needs to get the others on board. I will need the support of all of you. After all, this is the operation I have really trained you for the past six

She didn't see it coming

months. Even if the SF team will come, we don't know who and how many that are corrupted and involved in the drug trade around here and may turn against us, so we need trustworthy people."

"Got that, Lane?" he finished off with frowned brow, like he wanted to mark the seriousness of this part of their conversation but then he broke up in a smile again. One which made her stomach twist. She thought that she probably had seen him smile and laugh more since yesterday afternoon that she had in all the time she had known him. It was like the constant mask of sarcasm had washed off. Or maybe rubbed off in the bed.

"Got it, Captain McClyde. No off-piste", she smiled in return.

While he was talking, she reluctantly had gotten out of bed and now pulled on her combats which had dried overnight. He came over to stand close to her and took her face between his palms.

"You know that we can't acknowledge that night happened when we meet next, with the others around, right?"

"Of course, I'm not stupid."

"I know you're not, but I also know it may be difficult."

She did not know if he meant it would be difficult for both; if he was talking for himself; or if he just assumed it would be difficult for *her*. She could not help but feeling a little bit annoyed by the comment but said nothing.

They kissed one last time before she left, with lips already feeling bruised from all the snogging that night. It was a long kiss which nearly brought them back to bed, but both knew it was time to be professional and time for her to go.

She didn't see it coming

“Take care now, stay vigilant and focused. Look out for my message.”

As he closed the door behind her and she walked towards the barracks, she wondered what it would feel like seeing him next – and if there would ever be an encore of what had happened this night. They had made no promises, they said no words of love. Neither of them knew what this was, if anything, except one lovely night. It almost seemed like a dream already. She told herself she should not be too preoccupied with what *he* wanted, or how *he* would be. The important thing was to find out what *she* wanted herself. Problem was that part of her was dreading this because it collided with her professional self and part of her was not sure if she was over Elvis and yet. She doubted that Jack McClyde was the guy for her, or that he had any feelings for her, but her whole body was already missing the warmth of his and longing to feel it again.

She didn't see it coming

Chapter 7: Can she really be that special?

JACK

Jack closed the door behind Georgie, then sat down on the bed, with a sigh and a small laugh, leaning his head in his palms. Now that she was gone, thoughts were spinning wild in his head. Part of him was excitedly happy, part wondered how the hell he could have done this. As an Officer in Her Majesty's Army he should always keep emotions in check whilst on duty, both on the outside and inside. He had failed big time. Even if Army regulations did not per se describe what applied to "fake dead" officers, he seriously doubted that his superiors would approve of this situation had they known about it. She was no longer in his chain of command at least, not since Captain James had taken over, thank fuck, but anyway, a moment of weakness and it had ended in *this*.

- OG -

The first time Jack had heard about Georgie Lane was when he and Elvis had a beer together as they found themselves in the same bar an evening off duty. They knew each other from Sandhurst and liked to hang out when they got an opportunity, which was rare due to their profession.

Jack himself always had his fair share of female attention and enjoyed it, but Elvis was hard to beat. A handsome, charming, dark Italian, with the fit statue of a special forces soldier - the number of women who sought his attention was almost ridiculous. But as the evening went on, Jack realised that even if it may seem like Elvis was flirting he was actually turning all of them down nicely.

She didn't see it coming

"As far as I know Elvis, you're a single guy and having an evening off duty, so you have every right to enjoy yourself..."

"Yeah?"

"So, why are you brushing off every woman that comes over? Not interested in women?"

"Oh yes, I love women... but I'm only interested in one. Georgie Lane."

"Is she your girlfriend then?"

Elvis' eyes turned dark.

"No, I'm trying to convince her to be."

Jack had never been in love for real and felt curious about what kind of woman that had made the heartbreaker Elvis fall at her feet.

"What makes her so special compared to all others?" He made a gesture around the bar where there were quite a few pretty girls.

"I loved her from the first moment I saw her..." Elvis started but was interrupted by Jack who snorted so beer sprayed the table.

"Seriously?! How does one even do that, when you don't know the person? Isn't that just something people say because they want to sound romantic?"

"Remember I'm Italian, we're passionate. Do you want to hear the story or not?"

"Yeah, yeah, go on..."

She didn't see it coming

"There is just no one else as beautiful and brave as her... ", Elvis continued. "...and smart and funny and kind hearted. She is a medic in the Army, you know, and she gets me like no other woman ever could."

He nursed his beer like he had lost interest in drinking it.

"Sounds like you're really lost, mate. So, what's the problem? How come she is resisting your charms when everyone else falls head over heels?"

"Well, because she is not everyone. And because I had my chance and screwed it up. Maybe I should mention that I am trying to win her *back*."

"How did you screw up?"

Elvis looked tormented.

"We were going to get married..."

"Married?! Then you were serious for real? I didn't know that"

"Yes, we were serious. Engaged, had a real wedding planned and all, but in the morning of our wedding day, this girl I had dated a short while before Georgie, knocked on my door and told me I was the father of her baby girl. I panicked. I felt I had to be there for the baby and that I could not go through with marrying Georgie that day."

"Then what, you told her, and you broke up? She left you because you had a baby?"

"No, as I told you I panicked... I'm not proud of myself but I sent by best man, Charlie James - your "favourite", to tell her I couldn't go through with it."

"You stood her up at the altar?!!!"

She didn't see it coming

“In wedding dress and all, yes. Then I didn't see her for two years. I tried to contact her sometime after the wedding, but she refused to have anything to do with me, so I couldn't even tell her what had happened.”

Jack tried to take in the story. He liked Elvis, but he could not understand how any man could let the one he loved, *if* he really loved her, stand by the altar alone on the wedding day. He also wondered how one could truly love a person, yet not feel certain that she would stand by him and stay even with the baby, and instead chose to run in the other direction rather than trying her at all. Especially if she was as brave and kind hearted as Elvis claimed. It seemed Elvis was in some ways a less brave man than Jack had thought him to be and he could not 100% feel with him in this story.

“How did you meet her again?”

“My team and I were called to Kenya, to intervene in a hostage situation. A British soldier and a voluntary worker were held hostage by Muslim terrorists. When we arrived, and got the briefing pack, it turned out that the primary was Georgie. I thought I was going to puke in that moment... but I pulled myself together and we got her out. The other hostage was killed, so it was a closer call than I like to think off.”

“Then what?”

“She still would not talk to me, she was so furious even after two years. I think she would rather had stayed in that fucking cell instead of coming with me if she had known it was me”, he chuckled. “First thing she did when she saw my face was to slap me and then she just ignored me. She had moved on with her life and was

She didn't see it coming

engaged to another guy, not interested in hearing my story. Finally, I got a chance to explain though..."

"What did she say?" Jack was captivated by what to him mostly resembled the plot of a daytime soap.

"That I was weak. And she was right of course. Since then I have tried to prove myself to her. To tell her and show her I will be there for her, never fail her again."

But would you not? Jack wondered to himself. If your spinal reflex is to run when life gets complicated, can you ever change that even if you want to?

"We have crossed paths on tour since then and gotten as far now as being friends again, but she has not really let me in. I hope one day..."

Jack wondered if any woman would ever make him feel this way. Like there was no one else. Surely Elvis must be exaggerating how fantastic this Georgie was, blinded by love and perhaps by the fact that she was resisting him. He did not express his doubts to Elvis though.

"Looking forward to hearing the continuation. Another beer?" was all he said.

But all he got to hear was that Elvis soon after had been killed in Afghan. Jack wondered then if he had managed to mend things with his love before he was killed and once again left her alone and heartbroken. He hoped not.

Chapter 8: Looking in the rear mirror

JACK

Then he met her himself, although he did not know it was her at first. He and his team were working undercover in Nigeria, locating and surveilling a group of school girls that had been kidnapped by Boko haram, waiting for order to go in. Peanut had been posing as a drug lord and Jack as a mercenary working for him. Needless to say, Peanut had thoroughly enjoyed playing boss to his boss and taken every opportunity to boss around and make Jack perform errands for him. This afternoon, Jack had stopped by the road in a small village to get some water, when a boy started climbing the car. As he had to keep appearances up, Jack quite brutally threw the boy off the car saying he would snap him in half if he touched it again.

"Oi! What do you think you're playing at!?"

He turned around and was looking at... a dark little fairy, amazingly beautiful, petite yet strong-looking and angry as a bee. Next, he noticed the fatigues, the uniform of one of his fellow soldiers, but as the show had to go on he stepped towards her, threatening her.

"Why don't you run along, love, because you're gonna look mighty fucking silly putting your makeup on with a broken arm."

Inside he flinched at his own words, this was not how he liked to talk to any woman. She did not retreat an inch.

"If you were a man I would beat the shit out of you."

She didn't see it coming

Her voice was kept low but feisty and he believed that she would really have liked to have a go at it, which he kind of would have liked to see even if he seriously doubted she would have succeeded.

“Really?” he challenged her.

Even if this was a fake fight for his part, he felt his pulse beat faster from an adrenaline rush. It was like he did not know if he wanted to slap her face or grab her and kiss her. Of course, he did neither. He had never hit a woman and as for kissing her, it would hardly have been professional. Probably not appreciated by her either.

“Corporal Lane, step away now!”

They were interrupted by none other than Captain James.

Unexpectedly seeing his old antagonist, Jack no longer had to pretend he was angry. How far did a man have to travel to get away from that idiot? Halfway around the Earth was obviously not far away enough. At least the jerk had the presence not to acknowledge him as a fellow officer, so he was smart enough to realise Jack was undercover. Jack did not utter another word, just eyed James and left them, fuming jumped into the four-by-four and drove off, leaving behind a dust cloud.

In the backseat Peanut, dressed the part as drug lord in t-shirt, big sun glasses and bling-bling, sat laughing so tears were running.

“Glad I'm able to amuse you”, Jack said flatly.

“That was quite a show boss! Do you know who that was?”

She didn't see it coming

"James you mean? I know bloody well, wish I didn't."

"No, *her*. Best girl there is, Corporal Georgie Lane. Elvis' girl you know. Or used to be."

So, this was the famous Georgie Lane. He should have understood as he had heard from Elvis she was under James' command.

"I thought they broke up?"

"Just had reconciled when he was killed. He died in front of her. She is a medic but couldn't save him after that bomb went off right in his face. Oh, how she cried at the funeral, I thought my heart would burst too."

Peanut was not laughing anymore, instead the eyes of the hardened soldier were filled with tears at the memory.

Jack felt a completely illogical sting of jealousy. Illogical because Elvis was dead, illogical because *she* was nothing to him.

-OG-

Next time he saw her was at a Boko haram base only a few days later. He was there to discuss a presumptuous drug deal on behalf of his "boss", Peanut and spotted her at a distance just as she and a few others from the section were taken away. It was obvious they were prisoners and he was immediately filled with concern.

He appeared unmoved but cursed on the inside, knowing their lives were in immediate danger. He left as soon as he could without causing alarm and drove the miles to the camp where he now knew that 2 section were based. He was mad because saving them would blow up his carefully planned covert op, but he knew

She didn't see it coming

there was no alternative. They would not stay alive for long at the hands of Boko haram.

When he learned it had been an off-piste tour probably initiated by Corporal Lane, he was even more furious. Furious that the twat James was there and apparently unable to keep his men in line. He did not waste time or energy on his feud with James though. He knew they had to act fast while there was still someone left alive to save, so he put his anger aside and focused on that the task at hand.

Later that day they succeeded to extract the four captured British soldiers but had to leave behind the Nigerian army medic who was imprisoned with them. After a distraction manoeuvre involving an exploding van at the entrance of the Boko haram compound, Jack and his team blew up a hole in the wall of the cell where the hostages were held. Kingy, Rab and Maisie quickly followed their rescuers to the van, but Georgie first refused to Jack's dismay.

"I'm not leaving Ade Wally!" The Nigerian army medic was tied to a pole in the yard, where he had been badly beaten. Jack wanted to rescue him too but knew they were running out of time.

"Get into the truck now!"

"I'm not leaving without him!" she insisted.

"Our job is to extract you foreigners. Get into the truck NOW! GO!"

Damn woman, why couldn't she just obey orders? It was far too dangerous to stay there. As soon as the element of surprise was over, and they organized themselves, the Boko haram soldiers could outnumber them and then no one would make it out of there alive.

She didn't see it coming

She followed him then, but the look in her eyes was one of contempt rather than one of gratefulness for being rescued. It made him immensely frustrated that she was so headstrong, but he had to admire her courage. He too hated leaving a man behind, no matter that he was not British Army. He was a human and had worked alongside with them and deserved to be rescued, but sometimes tough choices had to be made.

During the briefing afterwards, he took out his frustration on 2 section and especially her, as she had initiated the whole off-piste tour. James ended his part of the briefing by saying he was proud of the section and Monk spontaneously started clapping hands, relieved everyone was gathered again. Jack, who had stayed quiet at the back of the room up to then, brusquely interrupted him.

“What are you cheering for? You have achieved precisely *nothing!* Less than nothing because that Nigerian medic won't be cheering now”, he spat.

“We never should have left him!” Georgie said, and he knew that her conscience must be heavier than the other's as it was her fault Ade Wally was at the Boko haram's men's mercy, but he thought she deserved it.

“This is what happens when you go off-piste, chaos follows. Chances are those kidnapped school girls will be sneaked away and never seen again. Our entire undercover operation has been blown, so clap that you fucking morons.”

He saw that his words hit her hard, but this was not the time to be sympathetic. They had played with lives and needed to understand that and learn that there were consequences of not obeying orders. Oozing with fury he left them.

She didn't see it coming

Later that evening, when he had calmed down he found her by the bedside of a captured, injured boy soldier they had in the provisional med centre. From a distance Jack watched her tend to him, unconcerned that the boy would willingly kill her if given half the chance. She looked tired but otherwise unaffected by the day's events. And beautiful. He wondered what she would look like with her hair down instead of the strict regulation bun. What she would look like without... 'Stop it Jack!', he told himself. 'She is one of the lads, nothing else.'

When she was ready attending to the boy, she came walking towards him and noticed he was standing there.

"I gather this was the second time you were being held hostage", he said.

"Occupational hazard I guess."

"Never happened to me."

"Well, it was my own fault" she admitted.

"Or Captain James" he was still angry that James had not kept his men, and women, in check. If he had done his job as their CO this would not have happened, he had obviously slacked in discipline or no one would have the idea of going astray.

"We were at Sandhurst together" he said.

Why did he say that? Because he thought it would shock her? Because he wanted to impress her? He didn't know. Her reaction was anyway one of surprise.

"You were at Sandhurst?"

"Yeah, in the same regiment. Then I did SF selection while he stayed behind and played mother hen."

She didn't see it coming

He *was* trying to impress her, just could not stop himself. Fuck.

“Do you just hate everyone? “

Impressing her clearly did not work very well.

“No. I liked Elvis.”

Her saw her face change, but he did not know if it was because she would have preferred he did not know of it and maybe would pity her, or because he awoke the painful memory. Maybe both, and he regretted saying the words. Feeling he had to amend it somehow, he blurted out;

“And I quite like you too.”

He had to turn around abruptly and leave because he felt his face turn hot, blushing like a school boy. What the hell! Why did he say that?

He did not like the presence of Georgie Lane one bit. It did strange things to his insides and made him behave even weirder. He was everything but pleased with himself as he crashed on his bed that night.

- OG -

The next twenty-four hours became more eventful than any of them had bargained for. They had planned to leave for Lagos next day, but at dawn a large group of Boko haram soldiers gathered outside the gate, shooting and shouting. It turned out the captured boy soldier was the leader's son and they were determined to get him back. The situation was grave, but Georgie came up with the idea to switch him for Ade Wally in a government-controlled area. That would both achieve getting them out of this situation and get Ade Wally back, without losing face by

She didn't see it coming

negotiating unduly with terrorists. It was brilliant, and he secretly admired her for thinking of it.

The exchange had worked out as planned, except for the last part. Ade Wally had been badly beaten and needed support walking to them during the exchange so a girl from the Boko haram group walked with him over the open plain where the exchange took place. In the last second, Ade Wally had managed to warn them that she had been equipped with a suicide vest under her voluminous clothes. During some dreadful minutes Jack, together with Fingers and Georgie, had prevented the girl from triggering the bomb, gotten the vest off and thrown it away just before it exploded. Miraculously, no one was injured. He had been impressed by the nerve and courage of both Fingers and Georgie, but meanwhile he saw Fingers close his eyes unable to look when he tried to disarm the explosives, she did not show the slightest shiver. When they had hit the ground, their feet knocked away by the blast and he asked if she was okay, she had barely seemed affected. She just got up, brushed herself off and said she was fine then started assessing the others like a pro medic. He had to admit Elvis had been right; he had never met a braver woman.

- OG -

When they finally reached the safe-haven of Lagos, an opportunity to take an evening off and go out to a bar, emerged for 2 section and everyone gladly grabbed it. Jack and his men were still on duty this last evening in Nigeria and sober they oversaw that everything went fine during the bar visit. The bar Slinkie's was popular among foreigners. There were other groups of soldiers and apparently a group of happy nurses who had many admirers among the lovesick men. Jack quite enjoyed watching the courtship game which was very obvious to him, seeing it all

She didn't see it coming

from above. He was standing up on a balcony watching over the dance floor when he saw *her*, dancing with Maisie. She was dressed in a simple white strap top and slacks. For the first time he saw her dark hair worn loose, longer than he had thought it to be, falling in soft waves over her shoulders and moving when she danced. And man, she could move... He was mesmerized. He realised after a while that he was doing a shit-job because the only one in the room who had his attention was *she*. He was not even sure he remembered to breathe.

When she came by them to say she had enough and was going back to barracks ahead of the rest of the section he offered her a lift. Partly because he wanted to keep her safe, partly because he was not ready to let go of her for the evening and like this he would get a few moments more. In the car. Alone. Shit.

They drove in silence. She seemed relaxed, but his senses were 100% alert. He noticed exactly how close her leg was to his in each moment, how she moved, her every breath. He did not recognise himself. This is crazy, he thought. I have got to do something. As they drove up to the gate outside barracks he had the brilliant idea that if he just slept with her he would get her out of his system, get rid of whatever this was.

“I’ve got this bottle of single malt in my single room and we could... share”, he blurted out when he had stopped the car.

She let out a coarse little laugh.

“You actually couldn’t sound creepier.”

He knew he should let go, but he could not. His lips were moving and making sounds without his permission.

She didn't see it coming

“Oh, come on. Time is short, why beat about the bush? Come tomorrow and you will never see me again.”

“Yeah?”

She looked amused, not offended. That had to count for something.

“Well, I diffused a bomb and saved your life. What else has a guy got to do?”

“I can genuinely say, it's not you - it's me.” she said and laughing again she jumped out of the car and walked off.

He sat there for a while, feeling deflated, like the biggest idiot on Earth. Pathetic attempt! Of course, there was not even the smallest chance she would say yes. At least, he told himself, she had no idea how he felt right now and that was a slight consolation. He started the car and headed back to the others.

When a drunk nurse later that night threw herself around his neck he did not push her away even if his interest in her was nil. Instead he brought her with him and in the morning ensured he was seen openly with her. As he had hoped, Georgie walked by at a distance and acknowledged them with a wave. Now she would for sure not think his proposal was anything more than a try to get laid, but it left a bitter taste in his mouth. He had achieved what he wanted. How come it felt so bad? He was relieved to leave Nigeria and her behind.

Chapter 9: To live by the rules

JACK

Time and different ops went by. He kept his mind occupied and with distance between them he thought he had just had some minor crush on Georgie, enhanced by the circumstances under which they met. Or not even a crush. He had not been with a girl for a long time, hardly even seen one during tour. He had been horny, in the mood for a shag and that was all. He was glad to be back to his usual self and enjoyed working with the special forces team, Spanner and Peanut.

When he first joined them right after the death of Elvis, he had done it respectfully, mindful that they just had lost a friend and appreciated boss and given them time to accept and adapt to their new leader. He knew they were extremely skilled, so he could trust them to do their job without keeping them on a short leash.

The covert op in Nigeria was their first longer operation together, stretching over several months. By then he felt like they were working like a smooth machinery, both as a performing team and as newfound friends. He had not been sure how his men felt though, until Spanner one evening said:

“You know boss, I’m really glad we got you as CO after Elvis. If we had gotten someone I didn’t like or respect I think I’d have left the Army.”

“And now you’re staying?”

“Yeah, definitely.”

“Same for me” Peanut chipped in.

She didn't see it coming

Jack was moved to hear this, as he knew they were not the kind of guys who said things unless they meant them.

“That’s the best compliment you could give me. I’m proud to be working with the two of you.”

When they returned from Nigeria, and he was a bit rattled from the encounter with Georgie, it felt good to have the routines with the lads to fall into again although he never let them know what had happened. Not only because he felt ashamed, but he also knew that to them she was Elvis’ girl and always would be. He would not risk their trust in him by exposing he had tried to sleep with her.

Then came Belize and changed the rules of the game.

- OG -

They were called to Belize to help rescue two British soldiers who had been caught in the jungle during a training exercise going wrong. When he learned that they were from 2 section he was willing to bet Georgie was one of them. That girl was attracting trouble. He was not sure what he felt about crossing her path but, now that he was his usual balanced self again, he figured he would be able to shut off any emotions whatever they were.

Upon arrival in Belize they were briefed that one of the two missing soldiers was Captain James, who was seriously injured from having stepped into some kind of animal trap in the middle of the jungle. The spear-like trap had penetrated his thigh and he was unable to move. Indeed, it was like Jack had guessed, the second soldier was Georgie but this time she could hardly be blamed for having brought trouble upon herself. As the medic, she had volunteered to stay with James alone in the

She didn't see it coming

jungle, as she was the one best equipped to take care of the wound and that could make the difference between life and death in this climate where wounds easily got infected. The situation had been further complicated when they found out they happened to be in the territory of a ruthless drug gang who were likely to try to kill them at sight. Over the course of a few hours, the training exercise had turned into an extremely dangerous real situation and now Jack and his men were needed to resolve it.

During the briefing, Jack realised that all their lives would be in danger during this rescue mission, as the local bandits were far better acquainted with the territory than them and had the upper hand. They had no choice though and he immediately ordered the men to prepare to move. Their hope stood to a tracker James had been wearing, which was sending out signals with regular intervals and might enable them to locate them, hopefully alive and without crossing the path of the bandits.

The next days were an ordeal. The climate was hot and humid, the terrain was difficult as they had to cut through thick vegetation and walk through deep muddy waters where dangerous animals likely were lurking. They had a backlash when they localised the tracker, abandoned, lying hidden in a village that had been burned by the bandits, but no sign of the two missing soldiers. It seemed like James and Lane had been forced to move from where the rest of the section left them, despite his serious injury. The rescue team had to accept that the chances of finding them alive now were minuscule and their hope of locating them stood to the drones they used for surveillance from above.

Jack refused to give up hope. He was unusually irritable with the men because he worried they would not reach James and Lane in time and pushed himself and the

She didn't see it coming

others to their limit. He did not waste any energy thinking of if his efforts were just what they would have been for any rescue mission, or if there was something more to it this time. Something else than his sense of duty driving him to frantically search through the jungle.

Hope emerged when there were signs that Georgie and James were on the move to a deserted air field and the rescue team headed that way. It was a miracle that Georgie had managed to move the injured James that far and the others realised that lost soldiers must be desperate.

When they finally approached the old air field, Jack was warned that the drones had located the bandits, coming from the other direction. Then he heard the Brigadier's voice over the radio giving an order.

“Do not engage unless it is absolutely inevitable.”

Jack pretended there was disturbance in the communication and did not confirm receiving the order. There was no way he would stand by whilst James and Lane were killed in front of him just for some political game. His priorities were crystal clear, he would save them at any cost now that they were so close.

In that instant, they heard shooting and sprinted, dreading they would be too late. James was nowhere to be seen, but Georgie had taken cover and was firing back at the thugs. Alone she would hardly had stood a chance for long as she was one against many, so help arrived in the last moment.

“Down, Lane!” Jack shouted as they fired, only for a split second allowing himself to feel relief she was alive before he focused on the men with guns. The fire only

She didn't see it coming

lasted a few minutes and the end of it, the bandits were all dead. They were ruthless, but the soldiers were far more skilled with their weapons.

The fire ceased, and he reached her, his heart now thumping hard with relief. She was dirty and bruised but seemed to be fine. He would have liked to catch her in his arms and tell her everything was okay now but that was simply not how things were done.

“How many times do I have to come rescue you Lane?”

It was all he harshly managed to say, and she did not look best pleased that, again, it was him of all people coming to her rescue. Even if he did not want to admit it to himself he had nurtured a small hope that she might look at him with a hint of admiration, some kind of gratefulness or even awe that he in alpha-male style had fought his way and found them in the middle of the jungle, but he saw none of that.

Her attention was not even really with him. She was preoccupied examining a young boy who had been shot by the bandits. It appeared he had helped her and James over the last days, and without him they would never had made it. The light in his eyes was now gone, forever extinguished by a shot to his head. Jack found it tragic but had seen too much over the course of his career to allow himself to feel for people he did not know, knowing sadness would drown him if he got started. Georgie held the dead boy in her lap, rocking him like a baby. For a moment she was lost in sorrow for the wasted life of a good person who had not yet left adolescence, and now never would. Then she snapped back to the urgent situation, remembering the captain who was still alive but in a bad state.

“We need a medevac! Immediately!” she told Jack and that set him in motion, made him stop just staring at her.

She didn't see it coming

Captain James was lying in a deserted building, hot with fever and unconscious. The injured leg was now infected and from what Jack could tell it looked very serious. He silently wondered if James would be able to keep his leg and walk again.

Soon, the helicopter came to transport James to the nearest hospital for the most urgent treatment. Trucks came to evacuate the others from what was now considered a crime scene. Even though the dead men were criminals, they were civilians who had been killed outside any war zone.

In the truck, Jack sat beside Georgie and with the adrenaline vanishing from his body, he felt strangely weak. Maybe because of the deep relief that she was safe and sound. He would have liked to comfort her after the last days' ordeal but did not even dare to put an arm around her shoulders or pat her on the back as he could have with any of the men, out of fear she would not welcome it.

Back at the camp and mission accomplished, he had barely had time for a shower and shave when he was summoned to the Brigadier. Jack knew him since before and this Brigadier was a commander which he did not think very highly of, as he always seemed more concerned with how things appeared than with what was actually achieved. The conversation that day maintained that impression.

Jack was told that it had been both bad judgement and disobeying orders to intervene and kill the bandits. As they were civilians there would be repercussions and the diplomatic costs would be dear. It was easy to read between the lines of the Brigadier's words that the preferred choice would have been to leave Lane and James to their fate. Jack was almost choking with anger but realised it would not help his case to talk against the officer in command.

She didn't see it coming

“Currently I'm doubting you are fit to be a special forces captain and you will need to prove yourself before you continue in that role.”

This he had not expected.

“What? Am I being demoted, Sir?”

“You can see it anyway you want, Captain McClyde. You will remain a captain but not for your regular unit.”

Jack began to fear where this was going.

“After the injury of Captain James, 2 section are a captain short and will be for the foreseeable future, I dare say. You will take on that role”

“Sir...”

“Not a word, this is an order – this time to be obeyed if you wish to have a continued career in the Army, McClyde.”

For fucks sake! Things could not get much worse. Beside leaving the team and job he loved, he would have to lead a much less experienced team and among them Georgie Lane. He had no valid reason to refuse - the last thing he wanted was to tell the Brigadier that he found one of the soldiers dangerously attractive. Instead, he would have to bury those feelings deep inside and suck it up. With gritted teeth he saluted the Brigadier and left to take on his new, unwanted role.

- OG -

Six months later, 2 section with Jack in the lead were sent off to Bangladesh. Officially it was a humanitarian mission but for his part also a covert operation few knew of due to its sensitivity, ironically involving the Brigadier. In his own opinion,

She didn't see it coming

Jack had managed being commander of 2 section quite well up to now, by following a set of simple but strict rules he had set up for himself.

Never to be alone with Corporal Lane.

Only talk to her as the job required.

Never touch her and avoid being too close to her.

Be at least as hard on her as on any of the others.

And never let her think he would repeat the suggestion to spend a night together.

Living by that he thought he was doing fine, even if he suspected 2 section would disagree.

During the past six months he had drilled them harder than they ever had experienced under James' leadership. He knew that it did not make them like him particularly, but he wanted a section that was fit for purpose, the secret purpose he had, and that was priority one. If Corporal Lane did not like him, it was just a perk which made his life easier.

Yet, it turned out that much was not needed to rock his solid ground. One morning he went running in the early hours before the others woke up. To stay as fit himself as he required the men to be, he had made an early morning PT his habit and he was pushing himself near maximum every time. Coming to the end of his run, he rounded a corner and abruptly bumped into Georgie. To keep them both from falling he instinctively grabbed her and for a few seconds their bodies were close. Close enough to feel the form under the clothes and each other's body heat, close enough for her to feel the smell of his fresh sweat and for him to feel the pleasant

She didn't see it coming

smell of some shampoo or soap. He noticed her breasts pressed to his torso and immediately backed away.

"Are you okay? What are you doing? Why are you up this early?" he asked in one breath. He thought he behaved like a fool, but she did not seem to notice.

"Following your orders, Sir. Going for a run. You told me I'm too slow, always coming in last so I try to improve that."

He could not complain about her determination, yet he felt terribly annoyed, mostly because he was knocked out of balance in more than one sense.

"Crack on then Lane but look where you're running next time".

He returned to his quarters and it was like he still had the touch and feel of her lingering on his body like a burn. He had to shake that off quickly as he was preparing for his own "death" the following day, so he headed for the showers to literally wash her off together with the sweat from the run.

- OG -

Everything had been meticulously planned in preparation for a VIP reception for the Brigadier. There were the official preparations including 2 section participating in a parade, and there were the secret preparations Jack made to fake his own death, so he could continue his covert operation. He had on several occasions visited the intended location for the garden party to plan where the mock bomb was to be placed for him to "discover", where he would run with it to be detonated, where he would disappear to afterwards and be picked up. He had decided that a small gazebo was the perfect place for the detonation. It was located at some distance from where most guests would be mingling, and it would be empty once

She didn't see it coming

the string quartet that was to play classical music there had a break. On the gazebo's pillars he had attached a couple of small, hidden explosive devices that would stand for the actual explosion, causing enough material destruction to make it believable. The mock bomb he would be holding would only cause an explosive sound and lots of smoke, but not harm him. Even though everything was prepared in detail he was feeling tense before it all got started, one could never know if something unexpected would happen.

In the end, everything went according to plan. The only thing he had not taken into account was Georgie standing staring right at him when the bomb was about to detonate, her face frozen in fear and disbelief. It hit him then what he was putting her through, considering the history with Elvis.

When their eyes met, he had wanted to tell her; "I'm not another one dying in front of you. You will see" Then came the explosion and smoke and he did not see her anymore.

Away from Georgie and 2 section he had been able to focus completely on his task and had secured the final piece of evidence that the Brigadier was heavily involved in the drug trade. He was still in doubt when it came to Inspector Chowdhrey however, not knowing if he was corrupted or, on the contrary trying to stop the yabba from reaching the refugees. That was why he had followed Chowdhrey yesterday when he saw Georgie and had brought her back here.

Had it really been necessary to bring her with him to his room or had he just wanted to be with her? He had broken his rule to never be alone with her and when she unexpectedly touched him... All his self-discipline had vanished like he had been

She didn't see it coming

washed over by a tsunami wave. That light touch and it had been like he had no willpower anymore, only senses and emotions.

Flashbacks from the night went through his mind; Georgie over him with her dark hair hanging like a curtain around his face, barely letting her lips touch his, moving her body... him being over her while she moaned and spoke out his name and he felt her tense and shudder inside, around him, and then he let himself go too... him kissing the soft skin of her back, tasting her, smelling her lovely scent, while she was lying content, half asleep.

In that moment, he had nearly told her that seeing her to him perfect shape in the morning light, the curve of her back, her buttocks, he could not help but hearing this silly John Mayer song* playing inside his head because this was just like it. He bit his tongue and swallowed the words as he felt that even if it was true, it would come out sounding totally cheesy. Instead he had kissed her back and told her he did not want this to end.

Just thinking back at the night, he felt his body reacting. He realised now that he had been badly mistaken that time in Nigeria when he had thought that he by sleeping with Georgie would her out of his system. She was in no way gone, instead it seemed she was flowing through his veins like quicksilver.

He would not want this undone, but neither could he afford to let it happen again. There are no army regulations stating what dead officers should do, but in a few days, he would “resurrect” and then there would be no excuses if he was not fully focused on the job. He could not allow himself to lose sight of the task at hand, not even for a second. No matter what both his heart and his groin inconveniently told

She didn't see it coming

him, he knew he could not involve himself with Georgie but had to keep her at a safe distance if he wanted to stay a professional soldier.

**The song Jack was thinking of was John Mayer's 'Your body is a wonderland'*

Chapter 10: The hit

GEORGIE

Georgie's night away did not render many questions upon her return. After all, the lie that she had been offered shelter by a woman from the clinic was easier to believe than the truth would have been. Even to her it was equally unbelievable that Bones was alive, and that she had slept with him – more than once and without regretting it. She giggled at the thought of what the others' reaction would be if she told them that, but of course she kept it to herself. As the days passed she found it harder to believe that it had happened. Had it really, or was she becoming delirious from the heat and the hard work?

Two weeks went by without any message from Jack. This was longer than he had seemed to anticipate so something must have gotten in the way. She got increasingly restless and pushed herself at the clinic to keep her mind occupied. Whenever she met the Brigadier, she had to fight to hide her contempt and she longed for the day when he would be seized. She could not understand how a British officer of his rank could involve himself in something so petty and so ruthless, as being involved in drug trade.

On a more personal level, she was often wondering what Bones/Jack was doing now. In his absence, he almost became two persons to her; Bones, the rough captain they all had known and dreaded; and Jack, the warm, gentle and seriously hot man that had been her lover for one night. She could not know if there would ever be anything more to it. She was not even sure what she wanted but he was intriguing and impossible to keep out of her head during the quiet evenings.

She didn't see it coming

Neither did she know how Jack had planned to contact her. Finally, one day at the clinic, a village boy handed her a note. Her heart pounded with excitement as she opened it.

Time to move. Brief C.J. & 2 section. Await further instructions.

J

Not that she had expected the message to end with “*Lots of love, XXX*” but she could not help feeling a bit deflated for a second. Then she shrugged her shoulders. How stupid, of course this was not the time for being personal, not even if he wanted to.

“You don't bring personal to battlefield” she reminded herself in a whisper.

She left the clinic early and went looking for Captain James in his office and knocked on the door.

“Permission to enter” he said, and when he saw her added, “Relax, Lane”.

She noticed that he looked a bit pale and his dark eyes were a bit unfocused, as if he was somewhere far away in his mind.. She was immediately concerned.

“Are you all right?”

“Yes, I think so” he said, still seeming a bit absent. Then he finally looked at her for real and seemed to snap back to the present and even gave her a wry smile.

“Yes! Yes, definitely! I'm just a bit shaken.”

“What Charlie?”

“I just face timed with Molly.”

She didn't see it coming

"And? Not any bad news, I hope?"

"On the contrary." He hesitated briefly, but then went on with excitement in his voice. "Okay, I have to share this with someone! When Molly came visiting me in rehab in Warwickshire and we made up... well... we really made up, if you know what I mean."

If the words had not been enough, his blushing cheeks told her the rest.

"You mean to say you had make-up sex?" Georgie smirked.

Captain James could use rough language with the men and did not shy away from profane jokes, but when it came to his personal life and especially Molly, he was normally very polite and private. 2 section had not even known he had divorced from his first wife until him and Molly finally had revealed their relationship many months after the return from the Afghan tour where they met.

"Hum, well, yes...Something like that."

"Okay?"

"The last weeks she has been feeling sick... in the mornings."

"Are you saying what I think you're saying?"

"We're having a baby, Georgie! She just told me now she had taken a test and it was positive!"

"And you're glad, right?"

"Yes! I'm ecstatic! I'm just a bit shocked too", he grinned "I mean, we had decided we wanted this now, but we both thought we would start trying when I got back

She didn't see it coming

from this tour, and that it might take some time before we actually got pregnant, but now she will already be three months pregnant when I come home!"

"I'm so happy for you two Charlie! It will be the cutest baby in the world, I'm sure."

She had to give him a big hug and she was thrilled that things were going this way. She had known it all along - Charles and Molly belonged together. They always would.

He regained his composure but the look in his eyes remained that of a very happy man.

"Don't tell anyone, please. Early days and I think Molly would want our parents to know before 2 section, even if they are family to us too in a way."

"You don't have to worry, I won't tell anyone. Pinkie promise."

"Enough about me, , you were looking for me for something else I reckon?"

"Something else entirely, I'm afraid."

When she had finished telling the story to him, he shook his head in disbelief. She had omitted the part that she had spent the night in Bones' room because Captain James was the last person she wanted to suspect what had actually happened. Instead she told him that Bones had caught her on the way from the clinic one day and they had talked for a while. Luckily, James did not question this.

"So, you're telling me that Bones is alive, he faked his own death to be able to get to the Brigadier, who is a drug dealer, and now Bones needs our help to complete the operation? That's a lot to take in!" he sighed. "I thought I had already had my share of shocking news today. But of course, even if Bones and I never see eye to

She didn't see it coming

eye we will stand by him, like he has stood by us in the past, if he has evidence against the Brigadier.

They both thought back to the numerous situations in Nigeria and Belize when Bones had saved both their lives, risking his own. It was time to pay back.

“Now, let's go brief the others so we're all prepared when we get word from Bones”

- OG -

Next, things were happening quickly. Now that Captain James knew everything, it was him Bones contacted directly, communicating officer to officer. A secret encounter was arranged between the two and at the end of it, James was fully convinced that Bones' story and evidence held up. Plans were completed, and 2 section briefed about their role.

Over the last weeks, Bones had solidified the evidence incriminating the Brigadier but found out that Chowdhrey was not involved. On the contrary, Chowdhrey had been doing his own investigations of other members of the police as well as the Bangladeshi general who was the close acquaintance of the Brigadier. Likely, it was him who once had involved the Brigadier in the drug trade. Now Bones, supported by the recently arrived Spanner and Peanut were collaborating with Chowdhrey and the plan was to strike simultaneously against all the identified criminals. Bones, his team and 2 section would take on the Brigadier, which was the only one within their jurisdiction, and leave the rest to Chowdhrey and his men.

The raid took place two days later, at the break of dawn when the Brigadier was still snuggled up in bed.

She didn't see it coming

Bones, Spanner and Peanut secretly joined the gathered 2 section in the early morning for a briefing before the operation was initiated. They had all been informed that Bones was alive, and the Brigadier was a corrupt drug dealer, and were not sure which was most shocking. They had found it hard to believe Bones was not dead until he now stood before them in the flesh with his usual grim look. They almost expected him to start shouting that they were a miserable bunch he could not trust to join him on this mission, but surprisingly he smiled warmly even if he spoke with his usual sarcasm.

“Good to see you again guys. Bet you're really happy to have me back to kick your lazy arses. Anyway, as I know Captain James already has informed you, this is the operation I have tried to prepare you for. This is no fucking pointless parade to impress some top brass. This is the real deal and I need you to be at your best today because we don't know how many we will have against us. It may all run smooth or there might be a blood bath if they put up resistance, but I intend for all of us to come out of it alive. We are going to catch a ruthless criminal, I'm counting on you.”

His in this instant steel blue eyes wandered over them as he spoke, over Georgie like any of the others and it disturbed her that it stung a little when he did not linger on her even for a second longer than on the others or with any flicker of emotion. When he was standing there tall and broad-shouldered, dressed in full kit and armed, he seemed very far away from the man she had spent a night with. For a moment, she wished that she could peel all the layers off from Bones and have Jack back. He had told her it would be like this, had even warned her it would be hard, but she had not realised it would feel like this. Like shit.

She didn't see it coming

The operation was initiated, the camouflaged team moving silently and swiftly between the buildings. On command, 2 section hid close to the Brigadier's quarters prepared to assist when Bones and his special forces unit strike. The Brigadier was taken completely by surprise when armed men stormed his bedside and he found himself looking down a rifle. Especially, he was shocked to see the operation lead by Bones, alive and well.

"You! How?" he hissed, spitting and with a look of disgust and fear his face.

"I have a few tricks up my sleeve. Aren't you glad to see me? I thought I was your favourite captain. I'm thrilled to see *you* - in cuffs, as you should be." Bones said mockingly.

The Brigadier was brusquely pulled out of bed and carefully watched as he got dressed.

"I have done nothing to deserve this! You will regret this, just wait! I will have you demoted to a shit hole!" he warned.

"I doubt that. There is plenty of evidence that you're involved in drug trade here and our orders come from the highest instance. I bet it is you who will spend the rest of your days in a shit hole, or as close as we get to that back in civilised UK. I wouldn't mind leaving you here in a prison full of mosquitos, but it seems like they want me to bring you home."

Spanner held on to the now cuffed Brigadier and started to lead him away. When the group came outside, 2 section cheered lowly to themselves, but Georgie thought of Bones' words to them in the past, never to relax until it an operation was over

She didn't see it coming

and to stay focused on the surroundings, so she tried to do that even if the presence of Bones himself ironically was a distraction to her.

Suddenly she saw a movement at the corner of her eye. Someone sneaking up from behind one of the buildings pointing a gun at the trio Bones, Spanner and Brigadier.

“Bones, Spanner - down!!!” she shouted and without thinking ran and threw herself at Bones to push him down. Normally she would never had been able to bring down his much more massive body, but he had registered her warning and let himself fall to the ground with her. Spanner pulled the Brigadier to the ground just as the gun fired with a deafening sound.

The shooter was a Bangladeshi man and either he was loyal to the Brigadier and had wanted to free him, or he had wanted to silence him now when it was obvious that he was exposed. He was quickly wrestled down and disarmed by Fingers and Monk and cuffed like the Brigadier.

Georgie lay panting on top of Bones. She realised felt no pain, the only sensation was his hard body under hers, so luckily she had not been hit. Their faces were only inches apart, his eyes meeting hers.

“Are you unharmed” she asked and, in a whisper, added “... Jack?”

There was a hint of the corners of his mouth tugging upwards at the secret intimacy.

“I'm fine. Thanks.”

“I figured it was my time to save your life.”

She didn't see it coming

“Glad you did, it *was* about bloody time. Are you unharmed, Lane?”

“Yes” she said, now a little stiff as she noticed the formal way he addressed her, and she regretted she had used his name. In one sentence, even one word, he had made it blatantly clear that he was nothing more than a superior officer to her. They got up, brushed themselves off and his attention was shifted to the surroundings without any acknowledgement of a special bond between them what so ever. Their night was obviously an exception to be forgotten.

The combination of the adrenaline rush which the sight of the sniper and the shooting had caused, and the complex feelings Jack's presence evoked made her slightly unsteady, but she swallowed, clenched her fists and tried to keep herself together. Wished that she was the same emotionless machine that he seemed to be, standing beside her looking grim but also incredibly handsome. She had to forget about them and just be grateful he was safe and sound. Then he was gone, moving on to the next part of the raid, to support Chowdhrey in the hunt of all who had been identified as part of the drug trade.

Chapter 11: Already gone

That evening they were all gathered for another briefing, jointly led by Bones and Captain James, who seemed to temporarily have buried the hatchet. James had assumed his favourite position, standing with feet shoulder-width apart, arms crossed over his chest. Bones was leaning nonchalantly against the wall, looking more relaxed but from experience they all knew not to be fooled into thinking he was any less alert than James.

When Georgie saw the two men next to one another at the front of the room, both natural leaders yet so different, she fleetingly wondered if being ridiculously attractive was a requirement for acceptance to Sandhurst. It almost seemed like it. Elvis had been a Mediterranean kind of gorgeous which few women resisted, Captain James could even be called beautiful with his chiselled features and dark curls in manner of old movie star and Bones was extremely good-looking in a rougher way. Especially in a moment like this when he apparently had not had time to clean up after the activities of the day. Was it stupid to find a man a shitting hot just because he had smudge on his face? Well, to be honest that was not the only reason. Funny she had never found him this attractive before. She looked away, did not want to be caught staring.

“Relax guys, well done today”, James said.

Bones nodded in agreement.

“Yeah, well done 2 section! Your support was instrumental to what we achieved today. I never thought I would say it, but I'm fucking proud of all of you and grateful

She didn't see it coming

to you, James for a good collaboration on this operation. It was a complete success. The Brigadier and quite a few others are safely locked up in cells tonight.”

“What will happen to them next?” James asked.

“The Brigadier will be shipped back to UK for trial, escorted by special forces. The Bangladeshi people that have been arrested ought to be prosecuted too, but as you know there is plenty of corruption here, so you never know. Maybe they will be out of jail in a few days, but it is not for us to worry about even if it is frustrating. I was pleased though, when we discovered that Inspector Chowdhrey is not one of the bad guys. He was just making investigations about the trade too and has helped us in the final stages of the operation.“

Everyone nodded confirming they were relieved too, because they had come to appreciate Chowdhrey and his sweet wife. The Brigadier had been a shock in one way, but he would not be missed. He had never been anyone's favourite leader, even if they most of the time had thought Bones worse.

“My SF unit's job here is done, so we will leave tomorrow, escorting the Brigadier. My sincere apologies that I'm leaving so soon after our reunion as I know I'm breaking your hearts by not staying”, Bones continued with his usual sarcastic grin, knowing well that they would be relieved not to have him back as their CO.

For a second, he met her eyes, but his face remained impassive, then turned to James.

“I assume 2 section will stay here as planned to complete the humanitarian outreach project?”

She didn't see it coming

“We will” James confirmed. “Three weeks remain, and we will make the most of them. I think we all can be proud to have been part of cutting the yabba trade off, at least for some time. That will help the refugees. Now lads, go get some scoff and go to bed. And Bones – we're glad to have you back alive.”

The two captains gave each other a curt nod and even stretched as far as a handshake. Georgie wondered if it was something of a truce she was witnessing here. Maybe not friends, but at least not outright enemies anymore.

She left the room with the others. She did not want to draw any attention to her and Jack and she did not think he wanted to talk to her anyway. Nothing he had said today or showed with his body language had indicated that. He was indeed very talented at putting on a stone face, she had absolutely no idea what the man was thinking.

- OG -

Later, after dinner, Maisie and Georgie sat on a bench outside barracks. Temperature becoming almost pleasant at this hour and they were winding down before going to bed. The rest of the section was relaxing too, Bones and his men had not joined them for the meal and were nowhere to be seen. Georgie was not sure if his absence was a relief or not.

“What a day!” said Maisie. “Even if Captain James had told us Bones wasn't dead, I almost shit my pants when he came back! I mean, after that explosion and the coffin and all, it was like seeing a ghost. Even if he is the hero of the day, I prefer James over him and his PT and drill and bollocking. I'm seriously happy he won't be our commander again.”

She didn't see it coming

“No, it seems he is back with his SF unit now and they will leave.”

Georgie was also glad Bones would not be her commanding officer but for other reasons than Maisie.

“We don't have much time left of this tour either. What will you do when we come home? When we have R&R before we start regimental duties?”

“Normal stuff. See my family of course, get a haircut, go shopping, have a night out with my sisters... other than that I don't know. It will be great with a few weeks off duty, I feel like I seriously need it this time. Will you go visit Rab in Leeds?”

She playfully pushed Maisie in the side.

“What? Why would I do that? I see enough of him at work, why would I want to see him when I'm finally off duty? It will be a relief to get rid of him and his big schnauz for a while.”

“Oh, come on Maisie! I heard you say that you had seen a photo of him as a boy scout on his mantelpiece. How could you do that if you hadn't been to his house? No need to pretend.”

Maisie realised she was cornered, and sulking said “Okay, I might have been there once.”

“Finally, she confesses!” Georgie giggled. “Tell me more! What's the deal with you two, are you a couple or just friends with benefits?”

“A couple, I think... I hope. I really, really like Rab. He is just different from all other blokes I have been out with.”

“He is a great guy and I think you're good for each other.”

She didn't see it coming

"It is just hard that we can't show we're a couple on tour. We thought about if one of us should transfer from 2 section but then we wouldn't be together for months."

Georgie knew that a transfer would be the right thing to do as far as regulations were concerned, but also understood why it would be hard for them. She would miss any of them if they left and had no intention of exposing their relationship even if it was not per protocol.

"The evening the boss had died, or not died but we thought so then...", Maisie continued.

"Yeah?"

"Rab told me he loves me... and I said I love him too."

Georgie smiled fondly at the thought of two secret love birds among them which only she knew of. She envied them for being such good friends and lovers at the same time. That was the best anyone could hope for.

"Enough about me and Rab! Let's talk about you instead. It has been a year since Elvis now. How do you feel, really?"

"I'm okay I guess."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that I feel like I live again, not just surviving", she smiled bleakly. "Some days are still hard, but many days are good too."

"But is it only work that feels okay? I mean, would you feel ready to date someone else, or do you still think about him all the time?"

She didn't see it coming

“Not all the time but sometime every day and it still hurts, but less. More like a sore bruise than a bleeding knife wound. I don't know if I ever will feel ready to date but I guess I just have to try it at some point, force myself back up in the saddle, unless I want to end up as a lonely maiden with twenty cats.”

She said this with both a hint of sadness and a little smile.

“Twenty cats?!” Maisie snorted. “It is very difficult to imagine you as a lonely maiden. I think you will find someone and otherwise you will always have the Army. No cats needed, we can go to Nepal and I will find you another goat, or two.”

In Nepal, when Maisie just recently had joined 2 section and Georgie had not warmed to her yet, the experienced medic had been mad with the fresh recruit for risking her life pulling out a goat from a demolished building, because she had mistaken the goat's bleating for a baby screaming.

“Thanks Maisie, that's sweet of you, but I have decided to give dating a try again this time when we're home. If I get desperate for a goat I promise, you will be the first to know.”

Still laughing, Georgie hugged her friend good night and went off to bed. She was grateful for this friendship. Before Maisie joined 2 section Georgie had never realised that she missed a female friend whilst being on tour, but now that she had one, tour was even better. She was also grateful for the dim evening light as she had felt herself blushing when Maisie asked about dating. Memories from the night with Jack had flashed by, made her feel a surge in her abdomen. Seeing him today had made the sensual memories more alive, so alive that she could almost feel his naked hot skin to hers again, but the man himself seemed very distant.

She didn't see it coming

Yes, she would date if the right guy came along, and that would obviously not be Bones, but now it was time to shut off such thoughts, sleep and then complete the last weeks of this Bangladesh tour.

- OG -

Even though she was knackered, she found it difficult to find peace and fall asleep that night. She lay in bed, bothered by the humid heat, listening to the crickets outside and the sound of the others as their breathing got slower and movements fewer until they fell asleep one by one. She thought of the events that day, thought of that Jack was near, still somewhere here at the base, and that he would leave for UK in the early morning together with Spanner, Peanut and the Brigadier.

Eventually, she got tired of just lying there, instead got up and went for a stroll on the gated grounds. No one was to be seen, it was dead quiet at this hour as even the crickets seemed to have called it a night.

Suddenly someone grabbed her hand and pulled her into one of the buildings. It was Jack, standing in front of her, framing her body with his as she found herself standing with her back pressed against the wall. The eyes that had been steely this morning, were now a softer shade of blue as they met hers.

"I couldn't leave without doing this" he said, with his hand tilted her chin up and bent down to let his lips come crashing to hers... Pressed his lean body to hers and kissed her deep and hard again and again until her body was burning... burning from the sun that had risen and now was peeping through the window, waking her up. She had fallen asleep and kissing Jack was nothing but a dream. Morning had come, and he was already gone.

She didn't see it coming

She had no idea when she would see him again, if ever.

Chapter 12: Home sweet home

Back in Manchester it was autumn. The tree leaves were sparkling with colours, the weather was still quite warm and sunny but the air crisp and had a different smell to it than in summer. This was Georgie's favourite season and she felt it was a fresh start, like starting a new semester back in school.

A few years ago, when her then fiancée Dr. Jamie Cole and she separated after she decided not to marry him, which unsurprisingly killed the relationship, she had gotten herself a small but cosy flat in Manchester. It could be seen an unnecessary luxury when she spent so little time there, but she just could not imagine moving in with her parents again. Instead, when she was working, she lent it to her little sister, Lulu.

Lulu was now sitting in front of Georgie, pretending to be cross with her for making her move out of the flat for the weeks she was home.

"You're just a spoiled brat" Georgie laughed at her. "If I had a regular job you would have to live with mum and dad all the time or get your own place."

"Hey, I'm not spoiled! I'm working hard when I'm staying here, watering your plants, feeding the cat and all that!"

"Shut up! I don't even have a cat and as for the plants I think they look half-dead. Now, stop whining, get your arse out of that sofa and let's go shopping instead. I want something nice for our night out."

Sometimes Georgie had a hard time to adjust when she returned home. Like she didn't know what home was; here in Manchester or the places the army took her to

She didn't see it coming

on tour. This time however, she just felt good about being here. Hanging with her two sisters, talking to her mum, some days helping her dad out at his private practice. They had always been close, and he was the only one who asked her more than superficial questions about what she got to see on tour. She told him some things but far from all. It was not that she intentionally held back, just that many things were difficult to share with someone who had not been there. Talking about an outreach project like the one she just had been working on, was of course easier than the tours to outright war zones like Afghan. Helping sick and weak people was common ground for them, but Max found it harder to stomach thinking of the dangers Georgie exposed herself to when she treated wounded soldiers in the battlefield than when she helped refugees.

This afternoon and evening, however, was only about girls' fun. Now when she had the chance to indulge in it, she realised she had missed it. When she went out with her squaddies she never relaxed 100%. As she wanted to remain one of the boys, she was never comfortable dressing too bare or getting plastered. She usually chose trousers over short skirt and only had a beer or two. She never flirted with anyone when her work mates or superiors were present, not even anyone outside the squad. Her only exception whilst being on duty was Bones, that she had allowed herself to end up in bed with him. With Elvis she had held it strictly professional until they came home from that tour and even if no one but Bones knew about *them* and had no reason to be indiscrete, it disturbed her slightly that she had allowed herself to slip. She still tried to get her head around what had made that night so special, that she had given herself to him so completely that it still made her blush whenever she thought of it.

She didn't see it coming

Tonight, though was different. Off duty, no rules and she would just enjoy herself. She totally deserved that.

Wearing a new little black dress from the afternoon's shopping tour, Georgie made the last touches to her makeup and hair whilst sipping some white wine. Her sisters were watching her from the sofa where they had some wine too, Marie sipping, Lulu rather taking large gulps.

The three sisters were very different, Marie the big sister, sensible, with a steady job and going out with the same boyfriend since many years. Georgie, the middle sister, in truth an ambitious workaholic but with an equally adventurous and dangerous profession and a love life track-record that had been more of a roller-coaster than she wished it to be. Lulu, the capricious little sister who still had not figured out what she wanted in life and was not bothered about it, shifted between temporary jobs and university courses that she seldom completed. She happily dated but so far never settled down with any guy longer than a month or two.

Georgie put on some lip gloss and frowned at herself in the mirror.

"How serious you look all of a sudden", Marie said and threw a cushion at her.

"I was just thinking I'm still young."

"Of course, you are, but isn't that something good? Nothing to frown about I would say?"

Georgie turned around from the mirror. "I was thinking I'm still young and it's time I have a go at dating again." She smiled faintly.

She didn't see it coming

“Oh Georgie, we know it's not easy for you, but I'm so glad to hear that my gorgeous sister will give dating a chance again. You really deserve to have some fun in your life! And love.”

“It's not fun if the date is a disaster” Lulu chipped in. “Last week I was on this horrible date...”

She was silenced by another cushion thrown by Marie.

“We're supposed to support Georgie taking up dating, not discourage her, you moron! We only want to hear about good dates!”

“Then Lulu has nothing to share!” Georgie teased.

They all giggled as they left the apartment, headed for a new trendy bar in the city centre.

Georgie seldom thought about her looks and that made her an even more noticeable girl. She had a naturally beautiful face which did not really need makeup. She was petite and graceful, yet strong-looking due to all the PT sessions that came with the job . When she made an effort like tonight, people were definitely turning their heads after her. In the new dress she was wearing, showing her slender figure and with the long dark hair in loose waves, she was stunning and the fact that she was oblivious to it just made her more attractive. Even in a bar full of young good-looking people dressed to the nines, she stood out.

She had so much fun this evening. The group of three sisters were a magnet to many men in the bar and they chatted, flirted, danced and even sang along with the tunes as the night went on. For Georgie, it was like having a mental cleanse

She didn't see it coming

from much of what had happened the last years, mentally rinsing off the sorrows at least for one night. It made her feel like the 26-year old she actually was again.

A few hours in on the evening, she stood talking to an old friend from school, Annie. They had not seen each other in ages but had met in the bar. Suddenly an unknown, blonde guy was standing next to her. Georgie thought he was yet another man who wanted to start a conversation with her but enjoyed talking to Annie so much after all this time, so she turned to him and said. "Sorry, but I'm really busy talking to my friend here."

She did not mean to be snappy, but so many guys had already approached her to buy her drinks, talk, ask for a dance or phone number and now she was really into the conversation with her friend and did not wish to be interrupted.

"That's all right as long as you don't mind me having a few words with my sister", he said with a cocked eyebrow, looking like he maybe found her a bit full of herself. Georgie's eyes darted between the two of them and both Annie and the guy burst into laughter.

"Georgie, this is my big brother Matt. Don't you remember him?"

She had vague memories of Matt. He was four years older than them and as children that gap had been so wide that they never moved in the same circles, except for when Georgie came to their house to play and the two girls disturbed the teenage boy. Now she laughed too.

"I'm so sorry, I didn't recognize you actually. I had so much fun with your sister and didn't want to be interrupted."

"... by some random bloke hitting on you" he filled in and smiled.

She didn't see it coming

"Matt, do you remember Georgie Lane?"

"Sure, I do. You're that odd tomboy who always dismantled Annie's dolls."

"Oi! Only to put them back together again. I was playing doctor if you must know."

"Oh, well that finally explains it. I always found it a bit creepy to find a doll without a head or arms. What are you up to nowadays?"

"Pretty much the same."

He gave her a look of surprise.

"Not removing dolls' parts, trying to put people together. I'm a medic in the Army."

He laughed again.

"You nearly had me worried about your mental health there for a while."

"I can see that", she smiled and realised that for the first time this evening she was flirting with genuine interest, because not only was he good-looking, he also seemed really nice.

Both him and Annie asked many questions about Georgie's job as an army medic and seemed interested for real. It turned out Annie was working as a teacher and Matt had started an IT company some years back and it seemed he was successful, although he did not appear the type who boasted about it. The trio had such a good time that they stayed put in their corner, chatting and having drinks. They were joined by Marie and Lulu every now and then, and friends of Matt and Annie also came and went over the course of the evening. Georgie felt she was happy content to remain in their company, maybe especially Matt's. She glanced at him sideways where he stood. He was good-looking. Like, really good-looking, Blonde, lean and

She didn't see it coming

pretty tall, although not as tall as Bones she for some reason registered. Matt would have had to stand on his tiptoes to be able to place his chin on the top of her head, something which Jack had done with ease as he pulled her close to his chest. She pushed that thought to the back of her head and focused on that Matt also had a great smile with a dimple in one cheek and, brown kind eyes, so big they made her think of a deer, and he seemed to have a great sense of humour.

'I would quite like to see him again', she thought but she did not feel ready to be the one to ask for a date, even if it was stupid. Perhaps it was a lame excuse for postponing dating a bit further, because maybe it was the date rather than the asking she was not ready for. Luckily, his thoughts were going in the same direction, but *he* did not have any qualms about asking her.

"I'm headed for home now" he said to her. "Tennis game tomorrow morning" and she felt a slight disappointment before he continued "...but it would be nice to see you again. Without our sisters, if you would like to?"

"Yes... yes I'd like that."

"Great then! Just give me your number and I will call you."

No fuss, just like that she had a date decided with a cute guy who was not a squaddie, not an officer and seemed nice and generally uncomplicated. This had really been a fabulous evening of much needed fun.

Chapter 13: A great date and alarming news

Matt called her already next day around lunch time.

“You said you only are home for two weeks, so I thought why waste any time? Do you want to meet up for dinner and drinks tonight? Are you free?”

She *was* free, and she wanted. Although, meanwhile she was preparing herself for the evening, thoughts of Jack suddenly emerged in her head. Where was he now? What was he doing? Was he ever thinking of her? Then she cut off the string of thoughts. Why think of a man who was far away and likely did not care for her at all, when she had a date set right here with someone who seemed to be a top bloke?

He picked her up at seven and took her to a fancy yet cosy sushi restaurant where she had not been before. The evening went by much too fast because she had such a great time. He was well funny and an attentive listener. He told interesting things about himself but spent at least as much time asking about her. After dinner they strolled through the streets to her door, where he gave her a peck on the cheek and said good night. He did not ask if he could join her in, and she was not prepared to ask him yet, but she felt happy and gladly accepted when he asked if she wanted to meet up tomorrow again. She went to bed with the feeling that this could be the start of something great.

The following day was a Sunday. When Matt showed up at her door, he brought a picnic basket he had prepared, or rather a backpack and asked her to put on hiking shoes. They drove east out of Manchester to the Dovestone reservoir. She briefly wondered if this was really his kind of date, or if he had chosen it because he thought she would like it due to her job. Either way, she appreciated it because this

She didn't see it coming

was her kind of date. Not that she did not appreciate being wined and dined too, but this felt more genuine. They hiked and talked, enjoyed the outdoors and the sun. She noticed that she sometimes had to slow down her tempo walking uphill because even if he was fit it was difficult to keep up with a trained soldier.

They eventually climbed up some rocks and found themselves standing with a spectacular view before them. This time of the year the landscape was amazingly beautiful with clear skies, reflected by the water below them and the trees' colourful fireworks in yellow, orange and red. Georgie took it all in, inhaled the autumn air deeply into her lungs, held it there for a while feeling like some part of her was healing and finally exhaled. To Matt it sounded like a sigh.

"Something wrong?" he asked, concerned.

"No, not at all. It's just so beautiful and calm and it's been such a long time since I was here. You know, when I'm on tour, I come to many places that are beautiful but there's always a war going on or other suffering of some kind. If there wasn't we wouldn't be needed there. But this..." She made a gesture to the scenery below. "This is home, it's just amazing and it feels like I'm recharging by batteries somehow. Healing a bit."

She realised it was the second time in his company that she felt like part of her was healing, healing because life for a moment was not harsh and filled with sorrow, but uncomplicated, fun and comforting.

"Then I'm glad we came there." He looked down on her with a smile which made his kind eyes crinkle at the corners in a way she really liked.

"So am I."

She didn't see it coming

It felt natural to take a step closer, wrap her arms around his neck and kiss him. It felt good to kiss a man who she knew was interested in her, who was not a mystery and who had made an effort to plan a nice date. Mysterious and unapproachable men were really overrated.

“And I’m really glad you did *that*” he said and kissed her again.

They continued the walk, holding hands, talking about anything and nothing and just had a great time. When they found a small village pub they had a break there. She enjoyed this uncomplicated life to the fullest and could hardly remember a time when it had felt like this before. Was it with Jamie? Or was it even longer ago, with Elvis before he jilted her at the altar?

When they returned to the city in the late afternoon, Georgie invited him to her place and they ordered Indian take away and relaxed, watching a movie. Just as natural as it had been kissing earlier, it was natural that the ending of such a day was for him to join her to bed. He was a considerate and gentle lover, but even if she did not want to admit it to herself, she was missing the fire from when she spent the night with Jack because with Matt sparks were not flying all over the place. He did not make her have to bite her lip to stop herself from moaning and screaming his name, he did not make her tremble and reach a shattering climax, but she enjoyed his attentions and told herself that this was a good start, this had potential and would only be better when they knew each other more intimately.

Georgie only had one week left home now and to make the most of it they met every evening after he quit work, spent time together and learned more about each other.

“What will you do now when you go back to service?” he asked. “Will you be sent abroad again.”

She didn't see it coming

"No, now we have six months of regimental duties. That's usually the way it goes after a tour, we're not deployed again immediately. Regimental duties aren't the favourite part of the job but it's a good way to get a break between the tours. Sometimes they're mentally exhausting."

"But still you like it?"

"I do, for most part. Sometimes it's difficult and even the things I like about it can take their toll, like when we try to help people in our outreach projects and many still die. Wars kill so many people beside the ones that are actually hit by bullets. And then there's the natural disasters, you feel really powerless against those."

He nodded, not knowing what to say. He wanted to be there for her, but he was not used to life being so complicated or cruel as what she voluntarily faced in her line of work.

After a moment's hesitation she added; "I will have time off every now and then during these six months, so I can come home most weekends, sometimes longer... and see you. If you like?"

She was really growing fond of him and hoped he would say yes. He was relieved at the change of subject.

"Is this the girl who told me to sod off the first evening we met in the bar?"

"I didn't say that! Not really, and I didn't know you were Annie's brother or that you were so nice, and funny..."

He interrupted by pulling her to him in a hug.

She didn't see it coming

“I would love to Corporal Lane... and now I'm taking you to bed because I will miss you so much when you're gone so I really have to take the opportunity now to show you by giving you my most special treatment...”

Laughing and kissing they headed for the bed.

Sunday afternoon Georgie changed her civvies for uniform, put her hair up in the regulation bun and adjusted the cap in the right angle on top of it. Matt drove her to the station, kissed her gently goodbye and smilingly waved as the train departed. As she sat back, relaxing and the train took her closer to the regiment, she felt happy. She felt glad to meet her friends in 2 section again, glad that Matt would be there when she returned home next time. However, she came to return much sooner than she had expected and under other circumstances than she would have wished.

- OG -

After one week back in service, she got a call from an upset Marie.

“Georgie, are you sitting down? Sit down, please. Dad has had a heart attack, less than an hour ago. He is alive, thank God, and they have taken him to the hospital. Please come home as soon as you can, please tell me you will. We need you.”

Georgie felt as if her world froze. ‘Not dad!’, she screamed on the inside. They had had far too little time together yet for him to go, there was still so much she wanted to do with him, say to him, so many hugs not yet shared.

- OG -

Max Lane had fallen to the floor in his home on a Sunday afternoon. Ambulance had arrived quickly and taken him to the hospital. This was where Georgie, who

She didn't see it coming

after having explained the situation to Captain James immediately had been allowed a leave joined the rest of her family. It was apparent that both Marie and Lulu had been crying, their eyes glossy and red-rimmed. Their mother, Grace was instead completely paralysed and just sat still on a hard plastic hospital chair, staring empty in front of her. Max and Grace Lane had met when she was 16, he 18 and had not lived any part of their adult life without one another. They had shared every dream and been each other support every single day. The heart attack came out of nowhere, as Max always had been healthy, and for Grace it was impossible to imagine a life without her love and life partner.

When Georgie arrived, they hugged for long and all were relieved that she was there now.

“How is he?”

“They're telling us he is stable now. He is getting the best possible care and they've been so nice to us.”

“He will survive?”

“Yes, it seems so, thank God, unless he has another attack” Marie said, and Grace let out a low whimper and rocked from side to side at her words. Marie lowered her voice “...and we don't know yet how he will recover from the first one, what state he will be in. It seems we will know more within a couple of weeks when they can assess the damage to the heart muscle tissue for real.”

Georgie felt like crying, but there was no room for that. Her father was the centre of this family, the one all depended on. Not because he was the male but because of the person he was, stable and loving. She knew that if he would not be able to

She didn't see it coming

fulfil that role, her mother and sisters would turn to her for that strength. She would have to be the solid rock they needed right now, even if she on the inside also felt like a little girl who needed comfort. She did not know how she would be able to give them that support when she returned to service, and she did not know how she would be able to cope herself.

It took a day before she called Matt, she was not used to him being a part of her life yet and was not sure how he would react in a situation like this. He turned out to be a wonderful support as soon as he heard what had happened and came to join them at the hospital.

"I'm here for you" he had said while taking her in his arms. It felt so good not to have to be strong alone for a while, but even then, she did not manage to cry. The tears and fear remained a hard knot in her stomach which she was unable to let out.

She remained home for two days, until it was sure that Max would survive, but they were still waiting for more news about his expected recovery when she had to return to barracks. She felt awful about going this time, when all she wanted was to be close to her family, but she did not know what else to do.

Chapter 14: Unexpected solace

When she reunited with 2 section, they were all very sympathetic and kind and she thought that she had the best section in the world. Yet, this was not where she wanted to be right now, and she found it impossible to stay focused on her daily tasks. Her mind kept drifting to her dad and how he would recover, and to her devastated mum. Georgie did not know how she would cope if Max passed away. Imagining either of them without the other was impossible. It also made her wonder anew if *she* ever would find anything like it. What she had with Matt was... good, but could it be as solid and everlasting and in a modest way all-consuming as her parents' love was? For them there had never been anyone else. For a while she had thought it was like that with Elvis, but she had been wrong. Was there any chance it could be like that with Matt? Or was that soulmate kind of love only found by a few lucky ones in this world?

To make bad things worse, Captain James delivered some disturbing news, rocking her world further. To Georgie it was not news really, but she had repressed that this was about to happen or maybe hoped it would not happen so soon.

The day after her return, he gathered the section, looking serious.

"Guys, I have both some good and bad news that I want to share with you."

They exchanged glances, wondering what was to come.

"First of all, on the good side, you know that Monk was allowed permission the other day as his baby was due. I have received news that he got a little baby girl, both she and the mother are well. Not sure how Monk is coping though."

He smiled, and all laughed. Their friend has grown increasingly anxious as the expected date of birth came closer and they had been joking that one could think that it was him and not his girl, who would have to press out something the size of a cabbage.

She didn't see it coming

"The other piece of good news is that Molly and I are going in the same direction."

He paused, scratching the back of his head as if he was a bit embarrassed.

"Errm... We're having a baby five months from now."

"Shit, Boss! ... Congratulations!... Boss, does this mean you slept with the medic at least once?... Does Molly know she is having a baby with a Rupert? I think someone should tell her, maybe she can still change her mind..."

They all cheered at this wonderful surprise, for a moment drowned him in congratulations, well-wishes and cheeky comments. He took it all in with an equally amused and proud smile. Once it got a little less noisy he continued.

"I won't comment how the baby was conceived Fingers, but thanks for the congratulations. Unfortunately, this will have some other consequences...or unfortunately may be the wrong way to put it because this is a conscious choice for my part, which I'm happy about. Both Molly and I have decided to leave the Army. The tour to Bangladesh was my last and I have already handed in my notice and it was accepted. I will stay with you until your new captain has been assigned."

Several jaws dropped as he delivered this message. No one looked happy, half of them devastated and all of them were moved despite that they were hardened soldiers. It was apparent that Captain James himself was deeply touched whilst telling them this. His voice was as steady as always, but he was rocking back and forth on his heels as he spoke, arms folded over his chest and his eyes were also suspiciously moist. The Army had meant so much to him for so long and 2 section above all. This was not a decision he had taken lightly, but even though he loved the Army, there were other things he loved even more. Like a certain chestnut-haired medic with green eyes and a smile that could touch his heart like nothing else.

She didn't see it coming

2 section were all upset because they appreciated him so much as a leader and person and despite that Georgie had known this would come, she was now feeling absolutely devastated.

'Not now!' she thought. 'I need him to be our captain now.'

She did not say it out loud though, just joined the others in congratulating James. She did not want to burden him with her insecurities when she knew this choice must be hard for him as it was. When the meeting ended, she left the others as she felt she needed to be alone.

Instead of heading in direction of her quarters, she went for a walk. Let her feet take her anywhere they pleased, over the parade ground, through corridors where her steps resounded as her boots hit the tiled floor and made her feel more desolate than ever. A familiar but unexpected figure came striding towards her through the deserted passageway and for a split second she wondered if her mind was playing tricks on her, or if it really was Bones. He had not noticed her yet, as he despite his determined step was looking done on his phone, multi-tasking walking and texting. She had not seen him since the last briefing in Bangladesh. That was as less than two months ago but with everything that had happened in between, meeting Matt, her father's illness, it seemed much more distant. Nevertheless, she felt butterflies in her stomach at the sight of him. By reflex, she briefly considered to hiding somewhere without knowing why for sure, but it would both have been ridiculous and difficult, so she just walked on with thumping heart. Now he tucked his phone in his pocket, looked up and registered her too. His eyebrows were raised in surprise before he resumed his usual impenetrable mask. Not unfriendly but not exposing any emotions either.

She didn't see it coming

"Corporal Lane."

"Captain McClyde", she saluted him formally as were expected from a private meeting a superior ranking officer. "You're here?"

"It appears so", he smirked. "Working on a counter terrorism operation here in UK for a while."

He did not develop it further and she knew there was no point in asking.

"I take it the end of the Bangladesh tour went well?"

"Oh, yes. Uneventful compared to what happened before."

She meant him being blown up and the events involving the Brigadier, but just as she said it she realised he might think she eluded to what had passed between them and wished she could take it back.

"Well, hard to beat that", he said, and she wondered which part of it *he* was thinking of.

There was a slightly awkward silence and neither broke eye contact.

"You have a beard," She noted out of nowhere, simply because she did not know what to say. It was non-regulation for officers to sport a beard and she wondered if he was granted an exception because it was needed for the current job, or if he simply did not give a fuck.

With grin he let his hand stroke over his own chin, touching it as if he was unused to it too and he needed to remind himself it was there.

"Yeah, so?"

She didn't see it coming

"I just never liked beard much."

Why did she say that? It was quite rude and absolutely none of her business if he grew a beard, even if it was true that she did not fancy facial hair much on any man. This was the worst conversation ever, could anyone please beam her away from here? How was it possible that things could be so awkward with someone you had been so intimate with? Or maybe that was the whole reason. When he was standing only a few feet away, wearing his barrack uniform as if it was tailor made for his lean muscular body, it was impossible not to remember what he looked like underneath and be affected by his presence. She could only pray he did not notice.

"Saves me a few minutes in the morning which I frankly can use for better things than shaving", he smirked.

A flash of a newly awake Bones, tucked between sheets, stretching his supremely fit body made her stomach twist.

"Sorry, I don't know why I said that", she hurried to add and felt her cheeks turning hot. This was really not her week at all and suddenly she felt exhausted, tired at keeping appearances up; for her family, for the colleagues, for him.

He looked a bit perplexed but did not seem offended, instead he glanced around them, but nobody was near.

"How are you, Lane?" Now he was scrutinizing her face and she got the feeling he noticed other things than her blushing. The bags under her eyes maybe, but she could impossibly share how she felt with him.

"I'm fine, Sir... I'm great... I mean, I'm fine."

She didn't see it coming

“That’s a hell of a lot ‘fine’ but I feel less convinced for every time you say it. How are you, *really*?”

There was an unexpected hint of concern in his voice and to her dismay she felt her eyes filling up with all the tears she had not let herself cry. It was most unwelcome but something about his presence triggered it. She did not dare to speak because she knew tears would start flowing freely if she did, so she just shook her head.

“Come here” he said, took her gently by the elbow and led her to a bench in a secluded corner. He sat her down and when she refused to meet his eyes, he took her hand, wrapped it in his larger one.

“Tell me”, was all he said.

Then it was like everything burst and all the tears she had been holding inside came flowing like a minor waterfall. He pulled her to his chest and held her there for a while, never minding his uniform got wet from the salty liquid or that this was not done between officer and private. For a while she allowed herself to rest there, with the reassuring hold of his arms around her, the uniform fabric a bit itchy to her cheek but comforting because *he* was underneath it.

When she finally looked up, she feared he would be judging her for being unable to hold herself together but saw nothing of the sort in his face. His expression was not the blank one he so often sported either and she found it difficult to interpret. She pulled away from him and wiped her eyes. He let his arms drop and retreated an inch too.

“Oh, what is the matter with me?! It is the second time I’m crying with you and I just feel so embarrassed.”

She didn't see it coming

"Don't be. Take your time. This is not like you, what is happening?"

"Everything! My dad had a heart attack some days ago. Captain James is leaving the army to have a baby. I don't know what to do with my life, what I want or should do. I want to be in the army, I think, but I also want to be with my family, my dad... and I want a family of my own, but I want to stay with 2 section and I don't want things to change."

"Okay..." he let her words sink in and tried to grasp it all as there was obviously several issues on her mind. "I'm sorry to hear about your dad. How is he?"

"He will live if he doesn't have another heart attack, but we still don't know how bad the first one was, how he will recover. My mum is just so devastated. They've always been together, you know, life-long love, and she doesn't even know who she is without him. I can't be there for her, because I must be here and work... and when I was home for a few days I felt like I wasn't enough. She needs me to be strong, but I don't feel so strong, I'm terrified too. I'm sick and tired of having to be the one that says that everything will be alright, like she needs me to do. And I *do* that, even if all I really want is to crawl under a blanket and cry, but I haven't even been able to cry. Not until now – and now I wish I could stop."

He nodded, reached for her hand again and she allowed him to take it. He squeezed hers briefly as if to transfer some strength, then let go again. Strangely, just holding his hand felt more comforting than being wrapped in Matt's arms had the other day.

"I understand that is tough and that you don't want to leave him. Have you considered compassionate leave for a while? That could be an option for you in this situation."

She didn't see it coming

Of course, she knew about compassionate leave, but it had not occurred to her it might be an option for her. She thought that applied only in really serious situations, but maybe this was considered as one. She wiped her nose as it seemed some tears had strayed that way, sniffled and knowing she must be an unattractive mess right now, she tried to pull herself together.

"I hadn't really. I will think about it. It would be such a relief not to be away from my family right now."

"I'm sure you would be granted a longer leave for a situation like this, but even so Lane, when you are home, try to be honest with your mum and the rest of your family about how you feel. This will be far too heavy for you if you don't."

"They expect me to be the strong one, they need me to keep my shit together..."

"And you are! It doesn't mean you don't have the right to be worried or sad, on the contrary."

It made sense when he said it.

"Then you mentioned James? He is leaving the Army? And a baby?"

"Can you believe it? Molly is pregnant and they're both leaving. He told me already in Bangladesh and then I was only happy for him, but now I realise it means we will have a new captain and I don't know what that will be like."

"You mean to say it isn't always easy to have a new leader?"

She glanced at him and thought she saw a teasing flicker in his eyes, but he remained serious, as she was. She shrugged her shoulders.

She didn't see it coming

"Well, it changes things and it may not be for the better. I always liked working under Captain James."

"And you don't want 2 section to change..."

"No, they feel like my anchor point. So much has happened over the years when I have been with them, but they have always remained the same. Now it feels like everything is changing and I can't do anything about it."

"And that makes you feel unsure if you should stay in or leave and what you should do with your life if you do?"

He did not mention her wish to have a family of her own. She was grateful for that as it was something she had blurted out unintentionally and she was not keen on discussing it with him really.

"Yeah, that pretty much sums it up."

He was quiet a moment, as if measuring his words before speaking again:

"There is one thing we can be sure of in life; nothing is constant. Things will always be changing whether we like it or not. Either you can be passive while the world around you changes, maybe in ways you don't like, or you can decide how *you* want to change your life and make it happen. Not everything will go your way always, because sometimes things that suck just happen, but at least one can try. Like with 2 section, it *will* change for sure. You already know James is leaving. Monk is a father now I heard, and then you don't know how long he stays an army man. Rab and Maisie... sooner or later one of them will have to transfer so they don't work together."

"You know about them?!"

She didn't see it coming

"I wouldn't be a very good commander if I didn't know my team, would I? As long as Rab and Maisie weren't too obvious and did their job I chose to ignore it. I know you think I just came in as an unsensitive bulldozer, but I noticed more than I let you know. Anyway, what I'm saying is, the others will make changes, so you should think about how you want things to change for *you*."

Again, what he said made perfect sense, but it was still complicated.

"Okay... but how do I figure out what I want to do and be when I grow up?"

"I didn't say it is easy, but we're already all grown up by now, aren't we? Is it time we make our own decisions."

"Yes, I suppose we are... but sometimes I just wish someone could figure it out for me. Life. Make all the difficult decisions."

"I don't think you do, really", he smiled. "If your parents had decided for you, you would have been unhappily married to a doctor now and left the army since long, remember?"

She remembered but was amazed that he did. She sat silent, thinking of what he had said. As they sat side by side on the bench, their hands were almost touching, and she wished now that he would take hers again, but he did not.

"*If* you decide to take a leave, which I really would recommend you, spend some time thinking about what you want. Not just now but also a few years from now. Think about what you need to do to get there. Make a plan."

"Do *you* have a plan?"

She didn't see it coming

When she first met him, she had taken him for a rough brute. In addition to being far more intelligent and compassionate than the first impression implied, she also had a growing feeling he was a strategic thinker who did not enter any situation without a game plan.

He looked surprised at the question in return but chose to answer.

“Not for *everything*, but I have a few things I want to happen in my life.”

He looked her straight into her eyes and for a moment looked like he was about to add something, but then thought the better of it and did not elaborate further on the subject.

“Why weren't you like this when you were our commander?”

“How do you mean?”

“Understanding. Supportive.”

“I thought I had told you. There's a time and place for everything. It wasn't what you needed me to be. 2 section were a tight, in many ways performing, team already and you had support in one other. You needed an outsider to push you, provoke you even, to get even closer and up your game. The way all of you developed over our months together was impressive.”

She knew he was right, but she liked him better this way.

A corporal named Johnson approached them.

“Captain McClyde, you're wanted in the E building”

Bones got to his feet but turned to her before he left, looked down on her and touched her shoulder.

She didn't see it coming

“I'm sure you will figure out what you want, Georgie.”

Her gaze followed him as he walked away and the feeling of his hand touching her lingered. An odd thought flashed through her mind. Odd because she was with Matt now.

‘But what if what I want is *you*?’

She didn't see it coming

Chapter 15: What do I want?

Georgie decided to follow Bones' advice and already the next day she spoke to Captain James about compassionate leave. He completely agreed that it would be the best in this situation and regretted that he had not thought of suggesting this to her before.

"Go join your family Georgie. You need to be with them and you won't miss out on much here. Let's say one month to begin with, with possibility to prolong if you feel it's needed. I will keep you updated of any news from here, my successor for example."

"Thanks Boss, but please don't make me think of that. I will miss you terribly, you know"

They looked at each other, none of them mentioning the rocky road their friendship had taken for some time but both knowing the other was glad that this was where they were now.

"You will have to come visit us in Bath once the baby has come", he smiled.

"Already looking forward to it."

They said goodbye and then she left for Manchester within the hour.

- OG -

It felt so good to return home and be able to support her family. She felt strengthened after her talk to Jack, both by his words and because she finally had been able to let all her fears out and he then had showed her that things did not

She didn't see it coming

have to be so bad. Slightly hesitant, she spoke to her mum and sisters about how she felt that she was the one who was expected to keep everything together and how she, even if she wanted that, needed their support in return to be able to make it. Grace was appalled, but mostly because she knew what Georgie said was true. She had allowed herself to despair and laid a too heavy burden on her daughters, especially Georgie. Instead of being upset by the revelation, it was the kick in the arse she had needed to turn more into her usual self. Still very worried for her husband, but not completely absorbed of thoughts of negative scenarios that might play out. This was naturally facilitated by Max health improving every day. Soon, he could return home from hospital. He would need a sick-leave of one month or two to recover, but the myocardial infarction had been mild. It seemed he was expected to recover fully and return to his job at the practice although he would have to follow the doctor's advice about exercise and diet.

“So typical that a doctor need advice from another doctor” he muttered grumpily but was very pleased to be home again.

During his hospitalization, Max had worried for his practice and patients, but in his absence, it had been arranged that another doctor which Max knew well, Dr. Rosenbaum, covered for him. As soon as Georgie was not required at home all day to tend to her father, Georgie started going to the practice to keep herself occupied for the remaining time. That prevented her from worrying too much. At the practice she helped Dr. Rosenbaum to the extent she was allowed with the training she had as an army medic. The ailments her father's patients had, were much subtler than the wounds and infections she had to deal with in the army, but she really enjoyed working with the patients.

She didn't see it coming

“You really have a talent taking care of the patients Georgie, the children as well as the elderly. You have never thought about becoming a doctor or nurse? I know you're an army medic, but I mean here at home?” Dr. Rosenbaum surprised her saying, one evening as they closed for the day.

She shook her head, but it was not true. She *had* thought about it her entire childhood, until it almost became a universal truth that she would follow in Max' footsteps. Then the Army had come in between by opening her eyes to other options, and the settled path had no longer seemed enough. That was a long time ago now and she had experienced so much in between, good and bad. Maybe it was time to re-evaluate the options she had if she would leave the Army.

As she took the bus home to her own empty flat, she heard Bones' words echo in her head.

“Spend some time thinking about what you want. Not just now but also a few years from now. Think about what you need to do to get there. Make a plan.”

Maybe the solution to what to do with her life if she left the army had been there right in front of her for a long time, but she had been so determined to choose her own path to see it. If she studied medicine, she would have a career which still could be challenging in many ways, although different from what she had. She could both feel she had a purpose, stay close to her family and lead a more normal life. The kind of life she had shunned when she was twenty, but which now seemed far more tempting.

“Maybe one day I will have a family of my own” she whispered to herself.

- OG -

She didn't see it coming

Georgie was able to get the compassionate leave extended and stay home another month to help her parents. During this time, she also investigated further what it would take to apply for med school. There would not be an opening to start studying until next autumn, so she would have some time to think about if this was what she really wanted, but she would have to submit her application almost immediately as the deadline was already in the autumn. Her grades from school were excellent, she knew she would easily get recommendations from the army and her experience would also be taken into account so from those aspects her chances were fair. In addition, she needed to do an admission test and score high enough. If she then got through to final selection she would have to go through interviews to show she was fit to be a doctor.

She also had to decide which universities to apply to. It was easy to decide on her option number one. It would be Manchester, so she could be close to the family, and close to Matt if everything continued as it was now. However, she would also apply to a few others to increase her chances. All in all, the whole application process would require quite some effort but once she had initiated it she felt excited about it. She did not tell anyone about her plans, though. She did not want to raise any hopes and later risk disappointing them if she was not accepted or chose not to go after all, or have family or Matt influencing her final decision. Also, in this regard Bones had been right. After all, she needed to make the difficult decisions about her life on her own. It was strange how well he seemed to understand her, so well that he understood what she needed before she did herself. Maybe that perceptiveness was just a trait he needed to be a good leader, but she had not realised until now that he possessed it.

She didn't see it coming

Over the next weeks, Georgie used the leave to secretly both take the computer-based admission test, which she passed, and file her applications in addition to dividing her time between the family, her father's practice and Matt. Once applications were submitted, all she could do was to wait for response and the university web pages had helpfully informed her that it could take long so she had better be patient.

The day before Georgie returned to the regiment to resume her duties, she had a long talk with her Max. He was up and about, and they sat in the small library he had created for himself in the house, as he was a fervent reader.

"I'm so glad you could be home during this time, Georgie."

"So am I dad, it would have been awful to be away."

"Not only for my sake, but for mum too. She needed you more than I. You know, your mum and I have been fortunate enough to love each other our whole adult lives."

She nodded, tears in her eyes.

"That makes us vulnerable in a way because it is very difficult to imagine a life without one another, but it has been worth it. All this love, all these years and you girls... if that leaves me vulnerable it was worth it. I would never have traded my life with her for anything else."

"I know dad, and I'm happy you've had that."

"It's what I wish for you too, most of all. I don't mean living in our street here in Manchester, maybe you're not cut out for that, but to live with the love of your life."

She didn't see it coming

"It didn't happen that way for me, did it? Elvis was killed before we even had started our lives together." She was sobbing now.

"Yes, he was and that was so unfair, so very unfair, and my heart broke for you. Still does. But I am also quite sure that the way Elvis loved you, he would have wanted for you to have love in your life even if he was not there anymore, Georgie. He would have wanted your happiness. Don't you think?"

Again, she just nodded, unable to speak. Elvis had been loving and generous. Sometimes an idiot, but underneath that always loving. She knew what her father said was true.

"Don't shut love off, promise me that. Life is too short, both Elvis and I are proof of that."

"You will live for long, dad!"

"Now it seems I was lucky, yes, but I could have passed away. I want to cherish every minute I have, and I want you to do that too and to allow yourself to love and be loved. Can you promise me to try at least? I don't know if it will be this Matt-boy or anyone else, but love is what I want for my girl."

"I promise."

He pecked her on the cheek and they sat in companionable silence a while longer before she left him. His words warmed her insides, but at the same time made her wonder. There had been something in Max' tone of voice and choice of words, that made her feel he was questioning if Matt was really the one for her, no matter how nice and handsome he was.

She didn't see it coming

She spent that last evening home with Matt, cuddled up in the sofa with a movie, like they had spent many evenings together these two months, but her thoughts were not focused on the screen. Instead she was thinking about love and finding the right one. This was cosy, but was she prepared to take it to the next level with him? If he asked her to move in together, would it feel right? It had been nice to share the evenings with him instead of being alone during this difficult time, but she was unsure how much they really had in common. Conversations were entertaining and relaxing but never seemed to reach any deeper than that and the sex was enjoyable but slightly tepid, she must admit. Maybe it was good that she returned to work now, so she could get some perspective with the distance.

- OG -

During her leave, Captain James had been replaced. His successor was a Captain Alvin Aldridge, given the completely logical nickname Chip due to the kids' movie about a chipmunk named Alvin. His reputation was good, and 2 section already seemed to have accepted him by the time she returned, but she could not help but miss James' leadership and felt her resolve about going to med school next autumn grow. The more the decision grew on her, the better she felt about it. Autumn was still far away though. A few months of regimental duties remained, and she would have time for a final tour before leaving the army.

One day in early December, Georgie sat alone in the mess. Earlier that day, she had received a letter from Manchester University. She had kept it unopened in her pocket for a few hours, constantly thinking of it. Then she had sat here staring at it, still unopened for another half-hour, until she finally tore it open a few minutes

She didn't see it coming

ago. When she nervously eyed through the text, it said that she was now a shortlisted candidate and called to her first interview.

Her heart was still pounding with excitement, the chances that she really would go to med school had just increased drastically. Occupied as she was, she had not noticed someone approaching her.

“Corporal Lane.”

By reflex, she straightened her back and looked up. Jack McClyde was standing above her.

“Relax” he said and sat down opposite to her. The beard was gone, and he was cleanly shaven. She had to stop herself from reaching out and touch his jaw line and felt she would have wanted to kiss him there.

“I didn't see you for some time. Did you take a leave?”

“I did. I followed your advice, thanks.”

“How's your father?”

“Much better. Back to work now, even if he has to take it easy.”

“I'm really glad to hear that.”

His fingers tapped on the table surface, as if he was impatient. Or maybe nervous, but that seemed like a less likely option.

She hesitated, then said;

”About last time when we met... when I cried...”

“Yeah?”

She didn't see it coming

"I just don't want you to think I'm this weak and feeble woman who cries as soon as something is hard."

His blue eyes were now fully focused on her and again it her both how incredibly blue and expressive they were if you had a close look.

"I know you're not. You're one of the strongest women... no one of the strongest *persons*, I know. That doesn't mean you can't allow yourself to break sometimes. No one will think less of you, you know."

He was quiet for a moment.

"And did you come to any conclusion about what you want to do with your life?" , he then added almost shyly, very uncharacteristic of him, like it was not his business, but he cared to know.

Suddenly she felt that she wanted him to be the first one to know.

"I think I have decided to try for med school for next autumn. Leave the army. I submitted applications for different universities when I was on leave. Today I got this..." She nodded towards the letter on the table. "I got to know I'm shortlisted and called for interview in Manchester. I'm still a bit shocked but thrilled actually."

Finally, she allowed herself to believe it and smile over it, and he smiled too. He really had a lovely smile the few times when he let it appear on his face and now he surprised her by sounding excited for her.

"Then I'm too! I'm not at all surprised that you passed first selection and I'm sure you will manage the rest too. You will be an excellent doctor. "

She didn't see it coming

"You think?"

"Absolutely. You would have been a terrible nurse, so I'm glad you're not aiming for that."

"Why is that?"

"Because you wouldn't have wanted others to tell you what to do. You're already used to take medical decisions under pressure and as a nurse I'm sure you would have questioned every decision taken by the doctors. They would have hated you and you would have hated them."

"Maybe you're right."

For a few seconds they were just grinning at each other, before both looked away and she cleared her throat.

"You're not going to try to talk me out of leaving then?"

"No... No, I trust you know yourself best. If you feel it is time for you to move on, then we should not keep you and it seems like you have it all planned now."

"Thanks for the advice."

"Don't mention it, I'm just glad if I could be of some help. I need to go now, but I'm sure I will see you around before you resign."

"We will be going on tour after Christmas, 2 section with Captain Aldridge I mean."

"Ah, Chip is your CO now... then you will be in good hands. Where will you be deployed?"

"We don't know yet, but we will get more info this week I expect."

She didn't see it coming

“Okay, if I don't see you before, I hope you have a good last tour and a happy holiday. I was glad to hear glad about you dad and your interview. Good luck with that.”

“Thank you, Sir.”

It felt so strange calling a man who had given her the most sensational orgasm, not once but repeatedly, ‘Sir’, but she did it partly because she wanted him to know how professional she could be. Today was a day without any tears shed, any hands touching or lips crashing, nothing but a supporting talk officer to private. As it should be.

“You will be missed here, though.”

He left, and she sat wondering if he meant she would be missed by the Army, or if *he* would miss her at some more personal level, but after Bangladesh he had never indicated anything of the kind. He had held her briefly when she was crushed over her dad, but it had been in a very platonic supportive way. It seemed like it was best to just forget the whole thing, forget that one hot and forbidden night. She still found that easier said than done, especially as he was so kind every time they met. Through all this he had understood her and given her better advice than anyone. She suddenly had the disturbing feeling that if he ever touched her or kissed her again, she would fall so hard there would be no turning back. It was a good thing she was leaving for tour.

She didn't see it coming

Chapter 16: The art of letting go

A few weeks before Christmas, Chip gathered 2 section to brief them about the upcoming tour.

“I know all of you have experience from several tours by now, but this one will be a bit different. If nothing else, the climate is far colder than you are used to from Afghan or Africa. We will be going to Estonia.”

He pointed it out on a map in case someone was lacking in geography knowledge, tracing the borders to Russia, Latvia and the Baltic Sea with his stick.

“Since approximately a year back, the British Army has presence in Estonia. It is not a war zone and it will not be a humanitarian operation, so why are we there? This is part of a NATO mission in the Baltic states to deter Russian aggression. The British Army has soldiers stationed in Estonia, other NATO countries have soldiers in Latvia, Lithuania and Poland to strengthen the Euro-Atlantic security. British troops are leading a multinational battlegroup in Estonia and you will be part of this for three months.”

Georgie was pleased. This would indeed be a new experience. New country, new people and it was always interesting to work alongside other nations' forces. It was also a relief in some ways that her last tour would not be in a war zone.

- OG -

Before leaving for Estonia, 2 section would get to enjoy a permission that lasted over Christmas and New Year. It would be the first time in years Georgie was home for Christmas and she felt like a child again at the prospect of taking part in the

She didn't see it coming

preparations and family celebration. She left the cooking and baking for the others as everyone knew it would probably taste better that way, but she took charge of decorations and selecting and bringing home the Christmas tree, whilst feeling all giddy with joy.

The day after she had come home, she went shopping for Christmas gifts with Marie. They made it a full day including a long lovely lunch break to hang out and talk just the two of them.

"How are things with Matt?" Marie asked between mouthfuls of a Caesar salad.

"It's fine, I guess. How healthy is a Caesar salad really, what with the bacon, parmesan and dressing?"

She had done her best to push aside the thoughts she had about Bones when they last met, even if she was not sure any relationship could be described as 'fine' when one of the involved had such thoughts about someone else. Marie was not so easily side-tracked.

"*Fine?* Really?"

"Yeah, fine. Why are you asking?"

"For one thing you obviously tried to change subject to the salad, but I was wondering already before that. It seems nice, *he* seems nice, but you don't strike me as being in love." She paused, frowning her brow. "Georgie, many of us are satisfied if we just find ourselves a decent bloke that we like and who likes u back, but you have had thunder and lightning with Elvis. You will never settle for less."

"Who says Matt can't be thunder and lightning?"

She didn't see it coming

"I didn't. I just said you will never settle for less and you drew your own conclusions."

As Marie said it, Georgie knew she was right.

"Is it thunder and lightning with Matt?"

She almost burst into laughter at the thought but did not think it very nice of herself.

"No. No it isn't. I like him, he's nice and I like to be with him. But... aaaw, I feel ashamed to say it..."

"Go on!"

"Sometimes when we kiss for long I just drift away and think about other things... like what we should have for dinner, or that I need to do some laundry... and when he thinks he's going to make me excited by nibbling my earlobes, I always have to hold back so I don't start laughing. It just doesn't do it for me when he does it... and I find his chest hair unsexy, don't know why... He thinks he is the dog's bollocks in bed and he is just... not. There are other things too. I think he may be a bit shallow. First, it was just a relief that things felt uncomplicated and fun, but now I'm starting to wonder if there is more to it or if that is all there is. You know, when you think you're about to get to know someone a bit deeper, but then discover there is no depth. It is a tad disappointing. But I don't know, maybe I have not given him a fair chance. We haven't seen that much of each other, maybe we just need more time."

Marie remained quiet.

"What do you reckon? What should I do?"

She didn't see it coming

"I think you know it quite well already, judging by what you said... I understand it's nice to have someone to be with, but don't let it go as far as it did with Jamie."

"How do you mean?"

"I think you knew long before it ended that him and you would never be enough, but you liked him, so you just let it go on and hoped and in the end that hurt him worse than if you had cut it off much earlier. You didn't do a favour to any of you."

"You're right, I would never want to hurt anyone like that again."

"Then you know what to do?"

"I suppose I do. Poor Matt."

Thinking about it, it seemed that even when Bones was taken off the table and she only considered her feelings for Matt, the right thing would be to break up with him.

After lunch they split up for a while to buy something for each other. It was then she bumped into someone from the past. 'Speaking of the devil' she thought when she unexpectedly found herself facing her ex-fiancée, Jamie Cole. To be fair, in their case *he* had hardly been "the devil". If anyone, the devil had definitely been her when she dumped a man who only ever had been good to her because she finally acknowledged she would never feel about him as she had for Elvis.

She had only seen him once after she cancelled their wedding, the day after it was supposed to take place and she had run off to catch a terrorist with Elvis instead. He had been so incredibly hurt, sad and, rightfully, angry. Now she could see her cruel actions for what they were, a poor excuse to escape from something she knew was wrong. Running instead of sitting down with him in an honest conversation

She didn't see it coming

about her feelings. Still, she had felt then that she had made the right decision and that feeling remained. She had been so relieved to return to duty that time.

Now he was standing right in front of her in *Marks & Spencer*. She felt her body turning into flight mode but, of course, forced herself to stay where she was.

"Hi Jamie, she said politely.

He did not look like he held grudges any more. He looked relaxed, happy and in Christmas mode.

"Hi Georgie, long time no seen."

"I have been away a lot."

"So, you stayed in the army?"

"I did, yes. How are you?"

"I'm fine. Happy - for real, not just something I'm saying."

"You look like it."

She wanted to tell him she was sorry for what she had done to him, apologise again, but words had never been enough to atone for what she had done, and furthermore, it seemed presumptuous to assume it still meant something to him.

Before any of them said anything more, a pretty young woman with a toddler on her arm joined him.

"Okay, now I have everything I need" she said.

She didn't see it coming

"Tamara, this is my... old friend, Georgie. Georgie, this is my wife Tamara and our son, Ben." The woman reached out her hand and gave her a warm smile. Obviously, she had no idea who Georgie was.

"Nice to meet you."

"Nice to meet you, too."

Tamara could not know it, but Georgie meant that in the sincerest of ways. She was so glad and relieved to see Jamie happy and in love again. It was like a weight she had not quite known was there was now falling from her chest.

"Sorry, but we need to move on now if we shall make it to your mum in time, Jamie" Tamara said.

"I'm glad we ran into each other. I'm glad your life seems to be good." Georgie hurried to say.

"It is" he said. "It is the best I could ever have wished for and I wouldn't change a thing. Happy holiday, Georgie."

"Happy holiday, Jamie."

She saw him disappear in the crowd with his family and felt like a chapter of her life finally had closed, and with a happy ending, too.

The encounter with Jamie, strengthened her in her decision regarding what to do with Matt. It reminded her that it was far better ending something that was not right early on than linger too long and hurt someone for real. Now she suddenly felt she did not want to postpone it anymore. She knew she would not find

She didn't see it coming

Christmas peace until it was done, even if she was not looking forward to it. So, after the gift shopping was done she headed for Matt's place later that afternoon.

- OG -

"How did he take it?" Marie asked when they met again at their parents' house that evening.

Georgie shrugged her shoulders.

"He was sad, at least he said he was, but I think he took it quite well. He told me he would have liked to continue but he did not cry or try to make me reconsider, which was a relief in a way. We have not been able to spend *that* much time together after all, so I don't have the feeling he is madly in love with me."

"And now you're disappointed he was not more devastated?"

"No! Well, maybe a little bit..."

They burst into fits of laughter over at the complex feeling that could emerge during a break up, when dreading to hurt someone, yet slight disappointment emerging if the other turned out not to be as hurt as could be expected.

"Does that make me a bad person? Of course, I didn't want to hurt him, but it felt like he let go so easily. I don't know, it was like once he heard me say I wanted to end it he was ready to move on at once. Almost eager for me to leave. I guess I should just be happy about that. It isn't like I wish to leave a trail of unhappy men after me and now both Jamie and he seem okay."

"I'm thinking good for you that you broke up, if the feelings were so shallow."

She didn't see it coming

Giggling, they joined the rest of the family for Christmas preparations and the only one who was sad for real to hear about the breakup was Grace. She wondered when her Georgie would finally find herself a man and settle down.

- OG -

Once all unpleasantries were dealt with, Georgie enjoyed the holiday with her family. For New Year's Eve, she, Marie and Lulu were invited to a big party hosted by a mutual friend. Halfway through the evening, when the girls were happy drunk on fizz, their friend Susan joined from another party she had been to.

"Georgie, have you and Matt split up?" Susan seemed a bit bothered as she asked.

"Yes, I broke up with him right before Christmas. Why?"

"Oh, that's a relief. I saw him snogging some other girl, tongue halfway down her throat, so I got a bit worried there."

Georgie laughed at the picture Susan painted. The way Matt had reacted when she ended it, she was not surprised that he quickly had moved on and she was not the least sad that she was not the one kissing Matt for New Year.

When midnight was approaching, she was standing on the terrace, a flute of fizz in hand and for a moment reflected over the year that had passed. It had been so eventful. Nigeria, then Belize and Bangladesh; the turn of events with Charles James, from very awkward to friends again; meeting Bones, sleeping with Jack; having some undefined feelings for Jack but being nothing to him except another squaddie. This time last year she had not even known him, and he had been such an important part of her life this year; as her saviour more than once, as her tormentor, as her lover and finally as her wise advisor. She fleetingly wondered

She didn't see it coming

how he was celebrating New Year, where he was, on an operation or celebrating with someone special.

“Oh, sod it!”, she then shrugged her shoulders. It did not matter where he was because they were not involved with one another in any shape or form. It had happened once. It was in the past, he had made that very clear. She decided this would be the year when she forgot about *him* and tried to find someone dependable but who also touched her more deeply than Matt, then and went toasting with her friends.

Chapter 17: The final tour

In early January, 2 section under the command of Captain Alvin “Chip” Aldridge left from Brize Norton for Estonia. They would be based in a camp near Tapa in the northern part of the country. Since a year back, British personnel were rotating here on a continuous basis alongside Danish, French, and host nation Estonian forces. 2 section were to stay for three months and during this time they would beside the regular duties take part in a large international training exercise which they all were looking forward to.

Georgie had expected the climate to be cold like Siberia, but it turned out that the proximity to the sea made it milder, with just a few degrees minus in daytime. Still, the nights were grimly cold and there was more snow than any of them had seen before. Every now and then the 2 section soldiers could not resist goofing around and attacking each other with snow balls. One such day Georgie found herself ducking behind a snowdrift, teamed up with Maisie. whilst Rab and Brains were bombarding them with snow which they did their best to return and they all laughed so hard their stomachs hurt. 'Oh, how I'm going to miss these guys! What will I do without them?' she thought, the pain of the loss almost there already despite that she still was among them. They were all more to her than just fellow soldiers, they were her friends and second family, and she would miss them dearly.

In the day to day life in and around the camp, they noticed little of the increased tension between Putin's Russia and NATO, but their presence was a result of that and that was also the reason for the training exercise which was initiated in February, called exercise Winter Camp.

She didn't see it coming

The exercise was to last for nine days and the purpose of the war game was to mimic the reality if Russia would try to invade Estonia and to rehearse warfare under winter conditions. Working in a winter environment required a different skill set from what they were used to from Afghan and Africa and was a great preparation for a possible real situation.

Undertaking a series of attack and defence manoeuvres against their Estonian allies, troops simulated what it could be like if Putin really send his forces over the border to annex the tiny Estonian nation, and simulated conflict as they fired blanks at each other inside a military training zone. Despite the plunging temperatures they spent the night in tents and the cold was at least as much of a challenge as their “enemies”, despite their winter kits. The exercise was made realistic by the actions of numerous umpires who would tell soldiers on both sides they had been killed by the blanks, resulting in them having to lie flat on the ground, or that they had been injured – allowing the practice of battle casualty drills for a variety of medical situations.

This was as near the real thing they came during peace time and they all took it seriously and enjoyed the challenge very much.

On day 7, Georgie was running to take cover from “enemy fire”, when she suddenly trampled through the layer of snow into a hole and her foot got stuck. It hurt incredibly, and she was not able to free herself. Much to her frustration, she was “hit” by an enemy blank. One of the umpires gave a sign that she was “killed” and out of the game. When the others realised she was hurt for real, Rab and Brains soon came running to help her. They shoved away snow around her foot, so she

She didn't see it coming

came loose, but when she tried to walk it was apparent that she could not lean on the foot.

Georgie was soon transported back to the camp where she was assessed by one of the other medics.

“I think you've only sprained your ankle. You will be able to walk in a couple of days, but you probably have to pass on the rest of the exercise.”

Georgie cursed her bad luck, as she really had enjoyed the exciting war game, but she agreed with the assessment and there was not much she could do about it as it hurt badly. She had to wave goodbye to the Rab and Brains as they returned to the rest of 2 section and the snowy woods for the last two days of the exercise.

She spent most of the days reading in bed and the hours felt long. She wished she was out there with Captain Aldridge and the others, even in the cold. She was so restless that she for a while started to wonder if it would be a mistake to leave the army to study, if she could not even cope with two days of reading - but she realised it had more to do with the circumstances. She did not like being left behind with little to occupy herself with.

In the afternoon of day 9, she eagerly kept looking for the guys to return and started to worry a bit as dusk came and other sections returned one by one, but not 2 section. She started asking around, but no one had seen them during the late afternoon. Late in the evening there was still no sign of them and Georgie was now not the only one worrying. 2 section did not return that night and Georgie lay sleepless wondering where they were. Sure, they had tents and other equipment from the exercise but according to the plan they should be back by now, and a deviation from plan seldom meant something good.

She didn't see it coming

Next morning, the 2 section soldiers were still missing, and a search was being organised. Georgie could not join as her foot still needed another day of rest and she waited impatiently all day. In the evening the search party returned - without her friends.

Georgie was seriously worried now, wondering if they simply were lost, had had an accident of some kind or if they had encountered someone out there who was not friendly. The fact that there had been no communication from them at all since lunch time day 9 was not promising.

The major in charge, Major Strickland, came to see her.

“We will do everything we can to locate them. We cannot continue tonight in the darkness, but we will send out a larger search party tomorrow and we will also be joined by special forces already tonight. We will find them.”

Georgie's heart skipped a beat when he mentioned SF but told herself this was a stupid reaction. There were so many other teams than Bones' so the chances that it would be him were minuscule.

- OG -

Still, it was indeed Captain McClyde who was standing there next morning during the briefing before that day's search was initiated. His previous mission must have been to a warmer climate because he was tanned and although he apparently had not had time for a shave after his arrival, judging by the stubble on his chin, he looked gorgeous where he was standing. 'So much for my New Year's resolution to forget him' Georgie thought as she felt her heart beating faster at the sight of him,

She didn't see it coming

unnoticed watching him from the back of the room. Then she felt embarrassed that her thoughts had strayed from the missing soldiers.

Major Strickland started speaking, summing up the situation at hand.

“Two days ago, Captain Aldridge and the rest of 2 section went missing, except for Corporal Lane who had stayed behind due to a sprained ankle.”

He nodded in her direction and then Bones shifted his gaze to her. She saw an expression resembling relief pass quickly over his face before he turned blank again. She realised that until now, he had thought that she was among the missing soldiers. He greeted her with a curt nod.

“It seems like 2 section were last seen here.” Major Strickland circled an area on the map. “After that we have no intel on what has happened to them. There are a few options; They got lost in the woods; they were injured in an accident, so they cannot move, and then the cold is the biggest threat; or, they have encountered someone out there who have taken them captives. There has been no communication from their end since they disappeared. They may be in radio shadow or someone may have eliminated their possibility to communicate. The search teams that have already been looking for them will continue searching based on the options that they're lost or injured. Special forces lead by Captain McClyde will investigate the other track - if someone may be keeping them as prisoners.”

Georgie noted that he did not mention the fourth, horrifying option, that they all might be dead already, but they had to keep hopes up. The major now gave Bones a sign to take over.

She didn't see it coming

“As you know, we are not that far from the border to Russia. I think all of you have heard of the Russian mafia. They are considered to be the world's most powerful criminal syndicate and extremely violent. There are many branches of the Russian mafia and we have intel saying that some are operating on this side of the Estonian border in deserted areas. If 2 section came off track during the exercise and accidentally crossed their path... well, we can only speculate what may have happened until we investigate further. We will send out drones and we will also track by foot, but with a small team. You don't kid around with these guys, many of them are former elite soldiers. We cannot risk raising any attention because if it is indeed the mafia they would kill them before we reach them.”

His words sent chills along Georgie's spine. If 2 section had encountered the mafia out in the forests, would she ever see them alive again?

When the briefing ended, she saw Bones talking to the major, who then waved for her to join them.

“Corporal Lane, if your foot is healed, Captain McClyde has asked if you will join his SF team in their search.”

She looked at Bones with surprise, she had not expected he would request her.

“We may need a medic. Your section may need their medic, if we locate them”, he explained.

“Of course, I will join” she said, as her foot was fine today, and she was eager to finally be able to do something to contribute.

As they left the room, Bones stopped her by taking her by the elbow.

“How are you, Lane?”

She didn't see it coming

"My foot is fine now, Sir. You don't have to worry about that."

"That was not what I was thinking of. Your section is missing."

His eyes seemed concerned.

"I'm worried sick, all I want is to have them back. It feels so wrong that I'm here, left behind. I should be with them."

"This will likely be very dangerous, you don't have to come. I know it is your last tour and you may not want to put yourself at unnecessary risk. Me and my team can handle ourselves and I shouldn't have asked you to join."

"Are you trying to talk me out of it? You don't need to have second thoughts. You said it yourself, my section may need their medic. Would you ask me to consider staying behind if I was a man?"

He shook his head with a faint smile on his lips.

"You're right. Fair enough, forget what I said. Go get yourself prepared, Corporal Lane. At least you're not among the ones we need to rescue this time as otherwise seems to be your habit."

She had to bite her tongue not to argue back, but she did not want to waste precious time on an argument. He could be unexpectedly kind and considerate for a moment, but then he was back to infuriating her like no one else.

Chapter 18: Operation Save 2 section

They left within the hour and headed East, closer to the border of Russia and the area where 2 section last had been spotted. Drones had been sent up and Bones received frequent reports from the headquarter during the day.

“It seems there is a deserted farm over here” he showed them on the map. “Or, previously deserted I should say. The drones have registered that there is activity now and we need to find out who it is, if that might be where our guys are and if they have company.”

They moved slowly, both because of the terrain and thick layers of snow and because they wanted to remain unnoticed. They did not speak much, just moving ahead was strenuous enough even for trained soldiers. Sometimes Georgie walked behind Bones in the line, watched his tall figure moving purposefully without seeming like he needed any rest and could not help wondering what went on in his head. He seemed the complete professional, totally focused on the rescue mission, as he should be, and she cursed herself for being unable to do the same to 100%. Sure, her attention was on the operation and her concern for her section did not waiver for one minute, but his presence disturbed her. A bit like a fly buzzing when you try to sleep, you want to ignore it but cannot. It was as bad when they changed so he walked behind her. Then she was even more conscious that he now was watching *her*, watching her steps as she moved and refused to allow herself to pause and breathe, did not want him to think she was holding them back. Then again, she thought, his attention was probably not on her at all, more likely on the surroundings and the communications he received through his headset. Then she

She didn't see it coming

stumbled, and he proved her wrong by catching her before she fell to the ground. Neither of them commented it and she could not decide if she resented it or was grateful, but now she knew for sure he had his eyes on her.

When they found themselves a few kilometres from the farm it was already late afternoon and they split up to be able to approach it from two different directions, with the intention to first spy, later strike if this was indeed where 2 section were held.

“It will get dark in an hour, so let us see what we can find out before then. We will have to spend the night here, no use heading back. Lane, on me. Spanner and Peanut, you go this way and come in from this direction.”

As they approached the old farm, they crawled through the snow and thicket, spying from a distance using binoculars. It was nearly dark when Spanner confirmed over the radio that he had sight on the soldiers, held prisoners in the main building and they all exhaled in temporary relief. It seemed an almost unlikely stroke of luck that Bones had been right about their whereabouts and that 2 section seemed to be alive. The challenge to get them out of there, still alive, remained.

Watching from a distance, it was apparent that 2 section had company and it seemed far from friendly. They identified approximately ten armed men around the farm, inside the buildings or hanging around in the yard and armed with this intel they withdrew for the night to strike in the early morning hours.

“We will move at first light. Bravo team, find some shelter over there where you can spend the night and we will do the same”, Bones ordered.

She didn't see it coming

Georgie prayed that nothing would happen to her friends during the night, as she and Bones retreated and at some distance from the farm found a small shed. It seemed sheep might have been kept there in the past but now it was empty, and they took shelter there for the night. The walls were not insulated and the raw cold seemed to sneak underneath even the army winter uniforms. They had a meal, army rations naturally, which they clumsily ate as they would not remove their gloves even for a few minutes. Their fingers were stiff from the cold anyway. Then they brought out their camouflage green sleeping bags, which always made Georgie think that the one sleeping in it looked like a cabbage worm. Bones was an exception, he still looked good tucked into it she noticed.

“We should stay close to keep as warm as we can” he stated. She knew that was logical but still had not expected him to suggest it and when he lay down behind her back she found it impossible to relax with him so close. Even if the setting was different, it reminded her too much of that other time. She was too aware of him, of his presence. She felt warmth coming from him even in the cold air, she felt the lean hard body pressed to hers even when padded, wrapped in that sleeping bag. They were lying there silent and she tried to be still, tried to breathe slowly, pretend she had fallen asleep. She ought to be knackered after the hard day, but she only felt incredibly restless and could hear from *his* breathing he was not sleeping either. She must be imagining but it felt like he had his lips to her hair.

“Do you ever think of our night together?” It just came over her lips, she had not intended it to.

He was quiet for so long that the silence was ringing in her ears and she regretted asking.

She didn't see it coming

"Please don't ask me that here, Georgie."

Maybe it was the fact that he called her by her name that made her insist.

"If not here, then when? I'm not sure when I will see you again. Please, just tell me; do you?" she begged.

There was another long pause.

"Every day" he then admitted so close to her ear she could feel his warm breath.

"*Every day?*" she asked in disbelief.

"Maybe not *every* day, but it feels like it."

She turned to him, wriggling clumsily in the sleeping bag but finally faced him and tried to meet his eyes in the dark.

"I don't want to", he continued. "I have tried stop thinking about you, but I can't, and you just keep crossing my path, or I keep crossing yours, I'm not sure which."

"You haven't shown any interest since that night... I thought it was nothing to you."

He snorted.

"Then at least I managed to be professional in some way. You know I couldn't, not in Bangladesh, we were there to do a job and nothing could come in between. There was also the fact that even if I wasn't your CO anymore, I had been and I didn't want that to reflect badly on either of us. Then when we met again... Georgie, I know you're with another guy now and I wouldn't want to interfere with that."

"I don't know how you knew about that, but I'm not. I was, I had a boyfriend for a while but not anymore. I didn't love him."

She didn't see it coming

Words poured out of her, eager for him to know the truth; that Matt meant nothing to her. Their faces were so close, yet she could barely see him in the dim light and was unsure of his reaction. She wanted to kiss him so badly, she thought it maybe looked like he finally had let his guard down and was looking at her like he wanted her too but maybe it was just imagination and the darkness that made his eyes look that gooey. Either way, he held back. No kiss came, and he spoke almost harshly.

“We can't Georgie, not here. We must stay focused or we will risk our lives and those we're supposed to rescue. This is not the time and place. Please try to sleep, and I will stay awake and keep watch.”

When she opened her mouth to protest, he added;

“That's an order.” Then softer; “Just turn around and sleep, you need it.”

If she had thought she saw some emotion before, his expression was now blank again, the emotionless mask carefully adjusted and put in place and she knew there was no point trying to get him to say something more. Disappointed and with her pulse resounding fast in her ears, she turned around again, thinking it would be impossible to sleep now. She could not decide if she should be cross because he rejected her, or happy because he at last had acknowledged that he had some feelings for her behind that stone-faced facade. He had been thinking of her, he had admitted as much.

She must have slumbered eventually, because she woke up to the cold morning light. Bones was already up and came in through the door after having checked the surroundings.

“Time to move.”

She didn't see it coming

They both felt it was a fateful day, as it might end up with 2 section being freed, or all of them being killed.

They returned to their positions from the evening before, near the farm, as did Bravo team on the other side of the buildings. They would have to simultaneously achieve keeping the captives safe and eliminate the enemy, which would be a challenging task for the four against the ten men they had identified. Bones had informed headquarters about the situation and helicopters with backup forces were prepared to come on demand but could not be called in before they had first freed 2 section as any helicopter noise would warn the guards and jeopardize the whole operation. There was a risk that if the mafia men were warned, they might decide to go in and execute their prisoners. If that happened, the operation would fail spectacularly.

“Ready?” he asked her, fixating her with his blue gaze.

“Ready”, she confirmed with a nod. As ready as you can be when everyone's life was at stake. She felt fear, but it was overshadowed by the adrenaline rush and determination to do what she could to save the lives of 2 section. In this moment she was not a girl worried for her friends, she was a soldier ready to initiate a rescue operation.

At this early hour, only one man was guarding the prisoners indoors, they could see him through the windows. Another two were patrolling the yard and the rest seemed to be asleep. When they initiated the attack, Bones aimed Bones the guard and pulled the trigger. With only a muffled sound due to the silencer, the bullet flew through the air, entered through the window, hit the guard right between the eyes and he fell to the floor. Already dead surprisingly quiet and neat.

She didn't see it coming

Simultaneously and equally silent, Spanner and Peanut took down the two men patrolling the yard. With attention to the surroundings they then moved fast and entered the main building through a back door. Bones and Georgie were able to enter the room where 2 section were held without stumbling on any of the other men. The prisoners had woken up when their guard fell dead to the floor and understood a rescue operation was underway. Georgie started to free them from their ties whilst Bones kept watch in the room and Spanner and Peanut continued to silently secure the area. Until they had released 2 section and made sure they were safe, they did not want to stir the remaining of the mafia men.

Despite that the 2 section soldiers were not in the best condition, they managed to get them through the back door towards the woods, so they could take cover among the trees. Once they were temporarily secured, the supporting forces could be called in and soon the sound of approaching helicopter rotor blades was heard over the tree tops. This alerted the sleeping men and soon gun fire echoed over the yard, but Georgie already knew that they had made it. The 2 section soldiers were freed, and the remaining mafia men were either captured or killed.

Georgie immediately assessed the condition of her fellow soldiers and was relieved that all were alive, and none seemed lethally injured. Maisie had taken a bullet in her calf and was in serious pain, but they had been allowed to put a tourniquet on and the bleeding had ceased, so if she only got to hospital she would be out of harm's way. Rab seemed to be almost equally taken by the injury of Maisie, and by now it was not a secret to anyone that he loved her. The others were quite fine, apart from bruises and the aftermath of the fear they had experienced over the last days as they sensed that their guards did not have any plans to release them or exchange them as hostages, rather just were deciding on when and how to

She didn't see it coming

eliminate the waste they had stumbled on. The impression was that the mafia guys had been awaiting orders from someone higher up in the chain of command, as the killing of foreign soldiers likely would cause unwanted commotion that could put them in the spotlight.

During the helicopter flight back to the base, Georgie sat opposite to Bones.

“Well done, Corporal Lane. You were an asset to the team today.”

“Thanks boss, I'm just glad you were right, and we got them out alive.”

Looking into his eyes, there were so many other things she wanted to say to him, do to him, but once again this was not the right time and place.

- OG -

That evening, after their return, a meal and shower, she sitting alone on her bed in the empty dormitory, drying her hair with a towel. The rest of 2 section were in the army hospital for medical surveillance after their ordeal and she was endlessly grateful that this was the reason it was empty here, not that they were dead. How close it had been. With the mission completed and the adrenaline gone from her system, she felt emotionally drained and thoughts were spinning in her head.

‘I don't know how I would have handled it if any of them were killed. I'm not cut out for this anymore, I feel far too much.’

Then she noticed Bones leaning in the doorway in his usual nonchalant manner, watching her intently with an expression which was hard to interpret. When he saw that she had noticed him, he came over and sat down beside her on the bed. She thought he would say something, but instead he cupped her face between his palms and his lips came crashing against hers. She coiled her arms around his neck and

She didn't see it coming

he kissed her, so it felt like she did not have a bone left in her body but was melting away. She did not want him to stop but he did.

“Someone can come here... do you want to join me to my room, my single room?”
he smiled.

She felt so different about that question than she had the first time he had asked it. Now there was nothing she wanted more.

“Do you have a single malt this time, too?” she smiled in return.

“No. No whiskey. I want to be absolutely sober for this.”

Afterwards, she had no idea how they had made their way to his room, if they had stumbled kissing or if he had scooped her up in his arms and carried her, but once they were there, he kissed her mouth, her eyelids, her cheeks, neck, earlobes so she got goosebumps all over her skin. Then, he made love to her as if he loved her.

She was not sure, but she thought she heard him murmur with his lips to her heated skin “I have been waiting for this for so long.”

Chapter 19: More than words

JACK

When Jack received the order that he, Spanner and Peanut where to fly to Estonia without delay to assist in the search of a disappeared British Army section, he was first only concerned in the way he always was when such a situation presented itself because he knew he would not be requested unless it was serious. However, he was used to it, just a day at work like any other and was cool as a cucumber until he opened the manila envelope handed to him and read that the missing men were 2 section, under the leadership of Captain Aldridge.

"Was that all, Sir?" he asked with steady voice, shifting his gaze from the papers in his hand to his CO. "If so, I will go brief the boys and we're off in less than an hour."

"That's all McClyde. Good luck."

"Luck has nothing to do with what we do", he answered, somewhat cocky but they both knew it was true. What his unit achieved was down to skill and bravery.

"Well, I'll make you right there", the major smirked. "Dismissed."

As soon as Jack had closed the door behind him, he increased his step and hurried down the corridor to the nearest restroom, where he locked himself up and let distress he felt show. He clasped his fingers hard around the edge of the basin and met his own eyes in the mirror. For a while he stood like that, his chest heaving, cold sweat seeping and with the feeling that something heavy pressed him down.

Georgie was missing along with the rest of her section in a territory where both the cold climate and the Russian mafia were very real and lethal threats. He had not

She didn't see it coming

known he would react like this and certainly did not appreciate the lack of control he had over himself. He was not sure what it indicated, all he knew was that he needed to get his shit together to once again ensure she was safe, and it felt more important to him than his own life. He turned on the water and let it run until it was ice cold, then splashed it plentiful on his face until his breathing and pulse returned to normal.

'I will get her out of this', he promised his mirror image before he turned and walked out to contact Spanner and Peanut.

- OG -

He had done his best to forget about Georgie after their night in Bangladesh, but it had proved impossible. The first challenge had been during the raid against the Brigadier. He had steeled himself beforehand, knowing she would be there, yet it had taken all his willpower to treat her like anyone, not to smile at her like a smitten fool when she stood before him. So small compared to him but still fearless, with a challenging look in her brown eyes when they met his. She was of course uniform clad like the others, but he had not been able to disregard that he knew what she looked underneath and felt a twitch in his groin. Most disturbing though, was the butterflies in his stomach and the urge to simply wrap her in his arms and tell her how fucking happy he was to see her again.

He was mad at himself for all those things and prided himself in that he at least did not show it on the outside. It had been close, when she bravely threw herself at him to make him dodge the sniper's bullets. When she was on top of him, all he wanted was to pull her lovely mouth to his in a kiss and for that reason he did not even allow himself to respond to her in the same way when she called him Jack, despite

She didn't see it coming

that the secret intimacy made him ridiculously happy. He had to get away from her as soon as he could not to expose himself.

He barely slept that night, knowing she was so close but off limits. When he finally dozed off, he dreamt vivid dreams of her and it was a relief when dawn came, and they left for the airport with the Brigadier in tow.

- OG -

It did not help to put distance between them this time. He thought about her often, far too often, over the next months. Even more so when he knew her section was back in UK. From a well-informed administrator he knew fancied him, he found out where 2 section was based after their R&R and then managed to pull some strings and get stationed there during a home-based counter terrorism operation. He was not even sure why he did it, but he felt this urge to be close to her. He was not her CO anymore, they were not working together so it was in fact not forbidden for them to see each other. *If* she wanted to. That was the burning question.

He realised that beside one night of passion he might in her eyes not have anything to offer. On the contrary she might resent much of what he stood for; an Army man and SF officer who just like Elvis risked his neck on near daily basis; a man with dubious reputation who no one would place a bet on to get married, as he attracted many women but was more known for his numerous, brief love affairs than being dependable; a man who with the exception of one rainy night never had showed her emotions of any kind towards her, besides anger, frustration and disappointment when she did not reach up to his standards - only him knowing his reasons for that. He realised that I he was to have any chance to get close to Georgie Lane for real, it would take more than just being located where she was. He would

She didn't see it coming

have to up his game and try to show her that he could be more than all those negative things.

He saw her already one of the first days at the regiment. She and the rest of 2 section sat on the grass outdoors during a break, as it seemed just recently returned from their permission and catching up. Jack had come walking down the outdoors colonnade, spotted them and for some reason lingered hidden in the shadows, eaves-dropping to their conversation.

The sight of her made his breath hitch. She looked happy and at ease, joining in the banter with her fellow squaddies. Despite the usual tight regulation bun and fatigues she looked more relaxed somehow and he was not the only one who noticed.

“So, what have you been up to during R&R?” Rab asked her.

“Nothing much, mate”, she said but her smile was mischievous, and her eyes twinkled.

“That's not what I heard. I was told someone has been dating.”

Georgie turned to Maisie.

“Maisie! I said not to tell!” she protested.

“Sorry, just slipped my lips.”

The rest of 2 section cheered, whistled and demanded to know more. Jack suddenly felt sick and did not want to hear another word but could not make his feet move away.

She didn't see it coming

“Okay, okay”, she said. “I have seen this guy named Matt a few times and that is more than I have been dating anyone since Elvis. It feels good, really good and it might be the start of something real, but it is early days.”

Jack was finally able to tear away but had already heard more than enough. She was happy with someone else and their moment had been a parenthesis in her life, that much was clear.

He remained based at the regiment but for his operation went back and forth daily to other nearby destinations, disturbed that thoughts of her distracted him even if he did not see her for over a week. He saw the rest of 2 section on one occasion, but she was missing that day and he wondered why.

Then one day he ran into her in a passageway, where it was only the two of them and the encounter was unavoidable. First thing he noticed was that she looked very different from the last time he saw her, the relaxed joyful easiness gone. She had dark circles under her eyes, the spark in them was missing and replaced by distress. Without thinking he had pulled her to his chest and she had not protested, instead let herself sink into him. For a minute he had allowed himself to relish that feeling, before he composed himself, knowing what she needed in that moment was not a superior drooling over her, but someone supporting her. So, he hid his feelings and wishes and tried to be just that. He hoped he had succeeded and that she would get more support when she got home from that boyfriend of hers, hoped that he would be the guy standing by her side which Elvis had not been, because even if it irked Jack to think of her with someone else, he only wished her the best.

He did not see her again until in December but knew through his channels that she had taken his advice to get compassionate leave. His thoughts returned to her again

She didn't see it coming

and again; if she was well, if her father was well, if she would really leave the Army and if she had decided what to do then and if she still was seeing that damn boyfriend. When he finally spotted her sitting alone in the mess one day, he allowed himself to watch her for a while before he approached her. Despite that she was fidgeting with some papers, she looked more at ease again, happier and it made him really happy in turn. He realised that his feelings and wishes remained unchanged even if it was futile when she was taken.

His stomach made a somersault when she greeted him with a smile and as he sat down in front of her he wondered if she even noticed that he had shaved off the beard that had been so offensive to her. He had been so glad to find out that she indeed felt better, like she was back on solid ground, but as glad as he was that she had found out what she wanted to do, it grieved him that she would leave the Army because that was the only touch point they had. Soon she would be gone, and he would likely never come across her again. She did not mention the boyfriend during the conversation, but then again why would she? She would not talk about such things to any officer, and least of all to him considering the awkwardness of their night together.

He wanted to grab her shoulders, stare her in the eyes and tell her that their night together had meant the world to him, that he never had experienced anything like it and yet it was nothing compared to the overwhelming feelings he had in the pit of his stomach every time he just saw her since then. His need for her was more than physical and it made him sick to think of her with someone else – but he said nothing. He had no right to when she was with someone else. Instead he impersonally wished her luck and felt like he maybe was dying a little bit when he left her that day.

She didn't see it coming

Now she was missing, and he did not know if she lived and he ever would see her again, it was like a punch in the solar plexus of this hardened special forces captain.

- OG -

Upon their arrival at the base in Estonia, he impatiently arranged for the briefing to take place immediately because he did not want to waste any time. He found Major Strickland a bit slow and ceremonious and wanted him to just cut to the point, almost zoned out until he heard the magic words.

“...except Corporal Lane who stayed behind due to a sprained ankle.”

Had he really got it right? His eyes scrolled the room and there she was, leaning against the wall in the back, looking at him. In that moment a sob of relief very nearly escaped him. Thank fuck, she was safe. He still had to save the others, but *she* was safe.

It was probably a stupid impulse to keep her as close to him as possible that made him request for her to join his unit in the capacity of medic. He regretted it immediately, knowing how dangerous it would be but when he gave her the option to pass she bravely refused it. He did not know if his strongest feeling was anger with himself for opening up for her to join in the first place, or admiration for her because she would not back down when she could be of help to her section.

How she had fought, marching and crawling through the snow and thicket, not once complaining despite that he knew it was much harder for her on her shorter legs than it was for the three tall men. Only one time did she stumble, and he caught her, without a word as he thought he might say something stupid like offering to

She didn't see it coming

carry her like some bloody knight in shining armour. He knew that both she, Spanner and Peanut would have laughed their pants off if he had done that.

When they split up in two teams, he kept her close to him, would never had dreamt of letting her out of his sight in this dangerous situation. Only afterwards did it occur to him that it meant they would spend the night together alone. He hoped she did not think he had planned it or that she felt awkward about it, what with their history and her current boyfriend. He did not want to put her in a situation where she would feel uncomfortable around him, never wanted her to feel like he was pursuing when she did not wish him to. Still, due to the cold they had no choice but to snuggle up close to one another. He tried not to enjoy it, tried not to think of her sexually, tried hard to fall asleep - and failed, until she asked him if he thought about their night together.

He had been reluctant to go into that conversation and been careful to keep his emotions and actions in check, because 2 sections lives were at stake, but when she had told him that she was not with that other guy, that she had not loved him, then turned to him and looked at him as if she wanted him to kiss her, he had been so immensely happy. He had been in a state of total happy disbelief, but his spinal reflex had been to do the right thing and tell her this was not the time for having this conversation. Certainly not the time for kissing and lose focus as he knew he totally would the moment their lips touched. He knew he had disappointed her, and his thoughts were still spinning madly when he eventually heard her breathing transform into that of a sleeping person. For long he just enjoyed having her sleeping next to him and promised himself that in the morning he would save 2 section, bring her back to the base and then give her the kiss her eyes had been asking for.

- OG -

Last evening, he had done that. Equally nervous and expectant walked over to 2 section's shared quarters where she now was staying alone. He had maybe looked confident enough, but he had far from felt it when he saw her sitting on her bed, fresh from the shower and with damp hair. He had not said anything before kissing her, afraid his voice would fail him. Only when she kissed him back with equal measures of passion and tenderness had he trusted himself to speak, asked her to come with him and she had accepted.

Only once had he tried to tell his father that he loved him. The father had looked at his six-year old boy with barely disguised contempt and told him that love was a four letter word coming from a man and that he never wanted to hear his son say it again. Jack had not known what a four letter word meant then, apart from the obvious, but he had understood that he never was to say it again. After that he had hesitated to use it even to his mum or sister, instead tried to show them in his actions how he loved them and cared for them. It was still like that.

This night he attempted to let his body do the talking with Georgie, show her in his actions rather than words how he felt. He was not sure how they made it to his room, but once there he tried not to let himself be overwhelmed by passion. Tried to be as gentle as he could, give them time. Let his hands discover her body anew, let his lips trail all over her soft skin before he finally closed them over her clit to give her the first shattering climax, which was soon followed by another as he moved slowly inside her, long and hard, stroking her most sensitive spot so perfectly that she came undone again and he felt her warm, damp walls contract

She didn't see it coming

around him until he released too, then stayed close to her, stroking her hair, kissing her softly.

He had thought that she might want to fall asleep then, but she had surprised him. Come on top of him, touched and kissed his body until he grew hard anew, then lowered herself over him. Rocked her body, arched against him until he was buried deep inside her once more and they had moved slow, until they were unable to keep it slow anymore and he had let himself go again with a groan, clasping her delicate waste and hips never wanting to let her trembling body go.

With her laying on his chest, the dark soft hair fanned out over him, he was overcome with emotions.

“I have been waiting for this so long”, he whispered.

They stayed like that until she fell asleep and even after. Like the night before he stayed awake much longer than her, did not want to miss any of it. He was so relieved. She was safe, and she was here in his arms in the most sublime way.

He never wanted to let her go again, but he knew he would have to.

Chapter 20: Left behind

GEORGIE

They woke up by a knock on the door. They had slept with their bodies tangled in an embrace all through the night but now he got up and put on his boxers with a grin in her direction, making her heart flutter. He opened the door and talked to someone outside in low voice for a while. She lay there, took the opportunity to unnoticed appreciate his lean extremely fit body whilst he was busy with the conversation. Took in the broad shoulders and muscles flexing on his back, his perfectly shaped arse and masculine legs, wishing he would join her again but wondering how they had ended up here and what would happen now.

He closed the door and came to sit on the bedside, with a cheeky smile like he knew exactly what she had been thinking.

“Good morning”, he moved away a strain of her from her face and bent down and kissed her, but then sat up again.

“We got word that we have to leave, my team and me. Our job here is done so even if I want to stay I can't.”

He now circled his finger around her bellybutton as he spoke, and she felt there was nothing she wanted more than for him to stay. She did not dare to say it though, did not want to seem needy when they had in no way established that this was anything beyond sex.

He got up to get dressed, explaining he was expected in less than fifteen minutes.

She didn't see it coming

“You should probably head back to the dorm too, before anyone misses you.” Then he gave her a foxy smile. “Come here.”

He pulled her out of bed, so she stood completely naked before him in the morning light and she giggled until she saw how he was taking her in with now serious eyes. To her surprise, he then started dressing her in the most sensual way. Kneeling in front of her, he held out her knickers for her to step into and then slowly pulled them up whilst caressing up her legs and buttocks. Standing behind her, he put on her bra with a feather light touch on her shoulders, then firmly cupping her breasts, teasing her nipples with his warm hands whilst kissing her neck. He pulled on her combats, then buttoned them, now kissing her on the mouth until she ran out of breath, put her arms up in the air so he could put her t-shirt on, caressing her belly. Lastly, he buttoned her uniform jacket from down up, button by button and ended by kissing her on the lips again. He did this in complete silence and never had she known that getting dressed could be so intense. She stood there, now fully dressed and wanted him badly, but she knew it was good bye for now. There was not time for more fondling and she knew he needed to snap back into captain mode, was already half-way there. He stepped closer, cradled her head and kissed her one last time, deep and hard, at the same time gentle.

“I will see you back in UK”, was all he said and then he was gone.

- OG -

Georgie returned to the still empty dorm. With the section still in the hospital, she had no specific duties for the day. She would go check on them later but now she would just stay another hour in bed, treating herself to a very rare sleep in. Half of her felt amazing after the night, the other half felt miserable that Jack was gone.

She didn't see it coming

They had not even had the opportunity to talk about what they were to each other, too absorbed in the heat of the moment and guided by their bodies needs to bother with words. She knew though, that if this would develop into a full relationship, it would likely always be like this. He would disappear off to God knows where without warning and she would not know when and if they would meet again, leaving her feeling powerless over her own life. It had been like that with Elvis and would be like that with any SF soldier, it came as part of the package. Could she handle that again? What if he met the same fate as Elvis? She did not think she would be able to bear that another time, but she loved to be with him, not just the passionate sex but to be close to him, talk to him, laugh with him. The more time she spent with Jack the more she craved but so far, the opportunities had been scarce. Could it be different? Would he want that? Only few times in her life had she felt as loved as she had in his arms tonight, but he had made no promises.

She longed for this tour to end now, longed to go home – even if she did not know if that would mean meeting Jack again or not.

- OG -

Later she went to see the others. All were doing quite fine considering the circumstances and cheered when they saw her. Maisie's bullet wound had been tended to, she was on painkillers and in good spirits now, but would travel back to UK in a day or two for rest and rehab. The others would after a few days' recovery return to their duties here and remain for the rest of the tour as planned.

"We owe you thanks Lane, you and the others that came for us. I'm quite sure those guys would have killed us off sooner rather than later", Captain Aldridge said.

"I know you would have done the same for me," she said modestly.

She didn't see it coming

"I've never been so scared in my whole life" Monk admitted. "You know, having a baby at home changes everything. I don't want Beth to be without a dad. All I could think of was if I ever would hold her again."

Georgie wondered to herself if Jack once again had been right, when he some time ago had guessed that Monk might bid farewell to the Army in a near future, now that he had a little family.

"I was mostly scared that Maisie would bleed out, until we stopped it" Rab confessed. Having been so close to death, the two of them no longer bothered to keep up the pretence and they sat next to each other holding hands. Everyone was more than fine with that.

"What happened out there?" Georgie asked.

It turned out that much of what they had guessed was true. The section had strayed and gone outside the zone of the war game and were unable to communicate over the radio. They had approached a farm with the hope to get some assistance there but suddenly found themselves surrounded by men with machine guns.

"Our only option was to surrender or all of us would have been killed on the spot. Then they just kept us tied up and waited for something, orders from above I suppose. I'm glad we never found out what."

"I've never been so happy to see Bones!" said Brains. "He isn't my favourite but when it comes to rescue operations he is the dog's bollocks."

Georgie just nodded and hoped she was not blushing. Just the mentioning of Jack made it feel like a mild electric current was running through her body.

- OG -

She didn't see it coming

By end March they all returned home. They were in for some well-deserved R&R, but first they had a week's duties at the regiment and during that time they also made an excursion they all had been looking forward to.

Towards the end of the tour, they had received the happy news that Captain James and Molly had had their baby. Both Molly and the baby girl were fine and Kingy, who had talked to James said he seemed immensely proud.

"Apparently such a cute baby has never been seen in this world before" he laughingly told them.

By now they thought that the James family had had enough time to settle in and deserved a visit, so they all headed for Bath over the day to hand over the baby gift in person. Chip had mumbled something about that it was "highly irregular and not a soldier's job to go for baby visits", but he knew this was a special occasion and allowed them to go.

Both Molly and Charles appreciated having their home invaded by their uniformed friends for a few hours. The baby, named Matilda, slept most of the time so they had the chance to talk over tea. They guys had suggested beers, but Captain James averted that with a patient smile.

It had been so long since Georgie saw Molly except on Facebook and it was such a happy reunion. Molly still had some of the extra weight she put on during pregnancy, but despite that and both her and Charles being tired, she looked radiant.

"How is baby life, Molly?" Georgie asked her when they sat alone for a while. "I mean for real. Do you enjoy it or are you missing work?"

She didn't see it coming

"I love it so far. Not every second - sometimes I feel like a completely unsexy milk cow and sometimes I just want to put the baby in the closet and go to sleep, but still... I love having her and that we're a family for real now."

"So, you're not missing work at all?"

"Not yet, but I think I will. I don't think I'm cut out to only be a mother, so I must figure out what I want to do, but there's plenty of time for that. Right now, I just enjoy being with her and Charles. We have spent more time together than we ever could do before and that has been amazing."

"What about you Georgie? Will you stay in the Army?"

Georgie looked around them, but no one was listening.

"No, I won't. I hope I get accepted to med school this autumn and then I will leave. I have gradually realised that things that have happened on tour have taken a toll on me. Not only Elvis but other things I have been through as well. Now latest when 2 section were captured in Estonia. I don't think I can take much more without breaking. Then, there is the thing about having a family at some point..."

She glanced at the baby sleeping next to them despite the noise from the rest of 2 section.

"I mean, it is possible to have both a career and baby, but an army career is a bit trickier than most."

Georgie had never been the most maternal of girls. Her dolls only had served as patients and she had never been overly enthusiastic over friends' babies but looking at Matilda she now felt a tiny flutter inside her. Maybe it was that stupid biological

She didn't see it coming

clock which she always had thought was something made up by men to make women want to give up their career for motherhood.

“And are you fine with living in Bath? You won't miss London?” she asked Molly.

“It is long since I really lived there anyway, and we figured it will be best to stay near Charles' parents, to get some help. My mum and dad anyway have enough with all their own kids yet, so we wouldn't get any help there. Charles parents will spoil her rotten. Also, his son from his first marriage, Sam, lives here and he wants to spend time with him. Both for his own sake and because he is Matilda's brother, so we hope they will be close. So far, he seems to adore her.”

“How is Charles handling not being an Army man anymore?”

“Surprisingly well so far. This house that we have bought needs quite a bit of refurbishing and he is doing most of it himself. He enjoys it so much that he considers continuing doing it for a living. He has never been comfortable behind a desk, too restless, so I think it would suit him. Working with his hands, seeing things progress in a concrete way. His mum would be appalled of course, but now that we have given her a granddaughter I think she is willing to forgive us anything.”

“You're probably right. I'm so happy things have worked out for you. I was a bit worried there for a while.”

“So was I, worried about him, me, both. It was not only that we were both suffering from what we had experienced on tour. When we first started talking about having kids I got cold feet. I was scared it would be like with my parents. My dad is a complete wanker and mum has always taken care of everything. For a while, I

She didn't see it coming

forgot that Charles is a completely different ball bag.” She sent a loving glance towards him over the room. As if he felt it, he turned and looked back at her, with the same intense love in his brown eyes.

Molly continued; “I think part of me was also afraid that without the Army, I would be back to the shitty little me that I felt like before I enlisted, but then I realised that I'm not that person anymore. I have done so much since and no one can take that away from me. Molly Dawes, or James, is a different person now and I will never go back, no matter what happens.”

Georgie looked at Molly and thought that she was right. No one could take away the confidence and experience she had gained over the years in the army from her. She was now a grown-up and confident woman, not a young girl doubting her self-worth.

“But I sure made a mess out of everything there for a while, said I wasn't sure if I wanted a family, or sure if we belonged together and then it was just a vicious circle of events. I pushed him away and he fled, and at one point I thought he might even have feelings for someone else. Until I visited him in rehab and we cleared all misunderstandings - and accidentally made Matilda, too.”

Both laughed, and Georgie felt such comfort and joy in seeing the two finding their way after leaving the Army. Both because she wished them all the happiness in the world and because it gave her hope for her own future.

Before they left she also gave Charles a long hug. Not the thing to be done with your commanding officer, but he no longer was that.

“Thanks, for everything”, he said sincerely.

She didn't see it coming

She knew that he did not only mean today. He was a such a good man, one of the best she knew but he had never been meant for her or her for him and she was glad he had found the way back to himself and his girl. If she had had any part in that she was proud.

“You have a beautiful family Charlie. Nothing could make me happier. Take care of them.”

“I will, I promise. Take care of yourself, Georgie.”

Chapter 21: Does he really care?

The remainder of that week, 2 section spent at the regiment and now they were all counting down the days until they would get to see their near and dear ones, the short encounter when they had been welcomed back at Brize was far from enough. Georgie could not stop herself from unconsciously looking for Jack, in the passageways, in the mess, on the parade ground, just in case he would be based at home right now. Sometimes she thought it was him when she saw a broad-shouldered figure from behind or a dark hair that reminded of his, but it always turned out to be someone else.

One day, she spotted Spanner walking across the yard and it sent her pulse spiking. If he was here, Jack was probably not far away.

“Hi Spanner, thanks for last time” she said smiling when he stopped in front of her, wondering what it was with these SF men and their weakness for non-regulation facial hair as Spanner sported a bigger beard than ever.

“Our pleasure Georgie and thanks to you too. You did well, maybe you should join special forces?” he smiled in return.

“I honestly don't think I would be either tough enough or motivated enough to pass that arduous selection.”

She knew that few soldiers passed it and very rarely women. It was called Special Forces for a reason.

She was not sure how she felt about seeing Spanner. It probably meant that Jack was around, but it also meant he was in UK without having contacted her. Had she

She didn't see it coming

misinterpreted him in Estonia, about actually wanting something more this time? He had not said but it had felt like it. She had not thought it possible to feel so physically bonded to someone as she had to him that night unless there was something deeper underneath, but maybe he was so incredibly skilled at pretending that he was capable of it even in such a situation. It was obviously impossible to know where she had this man.

“Are you stationed in UK again?” she said, casually she hoped.

“Not really, we are just lingering here meanwhile the boss is on compassionate leave.”

“Bones? Why?”

“His father passed away unexpectedly.”

She knew Jack did not have the kind of loving relationship with his father that she had with her own, but she had sensed that he grieved that he never was close to him or felt appreciated by him. Now it was too late for that to ever happen and she wondered how he was taking it. She wished she was with him and could not help hoping this was the only reason why he had not contacted her despite being in the country.

- OG -

The following day she departed from the regiment for the planned leave, but before heading for Manchester she took a detour to London without telling anyone. She had another interview for med school, this time for King's College. The one for Manchester University she had already completed before Estonia, but she wanted to maintain all back-up options until she knew if she was accepted anywhere. These

She didn't see it coming

were final interviews and in May she would get to know if she was offered a place or not.

Georgie still had not shared her future plans with her family and intended to wait until she knew the outcome, knowing well that her parents would jump with joy when she told them. She did not want to disappoint them if she in the end was not admitted. Truth was that she did not know what to do if she was not, because she was so set on leaving the army now, the events in Estonia had strengthened her resolve. Therefore, she gave her absolute best during the multiple mini interviews that was part of the selection and afterwards felt quite good about her performance, but she had no way of knowing if she had made it and suspected she might get a nervous breakdown in May before she finally got to know the result.

The mentally draining interviews were followed by the 2-hour train ride to Manchester and when she after the long, exhausting day arrived home and dropped off her bergen on the hallway floor, she realised how good it felt to be there, in her own home. For each time she was away now she missed it more and more. She needed a fixed point, not a vagabond life. Right now, though, she was too knackered for any deeper thoughts and just hit the shower, moved on to the bed and fell fast asleep.

- OG -

She woke up abruptly, to a noise resounding through the flat and identified it as the doorbell ringing. She fumbled for her phone and the screen told her it was nearly 10 am. She did not even remember when she last slept that long. Shit. She did not feel like having visitors, not even her family. She was not expecting anyone, maybe it was just kids selling cookies for a school trip. Dazed she got up, stretched,

She didn't see it coming

and yawning threw a quick glance in the mirror before going for the door. Her hair was a bit messy but otherwise she looked proper, dressed in a white lace trimmed cotton tank top with matching shorts. She decided it had to be good enough for whoever the visitor was. If they saw she was still dressed for sleeping it might even send them away.

When she finally opened the door a few minutes had passed since the bell rang and she saw the back of a man who already had turned to start walking away. At the sound of the door opening, he turned around again, and she met a pair of blue eyes, the colour of a summer day sky, familiar but unexpected here.

“Jack!?”

She could not believe he was here at her doorstep.

Almost as surprising as him being here at all, was his outfit. She had never seen him in civvies before, except when he was posing as a mercenary in Nigeria. That relaxed rough style had suited him, so she had unconsciously imagined that was what he looked like in private as well. What he was wearing today was completely different; a navy coloured trench which fit over his broad shoulders as if it were tailor made, underneath it an equally well-fitting crisp shirt in a blue colour that matched his eyes perfectly, paired with slim dark jeans. He looked extremely smart but almost like another man whom she never had met before. Bones/Captain McClyde/Jack was apparently a chameleon in many ways. She certainly had nothing to complain about, like this he was a strikingly handsome man, but she did not know what to expect from him now. She did not know this version of him at all. He looked a bit tired though, and maybe slightly insecure. That was also a new look because Bones had always seemed inexhaustible and never unsure of himself.

She didn't see it coming

"Tell me if I am wrong to be here, and I will leave" he said.

She stepped closer and raised her palm to his cheek, held it there and saw relief flash in his eyes. She did not trust her voice not to break with nervousness when she spoke but had to say the words anyway.

"You're not going anywhere but in here with me"

She grasped his hand and pulled him with her inside. Door closed, they stood in the hallway just staring at each other for a few seconds.

"I needed you", he offered as an explanation for being there.

They moved simultaneously to close the space between them. She put her arms around his neck and he placed his hands on her hips, pulling each other closer, lips crashing together. When she felt the intense, unmasked need in his kiss, she was not the least sleepy anymore and certainly did not feel like sending him away. His hands roamed over her body, pressed her even tighter to him and he involuntarily groaned in to her mouth.

She pushed the open trench off his shoulders, tugged it down his arms and he dropped it on the floor.

"You're wearing far too much clothes Captain McClyde"

"Don't call me..."

"Hush, we can talk later."

She placed her fingers to his lips and he kissed them, nodding with a smile.

"Too much clothes, definitely."

She didn't see it coming

He moved her hand down to the buttons of his shirt and she started to unbutton it slowly, button by button, like a reversal of his actions when he dressed her last time they met. When the shirt fluttered open she kissed his chest softly while her hands grazed over the ridges of his abs, moving downwards to where his jeans were tenting out and she heard him gasp. The shirt joined his coat on the floor. She was not even sure how the rest of his clothes disappeared, but she loved to feel how he was shivering with excitement when she touched him. They pressed their bodies against one another with the feverish feeling that they could not get close enough. She felt her feet leave the floor as he lifted her with strong arms, turning her so her back was up against the wall and she wrapped her legs around him and they ground against one another. Her loose sleeping shorts were still on, but he just moved them aside and with the tip of him found her wet core, rubbed against her folds, driving them both mad with desire and they merged into one right there in the hallway. He filled her so perfectly, hitting the perfect spot as he thrust harder and harder, as if he needed to let out some built up frustration or anger, or perhaps grief. She sensed it was not directed towards her. On the contrary he needed her to get rid of it and he did not hurt her, his long hard strokes were sheer pleasure to her. As if he realised himself how intense he was, he paused to look into her eyes with open vulnerability and desire in his own.

“I need you so fucking much.”

She nodded and pulled him to her to kiss him, wrapped her legs harder around him and beckoned him to move again. Showed him she wanted him with all that she was, met him, followed his moves until they came undone together. After that final deep thrust, their lips met desperately, then slowed and softened to a gentle kiss as they were catching their breath.

She didn't see it coming

Finally. Finally, he was here, in her world. No longer just an illusion on tour.

When he could hold her no longer, they collapsed into a pile of arms and legs on the floor, laughing. He leaned his forehead to hers.

“Sorry about that, if I made it too much about me?”

Smiling she traced the outline of his lips with her finger.

”Nothing to be sorry about, it was my absolute pleasure.” Then she added with a giggle; “If you came here for a shag, you were successful. That is the fastest anyone has ever gotten me into bed, without a bed even.”

She said this partly because even if this had been amazing, she did not know for sure why he had come all the way to Manchester and she was desperate to know.

He held her to him, now touching her silky hair.

“I didn't come here for a shag. I came here because I want to be with you. I can't help that you didn't even let me in properly before you ripped my clothes off.”

He answered jokingly, but she understood he was truthful in that he wanted to be with her and that made her feel both giddy with joy and somehow safe.

“Uhum, that's actually true. I'm not a very good hostess, am I? Should have offered you a cuppa first.”

“Didn't say that. I think you're an excellent hostess” he grinned, for a moment the cheeky Bones again, then turned serious and caressed her cheek. “But honestly, even if this *was* a lovely welcome it was not the only thing I came for. Far from it.”

She grasped his hand and kissed first his palm, then his fingertips. “I think I have understood that by now.”

She didn't see it coming

For a moment they were just watching each other, locking eyes. His blue, her brown, equally sincere and open. She felt like he for the first time let her see inside him for real. Then dropped his gaze and she broke the silence.

“Come, let us have a shower and some breakfast and I will show you the rest of my little place. Maybe even the bedroom if you're lucky.”

“Who needs a bedroom?” he murmured with his lips against her neck.

After a long shower together, they sat down by the kitchen island with toast and tea.

“When did you come here?”

“Drove from London this morning. Early. I was lying awake tonight, I have been doing that a lot lately, and then I realised what I wanted most was to see you. I knew from Spanner that you, or rather the entire section, just left for permission so I took a shot and went here.”

She wondered how he knew her address but nothing surprised her when it came to the SF boys.

“I met Spanner the other day. I heard about your father. I'm so sorry.”

He sat quiet, looking down on his own hands clasping the mug and then she realised he was crying. She understood why and left her bar stool to come and stand between his legs, wrapped her arms around him, rocked him and kissed away his tears. Silent, they stood like that for a long time.

“It's so stupid” he said at last, his voice breaking. “I thought I was way past caring about the old man, but now he is gone. He will never like me, approve of me for

She didn't see it coming

who I am, there are no more chances. It just feels so...fucking empty. I have been home with my family for some days, preparing the funeral and supporting mum, and all I could think of was that I wanted to see you. That I needed to be with you.”

His shirt was on again but unbuttoned and she nestled her hands inside, to stroke his back.

“I can't tell you how happy I am that you're here. I have been longing for you since you left that morning. If you want to talk, I'm here.”

“I want to talk, at some point but right now I just want to be close to you.”

They kissed again and the love-making that followed was filled with both solace and passion. This time they made it to the bed and in contrast to the raw passion before, this time was slow and beautiful and after he fell to a much needed sleep in her arms, whilst she was stroking his hair.

Jack stayed for two days. Georgie told her family she had a bad cold and had to wait to see her. The first 24 hours they did not leave the flat and were seldom more than a few inches apart. If he sometimes had been distant before, it was like he had opened a gate and wanted nothing more than for her to enter, to know him for who he really was. They spent hours and hours cuddled up and talking and when he fell asleep she tried to stay awake because she could not get enough of looking at him. When she finally did she slept like a baby, feeling happier and safer than she had done for many years.

They did not yet speak of the future. They spoke of the past, shared memories that had shaped them, both happy and painful ones and used their bodies to heal one

She didn't see it coming

another. The only thing she dreaded was that he would have to leave soon, leave her behind once again.

“Georgie, there’s something I’d like to ask you...” he said in the afternoon of the second day.

“Yes?” she was fearing what may come as she did not want to leave this bubble of happiness and intimacy. As much as she wanted a future with him beyond these days, she was unsure what that might look like. If it could be the life she needed.

“Can I take you out for a date tonight? Like a proper date?”

“Yes, I would love that”, she beamed at him.

It felt surreal but fantastic to go on a date. Before, t had only known each other on tour, unequal in rank, and as lovers, but during these days they also took the first steps to knowing each other at home; learning what the other liked for breakfast; her cooking dinner and him learning she was pretty shitty at it; brushing teeth side by side looking at each other in the mirror with mischievous toothpaste grins; throwing his only change of clothes into the laundry machine and then giggling jump into bed as there was nothing they would rather do when he anyway was naked. Going on a date was another such step to knowing each other in a non-Army setting. To have a romantic meal in a restaurant, hold hands in public, chat about anything over a nice meal, have fun together and stroll back home with his arm around her shoulders and hers around his waist.

She loved the relaxed normality. The dates with Matt had been either contrived or slightly dull, she could see that now when she compared it to this easiness mixed with ever present attraction.

She didn't see it coming

“This is the best date I have had in a very long time”, she told him with a content sigh.

He pressed his lips to the top of her head.

“This is the best date I *ever* have had.”

When he left next morning, to travel back to London for his father's funeral, Georgie knew for sure there was no turning back. She was utterly and madly in love with Jack McClyde.

Chapter 22: A man full of surprises

This time, they had finally exchanged phone numbers and he texted her over the next days; sometimes sad but mostly flirtatious, teasing and affectionate. She still could not quite wrap her head around that this cute, attentive guy was the same man that had used to shout at her so tersely when he was dissatisfied with her performance on the assault course or during the full kit run.

“For fucks sake, Lane. You need to do better than this or I will have to send you home! I can't have no fucking liabilities in this section!”

If someone had told her back then how he would touch her one day, gentle, sensual and hot, and how she would crave it, she would have laughed. If someone had told her that through their conversations it felt like he understood her like no one else and that he was growing to feel like one of the most trustworthy and dependable persons she ever had known, she would have said they were mental. But here they were, and all those things were true.

Each time her phone buzzed from a new text from him she jumped at the sound like a teenager in love for the first time, she just could not help herself.

One text came as she was having a coffee in the city centre with Lulu. Georgie tried to look casual while sneak-reading it, but Lulu knew her too well.

“Tell me, who is the guy?”

“It's nothing, just a bloke from work.”

“Yeah, I figured it has to be because you have not dated at home since Matt. You really *do* have a soft spot for squaddies.”

She didn't see it coming

"Not for squaddies in general" Georgie defended herself. "There was Elvis, and now there's Jack. No one else."

"So, he has a name... Jack... Tell me!"

She realised Lulu had cornered her, so she gave in and told her. She told the whole story of how they had met, and she had disliked him at first, their unexpected night when he was "dead" and the mixed feelings she had had ever since, but which had morphed more and more into something similar to love as she got to know him.

"Wow, that's hot - and romantic, Georgie", the normally cynical Lulu admitted.

"Where is he now?"

"In London, for his father's funeral."

"Okay, maybe not the time for a surprise visit then."

"I think not." She was quiet for a while and then said; "The only issue I have is that I don't know when I will see him again. Not just now, but it will be like that every time we part. It will be just as unpredictable as it was with Elvis."

"I understand... Georgie, I need to ask you this and I do it because I love you, not because I want to be pessimistic. Can you handle being with another soldier, and special forces? Not only that you will be away from each other much of the time but I'm also thinking of the occupational hazards... and what happened to Elvis. For a while after he died I worried you would go insane from grief."

"Don't you think I have thought about that hundreds of times? I know the risks and to be honest I'm not at all sure I can handle it if anything would happen to him. I just don't know how *not* to be with him either. Maybe it's bad for me, but I really, really like being with him. When he isn't here I may have doubts, but when I'm with

She didn't see it coming

him, all my reservations just disappear. I haven't felt like this since... you know... since Elvis."

Even then, the feelings had not been exactly the same.

"Bah, maybe it is a genetic defect with us Lane sisters. We '*let the bad ones in and the good ones go.*'" Lulu quoted one of their mutual favourite songs with Robyn.

"The good ones, like your exes Jamie, Matt - and my Rob, Marie's Tom - they're just not exciting enough. Maybe predictable good guys are not our thing. Well, except for that Marie actually sticks with Toby for some obscure reason."

"I wish it was, it would be so convenient, but I'm not sure you're right. I think Jack is a good one, just with a job that's not ideal, and even if Jack and Elvis may seem alike on the surface, SF soldiers both, they're very different underneath."

She did not say it out loud, but she somehow had the feeling that Jack would never had stood her up on a wedding day, no matter what came in the way. Elvis had loved her wholeheartedly but committing to the challenge of an everyday relationship had not been his strength. She could trust him to save her from brutal kidnappers, but maybe not to do the grocery shopping or push a stroller with a screaming baby. On the other hand, it was just a feeling with Jack for now, nothing proven, it was early days and she did not know him through and through.

"All I know is that I'm aching to be with him again."

"Oh, sis. I bet he feels the same." Lulu hugged her.

- OG -

She didn't see it coming

Then, he called and asked if she would like to join him in London for the last days of her leave. London was the place he called home as it was where his family lived, and he had a place of his own.

“The funeral was today, quite a sad story, and I'd just love to be with you before we return to service both of us.”

Whatever doubtful thoughts that had gone through her mind about their relationship, hearing his voice and the question she knew what the only answer she wanted to give was.

“Yes, I would love that too. Of course, I will come.”

She told her family she had been asked to return earlier, packed her bergen and then took the train for another secret detour to London.

- OG -

He picked her up at Euston station. Even though only days had passed since they last met, the sight of him took her breath away and made her stomach flip. She saw him already through the train window, so tall and serious, this time in a camel coloured midi length coat, a black turtleneck which by the looks of it was cashmere and another pair of jeans which flattering clung to his well-shaped legs. As she walked towards him on the platform it felt amazing to know that it was her he was waiting for. His face lit up in a broad smile as soon as he saw her, but he removed his aviator sunglasses so she saw that had dark shadows under his eyes, almost worse than when he first came to see her in Manchester and she understood how tough the last days must have been for him. They hugged and kissed for long before they even moved from the platform.

She didn't see it coming

"It is so good to see you again", he said looking down on her. "But I had almost forgotten how small you are."

"Sorry, can't do anything about that, but it is good to see you too, even if you're bloody tall and I will strain my neck kissing you."

He pressed his lips to hers again, this time let his tongue swirl into her mouth creating the now familiar surge in her abdomen.

"How was the funeral?" she asked as they started walking, hand in hand.

"Depressing. So many people were there to say farewell and yet, I know that very few liked him. He was a man with a lot of power and very few friends. Strangely enough, my mum loved him and I'm so sad for her... and sad for myself too, that he never let me know him for real. We can talk more about that later, or not. Let us go home to my place now."

He drove a black Tesla and even if she knew little of cars she was impressed by its beautiful, sleek lines and smiled to that in comparison, she had not bothered to get a car at all. Everything inside it looked expensive and it smelled like it was fresh from the shop.

"Well, this is nicer than my car."

"What car do you have then?"

"I don't have one, I don't need it."

"Neither do I. I mean, I have it, but I don't really need it. I thought it was so beautiful, so I couldn't resist it. A dark beauty like you", he grinned cheekily and for a moment the sorrow washed off.

She didn't see it coming

"Are we going to your apartment now?" she asked.

"Actually, we're going to my house."

"Your *house*? You have a *house* in London?"

She could not even imagine what that might cost, and it seemed strange as he was away most of the time.

"My family has invested in property over the years and some years ago I got this one to do what I pleased with, and I decided to live there."

He said it like it was nothing remarkable at all.

She assumed it would be a smallish house in the outskirts at least. She came to think of what Molly had told her when she had visited Charles in Bath for the first time and they had stayed at his parents' house. *'I got freaked out just by the size of it! And the bloody staircase! Made me feel like I was in a horror movie. Lucky Charles was there, or I would have turned and ran.'*

She was still smiling at the memory, when Jack turned into a street called *The Boltons* and stopped the car outside a gigantic townhouse in a lovely, green and obviously very posh neighbourhood.

"You're kidding me, right?"

"I'm afraid not. This is home. Are you disappointed?"

"I don't know what to say... I don't know anyone who lives in a house this big, not even families with kids."

He just grinned, walked around the car and opened her door.

She didn't see it coming

“Come on, get your pretty little arse out of the car and into my house”, he smirked.

“I only use part of it” he explained whilst unlocking and opening the door to let her in, like it would make the house itself smaller.

He took her by the hand and they walked from room to room. Some were almost empty, but everything that was there was of immaculate taste and looked exclusive. She recognised the Barcelona chair, Nogushi's famous coffee table and a hideously expensive lamp she recently had seen featured in an interior magazine. The rooms he seemed to use most managed to be quite cosy combined with the exclusiveness, due to thick carpets, colourful cushions, curtains and flowers. She wondered if he had done this on his own or had help from someone, his mum or an ex maybe. She knew nothing of his past love life except the rumours of a string of girls and that nurse in Nigeria and that hardly counted. She suddenly felt a brief sting of jealousy at the thought of him with other women.

They ended up in the kitchen where he made some coffee by putting pods into a poncey coffee machine.

“Do you like it? The house, not the coffee.”

“I do... I mean, what is not to like apart from that it is so big that I probably will get lost.”

“I hope you like it, because I hope you will want to spend some time here with me.”

He looked searchingly at her.

The house had made her feel a bit intimidated, but he stepped closer and put his arms around her. His embrace was by now both reassuringly familiar and yet

She didn't see it coming

tantalizing and being this close with no one else around to disturb them , they both forgot everything but each other for a long while.

- OG -

Later that evening, he cooked for them.

"You actually cook?" she said incredulous when she realised he was not going to call for takeout or prepare something prefab but was taking out ingredients from the fridge and cupboards to start preparing a meal from scratch. It was yet another thing she had not pictured that he would do.

He shook his head, laughing.

"I'm not an advanced chef but I have a few favourites I do quite well. Today we have pasta carbonara on the menu. I already know you don't cook from when you burned that omelette."

"Sorry to disappoint you, but very badly. I would never make a good housewife."

"You're probably right, you would make a lousy housewife for so many reasons."

He laughed again, and she had the feeling that he did not see that as a problem at all.

"What would you expect from your wife?" she asked coyly.

"If I ever were to get married, which I'm not sure I will, I would expect it to be with a strong woman who pursued her own dreams, not only followed my wishes. As long as she does that I can live with having to cook my own omelettes."

"Really?"

"Really."

She didn't see it coming

"I would also expect her to be funny, kind, smart and brave and amazing in bed. If you know someone like that, will you let me know?"

He gave her a wicked smile, silenced her offended exclamation with a kiss and handed her a glass of red wine. Feeling a hot flush, she took a big gulp, knowing she had it bad for this man.

They sat down by the table and started eating the surprisingly delicious pasta.

"You don't need to answer, but I'm just a bit curious. You said once your family is well-off, but are you like really wealthy? What with this house and dealing in properties?"

"I guess we are." He shrugged his shoulders, like it did not matter. "I don't think or talk much about it, especially not at work. We have the family business and then both my grandfather and father have been doing wise investments, in property, stocks and so on."

"We don't have to talk more about it. It was just a surprise."

"A negative one?"

"No... no, but I guess I got a bit intimidated by this house, and it also makes me feel that I know you less well than I thought I did by now."

He took her hand and laced their fingers together.

"Don't be intimidated. This is just varnish. I'm the same."

"I just realise there are so many things I don't know about you yet."

"I'm not hiding anything, Georgie, not anymore. Just keep seeing me and you will know everything, and probably discover I'm a quite common bloke."

She didn't see it coming

"I doubt that, you seem to be one of a kind."

When they fell asleep beside each other that night, or rather cuddled up as close as ever possible, she thought he was right. It didn't matter what family and background he came from, or what girlfriends he might have had. She felt like they belonged together and that was the only thing that really mattered. He was a bit like one of those Babushka dolls, where you open up layer after layer until you finally reach the tiny doll in the core. She hoped that this, the two of them together, was part of the core not an empty shell.

Chapter 23: Meeting the family

"I told my mum about you", Jack unexpectedly said over breakfast next morning, watching her reaction of the brim of his cup.

Georgie snorted, nearly choking on the tea.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to startle you", but his smirk contradicted his words. He was definitely amused.

"I just didn't expect you would have..."

"I know, I didn't really plan to, but she is so sad after dad and I wanted to share something with her that might cheer her up a bit and then I just happened to tell her."

"What did you say then? That you're sharing bed with a colleague?"

"I said I have met a girl... she is something special and I like her very much."

"You do, do you?"

"Is that a surprise?"

"No... but I'm just getting used to you showing me that I mean something to you. A week ago, I had no idea I what you felt about me, if anything. Honestly, I have been hoping for quite long that you had some kind of feelings, but I didn't know... Every time we met after that first night you just put on this poker face. First, I didn't even admit to myself that I cared what you thought, but after Estonia... I knew I wouldn't be able to forget you, but I had no idea how to get to you until you showed up at my door."

She didn't see it coming

He hesitated briefly about how honest he should be. He decided he was not ready to tell her that his feelings had been there already long before that night in Bangladesh. Instead he told her just part of the truth.

“After our first night together, I decided there could be no more, no matter what I wanted. I felt I had to stick to army regulations and not risk anything, not let feelings distract me on duty. I kept thinking about you though. Then I heard you had a boyfriend back home and I figured our night was just a spur of the moment one-time thing for you and you didn't have any feelings for me. So, I just tried to forget you, but I wasn't very successful. Every time I met you it was more difficult. After what happened in Estonia it was totally impossible and then I also dared to hope again. The other day I felt I had to take the risk and go see you.”

The mutual confessions of feelings hidden for a long time were hanging in the air, almost like something physically tangible, and it felt like a new bond between them.

“I was really jealous of that boyfriend of yours...”, he added.

“So silly, if anyone had a reason to be jealous it would have been him. When we met at the regiment back in December, I so wanted to kiss you. I realised then that I shouldn't stay with him when I felt like that with you.”

“So did I... want to kiss you that time.”

They kissed now, because they could and because they could not get enough of it.

When he finally leaned back in his chair again, he raked his bottom lip with his teeth, looking at her intently, as if he continued to taste her lips even when the kiss was over or was deliberating if he should kiss her again, but instead he spoke

She didn't see it coming

“Returning to the subject; my mum invited us to dinner tonight. It isn't what I had planned but would you want to go? My brother and sister will be there too. I know they very much want to see me before I leave again, but if you think it is all too soon we just skip it.”

This was a very unexpected acceleration of their relationship, a bit scary to meet family but she was also curious.

“You mean you actually would be fine with taking me there? To meet your family?”

“I think I would.”

He held her gaze without turning away and his seemed to twinkle with happiness.

“Okay, if you promise to save me in case they interrogate me.”

“Oh no, Georgie Lane, then I will listen to hear what secrets you may hide.”

‘But I don't have that many Jack, it's you who keep bringing on the surprises’ she thought. Compared to him, she felt like an open book.

“Everyone has secrets, but I'm sure yours would only make me like you more”, he smiled.

During the day, they took a stroll enjoying the beautiful April weather along Chelsea Embankment and the Physic gardens and sat down for a long lunch at a nice little restaurant. It was long since she had been in London except for the interview. When she was together with Elvis it happened every now and then as he was a Londoner but that was such a long time ago now, a life time it felt like, and Jack had other favourite places, so it was like discovering the city anew.

She didn't see it coming

"Have you always lived in London? I mean, before Sandhurst and traveling with the army."

"No, I was away for boarding school much of my childhood and then university in Cambridge."

"Really? I had thoughts about studying in Cambridge when I decided for the army instead. What if I hadn't and we had met as students."

"Then I would have missed the opportunity to save your life and you would probably never have fallen for me. Remember I was this nerdy thin guy back then."

"I think I might have liked you anyway and who says there wouldn't have been an opportunity to save my life there, falling off during a punting tour maybe."

"Well, I have always been a mean swimmer."

They both laughed at the thought of what different turns life may take.

"Is Cambridge where you have applied for med school now?"

"One of the places, I'm trying several universities to increase my chances. I'm hoping to be accepted in Manchester, but I've applied to Cambridge and King's College too."

He raised an eyebrow but did not comment further and she almost felt embarrassed when she had said that, hoped he would not think London now emerged as her number one option just because it was his hometown, when they only had seen each other for a week. She did not want to appear too needy. On the other hand, it was Jack who was planning on introducing her to his family already tonight. That was a leap big enough.

- OG -

Georgie was grateful she had brought one nice dress and put it on for the evening. It was crème coloured, elegant yet quite sexy, knee-length with a slit and showing off her slender figure. As she came out from the bathroom it, Jack's reaction was what she had hoped. For a moment, he just looked at her, taking in the picture of the dress wrapping her body in such a flattering way, her dark hair loose and high heels on.

"You look just amazing" he said with deep, hoarse voice and came over to stand in front of her.

"I have never seen you in a dress before. In fact, I think I have seen you naked more times than I have seen you in civvies and then only trousers."

"And which do you like best?"

"I really love this dress on you... but I think you know the answer to that question..."

She saw in his eyes what he wanted, and she wanted it too but put up some resistance.

"Oh, no Jack McClyde, I don't want you to mess up my hair before I meet your mum, so she sees what we have been up to."

"She won't suspect anything. She probably thinks her little boy is still a virgin", he grinned and placed his hands on her hips, stroking with his thumbs over her belly through the thin fabric. He was still only in boxers, fresh from the shower and smelled heavenly from a musky aftershave. The thought that anyone would think this very masculine man a virgin was beyond ridiculous.

She didn't see it coming

“As if”, she smirked.

He placed his lips to her neck, making her skin prickle.

“If I promise not to mess up your hair?”

His hand reached for the zipper at the back and she was unable to say no, instead met him in a kiss. Then, almost like magic the dress went off and on once more before they finally made it out of the door and headed for his mother's home.

- OG -

Georgie was a bit nervous as they arrived. The wonderful house of the elder McClydes was even larger than Jack's and in contrast fully furnished. Even though she was a girl with good self-confidence who seldom felt inferior to others, this family was obviously in a whole different league than her own. What would they think of her? And what would she think of them? What if she did not like his family at all? If they were snotty and unkind it would be awkward. She was very happy about her nice dress and the fact that Jack had kept his promise and her hair was falling tidy over her shoulders.

From the stories Jack had told about his upbringing and family expectations on him, Georgie had expected that his mother might be strict and stiff, but she was nothing of the sort. It seemed like all of that must have come from her late husband. When they entered the house, Mrs. McClyde gave them a warm welcome.

“Welcome, I'm Elle, Jack's mother. How nice to meet you Georgie! I'm so glad my boy could convince you to join us tonight.”

Despite that she was an aging lady, she was still a beautiful woman with blonde hair with silver streaks and only few wrinkles. She seemed very hospitable, kind

She didn't see it coming

and caring. From the way they were with each other, it was apparent that Jack loved her and she him.

Georgie was also introduced to Jack's brother Will, his wife Meghan, and the younger sister Sarah who were there with her two sons. One could easily see that Will and Jack were brothers as their features were similar, but Jack was taller, and Will apparently did not put himself through the same strict exercise regime as Jack did because he had some extra weight around the waist. Sarah was a younger copy of Elle, with the same blonde hair but without the silver streaks.

"We have met before", Georgie said to her.

Sarah frowned as she tried to recall the situation.

"In Bangladesh, when you came for Jack's coffin. I was in uniform then and I realise it was a special situation, so I'm not surprised if you don't remember me."

"That awful day... It was like everything was in a haze, I don't think I have ever cried so much, it was all so horrible. I was so mad afterwards that Jack put us through that."

"I've explained why."

"Yes, yes, I know, to make it believable and all that, but it was still cruel." She turned to Georgie again "When he called me up when I got home... I couldn't believe it was just an empty coffin we had brought back. I was so happy and relieved that I cried and cried again. Can you understand that feeling?"

"I think I can." Georgie briefly thought about how it would have been if anything had brought Elvis back from the dead for her. Of course, she had known for sure that was not going to happen, because she had held his dead body in her arms and

She didn't see it coming

looked into his open unseeing eyes. She met Jack's eyes now and saw that he understood what she was thinking. He put his arm around her shoulder.

"But this time it all ended well."

She leaned her head against his shoulder, but she and Sarah looked at each other, both thinking '*But what if it doesn't end well next time?*'

"Were you a couple already then? That day?" Sarah asked.

"No, luckily we had not really noticed each other then, so I only thought I was saying goodbye to a commander who thought I was the worst soldier in history."

"You know I never thought that", he pressed his lips to her hair.

"I know it *now*. Just as good I didn't know then, so I did not grieve you as much."

Sarah noticed the flicker in her brother's eyes and got the feeling that *he* had noticed Georgie before that day, even if she was unaware of it both then and now.

Apart from that moment, when the two girls reflected over Jack's mortality, the evening turned out to be very nice. Dinner was informal and they all chatted without Georgie ever having the feeling she was being measured or interrogated. Will turned out to have a great sense of humour, which she somehow had not expected either.

"Will is so different now that my father isn't around." Jack told her. "It is like he is a different person now that he doesn't have our father looming over him. I feel like we have found each other like brothers over the past weeks in a way we never did before. Before, everything was competition about my father's liking, with him gone we're coming closer. He seems to like you too, that also gives him plus points."

She didn't see it coming

"I like him too, all of them. I'm glad you took me here."

A bit later Georgie sat on a couch, next to Elle. They both watched Jack and Will who were engaged in a conversation at the other end of the room.

"It was not easy to be sons of John, not for any of the boys. He didn't know how to express his feelings and show them affection, only how to be harsh., but I know he loved them under that hard surface of his.", Elle said. "You know, when we thought Jack was dead, we got to read that "letter from the grave" they make all soldiers write. I cried then of course, but so did John. Then when we were told Jack was alive, we could not have been happier. It was just that John still wasn't capable of showing it. He was so proud of Jack, proud of the man he had become."

"He doesn't know. You need to tell him."

"Thanks, love. You're right, I will."

"He really needs to hear it, even if I haven't known him for long I have understood how complex their relationship is and that it grieves him they will never be close. I think knowing this might make him come to terms with that."

Elle nodded.

"The boys are different from John, though. They know how to show affection and express their feelings. That's *my* legacy to them."

When Georgie first got to know Jack, she had thought that he was like everyone described his father; hard and incapable of showing emotions, but she knew now that was far from the truth and she was immensely grateful for that.

She didn't see it coming

“In the end, I think it has been hardest for Will to live in the shadow of John, Elle continued Even if Jack didn't want to join the army, he found his place there and an escape. I have missed him and worried so much but still I have known he was fine all these years. Will, I'm not sure he really wanted to take over the family business and John was always watching over him like a hawk to see he made no mistakes. I'm not sure what will happen now when John is gone. Maybe both my boys will change and live a life they rather wanted.”

“And Sarah?”

“Oh, it was always different with her. She was a girl and to her John felt he could be soft. A parent shouldn't have a favourite, but he did, and she has always been able to do what she wanted.”

While she said this, Elle's gaze rested at Jack and Georgie had the feeling she had a favourite too. Maybe it was like he said, that she still saw him as her baby boy no matter how far from that he seemed to be to anyone else.

“She studied art, got pregnant with one of the teachers. They were together long enough to get a second child but then he thought it was time to make an exit, left her to bring up the boys alone. I think he was unfaithful asshole all along, to be honest. John was furious but could for once not do anything except helping Sarah economically. The one who has been like a substitute for the children's father has always been Jack, whenever he was home from tour.”

No wonder he had been missed when they thought he was dead, if he had been the only dad they knew.

“You know, you're the first girl he has ever brought home.”

She didn't see it coming

Georgie blushed.

"Really?"

"Of course, there has been girls, but none that he cared about enough to bring home."

Elle seemed to await Georgie's reaction.

"I like him a lot." She thought that was a lame description of what she felt but she was not comfortable telling Elle she was in love with Jack, when she had not said those words to him and he had certainly not said them to her either.

"Sometimes it just scares me what he does," she added as an afterthought.

"That he's a soldier? But you are too?"

"It's just that I've been through it before. I loved another man that was special forces too, and he died in front of me. To be honest, I don't know if I can handle that again. I don't know if anyone can go through that twice."

Elle put her hand on Georgie's arm and squeezed it softly, with sympathy.

"I hope you find out, because he is very fond of you for sure."

It was such a pleasant evening, she truly enjoyed the company of Jack's family. Still, the conversation with Elle got her thinking again and she was lying awake long after Jack had fallen asleep. The evening evoked such mixed feelings in her. She had liked being with family and she had liked the way he was with his family and that he seemed to enjoy having her there, but she had once again been reminded of the harsh reality of a special forces soldier and the risks of it. Tomorrow evening she would travel back to the regiment and return to duty but if

She didn't see it coming

she was accepted to ed school as she hoped, only a few months remained and during these she would be training new medics here in UK, no hazards there. Jack on the other hand would also return to duty and go God knows where and for sure risk his neck. Could she cope living with that always hanging over them? She looked at him lying sleeping and was not sure if she still had a choice, a possibility to back out now.

She moved closer, wrapped her arms around his sleeping form from behind and pressed her lips to his back. For the first time, without him hearing it, she said;

“I love you.”

Chapter 24: Doubts

When she woke up next morning it was with a hard knot in her stomach. Today they would part, and she did not know until when. She had to use all her will-power to keep a happy-face on. She did not want to part on a sad note or put pressure on him by letting him know how miserable the situation actually made her feel. He seemed happy and relaxed. Of course, he did not want to leave her either, but he was not worried about his job, so he was more in a state of pure happiness from now knowing she had feelings for him and feeling this was the start of something special, something he never had had before. He did not have the doubts she had and was blissfully unaware of hers.

They made the most of the day until it was time for her to leave for the train station and he took her there. He would head for Brize Norton a bit later as the SF unit was being deployed, that was all he could tell her. When they kissed goodbye on the platform, she felt tears prick on the back of her eyelids but managed to keep them there.

As the train departed and she left him behind on the platform, she finally allowed the tears to come and reflected on that it had never felt this horrible saying goodbye to Elvis. They were so young then and naïve in the way that even though they at some level knew of the risks for both of them, they had felt immortal and sure they would always return to each other – until Elvis did not. That had changed her in so many ways. She was not the same brave girl any more, she was a grown-up woman who did not fear much for her own part and loved her occupation but could not bear to see those she cared for most die around her.

- OG -

Georgie had always enjoyed training new medics so in that aspect she was looking forward to the upcoming months but in other ways May turned to be a month of angst. The occasions when she heard from Jack were irregular and she worried increasingly, until the point when she felt it was not healthy. During the night, she often woke up, soaking with sweat from nightmares. Sometimes she dreamt about the moment when Elvis had fallen to the ground of the bomb blast and as she failed to resuscitate him and looked into his dead eyes, the face morphed to Jack's instead. Sometimes the dreams were about the boy Ezra who had helped her and Charles in the Belizean jungle and who ended up with a bullet between his eyes, also morphing to a dead Jack in her arms. Even Captain James, feverish and delirious from infection turned into Jack and this time he did not survive.

In daytime, she could every now and then feel a heavy pressure over her chest, like she could not breathe properly, and she recognised it as panic attacks but could do nothing about it. Then when a text or call came from Jack, proving he was alive, all got better for a while but started over after a new period of radio silence. She knew it was a combination of the past catching up with her and what Jack did now and that she probably ought to see the army psychologist, but she could not bring herself to do it. So far, she had managed, at least in the way that it went unnoticed, but she seriously wondered how she would be able to cope like this and if the only solution was breaking up with Jack even if she loved him. Asking him to change profession did not feel like a possible an option, she could never ask that of him.

Georgie felt so alone in this. She did not want to talk to her family because they would worry too much and probably give advice that she did not like anyway.

She didn't see it coming

Neither did she want to talk to Maisie or any of the others in 2 section because she did not want to disclose her and Bones/Jack's relationship, and she definitely did not want to tell Jack. Not have him worry and put pressure on him, not show herself that weak. She just had to find a way through this alone.

In addition, she had another source for angst. She was also nervous from knowing that letters would come from the universities any day now, letting her know if she was accepted or not and with the potential to change her life. When the first one came, stamped Manchester University, she almost did not dare to open it. She just sat on a bench, letter in hand, staring at it for a long while, like if she waited long enough she would obtain x-ray vision and see through it. She wished Jack had been there beside her. Finally, she opened with shaking hands, unfolded the letter and read that Manchester University was pleased to offer her a place as medicine student. First, she could almost not believe the printed words - she had made it! She had passed selection and she would be leaving the army for a whole different life.

Her eyes were hazy with tears of happiness and relief. She was absolutely thrilled and would have loved to call Jack and share the good news with him first of all, but he was not reachable for now. She had to wait to share it with her near ones until she went home to see the family the upcoming weekend, as she did not want to break the news over the phone, and she could hardly wait.

The day after, a letter from King's College came. Compared to the letter from Manchester, Georgie was not especially nervous opening it as she already had a place now, but when she read it her thoughts started spinning. Amazingly enough, she *had* been offered a place at King's college too. Now she suddenly had two

She didn't see it coming

options to choose from. Some months ago, that would have been a no-brainer - all this time her goal had been to be close to her family.

Now she was struck by the fact that the medicine studies would last for five years and much could happen over that time. What if Jack and her... what if they stayed together and he continued to live in London when he was home? Then she would want to be with him as much as possible. The trip home to Manchester could easily be done over weekends, not at all like when she was away on tour and had no option to come see her family. It was definitely possible. On the other hand, the relationship with Jack was so new. Beside her issues to handle that he constantly was risking his life, she could not know if it would last anyway, how strong their feelings were if put to the test, if they truly were a match and she had no idea if Jack would want her living in London. There was no possibility to discuss it with him right now, which was totally frustrating. She had a few weeks to let the universities know her response but right now that felt like a short time for such an important decision about her life.

- OG -

A few days later she went home to Manchester and visited her parents for dinner.

“Mum and dad, there’s something I’d like to tell you. I have some news.”

They sat down together in the living room.

“Don’t fall off your chairs now, but I’ve decided to leave the army.”

“Oh, finally! Georgie, you don’t know how happy you make me!” Grace exclaimed.

Max was a little more controlled, but she could see that he too was happy about the news, as she had known they would be.

She didn't see it coming

"I have decided I want to go to med school. I applied already last autumn, and I was just accepted this week."

"I'm also glad about this Georgie, if it's what you really want. You're not doing this for us, are you?" Max asked. He loved his daughter and wanted her to make choices that she wanted herself.

"No, I'm not. Of course, I've been thinking about you but more in the sense that *I* want to be closer to home. When you had your heart attack, I felt how much I hated that my job was keeping me away from all of you and even when you got better it made me think of what I want in the future. That was when I realised that it is time to stay home in UK, not go on tour. I spent a lot time thinking about what I would do and then, when I helped at your practice, I realised how much I enjoy working with patients also at home and suddenly it all seemed natural. I just didn't want to tell you before I got in, not to raise false hopes."

"If you're happy with your decision, so are we."

"Dad, maybe I should add that this doesn't automatically mean that I will take over your practice one day. I don't know yet what kind of physician I want to be."

"No, no, I wouldn't assume that, having my girl at home and alive is good enough for me no matter what you do."

"And for me too! Georgie, I can hardly believe it! Come here, I must give you a hug."

"Where have you been accepted?"

"Well, you see that's the problem. I have been accepted to two universities and now I'm not sure which one to choose. One is Manchester and the other is King's College."

She didn't see it coming

“Your first option must be Manchester for sure! Why would you not stay here where we are?” Grace found it hard to understand why there would be any hesitation if Georgie had the possibility to study in Manchester and as she knew nothing about Jack, that was not strange.

Max looked at her, understanding that there might be other motives than just being close to family that affected her decision.

“Both are excellent universities and Grace, remember that Georgie must have a life of her own. She could easily visit us if she lived there too. Georgie, you must make your choice based on what *you* want, and think is best for *you*. Not based on what you think is best for us. Sure, we would love to have you around, but most of all we want you to be happy. Okay? Take a few weeks to think about it and I think your gut feeling will tell you.”

“I suppose you're right” Grace muttered.

“Oh mum, dad, thanks! You're the best.”

Georgie was relieved to feel that she had her parents', or at least her dad's, blessing to choose as she found best. She did not tell them about Jack that day, feeling she had given them enough to think of and did not want to spoil the good news about her leaving the army by adding she was dating another soldier and make them concerned.

Now she desperately needed to see Jack to get her thoughts straight and maybe she would not get the chance before the response deadline. She almost felt schizophrenic right now; half of her thought about selecting university based on where *he* lived so they could have a life together, despite that they just had started

She didn't see it coming

a relationship – and that was just crazy. The other half was telling her that for her own well-being's sake, she should turn around and run while she still could, before she changed into a version of herself that she did not like. She both wanted to go all in and retreat completely, perhaps already before she saw him again. Right now, she did not know which part of her that would win this battle about her future.

She didn't see it coming

Chapter 25: Difficult choices

Back at work she did her best to stay focused, but it was far from easy. It had remained completely silent from Jack for nearly two weeks and the worrying was like a constant ache within her. She hated that it was consuming her and that she was not quite herself. She did not like this anxious person she had become, who apparently was not in charge of her own emotions. She wanted to feel strong and independent again, but how?

Luckily, training other medics was such a routine job to her that she managed the lessons without much effort and the days went by. She would soon have to answer the two universities but kept pushing the decision ahead of her until last minute. She hoped she would be able to at least talk to Jack over the phone before, even though she did not know what direction that conversation might take.

One sunny day at the end of May, just as she was teaching the new medics how to do the primary survey of a casualty; checking CABC - catastrophic bleed, airway, breathing, circulation, she felt her phone buzz from a text message. She was bracing herself for disappointment as so many times before, but as soon as she got the chance to sneak a glance she read it and her heart jolted when she saw that this time it was finally him.

Jack: Hi, what are you up to?

She held back a giggle. If he only knew how much that casual message meant to her.

She didn't see it coming

Georgie: Nothing much. At work, teaching. You? Are you fine? Working on you tan I assume.

Jack: More than fine. I'm back.

Georgie: Home in UK?

Jack: Home and here.

Georgie: Here?

Jack: At the regiment. Come see me?

Georgie: Love to but working. Later?

Jack: Please

Jack: Please, please, please

The feelings that bubbled up in her during this written, sparse conversation was hardly possible to describe, a mixture of relief, happiness and anticipation about being close to him. Such a rush of adrenaline that her legs were almost shaking. 'This is insane' she thought, 'how can one little text affect me in this way'. She knew there was nothing she wanted more than to see him.

Georgie: Give me 30 min. Where?

She finished off the training session as soon as she could, hardly knowing how she was able to lecture coherently as her thoughts were elsewhere and then headed towards the office he had asked her to come to. They still had not told anyone about them, so they did not want to be seen in the open.

She didn't see it coming

For some reason, she knocked the door before entering and he looked up as she came in, where he sat perched on the desk. He was dressed in combats, the designer clothes gone again, was tanned which made the eyes look more intensively blue than ever. She felt slightly shy when she saw him, the time apart made him feel almost like a stranger again and she was not sure what to do. Despite that she had longed for him she did not know if he wanted her to touch him here in this setting, or if he wanted to keep it strictly professional at work even if they no longer were in the same chain of command. Her heart was racing, her pulse sounding aloud in her ears as she just stood inside the door leaning against it, hoping she looked relaxed but feeling she needed the support to keep standing.

“Are you going to stay over there all day, Corporal Lane?” he asked in a dry voice, cocking an eyebrow with a characteristic smirk, reminding of the way he had been when she first got to know him as Bones. Then his face broke up in a big smile which reached all the way to his eyes.

“If you're just going to stand there and play hard to get, then I guess I will have to come to you” and he crossed the room in a few big steps, leaned over her, tipped her chin up and kissed her.

“I have missed you so much. I have longed for you like crazy.” He paused to say, then let his lips crash against hers again.

She responded to his kiss, pulled him towards her, felt the warmth of his body, the strength of his arms around her and it was so lovely that she did not know how she ever would be able to say no to this. They stayed like this for long, snogging like teenagers but wanting more. Finally, using all her will-power, Georgie interrupted it.

She didn't see it coming

"I'm only off for lunch, I need to head back soon. I'm training medics and they expect me in five minutes."

"Can I see you tonight?"

"Yes. Yes, I'd love that." It was true, she was already longing for it, but she was also slightly apprehensive because she knew that now that she had him here, she had her opportunity to take the bull by its horns and no idea how that would end. "I have some news to share."

"Exciting... Looking forward to that then. So do I, by the way - have news to share."

They parted, both curious about what news the other one might have and looking forward to the rendezvous. Georgie was shaken, in his absence she had managed to forget the magnitude of the physical effect he had on her. She realised that if she seriously considered breaking up with him, it would probably have to be over the phone because face to face she would not be able to resist him.

- OG -

Later, they were lying close to each other in his narrow army bed.

"They don't make these beds for couples." Georgie said. "Clearly they don't want to encourage squaddies to share bed."

"Or they want to encourage us to be very, very close" he laughed and pulled her on top of him. "Look, like this there is plenty of space in the bed."

They kissed again, and she tried to be only in this moment, taking delight in being close to him because she loved it, but a tiny voice kept whispering inside her the

She didn't see it coming

question how she would manage when he left again, and she knew it was time to have the conversation she already had postponed for some hours.

"Now I want to hear your news Georgie. What's happened when I was away?" he said, as if he could sense what she was thinking.

Then she told him she had heard from the two universities and been accepted to both.

"That is amazing news! I'm so proud of you, I knew you would make it." He noticed a look on her face which he could not quite interpret.

"That is great news, isn't it Georgie? You look like your hesitating... have you changed your mind about leaving the army and go to med school?"

"No, I haven't, I feel good about *that* decision."

"But there's something else that worries you?"

"I don't know which one to choose..." He remained silent, waiting for her to continue as he sensed there was something important she wanted to say.

"Jack, ever since I applied I have thought that I would choose Manchester if only got in. But the education is four years and I have to think about where I want to be all that time."

"Yes, and?"

He started to have a feeling about where this was going but he wanted her to say it.

"Well, now I can choose London too... and if I did, it would be easier for us to meet when you are home... but I don't know. This, us, it is early days and I don't know

She didn't see it coming

where it is going, and I don't know if you even would want me to consider London and now I just feel confused about all of it.”

He took his time before answering, as if measuring his words carefully.

“Georgie, this has to be your decision, not mine. Like you said, this is new, and we don't know yet where it's going, and I wouldn't want you to make a choice on my behalf and then hold it against me if you regretted it down the line.”

She could not decide if she thought it was a good thing that he was pushing her to make her own decisions, or if him not wanting her to make choices that took him into account possibly meant he was not ready to commit to this relationship after all. He continued talking.

“But maybe *my* news will in some way help you make your choice. I don't want you to freak out over this and be too scared about how this affects us because it isn't only about you, just hear me out. Okay?”

Her heart skipped a beat. How could she not be scared? Would he leave for a war zone for a longer period, so long there was no point to continue the relationship? Or, did he have just second thoughts about them anyway? Even though she had been hesitating about their future, she did not want him to.

“Okay.” She inhaled and unconsciously held her breath, bracing herself for the worst.

He watched her face attentively as he spoke.

“I have also decided to leave the Army.”

She didn't see it coming

She let the words sink in, it was so unexpected that she was not sure she had heard him right.

"You will leave the Army? You? For real?"

"Yes. Yes. And yes."

He answered calmly, a smile at the corner of his mouth at her disbelief. She was incapable of saying anything and he continued.

"Listen, it probably feels less like a life changing decision to me than it did to you. Remember it was never my own choice to join the army to begin with, though I came to like it. With my father gone, I would love to be more with my family. Also, I've talked a lot to Will who isn't very keen on running the family business on his own. He doesn't enjoy it or have a real talent for it and would much prefer if we did it together. I think I would like that too. It was not an option when our father was alive, but now it is."

She nodded. "But wouldn't you miss the Army?"

"Probably a bit, yes, but I've always known I want to leave sooner or later. Have a life here at home for real, be there more for Sarah and her boys. Once I have kids of my own, and I want to, I want to be a different kind of father than mine was. I want to be there and let them know I love them, not keep risking my life every day on the job then. At some point, I have to choose between all that and the Army and it actually doesn't feel like a very difficult decision for me."

She just nodded again, still shocked.

"I said I didn't want you to freak out because I don't want you to think I'm doing this only because you're leaving, and I want to be with you. I don't want to put that

She didn't see it coming

kind of pressure on this relationship when we're so new. This decision is something that has been growing on me for a long time... but... if you want to keep seeing me, I would love that.”

Georgie still remained quiet.

”Then again, maybe you like me best as a soldier...” he added, now feeling he was rambling on, starting to lose his cool.

He didn't say it out loud but when he had been making this decision, she had a bigger part in it than he let on. It had crossed his mind that maybe she would not want him as an ordinary man, maybe she had a special thing for SF soldiers. It did not seem that farfetched as Elvis also had been one. In the end, he had come to the conclusion that if that was the case it would not last between them anyway, but he hoped desperately that it was not like that.

Now he saw tears on her cheeks.

“Georgie are you crying?”

“Yes...”

He pulled her closer to him. “Why?”

“I'm just so happy, Jack. Of course, I want to be with you if you resign. I have been worrying sick how things would be, if I could stand being with you when you will disappear for covert ops all the time and I wouldn't know if I would get you back alive or in a body bag. I didn't know if I can handle that when I love you.”

There, she had said it to him, awake, without intending to. He withdrew just enough so he could see her face and looked at her intently.

She didn't see it coming

"You *love* me?"

"I think I do" her heart was pounding over the unplanned confession.

He caressed away the tears from her cheeks.

"Lucky for me, because... I love you too,"

He only hesitated before saying the words that had not come over his lips for so long, but only briefly because it felt completely right to say them here and now. Their faces were close, both now looking at the other with completely undisguised love, so happy their hearts could burst.

"You do?"

"Yes, it is weird because you're such an annoying person who doesn't follow orders and always get into trouble, but I have loved you for some time."

"I guess this means we will keep seeing each other, at home... no more army regulations or dangers, just you and me."

"I think it does and I think I would like that very much, and Georgie, it also means we should talk to each other. If you are worried or sad, I want to know. I want to be there for you, like I hope you will be there for me. I think I have already seen you at both your strongest and your weakest and I love both, you don't need to hide who you are from me. You don't have to manage everything on your own. I know you *can*, but you don't have to, not anymore."

She pressed her lips softly to his collarbone.

"I know. *Now* I know." It was like the dark clouds that had been hanging over her dissolved just like that.

She didn't see it coming

After this, she stayed the night. They could not imagine spending it away from each other after having admitted their love like this and felt they did not care if someone found out. It was not forbidden now that he was not her CO and soon they would leave this behind anyway.

For now, they did not talk more of where she would decide to live, but as she lay on his chest she knew that she would follow her father's advice and make the choice for her own sake, not for her family's and what she wanted most of all now was to start her studies *and* to be with Jack.

Chapter 26: The secret is out

First thing when Georgie got the acceptance letter from the university, she had spoken to Captain Aldridge about that she would leave the army, but she had not yet told the others in 2 section. Now it was time to share that piece of news as well as something else, which she was even more nervous about how they would take. They were all off duty for the evening and were hanging out together, playing cards, chatting and joking around like they always did. Georgie had been unusually quiet, watching them but not taken part in the banter. She was preparing herself for taking the leap, let the secrets out and now cleared her throat.

“Hey guys, there is something I would like to say.”

It took some time for the banter to die out but then they realised that she was serious.

“When you all go for the next tour in a couple of months, I won't be joining you.”

She was immediately interrupted by worried muttering.

“What!? Why? What will you do, Georgie?” Monk blurted out.

“I will resign, leave the Army. For real this time.”

They all remembered how she had made a half-hearted attempt when she was going to marry Jamie but had cancelled that at the same time as she called off the wedding, her love for the Army was stronger than for the man. They had all cheered then as they secretly had doubted that Jamie really was the guy for her.

She didn't see it coming

“Last time I don't think I ever wanted to leave for real, it was all for Jamie's sake. Now, I feel I need it for *me*. I'm not leaving for someone else.”

They were all quiet and listening now.

“I feel that the past is taking a toll on me; Elvis, kidnappings, when you guys were captured in Estonia. I can't take much more of that. Also, I want to stay closer to my family. You know, the thing with my dad got me thinking. Now I find it harder to go on tour for each time, so Estonia was my last. I want to spend time with him while I have the chance.”

They all understood. Actually, they had been amazed that she managed to keep herself together and come back to them at all after Elvis death. She was tough, but now it had apparently come to an end as it would for all of them sooner or later.

“Do you already have plans for what you will do?” Rab asked.

“I have been accepted to med school, will start this autumn, so in one way continuing on the same track.”

She said this with a big smile and they all congratulated her and agreed it would suit her, but they also knew they would miss her terribly. She was such a strong personality, courageous and with integrity, they completely trusted this medic with their lives. They knew well, that being a great army medic was not only about the skill to tie a good tourniquet. It also required keeping cool under fire and willingness to risk your life for others. Georgie had proven so many times that she possessed all those qualities, in addition to being a great mate.

“Who will take care of our blisters and bullet wounds now?” Fingers asked, putting words to their thoughts.

She didn't see it coming

"I'm sure they will replace me with someone very capable. Maybe Ruby will return."

She hesitated for a moment, looked down on her hands with pounding heart.

"There's one other thing I would like you to know. I want you to hear it from me and not from the rumour mill. You know I have been single since Elvis..."

Now they listened even more attentively. Was it possible that Georgie had found love again? Few things would make them happier after all this time.

"Aaaw, this is so awkward, I don't know how to tell you, so I'll just say it... I'm with Bones."

First it was dead silent, then Brains, could not help himself.

"You are *with* Bones? *Bones*? Are you fucking kidding me?"

He looked like he regretted the words already as they left his mouth, but almost all of them were thinking the same. That brutal man and Georgie? However, Fingers, who had seen other sides of Jack than the others, did not look quite as shocked.

"I like Bones" he said. "But how did this happen?"

"Yeah! I've missed this intrigue completely, you secretive girl! How did this happen right under our noses?" Maisie complained.

Georgie felt herself blushing with embarrassment.

"It happened gradually, not when he was our CO though. He is a very different person once you get to know him, not the jackass he seemed like when he was our CO. He had his reasons for that."

She didn't see it coming

"Yeah, like that he is a sadist!" Bones was clearly not Brains' favourite and he felt protective towards their mate.

"Brains..." she shook her head smiling.

"Well, sorry, maybe I crossed the line, but I really hope he has qualities he has not shown to the rest of us, otherwise he isn't good enough for our girl. He had better make you happy or we will come and get him."

"He *does* make me happy. He really does. He takes care of me like no one else, you can rest assured about that."

They could see from the glow in her face that it was true, no matter how unlikely it seemed. Georgie and Bones, who always had been arguing in some way. Come to think of it, maybe arguing so sparks were flying. In this case, it was apparently true that quarrel was a start for love.

She also told them that he too would resign, and they planned to live in London.

"She keeps delivering shocking news! Our Manchester girl is moving to London!"

They all laughed but she sensed it would take them some time to digest all this. On the other hand, it had taken herself a year to come to terms with that she had feelings for Jack, first fervently denying it even to herself, so she couldn't expect them to catch up instantly.

When the group broke up for the evening, Maisie caught up with her.

"Now I want some more details, girl to girl!"

Georgie felt her cheeks heat again, but at the same time it was nice to finally be able to share this with Maisie.

She didn't see it coming

"When? How?"

Georgie shared their long story but omitted the details she felt were private between her and Jack, much to Maisie's disappointment.

"How is he in bed? I have always wondered about that. He looks like he could be well equipped?"

"Maisie! I never asked that about you and Rab!"

"Suit yourself, if you don't ask you don't get any answers, but Rab is amazing in case you wonder. Now it is your turn!"

"Nah, I won't tell."

"Please, just a little."

"Okay, he is pretty amazing too, but that is all I'm going to say."

As the girls giggling walked down the passageway, Georgie realised that when she relived her and Jack's love story by telling it to Maisie she felt even more in love, something she had not even thought possible as she was so completely in love already.

- OG -

Late in the evening Jack called. She could hear from the connecting signal that it was from somewhere abroad but as usual did not know where.

"How did they take it?" he asked, knowing she had planned on telling 2 section.

She didn't see it coming

“Sad that I'm leaving, flabbergasted we're together. You're not everyone's favourite person as you may know. Brains said he will beat you up if you're not treating me well. Probably all of 2 section will come for you. Just saying.”

He found this utterly amusing. On his end, he had planned to tell Spanner and Peanut and she knew he had been a bit nervous about it despite that he did his best to conceal that. She had been nervous about that too, as they had been so close to Elvis and she had the feeling they would always see her as his girl.

“Did you tell them?”

“Yeah.”

“And?”

“It seemed like they were genuinely happy for us. Turns out they have hoped you would meet a good guy after Elvis and fortunately I have passed their test, mind you.”

They both laughed at this with relief. To Georgie, telling Spanner and Peanut had been like she imagined that telling the kids about seeing someone new after a divorce would be. Their approval was important to them both. Now their relationship was finally out in the open, no more secrecy. Bones had informed his CO already before he left, preferred to come clean even if they were not breaking any rules when they did not work together. Georgie had told her parents the other week.

“So, now it only remains for you to meet my family and we will be 100% official.”

“Should I be nervous?”

She didn't see it coming

"I don't think mum has forgiven you for making me live in London instead of Manchester..."

"Oi, that was your choice!"

"Yes, but only because I find you irresistible. If you're lucky you may still be on the plus side with her because you're leaving the Army too. They have had enough of the military, I think."

"So, should we go see them next time I'm home?"

"Are you ready for that?"

"I think I am."

Jack had also turned in his notice and would only stay in a couple months longer. He would be sent off on operations during this time and had promised Georgie he would not take any unnecessary risks, but she was extremely relieved every time he returned. His decision to leave the army had somehow stemmed her panic attacks but she was still worrying. The good thing was that since they last met, she felt that she could ventilate her worries with him and that instantly made them smaller. Still, she knew that her heart would be lighter the day he "stamped out" as she could not help thinking that maybe she was jinxed. She was afraid that when she was this close to happiness, something would destroy it all. She had in mind both her wedding day with Elvis and Elvis' death right after their reconciliation when she had put his ring back on her finger. She hoped nothing would get in the way of a life together with Jack in the same way, before he left the army. She did not know if she would be able to bear that once again.

Chapter 27: Fantasy on the road

Two weeks later he was back in UK, in one piece. Now that the relationship was out of the closet, she could not bear waiting for him to join her and instead drove to Brize Norton to surprise him at the airport. As he did not expect her to be there, she saw him before he spotted her and as usual the sight of him made her heart race. He stood out among the others when he came striding confidently, a few inches taller than the average and even in the company of other soldiers more fit than most. He was still in uniform, with the bergen casually thrown over his shoulder as if it weighed close to nothing, despite that she knew for a fact that was not the case. His skin was even more tanned than when she last saw him and on his chin the shadow of a stubble, which she thought made him look shitting hot.. She felt that she wanted him more than ever and could hardly wait for them to be alone, but the plan was to drive directly to Manchester so right now they were up for many hours in the car. When he noticed her, his serious face was transformed by a huge smile and he dropped his bergen on the floor, crossed the waiting hall in her direction with giant leaps and, without caring about Spanner, Peanut or anyone else there, lifted her up and kissed her.

“Missed me?” he laughed.

“More than you can imagine.”

“You must have since you came all the way here to pick up a soldier who hasn't even had a shower.”

He raised his hand to ruffle his own hair and flashed another smile with teeth which looked incredibly white against the tanned skin.

She didn't see it coming

“Shower or no shower, all I want is to be close to you and I couldn't wait. I promise I will let you have a shower before you meet my parents.”

“I should hope so. I want to at least try to make a good impression on your mum even if she hates my guts for taking you away to London.”

Georgie had rented a car as she still did not own one and she offered to drive as already had many hours of travel behind him. Back on British soil and off duty, he could admit that he actually was tired and gratefully accepted the offer. And for the first part of the three and a half hour drive he could not keep himself from falling asleep.

She loved having him beside her again and kept glancing at him as she was driving, so happy that this gorgeous man was hers and that he had returned safe and sound. When he woke up, they shifted between driving in companionable silence and talking about anything. He spoke of the few things he could from his tour without disclosing classified information, but mostly she told him of what had happened at home. When she ran out of things to tell they drove in silence again, just enjoying each other's company.

“Do you know, the first time I was alone with you in a car I was so nervous I didn't know what to do”, he suddenly said. “I was aware of everything you did, every move, how close your leg was to mine... You seemed so relaxed and unaware and I was a total nerve wreck.”

“Are you kidding me? I had no idea, when was this?”

She didn't see it coming

On duty, they had not been alone in a car together many times. There was the time when he drove her back to the base in Nigeria but surely that was long before he felt anything for her.

“In Nigeria, when I drove you home from the night club.”

“But then... I didn't mean anything to you then... I thought you thought I was a moron after I had blown up your covert op?”

“Maybe I did too, but I was hitting on you, wasn't I? And was cruelly rejected”, he shook his head at the memory.

“I was sure you just wanted to get laid. With *anyone*, not me specifically – and you *did* bring home that nurse instead, so the rejection could not have been that hard on you. You're not seriously trying to tell me there was something more to it at that point?” she giggled.

He chewed his bottom lip, hesitated if he should tell her.

“I brought her home only so you wouldn't think I had been serious. I could have done without her company that night, and to be honest I was relieved when she passed out in my bed from being drunk, but I wanted *you* for real. I couldn't even understand it then. I was still mad at you for being so reckless and not obeying orders, but that evening when I saw you on the dance floor... I wanted you like nothing else and even though I denied it for long I think I have wanted you ever since. When I was forced to be your CO, I set up a set of rules for myself.”

“Why?”

She didn't see it coming

“Why? So, I wouldn't make a total arse of myself; so I wouldn't break Army regulations and be dishonourable discharged; so I wouldn't make you feel awkward for thinking your commander was pining for you.”

“Were you really? Pining for me?”

She glanced at him, but he stared on the road and she realised that even now he was slightly embarrassed.

“Yes.”

He was serious now and she realised it. She took his words in, reminisced all the moments that had passed between that evening in the car and the rainy hot night in Bangladesh. Seeing it all in a different light now, knowing he had wanted her all that time but never once let it shine through. Been professional, harsh, never come on to her in a way that either could have made her uncomfortable or made her desire him. Not until that night changed everything.

“But you were so hard and cold, scolded at me all the time, I thought I was your least favourite of everyone then...”

“Just trying my best to stay professional. Worked quite well until we were alone that night. Apparently, breaking the rule of not being alone with you was the undoing of me. I thought I was stronger but...” He cleared his throat for no specific reason other than that he now was embarrassed.

“Jack, you sure now how to keep surprising me”, she giggled, and it did strange things to her insides to know he had secretly wanted her then, when he had seemed so unapproachable.

She didn't see it coming

She stayed quiet for a while kept her eyes on the road but glanced at the man beside her every now and then and noticed he was staring at her with a smile, happy to be in her presence again.

“What would you have done if I had accepted your invitation that evening?” she then asked coyly, and it made him laugh.

“I was so fucking stupid then. I thought if I just slept with you once, I would be able to forget you after. Thought I would be able to put it behind me after a one-nighter.”

“Yeah, I get that. But what would you have *done*, to me? I'm curious.”

Now her tone was inviting rather than coy, and he cottoned on to that she was totally flirting with him.

“I would have seduced you Georgie Lane” he smirked.

“Tell me how, I want to hear what tricks I missed that time.”

“Are you sure you can stay on the road then?”

“Try me.”

”Okay... Dirty talk has never really been my thing” he sounded slightly insecure underneath his amusement. He could be so rough at times, curse and shout, but talking like this to a woman that he cared about was nothing he was used to, and he was blushing already before he got started.

“You don't have to be dirty. Just tell me what you would have done. If it is like you say you must have fantasised about it.”

He had. Hundreds of times before it finally came true in Bangladesh and then at least as many times afterwards.

She didn't see it coming

“I would have taken you with me to my room, just led you by the hand, asked if you wanted a glass of whiskey... but just one because I wouldn't have wanted you to be drunk. I probably would have downed one myself just to steady my nerves, being alone with you, close to you.”

He raised his hand and caressed her bare forearm, made the hairs stand on end.

“Then I kiss you, softly first to feel that you want it and when you respond I kiss you harder, opening your mouth, so I can feel your tongue meeting mine. It is an amazing kiss, sends shivers down my spine especially when I notice you seem to enjoy it. You don't regret coming with me. You pull me to you, put your hands around my neck and we continue kissing. I have to kiss your neck, down on your bare shoulders. You have a white strap top on and when I touch your breast through the thin fabric I realise you're not wearing any bra because I can feel your nipples through it. That makes me so incredibly excited. I push the straps off your shoulders, continue kissing your neck, then move your arms up over your head so I can take the top off completely. I can barely breathe when I see you with naked upper body for the first time because you're so stunning. You're standing leaning towards the wall, your hair falling around your shoulders. I have watched it all night when you were dancing, but now I can touch it. I almost don't dare to touch you, but I do. Your skin is so warm and soft and first when I cup your breasts they are all soft, but when I stroke with the pad of my thumbs over your nipples they turn all rigid, standing out as if they want to be kissed. So, I bend down and close my lips around one of them. Your tits are so perfect, I think I could just stay kissing them, nibbling them for hours. I feel your fingers in my hair, holding me to you and I hear you moan so I know I'm doing something right. I let my hands graze over your belly, then kneel in front of you and unbutton your slacks, tug them down your

She didn't see it coming

hips and pull off. Then I caress the inside of your thighs, up to the lining of your knickers, touch you on the outside of your knickers.”

Georgie felt herself getting increasingly aroused just by listening to Jack's words and his voice growing coarser as he spoke but was trying her best to focus on the road. Luckily it was straight with little traffic. Jack on the other hand held his eyes fixed on her face to see her reaction to his words as he got more relaxed telling the fantasy and, just like her, increasingly aroused.

Georgie had changed into civvies, a white blouse and midi length, A-line skirt skirt, before she picked up the car. As he continued talking he now did the same thing he was saying, placed his hand first on her knee, then stroke softly up the inside of her thighs under the skirt until he reached the lining of her knickers and then pressed lightly where she wanted it the most. He continued talking.

“Then I rub you there until I feel through the knickers that you're getting wet, and I keep kissing you all the time, your lips, neck, breasts... When you ask for more I remove your knickers and let first my fingers slip into you. I can feel then that you really want me, and I bring your hand to touch me on the outside of my combats, but you start unbuttoning them and then you slide your hand down my boxers... and I'm really hard by now.”

He was, both in the story and for real. Georgie let out a muffled sound as he continued to touch her, still on the outside of the knickers but more insistently.

“Georgie, fuck it, stop the car somewhere! I can't stand this anymore, I want you. I need you”, he demanded with thick voice.

She didn't see it coming

If he had not asked her she would have anyway because she wanted him so much now that focusing on driving was not possible. She turned off from the main road into one that was winding into the woods and soon found a place to park which they thought was private enough.

When she stopped the car, he pushed back his seat as far as he could and hastily unbuttoned his own combats, pushed them and the boxers down in one swift move and she straddled him. Both laughed at the acrobatics required, but then became serious. This was not the time for niceties because the need was too big for them both. Whilst kissing each other hard, he hoisted her skirt up. He was too excited to bother taking of her knickers, just pulled them to the side and rubbed against her, feeling how slick she was. Now she took charge of the pace and teasingly first just let him enter with the rounded tip of his length. When he groaned complaining, she pushed harder against him, so he finally entered her, first partly, then all the way to the hilt. This time they were unable to pause to take that feeling in. Frantically, with the raw need built up during the time they had been apart, they moved together, kissing, touching, clasping, panting, with eyes locked all the time. He grabbed her hips to pull her closer to him, so he got even deeper into her and she tilted her head back, exposing her neck to his hot kisses and unable to restrain herself, let out a mewl.

“I can't hold back much longer” he groaned, almost amazed with himself that he had managed for this long when his whole body felt so immensely sexually triggered. It had always been amazing between them, but never this intense and sensual, it was like their bodies could not be close enough, the thrusts hard enough. The pace and intensity increased for a few short moments until they both climaxed. The crescendo was almost painful pleasure and they collapsed into each other's

She didn't see it coming

arms and burst into laughter because it had been so unbelievably intense. He pressed his lips to her collarbone and inhaled her, kept the pressure on her hips to still hold her tight. Wanted to keep her close after sharing this.

"That was a tad uncomfortable but so worth it! I should have rented a bigger car."
She broke the tension.

"Oh Georgie, I think I should start telling you bedtime stories more often!"

"I would love that. We wouldn't get much sleep though" she giggled.

"Who cares?"

He took her face between his palms and with the passionate need now stilled, kissed her gently before they had to unfold themselves not to get completely stuck.

They soon continued driving down the small road with the purpose to find somewhere to turn but when they thought they saw a lake glimpse between the trees pulled over again. It was indeed a lake and as it was completely deserted, and as they could do with freshening up, they spontaneously left the car to go skinny dipping, splashing water on each other like kids and laughing. Then they lay naked on the grass, drying in the sun, talking and holding hands, feeling completely content with life. He rolled over to come on top of her, supporting himself with one hand on each side of her head not to weigh too heavy on her small body against the hard ground. He looked down on her with smiling eyes, reflecting the blue skies above them.

"When I met you Georgie I had never really been in love, but I love you. Love you to the moon..."

She didn't see it coming

"... and back, Jack. I love you too." she completed his sentence. They kissed softly again, and she could not remember if she ever had been so happy, felt as complete, as she did right in this moment. She felt him grow hard again from the touch of their bodies, the hardness pressing against her thigh, so she let her legs fall apart and splayed her hands over his buttocks to pull him closer and there in the bright sunshine, to the sound of chirping birds they became one again, but this time slow and gentle.

- OG -

After this lovely detour, they continued towards Manchester. When they arrived at Georgie's flat, both knackered stumbled into bed and fell fast asleep in each other's arms.

The following afternoon Georgie's parents were throwing a small garden party for the family, including any current boyfriends. Marie had been going out with her Tom for long, for Lulu there were still news on that topic every other week. Today she had chosen to come alone because she wanted to focus on getting to know Georgie's new man.

Georgie had noticed that Jack was a bit nervous on the way there and wondered what he would be like. It turned out he was the most charming version of himself, the one she previously only had seen when they were alone or with his family, and it hit her that likely this was how he was when he was being himself most. His brusquer demeanour was merely a façade. He managed to charm everyone, including her father who always had been sceptical to the good-looker Elvis' verbal charms. Georgie felt her heart swell with pride that he was here with her, for her, and winning over her family on his team despite being nervous.

She didn't see it coming

"He is so dishy!" was Lulu's comment.

"I like him, he seems genuine" said Marie.

Her mum only managed an ecstatic "Oh Georgie!" while giving her a hug a moment alone in the kitchen.

And Max said, "He seems to really love you, so he must be a very sensible man."

Cheerfully, they strolled the streets back to her place in a good mood after the successful evening and a few glasses of wine.

"You survived" she said.

"Indeed and had a good time too. Did I pass, you think?"

"With flying colours."

They stopped and kissed at her stairs but were interrupted by his phone ringing.

"Don't answer that" she whispered in his ear.

"I have to check who it is."

He checked the display, his face turning serious.

"Sorry, love, I have to take this. Why don't you wait inside?"

She went inside, her happy mood swept away like a rug had been pulled away from under her feet. While waiting for him, she had a nagging feeling about what would happen and when he finally came in, closing the door behind him, his face was grim.

"I'm needed."

She didn't see it coming

Chapter 28: Trapped

"You're needed?"

"Yes."

"I thought we would have this weekend."

She was so disappointed she felt sick.

"You know it's not up to me. But hey, this will be the last time I go away. Then it will be only you and me, doing what we want with our lives without interference."

He stepped closer, but she stepped back, too upset for wanting a hug.

"I just wasn't prepared... not after these days. It has been so perfect, but so short and I'm not ready for it to end yet."

"It *has* been perfect and all I want is to stay, but I can't."

"Duty calls, right?"

She hoped she did not sound bitter or sarcastic because she did not want to, even if she could not help feeling it on the inside. She knew how much she herself had resented when Jamie was holding her back when she was going on tour. She did not want to be *that* person.

"Come here" he said and pulled her to the sofa, ignoring her resistance. He sat down and took her with him in an embrace.

"Duty calls... but maybe it will feel better when you hear what it is about."

"Are you allowed to tell?"

She was surprised, that had never happened before. Not with him, not with Elvis.

She didn't see it coming

“This time I am because it isn't classified. I'm just needed for my expertise anyway, not going with the rest of the unit. Have you read in the news about the boys in Thailand who are stuck in a cave?”

“A bit. Why?”

“That's the mission. To help get them out.”

On June 23, 2018, twelve boys from a Thai football team had gone on an excursion in the Tham Luang Nan Non cave together with their coach. But a monsoon rain came, and the entrance was blocked and now the group had been caught inside the 10-kilometer cave system for two weeks. A few days ago, they had been located but there was still the issue of getting them out and it was a fight against the clock as continued rain could flood the whole cave system and drown them.

“But why you?”

“It is a highly risky operation to get them out, both for the boys and those who will extract them. I don't even think they know how to yet, the only way in and out is to dive for hours and obviously the boys don't know how to dive at all. International teams with the most experienced people from all over the world are being sent there - and beside being SF soldier I'm a highly experienced diver.”

Of course, he was, she thought. Why did he have to be so damn skilled?

“So, you will help with the extraction?”

“I will be part of the team UK sends there.”

“Must you go?” she could not help the question slipping out of her.

“Georgie, it is children who are trapped in there while the whole world is watching. We must do whatever we can not to let them die in front of us and time is running out. If we don't do everything we can, we can't call ourselves decent human beings.

She didn't see it coming

And now that they have requested me, I feel I just must go. I think you understand, don't you?"

She did not want to, but she did. Of course she did. If they had asked her she would have gone without hesitation. She buried her face by his collarbone.

"I do, and I love you for being the one to do this, but I will count the days until you're back."

"So will I, but we still have the night."

He kissed her and then, with her still in his arms rose from the sofa and carried her to the bed, where he lay her down. He posed himself beside her, so he could reach all of her. Looking at her, he traced the contour of her lips with his index finger, then placed his lips there softly. He started kissing every inch of her body, first the already bare skin and gradually removing clothes and kissing the newly undressed parts.

"I don't want any part of you to feel that it has been forgotten" he whispered, lips pressed to her neck.

"Then I think you need to kiss me here" she pointed him in the direction of her breasts and he willingly closed his lips around her nipples, treating one at a time. Once they both were pointing stiff he asked: "Anywhere else that feels neglected?"

"Here..." giggling she guided his head further downwards and as he followed her command applying lips, tongue and fingers she could not think of anything but the intense pleasure building up like a wave and finally exploding inside of her as she was arching her body against him. He kept his fingers deep inside her for as long as she was shuddering around them, then slowly retracted them and swiftly undressed himself with the intention to come into her and extinguish his own need, but she stopped him.

She didn't see it coming

“Now it is your turn” she patted the bed beside her with a sly smile and as he lay down, she too kissed him all over. Oh, how she loved to touch him and look at him. She loved stroking his broad back, where the muscles were playing as soon as he made the smallest move yet were slender rather than bulgy just as she liked them. She caressed the flat six-pack abs which was the first part of him she ever had touched.

“Washboard soldiers...” she whispered.

“What?”

“Washboard soldiers, that was what you said that you wanted us to be. You better not get too chubby yourself when you leave the army, because I love you like this”, she teased.

“And here I thought you loved me only for my beautiful inside.”

“That too, but not only.”

She continued her administrations, first with feather light caressing touches using her hands and mouth, driving him mad as he already was so excited and soon she touched more teasingly, more enticing and she heard him groan. She loved to know she was turning him on and that he was close to the edge.

”Georgie, please” he begged. ”I need to be inside you - now.”

She smiled and gave a short nod. His need for taking command asserted itself and he nimbly pulled her up to come level with him, flipped them around so he came on top of her, into her and they moved together, faster and more intense with each push until he climaxed, and she a second time.

They lay silent for a long while, catching their breath, their skin glued together by the thin film of perspiration that covered them both.

She didn't see it coming

"Jack McClyde, you are forgiven for leaving me" she sighed.

"Are you sure? Otherwise I have something else that might cheer you up."

"What then?"

"Nah, you seem content as it is. I don't need to tell you know."

He rolled of her to lie on his back, next to her, with a mischievous grin.

"Jack!"

"Georgie?" He continued grinning even when she threw a pillow on his face.

"Please, tell me."

"Okay, as you are asking so nicely. Thing is, there is something I have been wanting to ask you for some time."

"Okay?"

"We have only been seeing each other a couple of months and I know you're very independent and all that... but would you like to move in with me when you move to London?"

She had not been expecting this and felt her heart jolt.

"Are you sure you would want that?"

"I think I can fit in one poor student in my house."

"You can fit in twenty poor students if you want to, but do you really want me to move in?"

"Otherwise I wouldn't ask. I'm thinking I will be working quite much, getting up to speed with the family business. You will have your studies, and everyone knows that med school is no walk in the park. This means, we will be away from each other a lot, and then I would love if we came home together - to our home."

She didn't see it coming

His expression was nonchalant, but his blue eyes were pleading, and she realised this was not just making amends for leaving, he really wanted her there.

“I want to move in with you, and not because you have such an extremely beautiful home, but I want to be with you too.”

She was not sure that Jack McClyde was the marrying kind, but on the other hand she was not sure if she was either with two cancelled weddings behind her, but she felt in this moment that she wanted to spend the rest of her life with him. It just felt a bit premature to tell him that much.

Before they fell asleep, happy about the decision they just made, he ordered a cab for the early morning hours. They slept tight together with him as the large spoon, her as the little one. She was still lying there as he kissed her goodbye and closed the door at dawn. Silently, tears were running down her cheeks wetting her pillow, as she felt the sheets getting cold in the now empty space beside her.

- OG -

Even though she wished he did not have to go she was not worried initially, thinking this last mission of his could have been something much worse but as she followed the intense news reporting she changed her mind. She got increasingly anxious when she understood the complexity of the operation. Soon she was following the news in an almost obsessive manner. She was not sure which was worst; before, when he had been away for covert ops that she knew nothing about, or now when it was almost like reading the tabloids for gossip.

One morning she had routinely turned on the news and listened to the reporter whilst brushing her teeth.

“This cave adventure has now demanded its first casualty. A special forces soldier helping in the efforts to extract the boys has been reported dead. Apparently, it was lack of oxygen...”

She didn't see it coming

Georgie had dropped the toothbrush and stood frozen, a chill going through her entire body and a shrill sound ringing in her ears. The familiar and horrible pressure over the chest was there, she could not breathe, and it was worse than ever before. Casualty. Lack of oxygen. It was *him*. She could feel in her whole body that it was him. He was gone, and she was alone again. Then she did not remember more because everything around her was just in a haze.

Lulu found Georgie when she came by to pick her up for the jog they had planned together. She was sitting in a corner of the sofa, rocking from side to side, hugging a pillow, staring into thin air. She had no idea how long it was since she heard the news, how long she had been sitting there. It was as if time both stood still and had stretched to be endlessly long. Seconds seemed like hours, hours like years. Time did not matter anymore, if Jack was not there to share it with her.

Without knowing what had happened, Lulu could easily see that it was bad. Really bad. They used to joke about the psychology class she had taken but never passed, but one or two things had actually stuck, and she realised Georgie was in shock and had some kind of panic attack. Now she tried to connect with her.

“Georgie... Georgie? What has happened?”

To Georgie it was like someone was talking to her from afar, through a thick fog, but after a while her focus shifted from infinity to actually looking at and seeing Lulu.

“Lulu... what are you doing here?”

“I came to pick you up for our jog. What's happened?”

“No jog today. Jack is dead...”

“WHAT?!”

“I saw it on the news...”

She didn't see it coming

“They said his name?”

“No, they said it was a special forces soldier, died there in those caves, but I know it's him. I can feel it. I feel it in my whole body. I know his gone, I know we won't be happy together. It has happened again.”

“But you can't be sure, not if they have not said. Have you called him? Texted him?”

She had not, panic had crippled her logical thinking. Lulu helped her to dial the number on the phone, Georgie's own hands were shaking too much, but on the other end it went directly to the recorded answering message. Hearing the message in his familiar, cheeky, loved voice broke her heart. She would never hear it again for real.

She coiled up in the sofa again, sobbing, finding it hard to get enough air.

“Georgie don't do this to yourself. We must find out more before we can be sure.”

“I feel it” she just said and shut out she world, trapped in grief and panic.

Lulu was devastated to see her sister like this, but it was not easy to find out more details at this point. She did not want to have the TV on for Georgie's sake but googled all that she could. So far, the scarce information was identical from all sources: a special forces soldier had died, but there was no mentioning of name or even nationality. She tried calling Jack again and this time left a message. “Jack, it is Lulu. If you hear this, call back to Georgie as soon as you can. Please!”

But it remained silent.

Lulu called their dad and Max came, taking care of his daughter in the best way he could but he realised that the only thing that could help get her out of this black hole right now was a miracle. He heard her whispering the same phrase again and again, like a charm “Come back to me, I love you.”

She didn't see it coming

And then, after almost 24 hours of nothingness, the miracle happened. Georgie's phone rang. Lulu picked it up, checking the display

"It says it's Jack."

Light of hope returned in Georgie's eyes, but she almost did not dare to answer.

"Are you there, love?"

It was him, his voice.

"You're alive!"

Then she could not say more, choking with tears and emotions.

"Why wouldn't I be?" he seemed confused, not at all understanding how come she had worried in the way he could hear she had.

"They said a special forces soldier was dead... and you did not answer."

"I'm here! I'm alive! I have only been working. I was in that cave the last twelve hours, couldn't answer the phone. It is a bloody sad story about the dead guy, but he was a Thai former marine. Didn't they say? I never occurred to me you might think it was me. Georgie, for how long did you think I was dead?"

"Since I heard it. I don't know how long, a lifetime. It's been a lifetime without you and I felt I couldn't make it. Come home."

"Oh, baby. I will, soon. I wish I could come now but now we're all set up to extract the boys over the next days. We will take care."

"But one died."

"And we learned from that. It won't happen again, and I promise I will call you every time I'm out. I will be home in no time. I love you."

"Come back to me."

She didn't see it coming

“I will.”

Lady Luck had been smiling at them this time. He was not Elvis and maybe she was not jinxed after all. Maybe they would be allowed to live happily ever after. She sunk into the couch again, completely exhausted but endlessly happy. They talked a while longer, he told about everything that was going on over there and when they said good bye she fell asleep and slept like a baby.

No doubt, all available resources were needed over there in Thailand. Using pumps, the water levels had been reduced in the cave, but new rain storms were expected and if they did not manage to extract the boys in the next three to four days they might be caught inside for months or drown or die from the air quality getting worse by the day.

Over the next days, the rescue operation was launched, and reports came that successively small groups of boys had been successfully extracted, accompanied by divers and then transported to hospital. One of the divers was Jack and Georgie was nervous, knowing that he faced an 11-hour round trip diving – on the way back being responsible for guiding one boy. But all went well. On July 9, eighteen days after they first walked into the cave, the last boys and the coach were rescued. There were no more casualties and the dead Thai marine soldier was honoured for having sacrificed his life. Georgie was immensely grateful it was over, and her Jack was alive.

- OG -

She was now back at the regiment for her final weeks before leaving for good and impatiently waiting for the phone call from Jack, confirming he was back home. She was walking over the parade ground with Maisie, who just asked if she had heard anything from him, when she heard a harsh voice shouting behind them.

“Corporal Lane! Halt, and turn around!”

She didn't see it coming

She was not the only one turning to the sound of the commanding voice, but probably the only one who got butterflies in her stomach from it.

There he was, standing in the bright sunlight with a giant smile on his face and open arms. For a second, she just took in the sight, then rushed towards him and leaped into his embrace. Quite a few jaws dropped as many still had not known about this unlikely couple. Georgie and Jack did not care that everyone could see them or that this was not proper army behaviour at all, they kissed, and kissed and kissed - until someone had the nerve to shout, "Get a room!"

"Sod off!" Jack shouted back but the interruption made them gather themselves somewhat.

"I'm freakin' happy to see you."

"Me too, freakin' happy to see you and now I'm home for good. From tomorrow my services belong to you only and the Queen can go... well she can go pull an old blanket over herself or whatever because now I'm not running away on her account ever again."

"Never thought about that she was the woman I was competing with" Georgie giggled.

"Well, Her Royal Highness really lost the fight long ago. All I want is right here in my arms."

As they kissed again, Georgie knew that was true for her too.

Epilogue: Will she come?

JACK

As I'm standing here, waiting for her, I don't think I have ever been so nervous. My mouth is dry like sand, my palms sweaty and I can feel how tense my jaw is even if I try to put on a relaxed and friendly face. What if she doesn't come, if she has changed her mind? Then all the friendly faces around would just make it worse. They are all a bit of a blur to me right now, but I know they are here.

Spanner, Peanut – almost unrecognizable now that they are dressed to their teeth and Spanner even surprised by shaving off his beard. Maisie and Rab, as much in love as ever and newly engaged. Monk with his girlfriend (or maybe it is wife by now), Brains, Fingers, Kingy. She even convinced me to invite the wanker Charles James. I like his feisty wife though, so I guess that is some compensation for having to put up with him. Apparently, they managed to get a babysitter for their 3-year old because they did not bring her and from what I can tell by the exhilarated looks they are exchanging, they are looking forward to the hotel night on their own at least as much as to the wedding party. In the first row I see mum, already looking proud and tearful even if nothing has really happened yet. Will, who looks good these days, much more relaxed and good-humoured since he got out of running the company by himself and we found our way back to each other as brothers. Meghan beside him of course, Sarah and the boys, Georgie's family (ah, Lulu is actually still going out with that guy, the longest relationship I've seen her have) and then there's so many other friends. Almost didn't know we had so many as they are, now that I see them all in one room.

She didn't see it coming

I asked Georgie if she preferred church or at the registry office and she went with church as registry office wedding still held too many negative memories. I don't mind, anywhere would have been fine for me but it does look amazing in here today and it feels formal and proper, which I kind of like for this occasion because it is a big day. When she said she wanted to invite all from the old 2 section I joked and asked if it was so she could send them after me if I didn't show up. I shouldn't have done that, she didn't take it well... I guess some things will never be funny no matter how much time has passed, and I should have known, and I bit my tongue and cursed my large mouth. The last thing I want is to hurt her or make her worry about this day. Wild horses could not have stopped me from coming here. I just hope she feels the same.

- OG -

He had proposed a year ago. He had taken her to Paris for a surprise weekend to celebrate that she had finished her second year of medicine studies. Before going, he had considered if this was the right time to propose, because he knew he wanted to, but had decided it would just be too much of a cliché to propose in Paris and skipped bringing the ring he already had bought. Once there, he was blown away by the romance of the city and by her. It was the first time she was there and for him it felt like a whole different city in her company despite that he had been there many times growing up. They were both so incredibly happy, strolling through the streets and flowering parks hand in hand all day, making love half the night. The second evening they had dinner seated outdoors of a small, romantic restaurant in Marais and laughed together as cliché after cliché was ticked off; the small tables with checked cloths, the *moule frites* with white wine, the ambulatory rose seller and the passing street musician playing French tunes on an accordion. He felt

She didn't see it coming

happy through and through and looking at her smiling face in the candle light he had known for sure that he wanted to spend his life with this woman. So, in the spur of the moment, without any prepared speech or ring, only the rose in hand that he just had been tricked into buying, he went down on one knee in front of her then and there and said; "Georgie Lane, I love you to bits and I want to be yours for the rest of our lives. Will you marry me?"

She had looked at him, slightly shocked and first no words came out. People around them had noticed what was happening and it was like everyone froze in anticipation, forks halfway to the mouth, waiter pausing his busy step, even the accordion player paused with fingers in the air.

Then she said: "Of course I will, Captain McClyde, I just never thought you'd ask me" and kissed him. She was the only one calling him captain these days and he liked it, coming from her mouth it both sounded affectionate and flirty and it always turned him on slightly.

Cheering and clapping broke out among the tables and the waiter brought a bottle of champagne on the house. Afterwards walked back to the hotel they giddy with joy and insatiable kept each other awake until the first morning light. They even made love on the balcony with a view of the Eiffel Tower, although the view was bit wasted on them as they only had eyes for each other, then fell asleep in each other's arms.

- OG -

Now the music starts, where the heck is she?

She didn't see it coming

Finally! The doors swing open and there she comes with Max. She's here and... sweet fucking Jesus! She's so amazingly beautiful in that white lace dress that it takes everything I have to keep myself from crying. I can barely believe this day is finally here because I have wanted it for so long. I have never told her because I don't want to sound like an echo from her past - but I fell in love with her the first moment I saw her. It took some time before I admitted it to myself though. I thought Elvis sounded like such a loser that time he told me about how he had loved her right from the start. I didn't believe then that such things happened in real life and least of all I could believe it, or accept it, when it happened to me.

There is just no one else like her. Delicate on the outside, but inside so strong and courageous. She is both my weakness and my strength. My weakness because she sometimes makes me feel stripped naked from the strong feelings I have for her and I know that she could hurt me like no one else. My strength because with her I finally became myself again, leaving behind the cheeky, arrogant mask I put on the day I entered Sandhurst because I thought it was what I needed to survive the Army. I'm not sure she understands the effect she has on me, maybe it is for the best that she doesn't know that she has the power to ruin me because I love her so much. Sometimes I get a little restless, miss the action and the travels but I saw what it was doing to her, so I'm glad I took the decision to leave even if it was a bit earlier than I had planned. I'm not sure we would have made it to this day otherwise, so it was worth it, and I will never regret it.

I'm amazed I manage to get my words out loud, so everyone can hear them, my voice doesn't even sound weak. I don't really dare to believe this is all true until the moment she also says, "I do" and the priest tells me I can now kiss my wife.

She didn't see it coming

*Then I kiss her, so we wish it was time for the wedding night already, and I
whisper in her ear;*

"I love you Mrs. McClyde."

"I love you, Captain McClyde."

I'm the happiest man in the world.

Epilogue 2: Don't mess with my wife

JACK

Jack McClyde wriggled where he sat, partly because of the hard wooden seat, partly because he still, four years after leaving the Army, got restless if he sat still for too long. He was known for leading meetings standing or pacing around the room, getting impatient if he was forced not to move for long. Today was different though, he very much wanted to be right where he was and prepared to wait. He was here in the Southwark Cathedral for a very special occasion; his wife's graduation ceremony. This sunny July day, the impressive ancient church was hosting the graduation ceremony for this year's version of King's College medical degree ceremony and Georgie McClyde were among those who were to graduate.

He let out a sigh of relief once the music started playing, indicating the procession was about to start and the audience was asked to stand. She entered among the others and as usual, the sight of her made his stomach flip.

When the dean announced that this year's Jelf medallist, the undergraduate who had distinguished herself most, was Georgie McClyde, his heart almost burst with pride. He certainly was more emotional as the dean awarded her the medal, than he ever had felt when he received medals for his achievements in the Army and he noticed some excessive fluid in his eyes and blinked to get rid of it. He saw her enter the podium, dressed in the traditional robe and thought that wearing this she looked as petite as ever. The voluminous robe efficiently hid the fact that she was pregnant with their first child. Not that her body needed hiding, he thought her as

She didn't see it coming

beautiful as ever with her new rounded forms and he loved to know that inside her a baby which was the combination of them both was growing.

He glanced at Grace and Max beside him. They seemed equally taken by the moment and especially Grace did nothing to hide it. He offered her the light blue silk handkerchief he had tucked in his jacket pocket. It was intended only as an accessory, but he saw that his mother in law had more use for it. She bestowed him a grateful smile, it was long since Grace had forgiven him for sweeping Georgie away to London because she knew that there was no one better for her daughter.

The ceremony continued with presentation of the students, speeches, the medical oath solemnly taken, the National Anthem and finally recession. Afterwards there was a reception for the graduates and their families at the Memorial Garden, where light refreshments were served. Finally, he got to hold her in his arms again. It had been too long since this morning.

“I’m so fucking proud of you, Doctor McClyde”, he whispered to her ear, enjoying the feeling of her body pressed to his for a moment, her belly bulging out between them. Her eyes twinkled with happiness.

“I’m so glad this is over. In a month or so I never would have made it. The baby keeps pressing on my bladder and for half the ceremony I thought I would pee my pants. I wonder if they would have let me keep the medal if I did.”

He shook his head, smiling.

“Probably not, I don’t think there would be any acceptable excuses for peeing inside that cathedral.”

She didn't see it coming

Georgie was five months gone on the pregnancy and by now the bump was clearly visible, but she was feeling great and looked absolutely glowing in the way that pregnant women often are described but seldom feel. It had been a different story the first three months, when she had been extremely tired and nauseous. She had vomited not only in the mornings but through the day, to the extent that she once had to be admitted to hospital to get nutrition drip because she lost too much weight. She had not been any fun (her own words) and her sex drive had been absolutely nil. He knew she had worried about that, feared the change to her body and personality and feared that she might drive him away, but he had never felt like that. All he had felt was immense love and concern for her health and because of that he was incredibly happy when a turning-point almost magically came after three months and her spirits returned. He was relieved to see her eat and keep the food again, to see the dark circles under her eyes disappear and glad to see her smile return. He had not counted on her to regain her sex drive at all over the duration of the pregnancy and prepared himself to wait out patiently, so he had been positively surprised when it *did* return and almost stronger than ever before. Apparently that happened to a lucky few because of pregnancy hormones and he was nothing but appreciative.

They had planned for this graduation day during the period when she was most tired and therefore decided it was enough with the ceremony and reception arranged by the university. After that, her family would return to their hotel and enjoy an evening out in London, meanwhile Mr. and Mrs. McClyde would go home, kick their shoes off and enjoy each other's company. They had offered the Lanes to stay in their big house at least, but they had said that this time they wanted to enjoy a full tourist experience.

She didn't see it coming

“Are you sure you don't regret we didn't invite your family for a reception at our place?” Jack asked her. “It was different when we planned this, you were so exhausted then, but now? I'm sure we could find a caterer who could deliver something quickly, or I could cook?”

“No, it is fine, I promise. They will come by tomorrow anyway and this evening I'm happy it is just the two of us.”

“As long as you are sure, this is your special day.”

“Any day is special because you are here”, she smiled, and he felt the familiar flutter in his belly and wondered if it ever would disappear. He did not think so.

They finally said goodbye to everyone and took a cab home. Even if she was more vigorous this period, Georgie had been standing up for long and was tired now so she went for a nap which suited Jack fine as he had something he needed to do. Something he did not want his wife to know about.

“I forgot some papers at the office, so I'll just pop by and get them. I'm probably back before you wake up again.”

“Don't let Will pull you into any meetings, then you know you will never get away from there.”

Since Jack left the Army, the two brothers had run the family business together, but as Jack was used to lead and Will gladly had stepped down, Jack soon had become the front man of the company and Will spent more time on the golf course.

She didn't see it coming

Even so, Jack was not a workaholic. He was extremely efficient during the hours he was at the office and then he went home to his Georgie.

At a quick glance from an outsider, Jack would appear to be a successful business man and husband like any other. If you looked closer you might notice that underneath the suits and shirts of Savile Row origin, he seemed unusually fit for someone with a desk job. He had not filled out around the waist like so many other men his age, his jaw line was still sharp and there was an unusual spring to his step, as if he actually preferred running to walking. If you engaged in a longer conversation with him, he would strike you as uncommonly sharp and attentive. He never got distracted, he would notice every detail but keep focus on the target and no one ever screwed him over in a business deal. He was an expert at keeping his cool and showing an impassive face in the most pressured situations and he only seemed to have one weakness, which few people knew of; his wife. Jack McClyde was as fierce a business man as he once had been a special forces soldier, but few knew of his past career either. He was vastly popular among his employees as he was tough but fair and gave everyone opportunity to develop, and people who got to work for him did not change job unless they were forced to.

More than four years after they became a couple, one year as married, he still adored his wife. She drove him insane at times, but he loved her unconditionally. There had, however, been a few times over these years when Jack had not been honest with Georgie. When he had sneaked away to a hotel room or an empty office for a secret encounter – and this afternoon he would do it again. As much as he hated lying to her, he loved the excitement of the secrecy and that he was in fact

She didn't see it coming

wanted. He knew it had to come to an end though, and he intended for his meeting today to be the very last.

This afternoon, he did not go to his office but to a hotel in the city centre. He went through the main entrance of the exclusive establishment in broad daylight, knowing well that the best way to stay unnoticed sometimes was to stay out in the open. When he waited for the elevator, two beautiful women cast admiring glances at the handsome, well-dressed man. He noticed, but only gave them a short, polite smile. He simply was not interested.

When the elevator doors opened on the fourth floor, he turned left and walked the plush carpet to room 414 and knocked on the door five times, as agreed. The door opened, and the woman quickly let him inside and closed the door behind him.

Their eyes met, measuring each other and she seemed pleased with what she saw. He saluted her and thought how unusual that felt by now.

“Welcome Captain McClyde.”

“Major.”

She jerked her head towards a man sitting in a chair.

“For our purposes today, this is Mr. Smith. He is with MI5.”

Jack nodded to greet the man, well aware his name likely was anything but Smith.

“With all due respect, ma'am, why am I here? I thought I had made myself clear, that last time was the last opportunity when I could provide my services. You know

She didn't see it coming

I have retired from the SF and frankly I can't have this going on. I don't like to lie to my wife."

It was true, during the last covert op he had participated in when Georgie thought he was on a business trip, he had made it clear to them that it had to be the last. He had been requested on several occasions and felt unable to decline when his country needed him. He could not deny that he loved the thrill, but he did not want to lie, and he did not want to risk his life and leave Georgie alone, especially not with the baby on the way.

"I'm well aware that you left the Army, McClyde and it was a pity that someone as unusually skilled as yourself chose to leave so early. I also have an excellent memory, so I know full well what you said last time. This however, is different, as I'm sure you will agree when you hear what we have to say."

Smith handed him an envelope and he opened it, almost reluctantly as he felt like they would try to tempt into something he did not want. To his surprise it contained a bunch of photos, all of them of Georgie. Some taken from a distance, some close, of her alone or with friends, outside school, walking on a street, outside their house. Sometimes she was smiling, sometimes serious but never looking into the camera. They were all taken without her knowledge.

He looked up with heart thumping in his chest.

"What is this? Why all these photos of my wife?"

"You said you don't like to lie to your wife, McClyde, so I take it she is important to you. Maybe even the reason you resigned?" The major cocked an eyebrow, but he

She didn't see it coming

chose not to answer. "That is why I think this operation is very much in your interest. Those photos were found by MI5 when they blew up a terrorist cell here in London the other day."

"A terrorist cell had photos of Georgie? Why?"

"We don't know for sure, but it seems likely that it is connected to this man."

Smith placed a photo of a bearded man with cold eyes on the table. Jack had never seen him before.

"This is Jason Raynott, aka Abu. Does that ring a bell?"

It did. Abu was the Muslim terrorist of British origin, who many years ago had been part of taking Georgie hostage in Kenya, later tried to blow up a university auditorium in Manchester but been stopped by Elvis and Georgie. He knew the story but had never seen the man's face.

"But he died? Got a bullet through his head, if I'm not wrong?"

"He died, but others from his cell survived. They were scattered then, left the country or hid but it seems they didn't forget. It seems like *this* man, Raj, was close to Abu."

Smith put another photo on the table. Raj was darker than Abu, both skin colour and hair, but his eyes were equally cold.

"He was also part of the cell we now blew up, but he got away. By the looks of what we found, he wants revenge on Georgie. If we had not disrupted him, it looks like

She didn't see it coming

he planned to strike at the cathedral, the ceremony today, but now he couldn't. It doesn't mean he won't try at another occasion. On the contrary his wish to get revenge may have grown."

"So this man who has had eyes on my wife is running lose in London?! For fucks sake!"

"Calm down, McClyde. No need for outbursts."

He wanted to tell them they could fuck off, but he needed to know what they had to say, needed to know they had a plan. Then it hit him.

"Christ, Georgie is home alone, in the house! What if..."

"We have the house under surveillance, we not complete twits", Smith said dryly.

"We also we also have located Raj and have eyes on him. We want to strike, but he is hiding in a flat in a building where many families live. We fear that if he understands we are on to him, he may start shooting or blow himself up and take other with him."

He drilled his eyes into Jack.

"We need someone of unmatched skill to enter and eliminate him without further casualties. We were thinking you are the man for the job."

Jack could taste bile in his mouth. Not because he feared for his own sake, he never did, but the thought that they had been so close to Georgie, chosen to just watch but they could just as well had killed her. He had to get to this Raj. Now.

She didn't see it coming

“Where is he?”

Smith gave the major a triumphant smile, they had achieved what they wanted, the best man for the job. As if they had anticipated Jack would accept, the major brought out a kit bag with the necessary equipment. Clothes better suited for the operation than Jack's neat suit, and a rifle enclosed in another bag, so he would be able to transport it without raising alarm. Jack swiftly changed into the black, slim clothes, without caring that they got a glimpse of his toned body.

“A car is awaiting us outside”, Smith informed him and then they left after bidding the major farewell.

Jack paused in the doorway with a stern look on his face.

“Last time, remember that.”

The car took them to a suburb where ugly high-rises were climbing towards the sky, the home of many innocent people who they had to protect from harm. They stopped at some distance from the building where Raj was supposed to be holding up and Jack followed the instructions Smith had given him during the ride. He was on his own now and had no intention to fail.

First he entered a building across the street, took the elevator to the very top and entered the roof. Lying on the ground, he watched the opposite building through his rifle scope. Located the right flat and watched the windows. The blinders were half-shut but he thought he saw some movement. Not enough to know for sure it was Raj though, so he could not take a shot. He would have to do this face to face. Up close and personal, and it *was* fucking personal.

She didn't see it coming

He entered the other building, this time took the stairs as he wanted to look out for other people, if possible keep the stairway clean and definitely avoid collateral. Outside the door he stopped, there were no sounds. He brought out the rifle, took a deep breath to prepare himself, then it all went fast. He threw a gas grenade through the mailbox and waited until he heard some commotion. With a few well-aimed shots he blew the door open and entered, wearing a mask so he was protected against the gas himself. Raj was not in the hallway, but he found him in his bedroom, trying to put a cloth before his face to protect himself against the gas. When he saw Jack, he reached for a gun, lying on the bedside table but Jack pulled his trigger and a shot went through Raj's hand. Instead of surrendering, the man dived for a bag on the floor and even at a quick glance Jack saw that it contained explosives. There was nothing more to hesitate about, this man would always be a threat to UK, its citizens and to Georgie. Jack pulled the trigger again and this time the bullet hit the man in the head. He was dead before he reached the floor.

Jack walked over to him, met the man's now unseeing eyes under the surprisingly neat entry hole. He allowed himself to feel grief for a moment, like he always did when he had been forced to take a life. In this case, however, it was overshadowed by fury.

"You had it coming mate, Don't ever fucking mess with my wife", he said through gritted teeth.

Then he called for Smith on the radio he previously had been given.

"My job here is done, Raj is out. You can send your guys in to clean up, I'm out of here."

She didn't see it coming

“Thanks for your co-operation McClyde. Sure you won't consider joining my team?”

“Thanks for the offer, but I'm 100% sure. I have better things to do.”

He left the rifle and rest of equipment behind for Smith's team to take care of, then hurried to take a cab home. He had left his suit at the hotel but could not care less. He had many and all he wanted now was to come home to Georgie. He hoped she had not started worry and called the office.

As the cab drove up outside their house at *The Boltons*, he noticed a black car which had been parked across the street leaving and he waved goodbye to the surveillance team that had kept her safe.

It was quiet when he entered the house and he ran up the stairs in a few giant leaps, wondering where she was. He stopped in the bedroom doorway.

Georgie was still sound asleep, lying in their king size bed with the dark hair fanning out on the pillow, her long eyelashes resting on her cheeks unaware of everything that had happened this afternoon. He sat down on the bedside and with a smile he stroked a few strands of hair from her face and then she woke up.

“You're back already? Did I sleep long?”

“A few hours I think.”

“What are you wearing?” She looked with curiosity at the black outfit, clinging so flattering to his fit frame and obviously different from the suit he had worn when they said goodbye.

She didn't see it coming

"My PA had bought me a new tracksuit, so I tried it on."

"I think she has a thing for you."

"You do?"

"Why would she otherwise get you such a hot tracksuit?"

"So you think it is hot?"

"Uhum, ridiculously hot. In fact so hot that I may need to take it off. Come here."

After this afternoon, when life had seemed brittle, there was nothing he wanted more than being as close to her as he could.

She sat up, grabbed the hem of his slim top and pulled it over his head.

"I'm still obsessed with your torso. Do you know that?" she smiled and placed both her palms on his chest.

"I didn't but I'm very glad to hear it."

He now pulled off the white t-shirt she had been sleeping in, leaving her in only bra and knickers, and made sure that the bra came off swiftly too. He softly pushed her down, so she was lying on the pillows.

"Today is your day, remember? After all we have something to celebrate", he said with a wicked smile.

"What, do you have something special planned?"

She didn't see it coming

“How about this?” he bent down and caught one of her nipples between his lips, knowing that they were more sensitive than ever. They were a bit sore, so he knew not to nibble with his teeth, but he knew that she loved the soft administrations of his tongue and lips and soon he heard her moan. Meanwhile, he caressed her rounded belly, relished its new form which he loved so much, then found the lining of her knickers and tugged them off. She raised her hips to help him and off they went. Still nuzzling her breasts, his hand found his way between her thighs and began stroking, slow and teasing. When he noticed how she pressed herself to him, he removed his hand and moved down, then started over, this time using his tongue to bring her to wuthering height before she came crashing down, holding on to his hair, moaning his name.

With her changing body, they had found new positions, so it would be comfortable for her and now he moved over to lie behind her, spoon her. He was always slightly anxious he might hurt their growing baby, even if she had told him there was nothing to worry about. Now he gently pushed himself into her from behind, holding her tight to him, caressing her; her hips, her full breasts, her belly. She turned her head, so they could kiss while they moved slowly until he reached the pinnacle too. This soft yet intense love making with his hands splayed over the new life they had created was so intimate, that despite that it was long since he had found it hard to say words of love to her, there was hardly any way they could show their love more clearly than this. Yet, he spoke once he had stilled inside her.

“I love you so much. I don't know how I would live without you.” He needed to tell her this after the day.

She didn't see it coming

"You don't have to, because I feel the same", she smiled to his lips.

He did not tell her how close it had been that he had lost her, would never want to worry her.

"Happy graduation day, Doctor McClyde," he said instead.

"Thank you, special forces Captain McClyde."

"It was quite long since I was that now."

She pulled in his bottom lip between her teeth and bit him softly, so it hurt just a bit.

"Ouch! What was that for?"

"Don't you think I know what you have been up to? Tracksuit, kiss my back where it changes name!"

"You know?" his blue eyes now bashful, asking for forgiveness.

"I'm not stupid, I love you and I *know* you. There is a special twinkle to your eyes when you have been away on some secret action stuff."

"It was for a good cause."

"Isn't it always?"

"Would you believe me if I said it was for an *extra* good cause this time?"

She didn't see it coming

She heard the sudden vulnerability in his voice, as he was again overwhelmed by emotions at the thought of losing her.

“Is everything alright?”

“*Now* it is.”

“Okay, I’ll take your word for it, that it was for a good cause and that everything is alright now, but please take care of yourself, and don’t lie to me. I know you can do amazing things Jack, but I want to keep you too.”

“I won’t do it again”, he was sincere, totally convinced this had been the last time.

“I’ll believe it when I see it”, she smirked. “And you can tell whoever got you that outfit that it was shitting hot on you, so we’re keeping it. They can consider it compensation or a graduation present.”

Laughing, he kissed his adorable wife again.

- THE END -