

## You Know Whose Son

He swung his lantern three times and slowly the schooner appeared. Mister Krause gripped my arm, his calloused palm engulfing my bicep. As the boat approached the fenced sidewalk, Mister Krause crouched in front of me and clasped my shoulders.

“Listen to me, Jean,” he spoke softly, as if the wind would carry his voice to faraway ears, “You’re not going to have a home anymore. Captain Tory will take you away and keep you hidden.”

“But what about Mother?” I asked, but he shushed me and his brown eyes darted toward the shadowed town, street lights illuminating the cobblestones.

“Your mother’s dead, Jean. She can’t come with you and it’s not safe for you here, in Hamburg, anymore. The Nazis are starting to notice,” the last part Mister Krause murmured to himself, his beard muffling the words.

“Why isn’t it safe?” I whispered and fisted his overcoat. The schooner hovered a couple feet from the walkway, and a man with a red mustache threw a looped rope over the iron railing.

“Because of your father. Listen, and listen well, boy. You are no longer Jean-Marie Loret. That person never existed. The name Charlotte Eudoxie Alida Lobjoie means nothing to you.”

“But Mother-”

“No. That’s not your mother. You don’t know your father or your mother. You’re just an orphan. You hear me?” Mister Krause hammered in the directives by shaking my shoulders. He turned me toward the red-haired man standing on the boat, “this is Captain Tory. He’ll take care of you,” I faced Mister Krause one last time and fear pooled out of his eyes and stained his shirt, “forget about your past, Jean, if you want to live your future.”

He lifted me by the waist and over the railing. Captain Tory grabbed me and hauled me onto the deck. He pulled the rope back onboard the boat and left to steer. I stood on the deck, gazing at Mister Krause, who stood back on the sidewalk.

A gunshot echoed over the waves and Mister Krause collapsed onto the pavement, crimson spraying from his chest. Before I could comprehend Mister Krause's death, the cargo hold underneath the schooner's deck exploded, throwing me down. Flames sprouted from the fomenting wood, catching the sails and igniting the dark waters in a glowing silhouette. I crawled toward the bow slowly, my senses overwhelmed.

A scream erupted from inside the inferno and I turned to see Captain Tory running, his clothes aflame. He shrieked and raced toward me. Fumbling, I slipped off the deck accidentally more so than with intention. I fell into the water with a small splash. I pushed off the schooner with my feet and aimed in the direction of the sidewalk, away from the burning boat. The fire illuminated the murky depths and I swam silently toward land.

I breached the water's surface only when I reached the sidewalk's wall, gulping in air. The schooner's bow suspended up into the sky, the stern sinking while burning. I attempted to haul myself up onto the pavement, but it was too high and I was too weak. A shout startled me, enough for me to lose my grip and dunk underneath the water for a second. I remained under when a flashlight glimmered on top of the water where my head used to be.

By the time I resurfaced, the flashlight had left, but the clomping of footsteps was still prominent. I clung to the side of the wall with moss growing up from the riverbank, too afraid to move and risk being spotted by people. A harsh voice barked somewhere to my right,

“Get a boat, check the water for survivors. You! Get that body out of here.” Heavy dragging commenced and I refused to think about who they were hauling away. I remained hidden in the shadows of the wall, treading water, while a dinghy sailed out to the half sunk schooner. Men wearing swastikas pulled Captain Tory’s burnt body from the wreckage and dropped it next to Mister Krause on the back of a truck parked on the sidewalk. The man with the gruff voice walked among the others cordoning the sidewalk. He exuded dark conviction, and he wore round glasses. His wide forehead pulled back his skin with a buzz cut on the crown. A nervous-looking officer stopped toward him.

“*Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler, the only body we found on board was the captain and we found none in the water,” the man frowned and his clasped fists tightened behind his back.

“Send out search parties to the surrounding streets. Focus on finding a boy of age twelve, dark brown hair, answers to the name Jean-Marie. Question any residents if they saw anything, but be discreet,” he ordered the soldier, who saluted by shooting his arm out straight before moving to race away, but the serious man grabbed his arm and hissed in his ear, loud enough for only me to hear, “Chancellor Hitler won’t tolerate failure. And if I fail to find the boy, you fail too. Is that clear?” The soldier gulped and nodded, scurrying away when the man released him.

Not willing to risk my chances of being found, I took a deep breath and swam away, using the wall as a guide point. The knowledge that my existence here caused Mister Krause and Captain Tory’s deaths weighed my heart down into the liquidity depths, mixing my salty tears with the water. Fatigued and clothes heavy with water, I finally climbed out of the river near a shorter sidewalk, at least a mile away from the Nazis at the dock. I hid inside a garbage can for the rest of the night, too tired to think about a plan.

Mister Krause was right. If I was going to live my future, I needed to forget my past, ignore it, run away from it. Because it would probably kill me just like it killed him and Captain Tory.