Stranded

by Lyatt1941

Summary

Once upon a time, Flynn stranded the Time Team in 1754. 20 miles from Ft. Duquesne and with no blacksmithing skills, it's going to take longer than day for that LifeBoat to be repaired. This is an AU fic for 1x07.

Notes

This fic has been in the works since last summer and while I'm not as far along as I'd like to be before publishing this first chapter, I'm making myself do it so that I will be motivated to finish it. This was written per request of a dear friend of mine and I want to make sure I make good on my promise to her. I hope that you all enjoy this piece. It's definitely been a challenge...there are so many issues that I've had to work around to make this plausible.

Katie, thank you for asking me to write this....I hope you will not be disappointed.

Happy Reading!
Wyatt stared at the ceiling in his quiet and darkened apartment, the subdued sounds of early morning drifting through his open window. He wasn’t sure what time it was, he only knew that he hadn’t gotten one bit of sleep before his phone began buzzing steadily on his nightstand. With one glance at the screen, he breathed out a curse and rolled out of bed and headed towards his bathroom. There was no need to answer the call, no need to check the accompanying text message…it was such a common occurrence these days to be summoned in at all hours, he didn’t need to verify with anyone at Mason Industries to know that there was, indeed, a new mission on the docket.

A quick shower, a change of clothes and before he knew it, Wyatt was jamming his keys into the ignition of his Jeep with an angry huff. It had been less than 24 hours since the last mission and he was getting called back in to chase Garcia Flynn in some other God-forsaken point in time.

Well, not just him.

Lucy and Rufus were getting called in as well, but at the moment, Wyatt wasn’t too pleased with either of them. They had lied to him. Repeatedly. And as far as trust was concerned, his in them had been thoroughly shaken…something he never thought would happen after that Alamo mission.

That Alamo operation had been just two missions ago, but now, it felt like it had been a damn lifetime since his team had stood by his side refusing to go on without him. The disillusionment and disappointment of yesterday had made it feel that the actual difference of 180 years had been lived through and then some.

The day of the Alamo mission had started off pretty shitty. He had just been told that he was being replaced…but not before he had one last chance at taking out that sonofabitch, Garcia Flynn. It was fitting that that mission had him back in Texas, among the heroes he had heard about growing up. Their desperate last stand hit a little too close to home as this mission was his last stand; his last opportunity to prove himself before he would be handed his walking papers and sent back to Pendleton in disgrace.

He really couldn’t blame Homeland Security for letting him go…Garcia Flynn was still wreaking havoc through time, after all, despite the many chances he had at taking him out. He was really surprised he hadn’t been canned after the Vegas ’62 mission when Flynn had made off with a nuclear core. The point was, he had failed repeatedly and as the Alamo mission began to go to hell, he began to realize that he was going to have to face Agent Christopher and a slew of Homeland Security agents…hell, even his own Commanding Officer at Pendleton and own up to the fact that he had not lived up to his reputation.
It had been too much for him to take in that moment, surrounded by memories of Syria...how he
took that mission in the first place, because of the loss of Jess...how even when he didn’t care
about his own life, he was forced to live with the fact that he survived while other men...better
men, died.

As the bullets from the Mexican army came pelting down and he saw men, both old and young,
fighting desperately in a battle he knew they were going to lose, he knew he couldn’t...he wouldn’t
be able to walk away this time. To live with that guilt again? To be the lone survivor of yet
another desperate mission?

What the hell did he have to go home to anyway?

And then, suddenly just as he was about to give everything up, there was Lucy...to remind him
that he wasn’t alone. That it didn’t matter that he was replaceable...expendable, to Homeland
Security, he mattered to her...and to Rufus.

He mattered.

It had been a long time since he had mattered to anyone. Since Jess’ death, he had just been
another grunt, another soldier...another cog in the military machine. Lucy didn’t care that there
was another one of his kind waiting in the wings, she “didn’t want anybody else”, she needed him,
trusted him...and for the first time in a long time he felt like maybe he needed them too.

Wyatt scoffed at how damn naïve he had been.

For one brief moment, he had felt like he had more than a team, he had a family. As they stood
defending him to Homeland Security, refusing to continue the missions without him, Wyatt had felt
the full measure of their loyalty and trust in him. He wasn’t sure what he had done to deserve it, he
was pretty damn sure with Lucy, especially, he had skated on pretty thin ice...he still couldn’t
believe she agreed to work with him after he took that risky shot at Garcia Flynn in front of the
fiery wreckage of the Hindenburg, yet here she was, passionately declaring that he, Wyatt Logan –
the reckless hothead, “made the right decision every single time.”

Well...not every time...their last mission was proof of that.

It had been pure hell. Not even a few minutes into their cover as White House correspondents, the
entire team was taken by Flynn and his band of assholes. Lucy and Rufus were forced to go it alone, trying to take care of whatever it was that Flynn wanted them to do while Wyatt’s life hung in the balance. He didn’t particularly care about that…he had been in tough positions before…it was what came after that stung.

Rufus, as it turned out, had been secretly recording their conversations for a shady organization known as Rittenhouse. Their pilot, the man who had time and time again complained about traveling through time and risking his life on these missions, had been spying on them.

Even with all of his training, Wyatt had to admit, he was blindsided by that one.

But that was nothing compared to what had come just before that bombshell.

Wyatt had known that Garcia Flynn, the terrorist he was supposed to kill, had spoken to Lucy after the Hindenburg had come crashing down. It was he who had told Lucy to ask Homeland Security about Rittenhouse in the first place…he who had first given them any kind of indication that there were darker forces at work than just a psychotic madman with a time machine. What he didn’t know was that Garcia Flynn was being urged on in his quest for vengeance by the journal of none other than Lucy Preston.

Lucy denied knowing anything about the journal…claimed she hadn’t written it…her future self had…but Flynn had also said they had had several chats…not just the one he knew about. No. Apparently, she and Flynn had talked privately on nearly every damn mission…and damn it all if her betrayal hadn’t stung all the more. He didn’t want to spend too much thinking about why it bothered him so much that Flynn and Lucy seemed to be in some kind of cahoots together. It wasn’t that he believed Lucy was some kind of double agent…no way in hell could she be that good of an actress…it was the closeness Flynn alluded to that got under his skin.

*Lucy, what have you told him about us?*

Us. Just the idea of the *them* made Wyatt’s blood boil.

It should have bothered him more that Rufus was a spy…a double agent of sorts…recording their conversations secretly and handing them over to this Rittenhouse for God knows what reason. It should have bothered him more that Flynn and his psychotic ravings were starting to make some sense; that this Rittenhouse he kept accusing of his family’s murder actually did exist.
But no, that’s not what really got him riled.

It was bad enough to learn that Lucy had lied, that she and Flynn had had conversations that he didn’t know about. It was upsetting to learn that he was using her journal as a roadmap for his murderous rampage through history. But the real kicker, the one that had been the sucker punch to his gut, was Flynn’s coy remark that he and Lucy were going to be “quite the team one day.”

What the hell did that mean?

To think that Lucy, his Lucy would someday be working hand in hand with that mad man…but that was just the thing. She wasn’t his Lucy.

She was just Lucy.

So why the hell did it bother him so much?

Because she was supposed to be on his team?

Yes. That was it…it had to be. Lucy was just his team mate, his partner in this, not Flynn’s. So what if that sonofabitch had her journal? Like she said, she hadn’t given it to him.

Or had she?

Flynn maintained that Lucy would give him that journal…that she was going to write it a few years from now and Lucy, though she claimed it was a fake, had told Flynn that it was her handwriting.

He had been trained to withstand all types of prisoner interrogation methods, but sitting there, alone with Flynn in that room while he read out sections of Lucy’s journal almost broke him. Flynn, relating the story of his own family’s murder, the loss that he had suffered…Wyatt had to admit that, despite all of that training, this one was pretty damn tough. Hearing Flynn talk about the moment his family was murdered…he understood that pain…the rage that came afterwards…but he could not allow himself to sympathize with Garcia Flynn. He was the enemy…who was apparently being led on his quest for vengeance by Lucy.
He had been so careful not to mention the particulars of Jessica’s murder to her. He had surprised himself when he mentioned her death at all to this…stranger…as she was during the 1937 mission, but no way in hell had he planned on telling her that he had left Jessica on the side of that damn road, that he had driven off in the middle of the night leaving her exposed and helpless. Yet, as he sat there, handcuffed to that chair, Flynn smugly perched in front of him and read off Lucy’s detailed description of that night, even including the fight at the damn bar. He had no idea how she knew it, was mortified that she had included it in there to be read by Flynn of all people, but if that hadn’t been enough to shake him to his core, her admonition at the end of that entry had more than made up for it.

*He needs to let go and move on.*

Why the hell would Lucy put that in her journal? What was it to her if he had moved on from Jessica or not?

And why the hell did it bother him so damn much?

Hardly knowing whether or not he wanted the answers to those questions, he pulled into the parking lot of Mason Industries. In either case, he found he was in no mood to entertain any thought regarding Lucy Preston. Wrenching open the door and making his way down the hall, he stopped short at the sight of Lucy and Rufus who were already there and standing awkwardly to the side of the mission control desk, watching him.

Staring at them hard for a moment, Wyatt made his way towards Agent Christopher and without offering either of his team mates any kind of greeting or acknowledgement he asked, “What are we looking at?”

“Oh good, Wyatt…you’re here.” Agent Christopher muttered without looking up from her folder. “We’ve got an interesting one this time. Lucy, do you mind running down the particulars?”

Heaving a sigh, Wyatt turned reluctantly to Lucy who was obviously agitated and bothered by Wyatt’s cold demeanor. “Well…um…it seems that Flynn has decided to jump to September 14, 1754…but I have no idea why.” She shrugged, offering him a slight smile…one that Wyatt didn’t return. Her face flushing, she cleared her throat and explained, “I mean, I’m sure he wants to do something terrible…I just don’t know what. Anything of importance in 1754 during the French and Indian War happened earlier that year.”

When Wyatt continued to stay silent, Rufus shifted awkwardly and asked Lucy, “What kind of things?”
“Well, she began, doing her best to get Wyatt interested in the conversation, “there was the Battle of Fort Necessity and the Battle of Jumonville Glen which…”

“What does it matter if they aren’t the reason Flynn went there?” Wyatt sighed with a roll of his eyes. Lucy bit her lip and looked back at him, sheepishly and in that one short moment Wyatt felt bad for cutting her off…then he remembered why he was so upset with her to begin with and shook his head. No. He was not going to allow his soft spot for Lucy Preston to knock him off his guard. She had as good as lied to him, had kept important intel to herself, and had had who knows how many conversations with Garcia Flynn. He couldn’t trust her and from now on he was going to keep both Lucy and Rufus at an arm’s distance. He sighed heavily and stalked away, muttering as he went, “I’m going to get changed.”

Agent Christopher looked up abruptly from her folder, “Is there a problem?” she asked.

Lucy and Rufus exchanged nervous looks before she frowned slightly and shook her head, “No…” she lied, “not that I’m aware of.”

Agent Christopher raised her eyebrows at Lucy’s answer, her eyes following the path Wyatt had made towards the locker rooms, “Well, if there is a problem, see that you do whatever it is you need to do to fix this. You all are a team and if you can’t work together then we’re going to need to find a team that can. Is that clear?”

Lucy and Rufus nodded their heads in acknowledgement and headed off to change into their own 18th century clothes. Separating with a nod, Rufus entered the locker room as Wyatt was pulling his shirt over his head. “Hey, um…Wyatt. How you doing, man?” Rufus asked uneasily.

Wyatt grunted in return, looking as if the last thing he wanted to do was talk to Rufus. Rufus really didn’t blame him for being angry; he wasn’t exactly proud that he was being coerced into spying on his team. Still, he hated the thought of going on a mission with Wyatt so obviously upset.

He was their protection, after all.

“Look, I know I royally screwed up, but…I didn’t really have a choice.” Wyatt glared at him as he tugged on his 18th century jacket. “They threatened my family, Wyatt. What the hell was I supposed to do?”
Wyatt secured his breeches and slid on his shoes, slamming his locker shut with a deafening clang. Rufus thought that may be all the response he was going to get from the Delta Force soldier, but before he left the locker room, Wyatt stopped and called to Rufus over his shoulder, “You could’ve trusted me. Like I trusted you.”

Rufus looked back at him shamefaced and apologetic as Wyatt wrenched open the door. He was making his way back down the hall when he ran into Agent Christopher, “Wyatt, is there a problem?”

Wyatt sighed heavily, “No ma’am. Not one that I can’t work through with some time.”

She studied him with a keen eye before observing, “Did something happen on the last mission that you haven’t told me about?”

Wyatt’s face went stony. He hated that he had to lie to his superior officer, but there was nothing he could do. If she was somehow involved with this Rittenhouse, then who knows what would happen if Rufus’s secret was exposed? Clearing his throat, Wyatt murmured, “No ma’am it was just a rough mission, that’s all.”

She pursed her lips and nodded her head. Whether she knew Wyatt was keeping the truth from her or not, remained to be seen. He half-expected her to grill him on the particulars of the Watergate mission, but instead, she switched gears, “In my line of work, I’ve seen all kinds of people work together to meet an objective.” She smiled slightly, a rare thing for the Homeland Security Agent, and added, “I never thought the three of you would actually work together as a team…you all come from such different backgrounds and fields of expertise… but you have surprised me.”

Wyatt merely nodded in mock agreement. She couldn’t know the level of betrayal he felt and what the team had kept from him. Hell, what they all were keeping from her.

“I want to thank you.” she said after a few moments. “Your influence on the team has been very apparent.”

Wyatt narrowed his eyes at her in confusion, “How…how do you mean?”

“Well, from what I understand, Rufus Carlin rarely left his desk before these missions began. Now he’s fighting next to the likes of Davy Crockett at the Alamo. And with you…indisposed on the last mission, he really came through…at least that’s what I was told during the debrief.” Wyatt
nodded as she pressed on, “And then there’s Lucy.” At the mention of her name, Wyatt bristled visibly, something that was not lost on Agent Christopher. With a meaningful look, Agent Christopher asked, “Is there something going on between the two of you?”

Wyatt absolutely gaped at her, “No!” he blurted out a little too quickly. “Why would you think that?”

Agent Christopher shrugged, “Well, she defended you, refused to do the missions without you…”

“She trusts me.” Wyatt said quietly, trying not to think about that moment when she pulled him back from the brink…particularly since now he could not say the same about her. “That’s all.”

Agent Christopher eyed him suspiciously, before slowly nodding her head and observing, “Yes, well…as I said she has come a long way since that first mission. She’s more confident, more assertive, more sure of herself…and I think that’s all thanks to you.”

Wyatt couldn’t help but feel a little beam of pride at that statement. He remembered how scared she was on that first mission, how terrified she had been in Nazi Germany, how she had opened up to him about her accident, and then thanked him for helping to get her over the hump. He sighed as he brushed those feelings of rapport away. She was not his friend, she was his team mate. Friends wouldn’t lie to each other and keep things from one another. He cleared his throat and with stony face he replied, “I just treat her like I do any other soldier in the field. I saw that there was an issue and I helped her with it…told her she needed to figure out what she was fighting for.”

Agent Christopher’s mouth curled up into a hint of a smile. “So, it was you.” she remarked with a meaningful nod. At Wyatt’s confused expression she explained, “Lucy came to me with terms regarding her continuation with these missions. She told me that someone had told her to figure out what they were fighting for…and well, she apparently has.”

“What do you mean?” Wyatt asked despite himself.

“She didn’t tell you?” Agent Christopher asked in genuine surprise. At Wyatt’s blank expression, Agent Christopher shrugged, “She wants Mason’s team to work on a plan to restore her sister. She’s fighting for Amy.”

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For Lucy, the ordeal of changing into her era appropriate attire was a little more involved what with the corsets and the many layers. What would take mere minutes in the present time, took at least a half an hour, if not more for her…even with Jiya’s assistance. The chemise, the petticoat, the stockings, and the stays all had to be meticulously fitted with buttons, laces and garters.

Jiya was just helping her into her dress when a soft knock came to the conference room door followed by a hushed voice, “Lucy, are…are you ready?”

“I’ll be out in a minute, Rufus.” Lucy called out as Jiya began working the buttons on the back of her gown.

“Oh…okay.” he responded awkwardly, “I’ll just be here…waiting for you.”

Lucy let out a dry chuckle as she nervously tapped her fingers on the table. Jiya, never ceasing her work, let out a nervous laugh of her own, “I guess that means Wyatt is still pretty mad at you guys, huh?”

“So, it would seem.” Lucy muttered absent-mindedly before starting to attention in a state of slight panic, “Wait a minute, did Rufus tell you what happened?”

“No…it was just blatantly obvious after you guys got back from ’72.” Jiya pursed her lips together, unsure if she should continue, but curiosity got the better of her, “What did happen anyway?”

Lucy let out an exasperated sigh, “Ugh…it’s complicated.” She looked up at Jiya, desperate to talk to someone, anyone about this. “I can trust you, right?”

“Absolutely.” Jiya said with a solemn nod. “Those NDAs are no joke.”

Lucy smiled remembering when she, herself, was brought onto the missions and forced to sign the non-disclosure agreement. It seemed like so long ago and since that time she felt like she was cut off from the life she once knew…and not just because she had found herself in a new timeline with no sister.
Since she had added time travel to her curriculum vitae, hers was a lonely existence outside of Mason. Once able to talk to her mother about everything, she now found that nearly every question, every subject was taboo. She couldn’t even talk about past, shared memories with her mother, because this one didn’t remember a life with Amy and Henry Wallace…and to even hint at that would violate her sworn obligation to keep this whole messy situation, a secret.

Grateful, then to have someone other than Wyatt and Rufus to talk to, Lucy let out a shaky sigh, “Flynn…has my journal. That’s why he stole the Mothership, it’s why he goes where he goes.” Jiya’s hands stilled as a look of confusion stole across her face, but Lucy charged on, “But I never wrote a journal like that…” she scoffed, “I mean, how could I?”

“So…this journal, it talks about these missions…or history?” Jiya asked.

“The missions” Lucy breathed out incredulously. “I think…I know…it’s insane. I mean, that journal means that we’ve….”

“Done all this before.” Jiya responded in amazement. “How long have you known?”

“Since the Hindenburg.” Lucy muttered softly.

“So, I’m guessing Wyatt found out about this journal on the last mission?”

Lucy nodded before exclaiming, “You understand, right? It wasn’t like I didn’t want to tell him, I just…I didn’t want to believe it was true.” Lucy scoffed, “Why would I give Flynn my journal? When did I even write it? How did he even get it?” Lucy asked as Jiya’s fingers worked the buttons up Lucy’s back. “It makes no sense.”

“Did you know Flynn before all of this?” Jiya asked tentatively.

“No! Lucy exclaimed. “I’d never seen him before in my life until I got called in here.” She bit her lip in thought, “Why would he have my journal?” Lucy looked up at Jiya with pleading eyes as she pinned back her hair. “He keeps saying it says we’re going to be quite the team someday. Jiya, what if that means I’m going to…be like him? I’m not a killer….I’m….”
“Just a teacher?” Jiya asked with raised eyebrows. Lucy nodded silently and Jiya let out a laugh, “Just a teacher who travels through time.”

“Right.” Lucy breathed out nervously.

“Maybe he stole it, Lucy. Maybe Flynn is lying about what it says in there…I mean, have you read it?”

“No…but the handwriting…” Lucy began miserably, “the handwriting is definitely mine.” Lucy sighed, “And now Wyatt is angry because he thinks I don’t trust him, he thinks Flynn and I are in some kind of cahoots, and…”

“He’s jealous?” Jiya asked with raised eyebrows.

“Je…what do you mean jealous?” Lucy asked innocently.

Jiya shrugged, attempting, but failing to hide a smirk, “Oh, nothing…I just thought that maybe he didn’t like the idea of you and Flynn being a team because…”

“Oh…no. No.” Lucy said with an adamant shake of her head, letting out a derisive laugh. “No…he’s dead set on getting his wife back. I mean, he sent her a telegram in 1962.”

Jiya nodded her head, a hint of disbelief on her face. If Lucy noticed her skepticism, she didn’t let on. Jiya put the finishing touches on Lucy’s hair and stepped away to admire her handiwork. Lucy got up to leave, but turned before reaching the conference room door, “You promise you won’t tell Agent Christopher about any of this?”

Jiya sealed her lips together and made a motion as if she were securing a lock next to her lips. I’m sworn to secrecy.” she said simply. She gave a nervous glance around the conference room before asking in a low voice, “But why is Wyatt mad at Rufus?”

Lucy’s shoulders slumped down, the last mission fresh in her mind. Wyatt wasn’t the only one blindsided by Rufus’ revelation that he had been secretly taping their missions, she had been just as shocked, if not more so, by his admittance. She hadn’t wanted to believe that Rittenhouse was real,
but after meeting The Doc and discovering that Rufus had been ordered to spy on them, there was no escaping the grim reality that whatever Rittenhouse was, it was real.

Not wanting to burden Jiya with the truth, especially if Rufus hadn’t felt compelled to, Lucy lied, “I’m not sure. Maybe he thinks Rufus knew about the journal too.”

Jiya nodded at her slowly, looking entirely unconvinced by Lucy’s statement, but didn’t want to press the issue further. Not that there was time to do so. The minute Lucy wrenched open the door, Rufus was there, agitated and waiting. At the sight of the two women staring back at him, he looked suddenly embarrassed, “I’m… I’m sorry, I just… um… I just…”

“Didn’t want to be alone with Wyatt?” Lucy asked as she gathered her skirts and made her way down the stairs of the conference room. “Did he talk to you at all?”

“Oh yeah, he talked to me. If you count hitting me with the biggest guilt trip of my life before storming out of the locker room, talking to me then, yeah.” Rufus muttered rapidly as they made their way to the time machine. “You know, we’ve had some pretty sucky missions… but I’m pretty sure this one is going to rank right up there with the suckiest.”

“Look on the bright side, Rufus.” Lucy sighed, “There’s not much there, besides Fort Duquesne, so that means, we have a pretty good idea of where we need to go to find out what Flynn is up to.”

“Oh great, another fort out in the middle of nowhere.” Rufus muttered as he tugged at his coat.

“This is not like the Alamo.” Lucy assured, “There were some awful battles around the fort earlier in 1754, but there’s not another battle at Fort Duquesne until September 14, 1758.”

“Wait.” Rufus said as he stopped in his tracks, “What if Flynn meant to go to 1758… I mean, September 14th… that’s four years exactly.”

Lucy shrugged, “Well, if he picked the wrong year, then it’ll be a very quick trip.”

Rufus bit his lip in thought, “What if… well, you know that nuclear core he picked up in Vegas 1962?” Lucy nodded as Rufus continued, “What if he wants us to go to 1754, so that he can jump immediately to 1758 and screw up….”
“The Battle of Fort Duquesne?” Lucy finished for him, “You mean, you think this mission is a diversion? A red herring?”

Rufus stared back at her blankly, “I don’t know…but if he’s using that core the way I think he is, he can jump from time to time…we can’t…not without a recharge.”

“We’re burning daylight, people!” Agent Christopher’s voice yelled out from across the lab.

“How long does it take for a recharge?” Lucy asked Rufus quietly as they made their way towards the metal staircase.

“A couple of hours.” Rufus muttered as he looked nervously behind him.

“Can we track the mothership from the Lifeboat…know when and if it leaves?” Lucy asked breathlessly.

“Well, yeah.” Rufus frowned. “The LifeBoat is linked to the Mothership in case of emergencies.”

“Okay, well…if we go and it is a diversion, we’ll just make sure we get back here as soon as we can and go after him in 1758.” she muttered as they made their way up the stairs together.

“More secrets?” Wyatt spat out with a huff. His was already buckled in his seat, his head thrown back and his eyes closed as if wishing that he were anywhere but in that time machine.

Lucy and Rufus exchanged dark looks as they began adjusting their own harnesses. Lucy cleared her throat nervously, “Um…no, we were just talking about…”

“Fine.” Wyatt interrupted coldly. “Let’s just get the hell out of here, Rufus.”

Rufus cast a nervous glance at Lucy and began punching in the coordinates, muttering under his breath, “Oh yeah, this is gonna be swell.”
“What do you mean you forgot to bring a map?!” Wyatt spat out angrily as he spun around and faced the guilt-ridden faces of Lucy and Rufus.

They were standing in the middle of a dense forest somewhere near present-day Pittsburgh…a city that would not be founded for another four years, after the British victory at the Battle of Fort Duquesne in 1758. There were no roads, no sign posts…nothing but wilderness surrounding them at every turn.

Rufus rubbed a hand on the back of his neck, “Sorry,” he muttered, “but aren’t you supposed to be some expert at land navigation, though? I mean, what happens when you’re stuck out in the middle of nowhere in the Army?”

Wyatt glared at him as he turned to Lucy, who was standing awkwardly next to a tree picking at the bark, “Just what exactly are we supposed to be looking for?”

It took Lucy a few moments before she realized Wyatt was addressing her, given the fact that he had hardly acknowledged her presence since he arrived at Mason that morning. She startled suddenly and swallowed hard before responding in a small voice, “Oh…you…you’re asking me? I…I think Flynn would be heading for Fort Duquesne…it’s the really the only thing around here for miles…except a few trading posts and Native American villages.”

Wyatt raised his eyebrows in expectation, waiting for her to divulge more information, “And?” he asked impatiently when she didn’t immediately expound on her information.

“And?” Lucy asked in confusion before shaking her head in realization and continuing, “Oh…well, Fort Duquesne is the French stronghold in this region. Not surprisingly the French were outnumbered 20 to 1 by English colonists in North America, but while the British were busy establishing colonies, the French were heavily involved in the fur trade and building relations with the natives in this region.” She sighed, “Still, the French wanted to protect their interests here and so they built a series of forts starting from Lake Erie all the way down the Allegheny River to... somewhere around here.”
Wyatt stared back at her blankly.

“What?” Lucy asked as she looked between Wyatt and Rufus who was also now gaping at her slightly.

“*Where* did they build it?” Wyatt asked her incredulously. “You got a landmark, something that gives me any idea of where to go?”

Lucy flushed with embarrassment, “Oh…sorry. Um…it was built at the convergence point of three rivers, the Allegheny, the Ohio and the Monongahela…present day Pittsburgh.”

Wyatt nodded and scanned the area around them. The forest was dense and filled with the sound of rustling leaves and twittering birds; one might say it was rather peaceful…much more peaceful than their previous missions, anyway. Despite the almost serene atmosphere, however, there was something unsettling about being the only three people in the middle of an 18th century forest…well, the only three people they could readily see, because Wyatt was certain, given the little he knew about the French and Indian war, they were hardly alone.

He would never equate himself with the likes of Lucy Preston in the way of historical knowledge, but while serving in the Army he had learned a hell of a lot about past military campaigns and tactics…it was part of their training, after all. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, Wyatt knew that the tactics employed by standing armies was linear…meaning that the troops would line up in ranks, march within firing range and…have at it. The musket used in the Revolutionary war was a big reason for that…while one rank would fire the other would load, then step forward and fire their weapon, while the rank behind them readied theirs. In the Civil War, the advent of the rifle led to devastating losses, but linear tactics were still mostly employed…until the war waged on. Siege warfare, trenches around Petersburg…those were just precursors to World War I when the machine gun finally put linear tactics to rest. The French and Indian war, however, was no “gentleman’s war.” Wyatt didn’t remember all of the particulars but one thing he knew for damn sure was that ambushes were typical…and guerilla tactics common in the untamed wilderness that was the New World.

“Alright…” Wyatt said in a hushed voice, “since there’s a war going on…”

“Technically the war hasn’t started yet…” Lucy interjected, “there were a few battles, yes…but war isn’t officially declared until 1756.”

“Okay…then that’s good, right? So, if the war hasn’t started yet,” Wyatt declared in a now hopeful voice, “there should be no reason why we can’t…why are you shaking your head at me
like that?” He glared at Lucy who was frantically tossing her head back and forth, a desperate look in her eye.

“Tensions are extremely high right now.” Lucy explained in an urgent whisper, “earlier this year, there were two battles…the Battle of Jumonville Glen and the Battle of Ft. Necessity…”

“We don’t have time for a history lesson.” Wyatt spat out in annoyance, “Just tell me, who do I need to avoid?”

“The French…and maybe the British…and the Native Americans.” Lucy muttered.

Wyatt gaped back at her blankly, “Anyone else?”

“That about covers it.” she said with an apologetic shrug. “I told you…tensions are high. Everyone is going to be distrustful of…outsiders.”

“Well if there’s one good thing in all of this, it means Flynn is going to be having a hell of a time too.” Wyatt said as he crouched down near a tree. “Of course,” Wyatt added with more than a hint of annoyance in his voice, “he probably has a damn map.” Looking up, he noted the position of the sun, as he ran his hands around the trunk, frowning thoughtfully.

After a short moment, Wyatt stood up and checked the position of the sun once more, “Alright,” he said with a sigh, “North is that way.”

Rufus gaped at him, “How the hell do you know that?”

“The moss.” Wyatt said simply, without further explanation. Rufus made to make another comment, but Wyatt lifted his hand to silence him, tilting his head, listening…for what, Rufus could only guess.


“Water.” Wyatt answered. Sure enough, the soft trickle of flowing water could be heard just above the din of chattering birds and rustling leaves. Motioning for the others to follow him, Wyatt made
his way through the underbrush. His movements were swift and nearly silent…something that left Lucy a bit awestruck as she watched him weave in and out of the trees.

Rufus, by contrast, could have woken the dead with the way he was stomping along beside her.

After a few hundred yards of uttered curse words, snapping tree limbs, and crunching leaves, Wyatt stopped abruptly and turned to face them, “Seriously?” he asked.

“What?” Rufus gaped at him, looking to Lucy for support, but she had decidedly turned her head away focusing instead on a small rabbit that had just hopped across their path.

“Well…I don’t know.” Wyatt said in a biting tone, “do you think you could make a little more noise?”

“Well, I’m sorry” Rufus snapped back, “I’m not used to trudging around in the woods, least of all in these…” he motioned to his feet, “I mean look at me, I’m wearing heels for Christ’s sake.”

“Wyatt brought up his leg and pulled off one of his shoes, “You mean like these? Yeah…I’ve got ‘em too.” He glared at Rufus before sliding his shoe back on his stockinged foot. “If Flynn is here and he’s up to something, we really don’t need him and his band of assholes ambushing us in these woods—even if it is just so the two of you can have a little chat.” Wyatt spat out pointedly towards Lucy.

Lucy absolutely flushed…with anger and with shame. She knew that she had broken Wyatt’s trust with what she had done, but he wouldn’t even give her the chance to explain. Lucy’s eyes darted between the two men nervously, “Look, I think maybe we should talk about what happened…”

“Oh, now you want to talk?” Wyatt asked with raised eyebrows, “Because you sure as hell didn’t want to talk to me about all this stuff in 1865 or 1962…or at the Alamo.”

“Wyatt…I’m sorry, okay?” Lucy spat out. “But…”

But Wyatt didn’t stick around to hear any more excuses, he turned on his heel and resumed his determined march towards the river, calling over his shoulder as he did so, “There’s too many places for him to hide…and it’s making me uneasy…we need to keep moving.”
Once they found the river, Wyatt took a sharp stone and made a mark on a nearby tree pointing towards the direction they had just come. “This will help us find our way back to the LifeBoat.” he explained, “The last thing we need is to lose our way in these woods.” He looked at the river flowing southward, “Alright, you said this Fort is at the convergence point of three rivers?”

Lucy nodded, ‘Yes…um…” she picked up a stick, remembering Wyatt’s actions during the Battle of the Alamo, and began tracing a Y into the soft earth at her feet. “This is the Allegheny, this other arm here, is the Monongahela. They meet at the Ohio here…and the land in between is where Ft. Duquesne sits.”

“The problem is,” Wyatt motioned towards her drawing, “we have no idea which river this is. If it’s the Ohio, then we’re going the wrong way if we follow it South. If it’s one of the other two, we’re going the wrong way if we follow it North.”

“So…should we flip a coin or something?” Rufus asked anxiously.

Wyatt stared hard Rufus before explaining harshly, “No, we’re not going to flip a coin. We use logic.” He pointed down to Lucy’s crude drawing, “We’ve got 2/3 chance of being right by following this river South.”

“But these rivers don’t flow North and South…” Lucy blurted out as Wyatt turned to lead them on.

He threw his head back in exasperation, “What do you mean, they don’t flow North and South?” He pointed to the river, “That river is flowing South.” He pointed to a nearby tree, “You see that moss? Moss is more prevalent on the south side of the tree, the sun is moving towards the West, there.” he said as he pointed to the sky. “I may not have a map, but I damn sure know what direction I’m headed.”

“No, Wyatt.” Lucy tried to explain, “I mean geographically speaking, these rivers don’t flow North and South…well, I mean…eventually they do…except the Monongahela…that river flows North…I think…” she scrunched her face in thought as she continued with hesitation, “I mean, I’m pretty sure.”

Wyatt covered his face with his hands ready to scream in exasperation. This was exactly why he needed a damn map. Mustering all the patience he could, Wyatt exhaled a steady breath and calmly gritted out, “Do you think you can tell me how these rivers look on an actual map?”
Biting her lip nervously, Lucy exchanged a concerned look to Rufus before shrugging slightly and muttering in a small voice, “I…I can try.”

“Do or do not, Lucy…there is no try.” Rufus quipped with a teasing smile in an attempt to lighten the mood. Wyatt, however, merely glared at him as he turned on his heel roughly and sat down on a nearby stump. Lucy, too, looked at Rufus as though she were just about ready to slap him causing him to stutter uncomfortably, “It…it’s from Star Wars…Yoda…ya know…when Luke is trying to pull his X-Wing out of the….ya know what? Just forget about it.” He nodded sheepishly, “I’m...I’m sure you’ll do fine Lucy.”

Not sure whether she should be grateful for that half-hearted vote of confidence, Lucy sank down to her knees, clenching her eyes shut as she tried to remember the topographical map of the Ohio Valley. Typically, this wasn’t her strong suit - her background was in history and anthropology for heaven’s sake, not maps – but this particular bit of information stuck out in her mind because of how strategically placed this fort was. Using her hand to smooth over the “Y” she had previously made, Lucy tried to draw it in accordance with the directions Wyatt pointed out earlier.

Clearing her throat she began, “The Monongahela runs north from West Virginia…well what is currently West Virginia…right now it’s just part of the Virginia colony…”

“Lucy…” Wyatt moaned.

“Oh, right…sorry.” Lucy muttered apologetically. “The Allegheny runs southward, down from…um…Lake Erie…I think…and they both join the Ohio here.”

“So, both the Ohio and the Allegheny flow South?” Wyatt asked as he looked at her drawing.

“I think so.” Lucy murmured tentatively. “I really can’t be sure, Wyatt. There’s so many twists and turns with these rivers, who knows?” She swallowed hard as she looked at her crude artwork, “You know, the Native Americans didn’t even consider the Allegheny a separate river? It was just considered the upper Ohio River.”

“Fascinating.” Wyatt said with a roll of his eyes.

Lucy threw her hands up in exasperation, “Fine. Look, basically we have a 50/50 shot.” This can’t be the Monongahela because this river is flowing south…and we know…”
“The Monongahela flows North.” Wyatt said mechanically. “So, depending on where we are on this map, we need to go North or South along this river to get to that damn Fort.” Wyatt threw a stick in frustration, “If we pick the wrong way we could stuck wandering around in forests for who knows how long.”

“Not necessarily…” Rufus quipped uncertainly as he turned to Lucy, “Didn’t you say that the French built a series of forts up and down the Allegheny River?”

“Yes,” Lucy nodded in confusion, “all the way up to Lake Erie…but…”

“So, if we do go the wrong way, I’d rather go towards something…some kind of civilization…rather than, you know…getting lost in the middle of nowhere.” Rufus argued.

“Yes, but Rufus…the French aren’t exactly going to welcome us with open arms.” She shook her head frantically, “You don’t understand…the Battle of Jumonville Glen…”

“I agree with Rufus.” Wyatt interrupted. “The good thing about a fort, there’s almost always supplies.”

“And food.” Rufus reminded him.

Wyatt nodded his head thoughtfully, “Alright then, we’re heading North.” He turned to Lucy, “How far is the next fort from the one we’re supposed to be looking for?”

“Um…Fort…um…Fort Machault was in…Franklin, I think…about 35 miles away from Fort Duquesne.” Lucy stammered out. “But Wyatt….” she began as she looked meaningfully at Rufus, “I think you should kn…”

“But nothing, Lucy.” Wyatt snapped as he pointed to her map, “If this river is the Ohio and we follow it North, we’ll run into that Fort Duquesne. If it’s the Allegheny and we follow it north, we’ll run into Fort Machault. Either way, we find a fort…and with any luck…a damn map.”

Allowing Wyatt to stray a few steps away from them and definitely out of earshot, Lucy hissed at Rufus, “Don’t you think we ought to tell him about this whole thing possibly being a diversion?”
“No I don’t.” Rufus spat back in a harsh whisper, “You’ve seen how cranky he is…the last thing we need is for him to find out Flynn might have sent us on a wild goose chase.”

“And if Flynn did send us on a wild goose chase and we tromped through all of this wilderness for nothing?” Lucy snapped back, “What then? Huh? I don’t know for sure, but I think he might be a little angrier if we don’t tell him sooner rather than later.”

Rufus rolled his eyes at Lucy and said no more, knowing that she was probably right, but too terrified of Wyatt in his current state to come clean. Instead, he hoped that they would bump into Flynn, take care of business, and be on their merry way. By nightfall, however, it was clear that they weren’t going to be so lucky. Stomachs rumbling, feet aching, the team slowed to a halt in a protected grove of trees. “We’ll stop here for the night.” Wyatt said tersely.

“You mean…like…camp?” Rufus asked in a trembling voice.

“Yeah.” Wyatt said a shrug, “like camp. We can’t see a damn thing in the dark…all we can do is rest here until morning…start off again.”

Lucy shifted nervously beside Rufus, “Don’t…don’t you think we should have found something by now?” she asked weakly, “I mean, we’ve been walking all day.”

Wyatt laughed at her, “We probably only walked about 10 miles today…possibly 12.” He sank down to the ground and leaned against a tree, “Depending on wherever the hell we were when we started out, we could still have a long way to go.”

Lucy groaned as she too slunk to the ground, her aching feet were nothing to the stabbing pains in her sides; the corset she was sporting, cutting ridges into her skin. Though she was in considerable pain, she took care not to complain, feeling that to do so would only exasperate Wyatt further.

Rufus, however, didn’t seem to mind upsetting Wyatt.

“I’m sorry, but just how are we supposed to sleep? There’s no blankets, pillows…nothing out here.” Rufus whined as he looked around their pitiful campsite helplessly. Before Wyatt could respond, a low rumbling sound broke through the otherwise silent forest. “Is that…is that what I think it is?” Rufus asked nervously.
Wyatt huffed out a breath as he got to his feet, “Yeah...we’re gonna get wet.”

Dusting off his pants, Wyatt began stalking away, leaving Lucy and Rufus gaping after him in confusion, “Wh...where are you going?” Lucy asked desperately. “I thought this where we were going to stop for the night?”

“You don’t camp under trees in the middle of a thunderstorm.” Wyatt stated matter of factly, not even turning to look at her, “We need to find some shelter.”

“Shel...and just where the hell are we going to find shelter in the middle of a damn forest?” Rufus hissed out after him as the first drops of rain began to fall.

“You could always walk back to the LifeBoat.” Wyatt suggested angrily, but you’d be soaked through before you got there...and that’s not even considering the lightening.”

“Lightning? Are you saying we’re gonna get struck by lightning?” Rufus asked nervously.

“What the hell do you think I’m trying to find shelter for, Rufus?” Wyatt snapped as he peered through the darkness. “Come on,” he called, “I think I see some rocks up ahead. It’s not the safest option, but it’s the only thing we’ve got.”

Wyatt did manage to find rocks up ahead but only after they walked for what felt like another two miles. By then their clothes were more than a little damp, muddy, and the rain that had started off as a slight drizzle, had begun to fall at a steadier pace. Still, Lucy refused to complain, though her many layers and skirts felt like leaden weights as she sloshed through the forest. At a small outcropping of rock, Wyatt finally stopped, motioning the two of them under the largest boulder. A crack of lightning sounded nearby and Wyatt quickly followed them, finding to his great dismay that though the small crevice in which they found themselves wedged was mostly dry, it was also fairly tight. “Can’t you move over any further?” Wyatt moaned to Rufus as he tried to keep himself from laying too close to Lucy.

“Does it look like I have any more room over here?” Rufus snapped. “I’ve got a damn boulder sticking into my ass!”

Lucy, feeling more than a little awkward being wedged between both Rufus and Wyatt, did her best to make herself as small as possible to accommodate Wyatt’s bulk, but it was no use. Her
voluminous skirt prevented her from moving freely, the weight from the water still making every 
move take far more effort than she had energy for after their trek through the woods. Doing her 
best to sit up, she wrung out the excess water in her dress before she sandwiched herself between 
the two men once more. “Sorry.” She muttered as she brushed up against Wyatt’s chest.

Another crack of lightning and a deluge of rain began to pour from the heavens, “Looks like we got 
here just in time.” Wyatt observed, as another flash of lightning illuminated the faces of his 
companions. Rufus was staring out to the forest beyond their little safe haven, looking every bit 
like a fish out of water. Muttering and cursing under his breath, he fidgeted violently in his corner, 
attempting to find a more comfortable position.

His efforts, however, were causing extreme discomfort for Lucy…and by extension, Wyatt. Every 
move Rufus made, pushed her closer to the Delta Force soldier, until she and…as Wyatt couldn’t 
help but notice…her heaving chest were pressed up against his. Feeling at once the delicacy of the 
situation, Wyatt flipped around so that his back was facing Lucy, only to feel her pressed up against 
him once more as Rufus violently thrashed about in frustration. “Dammit, Rufus” Wyatt spat out 
angrily, “stop moving around so much!”

“Well, I’m sorry, these aren’t exactly the most comfortable accommodations.”

“Do you want to go out and see if you can find something that suits you better?” hissed Wyatt. 
“You can be my guest.” Wyatt motioned to the pouring rain in front of them. “It’s either out there 
or in here.” Rufus looking slightly abashed, stilled and said no more. “That’s what I thought.” 
Wyatt said with a snarl, “Now get some damn sleep.”

Wyatt turned away from his teammates with a huff, trying to ignore the way Lucy’s breath tickled 
the back of his neck…and how if he was really being honest with himself…he didn’t mind one 
damn bit.

The night wore on in about as miserable a fashion as could be imagined. Rufus, though not vocal 
in his complaints, still tossed and turned fiercely, consistently forcing Lucy to mutter sleepy 
apologies to Wyatt’s back as she was involuntarily pressed against him. Under normal conditions 
not one of them…not even Wyatt could have drifted off in the uncomfortable situation they found 
themselves in. Yes, they were wet, cold, and laying on an unforgiving bed of loose rocks and dirt, 
but the tension between the three of them…the awkwardness of their proximity to each other…that 
made things even worse. Despite efforts to keep to their own personal space, the dip in 
temperature coupled with their wet clothing made for a very chilly evening. When sleep finally 
did overtake the three of them, it was only because of sheer exhaustion as the relentless storm 
pummeled the forest around them.

Chapter End Notes
Sorry I have been so long in updating this! I had this chapter completed, but I really wanted to get a head start on the next one before I posted this. I was only two chapters into it when I published this...wanted to be three...but I also wanted to get it out here so I would be motivated to finish it.

This chapter was SUPER challenging to write. Trying to describe the rivers and how they are situated on a map, land navigation...ugh...plus it's like the worst camping trip ever and I don't camp. LOL. I know there's a lot of geographical data in this chapter, so I'm providing a link here so you can see how these rivers look on a map.

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/0/04/Monongahela_River.png/300px-Monongahela_River.png

Thanks for reading!
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

At some point during the night, the rain that had driven them to their place of refuge had ceased, leaving behind a forest floor strewn with newly fallen leaves and pools of water. The air was heavy with the sweet, yet musty scent of dampened foliage and though the air was still fairly cool, the rising sun’s beams spoke to the promise of a warmer day than the one they had previously toiled through.

As the sun climbed higher in the sky, the sheltered alcove in which Wyatt, Lucy and Rufus were still sleeping, was now illuminated by the morning light. Wyatt blinked his eyes open against the piercing, warm rays of the sun, groaning slightly as he was momentarily blinded by the brightness. His body was stiff and sore from his unforgiving bed, but though he could feel the jagged edges numberless pebbles piercing through his clothes and jabbing into his skin, he felt strangely contented and comfortable. As his eyes adjusted to the intensity of the dawn, he startled to find himself not only facing Lucy, but completely wrapped around her.

His first impulse was to jerk away, but as he made to move, Lucy shivered slightly and tucked herself closer to him, creating a slight stirring somewhere deep within his chest as she gripped at his jacket, as if seeking out every bit of warmth she could in their desperate circumstances. The sunlight illuminated her silky, rich chocolate colored hair which contrasted in stunning perfection against her fair ivory skin. Though it was marred by mud and dirt, her face was nothing short of lovely; there were no worry lines etched across her forehead, no franticness in her features…just peace. Wyatt realized as he lay there, a hair’s breadth away from her, holding her in his arms, that he had never seen her looking so comfortable and at ease…which, considering the accommodations was saying something. But it was more than that; in all the missions they had gone on together, all the time he had spent with her, all the times he had shielded her from danger, he had never held her like this, he had never been this close…

“What time is it?” Rufus’ groaned and yawned causing Wyatt to startle backwards into the stone wall of boulders behind him.

As he let out a stream of curse words, Lucy jerked awake, an apology already on her lips, “I’m sorry…I’m sorry…” she muttered in sleepy confusion before her eyes fell on a grimacing Wyatt, “Oh my gosh, Wyatt…are…are you okay?”

“Fine” Wyatt muttered gruffly as he quickly scrambled out of their hiding place, halfway out of embarrassment, halfway out of desperation. He needed out of that cave, he needed fresh air…he needed away from Lucy. Sure, seeing her tuck herself into his chest, cocooned in his arms was…endearing, but he was not about to let himself get carried away by her charms…especially not
when she had lied to him. No. She couldn’t be trusted…and she was just his team mate… whatever awkward position they found themselves in this morning had been done subconsciously because it was cold…not because of anything else.

Rufus soon followed Wyatt, muttering that he needed to use the bathroom, leaving Lucy all alone in a space that was definitely too cramped for her liking. Somehow, with Wyatt and Rufus flanking her, she had not felt the icy cold dread that normally accompanied such places. Maybe it was because it had been too dark in the crevice that night, or maybe it was because she had just been too exhausted to care, but now with sunlight pouring in and the absence of her team mates to distract her from her darker thoughts, Lucy was more than anxious to free herself from her rocky confinement. Weighed down as she was, however, by her hefty layers, she was further impeded in her efforts by the slick, muddy surface of the rocks, which caused her to repeatedly slip backwards every time she tried to climb out from the small shelter. Her claustrophobia threatening to overwhelm her as thoughts of being trapped forever under the rocky outcropping raced through her mind, Lucy frantically hoisted herself up once more, clawing desperately at the ground in front of her only to find that the muddy forest floor offered no purchase, no grip hold onto which she could cling and work her way out of her anxious predicament. “Um…Wyatt?” she cried out as she felt herself slipping once more, “A little help? Please?”

After finding himself cuddling her that morning, helping Lucy was the last thing Wyatt wanted to do…particularly since the position she was currently in brought certain things to his attention. But as he saw her frantically struggling to wriggle herself up and out of a literal hole in the ground, knowing the anxiety she had about tight spaces, he relented with a heavy sigh, making his way over to her in a few long strides. Crouching down he gripped her hands, being sure to keep his eyes trained on the outcropping of rock above her as he pulled her up and out of the small cavern. “Thanks” Lucy muttered in embarrassment as she wiped the mud from her hands and straightened her dress.

“Don’t mention it.” Wyatt mumbled in return as he quickly moved away from her. “I…um…I’m going to go look to see if I can find something for us to eat.” he muttered uncomfortably. “Just… just stay here.”

Lucy nodded back at him nervously, sitting down on a nearby stump as Rufus came meandering back to their makeshift camp, “Guess he’s still in a bad mood, huh?” he asked as he sat down beside her. Lucy shivered slightly. Her dress was still damp from the previous night’s rainfall and the cool morning air did nothing to help relieve her of her discomfort. “Where is he anyway?” he added, looking for Wyatt among the trees in front of them.

“He went to see if he could find us anything to eat.” Lucy said as she stifled a yawn. “I wish we would’ve thought to bring something with us…maybe we should bring that up with Homeland Security when we get back.”
“Yeah…maybe some damn camping equipment while we’re at it…a sleeping bag…poncho…something.” Rufus agreed. “One thing’s for sure, I hope we find Flynn soon…I do not want a repeat of last night.” He rolled his neck as he rubbed his sore shoulder, “I don’t know about you, but that was the worst night of sleep of my life.”

Lucy flushed slightly. The truth was that while the accommodations weren’t exactly first rate…and while being wet and cold added to all of their discomfort…she couldn’t readily agree with Rufus. She had been lying there, listening to Wyatt’s deep breathing and Rufus’ grunting snores, deciding that she would probably be awake all night despite her exhaustion when Wyatt suddenly turned and threw an arm over her waist. At first, it had made her uncomfortable…Wyatt was asleep, after all, and she knew that consciously he would never…particularly when he was so angry at her…hold her like that. But she was cold…and Wyatt was warm…and well, snuggling into his chest seemed like the natural thing to do…at the time. The steady sound of his heart beat and the feel of his warm breath on her hair lulled her into a dreamless sleep and while she knew somewhere in the back of her mind that she shouldn’t be taking comfort in Wyatt’s arms…especially when he didn’t realize he was giving it…she couldn’t bring herself to care.

That is until they woke up the next morning and Wyatt scrambled out from underneath that boulder as fast as he possibly could.

That had been a massive blow to her ego.

Maybe it didn’t have anything to do with her, Lucy thought hopefully. Maybe he, like she, didn’t like tight spaces.

Wyatt was never one to talk about his perceived weaknesses, after all…well, Wyatt wasn’t one to really talk much, in general…about himself anyway. His opening up to her about Jessica had been a bit of a fluke, something that Lucy believed Wyatt regretted even sharing with her. Then, in Nazi Germany he had given her that pep talk, but he hadn’t really gone into specifics…he had only shared his own story to help her get “over the hump.” But what had he told her that was really personal? He had a Grandpa Sherwin who was a bit of a hero of his and his father was a “world class sonofabitch”…whatever that meant. The only real glimpse she had gotten of Wyatt’s inner demons, was at the Alamo when she witnessed him beating himself up over the deaths of his brothers-in-arms in the same way he beat himself up over what had happened to Jessica. The look of shame that clouded his features when he realized Lucy had overheard his emotional conversation with Jim Bowie on the cusp of that terrible battle, was something that had forcibly struck Lucy to the heart. The same man who had been so arrogant at the Hindenburg, was now appearing to be not so much a reckless hothead as he was a man who expected far too much of himself.
Lucy knew that part of Wyatt’s shame was that she had discovered a part of his past that he had hoped to keep hidden...something he had considered a massive failure on his part. Whether it worried him that she would somehow think less of him because of what he had done, she had no idea, but nothing could be further from the truth. If anything, she had grown to admire him not only for his enduring love for his wife, but also for his relentless bravery. He was a man who had risen against impossible odds time and time again. He had lived through the trauma of his wife’s death and the death of his fellow soldiers, really all the family he had left, Lucy imagined, and yet, here he was, on another mission, another assignment…a dangerous one at that, protecting them, protecting history...even though his own was filled with unspeakable amounts of pain and loss. He had nothing to lose, but instead of spiraling down into a self-destructive path like Garcia Flynn, Wyatt dedicated his life to service, to helping and protecting others, no matter the cost.

How could you not admire someone like that?

Yet, as much as she admired him....as much as she felt like she understood him, she realized that there was a lot about Wyatt Logan she didn’t know…and since he wasn’t one to open up about his personal life and struggles, she wasn’t sure if she would ever really get to know the man who seemed to understand her better than anyone she had ever known…apart from Amy.

“I found some wild blueberries.” Wyatt’s voice called Lucy out of her reverie as he made his way back towards them. The promise of food had Lucy and Rufus practically leaping towards him, as he handed them each a few of the ones he had picked.

“Oh my God, thank you, Wyatt.” Lucy breathed out as she gratefully popped a handful of berries in her mouth. “I’m starving.”

Wyatt swallowed hard, feeling a bit guilty for being so hard on the two of them. They were civilians, after all, not trained Delta Force operatives. They weren’t used to these kinds of conditions…and he was pretty damn sure neither one of them knew how to forage for food. They depended on him, they needed him...just as Lucy had said at at the Alamo…and while he was still plenty upset at their duplicity and dishonesty, he knew from his time in the military that they were going to be headed nowhere fast if they didn’t work together to get the hell out of this mess.

Admonishing himself for being kind of an ass, Wyatt led them over to the blueberry bush, offering what advice he could on edible flora. “One good rule of thumb about berries in the wild.” he informed them with a serious nod of his head, “with black and blue ones, you’re usually okay. 90% of them won’t kill you.” He pointed to the blueberry bush, “It’s the white and yellow berries you need to look out for...most of them are deadly.”
“What about red ones?” Rufus asked as he nibbled on a particularly fat blueberry he had just plucked off of the overladen bush.

“Red are tricky.” Wyatt acknowledged with a quirk of his lip. “You’ve got about a 50/50 shot with those. Personally, I wouldn’t touch them, unless I knew exactly what they were...like...a raspberry or a strawberry.” He looked around at the expanse of wilderness before them, “Don’t eat too many,” Wyatt warned as he pulled out a handkerchief, “who knows what we’re gonna find in the way of food as we push on...and unless we find Flynn soon, we’re probably going to be out here for a while.” Picking off a good number of berries, Wyatt wrapped them up and tucked them away, “We’ll save these for later...even if we do find food, we can use these for juice.”

At that warning, Lucy and Rufus greedily picked off as many berries as they could find, eating some, taking care to stow the others, which took a lot of self-control considering they had had nothing to eat for almost 24 hours. When there were no more berries to be had, they pressed on as the bright Autumn sun climbed higher in the sky.

The good news was that Wyatt seemed in better spirits, which allowed Lucy and Rufus to breathe a sigh of collected relief. Instead of the snippy attitude of the day before, Wyatt was attempting to educate them on the different ways they could sustain themselves with what was around them, “Acorns are a great source of protein,” Wyatt explained as he stooped on the ground and scooped up a few fallen ones in his hand. “Cattails are also full of vitamins and nutrients...you can pretty much eat the whole thing, and dandelions too.”

“Oh boy, can’t wait to chow down on some weeds.” Rufus exclaimed in mock excitement. “Guess you’ll be telling me I can eat tree bark next...boil it down, pretend it’s jerky?”

“Oh, actually, you can...just about every evergreen has an inner bark that is full of starches and sugars...”

“How do you know all of this stuff? Don’t they feed you in the Army?” Rufus asked incredulously.

“Survival courses, Rufus.” Wyatt sighed, “When you find yourself in a desperate situation, you gotta know how to stay alive.” He offered them both a serious nod before resuming their march towards what they hoped would be Fort Duquesne; this day’s trek already much less egregious than their hike of the day before as Wyatt’s shift in manner put them all in more hopeful spirits.
After several more miles of trudging through the woods that were thick with heat and humidity, however, tensions began to boil over once more. Wyatt was doing his best from becoming visibly frustrated at the lack of nothing in all directions but Rufus’ audible complaints were wearing thin on his nerves. Noting this, Lucy positioned herself between the two men, having to jog on occasion to keep up with Wyatt and Rufus’ longer strides yet even though Lucy hadn’t so much as commented on the weather or the amount of mud now caked on her 18th century boots, she noted that Wyatt kept casting annoyed glances her way despite her attempts to be as cooperative and compliant as possible.

After another mile or so of growing strain on their already strained team, Rufus shucked off his woolen coat, “I’m sweating like a pig over here,” he moaned as he loosened the buttons on his thick leather vest. “It’s too damn hot to be wearing all of this.”

For September in Western Pennsylvania, it was unseasonably warm and though Lucy had made every effort to keep her complaints to herself, the heavy layers of skirts she had gathered up in her arms had her feeling a teensy bit bitter, “At least you have something to take off.” Lucy reminded him as she eased her way over some tree roots that were slick with mud. “Some of us aren’t so lucky.”

“Point taken.” Rufus conceded with a nod, “But Lucy, it’s not like you’d be running around in nothing but your bra and panties, you’ve got like, what? Another three dresses under all of that, right?”

“Among a few other things,” Lucy schooled as she rolled her eyes, “a corset, pannier, garters, and a couple hundred pins and ties.” She grunted as she regathered her many skirts and leapt over a fallen limb, grimacing as her boot sunk into a wet patch of mud, “I may not be as exposed in the modern sense of the word, but I still wouldn’t want to run around in just a corset and a few flimsy layers of cotton…I really don’t want to run into any 18th century Neanderthals when I’m half naked.”

Wyatt cursed under his breath. It wasn’t enough that he was already seeing flashes of her garters every time she lifted her skirts to avoid the large swaths of mud dotting the forest floor, or that her chest was heaving almost obscenely from the exertion of their trek through these God-forsaken woods. No. Now he had to contend with the mental image of Lucy running around in her underwear and that, coupled with the many grunts and pants issuing from her as she attempted to keep up with him, was enough to make Wyatt wish that another icy downpour would mercifully fall from the heavens and relieve him of his present discomfort.

Rufus, completely oblivious to any such suffering on Wyatt’s part, continued to press the issue, “I don’t see what the big deal is.” he said with a shrug, “pretty sure what you were wearing in Vegas was a hell of a lot skimpier than anything you could be wearing underneath all of that. Besides, I think we’re all comfortable enough with each other that none of us would have any complaints if
you stripped down to what passes as 18th century skivvies.”

Wyatt begged to differ, but said nothing.

“Obviously, I don’t have a problem with it.” Lucy said with a huff, turning to look at Rufus as she let her skirts drop, “I mean, didn’t I take off my bra on our very first mission? I’d rip this corset off in a heartbeat if I knew for sure that we wouldn’t eventually need to look the part of…whatever it is we’re supposed to be.”

“Jesus.” Wyatt breathed out as he dragged a rough hand over his face.

“Oooo missionaries, good thinking, Wyatt.” Rufus exclaimed before turning to Lucy, “That’s a thing now, right?”

Wyatt, however, wasn’t paying any attention to Rufus. He was too focused on attempting to clear his mind of every impure though that had recently snaked its way into his subconscious, which he was finding harder and harder to do the longer he walked next to Lucy. The unbidden memory of her bare, ivory creamed, and flawless back was now being forcefully replaced by an image of her in said corset and…well, he stumbled slightly as he attempted to shake those particular thoughts out of his head.

“Are you okay?” Lucy asked as she gripped his arm.

Not able to meet her eye, Wyatt wrenched his arm out of her grasp, ignoring the flinch it incited in Lucy as he turned on his heel and muttered, “I’m fine.”

“I’m guessing that’s a no on being missionaries, then.” Rufus observed to Lucy as Wyatt quickly huffed away ahead of them. “

“I think he’s still mad about all of this stuff with…you know.” she said with a meaningful glance at Rufus’ side pocket.

Understanding her meaning, Rufus quickly pulled out the recorder and paused it, “You mean this?” he asked as she offered him a curt nod. “He told me to keep recording these missions for Rittenhouse. Be a double agent, Rufus” he mimicked, “so why the hell would he be mad at me doing exactly what he asked me to do?” Lucy shrugged as Rufus continued, “If anything, I’d say
he’s still pissed about that journal.”

“This can’t just be about the journal.” Lucy said with a disbelieving shake of her head, “he’s angry at both of us, he essentially told us both that he can’t trust us anymore.”

“Yeah, but he seemed to be alright this morning.” Rufus countered as he made his way after Wyatt, “I mean, he didn’t feed us poisoned berries, that’s got to count for something, right?”

Lucy shrugged, unsure of what to think anymore. She and Wyatt had butted heads in the past, hell, after that first mission she wasn’t even sure if she would be able to work with him; he was so pompous and arrogant. But then, Amy disappeared and he began to be more understanding towards her; buckling her into her harness, even when he didn’t need to, comforting her when she cried, trusting her over his idol, Ian Fleming…but now, there seemed to be an iciness between them that had never existed before. It wasn’t just that he apparently didn’t want to be anywhere near her, he couldn’t even look at her and after everything they had been through together, Lucy found that Wyatt’s distance weighed on her heart more heavily than she ever believed possible. It wasn’t that she didn’t care for Wyatt, she knew she did…but she was taken completely by surprise at how much his coldness hurt her, how desperate she was to have him back as the confidante and friend she had come to rely on and trust.

Of course, she hadn’t exactly repaid his trust in her, had she? By keeping him in the dark about those meetings with Flynn, not telling him that Flynn was being led in this mad quest by her journal, her words…why wouldn’t he feel betrayed?

She thought by now, though, after being secluded with him in the Pennsylvania wilderness for close to 30 hours, that the damage that had been done to their relationship would begin to heal. Watching him stalk off ahead of them, however, hardly caring if they followed or not, Lucy was concerned that they would never achieve that same level of camaraderie and friendship that had enjoyed once before.

Darting after the retreating figures of both Wyatt and Rufus, Lucy followed, but kept her distance from the Delta Force operative, trailing behind both him and the time machine pilot as they continued their quest for either Garcia Flynn or Fort Duquesne…whichever came first.

As it was, neither appeared.

Though they had walked for a good part of the day, there was not a sign of civilization anywhere…and that troublesome fact was clearly weighing down on Wyatt as he rubbed a nervous hand across his jaw. They had long since consumed their meager ration of berries, their tongues
were parched and though the sun was sinking lower in the sky, the coming evening didn’t offer any hope of relief as the heat and humidity of the day gave way to a sultry and heated dusk. Finally collapsing onto a fallen log, Lucy pleaded with Wyatt, “Can we just stop for a minute? My feet are killing me.”

Wyatt turned huffily to find both Lucy and Rufus sitting side by side, grimacing, their shoes off, and rubbing the soles of their feet. “Do you see where the sun is?” Wyatt asked them angrily, “We only have about an hour’s worth of daylight left before we’re going to have to find another place to sleep tonight. I don’t know about you two, but I’d rather not spend another night in 1754 with nothing to show for it.”

“It may come as a surprise to you, Wyatt, but neither do I” Rufus muttered as he rubbed rough circles into his battered heel. “But what the hell do you expect us to do? We’ve barely eaten anything since this morning, we’re starving, we’ve walked God knows how long and yeah, I’m not a survivalist like you, but I’m pretty sure I’m halfway to dehydrated right now.”

“You want to drink that water? Be my guest.” Wyatt spat out as he pointed to the river. “Why do you think typhoid and dysentery were big killers back in the day?” Wyatt shook his head ruefully, “Dysentery can present itself in just a few hours, typhoid, a few days. You drink that, you’re playing Russian roulette with your life.”

“What about dehydration?” Rufus asked accusingly. “I may not be Delta Force, but I know we’re not going to last long out here without something to drink.”

Rufus had a point. The heat of this past day had taken its toll on all of them. Sweaty, hot, and exhausted, the dull pain in Wyatt’s head told him his body was already feeling the effects of dehydration. If they didn’t find this fort soon, they were going to have to resort to desperate measures.

“Isn’t there any way we can make that water consumable?” Lucy asked desperately as she looked past Wyatt at the flowing river beyond.

“You can boil it.” Wyatt suggested, “but first you’d need to find something to boil it in.” He shook his head as he worked his against his jaw again, pacing as he furrowed his brow in thought, “It’s still risky, but if we could find a place where this water doesn’t run smooth…find a place where there’s waterfalls, rapids, something…that’s generally the best place to drink fresh water without filtering it in some way.”

“And if we don’t?” Rufus asked meekly.
“That’s not an option.” Wyatt grimly remarked. “Let’s keep moving, maybe we can find something before nightfall.”

They continued their trek for what felt like miles when Wyatt suddenly raised his hand and motioned for Lucy and Rufus to hide behind a large tree. Crouching down behind one of his own, Wyatt peered out through the underbrush, at what Lucy could now see was a few French soldiers and a small gathering of Native Americans who appeared to be having some sort of confrontation as their voices were getting louder and more heated, cutting through the darkening forest like dissonant chorus.

It had been so long since they had heard any human voices besides their own, that it seemed almost surreal and a bit disconcerting to suddenly find themselves not so alone in the expansive wilderness. Yesterday, they would have rejoiced at such a sight, but today, in the growing dim, it made them all suddenly nervous. There had been hardly a sign, hardly a waver in the atmosphere to alert them to the presence of others. It wasn’t until they were almost on top of them that they heard or even saw them.

And that was more than a little unsettling.

Spying the French encampment a few yards in the opposite direction, Wyatt wordlessly motioned for Lucy and Rufus to follow him as he crept soundlessly towards a partially built structure surrounded by a series of tents and pickets, the guards of which all seemed to have been dispatched to deal with the argument ensuing just outside its borders.

“This…this isn’t Fort Duquesne.” Lucy breathed out as they settled themselves behind a boulder. “This fort isn’t even built yet….and look, there’s only one river here.”

“They where the hell are we?” Wyatt asked hotly as he peered out from behind their hiding place to survey the situation unfolding before them.

Lucy shrugged, “I don’t know…I guess this could be Fort Machault…or what will become Fort Machault, anyway.”

“What do you mean, you think?” Wyatt asked angrily.

“Well, I’m sorry,” she spat back defensively, her face flushed with anger, “I don’t know when
“Are you telling me, we’ve walked all this way and there isn’t even a fort?” Rufus moaned. “Should’ve gone South…and the irony of that statement, by the way, is not lost on me.”

“It’s an encampment, which means, there should be supplies.” Wyatt muttered as he loaded his gun and cast a wary glance towards the gathering that was drawing more and more attention away from the makeshift fort. “And that’s what we need right now more than anything, right? Food, something for water…a damn map?”

“What are you going to do?” Lucy asked suddenly as she looked up at Wyatt in alarm, “You’re not going over there?”

“Why wouldn’t I go over there?” Wyatt asked huffily as secured the clip with a slap of his hand, “we need supplies.”

“Yes, but Wyatt…you don’t speak French.” Lucy reminded him.

“I’m not gonna be chatting them up, Lucy,” Wyatt countered, “The whole point is for them to not even know I’m there.”

“We should at least go in there together, that way if you’re caught…”

“We’ll be more likely to get caught if we all go.” Wyatt argued. “Besides,” he stated with a pointed nod, “you’re probably safer out here.”

“What do you mean by that?” Lucy asked hotly.

Wyatt let out a heavy sigh, “I mean, these soldiers probably haven’t seen a woman in ages…”

“I can handle a few cat calls, Wyatt.” Lucy spat back in annoyance.

“I’m not talking about cat calls, Lucy.” Wyatt stated meaningfully. Lucy made to argue, but Wyatt
talked over her, “Rufus, back me up here, will ya?”

“I think you should listen to Wyatt, Lucy.” Rufus said with a nod of his head. “I mean, he’s right…there’s not a lot of…your kind hanging around out here. And I’m not sure if you know this or not, being the historian and all, but seeing as how I’m an actual commodity, I’d rather not go around advertising myself to a bunch white guys in obvious need of manual labor” he added as he pointed towards the unfinished fort.

Defeated, Lucy sat back with a sigh, but grew even more anxious at the sound of more arguing off to their left. She watched as more French solders made their way towards the small band of natives, feeling at once that whatever was happening wasn’t good.

As Wyatt made to move past her to the encampment beyond, Lucy pleaded with him desperately, “No, Wyatt…please…” she whispered, “you don’t understand, I think these Native Americans…Wyatt, listen to me!” she demanded in a harsh whisper as he continued to ready himself, “the Battle of Jumonville Glen…” But it was no use. Wyatt firmly placed a finger to his lips and slipped quietly past her, taking care to keep his eyes on the distracted French troops as he stealthily creeped forward into the neglected camp site. Staring after him, frustration and indignation firmly etched on her face, Lucy threw her back against the boulder with a huff, “Great, that’s just great. He’s going to get himself killed and we’re going to be stuck out here…”

Damn bugs!” Rufus spat out as he slapped his neck with his hand, apparently oblivious to Lucy’s dire prediction, “West Nile isn’t a thing yet, is it?”

Rolling her eyes in annoyance she answered, “No, but if I were you, I’d be a little more concerned with malaria.”

“Mala…are you being serious right now?” Rufus asked her in a state of panic, “Am I going to end up with malaria?”

“Relax” Lucy assured, “the incubation period can be anywhere from a week to a month…and by then, we’ll be home.” She cast a nervous glance towards the ever-increasing tense scene unfolding just beyond the clearing from them as she added, “If we don’t die here first, that is.”

Chapter End Notes

Apologies for almost being a month in updating this sucker…I’ve been BUSY. Spring is always a nutty time of year…I think for just about everyone. I have been slowly
updating this and the last few chapters of WMHB as I get the opportunity, writing a paragraph or two here and there anytime I get a chance or the inspiration, SO I GREATLY appreciate your patience and your readership. Thanks so much for hanging in there - hopefully when I finish WMHB the updates between these chapter updates won't be so stretched out.

Also, just a heads up - I MAY change the rating of this fic to M - not for sexy times...sorry, kids (I leave that to the professionals who know what they're doing) but for violence and situations. I really do strive to keep my fics at T level, but this is the French and Indian war and if you know your history, it's not a pleasant thing. There were some BRUTAL moments, and we're going to be experiencing some of them in this fic, either through narrative or through our character's experiences. I'm not one who thrives on a lot of violence, so what I consider M, maybe you all won't mind so much, but since it does deviate from my usual, I just wanted to give you a courtesy heads up that there will be situations coming up that will be a bit graphic. I'm just trying to stay true to the history of the war and the types of fighting involved - the book I own on the French and Indian War (and really, I don't have much background in it, my history concentration was on the American Revolutionary and Civil War/Gilded Age) is seriously like a Quentin Tarantino movie...which is a bit much for me. Some of you are probably laughing right now...and that's fine....but I try to be as open with my readers as I possibly can (without spoiling the narrative) so that no one stumbles onto a situation or a violent description that they are completely unprepared for.

I hope I didn't scare any of you away with that....I really am excited about what I've got planned for this fic (and for someone who doesn't do a lot of violence in her TV/movie watching - I hope that gives any of you who are concerned, a small bit of comfort)

I hope you enjoyed this update! As always, thank you for reading and your reviews are very much appreciated and loved.

Thanks!!!
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

If we don’t die here first, that is.

As shouts and jeers echoed through the forest, becoming louder and more belligerent with every passing second, Lucy thought that perhaps, maybe she wasn’t being too dramatic; the situation was definitely not ideal. If this was, in fact, the beginning of Fort Machault, then they had just walked 35 miles out of their way...for nothing.

Well, not for nothing...it appeared they were going to be witnesses to something if Wyatt didn’t hurry up with those supplies.

Rufus wasn’t much help. He didn’t give the slightest indication that he had even heard Lucy’s glass half-empty reply. The moment she had warned him about the possibility of malaria, he had gone into a near frenzy, swatting away at every mosquito, gnat and firefly that happened his way. Glaring at him as he wildly waved his arms in front of his face, Lucy cast a nervous glance at the gathering of soldiers and Native Americans to their left, terrified that Rufus’ actions would draw their attention, not only to them, but to Wyatt who was slipping in and out of tents, grabbing whatever useful items he could find while the guards’ attention was drawn to outside of the makeshift fort. When Wyatt was nearly spotted by a couple of curious soldiers advancing to the front picket, however, it was all Lucy could do to keep herself from standing up and calling out to him in sheer panic and desperation.

Covering her face with her hands, Lucy held her breath, unable to take the strain of Wyatt’s risky venture. If he was caught, he would be killed. There was no doubt in her mind about that. He didn’t speak French, and they would most certainly take him for an English spy...and she knew all too well, what happened to spies in this day and age. Each moment he remained within the confines of the camp, felt like pure agony as Lucy waited for the inevitable cry of alarm that would lead to Wyatt’s capture or death.

But no such cry came.

Instead, a blood-curdling scream ripped through the air causing Lucy’s breath to hitch in her throat as she whirled around in terror to find the source...something she immediately regretted the moment her eyes fell upon the grisly scene underway before them. She had read countless tales of the brutality that occurred during and even before the French and Indian war, but as she was discovering with every one of these missions, history was a bit different when seeing it in person.
French bodies pierced with spears and arrows, bare-chested natives with bayonet wounds, bloodied and gaping in their sides, were stumbling and falling to the leaf-strewn ground just a few yards away from them. Apart from the Alamo, Lucy had never witnessed a battle before, but unlike that desperate struggle in 1835, this one had a viciousness about it that made it morIf that display of brutality hadn’t been enough to turn her stomach, however, the next proceedings most certainly did.

As the fighting got more desperate and heated, an especially large Frenchman with an axe began hacking away at the natives, their screams piercing through the night like a wounded banshee as the gruesome sound of splitting bones echoed all around them. Lucy slammed her hands to her ears but the sickening crunch of the axe as it met with the flesh of its victims seemed to penetrate every inch, every corner of the forest; until all she could do was close her eyes and hope for it all to be over soon.

Rufus, however, now wholly unconcerned with insects buzzing around him, was frantically pulling at her arm, “We need to get the hell out of here!” he whispered to her desperately. Lucy, however, frantically shook her head, too terrified to move for fear of being seen. Rufus, however, was insistent, “I don’t know about you, but I didn’t sign up for a front row seat to the 18th century version of the Texas Chainsaw Massacre…I think we need to get the hell out of here before I become the worst cliché in the history of horror movies.”. Tugging her arm roughly, he attempted, and failed again to get her to move, “I mean it, Lucy…Night of the Living Dead, The Shining, The Exorcist…hell, even the real Texas Chainsaw Massacre…all end badly for the black guy. Please,” Rufus pleaded, “don’t make me a statistic. I didn’t look good with a flat top in the 90s…pretty damn sure, the close shaved version would look just as terrible. MOVE.” he ordered desperately.

Whether it was another blood-curling scream or Rufus’ panicked allusion to scalping, Lucy finally relented and allowed herself to be tugged forward. Scrambling on their hands and knees, Lucy and Rufus made a desperate escape towards a large copse of trees further away and far more shielded from the literal bloodbath still taking place somewhere behind them.

Once safely hidden behind the trunk of a particularly large oak, Lucy threw her head back against the tree, her breath coming in short pants as she asked in a voice shaking with emotion, “What about Wyatt?”.

Rufus shook his head, looking grim, “He’s a hell of a lot more suited to that kind of thing than we are.” he answered, “I may have grown up in Chicago hood, but I have never seen anything like that.”

Another blood curling scream ripped through the area and Lucy, fearing for Wyatt’s safety quickly turned to look back towards the fort, but Rufus wrapped his arm and around her and pulled her
down to the forest floor as a volley of musket fire exploded around them. As more yells echoed in
the woods behind them, Lucy was just about to give in to her panic when suddenly, Wyatt was
there before her, pale, trembling, and gripping at her arm. “We need to move, now!” he
commanded, pulling her to her feet. Relieved that Wyatt was back with them, and apparently
unhurt, Lucy couldn’t help but pull him in for a desperate hug, but Wyatt quickly pushed himself
away from her, reestablishing his grip on her arm as he pulled her forward. “I mean it, Lucy, we
need to go, now!” he cried out desperately.

Chancing a glance over her shoulder, Lucy discovered, much to her alarm, that while the massacre
of natives had mercifully stopped, they were now being pursued by a group of French soldiers.
“Wyatt?” Lucy called out in panic as she stumbled slightly from the almost paralyzing fear that
now had her heart in a vise grip.

He, however, only tugged her forward, urging her on wordlessly as the sounds of shouts and
French exclamations could be heard seemingly all around them as they raced through the woods as
fast as their feet could carry them. As they made their way through a particularly thick section of
wood, they made their way down a steep slope towards the river, where an outcropping of rock and
several tall pines shielded them from the view of anyone who might be looking down from the
ridge above. Thankful for the protection until they could catch their breath and recover, the three
team mates gasped for breath as they sank down on shaking knees. “What the hell?” Wyatt finally
panted out. “I thought the French and the Indians were on the same side in this war?”

“Not all of them” Lucy answered as she swallowed down the bile that was working its way up her
throat, the stitch in her side causing her to grunt in pain.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Rufus asked in confusion.

“It means what it means.” Lucy spat back sharply. “If you two would ever let me do my job, you
might know these things.” The relief at seeing Wyatt alive wearing off, she smacked him on the
arm, “What were you thinking?” she admonished angrily. “Why did you run off like that?”

Wyatt stared back at her in outrage, throwing down a stuffed saddle bag as he did so, “I was doing
my job. he argued, “We needed food, we needed supplies…you should be thanking me for literally
walking into a damn massacre so you could have something to eat tonight…thanks for that heads
up, by the way.”

“Thank…” Lucy gaped at him open-mouthed, her face flushed with anger, “You think I knew that
was going to happen?”
Wyatt shrugged, “You’re the historian.”

“Yes, but…”

Raising his hand to silence her, Wyatt motioned for Rufus and Lucy to tuck themselves further against the outcropping of rock as the sound of approaching horses sounded along the road above them. Raising a finger to his lips, Wyatt kept a steady eye on the little movement he could see through the thick leaf—filled branches above them. He had his weapon withdrawn, ready to defend them against anyone who might make their way down the slope and discover them.

But no one did.

It was only a few moments before the French soldiers rode off, but for the huddled group of time travelers, it felt more like an eternity as the shouts of French soldiers echoed above them and thunder of hooves made the ground tremble under their feet. When the last of the hoof beats died away and all was quiet once more, Wyatt let out a shaky breath, “That was close.”

“What happened back there?” Lucy demanded as Wyatt opened up the saddlebag and began unwrapping provisions.

“ Aren’t you the one who is supposed to be telling me that?” he asked without so much as glancing up at her.

“Not that.” Lucy gritted out, “I’m talking about back at the fort. Did they see you?”

Wyatt let out a derisive chuckle, “Well, let’s just say I just about got my head blown off my musket fire when that axe-wielding psycho finished up with the last of the natives. They caught sight of me just as I was making a run for it.” he sat back on his haunches and pointed an accusing finger towards the ridge, “Now, why don’t you tell me why we just sat through a damn massacre? I thought you said this war hadn’t started yet?”

“I told you,” Lucy gritted out, “tensions are high.”

Wyatt and Rufus exchanged dubious looks, “Lucy,” Wyatt stated in frustration, “don’t you think that’s a bit of an understatement?”
Rolling her eyes in exasperation, Lucy threw herself down on the ground, crossing her arms in front of her chest as she stared daggers at him, “I tried to tell you, but you wouldn’t listen.”

“You tried to tell me, what? You didn’t say a damn thing about a massac…”

“No,” Lucy corrected, “I didn’t….I didn’t know that was going to happen, but it doesn’t really surprise me…if those Native Americans were who I think they were.”

“Who were they?” Rufus asked meekly.

“If I were to guess, those…men we saw…were most likely part of the Iroquois Confederation. This land used to belong to them, but the French came in and basically took over this whole region…and not just here. They technically had more land in North America than the British did…not as many colonists, obviously, but Canada, all the way down the Mississippi was considered part of the French empire.”

“So the French and Indian war is about the French and Indians fighting each other, then?” Rufus asked.

Lucy shook her head, “No, the French had allies among the native population, but not all of the Native Americans sided with the French. The Iroquois, Catawba and Cherokee tribes sided with the British.” Lucy explained as she raised a shaky hand to her forehead. “In fact, the Iroquois had significant control over this region just before the French came along…so, for them, this was about regaining control of their territory.”

“By siding with other people who would eventually take their territory?” Rufus asked skeptically. “Yeah, that worked out well for them, didn’t it?”

“They didn’t know that at the time.” Lucy maintained. “I mean, hindsight is 20/20…even after the American Revolution this was still part of New France….it didn’t become part of what will be the United States until the Louisiana Purchase in 1803.”

‘Alright, so you have a bunch of pissed of Native Americans who want their land back, so they form this Confederation?’ Wyatt asked gruffly.
“Yes and no.” Lucy explained. “This confederation was formed by six Indian tribes sometime between 1570 and 1600. Ever hear of Hiawatha? He was basically the one chosen to lead it in the beginning. It started as an effort to bring the tribes together, to stand against invasion and to promote peace and civil authority…basically a rule of law.”

“So what happened?” Rufus asked.

Lucy shrugged, “Well, the usual. Dutch traders from New York sold the Iroquois weapons and as French fur traders began encroaching on their territory, bringing disease, among other things, the Iroquois fought back, matching them in firepower. This goes on for decades…colonists were killed, kidnapped and vice versa…and soon the confederacy began to split between Francophiles and Anglophiles.”

“So, what…this is like their Civil War?” asked Rufus.

“I guess you could call it that.” Lucy sighed, “Although there are more tribes involved than just those that made up the Iroquois Confederacy.”

“Okay,” Wyatt pressed, “that still doesn’t explain why French soldiers would attack in the way that they did. I mean, maybe I’m looking at this all wrong, but if those Native Americans were enemies, then why not just shoot them?”

A look of satisfaction stole across Lucy’s face as she slowly turned her head to face Wyatt, “Because,” she began pointedly, “of the Battle of Jumonville Glen.” Uttering those final words, slowly and meaningfully, Lucy drove the point home by offering Wyatt a piercing glare.

He stared back at her, recalling the many times she had tried to tell him about the battle only to be cut off by his growing impatience. Sighing heavily, Wyatt rubbed a hand over his weary eyes, “Fine…what happened at this Battle of Jumonville Glen?”

Feeling slightly vindicated, Lucy tossed her head back slightly as she explained, “At this time, the confederacy was essentially led by a man known as the Half-King by the British, his real name varies in the historical account, but most agree it was Tanacharison. He despised the French,” Lucy explained, “so when the British colonies began working on a plan to peacefully remove the French from the Ohio Valley, he was more than willing to help them out.”

“Something tells me it didn’t go so peacefully…” Rufus muttered with raised eyebrows.
Shaking her head, Lucy continued, “In May of this year, he joined George Washington as a guide to French outposts throughout the Ohio Valley. Washington had been ordered by the Governor of Virginia essentially go out and tell the French to pack it up and move on, but you can imagine how well that went over. Lucy shook her head, “When they refused, Tanacharison suggested the British build a fort at the fork of the Ohio River…”

“Wait a minute, I thought the French had a fort there?” Rufus asked. “Isn’t that what we’ve been looking for…this Fort Duquesne?”

“It’s one in the same…the French captured it with an army of men, a thousand strong. This, of course, didn’t go over well at all with the British or Tanacharison. Instead of driving the French out, the French were now more established in the region and,” she motioned towards the ridge, “still building more forts.”

‘They weren’t going anywhere.” Wyatt stated with a nod.

“No.” Lucy responded grimly. “In retaliation, Tanacharison joined with the British troops under Washington and surrounded the French encampment at…Jumonville Glen.” She swallowed hard as she raised a shaking hand to her forehead, as if trying to push back the memory of what she had just witnessed as she tried to explain the reason for it all, “No one quite knows for sure…but what is most accepted and widely circulated account is that the French were eating breakfast and the British soldiers fired down on them, killing more than a dozen and wounding many others. When the French realized they were surrounded and in a very vulnerable position, they surrendered.”

“Well, that’s not so bad…” Rufus began, but Lucy shook her head at him slowly.

“The French commander, Joseph Coulon de Jumonville was among the wounded…he sent out a note to Washington telling him that theirs was a peaceful mission. They were only in the area to try to come to an understanding with the British…whether that’s true or whether that’s what his note even said, no one quite knows for sure. What is known is that while Washington was attempting to have the note translated, Tanacharison walked up to Jumonville, bashed his head in with a hatchet, scooped out his brains, washed his hands in them, ate them, and then finally scalped him.” Lucy shuddered, “After that, it was a bloodbath. All of the wounded men, except one were viciously killed by Tanacharison’s men.”

“And Washington just let it happen?” Wyatt asked in disbelief.
“He was only a second lieutenant…it was his first command,” Lucy explained weakly, “I think he was just horrified and not sure what to do. He may have been allied with the Native Americans, but he didn’t like or trust them…he knew in many ways, they were playing both sides of this whole thing, and well, when things like this happen…” Wyatt nodded his head in grim understanding as Lucy continued, “…but he also couldn’t navigate this area without them.”

“So, I’m guessing what we saw tonight was, what? Retaliation?” Wyatt asked.

“Could very well be.” Lucy shrugged. “And this isn’t just an isolated incident, things like this will happen throughout the war. In fact, in 1757, the French soldiers look on as their Indian allies attack the British colonists fleeing Fort William Henry. Men, women, even children.”

“Wait a minute…that’s…that’s what happened in The Last of the Mohicans” cried Rufus.

Lucy nodded, “Yeah, that’s the battle James Fenimore Cooper was writing about. Once the fort was surrendered, the Indians made their way into the fort and began killing the wounded. Then they surrounded the camp of British colonists who were fleeing to Fort Edward…and massacred them the next morning…the women and children they didn’t kill, they kidnapped.

“Well, I guess that makes what we saw tonight make a little more sense. Guess that Half-king guy sort of set the precedent…so much for promoting peace and civil authority.” Wyatt snarked as he unwrapped some dried beef, offering it up to Lucy and Rufus.

“You’re seriously not thinking about eating that, are you?” Rufus asked as he stared at Wyatt incredulously.

“I thought you were hungry?” Wyatt asked huffily.

“Yeah…I was hungry…ya know before I saw people literally being butchered,” Rufus stammered uncomfortably, “but you know…you go right ahead.”

Rolling his eyes at him, Wyatt reached into the satchel and tossed Rufus a bottle, “Here…I found this in the Officer’s tent…maybe it will help take the edge off.”

Uncorking the unmarked flask, Rufus took a whiff and threw his head back, “Oh that’s potent.” he choked out as the stench of alcohol filled the air, ”pretty sure you could use this stuff to power up a
“Too bad they haven’t been invented yet.” Muttered Lucy as she grabbed the bottle from a coughing Rufus’ hand. Thinking Lucy was going to lecture them both on the evils of drinking on the job, Wyatt let out an exasperated sigh and steeled himself for her scolding, but none came. Instead, Lucy wiped off the top of the bottle and took a long drink, gasping and sputtering as she swallowed the liquid down, “That’s horrible.” she choked out, but before Wyatt or Rufus could comment, she raised the bottle to her lips once more and took another one.

“Hey! Save some for the rest of us.” Wyatt admonished as he wrenched the bottle away from her. “Weren’t you the one who gave me hell for drinking before that first mission?”

“This is different.” Lucy wheezed, “I’m thirsty…and well, I think we all could use a drink after,” she swallowed hard, “all of that.” Wyatt stilled and nodded, understanding and remembering, as a military man, what the horrors of war were like on his first assignment. So far, they had been lucky. Lucy may have gotten an up, close and personal view of Lincoln’s assassination, they might have all been fighting for their lives at the Alamo, watching scores of men die all around them, but there was something about hand to hand combat, something about bayoneting, or as in this case, hacking someone to death with an axe that took the level of brutality to a whole different level. For Wyatt, learning those techniques and dealing with them as part of his job as a Delta Force operative, he knew what it was like to grapple with someone in a desperate fight to the death. It didn’t make it any easier, but he, at least, had been trained. Lucy was a college professor. She had never asked for this, never signed up to do anything but be their walking, talking encyclopedia of sorts…hell, in the white-collar life she lived, he doubted she had ever seen so much as a fist fight before all of this insanity came into her life.

“You okay?” Wyatt asked as he lifted the bottle towards her, “you…you want another drink?”

“No.” Lucy said with a shake of her head, “I’m good, thanks.” She muttered as she chanced to offer him a small smile...one that, to her surprise, amazement and relief, he returned. Already feeling a bit better, whether from the strong shot of alcohol she had just consumed or the care and concern that Wyatt was now showing towards her, she didn’t know for sure. What she did know was that Wyatt was starting to act like his old self again...and she was going to do everything she could not to mess that up. She meant what she said that day in the Alamo...she didn’t want anybody else in this job...she trusted Wyatt...and she wanted nothing more than to be the person he could trust again. Yes, she had given him reason to doubt her, but as he stood there, next to her, observing her intently as if trying to assure himself that she really was okay, she knew that she would do everything in her power to make sure that she never gave him reason to question his faith in her again. She didn’t care what it took, she would earn it back, if it was the last thing she did. As if to make good on that resolve, Lucy pointed to a rip in his jacket, “How about you? You okay? Kind of a close call, there.”
Wyatt took a drink for himself, grimacing at the clear liquid burned down his throat. “I’m alright.” he acknowledged with a nod, handing the bottle over to Rufus. “I’ll just be happy when we can get the hell out of here, that’s all.”

“That makes two of us.” Rufus said with a nod as took the bottle from Wyatt. “Let’s just hope when we finally get to Fort Duquesne, Flynn is actually there and we didn’t do all of this for nothing.”

Lucy froze as her eyes darted to Rufus, but Wyatt, it appeared, had completely missed Rufus’ full meaning. “Yeah,” he said with a thoughtful nod, prompting Lucy to let out a sigh of relief. That relief was short lived, however, when Wyatt narrowed his eyes in confusion and confronted a suddenly contrite Rufus. “Wait a minute,” Wyatt asked, “where else would Flynn be?” he turned to Lucy, “You said that he would be most likely be at Fort Duquesne, right? That, that was really the only thing around here?”

Lucy continued to glare at Rufus who was looking like a deer caught in headlights. Taking a quick swig from the bottle, Rufus doubled over in a hacking cough as Lucy stammered out an answer, “Y…yes,” she mumbled as she moved her gaze from Rufus’ sheepish face to her wringing hands, “If Flynn is here, he would be at Fort Duquesne, it’s the only thing that makes sense…for this year…I, mean.”

“What do you mean “if”?” Wyatt asked, the tension in his voice increasing, “Either Flynn is here or he’s not here.” He cast accusatory glares between Lucy and Rufus, “So which is it? Is Flynn here, or isn’t he?”

“We don’t know.” Rufus mumbled as he rubbed the back of his neck with his hand.

“What was that?” Wyatt asked angrily, rounding on him.

“Nothing. Nothing at all.” Rufus answered, but Wyatt wasn’t having it. If there was one thing Rufus was not, it was a good liar.

Narrowing his eyes, Wyatt slowly approached Rufus, “You want to try that again?” Rufus swallowed hard and gave an indiscernible shake of his head, “What did you say about Flynn, Rufus?”
Cowering under Wyatt’s piercing gaze, Rufus shifted uncomfortably next to Lucy, insisting that he hadn’t meant a thing by what he said when Lucy blurted out, “We don’t know if Flynn is here or not. This whole mission could be a red herring.”

Wyatt stepped back from Rufus in confusion, “What do you mean this could be a red herring?” His eyes darted between Rufus and Lucy each one refusing to meet his eye, “Flynn did jump to 1754, didn’t he?” Lucy and Rufus kept their eyes trained to the forest floor, neither one daring to lift their heads, “DIDN’T HE?” bellowed Wyatt.

“Yes” Rufus said with a frantic nod, “technically Flynn made the jump to 1754, but we don’t know what happened after.” Rufus said quickly, before pointing an accusatory finger at Lucy, “she’s the one who thought that Flynn might have come here to throw us off.”

“Me?” Lucy gasped, “No, I just said I wasn’t sure why he picked 1754 when the battle that pretty much decided everything isn’t until exactly four years later in September of 1758. You were the one who said Flynn could be jumping here only to turn around and jump again to 1758.”

“What the hell are you two talking about?” Wyatt gritted out angrily, his eyes darting between the two of them.

Taking a deep breath, Lucy explained, “Look, as I’ve told you…nothing happens in September of 1754. The early battles that were fought this year happened months ago, so why Flynn chose this particular date is a bit of a mystery.” She pointed a shaky finger at Rufus, “I only said that the Battle of Fort Duquense takes place exactly four years from now, in September 1758, he was the one who said this whole thing could be a trick.”

“Are you telling me,” Wyatt growled, his face flushed red in anger, “that we’ve spent two days traipsing through the damn woods for nothing?”

“No.” Lucy maintained to Wyatt, “We don’t know anything for sure.” Poking Rufus roughly in the arm, she turned on him and whispered harshly, “I told you we should’ve told him.”

“How long have you known this?!” Wyatt spat out angrily.

Lucy cast her eyes to the ground, her guilt refusing to allow her to meet Wyatt’s heated gaze. “Since before we left Mason.” She admitted in a small voice. “It’s what we were talking about when we got into the Lifeboat.”
“And you didn’t think it was important enough to tell me?” Wyatt growled. At Lucy’s silence, he scoffed, “No, of course not. Why would it be? You didn’t tell me about the journal….why the hell would you tell me about this? I’m just the damn hired gun.” he snapped as he stepped away from their small camp and out into the expansive, dark forest.

Wyatt’s words cut through her like a knife. Here she was stupidly believing she could earn back his trust, but she and Rufus had been sitting on their suspicions about Flynn this whole time.

“Hey!” Rufus shouted as he chased Wyatt out into the clearing, “What the hell were we supposed to do? You were in such a piss ass mood when we were at Mason, biting our heads off left and right and then we jump and you’re already pissed as hell because we forgot to bring the map, were we really supposed to tell you in the middle of all of that that oh by the way, Flynn may not even be here?”

“Yes!” Wyatt spat out. “Better than wasting all this damn time, better than almost getting killed. Dammit, Rufus, Flynn could be anywhere by now!” He stared angrily at the two of them as they hung their heads in shame, unable to meet his eye. “You two want to keep secrets? Fine.” Wyatt spat out, frustration and hurt evident in his voice. “But you’re gonna have to find somebody else. I need to get the hell out of here.”

“Wyatt!” Lucy called out in panic as he began stalking off into the night, “where are you going? Wyatt!” But there wasn’t even a falter in his quick and determined step; he was angrier even than he had been in 1972 and Lucy knew that it was going to take a small miracle to ever get him to trust either one of them again. Their team was broken. Whatever small progress she had believed they had been decidedly swept away by this latest revelation. She watched him disappear into the forest, the darkness enveloping him, feeling completely and utterly alone and exposed.

Which was silly, because she wasn’t alone.

“Do you think he’s coming back?” came Rufus’s worried voice from behind her.

“I don’t know.” Lucy moaned as she held her head in her hands. She could feel the wave of panic cresting over her like a tsunami. They were in the middle of the 18th century Pennsylvania wilderness, surrounded by hostiles, miles away from the Lifeboat, and now they had no protection; neither she nor Rufus knew the first thing about navigation or the great outdoors, “What are we going to do?” she sobbed as her knees gave way, causing her to sink down on the ground in helpless heap.
Rufus was nervously pacing in front of her, biting his thumb, “He’s got to come back, right? I mean, I’m his ride home. Wyatt may be bad ass, but even he wouldn’t want to live out his life in 1754.”

A tiny bubble of hope began to grow in Lucy’s chest. Rufus was right, Wyatt needed them to get home. He would never risk staying behind on a mission…except…he almost did. During the Alamo mission, he was ready to sacrifice his life so that he could buy them the time to get out. What had he said? Everybody I care about is gone. At the time, Lucy had pleaded with him, trying to get him to see that he mattered to her…to them. Even if he didn’t care about them in the same way, he needed to know that he was more than just a hired gun.

He was Wyatt.

But now, with this latest betrayal…”Oh my God, Rufus…” Lucy gasped as she sprang to her feet in panic, “what if he doesn’t come back? What if we never find him? What if we never get back to the Lifeboat?”

In three strides, Rufus was at Lucy’s side, “Whoa, whoa….calm down, Lucy…okay? I’m sure he’ll be back. He just needs some time to cool off…and if he doesn’t…” Rufus trailed off, looking into Lucy’s desperate and anxious face, “We’re going to get through this, alright? You and me. Wyatt taught us a few things, right?” Rufus nodded his head, “Yeah…I mean, what’s that thing he always says? One thing at a time? We make it up as we go?” Rufus began pacing again, “Right, so….what do we need first? Shelter? We can stay here tonight. Food? We’ve got that weird jerky Wyatt stole from the French camp. Water? We’ve got the river…”

“We’re not supposed to drink that water.” Lucy reminded him with a sniff, “Dysentery.”

“Yeah, but what did Wyatt say? It was fine if we could boil it and,” he held up the bottle of alcohol in his hand, “we now have something to boil it in.” Rufus shrugged, “Now, I just need to figure out how to start a fire.”

Lucy couldn’t help it, she smiled at Rufus, grateful that in the horrible circumstance they had found themselves in, he had kept his head. He swept passed her and began digging through the saddlebag Wyatt had procured, searching for anything that might prove useful. Lucy sat down next to him as he rummaged through the stolen goods, staring out at the shimmering ripples of the river as they danced in the moonlight. If the situation were different, she might have considered this spot idyllic, despite the horrors they had witnessed that day. The sound of the rushing river was relaxing, the tall pines they were surrounded by, a more comfortable shelter than the cave of the previous evening, and looking up, the moon was almost full, but the thousands of stars that flooded the night sky absolutely took her breath away. She was about to nudge Rufus in order to point them out, when her gaze fell upon an elongated box that he had apparently pulled out of the
bag and cast off to the side. “Rufus,” Lucy muttered as she took it in her hand and examined it, “I think this is what you’re looking for.”

Dropping the saddle bag, he turned to her in confusion as she slid open the top and produced a piece of flint and a curved piece of steel. “Um…and this would be?” he asked in confusion as he took the elaborately curved piece of metal she held in the palm of her hand.

“This,” Lucy explained as Rufus handed her back the curled piece of steel, “is a tinderbox. It’s what they used before matches were invented. You strike the flint onto the steel and the spark it produces, lights one of these…” she expounded as she reached into the delicately handcrafted box, “a sulfur matchstick. Obviously, it’s not like the matches we know…these are really just pieces of wood dipped in a sulfuric acid…but in these days, it was quicker and more reliable than using kindling.”

“You’re telling me this is going to help me start a fire?” Rufus asked doubtfully. “I get that flint and steel can make a spark, but getting that spark to ignite…”

“Would you rather rub sticks together?” Lucy asked sardonically. “Look, I know that it’s not as simple as what we’re used to, but this is the best that we’ve got.” She swallowed hard as she looked at him desperately, “All we have to do is try.”

“You’re right.” Rufus said with a nod after a while, a look of sheer determination and grit on his face. “Um…gather up some stones, small branches, leaves…whatever it is people use for campfires. We’re going to boil some water.”

Wyatt could hear Lucy calling for him, but right now he didn’t care. He just needed some time away from her…from them, before he said something he would regret. Well, maybe he wouldn’t regret it right away…but he knew he would inevitably feel bad about it, even if they didn’t deserve his good graces.

He was pissed.

No. That was an understatement. He was beyond pissed. Right now, he was wishing that he had just humored Homeland Security, tucked his tail between his legs, and flew back to Pendleton after that failed Alamo mission. Why hadn’t he just let them fire him? It was clear now that whatever
the hell Lucy had said to him then was a damn lie. They didn’t need him, they didn’t trust him…if they did, they sure as hell wouldn’t be keeping secrets from him left and right, would they?

He was promised a team when he signed up for these missions, damn it. In his mind, a team would be comprised of elite fighters and survivors, like he was; a group of men and women who knew how to handle a weapon, knew what it was to put your life in the hands of your fellows in arms, knew what it was to serve and defend…but what he got was a high-strung historian and an engineer whose only experience with violence was in the movies he watched and the video games he played. Neither one of them seemed up to the task…and he had to admit, before and even during that first mission he had his doubts.

Then they began to surprise him. They both took on more than he had ever expected them too, that was for sure; but he also hadn’t expected either one of them to betray his trust like they had. He thought that maybe, after all that mess with Flynn, they had realized what they had done was wrong. They were just civilians, after all, and he couldn’t expect them to have the same outlooks on teamwork and trust as he did. In the military, working together, trusting one another, was a matter of life and death. Given the more academic backgrounds of Lucy and Rufus, he could never imagine either of them ever having to literally put their lives in the hands of someone else on a regular basis…not until these missions started anyway.

That was why, this morning, he was willing to give them the benefit of the doubt. He tried to teach them what it was to have to survive, to trust, to work together…and yet again, they had kept secrets from him…and it wasn’t like this one could be explained away by ignorance. No. Why the hell wouldn’t you mention the fact that this could all very well be a damn wild goose chase…particularly when you’ve spent two damn days trekking through the woods?

Wyatt cursed again, throwing a stick somewhere off into the distance as he realized it would be another two-day trek back to the Lifeboat; another two days trying to survive in the God-forsaken wilderness surrounded by two people he couldn’t depend on, two people he was obligated to assist…if, for no other reason than he couldn’t make it home without them. Of course, it wasn’t in his nature to leave people behind to die anyway…and no matter what Lucy and Rufus did to him, he wouldn’t abandon them, even if he did know how to operate that damn time machine. But one thing was clear, he would have to rely on himself to get them back to the present safely. They couldn’t be trusted, they couldn’t be counted on…he was effectively alone…and that was not what he was promised when he began these missions.

Taking a deep breath, Wyatt resolved right then and there, that once they landed in the present, he would ask to be reassigned. His reputation for getting the job done was being called into question every time they came back without results. Flynn was still torching his way through history and he had nothing to show for it; nothing but lack of sleep and a lot of hurt and disappointment. Bam Bam was waiting in the wings, he could take over at a moment’s notice, so his removal would cause little to no disruption for the operation at large. There really was no reason why he should subject himself to this humiliation any further, better to get out while he could before things got any worse.
That resolve should have made him feel better…but it didn’t. Somewhere in the inner workings of his heart he felt a tug, an ache, that he couldn’t readily explain.

He was just trying to explore the reasoning for why he would be sorry to leave any of this behind, when the subtle smell of smoke called Wyatt out of his inner musings, causing him to spin around in alarm. A forest fire was something that would cause significant problems for them, for not just the obvious reasons. Apart from the possibility of injury, smoke inhalation and being burned alive, the destruction of their source of cover, their shelter, could have dangerous consequences for them as they made their way back to the Lifeboat. Peering through the darkness, Wyatt caught sight of a soft orange glow casting ominous shadows against the trees, coming from where he had just left Lucy and Rufus.

Shit.

Racing towards the light, Wyatt tripped and stumbled over tree roots and slick leaves until finally he found himself sliding down the steep slope towards a cheery campfire and his two companions who spun around in surprise at the sight of him.

Ignoring their exclamations of relief at His reappearance, Wyatt immediately raced over to the camp fire and began frantically stomping it out, causing Rufus to gape at him, affronted, “Hey! Do you know how long it took me to start that thing?”

Wyatt, however, ignored him and continued to pound away at the flames, “What the hell do you think you’re doing?” he gritted out in frustration, “Do you have any idea what you’ve done? Before Rufus or Lucy could answer, however, the sound of hoof beats sounded all around them, causing the ground to shake beneath their feet as they stood there, almost paralyzed with fear. “Run!” Wyatt commanded as he took off at a sprint. Following his lead, Rufus and Lucy raced after him, sprinting through the woods as limbs slapped at their faces and tugged at their clothes all the while the sound of beating hooves and shouts seemed to surround them on all sides.

You just had to build a fire, didn’t you?” Wyatt spat out as they ran at a break neck pace.

“Well, how was I supposed to know they would see it?” Rufus argued as a branch slapped him hard on the arm.

“You do know fire makes light, right?” Wyatt countered in exasperated incredulity. Looking behind him he could see Lucy, her skirts raised, running as fast as she could, but noting with horror
a group of horsemen crashing through the forest just behind her. There was no way they could out run them, no way they could take a stand...but they didn’t need to. No sooner had Wyatt turned his attention back to the forest in front of him, then he came to an abrupt halt in front of a line of French soldiers, their muskets pointed directly at him. Raising his hands in surrender, he cast sideways glances at a breathless Lucy and Rufus, both of them looking terrified and remorseful as the French soldiers closed in and took them prisoner.

Chapter End Notes

Okay so this puts us (FINALLY) to the actual beginning of the episode. Things will not follow that narrative....though you will see snippets of the familiar, I have tried to weave as much from the episode as possible, but as the episode has them basically 40 miles round trip and Rufus becoming a blacksmith in a matter of a few minutes, this will most definitely be different.

For readers of WMHB, please know that I am working on that story as well. I have the next chapter essentially finished, but I'm not posting it until I get the other two chapters pretty much done. I've got some CRAZY things happening and I'm TERRIFIED I'm going to screw something up with the set up and delivery, so I'm waiting until it's all down in narrative form, so I can read it back to myself and make sure that all the important pieces are there. This twist and the mission will not follow what we know in the General at all, so please bear with me as I write the rest of that story out. In the end, it will benefit you...because I will post the last chapters in quick succession, so you won't have to suffer through a long cliffhanger.

As always, I appreciate your reading. And those of you who take the time to review, thank you for that...it's always nice to hear from you!
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Be warned: There's a lot of French in this chapter...and while I do not speak French, google translate does, so any errors you see...blame on the fine folks who run that program. : ) I tried my darndest to make it clear what they were saying...or at least the implications of what it is they are saying for those of you non-French speakers who aren't able or don't want to look up every phrase....so hopefully, you will still get the gist of everything without too much trouble/frustration.

Happy Reading!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The last thing any of them wanted was to be anywhere near the men responsible for the massacre they had witnessed earlier that day, but as they were woefully outnumbered and without any further options, the best they could hope for was that their ready compliance would be met with, at least, some semblance of civility.

Their cooperation, however, was not rewarded with much kindness…particularly after the French soldiers found Wyatt’s gun. They were pushed and shoved into a clearing where their hands were bound tightly by coarse rope that cut into their wrists. Lucy hissed out in pain as her small wrists were being wrapped, causing the axe-toting soldier to sidle his way up to her from behind, snaking his arms down the length of her own as he murmured in her ear, “Qu’est-ce qui ne va pas, mon amour? Les cordes sont-elles trop serrées? Tu pourras toujours rouler avec moi. Je vais m’assurer que tu ne t’enfuis pas. ”

Lucy flinched away from him with a look of disgust, something that was not lost on Wyatt who stood apart from them, seething as his own hands were being bound. He watched with growing anger as the man sniffed at her hair and ran his hands up her sides, but still, Lucy said nothing, choosing instead to huff out a breath of indignation and toss her head back resentfully. When the man pressed a kiss to Lucy’s neck, however, Wyatt no longer gave a damn about good behavior, “Hey!” he shouted causing the man binding his hands to tighten his bonds so much they drew blood. The soldier harassing Lucy looked over at him with a sneer, but Wyatt wasn’t the least bit intimidated, “That’s right, asshole,” he spat out, “I’m talking to you - get your damn hands off her.”

“He doesn’t speak English.” Lucy muttered out of the side of her mouth.

“I don’t care.” Wyatt responded with an angry huff, his eyes never once leaving the man who was still groping Lucy at her sides.
“Ah… tu es un amant?” the soldier asked as he made his way from behind Lucy and positioned himself in front of her, looking from Wyatt to Lucy curiously. When she refused to respond, he wryly grinned at Wyatt, taking Lucy’s chin in his hand, “Peut-être qu’on peut faire un arrangement? Sa liberté pour votre… coopération?”

At that indecent proposal, Lucy visibly shuddered and wrenched her face out of his grip, her breath coming in short angry pants as she attempted to ward off anymore unwanted advances. Wyatt didn’t need to speak French to know that Lucy was being propositioned, her entire body was tense, there was a strain in her face and the way she repeatedly attempted to wriggle herself away from the sonofabitch currently taking up residence in her personal space gave him all the hard evidence he needed to kick his ass all the way into the next century.

Lunging forward angrily, Wyatt drove his shoulder roughly into the man, knocking him to the ground. As he scrambled to his feet, Wyatt, though still bound, positioned himself in front of Lucy, roughly wrenching himself away from the many hands that were now grabbing at him in an attempt to subdue him. “Like I said,” he gritted out furiously, “keep your damn hands off her.”

Letting out a small chuckle, the soldier sneered, drew his pistol, and aimed it right at Wyatt’s head, “Des derniers mots, mon ami?”

At that, Lucy pushed herself in front of Wyatt, “No!” she cried desperately shaking her head frantically as she attempted to recall her French, “Ne le tuez pas. C’est mon… mon… mon frère.” She swallowed hard as the man kept his weapon aimed, “Nous sommes…” she cast a sideways glance at Rufus as she muttered, “missionnaires.”

She really harbored no real hope that they would actually believe that they were missionaries, wandering around in the middle of the woods… without so much as a pamphlet between them, let alone a Bible… still, it was worth a shot. This was the 18th century, after all, and spreading Christianity throughout the New World was just as important to the monarchs of Europe as exploiting the continent for its vast array of untapped resources and goods.

Just as suspected, however, the French soldiers didn’t seem convinced either that Wyatt was her brother, as Lucy had claimed, or that they were wandering around in the middle of nowhere to spread the word of God. Laughing derisively at her, the French soldiers wrenched her away once more causing Wyatt to start forward angrily at them again, only to be held back this time by a two of their brothers in arms.

“Des derniers mots?” the French soldier asked again as Lucy struggled in vain to stand between him and Wyatt once more. Wyatt stared hard back at the man, half daring the sonofabitch to take
the shot, half-wishing he hadn’t acted out and left Lucy completely unprotected when the sound of approaching horses drew the attention of everyone in the clearing.

A distinguished looking officer accompanied by a younger soldier dismounted his horse amid a flurry of salutes and murmurs. “Que se passe-t-il?” he asked as he looked around at his men. As his eyes fell on a still struggling Lucy, he narrowed his eyes and commanded his men to let her go.

Taking her place in front of Wyatt once more, Lucy made a desperate attempt to plead their case to this man, who in all appearances, seemed to be their commander. “S’il vous plaît, Monsieur, vos hommes essaient de tuer mon frère. Il essayait juste de me protéger.” she pleaded, ”Nous sommes missionnaires, nous nous reposons simplement sur notre voyage quand nous avons été attaqués par vos hommes.”

The commander raised his eyebrows and turned to his men, “C'est vrai? Avez-vous attaqué ces gens?”

A murmur of dissent arose from the French soldiers, all of them protesting Lucy’s statement that they had been attacked as they were attempting to rest for the night. With a wave of his hand, the French commander settled the crowd and turned once more to Lucy with a thoughtful frown, “En effet?”

With a solemn nod, Lucy replied, “Oui.”

He looked at her doubtfully and motioned for his companion to come forward, which he did, carrying with him a large saddle bag that looked awfully familiar. Holding the bag, the French commander turned once more to Lucy, “Ce sac a été retrouvé dans votre camp. Il contient des choses qui m’appartiennent.” Lucy swallowed hard and cast an uneasy look towards Wyatt as he added, “Tu n’es pas plus que des voleurs.”

Lucy frantically shook her head at the accusation, even though she realized that it was probably in vain, “Nous ne sommes pas des voleurs.”

“What’s wrong?” Rufus muttered, but Wyatt, seeing the saddlebag filled with goods he had taken from the French camp, understood, “They know we stole from the camp.” He muttered to Lucy, “Tell them we were lost…”
But his request to her was cut short by the French commander, who looked at Wyatt with renewed interest, “Vous ne parlez pas Français?” At Wyatt’s blank expression, he raised his eyebrows and asked, “Anglais?”

“Is he asking me if I speak English or if I am English?” Wyatt muttered out of the side of his mouth.

“I don’t think it matters much, man.” Rufus breathed out weakly as the soldiers all raised their muskets at them. “They’re gonna kill us either way.”

But Lucy wasn’t about to give up without a fight, “Je suis leur guide.” she explained desperately, “Nous étions perdus, nous avions faim…”

Her desperate pleas, however, fell on deaf ears. They either didn’t care or believe that they were lost and hungry…and really, why would they? They had been caught red-handed, it seemed, with a saddlebag filled with things from their camp. Wyatt had been seen fleeing the scene. The French commander shook his head grimly at her and nodded to the axe-toting soldier as he stepped away and tutted, “Savez-vous ce que nous faisons pour punir les menteurs?”

Without another word, Lucy was yanked roughly away from Wyatt with a knife held to her throat as the commander demanded to know the truth about what they had been doing in his camp.

Unfortunately, Lucy was the only one who could understand a word of what he was saying, but given that the edge of the knife was currently pressing into her throat, she was too terrified to utter another word. Seeing this, Wyatt lunged forward in alarm, “Hey! Leave her the hell alone! She didn’t do anything!” Wyatt yelled out, “It was me, alright? I’m the one who took the supplies!”

“Espion?” the commander asked in interest, misunderstanding Wyatt’s last word.

Wyatt looked to Lucy in confusion but she could only breathe out a helpless little whimper. “What…what does that mean?” he asked but no answer came. Instead, the soldiers lowered their muskets and Lucy was pushed roughly back to Wyatt and Rufus as the commander began barking orders to his men.

“Are they letting us go?” Wyatt asked hopefully, but Lucy shook her head at him sadly.
“No,” she muttered despondently, “now they think we’re spies.”

“What? Why? Be…because of what I just said?” Wyatt asked incredulously. “Hey, listen,” he called out to a French soldier, “we’re not spies.” He said with a shake of his head, “this has all been a big mistake.”

As the French soldier sneered at him and walked away, Rufus leaned over and muttered, “I don’t think they care, Wyatt.”

Linked together by a length of rope, Lucy, Wyatt and Rufus were herded into the midst of the French soldiers and their horses, forced to march forward into the darkening night. “Any idea where they’re taking us?” Wyatt muttered mechanically to Lucy.

Casting a wary glance towards him, she nodded offering him an ironic smirk, “To Fort Duquesne…to hang….most likely.”

“Great.” Wyatt spat out in disgust. “Just great.” Why the hell had he left them alone? He knew neither one of them knew the first thing about the outdoors or convert operations…well, not like he was anyway. Lucy, of course, had acted the part of a Nazi secretary with Ian Fleming of all people, but it wasn’t like she was trained to do that sort of thing. Even so, Lucy and Rufus were two of the most brilliant people he knew…so why the hell did they have to go and make a camp fire right after they had run for their damn lives? They knew they were supposed to be hiding…it didn’t make any sense. Angry at himself, angry at the situation, Wyatt couldn’t help but chastise them both, “You know, none of this would’ve happened if you would have just told me you were worried about this whole damn thing being a trap. Why the hell did you have to build that fire?”

“It seemed like a good idea at the time.” Rufus defended. “We just wanted to boil some water.”

“Yeah, well a lot of good it’s going to do you now.” Wyatt retorted angrily.

They marched on for what felt like hours until Lucy, exhausted from the effort, began stumbling so much that Wyatt had to brace her up with his bound hands. He was just getting ready to call out to them to stop for Lucy’s sake, when without warning, they did. Setting up camp, the French soldiers unburdened their horses and pitched tents all around the large clearing they now found themselves in. Grateful for a chance to rest, Lucy collapsed in a heap on the forest floor, too tired to care that she was still attached to Wyatt and Rufus, whose arms were both pulled down by her actions. Once their camp was assembled and their horses refreshed, the French turned their attention, finally, to their prisoners. Detaching them from the rope that pulled them all along, they were granted, at least, that small bit of independence.
The sneering soldier whom Wyatt had shoved, made his way to Lucy with a flagon of water, taking care to caress her face as he offered it to her. Angrily, she wrenched away from him once more as he chuckled and murmured, “Vous n’avez pas à souffrir, Mademoiselle. Viens boire un verre. Laisse-moi m’occuper de toi.” Lucy, however, refused with an angry shake of her head. Wyatt glared at him...something that was not lost on the French soldier who sneered at him and announced loudly, “On ne la tuera peut-être pas. Ce serait une perte honteuse. Tu ne trouves pas?” He turned and looked at his fellow soldiers who cheered and laughed...but Wyatt wasn’t looking at them...he was looking at Lucy, who flushed and turned her face away, obviously offended by whatever the asshole had said.

Seething with anger, Wyatt had to literally bite his tongue to keep from mouthing off to the sonofabitch who seemed duty-bound to harass Lucy. He couldn’t risk another outburst...not now...not when Lucy and Rufus needed him to get them out of this mess, but it took all the self-control he had to not “accidentally” trip the jackass as he finally slunk away to join the rest of his fellow soldiers. Wyatt stared daggers at them as they muttered conspiratorially among themselves, in words he didn’t understand...but could very well guess at in the way they kept casting devilish grins towards Lucy and breaking out in raucous laughter. He wasn’t sure if Lucy was just trying to ignore what they were saying or if she really couldn’t hear the comments being made, but he could tell she was far from comfortable...which, given the fact that they were tied up and awaiting a likely execution was hardly surprising...but for Lucy...

While they were all vulnerable to attacks and mistreatment, Lucy was even more so....and no one was more aware of it than she was. When Rufus finally succumbed to sleep, she shifted uncomfortably, casting nervous glances around her as she set her back against a tree and tucked her feet underneath her. Sitting up straight, Lucy shook off her own exhaustion looking absolutely determined to not let her guard down for a single minute.

As the soldiers slowly began retreating into their tents and the laughter from the camp gave way to grunts and snores, however, it became harder and harder for Lucy to fight off the overwhelming lure of sleep. Despite her obvious exhaustion, Wyatt noted, with more than a little bit of awe, she was putting up one hell of a fight. Her head would droop for only a moment before she would forcefully shake herself and press her back more firmly against the tree, attempting to stay in control, stay alert. Wyatt wanted to give her some kind of assurance, but he knew he couldn’t, when his hands were literally tied and they were so grossly outnumbered. Instead, he just watched her silently as she continued to battle with herself, desperately trying to fight off the overwhelming lure of sleep until finally, her head drooped down to her chest and stayed there, her deep and steady breathing driving the point home that she had finally succumbed. Wyatt sighed heavily and inched himself closer to her, resolved that if she couldn’t stay awake, he would...just in case.

As the early rays of dawn stretched their way across the sky, the sound of a horse whinny caused Lucy to dart her head upwards with a gasp, only to find Wyatt sitting cross-legged beside her staring hard at the soldiers moving around the camp. “Morning.” he muttered mechanically
without drifting his gaze.

“Morning,” she rasped out, her throat feeling absolutely parched, “I must have dozed off” she added almost apologetically. Wyatt only grunted in assent; too preoccupied by his thoughts to be very communicative. She glanced around the camp, noting with some confusion that there were fewer tents dotting the campsite than there had been the previous evening.

Wyatt, seeing the look on her face as she scanned the clearing in front of them, explained, “A group of them left just before dawn…don’t worry,” Wyatt added with a sneer, “your boyfriend is still here.”

Lucy let out an exasperated sigh at the thought of spending another day warding off the advances of that man. “What a relief.” she muttered sarcastically before turning to Wyatt and asking, “How…how long have you been awake?”

“Didn’t sleep.” came Wyatt’s muttered response.

“Oh.” Lucy said again in surprise, her voice filled with shame. Of course, Wyatt's didn't sleep. He had been betrayed again by the two people he was supposed to be able to trust…and that broken trust had now led to their capture. As Wyatt had said the night before, if they would have just been honest with him and told him about Flynn they wouldn’t be in this mess. She wanted to apologize, to tell him how grateful she was for him and how much he had done for them over the past three days, but Rufus grunted awake and immediately made their already bad situation, worse.

“Oh hell…I was half hoping I would wake up and find out last night was just a bad dream…but nope, still in the suck fest that is the 18th century. I don’t think I’ve had a good night’s sleep since 2016.”

Already seeing Wyatt losing his patience, Lucy interjected, ‘Well, you know…Wyatt didn’t sleep at all, so be grateful for the sleep you did get.”

“Oh, is that so?” Rufus asked, surprised by the revelation since Wyatt had given him such a hard time that first night, “I thought you could sleep anywhere, Wyatt?”

“Maybe I didn’t want to sleep.” Wyatt snapped back, “Maybe I was just enjoying the peace and quiet.”
“What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

“It means,” Wyatt hissed, “that maybe you need to shut up every once in a while and let me think. I gotta figure out a way to get us out of this mess, that you incidentally, got us in.”

“Me? Maybe if you hadn’t run off in the middle of the night, you would have been around to tell us not to start a fire.”

“Oh my God, Rufus…you’re a damn engineer, Lucy’s a professor, I thought between the two of you you’d realize that the first thing you do when you’re hiding is not give away your damn location! Didn’t you two ever play hide and seek as kids?”

Rufus made to argue with him again, but Lucy had had enough, “Will you two just stop? she hissed. “We’re not going to make this situation any better by…” Lucy’s voice trailed off as the French soldiers began cooking up a hearty breakfast. The aroma wafting towards them was maddening and her stomach ached with hunger.

“Now that is just cruel and unusual punishment, right there” Rufus moaned. “Any chance they’ll share that with us?”

“I wouldn’t hold my breath.” Wyatt muttered out as his own stomach rumbled.

Lucy couldn’t help but silently agree with Wyatt. The French had gone to no great lengths to make them comfortable the night before, and while she was offered something to drink from her “boyfriend” as Wyatt had called him, Rufus and Wyatt had basically been ignored. That’s why it came to no surprise to her that when the officer from the night before emerged from his tent, he informed the French soldiers that the “English spies should be given no food.” There was no point to it, really…since as he said, “they would soon be hanging from the trees.”

So…it was official…they were going to be hung as English spies.

The French officer mounted his horse, informing his men that he would ride forward to Ft. Duquense so that the gallows could be prepared for their prisoners. Taking two other soldiers with him, Lucy, Rufus and Wyatt were now only guarded by three….one of whom, was unfortunately, the man who had caused Lucy so much grief over the past few hours. Watching him ride away, Lucy gasped at a sudden realization, “I think that’s Captain Louis Coulon…he..he was the only
man Washington ever surrendered to…”

“No.” spat out Wyatt angrily. “No, history. Not right now.”

Lucy gaped at him, hardly believing he was doing this to her again, especially after all that had passed the previous evening, “I thought you’d want to…you know what?” she said as she clenched her eyes shut in frustration, “forget it. I know the situation is not ideal…”

“Not ideal is having French fries without ketchup” complained Rufus. “This has been three days of trudging through the mud…”

“And whose fault is that?” muttered Wyatt under his breath.

“…bitten by bugs I can’t identify, eating meat I don’t want to identify…” Rufus continued.

‘Three days of listening to you whine.” Wyatt spat out angrily.

“Come on you two.” Lucy admonished. “I don’t like it either, but if we don’t work together we’re never going to get out of this.”

“Yeah,” Wyatt scoffed derisively, “We’re really working together. You two keeping secrets left and right, Rufus recording us for Rittenhouse…”

“Really G.I. Joe?” Rufus snapped at him angrily, “Did you or did you not tell me to be a double agent? ‘Keep recording the missions, Rufus’ you said but now…now, you have a problem with it?” Rufus shook his head, “Give me a break. You’re just pissed because your big hero move last night got us into more trouble than we were already in.”

“What the hell do you mean by that?” Wyatt snarled.

“It means that if you wouldn’t have been over here defending Lucy’s honor then maybe we could have gotten some damn breakfast this morning! I mean, what the hell did you think would happen? That you’d be able to go all Delta Force on these jerks and they would just leave us alone?”
Wyatt stared hard at Rufus, wanting nothing more than to kick his ass all the way back to 2016, but upon seeing Lucy’s “boyfriend” make eyes at her once more as he made his way out of his tent, Wyatt leaned over to Lucy and muttered conspiratorially, “How do you say ‘I had sex with your mother’ in French?”

Lucy gaped at him, “You don’t.” she spat out in annoyance, “unless you are trying to get us killed right now.”

“I’m trying to do my job.” Wyatt stated meaningfully.

Lucy sighed. Rufus had obviously hit a nerve. Wyatt had been reckless the night before, she wasn’t going to deny it, even if Wyatt wouldn’t admit it, but she also wouldn’t deny that she was grateful for that recklessness last night…even if it did put them into worse circumstances. She looked back at him, Wyatt’s piercing gaze asking her silently to trust him and…well, what could she do? They were in this mess because they hadn’t trusted Wyatt enough to tell him about Rittenhouse, the journal and their suspicions about Flynn…if she was ever going to earn his trust and friendship back, she knew that she was going to have to prove that what she meant after the Alamo mission was true; She trusted Wyatt, he made the right decision every time and there was absolutely no one else who could take his place. Relenting, Lucy leaned towards him and whispered, ‘J’ai couché avec ta mère.” and Wyatt couldn’t help but raise his eyebrows to the sky.

It should not have thrilled him…given the situation they were in…to hear Lucy’s voice whispering dirty French phrases in his ear, but…it did. It wasn’t the subject matter, though he had to admit he was more than a little impressed that straight-laced Lucy Preston wasn’t so straight-laced after all...she could have recited the damn phone book and it probably would have elicited the same response….no, it was the intimacy. Her breath on the shell of his ear, the low, secretive and sultry sound of her voice sent his brain straight to the gutter…exactly where it did not belong.

This was Lucy. His team mate. The bossy know-it-all who got bent out of shape over historically inaccurate underwear. Historically inaccurate underwear that he bit through with his teeth…

Dammit.

Wyatt didn't want to dwell on why something as simple as a whisper, knocked him for a loop… particularly in regards to Lucy…Lucy, the woman he couldn’t trust…Lucy, the woman who was having secret side chats throughout history with Garcia Flynn… Lucy who was not and never could be as important to him as Jessica. He had a job to do, dammit, and well, he couldn’t focus on her…even if part of the reason he was doing this was so that he could properly beat the shit out of the French soldier who had groped her the night before.
Rolling away from Rufus…and more importantly, Lucy, Wyatt eyed his prospects…fortunately two of the soldiers were busying themselves in the camp, taking down tents, packing up gear, completely oblivious to the three of them. Unfortunately, the asshole from the night before was not among them; he had apparently gone off to relieve himself. Figuring it was more important to get freed than to get revenge, Wyatt called out to the soldier closest to him, “Hey Pierre! J’ai couché avec ta mère.”

Lucy watched as the soldier, offended and stunned, picked up his musket and pointed his bayonet directly at Wyatt. She was just beginning to regret her part in all of this when Wyatt used the bayonet to slice through his bonds and began…as Rufus put it…to go “full Delta Force on the French soldiers.”

If she and Rufus hadn’t been impressed with Wyatt’s prowess before, they definitely were now. Warding off attacks with bayonets, axes and old-fashioned fists, Wyatt managed to gain the upper hand, though he was, himself, unarmed…something he soon remedied the moment he got close enough to their confiscated personal effects. He had just managed to get his hand on his gun when both soldiers came charging at him again. With lightning quick reflexes, Wyatt brought both of them down with two quick shots, sighing in relief and exhaustion as he sat back on his haunches and tossed his gun aside.

That relief, however, was short-lived.

No sooner had he made his way over to Lucy and Rufus in an attempt to untie their hands then the crack of gunfire rent the air. Gasping in pain, Wyatt gripped his arm as he spun around to find the French soldier, the very one he despised, charging into view, the still smoking flintlock pistol tossed to the side as he raced towards Wyatt. The two men collided in a flurry of fists and curses, grappling with each other as each tried to gain the upper hand. Wyatt, now injured, was at a bit of a disadvantage…something the French soldier was all too ready to exploit by pummeling his arm repeatedly until Wyatt was groaning in agony.

Lucy scrambled over to the bayonet Wyatt had used to cut his own bonds and began using it to work on her own; frantically moving her wrists back and forth over the blade until finally, she was free. Rufus, seeing her efforts, quickly began work on his own, both of them desperate to help Wyatt who was clearly in a lot of pain.

Tripping on her many skirts, Lucy stumbled onto the forest floor as she attempted to make a grab for Wyatt’s discarded gun. As the two men grappled beside her she reached out and had just put her hand around the grip when she was suddenly grabbed roughly around the waist and hauled into the air. A rough hand was around her throat as the other sought for Wyatt’s weapon which she now firmly grasped in her hand.
Wyatt ducked down as the gun went off, the bullet hitting a tree right next to him. “Lucy! Get your finger off the trigger!” he yelled out as yet another shot rang out.

“Holy shit!” Rufus cried as he fell to the ground, holding his head in his hands, the last bullet having whizzed by his ear. Both he and Wyatt were ducking for cover as Lucy desperately fought off the soldier. He now had both hands around Lucy’s dainty wrist, clawing and twisting at her hand, until her death grip on the gun began to loosen. Seeing an opportunity as the French soldier’s attention was now fully concentrated on the gun he was slowly prying away from Lucy, Wyatt rammed into him from the side, knocking both he and Lucy to the ground. As Lucy wriggled herself away, Wyatt clambered on top of the soldier, keeping him from making another grab at Lucy as she shakily got to her feet, still holding the gun.

Pounding Wyatt in the arm again, the Frenchman regained the upper hand, now pinning Wyatt to the ground. Shaking, Lucy aimed the gun at the soldier’s back, turning her head and closing her eyes as she went to squeeze the trigger, but Rufus quickly forced her arms down. “What the hell are you doing? You could hit Wyatt!” he exclaimed desperately. “Here...let me...” Rufus muttered as he scanned the camp frantically. Spying the frying pan the soldiers had used that morning, he picked it up and swung it towards the soldier’s head, knocking him sideways off of Wyatt who quickly scrambled to his feet, grabbed his gun from Lucy’s trembling hand and shot the Frenchman before he could come at them again.

“Tres bien, you son of a bitch” Wyatt growled as he wiped the sweat off his brow and nursed his arm.

“Well,” Rufus observed, “I gotta say...you’ve got us out of some tight spots before, Wyatt...but that was pretty damn impressive.”

Wyatt however, was not about to respond to what he considered a lame kiss up move from Rufus...especially after their back and forth that morning. He had just rolled his eyes and turned away from Lucy and Rufus when Lucy gaped at the sight of his bloodied sleeve.

“Oh my God, Wyatt.” she exclaimed, “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine.” was his gruff reply. Peeling back the ripped fabric he shrugged, “Just a graze...nothing that can’t be patched up in five minutes once we get back to Mason.” He looked around at the camp, “Gather up some supplies...we still have one hell of a long walk before we get back to the LifeBoat.” He made his way over to a small stump and began rolling up the sleeve of his injured
arm, pausing slightly as he noticed Lucy hovering over him. “Can I help you?”

“Are…are you sure you’re okay?” she asked meekly as she continued to eye his bloodied sleeve.

“I told you,” Wyatt sighed, “I’m fine…just…just help Rufus gather up the supplies.” he added impatiently

“You’re going to need help wrapping that.” Lucy said as she swallowed hard. “Just…just give me a second.” Despite Wyatt’s protests, Lucy ran to the tents and began looking through the soldier’s belongings, emerging moments later with a small circular box. “Found one.” She exclaimed triumphantly as she knelt down next to Wyatt.

“Found one of what?” he asked warily.

“An 18th century first aid kit.” she muttered as she unclasped the lid and began looking at the small vials filled with different liquids.

“Um…Lucy…do you think you should be messing around with that stuff?” Wyatt asked nervously, “I mean, they didn’t know about…ya know…regular medicine back then…right?

“Mmmm…not exactly…but desperate times calls for desperate measures…” Lucy murmured as she lifted bottle after bottle squinting as she read the narrow handwriting on the labels.

“This isn’t a desperate time, Lucy.” Wyatt reminded her, “We’ll be at Mason by the latest, tomorrow morning.”

“When you were shot in 1865, you could barely walk by the time we got back to Mason and that was just hours.” she countered as she uncorked a small bottle.

“That was different, that was…hey!” Wyatt flinched away from the bottle Lucy had had pressed against his arm, the orange liquid stinging painfully as it worked its way into his wound. ‘What the hell is that stuff?”

“Iodine.” Lucy said simply as she began wrapping his arm with strips of muslin cloth dipped in
more odorous liquid. “It’s probably the best antiseptic you’ll find in the 18th century.”

Wyatt watched her as her nimble fingers worked to secure the bandage, feeling at once irritated that she insisted on helping him when he was angry with her and grateful that after he had been such an ass…an ass with good reason, he thought…and yet, she still wanted to help him. Scoffing slightly, he asked, “I thought you fainted at the sight of blood?”

Lucy stilled her work, glancing up at Wyatt briefly before shrugging, “Well, what can I say?” she said grimly, “After everything we’ve seen in the past few months…I’m getting used to it.” She replaced the cork on the bottle of iodine, placed it back in its tiny compartment and closed the lid of the medical kit, before standing up and announcing, “Alright…well…now you’re all patched up…at least the best I can do anyway.”

“It’s fine.” Wyatt said dismissively. As Lucy turned to walk away, he rolled his eyes and called out, “Thanks…for you know…this.” he said with a nod towards his arm.

Lucy smiled slightly, “Sure…and thank you for…you know…everything.” she muttered quietly. Wyatt merely nodded slowly, before an awkward silence fell between them, both unable to meet the other’s eye. “I think I’ll um….keep this” Lucy finally said as she motioned to the first aid kit, “just in case. We still have a long walk, right? Better to be prepared? I mean, who knows what else we’ll find out here?”

“Just make sure we have a damn map.” Wyatt called after her as he rolled his sleeve back down. After slipping on his jacket, Wyatt noted that he only had one magazine left…and after the excitement of that morning, he knew he only had two bullets left in the clip currently in his gun. Lucy was right, it was better to be prepared…who knew what they would run into over the next few hours? After killing these soldiers, he was pretty sure that might cause them to be on somebody’s shit list…and well, he wasn’t about to take any more chances. Taking a dagger, a flintlock pistol, ammunition, and a few provisions, Wyatt tucked them all in the saddlebag he had stolen the previous night and slung it over his shoulder, “You two ready?” he asked as Lucy and Rufus emerged from the two tents still standing.

“As ready as I’ll ever be.” Rufus admitted, “why…um…why can’t we take the horses again?”

“Because,” Wyatt sighed in frustration, “we’ll be spotted easier if we’re on horseback.”

“Yeah, but we’d get to the LifeBoat quicker…I mean, isn’t that the goal?” Rufus asked, “To get the hell out of here?”
“It will be easier and quicker to get to the LifeBoat if we don’t draw unnecessary attention to ourselves.” Wyatt admonished. “You want to ride off into the sunset? Be my guest…but if we’ve got to hide, there’s no way in hell anybody who’s looking for us won’t spot a white horse in the middle of the damn forest.”

“I see your point.” Rufus said with a curt nod. “It doesn’t mean I have to like it…but I see your point. So…how much further do we have to walk, you think?”

“I don’t know Rufus…” Wyatt sighed as he looked at the map, “maybe about 20 miles? We covered a lot of ground last night, so we should be a hell of a lot closer than we were.”

“Yeah, but…”

“Rufus, we’ve got a long way to go.” Wyatt warned him, “You can stand here and complain all day, but the longer we stand here, the longer it’s gonna take us to get home…and I don’t know about you, but I really don’t want to spend one more night in this hellhole, do you?”

Without hesitation, Rufus adamantly shook his head, “No…no…I…I want to go home.” he assured him. “The 18th century sucks.”

“Alright then,” Wyatt replied as he looked at Lucy and Rufus, “let’s go home.”

Chapter End Notes

Originally I had planned on making this chapter a little longer....ending it where they realize they are trapped/stranded....but as I worked out this chapter and the next one, I thought it just flowed better. Yes, you are still seeing some familiar scenes here and that, as I said, will continue from time to time...but this story is absolutely its own so when I do veer off from what we know or change it up a bit, please know that it is purposefully done and not because I "messed up" or didn't "get something right" from the episode. In trying to make this narrative work, I had to make some changes to canon because it just made no sense otherwise....the logistics, the timeline, even some of the history presented in the show doesn't jive with the actual historical record...so you know, nerd that I am...I have to fix that.

I hope you enjoyed this update...I am SO SO SO SO SO close to finishing WMHB...as I said before these last few chapters are pretty complex and so I'm just going over everything with a fine tooth comb. I hope to have that updated for you *soon* That
said, I'm going to be out of town this weekend and possibly some of next week - we have an EXTREMELY busy summer ahead of us, so please bear with me as I try to juggle our schedule, travels and these updates.

I appreciate your reading and your patience!!!
Hardly sparing a moment for rest, Wyatt led Rufus and Lucy back through the untamed forests of Western Pennsylvania. He moved with a determined swiftness; determined in that there was no way in hell he was going to spend one more night in this damned century. Already, they had been half-starved, dehydrated, and nearly killed…and while they had narrowly escaped the French, Wyatt knew that someone was bound to come looking for them when they didn’t arrive at Fort Duquesne…and well, he wanted to be long gone before that happened. If they had been ready to hang them over a saddlebag full of a few supplies and provisions, he didn’t even want to think about what they would do over the killing of three of their soldiers…even if one of them was a complete asshole.

Then there was Lucy. This was no place for her…and he realized that sounded about as misogynistic as you could get…but after the harassment she received at the hands of those French soldiers, he knew that the sooner she got home the better. Not that he cared that much about her safety…he just had a responsibility to his team…and she was part of his team and even though he had absolutely decided to throw in the towel the moment they touched down in 2016, he was still responsible for her protection now and by God, he was going to see that she got back to Mason safely.

Rufus…well, even though he was driving Wyatt up the proverbial wall with all of his whining and complaining, Wyatt knew that he was also at risk here. To these people, Rufus was just an object, a commodity…someone who could be bought and sold…and while he hadn’t been harassed and objectified as Lucy had been by the French soldiers, Wyatt didn’t want to take anything for granted. They still had miles to go before they could get the hell out of Dodge and as Lucy had said back at that camp, anything could happen. Therefore, Wyatt’s objective for the rest of this mission was to see that nothing did happen…to either of them. If he couldn’t take out Garcia Flynn, he figured, at least he could deliver his team in one piece before he left this assignment.

Flynn.

They had no idea what the hell Flynn had even come here for…or if he had even stayed. After three days of searching, he could have done anything; he could have changed history three times over and they would have no idea…until, of course, they landed back into a present they didn’t recognize.

And then what the hell would they do?
As if reading his mind, Lucy suddenly spoke up, her voice full of hesitation, “I know we’re all dead set on going home…and believe me, no one is more prepared to get out of here than I am…but…we still don’t know why Flynn came here.” Seeing Wyatt’s jaw clench, she quickly added, “I mean, he obviously came here…we know that much…so if we just assume that he did stay here to change things…”

“Well, what would he change?” Rufus asked, “You said yourself this war doesn’t officially start until 1756.”

“It’s hard to say,” Lucy muttered as she lifted her skirts and stepped over a log, “in this year it’s really just the British, led by a 22-year-old George Washington, trying to get the French to move out of the Ohio Valley. I already told you what happened at Jumonville Glen,” Lucy added grimly, “Everything else just escalates from there.”

“So, maybe he wants to take out a young George Washington?” Rufus suggested, “Change the outcome of the war? Make us the United States of France?”

“Possibly.” Lucy said with a shrug, “But…”

“But, what?” Rufus asked as he slowed to a stop beside her.

Casting a nervous glance towards Wyatt who had reluctantly paused his relentless march to wait for the two of them, Lucy continued, “Well…Flynn told me in 1865 that he wasn’t trying to destroy America…he was trying to save it.”

Rufus scoffed, “He has a hell of a way of showing it.” Shaking his head, Rufus continued as he march on, “You actually bought that? The man killed Lincoln…”

“I know.” Lucy conceded, “I just…I don’t know…why would he change the outcome of the French and Indian War if he was trying to save America? This war sets the stage for the American Revolution,” Lucy explained as she lengthened her stride to catch up with Wyatt and Rufus. “To cover the cost for this war and to fund the continued protection of the American colonies, the British government began to impose taxes…”

“Ah…so this is where the “no taxation without representation” argument comes in.” Rufus acknowledged with a nod. “And here I thought they were just being jackasses…”
“So why would Flynn want to change anything about this war…even in 1758…if his ultimate goal is to save America?” Lucy muttered almost to herself as Wyatt whirled around in annoyance.

“However Flynn was gonna do,” he snapped, “he’s probably already done it. There’s no use trying to figure that out now. So, let’s just cut our losses and go home.”

Exchanging a dark look with Rufus, Lucy nodded tersely, knowing that Wyatt was probably right. It wasn’t a comforting thought, sure…but what could they do? If Flynn had changed history while they had been running around in these woods, there was no way they could come back and fix it. That was the first lesson in time travel Rufus had taught them all the way back on the first mission to the Hindenburg: no redo’s. And if there was ever a mission Lucy wanted to redo it was that one. Losing Amy had been devastating…and all because Garcia Flynn had saved the airship from its fatal disaster.

They had been a disjointed mess of a team then, hardly knowing one another, and they most certainly hadn’t trusted one another, and she lost her sister because of it. Now, they were more broken than ever and she dreaded to think what would come of their failure this time.

It was, therefore, only the promise of home that kept Lucy from falling into complete and total despair over their situation. Sure, things looked bleak now in the 1754 Pennsylvania wilderness, but maybe once they were back at Mason, things would be different. Flynn had changed the timeline before…and yes, she had lost Amy…but there was still a chance, a hope to restore her. That, too, could be true of anything else Flynn had done…and who was to say that what he might have done would devastate the timeline anyway? Right now, starving, thirsty and tired as they were, it was only natural that they would be thinking and fearing the worst – they were all completely on edge. Once they were back in 2016, and had a meal or two or three…a hot shower followed by a hot bath…a good night’s sleep…maybe then things wouldn’t look so bleak. Maybe then even things between them all would improve.

Or maybe things would be just as bad as they feared. Then, what?

That’s why Lucy, despite the ache in her feet and the almost debilitating pain in her sides, said nothing as they marched, nearly non-stop, through the unending forest of Western Pennsylvania. Having worn her corset for three days straight, with absolutely no reprieve, she imagined that the indentations it had undoubtedly made along her waist would be permanently etched in her skin…but she didn’t let one word of discomfort escape her lips. As Wyatt had said, if they had just told him what they had suspected about Flynn at the beginning of this mission, they would have never gone off on that wild goose chase, would never have been captured by the French, and Wyatt would have never been shot.

So how could she complain about anything, really? It had been her doing. Hers and Rufus’.
If Lucy believed suffering in silence was a form of penance for breaking Wyatt’s trust, Rufus believed the complete opposite. Nearly every step of the way, Rufus complained about the bugs, the heat, the clothes he was wearing, the way his shoes pinched his toes, and how hungry and thirsty he was. It was clearly grating on Wyatt’s nerves and Lucy, for her part, didn’t want to give him any more reason to be angry at either of them. In an attempt to keep things positive, Lucy observed, “This is all going to be downtown Pittsburgh one day…concrete as far as the eye can see. But for now? It’s really beautiful, isn’t it?”

“Super beautiful.” Rufus responded with an annoyed huff, “No, restaurants, no movie theaters, no bathrooms either…I just wiped my butt with some leaves.”

That last statement earned him a glare from both Lucy and Wyatt, who quickened his step with a huff and a shake of his head. Lucy waited until Wyatt was well out of earshot before turning on Rufus abruptly, “What is your problem?” she hissed. “You know you’re not making this any easier on us…”

“I’m sorry,” Rufus returned, affronted, “But I’m not going to sugar coat this mission…it sucks.”

“I know it sucks, Rufus.” Lucy gritted out in exasperation, “We all do…but Wyatt’s right, this…”

But Rufus’ attention was suddenly drawn to Wyatt who had tensed in front of them and was drawing his gun. Together, Lucy and Rufus tiptoed their way towards the Delta Force soldier who had now taken up a position behind a tree. As they drew near they could clearly see what had affected Wyatt so strongly. There, before them in a clearing was the LifeBoat…just as they had left it, except now it was surrounded by three men…three men who didn’t look at all surprised or bewildered by the giant metal sphere in front of them. “Are those…?”

“Flynn’s guys, yeah.” Wyatt answered Rufus with a harsh whisper as he peered through the tree limbs towards the time machine. As yet, they seemed completely oblivious to the presence of Wyatt, Lucy and Rufus and instead were walking around the LifeBoat, carefully attaching bricks of….

“Is that…?” Rufus asked nervously.

“C-4” Wyatt acknowledged tensely, his anxiety suddenly spiking at the sight of the explosives. It was obvious that whatever Flynn had done here in 1754, his ultimate plan was to make sure he wasn’t followed back to the present. While Wyatt was a damn good shot, he was reluctant to take
down Flynn’s men while they were handing the explosives. If he were to miss, the damage to the LifeBoat could be catastrophic….and well, he wasn’t about to take that risk. Of course, if he didn’t take them out soon, it wouldn’t matter…the Lifeboat would be blown to hell and while he wasn’t an engineer, he was pretty damn sure that wouldn’t be a good thing.

With bated breath, he waited and watched as Flynn’s henchman covered the surface of the LifeBoat with small bricks of C4 until they finally scurried away and positioned themselves behind trees. It was now or never. Taking careful aim, Wyatt brought down one of Flynn’s thugs and while that was most definitely a good thing, it alerted the other two to their presence and the ensuing fire fight had Wyatt yelling at Lucy and Rufus to stay down as bullets whizzed past their heads and into the trees beyond.

Wyatt managed one more hit before he was forced to reload his weapon and in that space of time, Flynn’s guys took off running in the opposite direction, but not before one of them took aim at one of the C4 bricks and set it off causing a small explosion on lower right hand side of the time machine.

“No!” Rufus screamed as he scrambled out from behind the tree towards the LifeBoat.

“Rufus!” Wyatt yelled as he gave chase, “What the hell are you doing?”

“They just blew a hole in our ride!” Rufus yelled out frantically as he attempted to extricate his arm from Wyatt’s grip, “The Mothership is our only chance to get home!”

As that awful realization dawned on Wyatt, he and Rufus raced after Flynn’s men, leaving Lucy scrambling after them in a desperate attempt to catch up. After racing through the woods for quite some time, the forest gave way to a large field where the Mothership sat gleaming in the dying rays of the sun. Wyatt had already managed to clamber aboard the outer ring, his gun raised, as he attempted to force open the sealed door and for one, brief moment Lucy believed that he would. It wasn’t until Rufus yelled at Wyatt to “Get down” that Lucy realized it was too late.

As Wyatt tumbled to the ground, the Mothership disappeared in a flash of blinking lights and gushing wind, leaving behind a deafening stillness that seemed to fill the air with a hopelessness that had Lucy sinking to her knees in absolute despair as she breathed out in disbelief, “We’re trapped here.”

“No if I can help it.” Wyatt gritted out angrily as he brushed off his clothes and got back to his feet.
Rufus stared at him incredulously, “What? Are you going to walk to 2016?”

“We’re going to fix that damn Lifeboat.” Wyatt called back over his shoulder.

“And just what the hell do you propose we do, Wyatt? Look around you…do you see civilization…like, anywhere?”

“There’s got to be a back-up plan or something…a tool kit?”

“The LifeBoat IS the back-up plan, Wyatt!” Rufus yelled angrily. “You think I’ve got a welder and a couple of hundred spare parts hidden away in that sardine can?”

As the reality of their situation came crashing down on top of him, Wyatt kicked out at nothing in particular, “DAMN IT!!!!” He stared at the space where the Mothership had been, wishing to hell he had been just five seconds faster. Not only had he let Garcia Flynn slip through his fingers for a seventh time, he hadn’t even been able to get Lucy and Rufus back home safely…what the hell were they going to do now?

Lucy whimpered as she covered her face in her hands, and Wyatt felt a wave of dread wash over him. It was bad enough they were stranded in the 18th century, but now was not a time to lose their heads. His outburst was a piss poor move on his part...particularly since he knew he was the one Lucy and Rufus were depending on for their survival...if he lost his cool, Lucy and Rufus were bound to lose theirs. But much to Wyatt’s surprise, Lucy didn’t panic. Instead, she took a steadying breath and in a voice of forced calm asked Rufus, “Do we know that it’s absolutely hopeless? I mean, the explosion wasn’t as bad as it could have been, right?” As Rufus’ eyes darted to her she gave him an encouraging nod, “Maybe...maybe there’s still a chance...maybe we can still get out.”

“Maybe...” Rufus murmured, though he looked entirely unconvinced. “I...I didn’t get a good look at it,” he admitted.

“So then let’s look at it.” Wyatt suggested roughly as he spun on his heel and made his way back into the woods.

After arriving at the Lifeboat, however, one look at Rufus’ face told Wyatt all he needed to know,
“That bad?”

“Well, the good news is, it looks like we figured out why Flynn came here.” Rufus breathed out sarcastically as he shook of his coat and kneeled in front of the gaping, sparking hole in the Lifeboat, “what better way to get rid of us than to strand us in 1754?”

“So, while we were out looking for him, he was looking for the damn Lifeboat.” Wyatt gritted out as he shook his head angrily. “Gotta hand it to him, he picked the perfect spot…300 miles from anywhere,” he snapped as he motioned to the map, “in an area filled with hostile forces…”

“…and smallpox.” Lucy added grimly.

“Yeah…that too.” Wyatt spat out roughly, hating this…hating all of it. He had failed. He had one hope of salvaging this damn mission and he had failed. They were stuck in the 18th century and with Lucy and Rufus being Lucy and Rufus he had no idea how he was going to keep them both safe.

Throwing down the map roughly Wyatt sank down on an old log, cradling his head in his hands… and Lucy knew he was blaming them…why wouldn’t he? It was their fault. Hadn’t they suspected this very thing? That Flynn had come here as a means to trick them? And well, he had….and now they were trapped.

“Dammit.” Rufus muttered as he wiped his brow, “I can’t even think straight, I’m so damn hungry.” Spying a berry bush on the other side of the LifeBoat, Rufus made a beeline for it and had just wrapped his fingers around a berry when Wyatt quickly grabbed his hand and slapped the berry out of it. “What the hell, man?” Rufus asked.

“Those are red berries, Rufus.” Wyatt gritted out.

“Yeah, so what? You said the red berries are fine…”

“No, I said 50% of them are fine…the other 50% will kill you.” Wyatt lifted a limb of the berry bush, “Do you know what the hell these are? Because I don’t. First rule of thumb in eating things in the wild…if you don’t know what it is, you don’t put it in your mouth!”

“Well, I’m sorry!” Rufus spat out angrily.
“You have to do better than that, Rufus.” Wyatt argued. “This is 1754, there are no antibiotics, no hospitals, no drugstores…you make a mistake, you die.”

“I get it, okay? I suck at this. I hate the outdoors…and camping…and I really hate this survivalist crap. That’s why we have you!”

Wyatt stared back at him, clearly offended. “And who do I have, Rufus?” he asked in a voice filled with emotion.

“Well, you’re Delta Force…” Rufus offered with a shrug.

“Delta Force isn’t a person…it’s a team!” Wyatt exclaimed loudly as he shot pointed glances at both Lucy and Rufus, sick to death of them not understanding, not appreciating the importance of what that meant. “I’m just…I’m just one guy.” he breathed out in exasperation, “If I don’t have somebody I can count on…and I mean really count on…we’re not gonna make it out of here.” And with that, Wyatt shook his head and stalked away into the woods leaving Lucy and Rufus standing together awkwardly in his wake.

“Well, that was comforting…” Rufus said in an attempt at levity with Lucy, but she silenced him with an admonishing glare. “Hey, look…I am sorry about the berries…” Rufus offered seriously, “but he’s had years of training…we haven’t.”

“Exactly.” Lucy said with a serious nod. “That’s why he’s worried.” She sighed as Rufus’ shoulders drooped down despondently, “I’ll talk to him.” she offered quietly, “Why don’t you go back and see what can be done about the LifeBoat?”

Desperate to make things better with Wyatt, especially considering the dire circumstances they were now facing, Lucy followed after him as Rufus turned slowly back to the time machine. Wyatt hadn’t gone very far; he was crouching over the body of Flynn’s henchman searching his pockets for anything useful. Lucy approached him slowly, unsure of what to even say…she just knew she needed to try. “Look,” she said tentatively, “I know I’m the last person you want to talk to right now,” Wyatt scoffed as she continued, “I mean, this is all our fault…if we had just told you…” Wyatt rolled his eyes as he pulled out a few clips from the inside chest pocket of Flynn’s dead goon as Lucy continued, “I mean it…Wyatt, I’m really sorry. I…I should have told you about Flynn, about the journal….”

“And what about your little deal with Agent Christopher?” Wyatt sneered as Lucy gaped back at
him in surprise, “Yeah, were you going to tell me about that? Nothing about me or my wife, but hey, as long as you get what you want…”

Lucy stared back at him, her mouth dropping open in surprise and indignation. “That is not fair.” she countered, “It is no secret that I’m trying to get my sister back. I mean, you were the one who told me to figure out what I’m fighting for and well, I am fighting for Amy. I thought you, of all people, would understand that.”

Wyatt glared at her with a mixture of anger and resignation. Yes, he had told her to figure out what she was fighting for. Yes, he knew she was bound and determined to get her sister back, but dammit, she knew how he felt about his wife, how he hoped to change his own damn regret, and yet she didn’t even think to secure him a deal of his own. What, didn’t she think Jessica was worth saving? “Like I said,” he spat out, “just so long as you get what you want, right?”

“My sister was erased.” Lucy breathed out with growing anger, “Your wife was murdered…. it’s not the same thing.” she blurted out passionately but as the last word fell from her lips, she immediately regretted it. One look at Wyatt told her she had taken her argument one step too far – even if she was right, even if Amy’s disappearance and Jessica’s death didn’t amount to the same thing – Wyatt was still suffering, he was still mourning the loss of his wife, just as she was mourning the loss of her sister.

Before she had a chance to apologize, however, Rufus interrupted, “Okay, guys…I’ve got good news and bad news.”

Casting one hard glance at Lucy, Wyatt pushed past her and joined Rufus at the Lifeboat, hoping to God he had found a way to get them home so he could get the hell back to Pendleton. “Okay, Rufus…where are we?”

“Well,” he sighed, “aside from the obvious damage to the side panel, there is some serious damage to the circuitry. The good news is, I can cannibalize the wiring from the nav system, and if I can get some iron, I could maybe patch up the hole…

“What’s the bad news?” Lucy asked breathlessly.

“We’re short a couple of capacitors.”

“Like a flux capacitor?” Wyatt asked blankly.
Rufus tried but failed to hide an amused smile as he answered, “No…those don’t exist.”

“Well,” Lucy offered, “wh…what would it take to get a real capacitor?”

“You buy one.” Rufus answered simply, “from RadioShack.”

“Come on Rufus,” Lucy begged impatiently, “You built a time machine. If you absolutely had to build a capacitor here, now…what would it take to build?”

Rufus rubbed a hand on his forehead as he leaned against the outer ring of the Lifeboat, “I would um…need foil”

Lucy let out a despondent sigh, “Okay, well that’s going to be a bit difficult since foil wasn’t manufactured until the late 19th century.”

“Okay, barring that I could…um…hammer some copper or tin…very thinly…I’d need some salt and a couple of glass jars…”

“Okay, good…” Lucy exclaimed hopefully. “What else?”

“I’d need a forge.” Rufus said with a nod, “And then I’d need to learn to be a blacksmith.”

At that, Wyatt threw his head back in exasperation, but Lucy was not deterred in her optimism, “And then you’d be able to fix it?” she asked, not even wanting to dwell on the impossibility of their situation.

“Probably not.” Rufus admitted in defeat, but at Lucy’s anxious face, he corrected, if for anything but to give her something to cling to, “Maybe.”

Clinging to that “maybe” like it was a lifeline, Lucy shook off the nagging doubts that were threatening to overwhelm her as she picked up the map Wyatt had discarded earlier, “Okay, we are less than five miles from Fort Duquesne…they are bound to have a forge…and…all that other
Wyatt let out a derisive laugh as he looked at her incredulously, “Fort Duquesne? You mean the fort where the French soldiers were taking us to hang? That Fort Duquesne?” Lucy tossed her head back defiantly as Wyatt closed in on her, “What are we going to do? Walk up to the door and ask to borrow their forge? You don’t think they’re gonna remember us?”

“Well, we either do that or we learn to start farming.” Lucy stated plainly as she met Wyatt’s gaze with a fierce determination.

They were only an arm’s length apart, both of them attempting to stare down the other in a battle of wills that, from the looks of it, promised to be an all-out siege until one or the other capitulated by either conceding to the other’s point of view or blinking… whichever came first. As they were both of them, stubborn, Rufus thought it might actually be entertaining to see how long this panned out, but much to his surprise, Wyatt backed away from Lucy with a scoff, before turning to him and asking, “If you can get these supplies, if you can get the things you need… do you think you can fix this machine and get us the hell out of here?”

Rufus raised his eyebrows as he glanced between the two of them, “I haven’t even gotten to the hard part yet.”

“Oh, good to know.” Lucy breathed out sarcastically as she slumped down on a nearby log.

“If we use the wiring from the nav system, I won’t be able to control where we land.” Rufus explained, “It doesn’t matter if we fix the Lifeboat or not, we’ll never survive this trip home unless…” Rufus trailed off as a realization dawned across his features, “The Protocol.”

“The Protocol?” Lucy asked as Rufus dived into the Lifeboat, “What’s that?”

She watched with rapt curiosity as he pried up a panel from the floor of the time machine, his head disappearing into a hidden compartment between the seat she claimed as her own and Wyatt’s. “We’re going to send a message to Mason.” Rufus’ muffled reply came as he blindly handed a tiny shovel to Wyatt whose own curiosity had gotten the better of him.

“What the hell am I supposed to do with this?” Wyatt asked doubtfully.
“You’re going to need to dig a hole,” Rufus answered as he flipped through a black notebook, “um…three feet in front of the Lifeboat.” Setting down the notebook, Rufus dove into the compartment once more, this time pulling out a small lockbox. “Dig it deep,” Rufus ordered as Wyatt stared back at him, “this message needs to stand the test of time…and since this is all going to be Pittsburgh someday, we need to make sure no one else finds it before Mason does.”

“Finds what, exactly?” Lucy asked as flipped through the notebook Rufus had discarded.

“Behold, the power of non-biodegradable polyethylene.” Rufus announced as he lifted a small plastic tube from inside of the lock box.

“Wow,” Lucy exclaimed, unable to hide her disappointment, “You know, when you said send a message, I didn’t think you literally meant in a bottle.”

“Hey,” Rufus interjected defensively, “this bottle could very well save our asses.” At Lucy and Wyatt’s doubtful expressions, Rufus explained, “Our coordinates are locked in at Mason Industries…they know exactly where we are….”

“Yeah, but we have the only damn time machine, not counting the Mothership - and somehow I’m thinking that Homeland Security isn’t going to be catching up with Flynn any time soon…” Wyatt huffed out as he slammed the shovel into the Earth.

“No…you’ve got it all wrong. They’re not coming to get us…I mean, I guess technically they could…someday…but this, “Rufus said as he raised the polyethylene bottle, “Connor will fly to this spot with a team of archaeologists and dig this up…inside be a note, telling them that our navigation systems have failed and we need them to guide us in.”

“And what if they don’t get this note? I mean, in 260 years this place is going to look a lot different than it does now.” Lucy reminded him, “This could be a parking lot for all we know.”

Rufus’ expression turned solemn as he muttered quietly, “Without help, we could land anywhere…on a mountain, inside of a mountain, the middle of Fallujah would be amazing considering…”

“Considering what?” Wyatt asked as he paused in his digging.
“The Earth is 70% water.” Rufus said with a shrug, “You do the math. We’re more likely to land
in the middle of the ocean than on actual land.”

Wyatt’s eyes darted to Lucy who blanched as she raised a shaking hand to her head. She didn’t
need to say a word for him to know exactly what was going through her mind. She had narrowly
escaped death once before, had been pulled from a raging river as her car slowly sunk to its watery
depths and it had traumatized her so much, she still struggled with waking nightmares and
claustrophobia. Without taking his eyes from her, Wyatt asked, “Let’s say they didn’t get this
note…what are the odds of us surviving?”

“Somewhere between one in a billion and impossible.” Rufus stated seriously.

Lucy slowly lifted her head at that factoid, fear etched all over her face as she attempted to steady
her voice, “So,” she asked quietly, “what are our options?”

“Number one and the most ideal?” Rufus began, “Mason finds this bottle and helps us get home…
that is, if I can fix the LifeBoat.”

“And how will you know it’s fixed?” Wyatt asked.

“I won’t…until the rings start spinning.” Rufus replied with grim honesty. “Second option, we fix
the LifeBoat and Mason doesn’t get the note…we die trying to make it back home. Third option,
we’re stuck here. We live our lives out in 1754…until we eventually die from typhoid, dysentery,
smallpox…or being murdered by any number of hostile forces.”

Wyatt bit his lip as he contemplated the choices before them. The likelihood of Rufus’ canister
surviving nearly 300 years of urban development was like a snowball’s chance in Hell; he knew it,
Rufus knew it and as Wyatt eyes drifted to Lucy’s, he knew she knew it. It was already a risky and
most likely failed venture to expect Rufus to learn to be a blacksmith and repair the Lifeboat
anyway, but to repair the damn thing and take that flying leap into the unknown with a one in a
billion chance of survival, barring some miracle that Mason actually received their 300-year-old
SOS? They’d have better odds living out the rest of their lives here…though Wyatt was sure their
life expectancy would be a hell of a lot shorter than it would be in 2016.

It was likely death either way.

Damn his luck. Stranded with two people he couldn’t trust or depend on…two people who didn’t
know the first thing about wilderness survival…two people whose secrets and lies had gotten him into this mess to begin with…he sighed as his eyes met Lucy’s…two people whom he had a responsibility to protect. There was no other option but to try. Sure, they could live their lives in 1754…but based on what he had seen over the past three days, he highly doubted they would make it to December…hell, he wasn’t sure if they would survive the damn week. So why not throw in all his chips to the option that could possibly get them the hell out of there? What the hell did he have to lose? He would fulfill his obligation to Lucy and Rufus to the best of his ability and then, if they made it safely back to the present, he could head back to Pendleton with at least one win from this insane assignment. Wyatt nodded his head as he made his decision, “What the hell? I’m in.”

Lucy’s eyes darted to his and Wyatt could tell she was forming her own resolution. Though she looked terrified at the prospects laid out before them, there was a courage bubbling within her that Wyatt had come to recognize. He had seen it up close and personal as she pleaded with him at the Alamo, he had seen it when she desperately pleaded with Ian Fleming at the Nazi Castle, he had seen it when she saved his ass during that Watergate mission. Nodding almost indiscernibly, Lucy kept her eyes locked on Wyatt’s as she murmured a quiet, but resolute “Me too.” Wyatt understood. She had no choice. She had to survive. If she was truly fighting to save her sister, it was all up to her; no one else remembered her…and in that moment, Wyatt felt guilty for coldly throwing that back in her face.

When he had first met “world-class” Lucy Preston he had dismissed her as a high-strung, white-collar elitist with whom he could never bond…they were just too damn different…from two wildly different worlds. Yet when she came racing into Mason, helpless and panicked over the disappearance of her sister, he understood, probably better than anyone in that room, what it was to not know…what it was to feel your entire world collapsing around you as your mind attempted to wrap itself around the startling reality that someone you loved was now gone.

So, of course, she would make a deal to get her sister back. Amy Preston’s disappearance was directly linked to these missions…and as much as Wyatt hated to admit it, Lucy was right…Jessica’s death was not. While he would always regret what happened that night in February 2012, while he would give anything to change it, her disappearance, her death was not the result of some time traveling homicidal maniac. No. Jessica’s death was on him and only on him…and he was just going to have to live with the fact that once upon a time he had been a jackass and his wife was murdered because of it.

Wyatt agreed to this suicidal plan because he had nothing left to lose…but Lucy, Lucy had everything to lose if they didn’t try. She had a sister who needed her, a mother who loved her, and a sort of fiancé…she had a life filled with hope and purpose…and no matter how much Wyatt wanted to be angry at her for her part in getting them into this mess, her willingness to risk it all, to join him in the ultimate show of recklessness, gave him a newfound determination to see that the protocol, at least on their end, was a success. With that in mind, Wyatt repeatedly slammed the shovel into the soft ground, prepared to dig to China if he had to so that their message to Mason would survive over the next 260 some odd years. They had no guarantee that even if it did, Mason and his team would find it, but that was a risk they were all just going to have to take.
They had no choice to do otherwise.

Lucy watched as Wyatt continued to delve deeper and deeper into the ground as darkness slowly descended upon them, bringing with it a bone chilling wind that howled ominously through the trees. When there was no light left in the sky to work by, Wyatt wiped his brow and with the help of Rufus, climbed out of the deep hole he had dug. “That’s got to be about six feet,” Wyatt remarked as he rubbed his calloused hands together, “you think that’s deep enough?”

“Let’s hope.” Rufus sighed as he folded up the message he had written and placed it carefully in the polyethylene bottle. Handing it to Lucy, he smiled, “You want to do the honors?”

Taking the container from him, Lucy nodded and carefully stepped to the edge of the hole Wyatt had spent the evening digging. With a heart full of desperate hope, she let the bottle slip through her fingers and into the Earth below. It was literally out of their hands now…there was nothing more they could do, but wait…and see.

“It’s gonna be a cold night.” Wyatt observed as a gust of wind swirled the leaves around their feet. He motioned them over to a tight grouping of trees, “Why don’t you two go over there and try to get some rest? The trees should block out most of this wind…I’ll finish this up here.”

As Wyatt went to work filling the hole he had dug, Lucy and Rufus slowly made their way over to the trees. Wyatt was right; the tight grouping provided a nice barrier against the wind, but it did nothing to ease the chill of the night air.

Rufus, for all of his complaining, fell asleep almost immediately once he made a small bed from some leaves and pine needles. While Lucy didn’t begrudge him…or any of them…much needed rest, she suddenly felt very alone; she needed someone to talk to, to worry with and Rufus’ grunts and snores did nothing to quiet the nagging doubts and fears that had taken hold of her as she lay beside him, restless and wide awake.

How were they going to do this? They had already been here three days and were nearly starved as it was…what would they do for food? Where would they even live? With winter coming on fast, they couldn’t camp out like this…they would freeze before they even had a chance to fix the time machine. Which brought her to the next problem…could they even fix it? Rufus admitted he would have to learn to be a blacksmith…how long did it take for someone to be a skilled blacksmith? Weeks? Months? Years? Oh God, what would happen to them if they were stuck here for years? With a war on the horizon…how would they survive it? What if Wyatt got conscripted into service? What would she and Rufus do without him? What if he was killed? What if Rufus was killed…or worse, sold into slavery? What would happen to her? What would
happen to her if both Rufus and Wyatt were killed? What if they got sick? What if they had to sit by helplessly and watch each other die from some horrible disease? What if they never made it home?

“Lucy?” Wyatt’s voice was full of concern as he rested a steady, warm hand on her shoulder. Lucy startled at the sight of him; she hadn’t heard him approach and as she took in his prone position, she realized he must have been there, lying next to her, for quite some time. “Are you okay?”

Her heart was racing, her breath coming in short, shallow gasps, and she realized as she lifted her hand to her face that she was trembling. Not wanting Wyatt to think that she was weak, Lucy turned away from him, “I’m… I’m just cold.” she muttered.

Heaving a sigh, Wyatt shook off his coat and handed it over, “Here,” he grunted, “It’s not much, but it might help.”

Lucy draped the coat around her, grateful for Wyatt’s thoughtfulness despite...everything, “Thanks…” she murmured as she looked over her shoulder at him, “but…but won’t you be cold?”

Wyatt was laying with his back on the ground staring up at the sky with one arm tucked behind his head. Frowning slightly, he shook his head, “I’ve been in worse conditions.” he muttered with a frown.

Lucy nodded and turned away once more, wondering what kind of conditions he had lived through in his years with the military. She knew, of course, about Syria…but only because she had overheard his conversation with Jim Bowie at the Alamo. She had no idea what other types of missions he had gone on before his time at Mason, no clue what horrors he had seen…and she doubted he would tell her even if she asked.

Unlike Rufus, Wyatt was a closed book. He rarely spoke about himself, only offering glimpses of his life, of his past…and now, as they faced the very real prospect of death, she found that not knowing more about Wyatt bothered her. As he had said back at the Alamo, everybody he cared about was gone…and suddenly she was thinking of Amy and how she was the only one left who remembered her…who would remember Wyatt?

She and Rufus cared about him…but right now, he didn’t believe that…why would he when they had given him every reason to believe they didn’t trust him? She felt an unspeakable tug of sympathy for him as she laid there beside him, wrapped in his coat. If she felt alone, it was probably nothing to how Wyatt was feeling. He was just one guy, after all…and like he said…he needed someone to rely on, someone to help him…someone who would take some of the
responsibility off of his shoulders.

With a shuddering sigh, Lucy turned over onto her back and glanced over to Wyatt’s pensive face. “Wyatt?” she whispered, “I… I just… thank you.” she muttered sincerely. “I… I know you’re doing everything to try to help us get through this…”

“Just doing my job.” Wyatt grunted in reply, his eyes still fixed on the sky above him.

“No.” Lucy said with a shake of her head, “It’s not all on you… or at least, it shouldn’t be… you’re right… you need a team you can trust… and I know we haven’t made it easy for you…” Wyatt sighed heavily and shifted uncomfortably under her gaze, “… but you’re right… we’re going to have to work together to make it out of here.”

Wyatt gave one terse nod, but said nothing more… his eyes never wavering from the starry sky above them.

They laid side by side in silence for a log while before Lucy, unable to stand the frostiness between them, turned to him once more and stammered, “Wyatt? I’m… I’m sorry about what I said earlier… about Jessica. You deserve to get her back… you deserve to be happy.”

Wyatt swallowed hard as he slowly turned his face towards Lucy’s. Seeing her eyes shining with unshed tears and seeing the sincerity in her features, Wyatt couldn’t help but feel a tug of gratitude towards her. He nodded at her with a frown and quickly turned his face back towards the heavens as another bout of silence fell between them. After a few moments, Wyatt cleared his throat, “Well, for what it’s worth,” he murmured in return, “I’m sorry for what I said about Amy. If I could make a deal with Agent Christopher, I would… I’d do it in a heartbeat… so I can’t blame you for doing the same.”

“What’s the point of having a time machine if you can’t fix your regrets, right?” Lucy said with a derisive chuckle… realizing as she did so that that was exactly what Garcia Flynn was claiming to do… changing the past to change what had happened to his wife and child.

Did her desire to restore Amy make her like Flynn? Is that what he meant when he said they would be “quite the team” someday?

As another wave of panic and dread washed over her, Lucy shivered again, clenching her eyes shut as she tried to stem the flow of anxious tears that were threatening to spill out at any moment.
“You okay?” she heard Wyatt’s voice ask in concern. She could feel his gaze on her, even if she couldn’t see it…and the last thing she needed him to do was worry about her and her fears over what Flynn had predicted for her in that damn journal.

In an attempt to play off her latest bout of panic she voiced her anxiety over her other concerns, “It’s nothing…I’m just thinking about what we’re going to do for shelter…with winter coming…”

“Hey,” Wyatt eased as he turned towards her and placed his hand on her shoulder again, “one thing at a time, right?” Lucy nodded as the tears she was trying to keep at bay began to slip unbidden onto her cheeks, “Alright then, we’ll worry about shelter tomorrow…tonight, just try to get some sleep, okay?” he added bracingly as he gave her shoulder a squeeze. Lucy tugged Wyatt’s coat a bit higher over her chest, wrapping her arms in its folds as she attempted to stave off the chill that had settled in her chest and had her trembling from head to toe.

Wyatt watched her from the corner of his eye, knowing all too well that it wasn’t just the cold air that had her crying and shaking in the dark. He had seen this in the field more than once…she was having a panic attack, freaking out, cracking up…and he had no advice, no words of comfort to offer her this time. They were in a shitty situation, more so than they had been in Nazi Germany. At least there, if they had been stranded, they still had access to decent medical care and civilization. Here? Here, they could all die from disease within a few months. Here, they would be forced to hunt for their food…and with winter coming, that was going to be a challenge…especially for someone like Lucy…who wasn’t used to this sort of thing.

She was just going to have to learn…they all were.

Still, he hated seeing her looking so…so…vulnerable and helpless. In an attempt to offer her some sort of comfort, both in the physical and the emotional sense, Wyatt sighed as he turned towards her and tentatively wrapped his arm around her torso…much as he had done unconsciously that first night in this hell hole. Lucy immediately stilled beside him, her jaw clenched in tension and Wyatt thought that perhaps he had made a big mistake by crossing some invisible line that existed between them…a line which, as co-workers and team-mates, should not be crossed. He was just getting ready to mutter a quick apology and retract his arm, when Lucy turned to him abruptly and snuggled into his chest, lifting his coat, as she did so, so that it draped over the both of them.

Wyatt sucked in a breath, unsure of what to do…

Yes, he had slept this way with Lucy before…but he hadn’t realized it at the time…he had just woken up to find himself wrapped around her like a cocoon. This…this was different. They were both awake…and both very much aware that they were in each other’s personal spaces. It had been years since he consciously held a woman this close…years since he had fallen asleep to the feel of a steady heart beat pounding against his own…and while his first impulse was to re-establish a
comfortable distance between them so as to not make things awkward, the feel of her pressed against him, nuzzled under his chin, warmed him in a way no blanket ever could. Relenting with a sigh, Wyatt allowed himself to relax as his hand rested comfortably against Lucy’s back, tugging her a bit closer as she shivered once more…it was his responsibility to protect her, after all…and well, if that meant keeping her warm on a cold, Autumn night in the middle of the 18th century…so be it.

Chapter End Notes

Okay - this is the LAST chapter that will ring familiar for a while. We have now stepped off the breaking point and are in our AU world.

You may notice that I moved things around, changed up some convos, etc...and that’s because while this is still "Stranded" I wanted it to be somewhat fresh and new. I love this episode so much...so I want to be true to it while giving it my own personal spin, so I appreciate you guys coming along for this ride.

Things are starting to bubble between Lucy and Wyatt...and please remember this is a SLOW BURN story...so don't get too frustrated...there's going to be LOTS and LOTS of Lyatt moments...but these two idiots are going to be stubborn...until, well, they can't be stubborn anymore....and thats all I'm saying. I hope it will be a fun ride. It may drive you all crazy...but just bask in the cuteness of Lyatt and remember that I am a fan of happy endings...and this story will most certainly have one.

I'm already 3/4 of the way through the next chapter of this - I'm really trying to get ahead so I can focus more time on WMHB and get that out of the way, but inspiration keeps drawing me over to this one and well, I can't fight that...I will say, though, planning this fic out has been a lot of fun. I've never really stayed in the same place in a LONG fic before so that , in itself, has been quite a challenge.

I hope you all enjoyed this update...thank you for reading and have a great day!
“Don’t you two look cozy?”

The distant sound of Rufus’ amused voice unwillingly pulled a begrudging Wyatt out of a pleasant and dreamless sleep. Squinting against the bright rays of the morning sun, he could just make out Rufus’ silhouette; he was sitting back on his haunches grinning from ear to ear at what Wyatt could only imagine was how Lucy was currently using his chest as her own personal body pillow. As she shivered against him, Wyatt pulled the jacket they had been using as blanket up and over her shoulders to provide her some extra comfort which earned him an approving “Awww” from an annoyingly observant Rufus. Wyatt groaned and let his head fall back against soft Earth, not giving a damn about what Rufus thought...it was cold, dammit.

“It’s cold…” Rufus scoffed in disbelief as he made his way out of their little shelter of trees, “you’d let my ass freeze all night long before cuddling me like that.”

Wyatt, realizing that he must have spoken out loud, merely grunted in reply, knowing that Rufus was absolutely right...he would let his ass freeze all night...but that was more or less because Rufus had done nothing but complain for the past three days and well…it would serve his ass right. While he was not opposed to saving the life of his favorite time travelling pilot, he had to admit that, if given a choice, he would much rather sleep snuggled next to Lucy than next to Rufus anyway...because Rufus snored…and Lucy didn’t.

He would have gladly pointed that fact out to Rufus, except that he vaguely knew that Rufus was no longer within ear shot to care...and Wyatt, well...he was too comfortable to go chasing after him to make his point. As the last vestiges of sleepiness began to ebb away, however, all the awkwardness he had felt the night before came hurtling back as he considered the position he was currently in with Lucy. She was practically on top of him, her whole upper body draped across his chest, held there, securely, by both of his arms. While it was one thing to cuddle her in the darkness of night, amid dropping temperatures with a snoring Rufus beside them, it was quite another to lay together like this, basking in the warm sunlight...alone.

Wyatt knew that the moment Lucy woke up, their current situation would make her uncomfortable and so, as gently as he could, he rolled onto his side, carefully easing Lucy off of his chest and back onto the little bed of leaves and pine needles that blanketed the ground underneath their little shelter of trees.

He had just made to pull away from her when her eyes lazily blinked open and Wyatt froze. The
sight of her long, dark lashes fluttering against her ivory skin, even if it was smeared with three
days’ worth of dirt, was such a sight to behold, he couldn’t help but be a little transfixed. Lucy was
attractive...there was no argument on that point, but how she still managed to look like a million
bucks even with leaves tangled in her hair and mud smudged across her forehead was beyond him.

Completely oblivious to Wyatt’s internal assessment of her disheveled appearance, Lucy narrowed
her eyes in protest at being moved from her comfortable position. Yawning violently, she arched
her back with a groaning stretch before mumbling sleepily, “Good morning, Wyatt.”

“Morning” he returned with a smirk, flushing slightly as he realized that his hand was still firmly
planted on her waist. Quickly drawing his arm back, Wyatt cleared his throat as he sat up
abruptly, “You...um...sleep, okay?”

“Mmmhmm” Lucy hummed, “…and you? Oh…” Lucy gasped as her eyes fell on the dried blood
staining Wyatt’s sleeve, “How’s your arm?” He shrugged, looking at his arm indifferently before
his gaze slowly trailed all the way up her still reclined figure, until finally, they fixed on her dark
eyes with a sudden intensity that almost took her breath away.

Lucy furrowed her brow as she lay there looking up at Wyatt in confusion. He was now leaning in
towards her, slowly inching himself closer and Lucy, though completely taken surprise by this turn
of events, laid as still as she possibly could, waiting in anxious anticipation...for what...she wasn’t
quite sure...but whatever it was, she wasn’t exactly opposed to it.

She would never readily admit that she was attracted to Wyatt, he was in love with dead wife, after
all, and well, she couldn’t think of anything more pathetic than pining after a man who was clearly
in love with someone else. It would be like Michael Garrison and the prom all over again...and
no, she didn’t want a repeat of that humiliation.

So, she did her best to keep her budding attraction at bay...which proved to be more and more
difficult the more time she and Wyatt spent together. She trusted him, felt safe with him, admired
him...and while she never imagined she would ever measure up to the wife he had loved and lost,
a small part of her couldn’t help but wish that he would, at least, consider her as a possibility...as
someone who might help mend his broken heart.

That, she knew, however, was a total pipe dream. Wyatt was dead set on getting his wife back...hadn’t
he just said as much last night? She was his greatest regret, the one person he cared about
most in all the world. Wasn’t he angry with her partly because she had secured a deal to save Amy
and he didn’t have one to save Jessica?
So, what on Earth was he doing?

With almost cat-like stealth, Wyatt was creeping over to her until soon, his entire body was hovering above her own, his legs brushing the outside of her thighs, his sturdy arms bracing himself over her torso as his eyes burned with a fierceness that made her grateful she was already laying down. Swallowing hard, Lucy’s eyes darted to Wyatt’s lips, imagining what they might feel like as they drifted across her skin. The anticipation was maddening as he crept ever closer, his face suspended just inches away from hers; it would be nothing to close the distance between them, capturing his lips with her own… but she found that her courage was about as sturdy as her trembling limbs. Tentatively though, she pressed her hand against his chest, feeling the pounding of his heart, as her eyes sought his, “Wyatt?” she whispered as she gently lifted her head from the forest floor, bringing her face that much closer to his.

His gaze drifted momentarily to her lips before he softly muttered, “Don’t move.” She was just about to answer with a flirtatious giggle when with lightning fast speed and a flash of silver, Wyatt drove a dagger into the ground right next to Lucy’s head. With a horrified gasp, Lucy flinched away, glancing over her shoulder as she sat up straight. There, she saw to her utter astonishment and revulsion, Wyatt’s dagger, driven into the head of an enormous snake.

Scrambling to her feet, Lucy squealed in terror as the snake’s body writhed in the leaves around the trees. “Oh my God,” she exclaimed as she smacked Wyatt on the arm, “Why didn’t you tell me there was a snake there?”

“I didn’t want you to scare it.” he answered with a bewildered shrug. “I mean, look at you, Lucy. This thing is dead and you’re hysterical.”

Glaring at him, Lucy gritted out, “You didn’t want me to scare it? Are you kidding me right now?! And I am NOT hysterical.” She argued as Wyatt raised his eyebrows in utter disbelief. Shrugging, Wyatt made to pull the dagger out of the snake’s head, but as its body jerked and flipped once more, Lucy screamed out in terror, “And if that thing is dead, why is it still moving?!”

Rufus, hearing all of the commotion, came darting into the copse of trees with a large stick, frantically scanning the scene for whatever it was that had Lucy screaming out in fear. “You guys, okay?” he gasped out, “What’s going on, what’s happening?”

“Relax,” Wyatt sighed as he pulled his dagger out of the snake and wiped the blade on a few leaves. “Lucy’s just afraid of a little snake.”
“That is not a little snake, Wyatt.” Lucy gritted out as he slowly pulled the body out from around the tree, “Look at the size of that thing.” She shuddered as Wyatt purposefully wound the reptile around his arm, “Rufus,” Lucy breathed out as she grabbed onto his arm for support, “it was next to my head.”

“Hang on,” Rufus said in a voice filled with sudden alarm, “Are...are you telling me that you just killed that thing? Holy shit...does that mean-- was...was that in here with us last night?!” Rufus asked Wyatt in a panicked voice.

“Could have been.” Wyatt said with a shrug, but at the horrified looks on Lucy and Rufus’ face, Wyatt let out an incredulous laugh, “Come on you two, it comes with territory. You sleep outdoors, you share a bed with all sorts of things...snakes, bugs, spiders...”

“...historians.” Rufus muttered under his breath, but neither Lucy nor Wyatt seemed to hear him.

“Look, we’re going to be stuck here for a while...this is something you two are going to have to get used to. Hell, even if we weren’t sleeping outside we’d still have to deal with this kind of stuff.” Wyatt said as he lifted his snake wrapped arm to Lucy and Rufus, “You think that a rustic cabin in the middle of the woods is going to keep out snakes, mice, bugs?” Wyatt chuckled, “Think again. They’re looking for some place warm just like we are...”

“Yeah, I’m sure it was just looking to get cozy with the two of you,” Rufus quipped, “you know, before you jammed a knife into its skull.”

Wyatt shrugged as he cast an impish smirk at Lucy, “I think I did this guy a favor. Pretty sure Lucy would have made sure it died a slow and painful death if I would have let it slither over her throat.”

Lucy covered her face with her hands, disgusted by the very idea...but she couldn’t help it...she could feel phantom scales sliding against her skin, and that, sent a chill of repulsion down her spine...which was soon followed by a rush of dread, “Wait a minute...is...I mean, was...was that poisonous?” she asked breathlessly, hardly knowing if she really wanted the answer.

“No, I don’t think so.” Wyatt said with a shake of his head, “You see the head?” Lucy looked away from the bloodied mess he was pointing out, “It doesn’t have that distinctive triangular shape you see with most venomous snakes...it’s too big to be a garter snake, not the right color for a rat snake...if I were to guess, I’d say it was Northern water snake. Pretty harmless, but I’d say we’ve got a good four feet worth of meat to work with here.”
“Whoa, whoa whoa…” Rufus said as he lifted his hand in protest, “you don’t really expect us to eat that thing, do you?”

Wyatt stared blankly back at the two of them, “Well…yeah. Why else do you think I killed this thing?”

Lucy blanched as she shuddered involuntarily, “Oh, I think I’m going to be sick.”

“That makes two of us.” Rufus shuddered as he frowned at the bloodied reptile hanging from Wyatt’s arm.

Wyatt raised his eyebrows, “Look, you two…there’s no take out here. You want to eat? It’s hunting, fishing, foraging…this is how we’re going to have to survive.”

“I think maybe I might try being a vegetarian.” Rufus quipped but before Wyatt could give him another lecture, he motioned to the river, “I uh…think I’m going to clean up…see if there’s anything in the way of soap in one of those saddle bags we stole from the French. They’re into cleanliness, right?”

“That sounds like a good idea.” Lucy muttered as she looked down at her own hands, completely covered in mud. She watched as Wyatt slid his dagger back into its sheath and inched past her with a triumphant smirk planted on his face and suddenly she felt self-conscious. How on Earth could she ever think Wyatt was attempting to make a pass at her when she looked and felt like she was coated in enough dirt to grow a potato? She hadn’t seen a mirror in days and honestly…didn’t want to. Not that she was extremely vain…far from it. She valued cleanliness and a good moisturizer…..and right now she would kill for a decent bottle of shampoo, but…well, she was pretty sure that she wouldn’t care nearly as much about her current appearance if Wyatt hadn’t been so impossibly close to her dirt-caked pores that morning.

Now that her adrenaline level had somewhat normalized after very nearly having a heart attack because of that damn snake, embarrassment set in. She had almost kissed Wyatt…he was trying to kill a snake and she had almost kissed him. She wondered if he suspected, if he knew that she had completely misinterpreted what he was doing and what she had almost done. She cast a wary glance towards him; he was busily sifting through the stolen supplies, snake in hand, looking completely oblivious and wholly unconcerned about what had just happened.

But nothing had happened…so, why would he?
Ugh…but what would have happened if it had? What if she had actually kissed him? Oh God…what would he have thought? He had just finished telling her how much he wanted to get back his dead wife and her response was to wrap herself around him all night long and make out with him underneath a dang tree. She felt her face flush with complete and utter humiliation. She wanted to forget it…she wanted nothing more than to drown her mortification in a pint of Haagan Daz and a nice, warm bubble bath…but since both of those options were sadly off the table, a freezing cold river and some barbecued snake would have to do.

Lucy grimaced at the thought as she made her way over to the river, bound and determined to spend as much time away from Wyatt and that awful snake as she possibly could. She could not allow herself to get carried away with this stupid school girl crush she had on him…and since they were going to be stuck here for an undetermined amount of time, she was just going to have to commit herself to keeping him at arm’s length.

That wasn’t much of a tall order right now as Wyatt had set to work skinning the snake; the sound of ripping flesh sending her dry heaving to the water’s edge where Rufus was already scrubbing his neck and face. “You want some of this soap, Lucy?” he asked as he wiped off his brow with a handkerchief, “It’s not the best smelling stuff, but I feel a hell of a lot cleaner than I have for the past three days.”

Lucy eyed the proffered bar nervously, “You do realize that’s probably lye soap, right?”

“So?”

“So…if not measured out correctly, lye soap is extremely caustic…horrible for your skin…and back in these days, that was fairly common.” she explained as she took the bar of soap and sniffed it, grimacing at the ammonia-like scent. “Ugh…that’s gross…you know they made this from animal fat and ashes?”

“Lucy, I’m half-way clean for the first time in three days…I don’t give a damn what it’s made from…and what it smells like, for that matter.” he added with a pointed nod towards her upturned face. “Like Wyatt said, if we’re gonna have to learn to eat things like snake, we’re gonna have to learn how to deal with nasty ass soap too.”

“Amen.” came Wyatt’s voice as he sidled down the small hill that led from the camp to the river. Laden down now with a canteen instead of a bloody and skinned snake, Wyatt approached Lucy and Rufus with a nod, “Just be glad you have soap.”
“See, I knew Bear Grylls here would agree with me.” Rufus nodded as Wyatt crouched down and began filling up a canteen. “Um…Wyatt?” he asked, “what are you doing? I thought you said we couldn’t drink this water?”

“Not without boiling it, no…but this is not for drinking.” he said as he stood up again, “this is for washing our little friend up there.” he stated as he motioned towards the campsite.

“You’re giving that thing a bath? I thought it was dead?” Rufus asked blankly.

“Well, if it wasn’t dead before, it certainly is now.” Wyatt said with a quirk of his lip as he rinsed his bloodied knife off in the river. “I’ve got it sliced up and ready to go…just need to rinse it off and get it ready for grilling. We just need to build ourselves a real fire.” He looked at Rufus, “And if you’re finished with your bath, I’ll teach you.”

“Not necessary.” Rufus said proudly, “That camp fire you stomped out the other night? Yeah, that was me…no crazy survivalist skills necessary.”

“Yeah, and you almost got us killed.” Wyatt reminded him, “I’m going to teach you how to build a fire that can’t be seen…burns hotter too….and produces less smoke. Come on,” he said as he made a quick glance towards Lucy who was awkwardly crouched by the river, “let’s go get it started” he said as he tugged Rufus by the arm, “we’re actually gonna have a half-decent meal this morning.”

Lucy thought that Wyatt was being far too generous in his assessment of what constituted a half-decent meal, but she didn’t want to complain…especially not after last night. Wyatt had been kind enough to keep her warm and while she may have misinterpreted his actions that morning, he was, at least, treating her with more or less the same deference he had before that awful Watergate mission.

And that, at least, was something.

Sighing, she looked at the small bar of soap in her hand and began working up a lather, wishing she could remove her filthy clothes and wash them while she was at it…if anything but to just get out of the damn corset she had been forced to wear for four days. It wasn’t like it would do much good anyway, not if they were going to spend countless nights sleeping in the dirt. Still, since they were going to be here for a while, she reasoned that a change of clothes for all of them would need to be in order…once, of course, they found a place to live.
Rufus and Wyatt, meanwhile, made their way back to the center of the clearing to where bits of snake meat sat, gleaming, slimy and white on a large rock. Wyatt immediately crouched down and set to work rinsing the meat with the water he procured, ordering Rufus to gather up some small limbs to be used for kindling. Trying to one-up him, Rufus not only collected a few things for kindling, he began gathering rocks so that they could contain the fire. As he began placing them around the center of the clearing, Wyatt looked up from his work, “What the hell are you doing?”

“I’m helping you build a fire…like I said, I already know…”

Wyatt shook his head as he left the snake meat and picked up the shovel from the night before, “No…you built a campfire…when you’re trying to hide from your enemies you don’t build a standard campfire.” he explained, “You build a Dakota fire hole.”

“You’re talking to me like I’m supposed to know what that is…”

Sighing heavily, Wyatt explained, “It’s not much different from your standard fire pit. You dig a hole in the ground, about the size of a dinner plate…and then you dig another hole at an angle…coming off of it like this, for air flow.” Wyatt illustrated as he drew a diagram in the dirt with the edge of the shovel. “Because the fire is underneath the ground, it’s nearly invisible…and because of the way the air flow tunnel works, it produces very little smoke.” Wyatt shrugged, “It’s how we stayed warm in the mountains of Afghanistan without advertising our position to the Taliban.”

“Well, then why the hell didn’t you build this last night instead of letting us all nearly freeze to death.”

“Come on, Rufus.” Wyatt muttered as he worked on digging out the hole for their fire, “It wasn’t that cold.”

“Easy for you to say,” Rufus scoffed, “you were all warm and cozy with…” Rufus trailed off, his mind suddenly abuzz with a fresh new suspicion. “Oh,” Rufus gasped as he looked back towards the river at Lucy, “I see how it is.”

Wyatt paused in his digging, looking up at Rufus in complete bewilderment, “You see how what is?”

“Don’t give me that.” Rufus scoffed, “You looked awfully comfortable this morning snuggling with Lucy.”
“What the hell are you talking about, Rufus?” Wyatt spat out.

“I’m talking about the fact that you could’ve built this fire pit last night, but didn’t…and you just happened to wake up completely wrapped around a certain historian.”

“I didn’t build a damn fire hole last night because I spent all night digging out a six-foot hole for the Protocol. I was too tired to mess with it…and if you remember, the wind was blowing too hard to make lighting a fire even possible.”

“Uh-huh…” Rufus muttered, completely unconvinced, “says you.”

Rolling his eyes, Wyatt set right back to work, feeling that it was useless trying to convince Rufus that there was absolutely nothing going on between him and Lucy. Yes, he had kept her warm last night, but what Rufus didn’t know was the Lucy was also upset…and so even if there had been a damn fire, he still would have done his best to comfort her…because that’s what any decent person would do…for their friend…and team mate.

Though as Wyatt thought that, he knew that he wouldn’t get that close and personal with just any team mate. His eyes drifted from Rufus to the sight of Lucy, her hair pulled to the side as she washed her neck and face in the river a few hundred yards away, and he couldn’t help but remember the warmth that filled him as she nestled into his arms and how, if he were being completely and totally honest with himself, last night had been the best damn night of sleep he had had in years.

But that was probably because he hadn’t gotten any sleep the night before.

And they had just traipsed through 40+ miles of woods…and then, of course, he had spent all that time digging…

“Hey Romeo,” Rufus called to him as he waved his hand in front of Wyatt’s face. “You gonna stare at her all day or are you going to build us a damn fire?” Grumbling, Wyatt set back to work on the fire hole, silently resolving to never look at Lucy again…at least not when Rufus was around.

Once satisfied with its depth and the position of the air vent, Wyatt motioned for Rufus to bring him some kindling. He was just about to teach him how to start a fire without matches, when
Rufus pulled out the tinderbox he had used before. “Now it’s my turn to teach you something,”
With a smile, Rufus opened the box and pulled out the steel and flint, “behold…an 18th century lighter.”

Having practiced using the tinderbox before, Rufus quickly had a blaze going, and Wyatt had to
admit that he was impressed. It wasn’t rubbing sticks together, but using the flint and steel wasn’t
like striking a match either…and for someone who admittedly hated the outdoors, Rufus had
managed to light that spark much quicker than Wyatt had expected. Using a few limbs to cover
the Fire Hole they had built, Wyatt laid pieces of snake meat across the top and though Rufus had
declared he would rather go full vegetarian than eat snake, the aroma of sizzling meat soon had
him staring at the campfire with wanton eyes. Seeing this, Wyatt let out a small chuckle, “I
thought you didn’t want any?”

“Maybe I’ll have just a piece.” Rufus muttered as the snake meat began to curl and char from the
heat of the fire. “Like you said…beggars can’t be choosers.”

“No, they cannot.” Lucy said as she plopped down beside the two of them, fresh faced and clean…
well, as clean as one could get in these conditions anyway. With a smirk, she handed Wyatt the
bar of soap, “You're up…if you're going to be handling our food, the least you could do is wash
your hands.”

Wyatt exchanged an amused look with Rufus before he took the soap from Lucy, muttering under
his breath, “Sure thing, mom.” as he made his way down to the water’s edge. Despite giving Lucy
a hard time about washing up, he was actually grateful for the chance to do so, particularly with his
injured arm. If he was going to get them through this, he couldn’t risk an infection, and while his
injury was just a graze, he was determined to keep it as clean as he possibly could. Pulling off his
shirt, Wyatt was just working to undo the bandage that Lucy had secured when he heard a twig
snap behind him.

Whirling around, he came face to face with Lucy who was gaping at him in surprise. Flushing,
Lucy looked down to the handkerchief in her hand, “I…I’m sorry…I didn’t mean…I thought you
might need this.” she stammered as she handed him what they had been using as a washcloth,
keeping her eyes cemented to the forest floor as she did so.

“Oh…um…thanks.” Wyatt answered as he took the cloth from her outstretched hand. She
muttered another apology and was quickly making her way back up to the camp when Wyatt called
after her, “Hey, um…Lucy? Do you think you can get me that first aid kit…I just want to make
sure…you know my arm…”

“Oh.” Lucy gasped out with a quick nod, “sure, yeah…I’ll be…um…I’ll be right back.”
While Lucy went to retrieve the iodine, Wyatt quickly went to work washing his face, his arms and his chest and neck, understanding as he took in the scent of the soap, why Lucy had been so opposed to using it in the first place. It stung his skin and yes, the smell reminded him of glass cleaner…but as Rufus had so rightly pointed out, this was all they had…and it was just something they were going to have to get used to.

He was just rinsing off the back of his neck with the handkerchief when Lucy tentatively approached him with the box of what passed as medical supplies in this century. Clearing her throat, she set the box down on a nearby boulder and pulled out the vial of iodine as Wyatt lathered up his arm once more for good measure and wiped it away with the dampened handkerchief. “Probably not the most sterile way to do this,” Wyatt admitted as he wrung out the washcloth.

“No.” Lucy said as she swallowed hard, “but…but the iodine should help.” She pulled out some more strips of muslin as Wyatt sat on the ground next to her, offering up his arm….and Lucy couldn’t help but wish she had sent Rufus down to do this job.

Hadn’t she just resolved not to get herself into these situations with Wyatt…especially after her near embarrassment this morning?

There he was bare chested, wet and…chiseled….and nope…she wasn’t even going to let her mind go there. He was injured, he needed her help and she was a grown woman….she had more self-control than this.

Taking a steadying breath, Lucy approached, determined to keep her focus on his injured arm and absolutely nothing else…which she found to be a near impossible task. With trembling hands, Lucy touched his arm and Wyatt, flinched. “Sorry.” she muttered, “Did…did that hurt?”

“No.” Wyatt answered, but his voice was strained and his jaw was clenched as he stared out at the river in front of them.

Clearing her throat, Lucy examined the wound. It was still there, but it was no longer bleeding profusely; it was, instead, beginning to scar and as there was no redness or irritation on the surrounding skin, Lucy breathed out a sigh of relief, “It looks like it’s healing…it doesn’t look like it’s infected.”

“That’s good.” Wyatt winced as she poured more iodine over his arm, his eyes still trained on the river in front of them.
“Sorry.” Lucy muttered as she transferred turned the bottle over onto the fresh muslin strip and began to wrap Wyatt’s arms again. Her fingers shook as she wrapped the medicated strips of cloth around his arm, her breath catching in her throat every time they brushed against Wyatt’s torso. She had been so focused on the wrapping that she realized too late that she didn’t have enough to tie it. With an exasperated sigh, she glanced over to the first aid kit, “Um…Wyatt?” she asked in a voice filled with hesitation, “Do you…could you hold this in place? I need to get another bandage.”

For the first time since she began work on him, Wyatt turned his face from the river and looked at her, “Um…sure.” he said as he placed his hand over the small strip of bandage that was sticking out, his fingers grazing hers as he did so.

Ignoring the fluttering in her stomach, Lucy quickly made her way back over to the kit to retrieve another strip of cloth. With a determination to not let herself get any more carried away than she already was, she returned to Wyatt, resolved to get this over with as quickly as possible so she could go back to keeping him at arm’s length…and fully clothed. Quickly hugging the bandage around his arm, she wrapped it twice around until she finally secured it with a knot. “There” she sighed in relief, “all finished.”

In what she could only describe as a moment of weakness, she allowed her eyes to drift from Wyatt’s bandaged arm to his face and was startled to find that he was gazing at her with the hint of a smile playing across his lips. Lucy stared stupidly back at him for a moment before he, as if suddenly realizing what he was doing, quickly darted his eyes away and cleared his throat, “Thanks.” he muttered grimly, pulling his shirt back over his head.

“Sure.” Lucy mumbled in return as she made her way back to the medicine kit. She took her time replacing the bottle of iodine, taking care to check that all the other bottles were secure before closing the case, hoping that Wyatt would make his way back up to the campsite without her…but he didn’t. Lucy turned only to find him purposefully waiting for her…much to her own and Rufus’ displeasure.

“You know, I get that out of the two of you I’m probably the only one who knows how to make an actual home cooked meal, but I don’t know a damn thing about snake meat.” he called down to them. “So, if you’re finished doing whatever the hell it is you’re doing down there, you might want to check on this. I’m not taking the blame for burning our breakfast.”

As Wyatt and Lucy made their way back up to camp, Rufus eyed them both with interest…something that was not lost on Wyatt who rolled his eyes in exasperation. While Lucy put the medical kit away, Rufus leaned over to Wyatt who was busily removing the snake meat from off the makeshift grill, “So…you two were gone for a while…”
“Yeah, so?” Wyatt spat out in annoyance. “She was just wrapping my arm again, okay? You think I could bandage this up on my own?”

“Okay, okay…” Rufus mumbled defensively, “I get it…you don’t want to admit you’ve got a little soft spot for Lucy…but you know,” Rufus said with an impish grin, “you could’ve asked me to fix you up…it’s not like I don’t have the experience.”

Wyatt huffed out an uncomfortable breath. Yes, Rufus had patched him up in 1865…but it was surgery…and Rufus…well, as an engineer had experience with the level of detail work required for that kind of thing. This was just wrapping his arm…and Lucy had been right there…why wouldn’t he have just asked her…especially since she was the one who had wrapped his arm to begin with?

For his part, Wyatt was very much aware that Rufus was trying to create something that wasn’t there…whether for his own amusement or just because he had some overactive imagination, he couldn’t be sure…but because of that, he was going to take extra care to keep Lucy at arm’s length. He was already self-conscious around her because of how they had ended up last night…and with Rufus constantly ribbing him about it…well, if Lucy ever overheard it would make things very awkward for her.

And he definitely did not want that.

Hardly glancing at her, Wyatt dished out morsel of snake meat placing the rest of the canteen of water on the makeshift grate so they could have something to drink later. With a look of uncertainty, Lucy and Rufus exchanged nervous glances as they watched and waited for Wyatt to take the first bite. Seeing them both eyeing him with anticipation, Wyatt rolled his eyes, “It’s not going to kill you…people eat snake all the time.”

“Yeah, well, we don’t eat snake all the time.” Rufus reminded him, “so forgive me if I’m going to kick this back to grade school…you first.”

Wyatt took that dare without so much as a second of hesitation, urging Lucy and Rufus to follow suit the moment he swallowed down his first piece. It certainly wasn’t the heartiest meal any of them had ever had…and the meat was about as tasty as a bicycle tire, but…it was food…and as much as Rufus would’ve loved to complain about it, even he could not. Having eaten so little for four days, they were grateful for anything that kept their stomachs from roaring with hunger…even if it could have used some salt…and pepper…and a hell of a lot of barbecue sauce.
Maybe it was the fact that he felt somewhat cleaner than he had been in several days. Maybe it was the uplifting warmth of the fire. Maybe it was the promise of a drink of water after so many days of nothing but a sip or two of bitter alcohol. Whatever it was, Wyatt’s mood after this meal was lighter…well, lighter than it had been in days, anyway. The fact was they were still in a horrible situation, stranded as they were, smack dab in the middle of nowhere 18th century America, but the hopelessness of yesterday seemed to dissipate as he looked around the makeshift camp at the smiling figures of Lucy and Rufus.

Despite their complaints and obvious aversion to “roughing it”, they seemed to really be making an effort to stay positive…to keep their spirits up, even in the face of probable death. Add in the fact that they were now chowing down on something neither of them would ever dream of eating and well, Wyatt had to give them props for trying.

Yes, they needed still needed to find a place to live. Yes, this meager meal was far from the 2016 feast they all had had their hearts set on before Flynn blew their hopes all to hell, but at least it was more than just berries or whatever hell kind of jerky the French saddlebag had provided. Between the fresh meat (even if it was snake), the fire that served to warm, comfort and…as it was currently boiling water for them to drink…purify…their situation, while still crappy, didn’t seem quite as hopeless as it had yesterday. It was more than just the fact that for the first time in days they were satisfying some of their basic needs. This breakfast gave Wyatt hope - small as it was – that they could do this, they could tackle the 18th century…they could beat the odds and survive.

Maybe.

Chapter End Notes

I purposefully delayed updating this chapter BECAUSE as some of you know, I'm just about to head out of town and will pretty much be out of pocket until after the 4th of July. That said, I worked REALLY hard this week to write and not only is the next chapter of this fic ALMOST finished, but WMHB is nearly completed...I have one chapter ready to go and I'm halfway through the next one...which means I only have about one and half more chapters to write before that one is DONE. I'm not sure how much time I will have to write while I'm away, but as I'm going to be on an airplane and dealing with a lengthy layover, I hope to be able to make at least some headway in these fics during my trip. (Pray for cooperative kiddos!)

I hope you enjoyed this update! I will do my best to update it again while I'm away...depending, of course, on how much I am able to write.

Have a great day and thank you so much for reading!!
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lucy had hoped that eating that awful snake with no complaints would be enough to prove to Wyatt that she was making an effort, that she wasn’t above roughing it in the wild, but it seemed that eating snake was just a precursor for the even greater challenge of…washing it down.

She realized that she should not have been all that surprised that water from a forest stream wouldn’t exactly be flavorless. She wasn’t an idiot…but well, maybe she was a victim of false marketing. This was the untapped wilderness, after all…which meant people in hiking gear standing next to mountain springs, drinking the cool, crisp, clear, refreshing water that sprang from them. Certainly not…this.

This was definitely not anything close to that.

Beggars can’t be choosers…or so they saying goes…but Lucy had to admit, she would have killed for an ice-cold bottle of…pretty much anything…over the tepid, earthy, and musty flavor of what was passing for drinking water in their communal canteen. She tried, but couldn’t hide the grimace and shudder that involuntarily escaped her as she took a long, draught to soothe her parched tongue and throat. She had been looking forward to something other than alcohol to drink for days…particularly now since the terrible taste of snake was still lingering on her tongue…but this was worse.

So much worse.

Coughing and sputtering as she worked overtime to keep herself from revisting both the meal and the after-dinner “refreshment” she passed the canteen to a waiting Rufus, noticing with some shame that Wyatt was now shaking his head and rolling his eyes at her in apparent disappointment.

If he was disappointed in her reaction, however, it was nothing to how he felt over Rufus’. The canteen had barely touched his lips, before he immediately spewed out a mouthful of warm water all over the Delta Force soldier, who, unfortunately, was sitting right next to him. “What the hell, Rufus?” Wyatt exclaimed angrily as he wiped his face with his sleeve.

Rufus, however, was too busy gagging to even notice or care. “Blech!” he gasped out as he dry heaved next to the log he had been propped up against. Grimacing, he sat back up, wiping his tongue frantically with his hand and spitting as much as he could to rid his mouth of the foul flavor.

Wyatt stared hard at him as he yanked the canteen away and took a sip of his own, not even flinching at the taste…something that annoyed the hell out of still sputtering Rufus. “Don’t even try to act like you don’t think that’s the nastiest stuff you ever put in your mouth.” he quipped, “it tastes like rotten eggs and fish….warm rotten eggs and fish.” he emphasized as he gagged again. “I can see why they drink so much alcohol here…that needs some lemon or something…”

“I’m sorry Rufus, I’m fresh out of lemons,” Wyatt snarked, “but maybe I can pick you up some when they build a grocery store here in the next 100 years or so…”

“Very funny.” Rufus deadpanned. “Look, I’m just saying we should probably look for something to make that…less gross.”
“And what do you suggest?” Wyatt spat out. “Please, I’m all ears...” he stared at Rufus who rolled his eyes and slunk back against the log despondently, “Right now, this is all we’ve got...and you should be grateful we even have this.” Wyatt muttered angrily as he popped the cork back on the canteen, “if you’re thirsty enough, you’ll drink it.”

“Maybe...maybe we could find some mint?” Lucy suggested timidly, not wanting to upset Wyatt any more than he already was. He turned and looked at her in surprise and she stammered, “That...that grows in the wild, right?” When he continued to stare at her in astonishment, Lucy continued, “I...I’m not trying to be ungrateful, but...Rufus is right,” she said with a determined nod of her head, “it would...at least help with the...the taste.”

Rufus, angry about Wyatt’s quip about the lemonade, let out a derisive laugh, “C’mon Lucy...that’s not roughing it enough...”

“No.” Wyatt interrupted him, “I think it’s a good idea...great idea, actually.” Lucy lifted her eyes to his in surprise, amazed and relieved to see that he was offering her a soft smile. “Mint grows all over the place...we could probably find some around here pretty easily...and you’re right...it will help.”

Lucy smiled, feeling about as light as a feather that she had come up with something that could actually help them. Sure, it wasn’t killing snakes or knowing which berries to eat...but for someone like her, who admittedly gets lost in her own kitchen, it was something. She nodded, “Okay...good...and maybe” she bit her lip hardly daring to press her luck, “maybe if we ever find a trading post we...we can...I don’t know pick up some tea or coffee?” Wyatt’s eyes widened and she panicked, “I mean, I know...it’s not something we need or anything...I just thought...ya know...if we can’t find mint...”

Wyatt shrugged unconcernedly, “Why not? As far as I’m concerned, anything we can find or use that makes our lives easier out here is worth it.” He smirked at her proudly, “I wouldn’t say no to a cup of coffee, that’s for damn sure.”

“Oh I see how it is.” Rufus grumbled, “I say the water’s nasty and you jump down my throat. Lucy says the water is nasty and you agree...”

Wyatt turned slowly, gaping at Rufus, “Lucy didn’t complain.” he explained in a voice of forced calm, “She came up with a solution...there’s a difference.”

“Yeah, right there’s a difference.” Rufus nodded as he frowned dubiously, “There’s a BIG difference, alright.”

“And what the hell do you mean by that?” Wyatt spat back.

Lucy, seeing that things were getting tense between the two of them, quietly removed herself from the vicinity of the two men and began cleaning up things around their camp.

Rufus waited until she was out of ear shot before leaning close to Wyatt and whispering harshly, “You know damn well what I mean. Both Lucy and I thought that water was about the grossest thing we ever put in our mouths, yet I’m the only one getting crap for being “ungrateful.””

“That’s because Lucy didn’t complain.” Wyatt gritted out angrily, upset that he had to explain himself yet again. “Hell, do you really think I like the way that water tastes? But you know what? I sucked it up...I drank it and so did she...without spewing it out all over everybody.” Wyatt said pointedly with a roll of his eyes, “Thanks for that, by the way.”
“It’s not just that.” Rufus countered, “she comes up with a suggestion and it’s all “Oh that’s a great idea, Lucy…you’re the best” he mimicked, “but I didn’t hear you giving me any props for coming up with the solution to save our asses. If it weren’t for me, you wouldn’t know a damn thing about the Protocol.”

“We don’t know if that’s even going to work, Rufus.” Wyatt reminded him. “Mason may never even get that message, it could be buried under a damn skyscraper for all we know.”

“Hey, we may never find any mint…but you still praised Lucy to the sky.” he grumbled. “I just think you shouldn’t play favorites…that’s all I’m saying.”

“I’m not playing favorites.” Wyatt breathed out in exasperation, “you’re just…just…”

“Just, what?” Rufus provoked.

“You’re just being an ass right now.” Wyatt gritted out angrily, his fist clenched tightly by his sides.

“Yeah, well it takes one to know one.” Rufus mumbled in return.

Lucy cleared her throat loudly from across the camp, “Are you two finished? she asked with raised eyebrows as she lifted up the flintlock pistols they had stolen from the French soldiers, “Or are we going to have to settle this 18th century style?” She shook her head at them both with an admonishing glare, “Seriously, you two…we’re…we’re going to be stuck together for…who knows how long. Are we going to get on each other’s nerves? Probably. But…but we need to work together if we’re going to have any chance at surviving this.”

Wyatt and Rufus rolled their eyes, grumbling as they slunk away from one another, both of them knowing that Lucy was right. It was just the three of them against the entire 18th century and like it or not, they were going to have to put aside differences of opinion…even if those opinions were completely wrong. Wyatt bristled at Rufus’ accusation. He was not playing favorites. Lucy had a great idea and he praised her for it. What was the big deal?

Rufus, on the other hand, had done nothing but complain since they landed in 1754…

Lucy, seeing that Wyatt and Rufus were both sulking now in their respective corners, sighed heavily, “Look, for what it’s worth…this isn’t easy…for any of us.” Both Rufus and Wyatt looked at the other as if to argue their own case, but Lucy plowed on, “Wyatt, you know Rufus and I aren’t used to any of this…so it’s going to take us some time to…ya know…adapt.” She nodded at Rufus meaningfully as she continued, “but we’re going to try, right?” Rufus heaved out a sigh and nodded in resignation. “Rufus, Wyatt can’t do this all on his own. Since we got here, he’s been the one to get us food and something to drink…and I’m sure when we’re…less than grateful about what he finds us it’s…it’s…”

“Frustrating.” Wyatt grumbled in agreement.

“Right.” Lucy said with a nod. “I just…I just think it’s important for us all to remember we’re trying in our different ways to deal with…all of this.” she scoffed, “I mean, Flynn trapped all of us here…and yes, we’re completely different people…but…ultimately, we’re a team, right?”

Wyatt sighed heavily. A few days ago, he wasn’t sure if he wanted to be on this “team” anymore… and if he was being quite honest with himself, he still wasn’t. How many times had Lucy and Rufus shown that they didn’t know the first thing about team work? How many times had they kept him out of the loop and taken him for granted? Still, as he looked at Lucy…standing there attempting to bridge the gap that existed between them all…he couldn’t help but feel a surge of
gratitude for her. She was trying…and that’s all he really needed right now.

“I’m still going to complain.” Rufus said with a frown and a shrug, “Just being honest…but…but I’ll try to adapt.” he conceded with a smirk towards Lucy. “I mean, I’ve already eaten snake…”

Wyatt let out a dry chuckle, “And you know how to start a camp fire…”

“That’s right.” Rufus said with a nod of satisfaction, “I am the master of the tinderbox…and thanks to Wyatt, I know how to build a Carolina firepit thing.”

“Dakota fire hole.” Wyatt corrected, realizing that maybe he had been a little too hard on Rufus. “I um…I think you’re doing a pretty good job.” he admitted sullenly, “ya know, for someone who hates the outdoors.”

Rufus nodded at him in gratitude, “Well, I had a pretty good teacher…”

Wyatt nodded his thanks and cast a quick glance up to Lucy who, he was stunned to see, was smiling at him proudly. He felt an odd tug in his stomach as he smirked back at her and for the first time since the disaster that was the Watergate mission he felt like he had a team again…and it was all thanks to Lucy.

“So, what now?” Rufus asked abruptly, pulling Wyatt’s attention away from his inner musings, “We go to Fort Duquense, knock on the door…ask to use their forge?”

“That’s a great way to get ourselves killed.” Wyatt quipped sarcastically as he pulled his eyes away from Lucy’s, “We’re gonna need to come up with some kind of plan. It won’t be long before those French soldiers figure out what happened back at that camp…and I’d rather not give them another reason to try to kill us.”

“Well, if that commander is who I think he is,” Lucy said grimly, “it won’t matter if we try to get into the fort or not…he’s going to come looking for us.”

Wyatt narrowed his eyes at her in confusion, “What makes you say that? Just because I killed a few of his men?”

“Well…there’s that…” Lucy said with a nod, “but if that is Louis Coulon, his brother, Joseph, was the French commander killed at the Battle of Jumonville Glen.”

“You mean the…the brain guy?” Rufus asked with a grimace. “The one with the…” Rufus mimed a hacking motion with his arm as Lucy solemnly nodded. “Well, that’s too bad for him,” he quipped, “but why would that have anything to do with us? We weren’t there…”

“He doesn’t know that…” Wyatt answered sullenly with a thoughtful frown, “…and if he thinks we’re British spies…”

“Exactly,” Lucy nodded as she explained, “Immediately after the massacre at Jumonville Glen, George Washington expected to be attacked by the French…I mean, obviously…” she shook her head as she sighed, “So, he ordered the rapid construction of a fort to protect his men…Fort Necessity…”

“Good name.” Rufus acknowledged with a shrug.

“A few days after the fort’s construction was completed, the French and their Indian allies attacked - just as Washington believed they would…and well, apart from being a disorganized mess, it was a bit of a disaster. The French fired onto the fort from the safety of the trees and Washington, tried
to dislodge them by marching his men into an open field.”

“That was smart.” Wyatt scoffed sarcastically.

Lucy nodded in solemn agreement, “Washington was forced to surrender, but not before mistakenly admitting that he had Louis Coulon’s brother essentially assassinated…it was something to do with the translation – either Washington misunderstood what he was being asked or the interpreter got it wrong…I can’t remember all the details…but the point is, Washington didn’t realize what he had admitted to until afterwards, and by then…it was too late. No matter what Washington tried to say to the contrary, from Louis Coulon’s perspective, his brother was brutally murdered…and now he had a British officer admitting to…”

 “…putting a hit on him.” Wyatt finished for her glumly.

“Needless to say,” Lucy sighed, “he isn’t exactly going to be fair minded when it comes to dealing with anyone who he thinks has any kind of association with Washington.”

“You think?” Rufus gaped at her. “So, what you’re telling me is that this French guy thinks that we’re working for the man who had his brother’s brains literally bashed in?” Lucy offered an apologetic shrug, but Rufus was already in full-blown panic mode, “Oh well now it’s a given…they’re gonna murder us before we get two steps into that fort.”

“Not necessarily.” Wyatt said with an unconcerned shrug as extinguished their campfire with a sprinkling of dirt.

“I’m sorry, but didn’t you just say that going into that fort was a sure-fire way of getting ourselves killed?”

“In the way you described it, yeah.” Wyatt scoffed in annoyance. “That’s why I also said we needed to come up with a plan…and we can’t come up with a plan if we’re gonna sit around here all day.” he added as he snatched up a spy glass he had stolen from the French camp.

“So…what do you suggest?” Lucy asked as she cast a wary look towards Rufus.

“We need to go take a look at that fort.” Wyatt said simply. “We can look at a map all day and it won’t give us any idea of what their defenses are like, how many soldiers they’ve got on posts, who goes in and who goes out…”

Rufus frowned thoughtfully, “So we’re going on a stake out?”

“If that helps you.” Wyatt said as he rolled his eyes. Pulling out the map, he called them both over, “It looks like we’re about five miles away…now obviously, we don’t want to get too close, but if we can get close enough and keep out of sight, we can get a pretty good idea of what we’re dealing with. I mean, that Fort Machault wasn’t a fort at all…”

“That’s just because it hadn’t been built yet.” Lucy reminded him.

“…and I hardly think this is going to be like busting into a fully armed military compound in 2016.” Wyatt continued, completely ignoring Lucy’s interruption.

“Yeah, but hang on there, Rambo,” Rufus interjected, “it’s us against a whole damn army…and it’s not just the French…they’ve got friends…with tomahawks.”

“All I’m asking you to do is trust me.” Wyatt said with a sigh, “Can you at least do that?” Lucy and Rufus exchanged glances before both of them offered him a resigned nod. “Alright then, Wyatt
said simply, “let’s go.”

Deciding it would be best to put some kind of geographic barrier between them and the French army, Wyatt suggested they cross the river. Looking at the map, he noted that directly across the river from the fort, the land was elevated, which would give them a better vantage point anyway. Traveling a little further to their north to a point where the river narrowed somewhat, the found a crossing where large boulders jutted out of the water here and there, allowing them to cross without having to make a swim for it...something Lucy was eternally grateful for, figuring that her many layers would have her sinking to the bottom of the river like a millstone before she could even get half-way across the stream.

Not that she wouldn’t love an excuse to get out of her dress.

While she was really trying to keep from complaining, the truth was, she was in a considerable amount of pain. Her ribs were tender from the constant pressure of her corset which she had now worn for four straight days. The panniers tied around her waist to give her skirt that boxy boosted look were annoying the hell out of her, and her shoes...well, she was pretty sure she had blisters the size of the boulders she was currently using as stepping stones to cross the Allegheny River.

When she made one final leap from the penultimate boulder to the last that sloped down to the opposite shore, Lucy’s foot missed the rock and she found herself clinging to the stone as her legs splashed into the water. Unable to lift herself up with the added weight of water and the rushing current pulling her down, Lucy cursed under her breath before her hands were suddenly gripped by Wyatt’s, “I’ve got you.” he gritted out as he crouched down above her and began pulling her up.

She was about to breathe out her “thanks” when Wyatt, in order to lift, rather than drag her across the top of the rock, wrapped his arm tightly around her waist and pulled her up and over the jutting rock. In normal situations, that action wouldn’t have caused her the slightest discomfort, but with her ribs already so tender, she couldn’t help but cry out in pain as Wyatt brought her safely onto dry ground.

That cry of pain set Wyatt into a near panic. Quickly releasing his grip on her as she slumped down on a fallen log, he immediately crouched down in front of her, his eyes scanning over her to assess where the problem was, “Lucy?” What’s wrong?” he asked in concern, “Where does it hurt? Is it your side?”

Lucy shook her head frantically as she gasped, “I’m okay...just...just a little sore. Nothing to worry about” she gritted out through unshed tears.

Wyatt tilted his head skeptically and traded glances with an equally disbelieving Rufus, “If you aren’t hurt, then why are you crying?”

“I am not crying,” Lucy maintained, “I told you, I’m just a little sore, that’s all. I fell on a rock for heaven’s sake…”

Wyatt heaved a sigh, torn between wanting to trust Lucy’s assessment of her own well-being and trusting his own instincts. He could tell she was in pain, that much was abundantly clear…but he also knew that she hadn’t fallen that hard. Would it have hurt? Probably. Break something? Not likely. “You’re sure?” he asked finally, “Do you need to rest for a while?”

“Nope.” Lucy said with a little more chipperness than was unnatural - even for her, “I’m just fine.” she added brightly as she sprung to her feet and lifted up her arms, wincing slightly as she did so.

Wyatt narrowed his eyes once more, internally debating whether to call her on her bluff or let it
pass. He knew she was putting on a brave face, but why she was putting on a brave face was the bigger question he was now asking himself. He thought through all the shit they had gone through since landing in 1754, the rain storm, the sleeping conditions, the harassment she received at the hands of the French...and never once had she complained. Never once had she so much as hinted that she was in the least bit uncomfortable...though he knew, at times, she was.

While he didn't want or need another Rufus on his hands in the way of complaints, he was now a little concerned that by giving Rufus such a hard time, he had inadvertently discouraged Lucy from...well, complaining about anything. "Lucy," Wyatt encouraged, "you know, if you're hurt...you can tell me."

Lucy shrugged at him, but Wyatt noted she didn't meet his eye, "I'm fine." she repeated as she pushed past him, "Like I said, I'm just a little sore from my fall...that's it." She was now easing her way up the sloping hillside, using the trees to help keep her balanced, but Wyatt noted again that she seemed to be walking a bit stiffer than usual...but, he surmised, that could be because half of her dress was wet and it was therefore more difficult to move around. As she turned back to see why he wasn’t following, Wyatt shrugged it off and joined her in a few long strides. “You’re sure, you’re okay?” he asked again as she tightly gripped a tree when he brushed past her.

“Yep.” she gulped as she forced a smile on her face, “I’m just fine.”

Casting one last skeptical look in her direction, Wyatt nodded and motioned for Lucy and Rufus to follow him, determined to keep an eye on her...just in case.

Chapter End Notes

Hello! I promised you I would try to update this while I was away and I'm keeping that promise. Technically, I'm in between trips right now, but as I'm about to push off again I thought I'd give you a little update. I debated a lot on where to end this chapter....it was initially longer, but i ultimately decided to end it where I did because I think it just flows nicer.

I actually got a lot done on this fic AND on WMHB while I was in TX. I should be able to update WMHB soon...I know I say that all the time, but I am so wrapped up in this fic, it takes precious writing time away from that one. It's essentially finished, it's just me needing to round out the narrative...but it's been that way for over a month now...I just type a paragraph here and a paragraph there as I can. What can I say? I'm living in my Stranded fic and I don't want to leave it. LOL.

Wyatt now suspects that Lucy isn't being quite as vocal about things as she could be in regards to her own comfort and well...that's going to lead us places...and I hope you'll enjoy those places as much as I've enjoyed writing them.

As for the history...that's all true. Louis Coulon was the brother of Joseph Coulon de Jumonville and while he was the only man George Washington ever surrendered to, he also was led to believe (through the interpreter) that George Washington had basically ordered the assassination of his brother via tomahawk through the skull. Needless to say, there's not a lot of love there. That one event...the murder of Joseph Coulon basically started a world war. It promoted the French to attack in retaliation against Washington at the hastily crafted Fort Necessity...(and I'm actually headed up there
with the kiddos for a visit) and well, that butt-kicking upset the British and well...all hell broke loose. As many of you know, I'm sure, the French and Indian war was also known as the Seven Year's war and was fought in Europe as well as the Americas, so yeah...things escalated to a global scale...because of one guy with a tomahawk.

Anyway, I hope you liked this update. Thanks, as always, for reading.
Though Lucy and Rufus both knew that in order to have any chance of escaping the 18th century they were going to have to find a way to use a forge, the prospect of almost certainly falling into French hands again had them both following behind Wyatt with more than few butterflies in their stomachs. While he seemed confident that they could easily infiltrate the fort’s defenses…or at least, somehow, walk in there undetected, Rufus thought that perhaps it might be better, easier…and a hell of a lot safer just to “build their own damn forge.”

“And where are you going to get the tools and supplies you need? You gonna build those too?” Wyatt called over his shoulder as they inched their way quietly through the woods.

He had him there, Rufus had to admit…though he did so begrudgingly. It wasn’t like there was a hardware store they could just pop into for supplies. Apart from needing even basic materials for building the forge – a hammer and nails, for example - there were the actual tools he would need to be a blacksmith – an anvil, tongs, hammers of different sizes and weights….

in this new and undeveloped wilderness, those kinds of tools weren’t readily available. The people here, indigenous or no, were dependent on the land or the few items they could procure from a trading post in order to survive. Sure, there were plenty of muskets, knives, and yes, maybe a few tools here and there that would certainly prove useful to them…but establishing a forge took money and resources…something they didn’t have.

Wyatt was right, this was really their best shot - crazy and desperate as it was – to repair the Lifeboat.

As they approached the convergence of the three rivers, it became readily apparent to all of them that crossing the river was the wisest move to keep themselves hidden. The bank they had been on became less of a forest and more of a wide-open field - not so by nature, but by man - as countless freshly hewn trunks dotted the landscape, leaving absolutely no place in which they would have been able to effectively keep out of sight.

The bank they were currently on however, proved a very good choice for several reasons. Obviously, the thicker foliage was a definite bonus, keeping them shielded and hidden from French sentries positioned on the balustrades. Similarly, the geographic barrier offered Wyatt, Lucy and Rufus some peace of mind. In the event that they were sighted, it would take the French crossing a wide, expansive river to come after them, and by then, they could easily find someplace to hide. Thirdly, as Wyatt had deduced from the map, the ground was elevated here, giving them a sweeping view of the Ohio River valley.
The elevated ground, while offering them a stunning and strategic view of the land around them, proved to be a little tougher to navigate, however. Rocky slopes, slick patches of mud and tangles of tree trunks, fallen limbs and underbrush, made their trek through the woods physically taxing, if not somewhat hazardous…something that began to concern Wyatt as he watched both Lucy and Rufus struggle to keep up. More than once, he found himself racing back down the path to help one of them until finally he relegated himself to the rear of their group so that he would be in a better position to catch them if they did happen to fall.

From this position too, he could better watch Lucy, whom, he noticed with slight alarm, was favoring her sides and showing more and more evidence, as they made their way up the precarious hillside that she was not as “fine” as she claimed to be. Granted, they were climbing up a fairly steep incline, but to Wyatt’s watchful eye, her breathing seemed more labored, her face looked drawn and tense, and as if he needed any other reason to suspect that something was wrong, she absolutely flinched when he braced her side right side as they clambered up and over a series of fallen tree limbs that were blocking their path to the level ground just above them.

“Whoa.” Wyatt muttered as she clenched her eyes shut and jumped at his touch, “I’m sorry…I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

“Huh?” Lucy startled, her eyes blinking open to meet his, “Oh no…it’s nothing.” she breathed out as she gulped slightly, “You didn’t hurt me…I just…I just wasn’t expecting you to…” she glanced down at her side where Wyatt was still supporting her as they climbed up the steep incline.

“Oh.” Wyatt mumbled in sudden understanding as he quickly withdrew his hand, “I…I was just worried you might fall.”

Lucy rolled her eyes in slight annoyance. She knew since her fall in the river that Wyatt was on high alert…and while it was somewhat comforting to know that he at least cared about her enough to worry about her health and well-being, right now she just needed him to leave her the hell alone. All she wanted more than anything in the world was a chance to get out of the damn corset that was doing a number on her rib cage…but no way was she going to tell him that. He had already bitten through her underwear once before…and as enticing as she thought an encore performance of that might be…particularly when it came to this 18th century straight jacket currently squeezing her torso…she was supposed to be keeping him at arm’s length.

And well, how was she supposed to do that when he was constantly holding her hand, wrapping his arm around her waist and hovering around her like some sort of rescue drone?

“Really, Wyatt.” Lucy sighed in exasperation, “I’ve told you…I’m not hurt. You don’t need to
worry, I’m fi…” she began but at that very moment, she lost her footing and slipped backwards, only to find herself safely and firmly held in Wyatt’s arms.

_Dammit._

“You were saying, ma’am?” he asked with a smirk as she looked back at him, stunned and not quite able to move…not even sure if she wanted to.

“You two okay down there?” Rufus asked as he looked down on them in concern, but seeing a now fully blushing Lucy being held closely by Wyatt, he nodded awkwardly as he turned around once more, “Never mind…”

Rolling _his_ eyes now, Wyatt attempted to set Lucy back down, but once again, she lost her footing and slipped, this time falling forward onto the large limbs blocking their path. “Shit…Lucy…are…are you okay?” he asked as he scrambled to help her, but Lucy was already frantically attempting to clamber up the fallen tree to safety.

“I’m fine!” she insisted, but the weight of her soaked skirts and the slick mud on her shoes only worked to hinder her efforts.

“Lucy…” Wyatt scoffed as he watched her struggle, halfway amused at her determination, “you’re gonna…Lucy, will you just let me help you?” he asked in annoyance as she tripped and fell forward once more.

“No!” she spat out a little rougher than usual, willing the flush in her cheeks to dissipate, “I can do it on my own.” Ripping off her shoes and clutching them in her hands, Lucy lifted her skirts and with a face full of determination, she made her way up the side of the hill, clambering over the branches with…not exactly grace and poise…but with a resolve that Wyatt, despite being frustrated by her stubbornness, couldn’t help but admire.

She slipped several more times, but rebuffed each and every effort Wyatt made at helping her until finally, they neared the crest of the hill where it became infuriatingly obvious to Lucy that she was not going to be able to reach the top on her own…not with her shoes and her skirts gathered up in her hands. Wyatt, seeing her predicament, called out to a waiting Rufus to give Lucy a hand up. “Here, give me those.” he offered with a nod towards her shoes as Rufus came into view just above them.
“I can handle it, Wyatt.” Lucy protested, “I’m not completely helpless, you know.”

“I know you’re not,” he acknowledged, “but it’s gonna be a hell of a lot easier to climb if your hands aren’t full.” Looking up, he nodded to Rufus, “You ready?” and without so much as a warning, he bent down, wrapped his arms around Lucy’s knees and hoisted her up so that she could easily reach Rufus’ outstretched hands.

“Wh…what are you doing?” she gasped out in surprise, swaying slightly while she frantically grasped onto Rufus’ outstretched arm.

“Giving you a boost.” Wyatt grunted. “You got her, Rufus?”

“Yeah, I got her” he called back as he helped pull Lucy onto level ground. Breathless and panting she sat there on her knees, as Wyatt quickly joined them, dropping her shoes on the ground next to her. “You’re welcome.” he muttered grumpily.

Shoving her shoes back on her feet, Lucy mumbled her thanks, wiped the dirt off her hands and trudged forward, leaving Wyatt and Rufus behind in her wake. Rufus watched her go in bemusement, “What’s the matter with her?”

Wyatt shrugged in frustration, “She keeps saying she’s fine…but I know she’s not. She’s just being stubborn…won’t admit that she needs help…she’s gonna kill herself trying to prove some kind of damn point.”

Rufus raised his eyebrows in amusement, “Yeah? Well, that’s not really surprising.” At Wyatt’s puzzled expression, Rufus rolled his eyes, “When has Lucy ever not been tenacious as hell? Think about Wyatt…every damn mission we’ve been on she’s been….. you know…”

Wyatt did know.

Lucy Preston was a bossy know it all with a stubborn streak a mile wide…and that stubbornness usually pitted her into dangerous situations that usually required him to run in at the last minute to save her ass. When he first met her, he thought she would be cowering behind him every damn second…hell, she was freaking out about historically accurate underwear for crying out loud. But then before he knew it, she was running off alone, chasing down one of Flynn’s guys until that asshole had her pinned up against a wall. Hell, she even confronted Flynn himself…and both times Wyatt had told her not to do it, not to engage, and both times she hadn’t listened.
That, however, was nothing compared to 1944 Germany where she insisted on waltzing into a party filled with goose-stepping Nazi jackasses, despite not even knowing how to speak or even understand German. She knew damn well that Wyatt wouldn’t be there to protect her, that there was a good chance Flynn would be in there ready to do Lord knows what…and yet again, she did whatever the hell she wanted…and yet again, he had to rescue her at the very last minute.

So yes, Lucy Preston was stubborn as hell and it had gotten her into trouble more than once…but this time…well, this time there was no overarching mission that needed to be dealt with…there was no Flynn to chase down through history. This time, there was no excuse.

So why the hell wouldn’t she let him help her?

“Maybe you should ask her that.” Rufus suggested, as Wyatt’s eyes shot up to him in confusion.

“I was…just…I didn’t think I said that out loud.”

Rufus sighed, “Look man, I know you don’t want to hear it, but maybe the reason Lucy didn’t let you help her is…because she didn’t need your help.”

“You saw her, Rufus.” Wyatt protested, “she was tripping all over the place.

“So was I.” Rufus admitted, “but you weren’t buzzing around me like you were buzzing around her.”

“Are we seriously going through this again?” Wyatt sighed out in exasperation, “This isn’t about playing favorites. She fell…Rufus…and dammit, I know she’s hurt…she’s just too stubborn to admit it.

Rufus shrugged, “I’m not a doctor…but, if Lucy was really hurt, I don’t think she would’ve been able to do what she just did.” he said with a nod towards the rocky hill they had just climbed, “I think maybe you just need to trust that sometimes…she can take care of herself.” he added meaningfully.

Wyatt’s eyes darted to Rufus’ for just a moment before the time machine pilot outpaced him in an
attempt to catch up with Lucy. Left alone with his thoughts, Wyatt mused over what Rufus had just said.

He knew that Lucy could take care of herself...he had seen her do things on these missions that he
never would have expected her to be able or willing to do when he first met her. Who would have
ever expected a claustrophobic, high-strung college professor to even agree to do something like
this?

Certainly not him.

When Lucy predictably raced out of Mason Industries before that Hindenburg Mission, Wyatt had
gone into the locker room silently congratulating himself for pegging her as the worst possible
candidate for the job. When he emerged moments later and found her arguing about historically
accurate underwear, however, he had to admit...it surprised him. And Lucy continued to surprise
him. Hell, during their last mission she double-crossed Flynn, saved the Doc and came to his own
rescue...going so far as to try to battle off one of Flynn’s assholes with a lamp.

She hadn’t listened to him on that mission either...but he couldn’t deny that her stubbornness,
while infuriating, had saved him once or twice.

Lucy may have been a nervous wreck during that Hindenburg mission, but she was the one who
got Admiral Rosendahl to alert the base to Flynn’s presence. He may have killed a few Nazis in
1944, but it was Lucy who got them out of that damn castle alive. Hell, when he was ready to give
it all up at the Alamo, it was Lucy who ran out in the middle of the battle to literally save his life...
and in 1972 when he was handcuffed to a damn chair, Lucy and Rufus went out, alone and
unprotected...and saved the day.

Maybe Rufus was right. Maybe he was underestimating her...

But dammit, he knew she was in pain...he could see it....and while it was easy for Rufus to shrug
it off as no big deal, Wyatt couldn’t...because it was his job to protect the team...to protect her...
whether she liked it or not.

He was so caught up in his thoughts that he nearly collided with Lucy when she suddenly stopped
in front of him. He was just about to ask her what was wrong when with awe-struck wonder she
gasped, “There it is.”
Stretching out before them, the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers cut through the untamed wilderness, winding their way through the hills and valleys of what would become Western Pennsylvania, until converging together and forming the massive Ohio. While, in itself, a sight to behold, Lucy’s attention was arrested by the one place that had eluded them since their arrival here four days ago…the indomitable Fort Duquesne.

It was a large and formidable looking edifice; jutting out like a star right at the triangulation of land that commanded the waterways, making it the ideal spot not only for defense, but for trade…something Lucy was all too ready to point out as Wyatt used his stolen spy glass to study the fort’s defenses. “There,” she said as she pointed down towards the fort, “you see…there…they’re strengthening the defenses with that outer wall. And to think this whole thing was only built in a few months.”

Forgetting her earlier self-admonition to keep Wyatt at a safe and respectable distance, Lucy crouched down next to him behind a large boulder at the very edge of the ridge overlooking the rivers and the fort – too wrapped up in the sight before her to care much about anything else. It truly was a breathtaking sight to behold. Rolling hills and forests that seemed to stretch on forever, three rivers glistening like gold in the afternoon sun, and there in the midst of it all, a place she had only read about it in history books.

The fort itself was shaped like a lop-sided star with sentries posted on the diamond shaped balustrades that jutted out at every tip. It was surrounded by a wall that was in turn, surrounded by another wall that enclosed a much larger area, surrounding not just the fort, but numerous buildings and houses. She had always read how small the fort was in comparison to others of its day, but after seeing so little in the way of civilization in the past four days, she couldn’t help but be impressed by the size, considering how truly isolated they were.

“You see how the outer wall juts out and over here on the left?” Lucy continued to whisper excitedly by Wyatt’s ear as they settled down behind a large boulder right on the crest of the ridge overlooking the valley, “All those buildings there? Those are living quarters for the soldiers, families…traders, colonists…” she explained. He turned to look at her, as her face lit up with a now familiar enthusiasm that always spoke to her absolute delight at seeing things or meeting people she had only read about, in person.

When he had first met her, he found this excitement irritating, if not completely and unbelievably nerdy…but then he met Ian Fleming…and Jim Bowie…and well, he didn’t exactly have a leg to stand on. How excited had he been to find out after coming back from 1944 Germany that there was not only a new Bond film to add to his collection, but that he was in it? How humbled had he been when Jim Bowie handed him his famous knife moments before meeting his fateful end at the Alamo?

Fanboyung didn’t even cover it.
He could now understand why someone like Lucy, who had devoted her whole life to history, would be over the moon about something as mundane as a colonial fort...this was her Bowie knife...hell, just about everything was her Bowie knife. That’s why, now, Wyatt couldn’t help but smile as she gushed over every detail of the fort’s appearance.

“It’s certainly not as formidable as Fort Niagara and not as large as Fort Pitt will be one day, but for being out here on their own like this?” Lucy shook her head, “Do you know, those walls are six feet thick?

“Only six feet?” Rufus said sarcastically. “Oh yeah, breaking into this fort is gonna be easy as hell…”

“It actually doesn’t stand much of a chance against the British cannon.” Lucy informed him with a serious nod, “something the French knew...all too well. Next spring, the British will make another advance against the fort, but the French, knowing the fort’s weakness, decide to meet them about 10 miles away from here and decimate Braddock’s army...Washington is the only officer who survives. It’s not until 1758 that the British make another attempt at Fort Duquesne and the French, by that time are so low on food and morale, they burn the fort before the British can even launch an attack.”

Wyatt quirked his lip, “Too bad we don’t have a damn cannon.” Looking down at the fort through the spy glass, Wyatt hummed, “It doesn’t look too bad though...not a lot of French soldiers…”

“No, the strength of this fort came from its position.” Lucy said with a nod, “by sitting here, at the junction of these three rivers…”

…it could control anything that passed through here.” Wyatt finished for her with a thoughtful grunt.

“What about all those buildings there?” Rufus asked, shoving his arm between the two of them, “Outside the gates...right along the river?”

“That would be the trading post.” Lucy answered with a shrug. “Before Fort Duquesne was ever built the British had an established trading post here.”

“That explains why they were so pissed.” Wyatt mused, “this is prime real estate. If they were
already up in arms about the British encroaching on their territory…”

“Exactly,” Lucy nodded, “when Tanacharison suggested to the British that they fortify their position here, the French panicked and moved in…ousting the British completely from this area which, of course leads to…”

“A hatchet in the head for the French dude…” Rufus said with a low whistle.

“Well, it makes sense.” Wyatt shrugged. “These rivers…they’re basically an 18th century interstate.”

“Yeah…well, unless there’s a McDonald’s or a 7/11 down there…I don’t care.” Rufus grumbled miserably, “That trading post doesn’t do us any good if it’s run by people who are dead set on killing us.”

Lucy rolled her eyes, “They’re not the ones trying to kills us…I hardly think they’d turn down a chance to make some money or to score a good deal. The French may not have liked the British competition, but that doesn’t mean they were above selling to them.”

“Right.” Wyatt chuckled, “The British could stay here as long as they played by their rules and coughed up some cold hard cash…is that it?”

“Or tobacco, or coffee…or tea.” Lucy added with a shrug. “It wasn’t necessarily all about money in these days…it was just as much about goods and commodities. When living quite literally in the middle of nowhere, things people in the coastal cities or in Europe took for granted became almost more valuable than gold or silver.”

“I guess so.” Rufus conceded with a frown, “Can’t say I blame them…I’ve only been here four days and I’d give anything for a chocodile.”

“What?” Wyatt asked as he lowered the spyglass and turned to an equally stupefied Lucy, “What the hell is a chocodile?”

“It’s a Twinkie…” Rufus explained in astonishment, “covered in chocolate.” He looked almost offended when they both shrugged at him in total bewilderment, “Are you…are you telling me you never had a chocodile?”
“I’ve never even heard of a chocodile.” Lucy stated blankly.

“You both have had Twinkies, though, right? Your childhoods didn’t completely suck?”

“I know what a Twinkie is, Rufus.” Lucy breathed out in exasperation as she took the spyglass from Wyatt and began looking at the fort herself.

“Bet you didn’t eat them though, right?” Rufus muttered, “High-society, Stanford girl like you? Nah…you were probably all about the Little Debbie’s.”

“I did like Oatmeal Cream Pies.” Lucy acknowledged with a smirk as she turned from the spyglass and looked at him. “But I had my fair share of Twinkies too. Do you know that originally Twinkies used to be filled with banana cream? They switched to vanilla because of the rations imposed during World War II.”

“You know that, but you’ve never heard of a chocodile?” Rufus asked incredulously. “Can you believe this, Wyatt?”

“No…” he muttered as he took the spyglass back from Lucy, “I can’t believe that we are literally across from the French fort we’ve been searching for for days and you two are sitting around here talking about junk food.”

“Oh, I’m sorry, Delta Force.” Rufus quipped, “I guess you weren’t allowed to bask in the deliciousness that is processed sugar and trans fats…”

Wyatt sighed in resignation as he acknowledged, “I was more of a Swiss Roll guy.” Before Rufus could respond with either his love or condemnation of his snack cake of choice, Wyatt shifted the conversation back to the task at hand. “So, let me get this straight, the British set up a trading post here, that Tanacharison guy thought it’d be a great idea if they went ahead and built a fort too, the French didn’t like it, kicked them out and so the first chance he got, he took out his frustrations on the first French commander he saw?”

“Pretty much.” Lucy said with a nod.
"I don’t get it." Rufus asked with a shrug, “I mean, if the British were already trading here without starting a war, why wave a red flag in their faces? It seems to me that’s just asking for trouble.”

Wyatt frowned, “Maybe they just wanted the added protection of the fort? This isn’t exactly the safest neighborhood…”

“It might have been part of the reason he encouraged the British to fortify this area, but I think he was more concerned with giving them a strategic advantage. Remember Tanacharison hated the French. As leader of Iroquois Confederacy, he saw them as encroaching on his land and stirring up the other Indian tribes against him and his people. Plus, he was actually close friends with the men who established this trading post.” she explained. “William Trent…his father actually founded Trenton, New Jersey, was a wealthy merchant…came out here to build his own trade empire.” She nodded thoughtfully, “And…he actually did a pretty good job of it, learned the Indian languages, built up some useful alliances and friendships. His partner, George Croghan, really revolutionized the way the British began trading. Instead of just setting up trading posts like these,” she said with a nod towards the bustling dock, “he actually began setting up trading posts within the Native American villages themselves.”

Wyatt turned to Lucy with new interest, “Wait…are these guys…this William Trent and George Croghan…are they here right now?”

“No.” she muttered as she shook her head despondently, “After the Battles of Jumonville Glen and Fort Necessity, William Trent left for Virginia with George Washington…commissioned in the British army, received command of his own regiment.”

“So, wait - he just left everything behind to join the army?” Rufus asked incredulously.

“Well, what else could he do?” Lucy asked with a shrug, “It’s not like he could just set up shop next door…not without some sort of protection…especially not after…what happened.” she explained with a grimace.

“So where is this Tanacharison now?” Wyatt asked, “Why isn’t he out here forming up some plan to take all of this back? I mean, if this fort was his idea…”

“Well…after the British loss at Fort Necessity he and his wife sort of…fled the area.” Lucy said with a shrug.
Rufus let out a derisive laugh, “Ha, I wonder why? I’d skip out of town too if I had eaten the brains of a guy whose brother had a whole damn army to kick my ass with.”

So, I guess he headed off to Virginia too, then?” Wyatt asked with a shrug.

“No, George Croghan actually invited Tanacharison and his wife to stay with him at his estate near Harrisburg…about 200 miles east of here…not that it makes much difference;” Lucy remarked, “he and his wife will both be dead before the year is out.”

“What…does somebody bash his brains in?” Rufus asked with raised eyebrows.

“No…” Lucy said with a shrug, “they both just get very sick and die within a few weeks of each other.”

“Well…that’s kind of…anti-climactic.” Rufus mused in disappointment, “You’d think that guy would have died…I don’t know…Geronimo style.”

“Geronimo died of pneumonia, Rufus.” Lucy said flatly.

“Well, you know what I mean.” Rufus spat out, “Someone that badass isn’t the person you’d expect to die…lying in a bed…unless you know, someone murdered them in a bed.”

Wyatt rubbed his jaw in frustration. “Dammit. If just one of those guys was still here,” Wyatt murmured almost to himself, “we could use their trading posts for supplies instead of worrying about the French army breathing down our necks.”

“I think you’re forgetting that we’re gonna have the French army breathing down our damn necks anyway,” Rufus reminded him, “we’re gonna need to get in there to use that forge…and unless one of you has mad blacksmithing skills you haven’t told me about, I’m guessing we’re gonna need to go in there more than once. I may not know the first thing about being a blacksmith, but I do know that’s not just something you…ya know…pick up.”

Lucy rubbed her forehead in frustration, “Maybe…maybe there’s another way…maybe if we find someone else who has a forge…”
‘Are you kidding me right now?’ Rufus asked incredulously, “Look around…there’s nothing here.” Rufus shook his head. “We don’t even know where the hell we’re going to live.”

“I know, Rufus.” Lucy snapped in exasperation, “I’m just thinking, okay?” she trailed off, her brow furrowed in concentration as she thought over their situation. As much as she hated the idea of throwing themselves into the path of the French army again, there really wasn’t much they could do – they were desperate and therefore, would have to take the risk. She buried her face in her hands as she silently cursed Flynn for stranding them in 1754. With tensions so high and the French now believing them to be spies, Rufus was right, the situation was all but hopeless. She looked down at the fort despondently, thinking of the larger and much grander Fort Pitt that would replace it one day…the beginnings of what would be modern-day Pittsburgh…not that Fort Duquesne would be completely erased from its history. The elevated land where she was currently sitting with Wyatt and Rufus was known in modern times as Duquesne Heights. Heck, even the spot where they crossed the river earlier had its origins from this war, McKee’s Rocks, named for…

“Alexander McKee.” Lucy said with a gasp before turning suddenly to a confused Wyatt, “Quick,” she demanded, “give me the map.”

“Who?” he asked as he handed over the map in confusion, but she didn’t respond. Instead, she shook it open and began poring over it in rapt excitement. Wyatt and Rufus looked on, completely bewildered until she finally looked up from the map, a triumphant smirk firmly planted on her face. “Okay, Lucy…care to elaborate?” Wyatt sighed, “Who is Alexander McKee?”

“Where we crossed earlier?” she explained excitedly, “That was a place known as McKee’s Rocks, named for one Alexander McKee who was another business partner of our friends William Trent and George Croghan.”

“And?” Rufus quipped with a shrug.

“And,” Lucy said excitedly, “not only was he a successful fur trader and merchant, he was also a very influential Indian agent.” she added emphatically.

“How influential?” Wyatt asked skeptically, “He’s not one of those assholes giving out small pox blankets, is he?”

Lucy shook her head, “No. His mother was kidnapped and adopted into the Shawnee tribe…he was basically raised by Native Americans. Later, he’ll go on to marry and have a son with The Grenadier Squaw herself, Nonhelema…”
“Nona…who?” Rufus and Wyatt asked together, looking at Lucy with expressions of complete bewilderment. It wasn’t that they weren’t used to her fangirling over historical figures…they absolutely were by now…but Lucy also had a knack for the arbitrary…and her excitement for it didn’t necessarily mean anything except that Lucy Preston, as Rufus always put it, was getting her “geek on.”

With that in mind, Rufus rolled his eyes and huffed, “Is this somebody we should know…or is this just some weird historical figure that only people like you know?”

“Nonhelema.” Lucy said more slowly as she looked at the two of them expectantly. “She was a great warrior chieftess of the Shawnee, she fought in the Battle of Bushy Run…they called her The Grenadier because she was so tall…”

Rufus stared blankly at her, “So a tall Indian chick…that’s…that’s who you’re excited about? What was she like 5’11?”

Lucy glared at him, “Try 6’6.” she admonished. “Serious, she’s up there with the likes of Pocohontas and Sacagewea. You know who they are, right?”

Rufus shrugged as he looked at Wyatt, “Sure, Pocohontas is a Disney Princess…ya know…the one in love with Mel Gib…I mean, John Smith…ran around with that raccoon singing about rivers and colors in the wind and shit. And Sacagewea” Rufus mused thoughtfully, “wasn’t she that Indian girl that had a thing with Teddy Roosevelt?”

Lucy gaped at him in complete and utter disbelief, before burying her face in her hands, “Oh my God, Rufus.” she gritted out in a muffled voice, “Please tell me you are joking…”

“What?” he asked, completely nonplussed, “Is that not right?”

Taking several deep breaths, Lucy finally lowered her hands, “No…that’s not right.” She said in a voice of forced calm, “That’s completely wrong. Like…so wrong. Like…I can’t even begin to tell you how very wrong you are about all of that.”

Rufus made to argue, but Wyatt silenced him with a shake of his head.
For your information, “Pocohontas was the daughter of Powhatan…a great chief who welcomed the settlers to Jamestown…”

“So she was a princess…” Rufus quipped, but Lucy merely glared at him and continued.

“And she may have saved John Smith’s life, but she actually married John Rolfe and their marriage helped bring about a peace between the Powhatan people and the Virginia colonists for eight years.” Taking a deep breath she continued, “As for Sacagewea…”

“She was the guide who led Lewis and Clark on their exploration of the lands we got from the Louisiana Purchase” Wyatt finished for her, “and no,” he added as he glared pointedly at Rufus, “she did not have a “thing” with Teddy Roosevelt.”

Lucy nodded her head emphatically, “Yes…thank you, Wyatt. I’m glad at least one of you knows your history from something other than Disney movies.”

Wyatt shot Rufus a triumphant smirk, which set him grumbling, “Whatever man, I know you got that Sacagewea thing from Almost Heroes.”

Wyatt shrugged indiscernibly before clearing his throat and turning back to Lucy with a slight smirk, “Okay, so Nonhelema…

“She’s extremely powerful…and very influential in this region.” Lucy said with a meaningful nod.

Wyatt scoffed, “Lucy, I’m still not sure what any of this has to do with us…didn’t you say the Shawnee were fighting alongside the French?

“Yes, but…Alexander McKee…”

“Is she married to that dude right now?” Rufus asked with raised eyebrows.

“Well…no…but…”

“But nothing, Lucy…we’re still in the same damn spot we were before. The French hate us and
our only lead for a trading post outside of this damn fort is tied up with Indians who also…probably hate us.”

“Alexander McKee was raised practically raised by the Shawnee,” Lucy reminded him gruffly, “even if he’s not married to Nonhelema yet…the fact that is he’s a British Indian agent with a trading post, with some kind of influence with the Shawnee…that gives us an advantage…”

Wyatt frowned thoughtfully, “Do you know where we can find this guy?”

“No exactly.” Lucy admitted with a gulp, “but there are a few Native American villages on this map,” she said with a nod of her head, “it’s just a matter of asking…”

“And if we ask the wrong ones?” Rufus said in a voice heightened with anxiety, “What then?”

“He’s got a point, Lucy.” Wyatt said with a shrug, “we have no idea what we’re walking into…hell, we don’t even know if we’d even be able to communicate with them…”

Well…maybe we still could.” Lucy frowned thoughtfully. “I mean, we’d have to find them…and it would require meeting up with a few paranoid natives…”

“Hell no.” Rufus said with a frantic shake of his head, “we already know what they did to that French guy…I don’t know about you two, but I’d rather not risk a hatchet to the skull…I’d just as soon take my chances with the whole damn French army. Let’s face it,” he continued, “we’re screwed any way we look at this. We might as well just come to grips with the fact that we’re living here now because there is no way in hell we’re getting in that fort…I mean look at that thing.” Rufus said as he motioned roughly towards the looming walls of Fort Duquesne. “It’s got two damn walls surrounding it…two.”

“It also has gates.” Wyatt reminded him as he picked up the spy glass again.

“So, your solution to all of this is…what? Knock on the door and ask to use their forge?” Rufus spat out, “Didn’t I say that this morning? Because I’m pretty sure I said that this morning and you said…and I quote, “That’s a good way to get us all killed.”” Rufus mimicked angrily, “So now, what? You’ve changed your mind?”

“No.” Wyatt said with a small shake of his head and a frown, “I just think getting into that fort isn’t
“Wyatt, the minute we go down there, they’re gonna string us up on the nearest tree…”

Wyatt rolled his eyes in exasperation, “They don’t have pictures of us plastered all over the news, Rufus…only a handful of soldiers know what we look like…”

“Yes, but Wyatt…if that officer was Louis Coulon, he’s the commander of Fort Duquesne.” Lucy reminded him, “He is definitely going to remember us…well, at least you and me anyway.”

“Exactly.” Wyatt said with a meaningful nod towards Rufus who suddenly looked at Wyatt and Lucy with alarm.

“Oh no….no way in hell. If you think I’m gonna go in there by myself, you’re out of your damn mind.”

“C’mon Rufus, those soldiers hardly looked at you…” Wyatt soothed.

“Yeah, because I didn’t give them a reason to – you were the one who had to go and piss everybody off with your “I’m a bad ass” routine. Why should I have to suffer because you couldn’t keep your cool for two damn seconds?”

Rolling his eyes, Wyatt huffed, “You want me to go in there with you? Fine…I’ll go…but I’m telling you right now, you’re going to have less chance of being caught if you go in there by yourself.”

“He’s right, Rufus.” Lucy quietly agreed. “Chances are they’ve already told everyone in the fort about us…if we go in there together,” she shook her head and offered him an apologetic frown, “it’ll be much safer if only one of us goes…”

“Safer for who? For you? For Wyatt? Because it sure as hell won’t be safer for me.”

Wyatt handed him the spy glass, “Look down there.” he requested as Rufus looked up at him defiantly, “Please? Just look, okay?” Reluctantly, Rufus lifted the spy glass and peered through,
“What do you see?”

“A hell of a lot of soldiers…with guns.”

“Look at the gate, Rufus.” Wyatt breathed out in exasperation.

“It’s open…I see… um…men…black men…working on the outer wall…and bringing in crates from the dock.” he answered with a resigned sigh.

“Exactly.” Wyatt said with a nod, ‘So you go down there and you blend in…no one’s gonna suspect anything if you go in that fort…I’ve been watching them since we got here…they go in and out all the time. No one looks at them twice.”

“I feel like I should be offended by this conversation.” Rufus muttered grumpily as he scowled at Lucy and Wyatt. “If no one is gonna look at me twice, why the hell wouldn’t they look at you twice? It was dark…and like you said, it was just a handful of soldiers out there…”

“Look, Rufus…I know you’re scared…and it’s okay.” Wyatt assured, “But I sure as hell can’t go down there. Lucy’s right, they’d remember me. And it’s even more dangerous for Lucy…I mean, you saw what they did to her at that camp.”

“Mmm…that was one guy, and he’s dead now so…”

“It’s a trading post,” Wyatt continued to argue, completely ignoring Rufus’ last statement, “people come here all the time to buy and to sell…no one is going to suspect a thing. Just get in, get an idea of where that forge is, and see how many soldiers are hanging around it.” Rufus let out a heavy sigh as Wyatt continued, “You know I wouldn’t send you in there on your own if I thought you’d be killed.” His lip curled in a half smile, “I mean, if you die, we’re stuck here, right?” Rufus stared hard back at Wyatt, not finding his joke in funny in the least, “C’mon man, it’s just a reconnaissance mission” Wyatt pleaded, “get in, look around…and get out…and then we can try to figure out if we even have a chance at using that thing.”

Rufus looked hopelessly back at the fort, absolute fear and dread apparent on his face. His eyes fell on the laborers outside of the wall, both bringing in supplies and working to secure the fort’s defenses. Wyatt was right, no one was giving them a second look…and even though he hated to admit it, he knew Wyatt was also right…out of all of them, Rufus would be the one the French soldiers would least remember or care about. With a heavy sigh, he rose to his feet, before turning
to Lucy and Wyatt with a scowl, “I better not regret this.”

Chapter End Notes

I finished this chapter while I was in Texas but I forgot my computer on my next trip and therefore couldn't post it until today now that I'm back home...so I apologize for the delay.

There's a lot of history in this chapter, i know, but I have to set the stage for what it coming...so bear with me. All of that about William Trent, George Croghan and Alexander McKee is true. Nonhelema, while she plays a role in Stranded, doesn't REALLY play a role in the French and Indian war from what I could find in any of my reading other than she marries and has a son with Alexander McKee (Thomas). While Alexander is a British Indian agent and her tribe and loyalties seemed to be allied with the French, I'm thinking since Alexander McKee was practically part of the Shawnee tribe, his own political alliances were sort of overlooked...or ya know since Nonhelema was 6'6 no one dared question her choice of relationships...either way...all true. She doesn't really do much until the Pontiac's Rebellion when she fights in the Battle of Bushy Run (1763). Though I can't find anything for sure that tells me when she and Alexander met, their son Thomas, was born in 1770 ....so well after the events here.

If you'd like a visual on what the fort looked like, you can view it here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Duquesne

For those of you who celebrate it, I hope you had a great 4th! Thanks for reading!
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

“Just relax.”

Lucy bristled as she huffed out a frustrated breath. Wyatt had been telling her to “just relax” for the better part of an hour and still there was no sign of Rufus. Casting an angry glare towards him before she turned her attention back to the large wooden gate of Fort Duquesne, Lucy muttered angrily, “I told you I should have gone in there with him…he doesn’t speak French…”

Wyatt rolled his eyes, “He was just going to go in, look around for the forge and come back out. He wasn’t going to talk to anybody.”

“Well, that was almost an hour ago, Wyatt.” Lucy argued as she brushed her damp hair away from her face, “And now, they’ve closed the gate. Where is he?”

“I don’t know…maybe he’s trying to find it. Maybe he got lost. Maybe…”

“Maybe he’s been captured.” Lucy finished for him anxiously as she gathered up her soaked skirts and made to move out of their hiding place, just beyond the edge of the woods, “I’m going to look for him.”

“The hell you are.” Wyatt hissed at her as he tugged on her arm and made her sit down again. “What are you going to do, walk over there and knock on the damn door? Just relax.” Wyatt repeated in a voice dripping with exasperation, ‘He’ll be here.”

“How can you be so sure?” Lucy countered angrily, “Anything could have happened to him in there…we have no way of knowing…not unless one of us goes in there to look for him…and since you don’t speak French…”

“We talked about this,” Wyatt gritted out, “it’s too dangerous for you to go in there on your own.”

Lucy rolled her eyes, “I wouldn’t have been on my own,” she snapped back, “I would’ve had Rufus.”
Wyatt visibly flinched as he quietly scoffed, “Yeah…you have no problem with him helping you out, right?” He glared meaningfully at Lucy as she flushed, “Just me.”

Lucy swallowed hard as she looked from Wyatt back to the closed gate of the fort, wishing Rufus would reappear not just to ease her own concerns, but also to help ease the tension that seemed to be ever growing between her and Wyatt. She had spent the entire morning rebuffing his attempts at assistance, knowing full-well that it was driving him crazy, but it was something she needed to do, particularly since he was treating her with so much care and concern.

She didn’t need to find herself foolishly hoping for something that would never happen.

So yes, she did have a problem with Wyatt helping her…which is exactly why things went from bad to worse when they made their way down from that rocky summit….and exactly why both she and Wyatt were now at each other’s throats.

Earlier that day…

Though the trek down the hill was not nearly as difficult as the climb up, it still wasn’t without its dangers. Wyatt led the way, waiting at the bottom of steep drops to make sure neither Rufus nor Lucy came to any trouble…something Rufus was grateful for, but Lucy…not so much. Every time Wyatt would hold out his arms to help her, she would look at him uncomfortably and shake her head, maintaining stubbornly, “I can do it.”

Wyatt didn’t blame her for maintaining her independent spirit…not at first, anyway, particularly since he remembered how she had told him her near fatal accident had made her always seek out situations in which she could control. These missions had challenged her in that respect and this one…well, this one had basically thrown all control out of the damn window. If she was constantly relying on others for help, she was giving that up…so if this is what she needed to do to feel like she still had some say so over her own life, he figured, then so be it.

He was just going to be just as determined to make sure she didn’t kill herself in the process.

Lucy struggled…and Wyatt, of course, noticed…and he wasn’t about to let her hurt herself. Yes, she was stubborn…but it wouldn’t benefit any of them if she broke her neck. Despite her protestations, therefore, he waited patiently for her at the foot of every precarious drop, on the other side of every obstacle and even offered to hold her shoes again when he saw her struggle to shimmy herself down a fallen log rather than make an attempt at the mud slick path next to it. Yet
time and time again, she completely refused any assistance from him, but instead, relied on Rufus to steady her as she made her way down hills, held onto Rufus’ hand when she needed support, and even allowed Rufus to lift her up and over a series of jutting rocks that blocked their path.

While it bothered Wyatt that she seemed to be doing everything in her power to avoid his help, he was doing his damndest not to take it personally. She was stubborn, she was proud…and to accept his help would therefore, require a lot of pride-swallowing on her part. Still, seeing her cling to Rufus instead of him filled him with something…and while he didn’t want to dwell on what that something was he was pretty damn sure that if Rufus happened to trip and fall, rendering him incapable of helping Lucy any further, he wouldn’t have cared in the least.

When they got to McKee’s Rocks, Rufus and Wyatt easily made their way across the river, but for Lucy, encumbered as she was by her skirts, it was a little more difficult. She hadn’t even moved from the boulder where she had last fallen before Wyatt turned around and saw her hesitating. Determined to be the one to see her safely across the river, Wyatt leapt easily from the safety of the shore to the boulder Lucy was preparing to jump to, causing her to look back at him in indignation, ‘What are you doing?’

“I’m making sure you don’t fall again.” Wyatt said simply as he held out his arms. “C’mon, jump…I’ll catch you.”

Screwing her face up in determination, Lucy made ready to take a flying leap off of the boulder, but memories of Wyatt’s strong hands around her waist made her falter, “I… I can’t jump while you’re standing there.”

“There’s plenty of room,” Wyatt shrugged, “C’mon Lucy…you can do it…just pretend I’m not here.”

Lucy let out an incredulous laugh at that. Even as she steeled herself for the jump, she knew full-well that there was no way she could pretend Wyatt was not there…especially not now that he had shucked off his coat and was now standing before her in just his white shirt and vest. Shaking her head, she cast her eyes down at the swirling water between them, wondering vaguely how deep and how cold it might be. Biting her lip, she looked from Wyatt to the water, inwardly berating herself for being so silly.

So she had a crush on Wyatt…she was an adult, not some dewy-eyed teenager…she could master her emotions. She could…”Wh…what are you doing?” Lucy asked with a gasp as Wyatt began unbuttoning his vest.
“Water doesn’t look too deep here,” Wyatt shrugged as he began taking off his shoes, “I’ll just carry you across.”

“No.” Lucy said with a shake of her head, “It’s okay…you don’t have to…” but Wyatt was already easing himself off the rock and into the icy river.

Gulping as he slowly waded his way towards her, Lucy watched as he inched every closer, the water rippling just at his chest. More now than ever, Lucy was resolved to not allow him to help her. Looking towards the boulder he had just vacated, Lucy was all but prepared to make a jump for it when suddenly he was there, tapping at her shoes, urging her to leave the safety of her boulder and clamber into his arms. “C’mon Lucy…it’s not that cold.”

“No…I can do it, Wyatt.” Lucy said with a determined shake of her head, “just…just give me a second.”

“Lucy,” he sighed in exasperation, “come on. You won’t even get that wet. Just let me carry you so you won’t hurt yourself again.” he insisted.

“I didn’t hurt myself.” Lucy argued as he tugged on her foot…not realizing that at that moment she was preparing to jump. With Wyatt’s hand on her shoe, Lucy’s leap turned into a stumble and before either one of them knew what was happening, she tumbled head first into the icy water. She could barely hear the warbled sound of Wyatt’s shouts over the rushing water thundering in her ears as she clawed her way to the surface, the weight of her dress and the rush of the river hindering her efforts considerably. She emerged from the water with a gasping breath, desperately attempting to gain her footing while the heavy fabric pulled her further down river. She had just managed to stand when the current sent her careening backwards into the water once more.

Suddenly, Wyatt was there, his arms wrapped around her as he half dragged, half-carried her through the water to the shore where a concerned Rufus was waiting. Coughing and spluttering, Lucy clung to Wyatt’s shoulders, as he pulled her onto the safety of solid ground, both of them breathless, panting…and soaking wet.

“What the hell were you thinking?” Wyatt asked roughly in between breaths.

“Me?” Lucy protested as she sat up and shook her wet hair out of her face, “What about you? I told you I could do it” she spat out angrily, “and I could have, if you hadn’t tripped me.”
“Tripped you?” Wyatt asked incredulously, “Why the hell did you jump? I told you I would carry you across.”

And I told you I didn’t need any help.” Lucy said with a huff, absolutely hating everything about her 18th century attire now. Soaked with water, her already heavy dress felt like it weighed 75 pounds as she unsteadily got to her feet. Her stockinged feet sloshed in her shoes, the panniers felt like sodden bricks at her side and her corset…well, she was now even more anxious to take the damn thing off.

Storming past a chuckling Rufus, Lucy worked to wring out the excess water in her gown, feeling that the effort was somewhat futile with all the layers she was contending with while Wyatt went leaping back over the boulders to retrieve his jacket, vest, and shoes amid Rufus’ jeers that he had done a “great job of getting Lucy across the river safely.”

Once she had managed to wring out as much of her dress as she possibly could, Lucy went to work on her stockings. Her aching feet were peppered with blisters, but she hardly cared as she twisted and squeezed as much water as she could from her thick, knee-length socks. She grumbled as she slid them back on her legs, which she noticed with a grimace, were stubbled with hair.

When Wyatt came back his vest was haphazardly thrown on over his wet shirt and while he looked somewhat embarrassed about what had happened, his anger and frustration seemed to outweigh any feelings of shame he felt at essentially knocking Lucy head-first into an icy river. He didn’t say a word to her…or for Rufus, for that matter, but when he saw her shivering slightly, he tossed his jacket down beside her and stalked away, muttering angrily under his breath about her “damned stubbornness.”

Lucy was doing her utmost to have patience with Wyatt. She knew he was just trying to keep them safe…and while he had also assisted Rufus, she could tell that his attention was almost wholly on her when they made their way down that hillside. She could feel his eyes on her, watching her every move…all because of that stupid fall she had had on those rocks. Wyatt was already protective…but that one slip had pushed him into overdrive…so much so that he crawled into waist deep water just so she wouldn’t risk falling again. What he didn’t understand and what he could never know was that his attention…while not totally unwelcomed…was hazardous to her heart. Every touch, every whisper of concern, every offer of assistance only served to firmly plant him where he did not belong…knowing as she did that Jessica was and always would be the only woman he could ever love.

Dripping wet, angry and with more than a little tension between them, Lucy and Wyatt marched into the forest in silence, leaving Rufus to make awkward observations as they trudged along in the direction of the fort. Neither Lucy nor Wyatt said a word, both of them too upset to even hear what
Rufus was saying…and so this continued, until they reached an area where the trees began to thin considerably. Motioning for Lucy and Rufus to follow him, Wyatt found an old log in the midst of some heavy underbrush. Lying down on his stomach, he was almost completely shielded from view as he peered out over the log at the fort beyond. “We’ll stake the fort out here while you go in,” he said with a nod to Rufus. “There’s enough cover here that should keep us pretty well hidden.”

Lucy, seeing the small area next to Wyatt…knowing it was designated for her, cleared her throat nervously, “Maybe…maybe I should go with him. Just in case.” she added quickly as Wyatt gaped at her in complete indignation, “If someone speaks to him…he won’t understand…he can’t respond…”

“Are you crazy?” Wyatt spat out, “They’d recognize you…and even if they didn’t, you’re…you’re,” he motioned to her awkwardly before finally spitting out, “you know…a woman.”

“I realize that Wyatt.” Lucy said coolly, “it’s never stopped me before.”

“You weren’t stuck in 1754 before.” Wyatt hissed angrily, “Do I need to spell it out for you? These are soldiers…out in the literal middle of nowhere…what the hell do you think is going to happen when you walk into that fort?”

“There are other women here, Wyatt.” Lucy snapped back before conceding, “Not many…but it’s not like I’m the only woman around here.”

“And you think they aren’t going to notice you?” Wyatt said incredulously, “You’re soaking wet…”

“Yeah? And whose fault is that?” she replied angrily.

Rufus, looking like he would rather face a firing squad of French soldiers than spend one more minute listening to Lucy and Wyatt bicker, interrupted before Wyatt could respond. “I…uh…can’t believe I’m saying this, but I uh…think it’s best if I do this alone.” He rubbed his neck awkwardly as Lucy gaped at him in surprise, “I know I gave you all a hard time about it before, but ya know…now that we’re down here, it doesn’t seem as scary.” He nodded as if trying to convince himself of that fact, “I mean, I’m practically invisible, right? They won’t even know I’m there.”

And before Lucy or Wyatt could say anything in support or to the contrary, Rufus slipped out from
behind the cover of the trees, made his way resolutely towards the bustling gate of the fort, easily getting lost in the crowd of men and horses just outside of the gate and slipping inside. But after an hour or more of waiting and the sun now sinking lower in the sky and Wyatt’s continued admonitions that she just needed to “relax”, Lucy wasn’t banking on that assurance anymore. Something was wrong. It had to be. Why else would it be taking this long?

Spurred on by her increasing anxiety…and her desire to get away from Wyatt, Lucy scrambled to her feet, this time dodging Wyatt’s arm as he tried to ease her back to the ground, “I can’t wait anymore.” she hissed, “Something is not right. He should be here by now.”

“Lucy!” Wyatt whispered harshly after her as she lifted her dank, wet skirts and stumbled over the log. “Get back here!.” She, however, continued her relentless march to the closed gate as Wyatt trailed stealthily behind her, cursing as he did so, “Dammit Lucy, you’re gonna get yourself killed.” She was almost near the gate now, her head thrown back in haughty indignation as she stepped over the various ropes and pulleys left strewn on the ground by the gate workmen they saw earlier in the day, still refusing to even glance behind her to acknowledge Wyatt’s protests…and now he was getting desperate. “Lucy, don’t you dare go in there.” he called after her as loudly as he dared, “dammit, Lucy, I mean it!”. Jogging to reach her, he finally offered, “Fine. I’ll go…I’ll go in and find Rufus, okay?”

She turned to argue with him, righteous indignation etched all across her face when her foot accidentally knocked over a large hammer that was propped up against the outer wall of the fort. As it landed on a collection of pick axes and shovels similarly placed, a tumult of metal on metal sounded through the darkening sky, immediately drawing the attention of the French soldiers positioned on the balustrades, their shouts of surprise and alarm mixed now with the dying echoes of the hammer.

Horrified by what she had done, Lucy froze, not daring to move or even breathe as a beam of light appeared somewhere above her, the French obviously peering into the dusky evening with the aid of a torch. Wyatt, however, was already lunging for her, whipping her against the wooden battlements as French voices murmured above them. Positioning himself defensively in front of her, Wyatt raised a finger to his lips as he watched the gate with bated breath.

When the light from above disappeared, Wyatt let out a breath of relief, turning to Lucy with a smirk only to tense up once more as the creak and moan of the opening gate sounded in the darkness. As light from the now open gate flooded the ground in front of them, Wyatt took Lucy by the hand, and raced around the corner of the outer wall in an effort to hide, realizing with a pang of dread that they were pretty well screwed. The moon was full and shining brightly, making it nearly impossible to rely on the cover of darkness for concealment. They were also too far from the forest make a break for it and seek out some sort of cover. They were going to be banking on the hope that the French soldiers would do a half-ass job of searching for whomever or whatever caused them to wander out of the warmth and security of the fort and into the cool, moon-lit night of the Pennsylvania wilderness.
His heart pounded against his chest, his adrenaline skyrocketing as he began to mentally assess how many French soldiers he could take out with his firearm before he and Lucy were inevitably killed. Maybe, he thought, he could take out enough men, create enough of a diversion, to at least get Lucy to safety. Even if they didn’t remember them from the French encampment, their very presence outside of the French fort, after dark, would certainly draw suspicion. Wyatt thought back to his own experience in hostile regions and the characters they would have to look out for around the perimeters of their operating bases; there were almost always persons of interest (POI’s) hanging around that they would have to keep an eye on; the tricky part was determining which POIs were friendly’s and which were actually insurgents trying to gather intel. They would use all sorts of methods…sometimes they would pretend to be lost, other times they were masquerading as tourists…one time they even had a couple who…

Wyatt turned suddenly to Lucy, his eyes widening in realization as he recalled how they could hide in plain sight. He could hear a host of French soldiers chattering animatedly, their voices getting louder, the sound of their footsteps getting nearer…any moment they would be coming around that corner. Without so much as a warning, Wyatt wrapped his arms around Lucy’s waist and back, spinning her around until her back was flush against the wall of the fort. “Wyatt…what are you…?” she breathed out in a panic, but Wyatt silenced her with a finger to his lips.

“Trust me.” he whispered, with a meaningful nod before slowly leaning in, his face dangerously close to hers.

Realizing now what Wyatt was planning, Lucy’s heart skipped a beat as he inched ever closer, torn between absolutely wanting this and absolutely not…because to know what it would be like to kiss Wyatt Logan - while at the same time understanding that it would never happen again - was a little more than she thought she could handle.

Still…what could she do? He literally had her pinned against a wall and she couldn’t escape this even if she wanted to.

Because of the French…obviously.

As his hand drifted away from her waist and cupped her cheek, Lucy closed her eyes, trembling slightly as she felt his breath against her cheek hardly believing that this was actually going to happen…

Except that it didn’t happen.
She stood there waiting in anxious anticipation, his lips a hair’s breadth away from her own and yet…nothing. Confused, she opened one eye only to find that Wyatt, though leaning towards her as before, had his eyes trained on the French soldiers searching the perimeter just inside the scope of his peripheral vision.

At the sight of Wyatt’s focus and attention so obviously turned away from her, Lucy inwardly cursed herself for once again, being so stupid. Of course…of course he would only offer up the illusion of some romantic encounter…why on Earth would he actually kiss her? She wasn’t Jessica. She was only his co-worker, his team mate…and really, she wasn’t even sure if he even actually liked her. Before this mission, he had pretty much made it clear he didn’t like her and nothing had really happened to change that…had it?

Feeling oh so stupid and more than a little embarrassed that for the second time in one day she foolishly believed she was going to be kissed by Wyatt Logan, Lucy tilted her head back to move her chin out of his gentle grasp, feeling the awkwardness of their position even more now that once again, she had been carried away by his mere proximity. That action, however, turned Wyatt’s attention from the soldiers back to her, his eyes narrowed in confusion at the way she flinched and dropped her gaze downward, the way she trembled and tensed in his arms and while he though the latter could be attributed to the fact that she was still in her wet clothes on a chilly night, the others, he supposed, stemmed from their current predicament. “Hey,” he whispered as he caressed her cheek with his thumb, “just relax, it’s going to be okay.”

She lifted her eyes to him in annoyance, hardly daring to believe he had the nerve to tell her to relax when he had been doing that for better part of an hour and…well, here they were…wrapped in an awkward embrace just moments from being captured. Wyatt, however, completely oblivious to any other discomfort on her part besides the obvious, gave her a reassuring smirk and Lucy, despite her frustration, couldn’t help but let out a relenting sigh and smirk back.

Seeing that slight smile, Wyatt’s own tension began to melt away and he suddenly became very aware of her…of them…and the fact that if he wanted to, he could close this last bit of distance between them and discover what it would be like to kiss Lucy Preston. He swallowed hard as his gaze turned suddenly serious, drifting from her doe-like eyes to her slightly parted lips and he found that he was now the one who was unexpectedly trembling.

Oh shit. He was standing too damn close to her.

Waking up in each other’s arms because it was cold was one thing, but this? This was his lips brushing against her cheek, her breath on the shell of his ear, her body pinned between him and an unforgiving wall…and well, somehow in all his concern about hiding in plain sight, he hadn’t factored in…that.
Despite his sudden self-consciousness, however, he could not bring himself to pull away from her, to restore some distance between them. Obviously, he couldn’t…

Because of the French.

Still, he knew somewhere in the back of his mind that the sounds of the soldiers’ voices had faded away and while that should have given him more than enough reason to take a step back and clear his head and reassess their situation…he didn’t. Instead, he leaned forward…just an inch or two more until his lips were ghosting over hers in intoxicating anticipation.

“Wyatt? Lucy?” Rufus’ hushed and frantic voice startled them both to attention. Quickly dropping his hand from her face, Wyatt nearly jumped backwards away from Lucy stumbling towards the sound of Rufus’ voice. He was wandering around the edge of the woods, laden with a crate and looking extremely anxious, “Where are you gu…oh.” he stopped abruptly when he turned to see them both making their way towards them; Wyatt, nearly jogging to meet him while Lucy was slowly bringing up the rear. “What the hell were you two doing over there?”

“Nothing.” Wyatt blurted out defensively, “We were…uh…just ya know…worried about you.” He paced nervously in front of Rufus, rubbing the back of his neck with his hand as he explained, “The soldiers heard us when we were uh…trying to figure out how to get inside and we…had to…um…hide.”

“Uh-huh…” Rufus said as he raised his eyebrows in suspicion, watching as Wyatt looked and acted like someone who had just been caught with his hands in the proverbial cookie jar, “…and what exactly were you doing while you were hiding?”

If Rufus had any suspicions that “nothing” meant “something” they were confirmed by the panicked look in Wyatt’s eye as Lucy approached them. She, however, looked completely at ease as she wrapped him in a hug and muttered, “I’m so glad you’re okay…I was so worried.”

“Well…I guess…I should thank you,” he said with a shrug, “whatever the hell you guys did caused enough of a distraction so I could get away.”

“What happened?”
“I was just asking Wyatt the same thing.” Rufus said with a smirk, noticing that Wyatt was absolutely refusing to look at either of them. “You two must have done something to scare those French soldiers away.”

Lucy, however, cast one quick look in Wyatt’s direction and shrugged, “I accidentally knocked over some tools and we had to hide. As far as I know, they didn’t even see us. What about you?” she said with real concern, “What took you so long?”

Rufus shrugged, “Well, I went in to try to find that forge, just like you said…and well, turns out that forge is in the actual fort…not out here in this main section” he said as motioned towards the wall, “So…I tried to sneak in…”

Wyatt stopped pacing and stared at Rufus, “You, what?”

“I tried to sneak in…” Rufus admitted sheepishly, “turns out they didn’t like that.”

“You think?” Wyatt sighed out in exasperation, “Jesus, Rufus I told you just to go in, look around and come back out.”

“Well, I’m sorry…but you also told me to look for the damn forge, so that is what I was trying to do.” He sighed, “It’s okay though, I guess a lot of the workmen don’t speak French so I just acted like I was lost…but then when I was leaving the fort I ran into that dude from the campsite.”

“Louis Coulon?” Lucy asked nervously.

“Yeah…I don’t know if he recognized me…but he looked at me funny…like maybe he did.” He gave an apologetic shrug, “I skirted out of there as fast as I could but then the next thing I knew, they were closing the gates to the whole damn place.”

“Wait a minute, Louis Coulon ordered the gates to be closed after seeing you?” Lucy breathed out anxiously.

“I don’t know who ordered it.” Rufus said with a shrug, “But nothing happened…I was just sort of stuck. I figured it would look too suspicious if I tried to leave then, so I hung around the place…and picked up a few things while I was at it.” he said as he lifted the crate in his arms.
“You did good, Rufus.” Wyatt said with a solemn nod, “That was right thing to do.”

“Except that Louis Coulon recognized him” Lucy hissed out in panic.

“You don’t know that.” Wyatt countered a little too roughly, “It could be a total coincidence. I mean, if he did recognize Rufus, wouldn’t he have ordered his men to arrest him right then and there?

“How am I supposed to know what he would’ve done? The fact remains, he ordered those gates to be closed after he saw Rufus…which means…”

“Nothing.” Wyatt said with a resolute shake of his head.

“Which means,” Lucy said a little more forcefully, “he was suspicious.”

Wyatt shrugged in exasperation, “So let him be suspicious. Rufus is here, he’s fine…aren’t you?”

“I don’t know about fine.” Rufus said tentatively, clearly uncomfortable by the way he kept shooting awkward glances between Lucy and Wyatt, “but I’m alive, if that’s what you’re asking.”

Satisfied with that answer, Wyatt nodded at Lucy triumphantly, who flushed with anger and rolled her eyes as she pushed past the two of them. “I see you two are still fighting like an old married couple…” Rufus muttered quietly to Wyatt as they watched Lucy huff away.

“What the hell do you mean by that” Wyatt snapped, his face flushing.

“Whoa…easy. It’s just an expression.” Rufus assured, “I just mean that you two have been at each other’s throats all damn day…I just thought by now you’d…ya know…be over it.”

Wyatt scowled. “Be over it” Be over what? It was Lucy who had been so damn infuriating all day, refusing his help, arguing with him over every little thing, being so damn stubborn she nearly drowned herself trying to prove a damn point.
He had only been trying to keep her safe…

Hell, that was his job…and she was keeping him from doing his job….making his job a hell of a lot harder in the process. If she would have just listened to him, instead of storming off towards that fort, they would’ve never had to hide from the French soldiers to begin with. Of course, Rufus did say that Lucy’s clumsiness had been the distraction he needed to escape that damn place…so, he supposed, that had worked out to their mutual advantage. Or frustration…he still wasn’t quite sure how he felt about everything that had happened back there at the fort…he just knew there was no way in hell he was ever going to let Rufus know.

“I gotta be honest, though,” Rufus said with a sigh as they caught up to Lucy, “I am so relieved that it was just you two making all that racket out here. When those French soldiers came back in they were all “animu, animu” and so I half expected to run into a bear or something.”

Lucy furrowed her brow in confusion, “Animu? What’s animu?” she asked.

Shrugging, Rufus frowned, “I don’t know, aren’t you the one who speaks French?”

“Yes, but…” Lucy bit her lip in thought. The French word for animal was animal, but maybe Rufus heard them wrong. “Oh well, “ she shrugged, “I guess being where we are, it’s probably a good idea to look out for bears and things anyway…this is Appalachia after all.”

“Yeah well, I’d like to know what the hell they saw out there.” Rufus said nervously, “I’d feel a hell of a lot safer walking back to camp without being worried about bears or mountain lions…”

“Rufus,” Lucy consoled, “Wyatt and I were out here the whole time and we didn’t see any…” she trailed off thinking about what had passed from the moment the French soldiers had come out of the gate. If they were looking for whatever had made that sound and caught sight of them…”Wait,” Lucy said suddenly, “did…did they say animal or…amoureux?”

“Yeah…that’s it…animu.” Rufus said with a nod, “So…what? That doesn’t mean animal?”

Lucy pursed her lips and cast a wary glance towards Wyatt, who refused to meet her eye. “No.” she said simply. “It…uh…it doesn’t mean animal.”

“Well what does it…” Rufus began, but Wyatt suddenly erupted into a loud coughing fit, “You
okay, man?” Rufus asked in concern.

Wyatt, however, didn’t answer. Instead he quickened his pace to put as much distance between himself and Lucy and Rufus as possible. He didn’t need to speak French to guess what “amoureux” meant…and one glance at the flush on Lucy’s cheek told him that he was going to have to talk to her…privately…far away from Rufus…about what had happened. Right now, he just needed to stay the hell away from her.

“What’s the matter with him?”

Lucy shrugged, though she believed she had a pretty good idea of just exactly what was the matter with Wyatt.

It must have been hard for him, she figured, to be linked to her romantically –even if it was just for show - when he was still so in love with his wife. With the guilt that he carried over her death and his unrelenting hope to save her, was it any wonder why even the tiniest implications that he was unfaithful to her and her memory would bother him? Though she had to admit that there, right before Rufus had interrupted, there was a moment when she almost believed he had wanted to kiss her…which was exactly why, right now, she was angry; angry at herself for being so stupid as to fall for the ruse not once, not twice…but now three times.

Three times. Three times in one day, Lucy had foolishly believed Wyatt was going to kiss her. She cursed herself for being so unbelievably pathetic. Sure, it had been a while since she had been in a relationship…well, if you didn’t count Noah (and she absolutely did not count Noah)…but she normally had more self-control than this. After Michael Garrison stood her up for the prom she swore to herself that she would never get mixed up in a one-sided romantic anything ever again. It had been absolutely humiliating, to say the least, being stood up for her own prom, forcing her to play it off in front of her friends by attending a debate tournament at the last minute instead. No matter how many forced smiles she plastered on her face, however, she knew they knew the real reason she hadn’t set foot in the high school gymnasium that night.

Just the memory of it made her cheeks flush.

So, no. She was not about to do this again. She had to get her emotions under control and fast or she knew she would end up making a complete fool of herself and…only break her heart in the process.

They hadn’t walked much farther when a scream of horses had the three of them wheeling around in panic and diving for cover in the underbrush around the trees, “Something’s happening.” she
breathed out as Wyatt frantically pulled the spyglass from his belt, “there’s um…three, four, five… six…six soldiers on horses heading out of the gates.” She looked to Wyatt with concern as he put the lens to his eye, grateful that the brightness of the moon would allow him to better monitor their movements, but realizing with concern, that it would allow the French to see theirs.

“That’s the French commander from the camp.” Wyatt murmured, “Oh boy…He does not look happy.”

Lucy bit back the temptation to mutter an “I told you so” but one look from Wyatt told her he knew she was thinking it.

“What are the chances they aren’t searching for us?” Rufus asked nervously.

Wyatt chuckled grimly, “I wouldn’t put money on it. They’ve been expecting us to show up with those other French soldiers….and if he did recognize you…”

“That means he knows we’ve escaped…” Lucy murmured.

“…and that we’re close.” Rufus added. “So…what do we do?”

Wyatt bit his lip thoughtfully. He wanted to put a geographic barrier between themselves and the French, but there was no way in hell he was going to try to cross the river again, at night… especially not with Lucy.

“Do you think they’re headed back to that camp? Where they last saw us?” Lucy asked nervously.

“I imagine they’ll get there eventually.” Wyatt said grimly, knowing that they were going to come upon that encampment finding nothing but a few dead soldiers and some missing supplies.”

“Uh-huh.” Rufus observed nervously, “How pissed do you think that Coulon guy’s gonna be when he sees we killed his men?”

“Pretty pissed.” Wyatt said with a curt nod, “And if he already suspects that you were at Fort
Duquense…he’s going to have his men scour every inch of this place looking for us.”

“But our camp….the supplies.” Lucy gasped, “Wyatt, we just left them there…if they find them…oh my God, the Lifeboat…”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa.” Wyatt breathed out, “one thing at a time, okay? Look,” he pointed towards the retreating horses, “They’re following the road….the LifeBoat isn’t anywhere near that road…we could follow behind them and do what we can to hide the Lifeboat.”

“And just how do you suggest we do that?” Rufus asked. “I can’t exactly park it someplace else and we sure as hell can’t move it.”

“No…but we could camouflage it.” Wyatt stated as he bit his lip in thought. “I don’t know what musket fire could do to that thing and well, we’re already far enough up shit creek without a paddle, I don’t think we need to risk anything else happening to it while we’re out here.”

“Agreed.” Lucy breathed out nervously. “But Rufus is right, how are we going to hide something that big?

Wyatt rubbed a rough hand across his face as he wracked his brain for ideas. In the military, they used camouflaged netting for stuff like this in the field, but out here? What the hell could they use? His eyes scanned the forest floor, thick with underbrush that snaked up the large trees surrounding them, almost completely covering the bark with their thick, green foliage. Wyatt turned to Lucy and shrugged, “We let nature do the job for us.” he said with a nod towards the trees. “C’mon…let’s move.”

Chapter End Notes

I don't know that I have anything to say in my notes except that things are heating up between Wyatt and Lucy and will continue to do so : ). Originally this chapter was going to have her out of her corset (in what way I will not divulge) but it became TOO long...and while I know some of you don't mind long chapters...they give me fits...so this is where we are for now...and hopefully I'll have the next chapter all ready for you soon.

I've been working on a special surprise for Torrent readers, so expect something this weekend...that's all I'm going to say....you'll just have to see what lies in store!
“You don’t think it will damage it, do you?” Lucy asked Rufus nervously as they stood in the moonlight before the gleaming Lifeboat.

He shrugged. “I don’t think so. The Lifeboat is designed for all kinds of conditions…as long as we keep the door sealed and make sure we don’t let the growth get too out of hand…we should be okay. Besides,” he chuckled darkly, “it can’t be worse than C4.”

The evidence of Flynn’s treachery looked so small and inconsequential in the stillness of the evening; a minor blemish on the face of this marvel of 21st century of engineering…that, for better or worse had doomed them to live…to survive in 1754. “Do you think…do you think they’ve found it? The…the Protocol, I mean?” Lucy whispered.

“Who knows?” Rufus said with a shrug, “By now they’ve got to know we aren’t coming back…” he paused, “well, not…I mean, I didn’t mean…”

“I know what you meant.” Lucy said with a small smile.

Rufus nodded thoughtfully, “You know…Connor Mason recruited me when I was just a kid at a science fair on the South side of Chicago. I had done this small-scale model of the city, complete with a monorail that ran on coffee pods.” He chuckled, “Mason wanted me to talk with him after the fair and I told him I couldn’t…I needed to pick up my brother. I had a responsibility, you see…and even though I knew this was THE Connor Mason, my family came first…and I don’t know,” he said with a shrug, “I guess that impressed him. He took me under his wing, mentored me, made me who I am today.” Rufus nodded thoughtfully, “I owe everything to that man…and if he was willing to wait for a scrawny nobody kid like me, I’d bet my life that he’s gonna do everything he can to see that we get home safely…he’ll find a way…I believe that 100%”

Lucy smiled gratefully, “Thanks Rufus…I’m sure he will. If not for us, then for the time machine, right?” she teased. “I can’t imagine he’d be okay with two of his greatest inventions going missing.”

“I don’t think Rittenhouse would let him be okay with that either…” Rufus muttered with a shrug.
“What do you mean?”

“I mean, there’s got to be a reason they invested in time travel, right? All of this is funded by them…and if they got all bent out of shape over a voice recording…how the hell do you think they’re going to feel about losing both the Lifeboat and the Mothership?” Rufus shook his head anxiously, “No, I don’t doubt Mason will do everything he can to help us, but I don’t think he’d have a choice one way or the other…whoever this Rittenhouse is…whatever they are…they’re going to want to make sure they have something to show for all the billions they poured into this project.”

“Well I guess that’s sort of comforting,” Lucy said with an anxious shrug, “and a little alarming…I mean, it almost makes you glad that the Lifeboat is stuck here in 1754.” Rufus gaped at her incredulously as she quickly reemphasized, “Almost.”

Rufus was about to respond, no doubt with a quip regarding slavery or smallpox, when a rustle in the leaves put them both on their guard. Wyatt had left them a while ago in an attempt to tail the French, leaving them each with a loaded flintlock pistol for protection. It was already nerve wracking enough being stranded, as they were, but without Wyatt there with them they felt even more vulnerable. It was with a great sigh of relief, therefore that they greeted the familiar approaching figure, as he jogged towards them from the trees, “Good news” Wyatt gasped out breathlessly, “The French have set up camp about four miles from here…”they’re not going to be moving anymore tonight.” He nodded to Rufus, “Got anything to drink in that crate of yours?”

The large crate Rufus had procured from Fort Duquesne lay just at the base of the Lifeboat. Smiling, Rufus turned quickly and pulled it out towards the center of the camp, so that its contents could easily be seen by the bright light of the moon. He picked through the crate with a flourish, spreading its contents before them. “Bread, cheese…I think this is some kind of jelly…I’m not really sure. I got a pot of soup…I got some more of that weird jerky you liked,” he said to Wyatt, “some wine…blankets…and probably the greatest grab of all? Check it out… an extra pair of clothes.”

“Really?” Lucy’s asked in excitement as she quickly made a grab for them. “Thank you, Rufus!”

“Uh…what do you mean, ‘thank you, Rufus?’ these are mine.”

“Oh that’s nice…you couldn’t get extra clothes for all of us?”

“What do you think this is? The mall?” Rufus asked her, “I barely made it out of there with this stuff…” he added as he grabbed back the set of clothes from a very reluctant Lucy. “Hey don’t blame me…I’m pretty sure your kind weren’t allowed to run around in pants back in these days, probably qualified as indecent exposure or some nonsense…so don’t even think about doing what I
Lucy sat back with a grumble glaring at Rufus as he stuffed the clothes safely back in the crate, “Do you think I care what these people think?” she muttered.

“You should care,” Rufus reminded her, “you’re the damn historian.”

Wyatt, meanwhile, was busy uncorking one of the wine bottles, desperate for anything to slake his thirst after running through the forest for several miles. Even if wine wasn’t the best way to rehydrate it was at least something and he was grateful for it, “I think,” he finally gasped out after taking a few drinks, “we should do what we can to hide the Lifeboat and then camp out here ourselves for the night,” he added with a nod towards Lucy “and then tomorrow…maybe we can find something a little more permanent.”

“You want to cover this thing tonight?” Rufus asked incredulously.

“Why not?” Wyatt asked as he looked at the clear night sky, filled with stars and a bright shining moon, “We should have enough light, and I’d like to have this covered up before dawn…who knows what the French have planned…I don’t want to risk them finding this thing.”

Setting straight to work, therefore, Wyatt began climbing up the nearest tree, detaching strands of ivy and letting them fall to the ground in a heap. Rufus, seeing Wyatt’s example, followed suit… though it became readily apparent that he was not nearly as adept as the Delta Force soldier in these proceedings. Huffing laboriously, Rufus grunted as he wildly grasped at the ivy while clinging to a limb, nearly falling several times before he managed to pull it from the trunk and send it sailing to the earth below.

Lucy, wanting to be useful, picked up a tendril of ivy and boosted herself up on the lower ring of the time machine. With a look of sheer determination, she began inching herself up the side of the machine, ivy in hand, in an attempt to get to the top. Wyatt paused mid-climb as he watched her repeatedly slide down the sloping surface, “Lucy,” he finally asked, “what the hell are you doing?”

Huffing out an impatient breath, Lucy turned to him, “What does it look like I’m doing?” she asked in annoyance, “I’m trying to help you.”

“Do you…do you really think that’s a good idea? I mean…”
“What?” Lucy asked heatedly, already angry at the repeated insinuations that she wasn’t fit or able enough to do things like this on her own. Okay, so she had a reputation for being a bit of a klutz, but she wasn’t completely helpless.

“Well, Lucy,” Rufus gasped out as he situated himself over a branch in an attempt to catch his breath, “that’s not exactly safe for you, I mean…well you know…”

“You should be more concerned about yourself.” Lucy answered in annoyance as Rufus nearly slipped off his branch, “I’ll be fine.”

After another unsuccessful attempt at clambering to the top of the time machine, however, Wyatt jumped down from his tree and made his way over to her, “Lucy, I’m serious…get down from there. I get that you want to help, but it’s fine…”

“You were the one saying we needed to work together as a team…well, I’m part of this team and I want to pull my weight.” Lucy argued.

“Yeah, but…”

“Look, if we all work together on this, it will take less time. Besides, with these rings…I should be relatively safe, right? Safer than I would be climbing a tree.” she added as she motioned to Rufus.

Wyatt couldn’t argue with either point; if Lucy was determined to help out, it would be better if she wasn’t climbing up and down trees…and yes, the now stationary rings would serve as sort of guard rails if she did happen to tumble over. Still, balancing on top of the Lifeboat? Lucy? This was the woman who fell through windows and had an uncanny knack of tripping over her own feet. “If you do this…” Wyatt began.

“No, there is no if about this.” Lucy argued, “I am going to help. I think I’ve more than proven that I am willing and able to do things on my own, don’t you think?

Wyatt sighed as he looked at her in her still damp dress and he immediately felt guilty. He hadn’t trusted her, and she wound up in the damn river. Maybe he should have listened to Rufus…maybe she just needed him to believe in her…to trust her to be able to do things on her own. Wyatt heaved a sigh, “I will let you do this on one condition.” he said finally, “you don’t get up or down this thing by yourself…you understand? You have to at least let me or Rufus help you with that, okay?”
As much as she would have been able to clamber up and down the time machine on her own, Lucy already knew that task was a near impossibility. As long as Wyatt was willing to trust her with the job of covering the time machine, she would allow him, in this instance to help her. Nodding in agreement, Lucy begrudgingly allowed Wyatt to give her a boost until she could clamber up onto the rounded dome of the machine. “Just…just don’t get close to the edge, alright?” Wyatt admonished as he cast a worried glance towards her while she situated herself. “Rufus and I will hand everything up to you, you just do your best to cover the Lifeboat without falling off, alright?

“I’ve got it, Wyatt.” Lucy said with an annoyed roll of her eyes, “It’s not like I try to fall off things.” she mumbled under her breath.

Trying to balance herself on top of the sloped surface of the time machine was much harder than it looked, however. At first, it wasn’t that bad – Lucy was more or less able to navigate with little to no problems. Though it was night, the light from the moon was bright enough as to not cause a problem for her (or Wyatt and Rufus’) visibility. As the surface became more covered, however, not only was she forced to stand up in order to avoid getting tangled in the lines of crisscrossing ivy, but it also proved to be more difficult to determine how close she was to the edge. Several times she nearly slipped right off the LifeBoat, having misjudged how far she had ventured to the end, but much to her satisfaction and relief neither Wyatt nor Rufus had noticed.

“Looks pretty good.” Wyatt announced finally as he leapt down from a tree and began walking around the Lifeboat, “If our French pals come looking, chances are they won’t give it a second glance…”

‘Even if they did,” Rufus called from his tree, “they wouldn’t know what the hell they were looking at…but maybe it will keep them from going after it with a Tomahawk.”

“Or trying to blow it to hell with a musket.” Wyatt added with a scoff as he made his way towards the side where Lucy was waiting to be assisted down.

Rufus was more than happy to hear that he would not be required to scramble up another tree as he had already nearly fallen out of the last couple he had climbed. Eager to be back on the ground, he quickly began to make his way down when the small limb he was standing on snapped and with a sickening jolt, had him desperately grabbing for the large branch above him. “Oh shit” Rufus breathed out, dangling 20 feet off the ground. ‘Uh…Wyatt? A little help, please?” he pleaded.

“Hang on.” Wyatt grumbled as he made his way over to Rufus who was wildly bicycling his legs in an attempt to work his way back up and over the limb to which he was clinging. Seeing this, Wyatt shook his head in utter bemusement, “Just wrap your legs around the trunk and shimmy
“Do I look like a fireman to you?” Rufus spat back. “I barely got up this damn thing…and now…oh hell, now I’ve got a splinter…are you happy?”

Rolling his eyes, Wyatt stood underneath the tree, trying to coach Rufus down, offering up words of encouragement, promising that he would catch him if he fell. Rufus was just easing himself over to the trunk in an attempt to follow Wyatt’s advice, when the whinny of a horse sounded just outside of their clearing.

Whirling around in a panic, Wyatt could see another small caravan of French soldiers on horseback making their way through the woods a few hundred yards away from them. “Shit” he breathed out anxiously. They were completely exposed…well, he could easily hide…but Rufus, dangling as he was from the tree and Lucy, perched as she was on top of the time machine would almost certainly be spotted. ”Lucy!” Wyatt called out in a hushed voice at her standing figure, “Get down!” he hissed as he tried to urge Rufus out of the tree faster. Lucy, instead of laying flush against the time machine, however, misinterpreted Wyatt’s order and began attempting to make her way down off the LifeBoat on her own…which proved more difficult now that it was covered in ivy.

Wyatt, immediately seeing the danger in what she was trying to do, raced to help her – leaving Rufus helplessly hanging from the branch of the tree - but it was too late; tripping and losing her balance, Lucy slammed backwards into one of the giant rings and slid down a few feet before tumbling over the side where Wyatt, grasping her firmly around the waist, caught her just as they both slammed into the ground with a debilitating crash, her foot and ankle tangled up in a mass of ivy that crumpled on top of them with a soft whump.

The impact of the fall had Lucy seeing stars that seemed to amplify the buzzing noise now sounding in her ears. She felt paralyzed and for a long while she could hardly move, could hardly breathe…and yet she vaguely knew she could…

She just needed to remember how.

“Ouch” she managed to squeak out as she felt Wyatt moving out from underneath her.

“Lucy!” Wyatt’s muffled and whispered voice sounded somewhere in the space around her. She blinked her eyes hard and finally saw his anxious face coming into focus, hovering over her own as she sought to do anything but lay there like a pathetic heap. He, however, seeing that she was, at least, conscious, placed a finger to his lips and hovered over her protectively as he pulled out his gun, watching with bated breath as the French soldiers passed through the forest ahead of them.
They were chattering loudly and while Wyatt had no clue what the hell they were saying, he was grateful that they, at least, seemed more focused on their conversation than on the goings on in the forest around them. Still, Lucy’s fall against the time machine hadn’t been exactly quiet and Wyatt wasn’t about to take any chances. It would take one…just one soldier to catch sight of their little camp and it would be all over - they would be taken back to Fort Duquesne and killed before morning.

Wyatt knew he could take out maybe two or three of those French assholes before they got a shot off on one of their flimsy little flintlock pistols…but even then, it wasn’t just him. He had a responsibility to protect his whole team. How could he do that in his current position? He thought about getting up, but that left Lucy exposed and vulnerable…not to mention, any sudden movement like that would draw their attention towards them…and he sure as hell did not want that problem.

For Lucy, the problem was that it was this just this sort of thing that she was desperately trying to avoid with Wyatt…yet here again, she was back to fighting the overwhelming impulse to kiss him… and his proximity to her was almost too intoxicating to prevent her from thinking about anything else. In a desperate attempt to keep her mind focused on the fact that they were in danger and this was definitely not the time to make out with Wyatt Logan, she clenched her eyes shut and tried to ignore the way his breath tickled the shell of her ear, or the way the scruff of his jaw felt as it brushed against her cheek, and instead attempted to focus on what the soldiers were saying.

She could only catch snippets but what she did hear, didn’t help her current dilemma as it only set her panicking slightly…which in turn, caused her to start breathing heavily…which, unfortunately, caught Wyatt’s attention. Looking at her in concern, Wyatt offered her a questioning glance, one that Lucy answered with a shake of her head as she anxiously whispered, “They heard my fall.”

Wyatt immediately tensed, his own heart set to racing as he considered their options. He could do his best to take out each and every one of those French soldiers, but he knew even with his modern gun, he wouldn’t be able to shoot all of them before one of them got a shot off at him or another member of his team. They could lay there as is, hoping that they remained unnoticed and unseen. They could surrender…and maybe die at the end of a hangman’s noose.

Or they could somehow convince the soldiers, if they were seen, that they weren’t the people they were searching for…

There was, of course, another option, but Wyatt wasn’t going to touch that with a ten-foot pole… not after whatever the hell had happened at the fort…except now that that memory had briefly crossed his mind, it was all he could think about.

He had almost kissed her
Lucy.

It was only supposed to be a tactic, a ruse to allow them to hide in plain sight, a trick…hell, he hadn’t even planned on actually kissing her. She was…Lucy…bossy-know-it all Lucy, co-worker Lucy, engaged Lucy…off-limits Lucy and yet, no matter how much he had tried to deny it since leaving that shadowy corner of Fort Duquesne he could not deny…that despite all of that, he had wanted to kiss her.

That cold-hard fact struck him like a devastating thunderbolt and while it completely unnerved him, he tried to put things into perspective. They had been in pretty close physical contact for the past few days, sleeping next to each other…even relying on one another for warmth…that was bound to have some kind of weird emotional effect, right? They were also in a dangerous situation and with the heightened adrenaline and everything, well…

It didn’t mean anything…it was just some crazy emotional response to all this damn trauma.

Which was exactly why he could not be thinking about this right now.

Nope…especially not now while he was hovered over her, his legs entangled with hers, her heaving chest pressed against his own.

Dammit! Why the hell did he agree to this?

He should have known better. Lucy Preston was notoriously clumsy…she had a record of trip-ups a mile long and yet he had stupidly agreed to let her clamber on top of a metal ball, in a dress, at night, and predictably, she had fallen. Tumbled right off, just like he had believed she would…and now here they were…not only pressed against each other, but also completely horizontal, hiding from the French (again), with their lips so tantalizingly close to one another he could almost feel them ghosting across his own and…oh God, how he wanted to kiss her.

DAMMIT.

Looking for a distraction, any distraction from his current…situation, Wyatt desperately focused all of his attention on the French soldiers who had now slowed their horses to a trot and were peering through the trees nervously. He began counting them, their horses, their legs, and then their horses’ legs, adding them up, subtracting them…anything he could do to keep his mind from
wandering to where it did not belong. A little groan from Lucy, however, had his eyes darting from
them to her…something he almost immediately regretted.

Almost.

His breath hitched in his throat as he glanced down at her; her ivory skin practically glowing in the
moonlight, her shining black hair, fanned out behind her head, her lower lip caught between her
teeth and…oh hell, he was glad that her eyes were closed because he was pretty damn sure he was
ogling her like some pathetic, sex-starved jackass. She was obviously uncomfortable…probably in
pain…and here he was, his mind planted firmly in the damn gutter.

He shifted in an attempt to move away, to ease her and his own discomfort, but another groan from
Lucy made him pause. “Am I hurting you?” he whispered to her in concern,

Frantically shaking her head, Lucy whispered back, her eyes still clenched tightly closed, “No.”

Still, Wyatt couldn’t help but think from the way she had to be in some kind of pain. She had just
had a pretty nasty fall, after all, and since she was currently sprawled on the hard ground littered
with rocks and sticks, he figured that wasn’t helping things. As carefully as he could he eased his
left hand from underneath her back and moved it so that it cradled her head, his fingers threading
through her dark, silky curls, softly massaging her skull…hoping that that at least, that would help
ease whatever soreness she currently experiencing. “How is that?” Wyatt asked. “Better? Are
you okay, now?”

Though she nodded, the truth was Lucy was far from okay. Right now, she wanted nothing more
than to scramble out from underneath Wyatt and never get within two feet of him ever again.
Knowing that such an action in the present moment would probably get them all killed, however,
she decided it was probably best to just play it cool.

Not that she had the first idea how to do that.

Especially not when he was massaging her head.

And laying on top of her.

And whispering in her ear.
Though she refused to open her eyes, she could tell that Wyatt was close…very close…too close and as tempted as she was to open her eyes to see just how close he actually was, she knew that between the proximity, the tender caresses and well…her own stupid school-girl feelings she would be much better the way she was. Circumstances may have forced them together, but she was not about to get swept away again…she had had one too many close calls already. The pounding of her heart sounded like a drum in her ears…she could feel it hammering against her chest leaving her with no doubt that Wyatt could probably hear and feel it too. Her entire body seemed to be vibrating with each beat and just as she inwardly cursed herself for being so loud, she realized it wasn’t her heartbeat at all. It was hooves, thundering somewhere in the distance. How close they were, she had no idea…and really, she didn’t think she wanted to know.

She clenched her eyes tighter at the thought of being discovered by the French soldiers, her body seizing up once again in fraught tension, but Wyatt’s soothing voice sounded in her ear, “Lucy,” he whispered, “I think they’re leaving.” She fluttered her eyes open slowly, nearly gasping at how close his face was to hers. His eyes, thankfully, were trained on the retreating soldiers and Lucy, nearly beside herself with relief, had to bite back a laugh as she considered they hadn’t even given the leafy monstrosity before them a second glance.

Wyatt carefully eased himself up, his eyes scanning the woods around them for any more sign of the French soldiers. But Lucy, still a bit stunned from her fall…and well, everything that happened after, didn’t move. Instead, she continued to lay there attempting to catch her breath and calm the racing of her heart as Wyatt crouched down beside her. Thinking that her hesitation to move stemmed from injuries, Wyatt’s training kicked into high gear, “Jesus, Lucy…can you move?” Nodding, Lucy groaned as she attempted to sit up, but Wyatt stopped her, “No…roll over onto your side, first…can you do that?”

“I think so.” she gritted out, feeling every result of that fall as she rolled over.

Wyatt breathed out a sigh of relief as he helped her sit up, “Why the hell didn’t you wait for me or Rufus? Oh shit, Rufus…” he exclaimed suddenly as he scrambled to his feet in order to help the time machine pilot who was now dangling from the tree by his forearms.

“Yeah, still here” Rufus snapped, “literally out on a limb.” As Wyatt rushed to help an exhausted Rufus, Lucy grimaced as she finally managed to sit upright, every inch of her body aching in protest as she did so, holding her head gingerly in her hands as Rufus angrily made his way over to her, “…and you” he was ranting, “I told you you were gonna break your neck if you weren’t careful. What the hell were you thinking?”

“Me? Wyatt told me to get down….so I got down” Lucy spat out defensively.

“Out of sight, not off the machine.” Wyatt countered in frustration, “How was I supposed to know
you’d take me literally? Holy shit, Lucy you could have killed yourself doing something like that.”

“I’m sorry, okay?” she spat out as she attempted but failed to get to her feet. If her sides weren’t screaming from wearing that damn corset for so long, they certainly were now. “I just panicked, alright?” she gritted out as she tried to push herself off the ground once more. Heaving out a sigh, Wyatt went to wrap his arm around her waist for support in an attempt to help her to her feet, but Lucy flinched away from him in pain…and well, for boundaries sake, “No!” she cried out, “Don’t…I’m…I’m okay…I can get up on my own.”

Looking entirely unconvinced, Wyatt backed away from her, his arms poised and ready to catch her as she eased herself up off the ground. He eyed her as she gingerly made her way over to a log and sat down, noting with concern that not only was she limping, she was favoring her sides again. “Lucy, you could have a concussion…or a broken rib or a broken ankle or something…we should check…” Wyatt began.

“No.” Lucy said with a shake of her head, “nothing’s broken…well, except maybe my pride.” she joked as she tried to manage a small smile…but neither Wyatt nor Rufus were laughing.

“Lucy…”

“I’m fine, Wyatt.” Lucy stated with fierce determination. “I’ve just had the wind knocked out of me, that’s all.”

Wyatt looked to Rufus for support but found that he was no help at all; shrugging at Wyatt Rufus stated unconcernedly, “If she says she’s fine, then she’s fine. I hardly think she’d be sitting here fighting with you if she wasn’t…”

‘Exactly.” Lucy said with a determined nod, though Wyatt could tell from the strain in her face that she was still in a lot of pain.

Reluctantly, Wyatt backed away from her, as Rufus continued, “…I, on the other hand, have a damn splinter…”

“So, pull it out.” Wyatt spat back at him in annoyance.

“I tried.” Rufus complained, “but it’s shoved in there too deep…I’m gonna need tweezers.”
Wyatt shook his head, “I’m sorry, Rufus but I left my manicure set at home.” he muttered sarcastically as he pulled out his dagger and handed it to him, “Guess you’ll just have to cut it out.”

Rufus blanched as he looked at the knife, “I…I…it’s on my right hand…I don’t know if I can manage with my left…” he stammered as Wyatt rolled his eyes in exasperation and set to work on the splinter himself. Rufus winced as Wyatt worked the knife edge into his skin, easing out the sliver of wood that was embedded into the palm of his hand. Wyatt was just trying to angle the blade to help lift the splinter when Lucy carefully stood up and began limping around the camp, diverting his attention from Rufus’ hand to her, “Ow! Watch what you’re doing, will ya?” Rufus complained as Wyatt muttered a quick apology and set straight back to work completely oblivious to the eye roll Rufus offered in return.

“Will you stop flinching?” Wyatt spat out as he yanked Rufus’ hand back towards him, “I’m never gonna get this out if you keep jumping every time I get close to grabbing this thing…I almost had it that time.”

“Well, I’m sorry, but it kinda hurts.” Rufus returned hotly, biting back a myriad of curse words as Wyatt drove the knife blade deeper into the surface of his skin.

After nearly chewing a hole into his lower lip, Rufus breathed out a sigh of relief as Wyatt triumphantly held out a large sliver of wood. “All done.” he announced as Rufus gaped at his hand in pain. “What?” Wyatt asked, “You want a band-aid? A lollipop?”

“No.” Rufus grumbled, “But…you cut a hole in my hand…”

“C’mon, Rufus…give me a damn break, all I had was a kni…” Wyatt stopped short, a sinking feeling growing in the pit of his stomach as he took in the sight of their empty camp. “Where’s Lucy?”

“Uh…” Rufus swallowed hard as he looked around, “She…she was right here a minute ago…”

Wyatt, clearly on edge, quickly darted around the trees, anxiously searching for her, “Lucy? Lucy?!”

“Whoa…ca…calm down, Wyatt…maybe she just went off to the bathroom or something…” Rufus offered, “you know she’s got a lot of…stuff…going on under that dress…it takes her a while.” As much as Wyatt wanted to take some comfort in that thought, he couldn’t help but think that Lucy
would’ve told them as much… it wasn’t like her to just disappear… especially not when she knew how close they were to the French fort… hell, to the French soldiers.

No. She wouldn’t have just run off… that wasn’t like her.

“Dammit Rufus, will you just shut up and help me look?” Wyatt spat out despite himself. It wasn’t just the fact that they were in the woods, in the night, surrounded by hostile forces. No. She had just had that hard fall. If she had hit her head and was disoriented, she could’ve wandered off somewhere in confusion… gotten lost in this maze of trees, or headed straight for…

“The river.” Wyatt gasped before racing towards the water’s edge, dreading what he might find there. Why the hell hadn’t he insisted on checking her for injuries? How could have been so damn stupid? Rufus was right on his heels as Wyatt, now ankle deep in the water spun around helplessly as his eyes scanned the expanse of dense trees and water all around him.

She wasn’t there.

A wave of panic washed over him as he stood there, feeling about as helpless as he had on a cold, dark night in February 2012; the night Jessica disappeared and was taken from him forever. The same agony of not knowing… the same horror in slowly comprehending that the worst of your fears was becoming a reality overtook him as he stood there, his eyes darting back and forth, desperately searching for any sign of Lucy.

“Wyatt…”

“You told me she was fine.” Wyatt growled, his anger growing. “I knew I should’ve checked her… I knew I shouldn’t have listened to either one of you. She was hurt and instead of taking care of her, I had to pull out your damn splinter!”

Offended, Rufus gaped back at him, “What the hell, man?” he snapped back, “Don’t blame me for dropping the ball. If you were that damn worried you could have…”

“What’s going on? What happened? Why are you two fighting?” Lucy asked as she stood staring at the two of them in confusion from the shoreline. “And why are you in the river?”

After gaping at her for several seconds, Wyatt’s relief suddenly turned to anger “Where the hell
have you been?” he spat out.

Taken aback, Lucy looked towards a shrugging Rufus and stammered, “Well, I was…I…was trying to…and then I heard you calling…so I…” she looked at him in complete confusion, “What…what’s wrong?”

“What’s wrong?” Wyatt asked her incredulously, “Do you have any idea what we just went through looking for you?” Lucy looked back at him completely bewildered as Rufus shook his head in apparent disagreement, “Jesus Lucy, we thought…you could have been…I mean, with your fall….”

“Wyatt…I…I told you,” Lucy scoffed, “I’m fine. I was just…” but he was already pushing past her and heading back up to the camp, clearly frustrated and angry. Lucy looked back at Rufus helplessly, “What…what did I do?”

“You gave Wyatt a panic attack.” Rufus said with a dry chuckle as he made his way back to the river bank towards Lucy, “He may act all tough, but he’s got a few soft spots…especially where you’re concerned.”

Lucy shook her head in disbelief, “I don’t think it has anything to do with me. He just takes his job seriously…”

“Sure…that’s it. His job.” Rufus said with a nod, entirely unconvinced, “Well, for what it’s worth, Lucy…I’m glad you’re okay…and not ya know…floating face down in the river or anything.”

“Thanks, Rufus.” Lucy answered with a roll of her eyes as they slowly made their way back up to the camp, Lucy leaning on Rufus for support, only to find Wyatt, brooding, as he forcefully dug the shovel into the Earth.

“What are you doing?” Rufus asked in confusion.

“What the hell does it look like I’m doing?” Wyatt spat out. “I’m setting up camp.”

“But what if more soldiers come by?” Rufus asked nervously.
Wyatt shook his head as he continued to dig deeper, “No way in hell are we going to be marching through the woods tonight, not after what just happened.”

“You mean my fall?” Lucy asked incredulously, “Wyatt…I’m fine”

He paused in his digging and looked up at her skeptically. “Sure, you are. You’re only limping.”

“Yes, but…”

“But nothing.” Wyatt interrupted heatedly, “We stay here tonight. You obviously need to rest.” he said with a nod towards her ankle as he began shoveling again, “which means the last thing you need to be doing is wandering off in the woods…alone.”

“I didn’t run off…” she began but she quickly bit her lip, apparently thinking better of arguing, “You’re right.” she said with a sullen nod and a quick glance towards Rufus who looked as surprised as Wyatt that she switched gears so suddenly, “I’m sorry…I um…shouldn’t have disappeared on you.” Wyatt eyed her suspiciously as she limped to the crate of supplies, wondering where the hell she had run off to and why she seemed to be avoiding any discussion about where she had gone.

“I’m telling you she went to the bathroom.” Rufus suggested when Wyatt pulled him aside after he had started the fire.

“Well then why wouldn’t she just say as much?” Wyatt asked as he looked over his shoulder at Lucy who was slicing up the loaf of bread Rufus had procured.

“You know how women are,” Rufus hissed back, “they make up all kinds of weird excuses to hide what they’re actually doing…powdering their nose, reapplying lipstick, having "girl time". Rufus scoffed, “it’s like they think we don’t know they have the same bodily functions that men do.”

Wyatt hushed him as Lucy approached, still eyeing her suspiciously as she hobbled towards the fire handing them both some bread and cheese as they waited for the soup to warm. “How’s your ankle?” he asked as he cleared his throat.

Lucy paused as she sat down on the far side of the fire, being sure to keep as much distance between herself and Wyatt, “It’s fine.” she said with a shrug, “it’s a little sore…but that’s hardly
surprising considering…everything.”

Wyatt nodded thoughtfully but otherwise said nothing as Rufus passed around the pot of soup, the aroma wafting from it, driving out any other thought from his mind. It was a hearty stew, with chunks of meat, undoubtedly venison, with bits of carrot and potato and after so many days of hardly anything, it truly was the best thing any of them had ever tasted. Paired as it was, with homemade bread, cheese and washed down with a few swigs of wine, it was heads and tails above the snake they had eaten earlier that day…something Rufus was all too quick to point out.

“See, Bear Grylls…we can have a meal out here without resorting to eating snakes and bugs and whatever other weird survivalist shit you’ve got in store for us.”

“Very funny, Rufus.” Wyatt said with a roll of his eyes, “but I didn’t hear you complaining when that was all you had to eat. We won’t always be this lucky…”

“No.” Rufus shrugged in agreement, “but I get some weird satisfaction knowing that the first decent meal we had since landing in this hell hole was due to my knack for “blending in” and not because of your crazy wilderness skills.”

Rufus half expected Wyatt to give him a tongue lashing about dismissing the importance of knowing how to survive in the wild, but he didn’t. Instead, Wyatt poked at the fire and casually called out to Lucy, “Where are you running off to now?”

Surprised, Rufus looked up to find that Lucy was no longer sitting across from them, but had inched her way to the edge of the clearing. She looked flustered and embarrassed at being caught, but there was a hint of frustration in her voice as she snapped back, “Nowhere…I was just going to wash up.”

Wyatt stood up, eyeing her thoughtfully, “No need for you to run around on that ankle of yours.” he motioned for Rufus to hand him the now empty pot that held the soup, “I’ll go get you some water.”

Lucy hobbled back towards the fire and plopped down, wrapping herself up in a blanket as she did so while Wyatt ran down to the river and brought her back a pot full of water and handed her his handkerchief. “Thanks.” she muttered despondently as she took it from him.

Rufus, meanwhile, had taken a blanket of his own and stretched out underneath a large tree. “Oh
yeah, this is so much better than freezing my ass off.” he said as he yawned violently and nuzzled himself under the covers.

Following his lead, Wyatt grabbed a blanket of his own but as he began laying it out, he looked over at Lucy…still on the other side of the campfire, mindlessly dunking the handkerchief he had given her in the water, “You know,” Wyatt piped up as he spread out his blanket, “if you’re planning on using that to wash up, it helps if you actually use that to…wash yourself.

“Huh?” Lucy startled at his comment, “Oh, right…I’m sorry.” she muttered as she began scrubbing her face and hands, looking at once embarrassed and irritated by the attention.

Wyatt, however, wasn’t phased in the slightest by her huffy breath…if anything he was more convinced than ever that something was not right. After watching her half-heartedly clean her face and hands and toss the handkerchief back in the pot of water with a scowl, Wyatt accosted her again, “Are you sure, you’re alright?”

Rolling her eyes this time, Lucy snatched up her blanket and moved further away from the fire…and them, “Yes, I’m fine.” she gritted out, “I’ve told you…”

“Then why the hell are you all the way over there?” Wyatt asked, ignoring the snort from Rufus who had now thrown off his blanket and was casting an amused glare towards the Delta Force soldier.

Lucy shrugged in bewilderment, “I don’t know…I just felt like moving over here.”

“You know, your dress will dry out faster if you’re close to the fire.” Wyatt added, “I can’t imagine you’re comfortable…I mean, it’s kind of chilly tonight and your clothes are still wet…”

“And whose fault is that?” Lucy snapped, causing Wyatt to dart his eyes to hers in surprise, “It’s too hot by the fire, okay? I’m perfectly comfortable where I am.”

Wyatt, taken aback by her obvious anger, traded a glance with Rufus who was biting back a laugh. Ignoring him, Wyatt argued, “We should still stay close together…you know, for safety’s sake.” Rufus snorted again and Wyatt, finally having enough of his antics turned to him and hissed, “What the hell is your problem?”
“Me? I don’t have a problem…but I think it’s pretty obvious you do.”

“What are you talking about?”

“C’mon Wyatt.” Rufus whispered. “You…Lucy…the fact that she’s there and not here…snuggled up next to you.”

Wyatt gaped at him, “I don’t know what the hell you’re talking about, but that has nothing to do…we’re out in the woods, Rufus…it’s safer if we sleep close together in case something happens.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Rufus muttered as he turned on his blanket away from Wyatt who was left stewing in his own indignation.

He hated that Rufus was insinuating his motivations were spurred on by anything but Lucy’s safety…what the hell did he care where she slept? His job was to protect the team and it would be a hell of a lot easier to do that if they weren’t spread out all over the damn place.

Anyone could see that.

Everyone but Lucy and Rufus, apparently.

As Rufus nuzzled under his covers once more, Wyatt turned his attention back to Lucy who was hugging her knees to her chest, looking almost as if she were waiting for a bus. He thought about suggesting she try to get some sleep, but after the way she snapped at him earlier and the way she had been acting all day, he thought better of it. Obviously, she was trying to avoid him….or she just needed space….or maybe she had overheard Rufus’ damn accusatory comment and it made her uncomfortable. Whatever it was, Lucy clearly did not want to be near him…and he didn’t want to think about why that seemed to bother him so much…

But as he tossed and turned on his own blanket, there was a nagging voice in his brain – that oddly enough sounded just like Rufus - telling him that he would sleep a hell of a lot better nested next to a certain historian. He half wondered if Lucy was feeling the same way….or if she was now avoiding him because of what had happened back at the fort...oh dammit, what if that was why? What if he had just royally screwed up their professional relationship because of that stupid plan he had to hide in plain sight? He had made things awkward between them and hadn’t talked to her about it….he was going to have to fix it. He was going to have to explain to her that it didn’t mean
anything…that they were just friends…and then maybe things would go back to normal between
them…but then he remembered she had been aloof with him all morning…well before anything
even happened at that fort. So maybe she wasn’t upset about that situation at all.

And why would she be?

He hadn’t actually kissed her…and well, as far as she knew the whole thing was just a stunt to
keep them both safe. She was fine. There was no reason to feel awkward about their relationship…
because nothing had changed. They were team mates…team mates who had not kissed…and that
was all there was to it.

After nearly an hour of listening to Rufus snore, however, Wyatt finally rolled back over and
peered across the campsite again to find Lucy sitting with her back against a tree, her arms cradled
around her knees and absolutely stifling a yawn.

“Okay,” Wyatt muttered to her mechanically as he sat up with a sigh. “What’s your favorite
movie?”

Lucy startled in confusion, “Wha…what?”

“It helps,” Wyatt explained simply with a shrug, “when you’re trying to fight off sleep…talking.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Lucy hissed back at him in a huff, “I’m not trying to
fight off sleep…I’m just not tired.”

Wyatt looked at her doubtfully, as she attempted to stifle another unmistakable yawn, “Okay…
fine…you’re not tired. What’s your favorite movie?”

Lucy sighed in exasperation, “I don’t know…probably one of the classics…like Philadelphia Story
or Singing in the Rain…or Casablanca…something like that.”

Wyatt smirked, “Figured.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Lucy asked, affronted.
“Nothing. I just pegged you for a black and white movie type—that’s all.” Wyatt answered.

“I like other movies too.” Lucy said defensively, “I just happen to think there’s a sort of…charming nostalgia that comes with…what?” Lucy asked as Wyatt let out a small chuckle.

“You don’t have to defend your movie choices with me, Lucy. I’m just trying to have a conversation.”

“Alright, then what’s your favorite movie?” Lucy asked matter of factly, before she shook her head excitedly, “Oh wait…don’t tell me…James Bond?” Wyatt gave her a bit of an eye roll as she continued, a triumphant smirk on her face, “Let’s see…I think you would probably vote Sean Connery as the quintessential Bond.”

Wyatt scoffed, “Of course…he’s the original.”

Lucy nodded triumphantly, “Okay…so a Connery Bond film…hmmm.” Lucy was no Bond connoisseur, but it wasn’t like she was completely ignorant of pop culture to know at least some of the Bond movies. Most of the men she dated had been fans, after all…and her own father…well…step-father, would occasionally watch a Bond film or two. But which one would be Wyatt’s ultimate favorite? “Dr. No seems too obvious. Goldfinger too cliché…ohh, Never Say Never Again?” she asked remembering what he had said to Ian Fleming before they left Germany. “Oh no wait, what was that one about us? Weapon of…something…Chance?”

“Weapon of Choice” Wyatt muttered grumpily.

Lucy narrowed her eyes in confusion, “What? Did…didn’t you like it?” Wyatt frowned and shook his head, completely taking Lucy aback, “Really?” she asked in disbelief, “I thought for sure you would’ve loved that one…I mean, you’re in it.”

Yeah, he was in it…but so was Lucy.

Wyatt shifted uncomfortably on his blanket as he relived the disappointment and infuriation of that flaming piece of garbage masquerading as a Bond film. “Connery’s finest” Mason had called it, but Wyatt could not disagree more. Not that it was Mason’s fault, he hadn’t been there, after all…maybe if he had, he wouldn’t have ranked it above the likes of From Russia with Love or Diamonds are Forever. Hell, as far as Wyatt was concerned, Weapon of Choice ranked below
them all, *Moonraker, A View to Kill*, or even that George Lazenby nightmare, *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*.

It wasn’t that the plot wasn’t good…taking their World War II era mission and transposing it to Soviet Russia was a brilliant move given the Cold War and that particular mission’s emphasis on the rocket/space programs. While Von Braun wasn’t the scientist in need of saving in *Weapon of Choice*, it was clear to Wyatt that role had been inspired by the German engineer. It also became abundantly clear that Ian Fleming had twisted the story around a bit, to put himself, or rather his counterpart, into a more favorable light. It was Lucy’s brilliance that had alerted both Wyatt and Ian Fleming to Von Braun’s importance. Hell, Ian Fleming was ready to kill him, until Lucy stepped in…but did she get any credit? No. That asshole had given all the glory to Bond.

But that wasn’t the only liberty Ian Fleming had taken.

While he and Rufus’ roles in the mission and the subsequent rescue had been significantly reduced, Fleming had at least treated their characters honestly. Rufus was the brilliant engineer who bravely volunteered to disarm the Nazi missile…well, Soviet missile while Wyatt was portrayed as a no-nonsense crack shot CIA (OSS) operative. Of course, Wyatt wasn’t *really* a CIA operative…but as Ian Fleming didn’t know that, that little discrepancy could be easily overlooked and forgiven.

What could not be so easily forgiven was how he had completely decimated Lucy’s character. Instead of being the strong, brilliant, and courageous woman he knew her to be, Ian Fleming had turned her into an empty headed, bumbling secretary whose sole purpose in the story was to tumble into bed – repeatedly - with Bond. He knew in 1945 that Bond had been interested in Lucy. He had watched him flirt with her over a glass of wine, hold her hand in the Nazi castle…hell, he had even heard the sonofabitch proposition her right there at the end of their mission. Lucy, however, had flatly rejected him…and this…this was how he repaid her.

Coloring slightly, Wyatt shrugged, “I um…just didn’t think it was that good. You know…being on the actual mission and seeing…well…seeing…” he cleared his throat nervously as he continued, “I just think the real deal is better, that’s all.”

Lucy nodded slowly, “I guess that makes sense. I suppose it would be kind of disappointing…seeing some cheap imitation of yourself running around on the screen.” She offered him a sheepish grin, “Nothing is quite like the real deal, right?”

Wyatt ducked his head down, a knowing smile playing on his lips as he considered what Lucy would say if she knew how much Ian Fleming had objectified her and turned her into what amounted to nothing more than a brainless groupie. He nodded as he muttered back, “You got that right…ma’am.”
They continued to laugh and talk as the night wore on and though Lucy was looking visibly more relaxed than she had been all day, Wyatt could tell that she was really fighting to stay awake…yet he had no idea why. Well…that wasn’t true…he did have some suspicions. The French were looking for them after all, and knowing how anxious she and Rufus had been about being caught again, he imagined their close call this evening had probably unnerved her quite a bit. Then there was her fall. Lucy had insisted that she was fine, but Wyatt had seen how she limped and clutched her sides and he couldn’t shake the feeling that something was very wrong…and it hadn’t started at this latest fall…no, the fall she had earlier in the day had elicited the same response. Maybe she had actually broken a rib and she didn’t want to worry him…maybe that’s why she didn’t want him touching her waist…maybe that’s why she didn’t want to lay down…maybe that’s why she looked like she was in so much pain when they were laying there together waiting for the French soldiers to pass.

It made so much sense.

Wyatt had just resolved to confront Lucy over these suspicions when her head fell against his shoulder…having finally fallen asleep. Not wanting to risk waking her, particularly since he suspected she was hiding an injury, Wyatt gently eased himself against a tree, allowing Lucy to continue using his shoulder as a pillow. If laying down caused her pain, Wyatt figured, he would sacrifice some comfort for her behalf…it was his job, after all, to keep her safe. Pulling his blanket over the two of them, he leaned his head back, letting it rest against the trunk of the tree, feeling much happier and at ease than he had been, as he too drifted off to sleep.

Wyatt wasn’t sure how long he had been asleep before he awoke with a start, unsure of what had disturbed him until he looked over and saw that Lucy was no sitting next to him. As the grogginess began to melt away, a rising panic bubbled in his chest, threatening to overtake him as his eyes darted around the darkened campsite. Looking up, the once bright moon was now obscured by inky clouds that stretched across the starlit sky like a menacing shadow, filling him with a sudden sense of fear and helplessness. He scrambled to his feet, afraid to call out too loudly, but wanting nothing more than to find her…as soon as possible.

As quietly as he could, he retrieved his gun and eased his way around the camp, his ears straining for any clue as to where she might be. Hearing a rustling in the small copse of trees they had used the night before as their sleeping quarters, Wyatt silently made his way towards the sound, hoping to God he would find her there. His gun was poised, his heart pounding in his chest when he heard the unmistakable sounds of a struggle within. Fearing the worst, Wyatt was ready to charge into the trees, guns blazing when he thought better of it. Instead, he stepped close to the trees and called out to her, “Lucy? Are you alright?”

A yelp followed by the apparent sound of someone toppling over had Wyatt just about ready to crash through the trees to find out just what in the hell was going on, but suddenly Lucy cried out in panic, “Wyatt? What are you doing?”
“I was going to ask you the same thing.” Wyatt said as he breathed out a sigh of relief, “Jesus, Lucy it’s the middle of the night.”

“I realize that.” Lucy spat out in annoyance, “Just…just go back to sleep, okay? Everything is fine.”

“The hell it is…you’ve been acting funny all day…what’s wrong?” he demanded as he holstered his weapon.

“Nothing is wrong,” Lucy gritted out.

“Dammit, Lucy…I know you’re hurt.” he contended as he attempted to step between the trees and get to her, “What is it? Your ribs? Your back?”

“No!” Lucy insisted, “No…it’s not that…it’s…”

“Don’t lie to me, Lucy.”

“I’m not!” she argued defensively, “It’s just…it’s…it’s my corset, okay?” she finally relented with a sigh.

“Your corset?”

“Yes, my corset.” she snapped, “I’ve been wearing it for five days and I just can’t take it anymore, okay?”

Wyatt rubbed a frustrated hand across his face, almost laughing with relief, “Lucy…why the hell didn’t you say something? Here I’ve been worried you had a broken rib or something…”

“I told you I was fine.”
“Yeah, but Lucy, if it was bothering you that much…”

“And what would I have done, huh? Strip down? Walk around here in my underwear?” she scoffed, “I told you when we first got here I wanted to rip this damn thing off.” Wyatt swallowed hard, suddenly remembering that she had mentioned ripping off her corset…but he had been working overtime to get that visual out of his head and he hadn’t (thankfully) given it another thought.

“Still, Lucy….” he offered consolingly, “If you were in pain you should’ve said something…”

“I didn’t want to complain, alright? Besides…it’s…it’s my underwear.”

Wyatt let out an exasperated sigh, “Oh my God, Lucy…what are we? Twelve?”

“No…” she began but Wyatt talked over her.

“So, you would rather spend five days being miserable than admit something is bothering you?”

“Look,” Lucy countered defensively, “you and Rufus don’t get it. You have your pants…and your shirts…I have layers and layers of….ugh…you have no idea what this is like, okay? Sometimes being the only woman on this team, sucks.” Wyatt heaved a sigh and began to move around the bushes towards her, “What…what are you doing?” she asked in alarm.

“I’m helping you.’ Wyatt said matter of factly.

“No, really…it’s okay…” she muttered as she twisted her arms behind her and grunted, “If I can just get this knot untied, I can get out of it…” she let out a grunt as she yanked once more to no avail, “Dammit.” Wyatt shook his head and dove through the trees towards her, stopping suddenly at the sight of Lucy scrambling to lift her discarded and damp dress over her front in a feeble attempt to cover herself. “Wyatt…wait…what are you….”

He raised his eyebrows at her, clearly amused at her sudden modesty, “Lucy…what the hell? You’re wearing more clothes right now than you were In Vegas….are those pillows?” he asked suddenly as he pointed towards her panniers.
Lucy rolled her eyes impatiently as drew her dress up defensively against her chest, “It’s still my underwear, Wyatt.” she gritted out indignantly.

“1754 underwear, Lucy.” Wyatt reminded her, “By 21st century standards you are pretty much fully clothed…relax.”

Lucy cast him a sardonic glare before relenting with a sigh, “Yeah…okay, I see your point.”

“Just…let me help you out, okay?”

Feeling suddenly silly, Lucy heaved a sigh as she turned her back to Wyatt and lifted her hair up away from her neck giving him a clearer view of the laces. He set to work right away, his fingers tugging at the knot and Lucy couldn’t help but chuckle at herself, “I’m sorry.” she muttered softly, “I don’t know why I’m so uptight about this…I mean, this can’t be any worse than you biting the underwire out of my bra on that first mission, right?”

Wyatt’s fingers faltered on the knot as the memory of her bare back came racing to the forefront of his mind. He hadn’t expected her to take her shirt off…he was just interested in getting them the hell out of there and her underwire seemed like the perfect solution. How was he supposed to know she would strip down right there in the middle of the jail house? With shaking hands, he reached for the laces of her corset again, cursing the snakelike part of his brain that had suddenly awoken, reminding him of every impure thought he had had of the high-strung professor since that damn night in 1937 New Jersey. As if mocking him, a tendril of her raven hair fluttered down drawing his attention to her mercilessly exposed neck…just aching to be touched, kissed….

What the hell was his problem?

Lucy was suffering…she was in pain…and here his damn mind was stuck in the gutter…where it did not belong…particularly in regards to her. This was Lucy, dammit. His team mate, his co-worker…his…

“Wyatt?” Lucy asked as she turned slightly to face him, confusion evident on her face, “Wh… what’s wrong? Can’t you get it?”

Wyatt gulped. Somehow standing with her in the moonlight, under a canopy of trees, and removing her corset didn’t seem like such a good idea anymore. Stumbling, he backed away, stammering some incoherent nonsense about Jiya’s handiwork on the knot, desperate to distance
himself from her as she stared back at him in confusion. With the light from the moon now absent, Wyatt tripped over a limb in the darkness, nearly falling backwards until Lucy reached out and grabbed him by the arm, the dress she had been holding up against her now lying in a heap between them.

“Are you alright?” she breathed out in concern.

“Yeah…” Wyatt stammered in embarrassment, averting his eyes, trying to look at anything but her. “I was um…I was just going to get my…um…my knife.”

“It’s in your belt, Wyatt.” Lucy said blankly.

“Huh? Oh….” Wyatt startled as he looked down at the leather sheath adorning his hip. Clearing his throat, he withdrew the knife and wordlessly motioned for her to turn, willing his brain to stop reminding him that he was about to cut Lucy out of a corset and that was bound to do all sort of horrible things to his brain…and his dreams…just like when he had bitten through her bra….

Shit.

Desperate to just get it over with, Wyatt tightly grasped onto her corset strings, not caring about anything except helping her and then getting away from her as soon as possible. “Ow!” Lucy gasped, “You’re pulling it too tight…”

“I’ve almost got it.” Wyatt gritted out as he slid the large blade underneath the laces and began sawing away, “Stop wiggling…” he grunted out, “this isn’t as easy as it looks, you know…”

“Well, I’m sorry…” Lucy grunted back, “but I can’t breathe….”

Wyatt muttered an apology and yanked the laces tight one last time before the laces gave way and Lucy’s corset fell open and billowed out away from her sides, causing her to gasp out in relief, “Oh my God, you have no idea how good that feels.” She quickly pushed the ruined garment off her shoulders and tossed it away from her, happy and relieved to be finally free of it. Wrenching the bottom of her chemise out of her petticoats, Lucy lifted it slightly to assess the state of her abused torso. The moon’s light might have been dimmed by clouds but there was no mistaking the angry red welts that marred her skin.
“Jesus, Lucy…” Wyatt breathed out, horrified at the sight, “Why the hell didn’t you say something sooner?” Every snakelike thought that had entered his brain at the sight of her in her corset had completely evaporated as he stood there, staring at the ugly and deep indentations that cut into her side. She had clearly been suffering, had obviously been in pain for some time, yet she never said a word. He wasn’t quite sure whether he should be mad as hell or in complete awe of her stubbornness. Embarrassed, Lucy let her chemise drop to hide the evidence of her suffering, but Wyatt caught it before it fell completely, tentatively allowing his fingers to trace the inflamed divots in her skin. She hissed out in pain and his eyebrows narrowed in concern, “Sorry,” he muttered, “Am…am I hurting you?”

Barely able to squeak out a response, Lucy merely shook her head, hardly daring to breathe as Wyatt’s fingers gently pressed against her ribs, “How about now? Does this hurt?”

Realizing that Wyatt was now checking her for further injuries, Lucy tilted her head and offered him a sardonic glare, “I told you…I’m alright…”

“You think I’m going to take your word on that after seeing this?” Wyatt asked her incredulously. He pressed into her ribs again, this time with a bit more pressure, “Does this hurt?”

Lucy’s eyes met his, so full of concern and a dazzling intensity, and her breath hitched in her throat, “No,” she gasped out, but at Wyatt’s sceptical stare and another press into her ribs she yelped, “Ow! Alright…it’s a little sore…but I’m pretty sure it’s because of that damn corset…”

“Lucy….”

“Wyatt…I swear…I will let you pound on every single one of my ribs…but not tonight, okay?”
Just…just let them have a chance to breathe first…alright? That’s all I’m asking.”

The snap of a twig had both Lucy and Wyatt turning towards the clearing in alarm, both of them peering out through the branches where they could just make out a retreating figure in the shadows, quickly slinking away. “Rufus?” Wyatt called out in uncertainty.

“Yeah…um…bathroom….sorry…” he answered awkwardly, “I…um…I didn’t mean to interrupt…you guys just keep doing whatever it is you are doing.”

“Oh no, no…Rufus…” Lucy called out as she made her way out from behind the trees, “Wyatt was just helping me out of my corset.” she explained innocently.
“So I heard.” Rufus said pointedly, “Look, we’re all adults here...if you two want to sneak off in the middle of the night for some alone time, I completely understand...just try to keep it down next time, okay?”

“Dammit Rufus,” Wyatt snapped, sick to death of his insinuations, “nothing happened, okay? She was just…”

“Say no more Wyatt, please…” Rufus interrupted with a wave of his hand, “I don’t need the details of whatever it is you two have got going...are those pillows? Damn, Lucy what else did you have going on under that dress?”

“Okay…you know what?” she gritted out as she untied her panniers and tossed them away from her, “This is exactly why I didn’t want to do this in front of you two...it’s not like this isn’t humiliating enough.”

“Humiliating? Lucy, what the hell?” Wyatt countered as he gaped at her in disbelief, “You think we wouldn’t have cared that you were in pain?” He shook his head as he pointed to her side, “No one should have to suffer like that Lucy...why the hell did you wait so long to get that damn thing off?”

“It’s not like I didn’t try, okay?” Lucy spat back defensively, coloring as she crossed her arms over her chest.

Wyatt stared back at her in confusion, “You mean...are you talking about earlier? Dammit, Lucy is that where you went?” She jutted her chin forward, but said nothing, giving Wyatt all the confirmation he needed. “Why the hell didn’t you just say so?”

“I told you...it’s...embarrassing...and besides, I didn’t want to be stuck in my underwear...for obvious reasons.” she gritted out angrily, “But then...well...” she stole a quick glance towards Rufus before adding quickly, “I found something I could change into...”

Confused, Rufus narrowed his eyes at her, “You found...holy shit!” he gasped as he ran towards his crate of supplies, realization suddenly dawning on him. “You stole my clothes didn’t you?”

“Yes I did.” Lucy snapped back, “And I’m not sorry either...what else was I supposed to do? You didn’t think of anyone but yourself...”
“What do you mean I didn’t think of anyone else but myself? I got you food, didn’t I?”

“That’s besides the point.” Lucy snapped back, “Do you have any idea what it’s like running around the woods in a dress?”

“Don’t go trying to blame me for the messed up way things are done in this century.” Rufus countered, “I didn’t make the damn rules…you’re going to stick out like a sore thumb if you go prancing around here in a pair of pants.”

“Yeah, like she’s not going to stick out like a sore thumb prancing around here in her underwear.” Wyatt scoffed, “Let her have the damn clothes, Rufus.”

“But…”

“I said let her have your damn clothes.” Wyatt gritted out, “You can always pick up some more later…she needs something now.” Lucy offered him an appreciative smile, but Wyatt absolutely felt like he did not deserve a single ounce of gratitude. He felt like an ass. As the only woman on their team, she needed and deserved privacy…and because he hadn’t allowed her that, she had suffered in silence for days. He would have gladly given her the clothes off of his back if he knew she was in that much pain…but he did know, didn’t he? In the entire time they had spent here, she complained once…and only once…and instead of paying attention to the fact that she was uncomfortable, his mind had gone straight to the damn gutter and he had pushed it out of his head…that is until he noticed she was favoring her sides today. All damn day she had shown signs that she was in pain and he had let it slide, stupidly agreeing with Rufus that if she was really hurting, she would say something.

Resolved to make up for that failure, Wyatt cleared his throat nervously and nodded towards the copse of trees, “Why don’t…why don’t you go ahead and get changed and then I’ll see what I can do about wrapping that ankle?”

“Wyatt, you don’t have to…it’s fi…”

“I want to, Lucy.” Wyatt interrupted firmly. “I meant what I said earlier, you shouldn’t have to suffer…just let me take care of you, okay?”

Lucy startled at the sincerity in Wyatt’s voice, “Okay.” She said softly with a nod as she
awkwardly motioned towards the trees, “I’ll…just go change then.”

Relieved to at least know now what had been bugging Lucy all day, Wyatt let out a heavy sigh as he watched her go…something that did not escape Rufus’ notice. “There it is…” he said with an impish grin.

“There what is?” Wyatt snapped back.

Rufus shrugged, “You…sighing over Lucy like she’s your grade school crush. Don’t think I didn’t see the way you were looking at her in there.” he said with a nod towards the trees.

“Don’t you have to go to the bathroom?” Wyatt asked in annoyance as he turned away from the trees, making a beeline towards their supplies.

“Yeah, yeah…I’m going.” Rufus acknowledged with a wave, “but you can’t fool me, Delta Force. I can see right through you.”

Wyatt rolled his eyes as he sorted through their cache of stolen items, wishing to hell Rufus would quit screwing with his already messed up brain. There was nothing going on between him and Lucy…nothing. She was his friend…and yes, okay…he was attracted to her…but he was a red-blooded male and she was…beautiful…and smart…and funny…and…

“Wyatt!”

Rufus’ voice rang out through the clearing, causing him to throw back his head in frustration, “Dammit, Rufus…keep it down, will ya? he gritted out as he pushed himself to his feet and turned around with a huff, “You’re gonna wake the...French.” Wyatt stopped short as his eyes widened in horror at the scene in front of him; French soldiers, seven of them, were standing just at the edge of the clearing. Two of them had already apprehended Rufus, wrenching him away, his arms pinned behind his back as he attempted to break free. Lucy, still clad in just her petticoat and chemise, had a hand clamped against her mouth as she too struggled against the soldier who had taken a hold of her. Somewhere in Wyatt’s mind he knew he should just throw up his hands and surrender, but seeing Lucy and Rufus in danger, he instinctively made a grab for his gun.

Time seemed to slow down to an impossibly sluggish pace as a crack as loud as lightning rent the air. Wyatt could see it all, the spark from the pistol, the puff of smoke, the anguished look on Lucy’s face just as a blinding pain in his head sent him hurtling backwards to the ground. He
could hear her screams, he could hear Rufus’ shouts but there wasn’t a damn thing he could do except lay there as his entire world went black.

Chapter End Notes

I'd like to apologize for the delay - I have been busy with travels and life just sort of caught up with me - I hope you understand.

Parts of this chapter have been finished for a WHILE and so I am so excited to finally get it out there for you. It turned out MUCH longer than I had originally anticipated but there you go. Covering the Lifeboat was always something that I felt they would have to do if they stayed longer....it was already vulnerable with that gaping hole in the side and just as we see in the show, it alarms the French when they see it. I don't think that Wyatt especially, with his military training, would be okay with leaving it exposed and potentially damaged more than it already was.

I hope that you all enjoyed this update....and I will work to get the next chapter out for you soon. I appreciate your patience and your readership.

P.S. As much as I'd like to apologize for leaving you with a cliffhanger....I can't. LOL.
Let me first apologize for the long delay in updating this...and on a cliffhanger too. It has been insanely busy at our house and I have only been able to eke out a few moments here and there to type...but I have been working on this NEARLY every day. I feel REALLY awful about leaving you all hanging for so long. It's not something I meant to do, everything just sort of happened all at once.
Now for the fic itself - there's a lot of French in this chapter - so be warned. (that's another reason it took so long to write this...I was out of town in the BOONDOCKS of CT and had very little internet capability) so for you non-French speakers, be prepared to google translate some of this.
I can't give much else away, but there are some sensitive topics that are brought up...and will be brought up in future chapters but that is why I changed the rating to an M.

I hope you enjoy this installment. I was going to end it at a certain spot (you'll probably recognize it in the chapter...it's fairly obvious) and start the following chapter after that, but since I left you for so long with that big cliffhanger, I didn't want to do that to you twice, so I included it here to leave you on a more optimistic and hopeful note.

Happy Reading!

Silent tears streamed down Lucy’s face as she limped next to Rufus, both of them bound and being led by musket point through the darkened and eerily silent forest. She had no idea where they were going or what would happen to them when they got there…but she really didn’t care…because, really - what difference did it make?

Wyatt was dead.

It wasn’t enough that they were stranded here with little to no hope of ever getting back to the present again, but she had taken solace in the fact that no matter what this century threw at them, she, Wyatt and Rufus would face it together. Yes, she knew that certain death – given the century and the political climate of the time - was always possible, even expected…but she had never once believed that out of the three of them, Wyatt who be the one to fall victim to the inevitable first.

“What are we going to do, Rufus?” Lucy’s small, quavering voice whispered beside him.
“Without Wyatt…”
“Hey,” he tried to console her, “we’ve still got each other, right?” But even as he spoke those words, he felt the emptiness behind them. Without Wyatt, they weren’t complete. Without Wyatt, they had no protection. He may have had some delusions of grandeur in regards to his own abilities after his successful raid of the fort earlier that night, but Rufus was all too aware that he was not even half the soldier Wyatt was…hell, he wasn’t even a soldier. He was just an engineer; a techno nerd who had spent years hiding behind his computer because he was too damn scared to talk to his own desk mate…and now what he wouldn’t give for a chance to tell her how he felt about her.

Who was he kidding? Lucy was right…without Wyatt, they were screwed.

He glanced over at her, her tear-stained face wrenched in absolute agony. “Are you okay? I mean,” he amended as he lifted his bound hands and pointed to her face, “you aren’t…ya know…in a lot of pain or anything, are you?”

Lucy shook her head despondently as she quickly wiped away a few stray tears. A large bruise was forming just under her left cheekbone compliments of the French soldier who had ruthlessly killed Wyatt.

She had never considered herself a violent person…hell, until recently she had fainted at the sight of blood. But when that soldier fired that pistol and Wyatt hit the ground, a rage like she had never known exploded within her. She wanted to inflict as much damage on the shooter as she possibly could, to make him feel a fraction of the pain she was feeling, and so, when it was clear Wyatt wasn’t getting back up, Lucy wrenched herself out of the arms of her captor and flung herself at the soldier, screaming and clawing at him in anger until he landed a vicious blow to her face. That action, however, earned him a stiff reprimand from his commanding officer who not only helped Lucy to her feet, but also took off his own military coat and offered it to her as a means to cover herself.

Lucy had begrudgingly taken it from him, feeling that to take a kindness from any of these men would be an insult to Wyatt and his memory. Still, she knew that she was even more vulnerable now without Wyatt…and without proper clothes…and as this particular French soldier seemed to sympathize with her plight, she felt that it would only hurt her more to refuse his assistance.

As she slipped the jacket on, she felt empty. There was no warmth, no comfort that she took from it. With Wyatt lying several yards away, dead, it was all she could do to stay where she was, next to Rufus, as their wrists were bound with coarse rope. It was no use to resist. They were surrounded, had nowhere to go, and the one person they depended on the most for their survival, had been killed. To fight back would only mean more pain for both of them…and while Lucy didn’t give a damn about herself, she cared too much about Rufus to push her luck any further.
Therefore, she obediently complied to every request and didn’t even flinch when the shooter made sure to yank the cords extra tight for good measure…which, she felt was probably in retaliation for large scratch she had given him that ran all the way down the side of his face.

“You sure you’re okay?” Rufus whispered to Lucy again as they slowly trudged through the forest.

“No.” she answered, her lip trembling with emotion. “I’m not okay. How can I be?” She sobbed miserably, “Wyatt is dead, Rufus. He’s dead.”

Rufus swallowed hard, “Maybe…maybe he’s just…”

“Don’t…don’t do that.” Lucy breathed out through her tears. “Please.”

Rufus couldn’t help it. He wanted to believe that Wyatt was alright…that he was just faking, laying low until he could sneak up on the French and take them by surprise…but somewhere in the back of his mind he knew that wasn’t true. There was no way in hell Wyatt would have stood by and let Lucy get a blow to her face like that. No. Wyatt would have beaten the shit out of the guy no matter how badly he was hurting. There was no doubt in Rufus’ mind about that. Hell, this was the guy who, in 1865, got shot, had the crappiest surgery (and surgeon) known to man, and still went out and saved the day. If there was one thing they could count on Wyatt for, it was his almost super human resilience. Nothing seemed to be able to stop him.

Not until tonight anyway.

“I’m sorry, Lucy.” Rufus muttered, his own voice cracking with emotion, “I just…I don’t want to believe he’s gone…you know?”

“I know.” Lucy gasped out, clenching her eyes closed as more tears spilled onto her cheeks.

She was completely devastated. Her fall had obviously drawn the French soldiers’ attention to their camp…why else would they have come back? In the middle of the night, no less? They must have been waiting to catch them off guard. Wyatt had told her not to get off that machine without his help…why didn’t she listen? Why did she stupidly believe that he would have asked her to clamber down that thing on her own after he had spent the entire day hovering over her, worried that she would fall and hurt herself? Why hadn’t she just changed earlier that day? Why didn’t she just tell Wyatt what was bothering her?
Maybe if she had, this wouldn’t have happened.

Haven’t Wyatt asked her to be honest with him? Haven’t he practically demanded they stop keeping secrets from him? And what had she done? Kept her discomfort to herself…and it had cost him his life.

More tears spilled onto her cheeks as she began thinking over everything she could have done differently. If she had been open with him about her corset, maybe she would have been able to change earlier, instead of sneaking off in the middle of the night. Maybe if she had been wearing pants, she wouldn’t have fallen off the Lifeboat like she had. If she hadn’t fallen, maybe the French would never have heard them and suspected they were in that part of the forest. If she had just let Wyatt or Rufus in on her problem, they could have helped her change without causing so much of a fuss. No doubt all that arguing gave them away too…with as much noise as they were making was it any wonder the French came looking for them?

Then there was what had happened after all of that.

Wyatt had just asked her to let him take care of her and as much as she had warned herself against getting too carried away by his attention and concern, she couldn’t refuse. He had been so kind and understanding about the corset and she had felt so unbelievably stupid and ridiculous about the whole thing…what was the point of fighting it anymore? He knew she had been lying about how much pain she was in, he knew her ankle was sore…refusing to allow him to help her just because of her own school-girl feelings seemed pointless and downright silly. Despite her admonitions, she was almost giddy at the thought of Wyatt wanting to take care of her…so much so that she was completely oblivious to anything and everything going on around her as she stepped behind the tree to change.

How long had the French been standing there? How long had they been closing in on them, watching them? She had just picked up the shirt and turned when a movement caught her eye…but did she raise the alarm? No. She foolishly went to investigate…on her own. Before she knew it, a hand was clapped over her mouth and she was being half dragged, half carried towards the sound of Rufus and Wyatt’s voices. Upon seeing Lucy, Rufus’ eyes widened in fear and he did what Lucy had failed to do…he called out to Wyatt; but it was too late. Wyatt, his attention focused on the medicine kit, was caught completely by surprise…and it cost him his life.

*She* had cost him his life.

Maybe if he hadn’t been so focused and concerned about her, he would have been more aware of the fact that they were being surrounded. Wyatt normally had a sense about those things, after
all…he had never ceased to amaze her with his uncanny ability to detect danger on their missions. But tonight…tonight he was unprepared, blindsided…all because he was looking for a stupid bandage to wrap her ankle.

The guilt she was feeling weighed down on her like a millstone.

“Where do you think they’re going to take us?” Rufus asked Lucy quietly. “I’m no expert at navigation, but this doesn’t look like the way to the fort.”

“No.” Lucy said despondently, “It’s not.” She sighed shakily, “Maybe they’re taking us to their camp for the night.”

“Or they’re taking us somewhere to kill us.” Rufus breathed out anxiously.

As much as those words should have sent an arrow of icy dread into her heart, Lucy found that she could hardly bring herself to care. With Wyatt gone, what were their chances of surviving without him? Their survival was already a long shot as it was, but without him? Nearly impossible. Even if they did manage to somehow escape and make their way back to the present, how could she continue on with these missions without Wyatt? How could she sit across from anyone else in the Lifeboat without thinking of him?

She had cared about him…more than she ever wanted to admit. He was the reckless hot head who broke the rules, took risks and had the uncanny knack to make her so angry she could scream at times…but he was also the man who had trusted her, who respected her judgement, who was the sure and solid presence she had come to rely on and trust above anyone else.

How could she go on without him?

“Yup…they’re going to kill us.” Rufus repeated as a French soldier poked him in the back with a bayonet point, “We’re marching to our death right now, aren’t we?”

Lucy turned to face Rufus, his face lined with worry and she offered him what she hoped would be a small smile of encouragement, though she felt nothing but emptiness inside. “I doubt it.” she answered flatly. “Why bother taking us prisoner? Why waste their time tying us up when they could have just shot us all back there?”
“Plus besoin de parler” barked the French soldier as he roughly shoved them forward. Lucy offered Rufus an apologetic shrug and quickly turned her head away, not wanting to give the French soldiers any excuse to hurt him – especially not now -when they only had one another.

They marched silently onward, therefore, casting resentful glares towards the soldiers as they urged them forth. The combination of darkness, a sore ankle, and thick underbrush, however, had Lucy stumbling along the path more frequently than usual until finally she stepped wrong and tumbled hard to the ground. Wyatt’s killer sneered at her and attempted to roughly drag her to her feet, but once again, he was rebuked by the French soldier who had offered Lucy his jacket. Offering her a hand up, he asked, “Tu vas bien, mademoiselle?”

Lucy huffed out an indignant breath as she got to her feet, nodding curtly to the kind soldier before wrenching her arm out of the grasp of the callous man who still had a hard grip on her elbow. “Do you mind?” she gritted out angrily.

“Vous devriez apprendre un peu de respect’’ he growled out roughly as he lifted his hand to her again.

Lucy, however, far from flinching away in fear, stared back at him defiantly; practically daring him to strike her again, but once more, the kind officer intervened. “Vous devriez apprendre la façon de traiter une dame” he barked, staring the man down until he loosened his grip on Lucy’s arm and stepped away with a sneer. “Mes excuses, mademoiselle.’’ the officer, said with a slight bow, “Mes hommes agissent comme des animaux ce soir.’’

One part of her wanted to thank him for his comparable benevolence, but the other part of her wanted each and every single one of them to pay for what they had done. It didn’t matter that he wasn’t the one who had killed Wyatt, it didn’t matter that he was at least treating both herself and Rufus with some semblance of respect…he was still one of them and that was enough.

Lucy nodded her head in acknowledgement again, waiting until he stepped away before moving closer to Rufus who whispered, “At least one of them is nice, right?”

She cast an uneasy glance over her shoulder to find that several of the soldiers were staring daggers at her, clearly resenting the rebuke of their commanding officer. “I’m not sure if that is such a very good thing,’’ she murmured back quietly.

They hadn’t walked much further, when they came upon the French camp, the one Lucy remembered with a pang, that Wyatt had staked out earlier that evening. The sentries called out to them as they approached, clearly on edge…which, Lucy imagined, spoke to the fact that these men
were not comfortable being away from the fort and the protection it offered, overnight.

Not that she could blame them.

While most tribes were supportive of the French and their efforts to oust the British, there were many who were not. The earlier bloodshed near what would soon become Fort Machault was more than enough of evidence of that fact. Given that there were tribes loyal to the British and Indian agents for the British crown regularly passing through this area in an attempt at diplomatic solutions to the mounting crisis, there was already cause enough to be concerned about enemy forces ambushing them in the middle of the forest…and well, Jumonville Glen was still a very recent memory for them. It didn’t help matters that Louis Coulon’s own brother had been the doomed leader of that French force and therefore, only added to the paranoia and resentment.

The grisly scene they had inadvertently witnessed at Fort Machault had probably worked against them as well, now that Lucy thought about it. Those Native Americans were obviously not allied with the French and she, Rufus and Wyatt had been seen fleeing the scene only to be found later, with stolen items from the French encampment. Of course Louis Coulon would suspect them as being spies…why wouldn’t he? As far as he knew, they had worked in concert with the Indians to create a distraction that allowed Wyatt to sneak into their makeshift fortress. As witnesses to the French barbarism in that particular skirmish, Louis Coulon was most likely fearful that the three of them would report back to the British Governor Dinwiddie in Williamsburg, prompting a full-scale attack on the French position at Fort Duquense.

Of course, little did Louis Coulon know that plans were already being made in Williamsburg for such an invasion. It would end in disaster, Lucy knew, with the death of British Commanding General Edward Braddock, but Lucy couldn’t help but hope that when the British Army did come, she and Rufus would still be alive to see some of these men pay…one man in particular, she thought with a huff as he roughly yanked her down to the ground as Louis Coulon, himself, emerged from his tent.

Peering through the darkness at the seated figures of Lucy and Rufus, he narrowed his eyes, “Et le troisième?” he asked.

“Il est mort.” the shooter proudly proclaimed, “Je l’ai tué moi-même.”

Lucy flinched at the cold manner in which Wyatt’s death was announced; the soldier practically boasting of his “triumph” …when really, he was nothing more than a murderer. Wyatt hadn’t even had a chance to defend himself. He had been completely taken off-guard. If Wyatt had been ready…if he had been prepared…he would have never allowed that man to lay so much as a finger on her.
No. He would have been the one laying dead in the middle of the forest. Not Wyatt.

Lucy’s eyes welled up with tears once more and Louis Coulon, seeing this, took that as all the verification he needed. Nodding to his men, he announced, “Très bien. Dormez un peu. Demain, nous retournerons à Fort Duquense.” He was about to retreat into his tent when he turned once more with a nod towards Lucy and Rufus and ordered, “Attachez-les. Gardes... voir qu’ils ne s'échappent pas.”

Sneering at them, the shooter returned, bearing a length of rope which he used to roughly bind Lucy and Rufus’s feet. Once satisfied with his handiwork, he stood up and growled, “Rêves agréables” before stalking away to a tent of his own.

“Pleasant dreams” Lucy scoffed, “like we can even sleep after everything that has happened tonight.”

Rufus inched his way backwards to the large tree situated behind them and motioned for Lucy to join him. He couldn’t do much to comfort her, given that they were both bound, but he nudged her and allowed her to rest her head on his shoulder, “I’m sorry, Lucy.” he whispered quietly “I shouldn’t have froze like I did...when I saw that they had you...I should have yelled out something sooner. Maybe then…”

“It’s not your fault.” Lucy muttered despondently, “It’s mine.” Using her bound hands, she wiped the tears away from her face as she sobbed, “I just hate the idea of him laying out there...all alone. It’s not right.”

“I know.” Rufus acknowledged with a solemn nod of his head, “But there’s no way in hell these guys are gonna let us...I mean, we didn’t exactly give those French soldiers a proper burial, did we?”

“I guess it won’t matter much anyway,” Lucy said with a sigh, “without Wyatt…” she trailed off, her voice lost somewhere within the confines of her throat, but Rufus understood. Without Wyatt they were toast. Even if the French didn’t execute them for being British spies the moment they made it back to the fort, they were still trapped in the 18th century...and as prisoners, Rufus was pretty damn sure the French wouldn’t care one way or the other about their hygiene, diet, or exercise. If they, by some miracle, managed to escape, they would be forced to eke out a life in a hostile wilderness, with no shelter, little to no survival skills between them...and winter on the horizon.
No matter what happened next...this was the beginning of the end for them.

What that end would be, Rufus had no idea, but he was pretty damn sure it wasn’t going to be pleasant...no matter what that French asshole had to say.

They spent the rest of what was left of the night in relative silence...neither one feeling like much conversation considering...everything; both of them feeling far too heavy hearted to even make an effort. As the night sky faded into a pink dawn, Lucy and Rufus steeled themselves for a new day...a new reality...without Wyatt.

The kind French officer emerged from his tent, stretched and offered them a sympathetic smile before rummaging within his rucksack. Lucy noted that in the light of the morning, he didn’t look as hardened as his compatriots, his demeanor and attitude more gentlemanly than the soldiers they had encountered previously and therefore, she imagined, he must have only recently commissioned. Looking down at the jacket he had offered her, she confirmed her suspicions; he was a lieutenant...and obviously newly arrived. Unaware that Lucy was scrutinizing him, the officer stole a glance at the other soldiers, now slowly making their way out of their respective tents, and slinked over to the two prisoners offering them a small amount of provisions, ”Tu devrais manger. Nous avons un long voyage devant nous.”

Though she had no appetite, Lucy took the proffered jerky, nodding to Rufus to do the same. “Je vous remercie” she muttered, lifting her bound hands to her lips and taking a bite. It had a very gamey and salty taste...she had no idea what kind of animal it came from, but she found she just didn’t care.

Rufus, however, looked a little less sure, “What kind of meat is this?” he asked, sniffing it before he took a bite. “It doesn’t taste like anything I’ve ever had before.”

“It’s food, Rufus.” Lucy said with a sigh. “Just be glad they’re feeding us and not letting us slowly starve to death.”

“They could be poisoning us.” Rufus suggested, but that theory was quickly disproven as one by one, French soldiers began partaking of the very same bits of meat. “Well, what’s the point of feeding us? They’re probably just gonna kill us when we get to that fort anyway.” Rufus moaned. “Ugh...” he grimaced as he took another bite, “I need something to wash this down with...” motioning to one of the soldiers he called out, “Could I have some water? You know? Something to drink?” At their blank expressions he turned to Lucy, “Help me out here will ya?”

Clearing her throat, Lucy rolled her eyes at Rufus and requested, “Pourrions-nous avoir quelque
chose à boire?

Nodding at her in understanding, the lieutenant brought over a tin mug filled with something that smelled very much like alcohol. Taking a sip, Lucy muttered her thanks again, clenching her eyes shut as a strong burning sensation made its way down her throat. Rufus, however, choked and nearly spit his right back in the cup. “What the hell…don’t these people drink anything other than liquor?”

“It’s bitters” Lucy explained.

“Bitter is right.” Rufus complained, “That stuff is nasty.”

“No,” Lucy clarified, “It’s bitters. It’s herbs and things added to alcohol…think of it as the 18th century version of a vitamin supplement.”

Rufus grimaced as he took another drink, “To think I gave my mom crap about those chalky Flinstone things.” He chuckled mirthlessly as he passed the cup back to Lucy who took another sip, inwardly hoping the alcohol would numb the pain of Wyatt’s death…at least for a little while. “Uh-oh” Rufus said suddenly with a nod towards the largest tent where Louis Coulon was now standing, staring at the two of them with a sneer, “someone does not look happy.”

Lucy lowered the mug quickly, darting her eyes to the kind officer who had given it to them, realizing at once, that she had inadvertently revealed to Coulon who had probably disobeyed orders. “Nicolas!” Louis Coulon bellowed, motioning for the lieutenant to stand before him, “Pourquoi les prisonniers ont-ils de la nourriture et des boissons?’’

Shame-faced, but looking absolutely undeterred, Nicolas made his way to his commander, saluting bravely as he answered, “On a un long chemin à parcourir, père. Je ne pensais pas qu’il était sage de les avoir faibles pour le voyage.’’

Smiling affectionately, Louis Coulon patted Nicolas on the face and murmured, “’Ta mère t’a élevé trop doucement, mon fils. C’est la guerre. Tu ne dorlotes pas tes ennemis.’’

“Well…that explains a few things.” Lucy muttered to Rufus who looked at her in confusion, “Father and son.” she explained with a nod to the two officers.
“It explains, what?” Rufus asked, still confused.

“Well, he’s young, inexperienced, but he’s commanding these troops who…don’t seem to like him very much.” Lucy muttered out of the side of her mouth.

“I see.” Rufus mused, “So…he got this job because of his dad and nobody takes him seriously…is that it?”

“Seems to be.” Lucy sighed, “I know a little of what that’s like.” she stated with a quirked lip, “working with your more respected parent, constantly being compared…having to prove you’re worthy of the position that other people would…well, let’s just say there’s a downside to it.”

“Don’t you go feeling sorry for him now.” Rufus warned her as he took another sip of bitters. “He may be nicer than any of the other guys out here, but as far as I’m concerned, they’ve all made our lives a living hell almost as soon as we landed in this damn century.”

Lucy shushed him as the French soldiers approached, slicing through the ropes at their feet and pulling them up to stand.

“Where are we going?” Lucy began, rolling her eyes immediately at her mistake before asking more roughly, “Où nous emmènes-tu?”

Wyatt’s murderer sneered at her, pushing her roughly to the center of the camp as he spat out, “À la justice, mademoiselle.” A raucous cry erupted throughout the camp, mocking Lucy as she stood amidst a group of soldiers, leering at her like she was a piece of meat. “Ce serait dommage, cependant, de laisser toute cette beauté se perdre.” he added with a lick of his lips as he toyed with the buttons on her borrowed coat.

“Ça suffit.” Nicolas’ voice sounded over the din. The soldiers parted as he made his way towards Lucy, staring daggers at the soldiers who were harassing her, “Vous êtes des soldats de la couronne Français. Vous êtes un gentleman… Oui?” he asked roughly as he looked around the camp as if daring anyone to contradict him, “Alors tu ferais mieux de commencer à agir comme ça.” He turned to Lucy, with a gentle smile, ”Je suis désolé, mademoiselle. J’espère que vous pardonnerez les manières grossières.”

Louis Coulon smirked and made his way towards the now dispersing crowd of soldiers, eyeing Lucy with scrutiny, “Tu es sûre que c’est une dame, mon fils?” Lucy ruffled and huffed out a
breath as he continued, “Quelle dame apparaît dans ses sous-vêtements, après tout?” He cast his eyes towards Rufus, “Et voyager avec deux hommes sans chaperon?”

Lucy stared back at him indignantly, hating the fact that she was half-naked among these men - even if, by her standards, she was practically full clothed. Her character was already being called into question for her attire, but that, coupled with the fact that she was unmarried and had been traveling with two male companions without a chaperone gave Louis Coulon the distinct impression that she was not worth the deference his son was showing her.

She hated this century.

It didn’t matter what the French thought of her…she knew that, but given that she was “half-naked” (by their standards, at least) and apparently about to be taken to the proverbial lion’s den, she felt the overwhelming need to defend her ever slipping reputation. With tears of fury in her eyes she gritted out, “Je te l’ai dit. C’était mon frère…” she let out a sob as she nodded towards Wyatt’s shooter, “et il l’a tué.”

Louis Coulon frowned at her, looking highly amused, clearly doubting her remarks. His son, Nicolas, however, offered her a handkerchief which Lucy took, gratefully. Shaking his head, with a sigh, Louis Coulon leaned forward and muttered, “Vous l’aurez peut-être dupé, mademoiselle, mais je ne croirai jamais que cet homme était ton frère.” Lucy stared back at him defiantly as he added, “Un homme ne défend pas l’honneur d’une sœur avec une telle passion.”

Unable to keep a brave face at the suggestion of how deeply Wyatt had cared for her, Lucy burst into tears; whether intentional or not, Louis Coulon had hit her where she was most vulnerable in regards to the fallen Delta Force soldier. Though she had tried to deny her own growing feelings towards him, she knew, deep down, that she cared about him…probably even loved him; but Wyatt…Wyatt was in love with Jessica. Yes, he had defended her the night they were captured, yes, he had stayed up all night…watching over her…but that was his job. But that job had made her feel safe, protected…cared for…and now that he was gone, she felt doubly all that she had lost when she lost him.

At Lucy’s outburst, Rufus fought his way over to her side, doing his best to comfort her as he glared at the French officer. “I know you don’t understand me.” Rufus stated solemnly, his voice quivering with emotion, “but you killed a good man…and I don’t know how…I don’t know when…but someday…you’re gonna pay for that. In the meantime, leave her the hell alone….or deal with me.”

Unfazed by Rufus’ not so-veiled threat, Louis Coulon merely chuckled and ordered his soldiers to fall out. As they had the night before, Lucy and Rufus were corralled in the center of troops, some on horseback, others on foot, holding them at musket point as they made their way to the fort.
Limping along, Lucy sniffed out her thanks to Rufus, “You didn’t have to do that…but I appreciate it.” she muttered quietly.

“I meant it.” Rufus said seriously, “I may not be half the man Wyatt was, but…I won’t stand by and let them hurt you.”

“Don’t sell yourself short.” Lucy said with a watery smile, “you’re every bit the man that Wyatt was…and I’m glad you’re still here.”

“Well, for the record…I’m glad you’re still here too.” Rufus admitted with a sheepish smile, “But if I’m being totally honest…I wish Wyatt was with us.”

“Yeah.” Lucy breathed out, her voice choked with emotion, “Me too.”

All too soon, the walls of Fort Duquesne loomed ominously before them. A chill ran down Lucy’s spine as with eerie silence, they made their way through the large wooden gates amid the gaping stares of soldiers and slaves. Rufus moved closer to Lucy, his attempt to shield her from scrutiny, but she knew it was no use. Though she appreciated his efforts, she knew that his protection wouldn’t amount to much. He was a second-class citizen…as was she…and therefore, she knew that no matter what either of them did, they were both at the mercy of whatever Louis Coulon had in store for them. Since he had already suggested that Lucy was not and should not be treated as a lady, she imagined he would do very little to stop any harassment or assault that was bound to come her way.

The fort was large, but still under construction. The outer walls were built, but they were nothing truly formidable. Wooden posts were all that served as protection from outside forces. There were no earthen works, no brick foundations, as would be the case with Fort Pitt, only the tall wooden posts, stretching out like a large pentagon towards the Ohio and Monongahela Rivers. There were a few buildings, dotted here and there within, but mostly tents. Lucy imagined this was because they hadn’t had time to complete the barracks yet, but still, she was impressed with how much they had gotten completed in the short few months since the fort was established.

They made their way into the inner fortress that made up the military headquarters of for the fort where they were led to a small guardhouse, just to the right of the inner gate. As the guard unlocked the heavy door and swung it open, a foul stench immediately assaulted their senses, burning their eyes with its intensity. Inside was nothing remarkable. The room was narrow and dim, as the only light issuing forth was from two tiny barred windows at either end of the building. Along the back wall was a large cell, filled with straw that from the looks and smell of it, was to serve as a bed and as a means to absorb…bodily fluids.
Coughing and grimacing, Rufus and Lucy hovered near the doorway as Louis Coulon spoke in hushed tones to the guard; his son, Nicolas chiming in from time to time with a few comments of his own as they considered what was best to do for the prisoners. “Are they going to kill us?” Rufus whispered to Lucy.

“I’m not sure.” she answered as she leaned her head forward, attempting to catch snippets of the conversation, “they keep saying “en bonne santé”’” Lucy said in confusion, but I’m not getting much else.

“Well…what does that mean?” Rufus asked, his anxiety rising.

“Healthy.” Lucy muttered flatly. “Maybe they aren’t going to kill us.” she said almost hopefully, “maybe they’re just going to put us to work.”

“Well…I don’t mean to be that guy, but if we’ve got to live in there…” he grimaced, “I’ve seen public restrooms that were cleaner than this.”

“I don’t think we’re going to have any say so in our accommodations, Rufus.” Lucy sighed, “We’re just going to try and make the best of it.”

“Until when?” he asked, “we die of typhoid or the bubonic plague?”

“Or until the French surrender the fort to the British.” Lucy answered with a shrug.

“And when does that happen?”

“1758” she answered meekly. As Rufus let out a desperate moan, she amended, “And actually, the French burn the fort before the British arrive so depending on…”

“So basically, what you’re telling me is this is hopeless?” Rufus interrupted roughly.

“No.” Lucy said with a determined shake of her head. “No…we…we’ll find a way, Rufus. We can’t give up now. Wyatt wouldn’t want us to…we have to do this, we have to try to get back home. For him.”
Whether or not Rufus shared Lucy’s determination or not, was anyone’s guess. No sooner had she stated that they would work together to find a way out of their predicament, then two soldiers stepped forward and pulled Lucy away from Rufus while another man, a doctor, by the looks of it, began examining him. Wrenching her arms away and fighting to make her way back to him, Lucy gritted out, “No…what are you doing to him?” Huffing out an indignant breath, she corrected, “Qu'est-ce que tu fais?”

Ignoring her, the doctor continued his examination checking Rufus’ teeth, the looks of his eyes, the mass of his body, announcing finally, “Perfectionner. Un excellent spécimen.”

“An excellent specimen for what, exactly?” Rufus asked, understanding that particular French phrase perfectly.

A sudden fear gripped at Lucy’s heart, but she refused to even entertain the notion that was beginning to form in her head. Her eyes darted in panic towards Louis Coulon and his son and back to Rufus who, from the look on Lucy’s face, seemed to understand that she was concerned. He was just forming another question when, Louis Coulon responded with a phrase that drove into Lucy’s heart like an icy dagger, “Très bien. Il nous apportera un bon prix.”

“No!” Lucy cried out in horror, “You can’t….he’s a free man!” she shook her head in agitation, trying to remember her French as Rufus, now realizing what was happening, began frantically resisting the guards. “No… non. Vous ne pouvez pas faire ça. C'est un homme libre!’’ she cried out but they were already dragging a desperately fighting Rufus into the guardhouse.

“No!” Rufus gritted out as he attempted to wriggle himself out of their hold, “No…Lucy! Lucy! Don’t let them sell me!”

“C’est un homme libre” she was still pleading, but Louis Coulon dismissed her with a wave of his hand as he made his way to his quarters.

“Et la femme?’’ Nicolas called out to his father, ‘‘Qu'est-ce qu'on va faire d'elle?’’

Louis Coulon turned slightly, an indifferent smirk on his face as he stated coldly, ‘’Je suis sûr qu'elle trouvera un moyen de se rendre utile.’’ Lucy fought once more against the soldiers holding her, screaming after the commander as he marched away, but it was no use. Rufus’ angry & panicked protests became muffled shouts as the door to the guardhouse snapped mercilessly closed leaving Lucy alone…to fend for herself.
I don’t want anybody else. I trust you.

You are the one that I trust. Rufus needs you. I need you. Okay?

Wyatt blinked hard against the early morning rays of the rising sun, the remnants of a dream dissolving in the rising mist as an agonizing pain pounded in his skull like an insistent drum. Everything hurt...his head, his back, his arms...but oh God, mostly his head. Groaning, he reached up with a shaking hand to blindly examine the side of his face which felt oddly sticky and cold and almost immediately he could feel the gummy evidence of clotting blood along his temple. Easing himself up to sit, he pressed his hand over his eyes as the world began to spin, his head feeling like it was going to split open any minute.

What the hell had happened?

His mind was a confused and muddled mess and judging from the sudden wave of nausea that prevented him from attempting to move any further, he could only imagine he had somehow wound up with a concussion...though he hadn’t the first clue as to how. Something had obviously knocked him for a damn loop...and while a thousand possibilities as to what that something was entered his scrambled brain, not one of those possibilities could explain the acrid stench of burnt hair that was currently assaulting his nostrils.

He focused on the ground before him in a desperate attempt to get his bearings, noting with confusion, the open medical kit lying by his side. Gingerly, he reached over and pulled out the iodine, remembering vaguely that Lucy had said it was the best anti-septic in the 18th century. With that in mind, he dabbed a bit on piece of cloth bandage and pressed it to his head, hissing in pain as the solution made contact with his open wound. How deep it was, he had no idea, but as it seemed to have stopped bleeding freely, he imagined it couldn’t have been very bad.

So why the hell did he feel like he had just been hit by a bus?

And where the hell were Lucy and Rufus?
Very carefully, Wyatt got to his feet, wobbling unsteadily as he did so, scanning the campsite for any sign of his team mates. “Lucy?” “Rufus?” he called out tentatively, but only the chattering of birds and the sound of the wind in the trees broke the eerie stillness. Their blankets lay on the ground, cozy and inviting, as if they would return at any moment…but yet, Wyatt somehow knew they wouldn’t. He had no idea why. There was no sign of any struggle, no sign that they had even been attacked…Wyatt clenched his eyes shut willing himself to recall what had happened, where they had gone…but he could only remember…

Lucy.

His eyes fell on her ruined corset…the one he had helped remove. He stumbled towards it, tripping over some more of her undergarments…the pillows Wyatt thought to himself. Snippets of conversation came flashing back to him as he made his way around the camp. She had been in pain…hurting…that’s why he had the medicine chest out…he was going to help her. Help her with what?

Damn his brain…why couldn’t he think?

He snatched up her corset and held it in his hands, desperate to remember. She had taken it off because it had been hurting her. He remembered feeling the welts on her side…but there was something else…her foot? No…her ankle. She had hurt it because she fell…Wyatt’s eyes scanned forest until he was arrested by the sight of the Lifeboat, covered in ivy…camouflaged to keep it safe, to keep them safe…but Lucy…Lucy had fallen.

Why?

He told her to get down…but she wasn’t supposed to…not without his help…but then the French….

The French.

Holy shit.

The events of the preceding night came hurtling back to him in rapid fire succession leaving him with the horrifying and final memory of Lucy and Rufus struggling against their French captors, both of them shouting, screaming at him. No…not at him…for him. They needed his help…and he couldn’t get to them. He couldn’t protect them. His head…something…something had hit his
head. It was coming back in flashes, the crack of the pistol, the smoke, the pain...he had been shot. Raising his hand to his wound once more, he could feel the groove that had been made along the side of his head...a graze...which now explained the stench of burnt hair.

He had almost been killed...hell, the French probably thought they had killed him...which is why they left him...alone. Obviously, the impact from the bullet or the fall had knocked him out...but for how long?

And more importantly, what the hell had happened to Lucy and Rufus?

Panic...sheer panic stole through him as he raced out of the clearing, his mind filled with every possible worst-case scenario as the horrible truth of his situation hit him like a bolt of lightning.

They were prisoners...had been for hours and while he would like to have believed that they were holed up together in a cell somewhere in that damn French fort, Wyatt couldn’t help but remember that the French believed them to be thieves and spies....and he was pretty damn sure the spies thing wouldn’t be readily forgiven...not given the current political climate. Lucy could possibly argue their case, being able to communicate with them, but even then, the odds were not in their favor. Rufus had been in that damn fort, had most likely been recognized, and that, if true, would only serve to strengthen the allegations of subterfuge and give the French every reason in the world to kill them both.

But would the French really execute them?

Wyatt didn’t want to think about it...because to think about that meant that he would have to somehow come to grips with the possibility that Lucy and Rufus were already dead...and he just could not.

It would mean that he had failed...in the worst possible way.

Again.

His knees nearly gave out as he thought of that night in February 2012. How angry he had been, how stupidly he had acted, until Jessica had all but demanded to be let out of the car. He knew he shouldn’t have left her...but he did...and for five damn years he had lived with the consequences of that night. He had stopped caring, stopped living...until that day at the Alamo.
Lucy had pleaded with him, begged him to see reason. He had been so ready to throw it all away, to leave her and Rufus behind, to die a hero’s death, but now as he stood alone in the Pennsylvania wilderness, he realized what an ass he had been…they were his team, dammit. His family. Lucy had risked her own life to save his and how had he repaid her? By throwing it back in her face all because he was pissed about Garcia Flynn and that damn journal.

He should have apologized. He should have told her how grateful he was for her…for what she had done for him…for making him feel wanted, needed...but he never had….and now he was terrified that he would never get the chance.

No…he couldn’t think like that. They were still alive…they had to be.

But even that thought didn’t comfort him.

Rufus, having been in the fort and almost certainly recognized, could and would no doubt, face all sorts of punishments for his attempt at reconnaissance. Hell, death would almost be a blessing in comparison to the things they could do to him. Wyatt was no historian, but he knew the military…what’s more, he knew military history…and branding, whipping, flogging, gagging and back-breaking labor were all par for the 18th century course when dealing with something like this. Add in the fact that Rufus, being a black man, was considered less than human in this day and age and well, his hope of finding Rufus alive and well seemed to diminish by the second.

Lucy, though she could speak and understand French, was a woman and while in some circumstances that might have allowed her to be treated with a bit more deference and regard, Wyatt highly doubted that this would qualify as one of those circumstances. While being able to communicate with her captors was certainly a bit of an advantage in that she could attempt to negotiate her position and possibly spare her life, what would it cost? She had been in her damn underwear when they grabbed her…and after seeing how she had been treated by some of those assholes when she was fully clothed, Wyatt didn’t even want to begin to think of what they would do to her when she was, by their standards, half naked.

But he couldn’t help it…it was all he could think about…and it made him sick.

No matter how he looked at it - he had failed.

Lucy and Rufus depended on him for protection, they relied on him and his judgement. Hell, Lucy had stood up in front of Homeland Security and declared that he, Wyatt, had made the “right decision every time.”
Well, not this time.

This time he had made a devastating mistake, he had made that damn grab for his gun and it had probably cost them all their lives. Even if Lucy were still alive, there was a very good chance that Rufus wasn’t…which meant he had just doomed them to a life sentence in 1754. If Rufus had, by some miracle, escaped execution there was no way in hell he was going to be able to sneak into that fort again to use that forge.

So even then…they were going to be stuck here.

They? He would consider himself lucky if there was still a *they* to survive in the 18\(^{th}\) century with. It could very well just be him…left alone in 1754…forced to live with the fact that not only had he failed to stop Garcia Flynn, he had failed to protect his team, he had failed to bring them home safely…and that was something he wasn’t sure he would be able to live with.

Hell, he knew he wouldn’t be able to live with that.

As he looked around the empty forest, he realized that he wasn’t sure where the hell he was going or what the hell he would even do when he got there. He had to focus. He had to figure out what he was going to do…but another wave of nausea sent him retching behind a tree.

What the hell was he going to do?

He felt completely helpless as he considered the options before him. First, he had to find out where the French had taken Lucy and Rufus. Back to their camp? Possibly…but after their unbelievable escape, the French would make damn sure that they didn’t make the same mistake twice. So, he deduced, they had probably taken them directly to Fort Duquesne in order to keep them under lock and key.

Not that that made the situation any easier.

With unforgiving walls, guards, and a whole host of soldiers to contend with, Lucy and Rufus might as well have been on the other side of the damn planet. There was no way he was going to make it into that fort and even if he did, how the hell was he going to get them out?
He staggered over to the edge of the river, desperate to rinse the sharp taste of bile from his mouth and hoping that the icy water would help clear his head. He dipped a shaking hand into its current, the shock of the cold sending a chill down his spine as he scooped a handful of water into his mouth. He was tempted to drink, but knew he would most likely regret it later…and right now was not the time to take those kinds of risks. Not when Lucy and Rufus were depending on him.

Catching his reflection in the rippling current, Wyatt startled…he hardly recognized himself; the entire side of his face was covered in dried blood and dirt. Taking a handkerchief, he began scrubbing at his face, cursing the growth that was now occupying his jaw which only served to frustrate and hamper his efforts.

God, how he wished he could shave. If he let this go much longer, he was gonna look like he belonged to that family on *Duck Dynasty*. He had never been this unkempt…not even in Syria. If his old Delta Force buddies could see him now they would…

…never know it was him.

Holy shit.

If his best buddies in Delta wouldn’t recognize him looking like a damn bushman, then maybe he could manage to get into the French fort after all. He hadn’t been nearly this scruffy when they first ran into those assholes…and last night it had been dark…and things happened so fast…he doubted they even saw his face. He looked at his clothes, covered in blood and dirt…that would definitely draw some unwanted attention…but Rufus had managed to grab that extra set…he just needed to get it.

Stumbling back to the camp, Wyatt felt a hell of a lot better than he had earlier. With the beginnings of a plan taking shape, he felt more confident that he could do this…that he could find them.

He just hoped he’d find them alive.
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

When Lucy was fielding offers for a teaching position, a small college in Ohio caught her eye. Small town life, quiet living…and a school where her mother’s legacy, while known, wasn’t constantly hanging over her head like a dark cloud looking to forever rain on her parade. It wasn’t that her mother wasn’t supportive, it was just that she was seemingly never satisfied with anything Lucy had ever accomplished.

She could always do better.

And so, when Lucy told her mother about the job offer that had come in from that tiny, no-name school in the Midwest, it was hardly surprising when her mother scoffed at the very idea of Lucy “selling herself so short.” “Stanford” her mother had said, “was the only rational and clear choice.” Lucy, however, disagreed. Though her mother’s legacy had given that Department the prominence it enjoyed, Lucy knew that no matter what she had accomplished in her own right, she would never be allowed to revel in the satisfaction of her own achievements. Accepting the open position at Stanford would ensure that she would forever be held to the standard her mother had set…and more so, given that she was sure there would be some among her peers who saw her as nothing more than a coat tail rider; cashing in on her mother’s legacy. Still, it was that legacy, her mother wished for her to carry on. No one else could possibly fill the void Carol Preston would leave behind when she inevitably retired from academia…or so her mother had told her over and over again.

Though Amy had told Lucy to forget Stanford and make her own future, Lucy couldn’t help but remember when she had tried to do just that during her sophomore year of college. Singing had always been something of a passion, more so because it was something that was all her own as neither Amy nor her mother could carry a tune. When the opportunity arose to actually make a little money off of that passion, Lucy eagerly jumped at that chance only to find herself, hours later, trapped in a sinking car, absolutely kicking herself for being so reckless and irresponsible with her life.

From that moment on, she would err on the side of caution, wouldn’t take unnecessary risks, play it safe.

Ohio wasn’t reckless or irresponsible, but it wasn’t part of the “plan” and so accepting that position was already something of a risk for her. While she had almost accepted the position, her mother’s cancer diagnosis had come in and the thought of leaving the burden of caring for their ailing mother all to Amy was something she couldn’t do. It was a sign, she believed, that her future was set. She had a responsibility, a duty…and so she took the position at Stanford, telling herself that if
she worked hard enough and refused any special favors, she could become the professor she wanted to be and not just be known as “Carol Preston’s daughter.”

Despite her own and Amy’s disappointment in the decision, Lucy busted her ass for years, had become one of the most popular lecturer’s in the department, had believed she had actually made a name for herself and stepped out of her mother’s shadow…but after years of hard work and a stellar record, she didn’t even get tenure.

She had never felt like a bigger failure in all of her life.

Until now.

Lucy stood gaping at the wooden fortress that was Rufus’ prison wishing to hell she had taken that job in Ohio and never looked back. If she had never written that journal, none of this would have ever happened. Flynn would never have stolen the time machine, Amy would have never disappeared, they would never have been stranded, Wyatt would have never been killed and Rufus wouldn’t currently be awaiting his turn on the auction block.

If what Garcia Flynn had said about that journal was true, then yes, she was ultimately responsible for it all; Amy, Wyatt, Rufus…all of it.

How could she have failed all the people she loved most in this world?

Gripping onto Nicolas’ arm as he ushered her away from the guardhouse, she pleaded, “S’il vous plaît. C’est toute la famille que j’ai quittée. Je ne peux pas le perdre.”

Nicolas looked down at her with the utmost sympathy, but looked utterly helpless to do anything more than apologize for her loss. Gently leading her away by the arm, he explained, “Mon père voulait vous tuer tous les deux. C’était la seule façon d’épargner ta vie.”

Consumed with emptiness and failure, Lucy closed her eyes as a fresh stream of tears fell from her eyes, “Je pense que nous aurions préféré Mourir.”

“Les choses semblent sombres maintenant,” he consoled softly, “mais j’espère qu’un jour vous serez heureux à nouveau.”
Lucy let out a scornful laugh. Trapped in a century where she did not belong, witnessing Wyatt’s death and Rufus’ sentence into a life of bondage? How could she live with herself let alone ever be happy again? “S'il vous plaît...’’ she begged, ‘’Je ferai n'importe quoi. Vends-moi... me tuer, je m'en fous... Ne blesse zassez pas Rufus.’’

Nicolas stopped abruptly and shushed her, clearly sympathetic, ‘’Tu ne devrais pas parler comme ça. Vous devriez valoriser votre vie, Mademoiselle.’’ he lectured her gently, ‘’C'est un monde nouveau, une nouvelle terre, pleine de promesses et d'opportunités’’. As Lucy looked up at him doubtfully, he added, ‘’Je ferai tout ce que je peux pour m'assurer que vous êtes bien soigné et protégé, vous avez ma parole.’’

As much comfort as she wished she could take in Nicolas’ promise to look after her and see that she was safe, his words meant absolutely nothing. What did it matter what happened to her anymore?

Wyatt and Rufus were the only ones who understood.

They had become her family; they were the only ones who knew that she was supposed to have a sister named Amy, that the life she was living after that ill-fated Hindenburg mission was a complete lie. It wasn’t just the missions and the job that tied them together, it was the risks they took, the things they knew, the secrets they were forced to keep. They were the only people in the world, except for Garcia Flynn, who weren’t unknowingly living in an altered reality. Every time history changed, every event that didn’t go off like it was supposed to, left them as the only witnesses to their known history.

And now they were gone…and she was utterly alone.

Well, she wasn’t alone…the jeers from the French soldiers more than reminded her of that fact… but without Wyatt and Rufus, she had lost her only connections to the present, her only connection to a timeline with Amy, she had lost the last people on Earth, besides her mother, whom she wholly cared about.

And it was all her fault.

Why the hell did she even agree to these missions? She was nowhere near the world-class historian her mother was and Stanford had just made that perfectly clear. Ill-qualified and hardly able to even clamber inside the time machine without suffering massive panic attack and now
Rufus’ life - hell, their only chance at getting back to the present depended wholly on her?

It was like she was trapped in that sinking car all over again; she couldn’t think, she couldn’t breathe, an icy chill gripped at her heart the full weight of nearly paralyzing her with fear as she realized that there was no one to save them this time. It was all up to her...and she felt completely weak and helpless. She couldn’t do this; she couldn’t survive the 18th century on her own. A woman in her position, unmarried, unprotected? How would she even live? She couldn’t own land, she had no rights, she had no means to protect herself.

And then there was Rufus…how was she going to save him?

Never before had a small wooden building looked so hopelessly impregnable as that tiny guardhouse.

This was a nightmare – it had to be.

Yet even as that thought crossed Lucy’s mind, her sides screamed in agony as she was laced into a new corset, making her painfully aware that this hell she was currently living through was real. Gasping for breath, Lucy leaned forward as a new petticoat and skirt were offered up to her as well as a bed jacket and apron. Unlike the gown she had procured from Mason’s collection, this outfit was plain and coarse, far more suited to the harsh conditions of frontier life than that had been. Once changed, the woman charged with her care, began attacking Lucy’s curls with a bristled brush, yanking and tugging until Lucy’s eyes were watering from the pain. Once satisfied that her hair had been essentially detangled, her hair was drawn up, away from her face, roughly secured with pins, and covered with a muslin scarf.

“Maintenant, vous avez l'air décent” the woman tutted with a judgemental glare as she tossed her brush aside, “Imaginez, marchant autour de la moitié habillé. C'est du jamais vu.” Giving her one final glance over, the woman, seemingly satisfied with her work, roughly tugged at Lucy’s arm and led her out of the one-room dwelling she had obviously called home and out to the open kitchen and laundry area beyond.

It was here that Nicolas had escorted Lucy, promising her that he would do everything in his power to make sure she was not left wholly unprotected. Located on the far side of the fort, this little alcove was home to servants and the handful of soldiers who had traveled to western Pennsylvania with their wives. Apart from the few rough dwellings, there was a small garden, kitchens and large washtubs and lines for laundry.

Here, among the few other women of the fort, Nicolas believed that Lucy would not only be kept
safe from harassment, but that she would also “être là où elle se sentait le plus à l'aise”…something that Lucy couldn’t help but roll her eyes at. Yes, it was the 18th century and women’s roles were horribly limited, but even if she was more comfortable in the domestic arts, this was hardly the kitchen and laundry room she was used to.

If Nicolas hoped that Lucy wouldn’t face harassment here, among the people he thought she would be most comfortable, however, he was sorely mistaken. The moment Lucy stumbled out of the humble one-room abode, all eyes were on her, full of judgement and disdain, not a friendly face among any of them….and she had never felt more alone in all of her life.

As a woman with apparent “loose morals” and wavering “loyalties”, she was essentially shunned. No one would approach her except to bark orders or insult her and while she had dealt with her fair share of bullies in the past, this was like nothing she had ever experienced before. The labor was back breaking. She was given a wash tub all to herself where piles and piles of shirts, stocking and underwear were left for her to launder. She was laughed at as she struggled to follow each instruction to the tee, unused to hand wringing clothes and cranking them through a press, her hands ached and her muscles strained until she was involuntarily shaking from the effort. As she limped her way through the camp, arms filled with clothes to hang, she was deliberately tripped or shoved which caused her to drop her load of freshly washed linens and start the process all over again.

By dinner time, she was both physically and mentally exhausted, too tired to even care that she was practically being mauled as she helped dish out stew to all of the soldiers and traders vying for a hot meal. She took little comfort in the fact that she was hardly the only woman on the receiving end of their attentions; the unmarried servant girls whom she was assisting, however, seemed to welcome their advances at times. And why not? In this era, catching a husband was one of the principle focuses of a woman’s life. Having a husband meant you were protected, provided for, and allowed to at least share in the rights he enjoyed.

Still, there was a fine line between what was respectable and what was not and while these women were most definitely being flirted with, it hardly compared to the harassment Lucy was receiving. Her absence of attire upon arriving at the fort, the gossip that she had been traveling alone in the company of men, and the fact that she was more or less a prisoner all served to plant in each and every one of their minds that she was not much more than a harlot and should therefore, be treated as such.

Some of them grabbed at her waist, others nuzzled into her neck, a fair few came right out and made indecent proposals towards her and one man actually grabbed her by the arm attempting to lead her off, no doubt to force himself on her in a darkened corner somewhere, until Nicolas came rushing to her aid, waving off her harassers as she flushed with both anger and humiliation. With a gentle and kind hand, he ushered her over to a comfortable spot by the fire, giving her a blanket to warm herself with, apologizing once more for the behavior of his men, and offered her a hearty portion of stew, which she adamantly refused.
Nicolas frowned at her and attempted to coax her into eating a little something, reminding her that she had hardly eaten anything all day and needed to keep up her strength, but Lucy despondently shook her head as a few tears trickled their way down her cheeks.

She had no appetite.

The abuse she was receiving she more or less expected, and though it didn’t make it any easier, the horrors she was experiencing were nothing compared to the absolutely dehumanizing situation Rufus was in. Locked away in that guardhouse like an animal, awaiting to be sold into a life of bondage with no hope whatsoever of being a free man again?

It made her sick.

But what could she do? If she had entertained any hopes of somehow rescuing Rufus, they were pretty much quelled after the day she had. Little more than a slave herself, there was not much she could do. She was being forced to do all the work that was typically shared among the other servants. Instead of assisting her, they mocked her, shunned her….and while she didn’t mind being left alone, her every move was monitored, so that if she rested for even a moment, she was assailed with threats and abuses.

Even now, as she looked around the camp, the disdainful glares of soldiers and servants were turned towards her…and also Nicolas - particularly from Louis Coulon, himself…something she was quick to point out to him. “Ton père n’aime pas que tu sois gentil avec moi. Peut-être que tu ne devrais pas.” she observed with a sigh, hating that she was brushing off the only person who had showed her any bit of kindness in the midst of all of her misery.

Far from becoming apprehensive or self-conscious over the attention, Nicolas shrugged, ”’Ma mère m’a toujours appris à traiter tout le monde avec respect... en particulier les femmes.’’ He smiled, ‘’Mon père n’est peut-être pas d’accord, mais je ne peux pas déshonorer la mémoire ou les conseils de ma mère.’’

Lucy nodded to him gratefully, but couldn’t help but be concerned about the consequences his kindness could bring down upon him. As the commander’s son he may have been afforded a bit more liberty than most others in his position, but it was that selectivity that Lucy worried about. Having been in a similar situation herself, she knew that perceived favoritism due to patronage could cause resentment, jealously and even in some cases, attempts at subterfuge. She, being a prisoner…particularly one who was suspected of being a British spy and getting cozy with the commander’s son could lead to all kinds of trouble…for both of them. With that in mind, she attempted to warn him again with a solemn whisper, “J’apprécie votre gentillesse, mais je ne veux...
Nicolas looked as if he was going to contend her point, but as he looked around the camp at the stares they were both receiving, he heaved out a sigh and made his way over towards his father. While Lucy was glad that he had taken the hint, the moment he got up to leave, she inwardly groaned, knowing that his absence meant that she was back on the proverbial meat market. As she looked around the camp fire at the other soldiers, jealous glares give way to wanton leers and she was hardly surprised to find that the men who had been crowding around her in the food service line were now hovering around her as she sat by the fire.

Feeling extremely uncomfortable, Lucy made to get up and leave, but she was immediately pulled down into her seat again by a not so friendly face who had taken Nicolas’ spot next to her - the man who had shot Wyatt. Seething with absolute hatred for him, Lucy yanked her arm out of his grip and attempted to slide away from him, but the moment she moved, his hand tightly gripped her thigh keeping her essentially pinned in place. The stench of sweat and alcohol nearly overwhelmed her as he leaned over and muttered perversely in her ear, “Où pensez-vous que vous allez?”

Slamming her own hand down over his, Lucy glared at him as she wrenched his fingers off of her thigh, “Enlève tes mains de moi.” she gritted out angrily, tossing his hand away from her. As he lunged for her again, Lucy darted sideways away from him which caused him, in his inebriated state, to tumble to the ground. As the men around the campfire laughed and jeered him, he made a furious lunge for Lucy again, but no sooner had he dove towards her than another man had wrapped his arms around Lucy’s waist and pulled her onto his lap.

An eruption of cheers followed this as Lucy leaned forward, struggling against her new harasser who kept tightening his grip on her and pulling her backwards against his chest so that he could press kisses on the shell of her ear. Lucy wriggled and writhed in an attempt to loosen the hold he had on her, but it was no use. The moment she managed to break out of his hold, he grabbed her again, this time hauling her up in the air and dragging her away. Kicking and clawing at him now, Lucy desperately fought against him, knowing with a pang of dread that this was her life now. As an unprotected woman in the 18th century, with no one to watch over her, she was going to have to come to grips with the fact that fighting off harassment and assault would be a normal part of her life…or she was just going to have to accept what was increasingly seeming to be the inevitable.

Tired and exhausted as she was, she hardly had the strength to fight…and as the camp erupted in whoops and whistles, cheering while she was being slowly hauled away, she found she hardly had the will to. What was the damn point, anyway? Tomorrow it would be just more of the same…and the next day…and the next. They were never going to stop. She was outnumbered among people who didn’t give a damn about her or her virtue…and since they already had more than enough reason to call that into question, why would they? As far as they were concerned she was a fallen woman and was just reaping the fruits of what she had sown.
She desperately rammed her elbow into the ribs of the man behind her but her efforts were in vain. Instead of loosening his grip, he only grasped onto her that much tighter, now trying to pin her arms down so she couldn’t fight him as they made their way backwards through a sea of laughing and jeering soldiers. Frantically she threw all of her weight forwards and attempted to wriggle away, but her resistance was wearing thin as hopelessness began to overtake her. The whole thing seemed absolutely futile. There was no point to fight. Without Wyatt or Rufus, she couldn’t survive here, without Wyatt or Rufus she would never get home…and even if she did - who knew what kind of present she would even come home to? With Flynn left unchecked, all of history would be completely torched and there was nothing she could do about it. There would be no saving Rufus, no saving history, no saving Amy…so why in the hell should she even try to save herself?

_Figure out what you’re fighting for and you’ll be okay._

Wyatt’s advice from what felt like so long ago, came hurtling back to her from across the centuries, as if he, himself, were urging her not to give in and give up. Tears sprang to her eyes as she remembered that awful day in 1945 Germany; how scared she had been, how she had wanted to quit…but Wyatt, sensing she was struggling, came in and helped her “get over the hump.” Though this particular hump seemed insurmountable, the memory of Wyatt’s comforting words of advice, filled her with the same conviction she had felt that day. What was she fighting for? She was fighting for Amy…and if she ever wanted to see her again, she couldn’t give up. Amy was depending on her…and so was Rufus. How could she abandon them? How could she give up on them? She was their only hope. Their lives depended on her and though she hadn’t the faintest idea as to how she was going save Rufus, she knew that she had to…not only to save him from a life of bondage, but to save both of them from this - their 18th century prison. They needed one another to get out of this mess and if she gave up now, they both might as well be dead.

With all the energy she could muster she fought against her captor once more, this time slamming her heel sharply into the man’s shin until he loosened his grip, causing her to fall roughly to the ground. As she attempted to scramble to her feet, a group of cat calling soldiers descended upon her, and while she was determined to beat every single one of them off if she had to, Nicolas’ arrival made it unnecessary. Once more, he quickly dispatched her harassers and angrily ordered the rest of the on-lookers to get on with their dinner, as he helped her to her feet.

Once the crowd had dispersed, Nicolas sighed and looked down at a dishelveled Lucy, “Tu vas bien?” he asked her breathlessly, obviously from rushing over to assist her. Lucy swallowed hard, too humiliated to even look at him as she nodded her head curtly. Hugging her arms around her protectively, Lucy made to limp back to her station fully prepared to endure a few more hours of harassment before she was finally released back into the care of the prudish woman charged with her care, but Nicolas stopped her. “Tu as l’air d’être blessé. Tu veux bien voir le docteur?”

Memories of the previous night came flooding back to her; the concern Wyatt had had over her ankle…his desire to take care of her and how it had been the reason he was ultimately killed. Though she tried to maintain her composure, she found herself choked with emotion and Nicolas,
seeing this, took it to mean that she was in physical pain and insisted they stop. No amount of assurances from her would dissuade him and before she knew it, she was sitting outside the medical tent, while Nicolas ordered the doctor to examine her.

Lucy flinched in pain as the doctor held her unstockinged foot in his hand, rolling her ankle and pressing his fingers over the obvious areas of swelling. “C'est une entorse.” the doctor announced after a few moments, “Elle devrait le tremper dans du vinaigre et l'envelopper dans du gruau jusqu'à ce que l'enflure diminue.”

Lucy scoffed at the prescription, insisting that she did not need vinegar or oatmeal around her foot to help it heal, but the doctor dismissed her with a wave of his hand and she soon found her ankle being slathered with a lumpy and revolting paste made up of oatmeal, vinegar and fat before it was wrapped tightly with a muslin bandage. As Nicolas handed her her shoe, he bowed slightly and observed, “Avec une blessure, tu devrais vraiment manger quelque chose. Tu as besoin de ta force.”

“J'ai pas faim” Lucy answered with a roll of her eyes, wishing he would stop badgering her about eating. His attention and concern for her, while appreciated, was drawing more attention her way, even now as they sat together outside of the medical tent she could see several pairs of eyes fixed on them, observing their every movement, listening to their conversations, watching them. “S'il vous plaît,” Lucy pleaded, “laissez-moi tranquille. Je vais m'en sortir.”

Nicolas, however, was not deterred. Attempting a new strategy he asked, “Tu mangerais quelque chose si tu dînais avec ton ami?”

Lucy’s eyes darted to his in disbelief, hardly daring to believe what he was suggesting. “Rufus?” she breathed out, “Tu vas me laisser voir Rufus?”

Nicolas smiled as he explained, “Mon père m'a donné la permission de vous permettre de rendre visite à votre ami avant qu'il ne soit emmené demain.” He frowned as he nodded solemnly at her, “J'ai pensé que vous aimeriez dire au revoir.”

One last meal to say goodbye. The thought of seeing Rufus filled Lucy with unspeakable amounts of joy, yet the knowledge that she only had until the following day to break him out of that cell before he was sent off to the ends of the Earth to live out the rest of his days as a slave, sent her mind reeling. How could she do it? There was no way she could sneak him past the guards. No way she could slip him a weapon so that he could fight his way free.

This wasn’t her skill set…it was Wyatt’s.
Nicolas procured a pot of stew as well as some bread and cheese and motioned for Lucy to follow him towards the other side of the fort. Though her ankle still hurt, the supporting bandage made it less painful to walk on and she jogged slightly after him, desperate to see Rufus. As they got nearer and nearer to the guardhouse, Lucy wracked her brain for anything she could do to help him escape, but her mind was drawing an infuriating blank. She kicked herself for freezing up at such a time, she had fought at the Alamo, dammit…she was better than this.

But this…this was different.

This wasn’t attempting to bring down the Hindenburg by pretending to be terrorists, this was breaking someone out of a fortress, surrounded by men with guns. Even if she did manage to somehow get Rufus out, how would they both escape? As the door to the guardhouse swung open, panic gripped at Lucy’s heart as she realized that she had no plan to save them and this would probably be her only chance to try.

And she was blowing it.

The same horrid stench that assaulted her senses that morning, met her again as she stepped into the gloomy, low-ceiling room. The light of a small lantern flickered in the corner, casting long shadows on the floors and walls, giving the entire place an ominous feel…which only added to Lucy’s desperation. Rufus was standing, shackled before her behind the iron bars of his prison, looking absolutely relieved to see Lucy. After the guard unlocked the door to his cell, Lucy charged forward and wrapped her arms around Rufus’ neck, sobbing into it miserably, “I’m so happy to see you.”

“You’re happy to see me?” Rufus asked incredulously, “I’m happy to see you.”

With shaking hands, Lucy ran her hands over Rufus’ shackled hands, hating to see him in this state, “Are you okay?” she sobbed, “I’m so sorry.”

“Hey.” Rufus consoled, “It’s okay, Lucy…don’t; worry about me - I’m alright.” he cleared his throat as he stepped back away from her, “You look like hell though.” he observed with a hint of concern in his voice as he took in her disheveled appearance, “what the hell did they do to you?”

Tears sprang to Lucy’s eyes, but she dismissed his worry with a shake of her head, “I’m fine… Nicolas,” she said as she motioned towards the French lieutenant, “has been…um… watching out for me.” Rufus raised his eyebrows at her, clearly curious as to what “watching out for her”
entailed, but Lucy rattled on, “He got permission from his father for me to see you. Are you hungry?” she asked as she motioned to Nicolas.

“Starving.” Rufus admitted as Lucy handed over the tureen of stew and a loaf of bread. As he tore into the bread, he paused and looked at Lucy who was sitting against the wall, watching him, “Aren’t you going to eat?”

“I’m not hungry.” Lucy dismissed as her stomach rumbled loudly.

“Lucy,” Rufus said with a disbelieving shake of his head, “you look like hell, you need to eat something.” Lucy shook her head again, but Rufus pushed the soup towards her, “Eat.” he demanded, “or I won’t.” Sighing heavily, Lucy humored him, taking several bites of stew before she grimaced and handed it back to him. “What?” Rufus asked, “isn’t it any good?” He sniffed at it and tried it himself, “Tastes fine to me.” He observed, but noted that Lucy was looking a little green, “What’s wrong?” he asked in concern, “Are you sick?”

“Nothing is wrong with me.” Lucy maintained, but her stomach was turning…not from any illness, but from disgust. Having dished out countless bowls of that stew all while being assaulted left her unable to even smell it without feeling those roving hands all over her body. “I’m just not hungry.”

But as she said that, her stomach gave another loud rumble and Rufus scoffed, “Yeah, right.” Tearing off a piece of bread and cheese, Rufus handed it to her, “You are a terrible liar, Lucy Preston. Eat.” Relenting with a sigh she nibbled on the bread and cheese, leaning her head against Rufus’ arm as he dipped some of his own bread in the stew. “So,” he asked as he wiped his mouth, “you gonna tell me why you look like you had one too many romps in the hayloft?”

Lucy glared at him, but let out a derisive laugh, “Don’t worry….like I said…Nicolas has been watching out for me.”

Rufus cast his eyes towards the French officer, offering him a grateful smile before turning to Lucy with concern, “He’s not going to be able to watch out for all the time, Lucy.” he said quietly.

She nodded, fighting back the tears as she admitted, “I know.”

“Then what’s the plan? How are we gonna get out of here?”
“I don’t know.” Lucy blurted out in tears as she shifted her gaze to the floor, “And we’re running out of time. Nicolas told me they are sending you away tomorrow…I don’t know where.” she gasped out, “I keep trying to think of a way to get you out of here, but Rufus…I’m not Wyatt” she cried out desperately, “I don’t know the first thing about breaking someone out of prison.”

“That’s bullshit and you know it, Lucy.” Rufus countered, “On our first mission you took off your damn bra so that Wyatt could pick that lock.”

“I don’t have a bra, Rufus!” Lucy hissed, “Besides, even if I did, I don’t know how to pick a lock…do you?”

Rufus shook his head, frustration and despondence written all over his face, “No.” he admitted glumly, “but if my choices are: be sold as a slave or stay up all night trying to pick a damn lock, you better believe I’m gonna be up all night trying to pick a damn lock.”

Lucy covered her face with her hands, feeling like an enormous failure. Rufus was depending on her to save him from the auction block and all she did was bring him dinner. She knew she was running out of time, she knew at any moment her visit would be over…and with it, all hope of ever leaving the 18th century. “I’m sorry, Rufus. I don’t have anything that can help us.” Lucy sobbed, “I don’t know what to do.”

Feeling guilty for making her cry, Rufus nudged her, “Hey…don’t….I mean, I don’t know what to do either.” he admitted. “And as much as I don’t want to give up my freedom…I think I’m more worried about leaving you here to fend for yourself.” Lucy looked up at him with red rimmed eyes as Rufus looked at her desperately, “What the hell is gonna happen to you, Lucy?”

She didn’t have an answer for that, hell, she didn’t even want to think about what the next day would bring with Rufus gone. Turning to him pitifully, she wrapped her arms around his neck and cried, “I don’t know…I just know I can’t lose you too.”

“You’re not gonna lose me, Lucy.” Rufus declared firmly, “We’ll figure this out, okay? Okay?” he asked as he pulled away from her, waiting for her to nod in acknowledgment. “We’re not gonna let this century kick our asses…you got that?” Lucy nodded and as she did tendrils of her hair fell from her bun and became plastered against her wet cheeks. As she swiped away her tears and went to tuck her hair back into place, she froze when her fingers grazed one of the pins securing her bun. Suddenly, she was transported back to that cell in 1937 New Jersey.

Piece of crap old lock.
Can you open it?

Oh yeah, easy with a hairpin, which I’m guessing you don’t have.

“My hairpin!” Lucy gasped as she yanked it loose and slid it into a confused Rufus’ palm, “Remember? Wyatt had to use my underwire on the lock because I didn’t have a hairpin.”

As realization dawned on Rufus’ face, the French guard announced that Lucy’s visit was over. Wrapping her arms around him once more, she whispered, “Get yourself out of here…don’t worry about me. I’ll make it out somehow.”

“I’m not going to leave you.” Rufus maintained, but Lucy shook her head at him desperately, pleading with him silently to save himself. As the guard pulled Lucy away from Rufus, he called out to her, “Wait…Lucy…how will we find each other again?”

Stumbling out of his cell, Lucy turned to look at Rufus as the two French soldiers flanked her and led her out of the guardhouse. Standing on her tip toes, she peered over their shoulders toward her friend and pilot blurting out, “The Lifeboat,” before the guardhouse door snapped shut behind her.

As Nicolas led her back to her own prison, Lucy silently prayed that Rufus would be successful, that he would escape…and that somehow, she could find him again. Their old camp site wasn’t the greatest of options given that it was where they had been captured before, but that was precisely why Lucy had chosen it. Their supplies were there…and so was the time machine. Rufus could hole himself up inside the Lifeboat while he waited for her to arrive, completely hidden and protected from the French soldiers and any other problems that might come along.

But that wasn’t the only reason she had chosen that as their rendezvous point.

The thought of Wyatt, lying there…alone…in the middle of a lonely wilderness with no one to mourn him or give him a proper burial, absolutely broke her heart. He didn’t deserve that and while she wasn’t sure she could handle seeing his maimed body after several days out in the forest, she couldn’t bear the thought of not honoring his remains.

As a soldier, as a friend…he deserved no less.
“J’espère que tu te sentiras mieux maintenant.” Nicolas’ voice called her from her thoughts.

“Hmm?” Lucy startled. They were standing outside the home of the prudish woman he had charged with her care. She had completely forgotten he was walking beside her, had hardly even noticed where she even was. Coloring slightly, Lucy nodded, “Oh…um…ouais. Merci de m’avoir laissé le voir.’’ she said with a smile, “C’était exactement ce dont j’avais besoin.’’

Yes, it was exactly what she needed. Seeing Rufus? Giving him a chance to escape? Her heart felt about a million times lighter than it had and for the first time since Wyatt was killed, she felt hope.

Looking absolutely pleased with himself, Nicolas nodded, “Je suis content de l’entendre. C’est bon de te voir sourire.” he murmured softly, his face slightly flushing as he raised her hand to his lips, “J’espère que vous avez une agréable soirée.”

Lucy gaped at him, hardly knowing what to do or even say as he bowed to her again and then turned on his heel and walked away. She was grateful for his kindness, but she thought it had come from a place of gentlemanly respect. Now, however, she was wondering if he might be harboring a little crush…and while she was flattered, she couldn’t help but feel guilty. She was plotting against him and his father, after all, using his kindness as a means to break Rufus out of jail…and while she absolutely did not regret it, she knew that he would probably bear the brunt of her treachery when it was discovered that Rufus had escaped.

She couldn’t think about that right now, however.

Right now she needed sleep and given that she was sure the next day would be just as grueling as this one, she preferred to do that sooner rather than later…not that she would sleep well.

Nicolas, considerate as he was, understood that Lucy would be a target for harassment and therefore arranged for her to spend her evenings under the watchful care of an elderly servant, Madame Auclair, who served as a type of chaperone for the other unmarried women of the camp. Disciplined, pious with a bristly personality, she was not a woman to cross and as Lucy came through the door, she knew with one look that she was in for a tongue lashing. It was well past curfew and as Lucy was already suspected of being not much more than a harlot, the judgement heaped upon her was strong as she was handed her bed clothes and lectured on how “twilight was the devil’s playground.” Stepping behind the screen to change, Lucy tried to tune out the harsh rebukes still being thrown her way, but when Madame Auclair screamed out in fright and began crossing herself uttering up prayers of deliverance, Lucy stumbled out from behind the screen, her night gown completely askew, and bore the brunt of even more accusations. “Jézabel !’’ Madame Auclair gasped out in affronted disgust, “Des hommes rôdent devant notre
maison à cause de toi.’’

Lucy bristled at the notion that she had brought the soldiers to their door. It wasn’t like she asked for them to harass her every hour of the day, but she knew, given the glares of judgement from the other women crowded around the small table in the center of the room, that it would do no use to argue. Muttering an apology, even though she had no idea what she was apologizing for, Lucy took her spot on the stool next to the fire as prayers were read before they all retired to sleep.

There were only two full sized beds in the room already occupied by three women each. Lucy, as the newcomer and “harlot” was relegated to the loft above…which was really nothing more than a low-ceilinged shelf accessible only via ladder. Lucy’s chest tightened as she made her way up the rickety ladder, noting with mounting anxiety how low the loft actually was. Bumping her head on the ceiling as she sat on the thin mattress attempting to get herself under the covers, Lucy let out a shaky breath, willing her anxiety to fade away, reminding herself that at that very moment, Rufus could be working his way out of his shackles…and it was with that thought, the thought of Rufus gaining his freedom, that she finally drifted off into a fitful and dreamless sleep.

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As Lucy suspected, the next day brought with it the much of the same horrors, though instead of laundry, she was relegated to the much more isolated kitchen – Madame Auclair’s attempt at keeping her new charge “away from temptation.” Though she had never been comfortable in the kitchen…even less so in rustic settings…Lucy found this arrangement much more agreeable even if it was meant to be a punishment for her.

Tucked away in the kitchen, Lucy was tasked with washing and cutting up vegetables, kneading and baking bread…and while she was definitely neither a cook nor a baker…she found that after a few tries, she was managing fairly well. Of course, she had help…and while none of the other women wanted to talk to her, when it was clear Lucy hadn’t the first clue of what she was doing, they had to get over their indignation at her “immorality” and lend a hand, lest they all bear the wrath that would surely come over a ruined meal.

Apart from instructing her here and there, however, the women mostly left her alone…which didn’t bother Lucy one bit. Less talking meant that she had more time to think – and she had plenty to occupy her thoughts.

First and foremost on her mind was escape…and how she could possibly manage it given that every gate was manned by a minimum of four soldiers night and day. Second, of course, was Rufus…and whether or not he had been successful in his own escape attempt. Being in the kitchen, while good in that she was shielded somewhat from the harassment she faced the previous day, had her cut off from the goings on in the fort at large. If Rufus had somehow managed to sneak out, she had no knowledge of it – no alarm had sounded, no general excitement was in the
By late afternoon, Lucy was getting a little anxious. Surely if Rufus had gone, there would be some indication, some concern, some alarm raised throughout the fort…but every time she managed to peek outside, there was nothing to suggest that anything out of the ordinary had happened. She needed to find out, she needed to know and so when it was announced that more water was needed for boiling, Lucy promptly volunteered to go. Hardly trusting her to leave the confines of the fort alone, she was accompanied by a few other servants, each of them burdened with a yoke and two buckets.

Even without the added weight of water weighing it down, the yoke was heavy. She stumbled through the camp, ignoring the jeers from some of the more depraved soldiers as she sought to balance it neatly on her shoulders. It was a difficult task, one that would have been challenging under normal circumstances, but with her ankle, sore as it was, it became even more so.

She struggled as she made her way through the back gate and down the sloping path to the Monongahela river beyond. The afternoon was beautiful, but there was a heavy scent in the air which indicated a storm was soon on its way. The docks were bustling and crowded today, with many boats tied to the short pier and many crates being carried into the main gate of Fort Duquesne. It was obvious a shipment had come in and with it, hosts of traders, some Natives, but mostly French trappers and hunters, covered from head to toe in pelts and furs, mingled and bargained with one another all along the river’s edge.

As she limped her way down to the shoreline, she groaned as she lowered the yoke to the ground and unhooked the first bucket. While the other ladies chattered away in French, filling their own pails, Lucy took the time to stake out the exterior of the fort, taking note of any vulnerability, any blind spot that she could possibly use to her advantage. While the fort’s defenses were formidable, they weren’t without defects…and she knew that if Fort Duquesne had one Achilles’ heel, it was its low-lying position which made it susceptible to flooding. If a storm was indeed on its way, and if it was bad enough…maybe she could slip out somehow.

She was just lowering her second bucket into the swift flowing Monongahela when she chanced a look up to the pier and saw to her horror, Rufus, still shackled, and being led onto one of the waiting boats tied at the dock. Not able to contain her fear and panic, Lucy abandoned her bucket and sprinted towards him, battling her way through crowds of traders as she screamed, “Rufus! Rufus!!” All eyes were on her as she clawed her way through Indian traders and fur trappers, she could see Rufus craning his neck to look for her as she screamed out his name, but it was no use, no sooner had she broken through the throng of people at the river side then she was roughly apprehended by the French soldiers and roughly dragged away from the water’s edge. She could hear a commotion going on behind her, and she half hoped it was Rufus fighting back, but she knew even if he did, there was little chance that he would escape now.
Devastated and heartbroken, Lucy cried bitterly as she was carried back into the fort, fighting against the soldiers with every ounce of energy she had left until the scene she was making drew the attention of Louis Coulon, himself. “Qu’est-ce qu’elle a fait maintenant?” he barked out in anger over the din of murmurs and jeers from a growing crowd of soldiers and on-lookers.

“Si vous voulez, monsieur,” one of the soldiers responded importantly, “elle a essayé de s’échapper.”

Lucy tried to explain through her tears, that she hadn’t tried to escape at all, but her clarification was interrupted by the now furious commander, “Silence! J’en ai assez de tes mensonges.” he spat out forcefully. “J'ai épargné ta vie, t'ai donné à manger, mis un toit sur ta tête, je t'ai habillé et c'est comme ça que tu montres ta gratitude?” He turned towards a shame-faced Nicolas, “Je t'ai dit qu'on ne pouvait pas faire confiance à cette femme.” With a spiteful glare, he nodded to the guards as he ordered, “Vingt coups de fouet”

"Non, père... s'il vous plaît, être raisonnable.” Nicolas pleaded.

“J'ai été plus que raisonnable.” he responded roughly. “C'est une traîtresse et une espionne.” He pointed roughly at his son, “Vous avez demandé d'épargner la vie de cette femme et je l'ai fait, mais je ne tolérerais pas ce manque de respect. Nous devons lui donner une leçon.”

“Ayéz un peu de compassion.” he pleaded again.

“Je n'ai aucune compassion pour les espions. C'est la guerre, mon fils. Les traîtres doivent être traités sévèrement.” He nodded to the guards once more, “Vingt coups de fouet.”

That order, followed by laughter and cheers from the crowd, should have elicited some kind of reaction from her, but Lucy felt nothing; nothing but a horrifying sense of emptiness and hopeless isolation. With Rufus gone, there was no way to escape out of this hell and therefore...no more reason to fight. All of the determination and conviction she had felt earlier all but disappeared as she was led to the flogging post in the middle of the fort. She didn’t care about their plans to whip her into submission, she was already completely broken and beaten down. They had taken everything from her...Wyatt, Rufus, her freedom and now...her dignity...what did anything matter anymore? Slumping against the post with angry tears streaming down her face, she clenched her eyes shut and waited for the first of twenty stinging blows.

But they didn’t come.
Instead, shouts from the crowd, growing louder and more frightened, sounded all around her and though Lucy wasn’t really in a position to do anything about whatever it was that had caught their attention, her curiosity got the better of her. Peeking one eye open, Lucy found that the crowd’s attention, which had been wholly focused on her, was now anything but – every single soldier was pointing and shouting towards the far wall of the fort which she could now see was now consumed in a billowing cloud of black smoke.

Fire.

As chaos erupted throughout the fort, Lucy was left alone to struggle against her bonds. She may have lost all hope, but there was no way she was going to let this opportunity pass her by. She had nothing left to lose, after all…and she had no idea when another chance to escape would present itself and if she could somehow get to Rufus…it would be worth it. Gritting her teeth, she wriggled her wrists against the coarse rope, causing her skin to chaff and burn from the effort. When she finally managed to slip one wrist out, a rumble of thunder overheard had her working double time to loosen her other. The fire might keep the soldiers occupied for a while, but if nature was going to help their efforts in extinguishing the blaze, she didn’t have any time left to lose.

With a gasp of pain, she wrenched her wrist free, grimacing as the cords cut into her skin, causing her to bleed. Cradling her wrist in her hand, she ran blindly to the opposite end of the fort, the black smoke coupled with the darkening clouds overhead making it nearly as dark as night. She stumbled towards the back gate, her sore ankle making her progress slower than what she would have otherwise liked. When she arrived there, however, she found that her exit was blocked by a large group of servants laden with water buckets who were making their way out to the river in an heroic attempt to save the fort.

Far from being discouraged, it gave Lucy an idea.

Rushing to the nearby kitchen, she scanned the shelves for a bucket of her own, but everything appeared to have already been taken…everything, that was except the cooking pot. Using her apron as a mitt, Lucy lifted the pot from the fire, dumping its contents over the hard-packed floor, hardly caring that the meal she had spent all morning helping to prepare lay ruined at her feet. The handle was hot though and her apron was thin – she was going to need something to help keep it from burning her fingers. Her eyes darted around the tiny room, finally falling on a heap of cloth covering half of a freshly baked loaf of bread…that was just in the process of being sliced. Scooping up the knife and dropping it into her apron pocket, Lucy readjusted her grip on the pot handle and made her way back out towards the gate.

The wind was blowing stronger now, the storm clearly only moments away from bombarding the fort with a deluge of rain. While the heavy showers would undoubtedly assist the French in their efforts, Fort Duquesne and its vulnerable position on the low-lying peninsula between the Ohio and Monongahela rivers was prone to flooding. If Lucy wanted to make a break for it, it had to be
Outside of the kitchen, everything was in upheaval. Soldiers were shouting and scrambling from place to place as the wind carried the fire to other areas of the fort, threatening to consume the whole. The gusts of wind were blowing smoke, ash and debris into the garrison making their efforts to stop the spread of the flames…and well, extinguish them in general…challenging. The smoke and the ash made it difficult to see clearly and even harder to breathe, even Lucy's eyes were stinging and watering with irritation as she made her way towards where she knew the back gate to be.

She hadn't gotten very far when she ran headlong into a soldier who was racing towards the fire. Toppling to the ground, the pot she had been carrying fell out of her hands and rolled off to the side. She was just about to scramble back to her feet and retrieve it when a gentle hand was reached out to her, "Je t'ai cherché. On doit vous mettre en sécurité."

Lucy shook her head, "No, Nicolas." she said with grim determination, "Je ne resterai plus ici."

Nicolas looked back at her in confusion momentarily before he was attacked and roughly shoved to the side by another soldier, who looked down at Nicolas fallen figure with utter disdain, "Consorting avec l'ennemi?"

Taking that as a cue to leave, Lucy quickly scrambled away only to find herself roughly gripped by the waist and flipped onto her back. "Où pensez-vous que vous allez?" the soldier gritted out angrily before adding with a wanton leer, "Je n'en ai pas encore fini avec toi."

Peering through the thick clouds of smoke, Lucy could just make out the sneer of the man who had shot and killed Wyatt. He was roughly attempting to pin her arms, as he pressed himself on top of her, but Lucy was too desperate now. With a sharp kick upwards, she incapacitated him enough to flip back over and crawl away when he made a grab for her again. "Let me go!" she shrieked out, kicking back with her foot again, stretching her arm forward until her fingers grazed the edge of the pot. The metal was still boiling hot to the touch, but she was not deterred; as far as she was concerned, this was her last chance at escape and she was going to take it. Grasping the handle roughly in her hand, Lucy let out a painful yelp as she flipped herself over swinging the pot with her as she did so until it made contact with the head of the soldier who had her pinned to the ground. Gripping at his face in pain he let her go long enough so that she could scramble to her feet and make a run for it. "Arrêtez-la! Elle s'échappe!" the soldier cried out to a few French soldiers racing to his assistance. Lucy made one quick glance behind her to see three of them wrestling each other in frantic confusion before tripping over themselves to get at her.

In sheer desperation, Lucy sprinted as fast as she could out of the fort and towards the river. If she had to swim for her freedom…so be it. Though thunder was booming and lightning was streaking
across the sky, she hardly cared…Rufus was somewhere on this river and this could be her one and only chance at finding him - dangerous conditions be damned. She had just stumbled into the Monongahela, the icy water swirling around her knees causing her dress to billow out around her, when she was nabbed from behind once more, her captor wheezing and coughing as he dragged her back to the shore. Undeterred, Lucy reached into her apron pocket and grasped onto the knife, determined to use whatever means necessary to save herself….to save Rufus. With a rush of adrenaline and fury she spun around, falling slightly as she did so and drove the knife into the forearm of the soldier who had come racing out to apprehend her.

With a hiss of pain, he quickly dropped her as he grasped at his arm. Shoving him roughly away from her, Lucy made to rush into the river again until the soldier shouted after her in a voice that was oddly and impossibly familiar, “Dammit, Lucy! What the hell? It’s me!”

With a sharp intake of breath, Lucy turned slowly. It couldn’t be…she saw him die….yet….there he was, standing before her, dressed as a French soldier…and looking absolutely pissed. Stumbling backwards from the shock, Lucy nearly fell into the river gaping at the man whom she believed was lost forever. As a steady rain began to fall all around them, Lucy shook her head in disbelief, hardly able to breathe, hardly able to even articulate a sound except for the small squeak that escaped her as she gasped out in complete incredulity, “Wyatt?”

Chapter End Notes

I had 8100 words written on this a little over two weeks ago and it has taken me that long to get the last bit of this chapter written out for you (it's at a little over 9500 words). I apologize for that - with school starting we've had lots of meetings and events. (yes, even though I homeschool - we still have them for co-ops and extra-curriculars). I wanted to give you a whole chapter from Lucy's point of view....and don't worry...you'll be getting Wyatt's POV in the next chapter...what happened to him, why it took him so long to get to her etc. I expect as we move past all of these "start of the year" things life will calm down again and I won't be leaving you hanging for so long. I hope you enjoyed this update! Thanks so much for your patience!
Chapter 14

Let me apologize profusely for being so long in updating this. As some of you know I've been busy. I've been more involved in our community here from auditioning and joining a choir to volunteering and working with my daughter's choir group and still homeschooling and being active in our co-ops and such...it's just taken me away from writing.

This chapter has been ALMOST finished for a whole month if that gives you any kind of idea of what life has been like. Apart from it being incredibly long, I also ended up rewriting a large section of it...which of course, just added to the delay. That was partly my fault for trying to write parts of this story while suffering from the chest cold from hell...(I don't recommend mixing writing with cold medicine) but even after rewriting that section there were just parts of it that I just wasn't happy with and so I muddled over passages for days and weeks until I finally worked out the kinks.

This chapter gives us Wyatt's POV and will see our team finally catching a break in all of their misery. I hope you enjoy it and again, I apologize SO SO MUCH for the delay! As always, I appreciate your patience and your comments. Thank you so much for understanding. Happy Reading!

Several months ago, Lucy had been at home, nursing a massive blow to her ego, when Homeland Security Agent Kondo knocked on her door and essentially turned her life upside down. Whisking her off to Mason Industries where she learned for the first time that time travel was not only possible, but was in fact, an actuality, had stunned her in a way nothing else ever had before.

That, however, was only the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

Seeing the Hindenburg, watching it defy known history and land, coming back from 1937 only to find that her beloved sister, Amy, had never been born and her terminally ill mother was now thriving and healthy...had all culminated into what was, by far, the most shocking day of her life.

This? This was a close second.

Too flabbergasted to move, hardly able to even breathe as she stared through a steady stream of rain at a bloody and bruised Wyatt, Lucy stammered, “You...you're...supposed to be dead.”

“Sorry to disappoint you, ma’am.” he gritted out as he took hold of the knife, groaning as he attempted to pull it out of his arm.
It was only then that Lucy realized, with horror, what she had done, “Oh my God, Wyatt…I’m so sorry.” she whimpered as she went to help him pull it free. “Are…are you okay?”

“No, I’m not okay!” Wyatt spat out as he wrenched it free, “You stabbed me!” he exclaimed as he tossed the knife off to the side, “I mean, seriously…what the hell?

“I didn’t know it was you!” Lucy argued weakly. “Besides, why would you grab me from behind like that?”

“Why…” Wyatt stared at her incredulously, “you want to jump in a river during a thunderstorm? Be my guest. Do you have any idea what I’ve just been through trying to save your life?” he spat out angrily.

“What you’ve been through?” Lucy bristled. “What about what I’ve been through? I thought…” she stammered in a voice choked with emotion, “I thought you were dead.”

A crack as loud as lightening rent the air, causing Wyatt to duck defensively, pulling Lucy with him as a nearby tree bore the brunt of the musket shot meant for them.

“Well if we stay here any longer, we’re both dead.” Wyatt huffed out as a host of French soldiers made their way out of the gate. All of them pointing and yelling at them. Gripping her arm, he urged, “C’mon…we need to get the hell out of here.”

“What about Rufus?” Lucy asked desperately as Wyatt pulled her along. “Wyatt…they just sent him off to be sold into slavery.”

“No, they didn’t.” Wyatt urged, “come on, Lucy - I didn’t do all of this just to be shot by those assholes again.” He took her by the hand and set off at a hard sprint, racing towards the woods, but their efforts were in vain. No sooner had they made it to the tree line when Lucy, already suffering from a sore ankle, got her foot caught up in a wooden crate left lying out and tumbled to the muddy ground. “Shit…Lucy.” Wyatt breathed out, but as he stooped down to help her, more shots rang out forcing him to take cover. Pulling out his own gun, Wyatt took out a few of the French soldiers, all the while shouting at Lucy to crawl towards him.

Desperately clawing at the crate her foot was tangled in, Lucy tried to get free but it was no use. Between attempting to shield herself from musket fire and maneuver her foot out of the crate, she
was having a hell of a time and Wyatt was getting desperate. Abandoning his position behind a large tree, he quickly scrambled to her side using the butt end of his gun to break her foot free from the wooden crate only to be set upon by two more soldiers. Wyatt grappled with one, while the other took hold of Lucy, attempting to drag her back to the fort as she clawed and kicked in a desperate effort to get away.

“Get off of me!” she gritted out angrily as she kicked the French soldier in the shin, causing him to howl out in pain and release her, at which point Wyatt came charging towards the soldier, knocking him over. Before the soldier could scramble to his feet to make a grab at Lucy again, Wyatt was on him, punching him relentlessly in the face until Lucy spun around only to see a familiar face charging towards them, pistol drawn…and aimed directly at Wyatt.

“No!” Lucy cried out, stumbling forward. “Ne lui faites pas de mal.” she pleaded. Nicolas hesitated, looking at Lucy with the greatest sense of conflict; torn between doing his duty and showing her…them…mercy. “On veut juste rentrer à la maison.” she begged, standing in front of Wyatt, who had quickly scrambled to his feet. “C'est tout. S'il vous plaît, laissez-nous partir.”

Wyatt stood behind Lucy, alert and tense, ready to reach for his own gun in a moment as Nicolas ordered her to step aside, but Lucy shook her head at him defiantly, “No. Tu vas devoir me tuer. Je ne vais pas te laisser faire du mal à cet homme.”

They stood, facing off, as the rain pummeled the Earth all around them, but when it was clear to Nicolas that Lucy was not going to give in to his repeated demands that she move aside, he shakily took aim again, this time pointing the pistol at her…which made Wyatt quickly reach for his own gun. Lucy however, took a step towards Nicolas, “S'il te plaît, ne fais pas ça. Tu es un homme bien.”

Nicolas’ face contorted in agony, clearly in conflict with his emotions, but as Lucy reached out tentatively and touched his arm, he relented with a sigh and lowered his weapon. “Sois parti. Quittez cet endroit.” he muttered.

Lucy let out a sigh of relief and had just opened her mouth to thank him when a deafening shot pierced the night. Instinctively, Wyatt made a grab for Lucy, but it was Nicolas who faltered and fell to the ground. “Nicolas!” Lucy yelled out as she stooped to check his wounds, but Wyatt pulled her away as more gun shots exploded into the trees around them.

“We gotta move, Lucy!” he urged, pulling her along beside him as they dove into the rain drenched forest, dodging more gunshots as they quite literally ran for their lives. As musket balls exploded into the trees all around them, Wyatt silently thanked God again that accuracy was not a main attribute of the flintlock pistol, but as Lucy faltered beside him, his heart sank into his stomach. “Lucy?!” he cried out, gripping onto her arm tighter as she nearly collapsed on the
“It’s just my ankle” she gasped out, gripping at a stitch in her side.

“Come on, we’re almost there…we can’t stop now.” Wyatt ordered pulling her forward, as shouts of “Meurtriers!” rang out behind them. “What the hell does that mean?” he asked as they splashed through a large mud puddle.

“Murderers.” Lucy moaned, “Oh my God, Wyatt…if they’re calling us that…that must mean Nicolas is dead…oh my God…he’s the commander’s son! This is bad…this is very, very bad.”

“Better him than us.” he gritted out, clearly unsympathetic as he hoisted her up and over fallen log before tugging her forward once more. They ran onward, the shouts from the French sounding mercifully further away, until at last, they reached a steep embankment that sloped sharply down towards the river. Practically sliding down it in the hopes that their sudden disappearance would keep the French off their tail, Lucy and Wyatt tumbled to the rocks below, slipping to the bottom in an awkward and graceless embrace.

“Ouch!” Lucy cried out as they collapsed onto the gravelly surface, but for Wyatt, this was no time to nurse injuries. As quickly as he could he scrambled to his feet, pulling a protesting Lucy up behind him.

“We can’t stay here, Lucy!” Wyatt reminded her urgently, “we’ve got to get the hell out of here before they catch up to us.”

“Where are we going to go?” Lucy moaned, as she faltered again beside him, “It’s no use…they’re just going to find us again…”

Wyatt wanted to argue with her, but they didn’t have time for that right now. Right now, he was focused on getting them to safety. Not saying a word, therefore, Wyatt pulled her forward with more determination than ever before, racing along the river bank until they came to a depression near the water’s edge where, huddled against the rocky outcropping was…

“Rufus?!?” Lucy gasped, stopping short at the sight of him. “How…how…?”

“What the hell took you guys so long?” Rufus demanded, ignoring her as he rushed towards them,
“I may not be Bear Grylls, but I know you’re not supposed to be on or near water during a damn lightning storm!”

“We ran into a little trouble,” Wyatt answered hurriedly as he quickly brushed past him and snatched up the small bag of supplies he had left behind with Rufus.

“Uh-huh.” Rufus said with a nod of his head noticing Wyatt’s bloody arm, “define trouble…”

Shouts sounding somewhere above them, however, made explanation unnecessary, “Shit.” Wyatt breathed out, “We’ve gotta move.” As he looked around desperately for a route of escape, he knew that in this storm, with Lucy’s sore ankle, there was no way in hell they were going to outrun them. Making up his mind, he threw their meager bundle of supplies into the small canoe lying on the shore, covered almost completely with limbs that Wyatt was now furiously tossing to and fro. “Get in the boat.” he said decisively.

“Get in the boat? Did you not hear a damn word I just said?” Rufus exclaimed loudly. “You don’t go out on the water during a lightning storm!”

Musket shot exploded into the ground next to them, showering their feet with gravel and rock. “Shit!” Wyatt exclaimed as he grabbed Lucy around the waist and practically tossed her into the canoe, “Get in the damn boat, Rufus!”

As another shot exploded into the rocks next to them, Rufus didn’t need any further convincing. Scrambling into the boat next to Lucy, he covered his head with his hands as the shouts from the French soldiers got louder. Using all of his strength, Wyatt pushed the canoe into the swift flowing river clambering up the side of the boat before it carried the three of them northward up the Monongahela.

Keeping low in the canoe, the three of them lay there together as rain, thunder, and musket fire pounded all around them. “Just stay down.” Wyatt ordered them, “we’re surrounded by mountains…that’s a good thing. Lightening usually hits high ground first.”

“Excuse me,” Rufus argued anxiously, “but there’s a reason you don’t go into the pool during a damn thunderstorm. Do you know if lightning strikes water it can kill someone 10 miles away?”

“Will you shut up, Rufus?” Wyatt hissed as Lucy whimpered in fear. “It’s not like this was my first choice, okay? But since those assholes think we murdered the commander’s son…”
“Wait, what?” Rufus asked. “You murdered somebody?”

“No!” Lucy and Wyatt answered together. “They think we did.” Lucy explained, “Nicolas was trying to stop Wyatt from taking off with me when...he took a shot that was probably meant for us...and since he’s Louis Coulon’s son. I mean, first his brother at Jumonville Glen, now his son...if they think we’re British spies…”

“I don’t give a damn what they think.” Wyatt spat out angrily, “We didn’t do it...if that asshole would have just left us alone…”

“He was not an asshole.” Lucy snapped angrily, “He was the only person in that whole place who was nice to me. He watched out for me, defended me...and now he’s probably dead because of us, so I’d appreciate it if you’d try and show a little respect.”

Wyatt stared at her in complete disbelief. “He tried to kill me.” he reminded her with an angry scoff, shifting away from her.

“But he didn’t.” Lucy argued, “He was letting us go...besides, what do you expect him to do? I mean, you’re a soldier...what would you have done in the same situation?”

Wyatt rolled his eyes, “I’ll tell you what I wouldn’t have done...I wouldn’t have been playing nice with the French after they nearly murdered one of you.” Wyatt scoffed indignantly, “Do you know how many damn times I tried to save your ass in that fort? But you didn't even...it was like I wasn't even there…”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Lucy asked, gaping at him. “How...how was I supposed to know you were alive? And for the record,” she said as she turned to Rufus, “how are you even here? The last time I saw you, you were on a boat going to God knows where.”

“You didn’t tell her?” Rufus asked Wyatt incredulously.

“I was kind of busy, Rufus.” Wyatt grunted out in exasperation as he shifted into a more comfortable position.
“Tell me, what?” she asked, her head sloshing back and forth to look at both Wyatt and Rufus who were situated on either side of her. “How long have you known he was alive?” she asked Rufus accusingly.

“Since last night.” Rufus answered with a shrug. “What…you didn’t know?”

“No, I didn’t know! So, you could tell Rufus you were alive, but not me?” Lucy asked as she rounded on Wyatt who was now cursing underneath his breath.

“And when the hell was I supposed to do that? Huh? When you were cozying up next to your French boyfriend back at the fort?” He spat out forcefully, rolling his eyes at Lucy’s affronted gasp, “Yeah, don’t think I didn’t see the two of you hitting it off back there.”

“I don’t have the slightest idea what you’re talking about.” Lucy gritted out, talking over Wyatt as he made to argue with her, “He was not my boyfriend.”

“Could have fooled me.” Wyatt huffed out as Rufus bit back a laugh.

Wyatt rolled his eyes and shifted away from her, but Lucy pressed further, “And if there was something going on between us…which there wasn’t…then maybe you should have come up to me to let me know you were still alive instead of sneaking around and spying on me!”

‘She’s got a point there, man” Rufus muttered.

“Nobody asked you, Rufus.” Wyatt spat out before he flipped over on his stomach, rocking the boat in the process to look at Lucy more directly, “And I wasn’t spying on you…” he countered angrily, “I spent the whole damn night trying to get you the hell out of there.”

“Oh really?” Lucy argued doubtfully, “When?”

**ONE DAY EARLIER**

Despite a massive headache, nausea, and more than a little bit of dizziness, Wyatt had made his way back to their old campsite, found the discarded clothes Lucy had left behind and clumsily
raced towards the French fort still completely at a loss as to what to do when he got there.

Somewhere in the back of his mind he knew that without his usual stealth, he was bound to run into trouble, but at the time, his focus was solely on getting to his team mates as quickly as possible. With a fresh set of clothes and a fairly shabby visage, he was holding out hope that he would be able to slip into the fort, among the trappers, traders, and farmers and find out what the hell the French soldiers had done with Lucy and Rufus. The moment he reached Fort Duquesne, however, he realized he was going to have a tough time blending in with the other denizens of the French compound. It wasn’t that there weren’t enough people moving freely in and out of the fort to avoid detection, it was that those people were decidedly dressed differently than he was.

Yes, Rufus had procured a new set of clothes and while otherwise unremarkable in their make up (just a plain white silken shirt and a pair of khaki breeches) the only persons wearing similar attire were, oddly enough, the Native Americans who were gathered along the shoreline trading animal skins for muskets, metal tools and the like. Unlike him, however, they had adorned their plain garments with colorful beaded necklaces and sashes...making an otherwise plain raiment, stylish and vibrant. The French traders, by contrast, were draped in dark furs and wore leather pouches…their hair an unkempt mess causing them to look far more wild and uncivilized than the people they had come to cultivate. The farmers and even the slaves too, wore darker shirts of a coarser material, while the French, in their smart uniforms of bright blue and white, stood in sharp contrast to all of them.

In most circumstances, plain, ordinary and otherwise commonplace attire would work to ones’ advantage in attempting to blend in with the crowd. But in this crowd, among all of this, Wyatt was most certainly the odd man out. Deciding he was either going to have to come up with a better plan to blend in or figure out another way into the fort, Wyatt made his way towards the Monongahela side of the outpost in an attempt at the latter hoping that he might be able to find a back door or a low place in the wall he could climb over.

But that is where he ran into trouble.

No sooner had he crashed through the underbrush on his way to the Eastern side of the fort, then he found himself completely surrounded by a very angry looking bunch of Native Americans. Since they didn’t look at all surprised by his sudden appearance, he could only imagine that his brash ramble through the woods had drawn their attention to his presence and they had spent the better part of the morning tracking his movements.

Throwing up his hands in surrender, Wyatt inwardly cursed himself for being so damn careless. Taking a deep breath as they slowly made their way towards him, he pleaded, “Listen…I’m not here to hurt anybody. I just want to save my friends…okay?” He pointed towards the fort in explanation, “My friends…I think they’re prisoners there…this whole thing has been a misunderstanding. I just want to get them out of there and go home.”
He held out little hope that they understood a word he said, but as they began murmuring amongst themselves Wyatt thought that perhaps, maybe they had. He was just beginning to believe that they were going to let him go, when he found himself being poked roughly with a musket barrel and sent marching in the direction of the fort.

Dammit. Well…that was one way to get in…

Wyatt knew however, it was not at all ideal considering the French had already tried to kill him once. If he suddenly appeared on their doorstep alive? He might not have been the historian, but he was pretty damn sure they wouldn’t respond by sending out the welcoming committee.

Well, they might send out a “welcoming” committee, but he hardly believed he’d be made to actually feel welcomed.

Wyatt stomped along in the midst of the Native Americans fully expecting to turn towards the fort at any moment, but to his surprise, the troop veered off to the left, towards the Monongahela River marching him all the way down to the water’s edge where they paused and motioned him into one of several waiting canoes. “No…no…wait.” Wyatt protested. “I need to help my friends.” he argued as he pointed back towards the fort, but with several muskets now pointed in his direction, he decided the best thing to do, at this point, was to comply.

Reluctantly, therefore, he sat down deciding he had better not press his luck. He had already had one close call as it was and if he was going to be of any help to Lucy and Rufus he didn’t need anymore. He took some comfort in the fact that thus far, the Indians had neither bound his hands nor searched him for any weapons and so while he wasn’t happy about his current predicament, he felt that maybe cooperating with them might work in his best interest.

Maybe if he could communicate to them, make them understand that he was not a threat - he could earn their trust…and their help.

Battling against the north flowing current of the river, the canoes slowly made their way southward down the twisty and winding bends of the Monongahela and Wyatt couldn’t help but look back towards the direction of the fort, his thoughts wholly turned to his friends who now seemed more out of reach than ever. The further they traveled, the more anxious he became -with every stroke of the oar, he was being pulled further and further away from the people who needed him. His anxiety must have been evident on his face, for no sooner had he shifted nervously in his seat than a hand rested on his shoulder followed by words he didn’t understand, but one look into the face of the man speaking to him and Wyatt knew they weren’t planning on hurting him.
But that didn’t stop him from seriously contemplating about jumping out of the damn boat and swimming for it.

After what had to have been hours, the canoes finally made their way towards the Eastern shore of the river, 10 miles south of Fort Duquesne, coming to rest at a small peninsula that jutted out away from the shore. As the Natives scrambled onto the bank, they motioned for Wyatt to follow, but his patience was now wearing thin. He stubbornly hesitated in the boat, half scheming to commandeer the canoe he was in and paddle as fast as he could back to Fort Duquesne. Several hands, however, grabbed for him and pulled him forward, urging him up the sloping forest path to where Wyatt came face to face with an honest to goodness Indian village. He stood gaping at the scene around him – a scene he had truly only seen in books and movies and he couldn’t help but wish that Lucy was with him to see it too.

And it made him all the more anxious to get back to her.

As he stumbled into the camp, murmurs arose among the tribe as they all turned to stare at him, a newcomer, and from the looks of tension on the faces of some – a perceived threat. While Wyatt felt completely out of place and a more than a little alarmed at his current situation, he breathed out a sigh of relief when his eyes fell upon a man donning the familiar uniform of a British officer speaking with one of the men who had ushered him into a canoe.

The officer was of a darker complexion with fierce, nearly black eyebrows, sharp eyes and a strong jaw and Wyatt had a strong suspicion that whoever this man was, he wasn’t your typical Englishman. He acknowledged Wyatt with a nod of his head as he listened intently to whatever message was being conveyed to him by his Indian captor. After several moments, the officer approached him with a bow. “I understand you speak English?”

“Yeah.” Wyatt responded somewhat impatiently. Though he knew he was probably being rude as hell, Wyatt’s eagerness to get back to finding Lucy and Rufus outweighed any sense of protocol he probably should have followed in addressing this man. He could barely hide the tone of annoyance in his voice as he barked out, “Listen, I don’t know why the hell I’m here…but I can’t stay…I have to get back to that fort…my friends need my help.”

The British officer looked up at him in marked surprise, clearly unused to be spoken to with such little civility, but far from reprimanding Wyatt, he chuckled mirthlessly, “I’m sorry to say, but if your friends have been taken captive by the French there is very little chance that…”

“They’re alive.” Wyatt interrupted curtly with a look of grim determination in his eye, “I just need to get in that fort – can you help me or not?”
“I’d love to be of service to you…but…” the officer trailed off, eyeing Wyatt suspiciously, “Why don’t you start by telling me who you are and how you came to be here?”

Wyatt groaned, feeling completely out of his element since it was Lucy who usually provided the context of their cover stories, understanding better than any of them what was conventional and what was not in any point in time they were visiting. It wasn’t like he could exactly tell this man the truth, but he knew, given that they were out in the literal middle of nowhere, amid high tensions, their presence was suspicious. “Look,” Wyatt said as he rubbed a hand across his face, “you’re the ones who brought me here. No offense, but I don’t care about you or the French…I’m just trying to save my friends.”

“My dear man,” the officer replied, “we are on the brink of war…”

“I don’t give a damn about any war.” Wyatt spat out impatiently, “This is not my fight…”

“Ah…so you’re a Quaker,” the officer nodded in understanding, “but I must say, given your physique and build, you’d make a fine soldier for his majesty, the King…particularly in these desperate times. We cannot allow the French to continue their conquest of this land…which is why, unfortunately, there is very little I can do to help you. The French and English aren’t on the best of terms, you see. But perhaps you can help me?” he asked as he ushered Wyatt over to a nearby log.

Wyatt took a reluctant seat beside him as the officer continued, “Several months ago, a dear friend of mine, John Fraser, was forced to give up a trading post many miles north of here due to French aggression. He had been there for years, tried to maintain his neutrality in all of this madness, even flew the French flag…but Louis Coulon and his men seized his land and ran him out of his home so that they could build yet another fort in this region.” He sighed heavily as he continued, “That was alarming enough, to be sure, but several days ago, we heard reports that members of the Confederation to which this tribe belongs, peacefully sought out that trading post in an effort to do business as usual…and though we have no account as to what happened, my own investigations have provided enough information to alarm me exceedingly…from what I can tell the entire party were slaughtered.”

Wyatt blanched, remembering the bloodbath they had encountered almost as soon as they arrived. Noting this, the British officer nodded, “You seem to know to what I am referring…”

“Yeah.” Wyatt breathed out, “I was there…my friends and I” he swallowed hard as he explained, “I didn’t…I mean, we didn’t have anything to do with that. We were just…lost and ran into that damn bloodbath.” he stammered out.
“Yes, well you see…I am tasked, as the Crown’s representative in these colonies with the affairs of the Indians to reach some sort of conclusion as to what is to be done. We have a responsibility to our allies here…”

Wyatt cleared his throat nervously, “Look, my friends and I…we don’t belong here…we’re just trying to get home. We were just in the wrong place at the wrong damn time. The French thought we were spies and chased us down for days until last night when they ambushed us…took off with my friends…nearly killed me…I just need to get them back so we can try to get the hell out of here.

“My dear man, how do you even know your friends are still alive? If the French truly believed your friends were guilty of espionage, I’m afraid the odds don’t appear to be in their favor.”

“I know.” Wyatt admitted glumly, “but I have to try…if they are alive, I’m the only one who can help them. Please,” Wyatt begged, “isn’t there something you can do to get me in there? Send me as an envoy or something?”

“I’m afraid I cannot help you there.” the British soldier replied. “With this latest act, the French have made it clear that they aren’t interested in negotiating a compromise to the present situation…and now with kidnapping English citizens…” He tutted with a shake of his head, “No…all negotiations appear to be at an end and I am under direct orders from the Governor, himself, that no further attempts should be made without a blessing from the King…”

“Then why the hell did you bring me here?” Wyatt demanded.

“Why…to save your life.” the officer responded in surprise, nodding towards the Native Americans situated around the camp. “My friend here tells me you were stumbling about in the woods, confused and injured,” he said with a nod towards Wyatt’s head. “they thought that perhaps you might be French…that is until you started speaking…these men may speak very little English, but they recognize it when they hear it.”

“It’s not that I don’t appreciate what you all were trying to do for me.” Wyatt said with a nod, “but every minute I’m here is more time for them to do God knows what to Lucy and Rufus…I’m not asking for anything…I just need to get in that fort…and sitting here,” he spat out suddenly, leaping to his feet in agitation, “is just wasting time!”

“I understand your frustration, but how do you expect to get into the fort dressed as you are?”
“Help me with that.” Wyatt urged, “Get me so damn clothes…I don’t care what it is…just…please help me.”

The officer pursed his lips thoughtfully as he took in Wyatt’s appearance before calling to one of the Native American men, speaking to him in the native tongue, before turning back to Wyatt with an appraising nod, “They’ll supply you with trapper garments, furs and things - that should at least help you look less like an out of place Englishman…but it will require payment.”

Wyatt threw up his hands, “I don’t have any money.”

“Money?” My dear sir, who said anything about money? In these wild and untamed lands, trading goods and services is far more valuable than money.” He pursed his lips in thought before adding in explanation, “I require information…if you can give me a full report on the events that transpired near this Fort Machault, you will have done your duty as an Englishman and have the unwavering gratitude of the Crown.

Not seeing any other safe way out of his predicament, Wyatt agreed with a sigh, relating to the British officer all that he had witnessed that horrible afternoon and how the French, thinking that they were spies, had pursued and captured them.

The British officer assailed him with questions, which Wyatt attempted to answer to the best of his knowledge until finally, the officer stood up and shook Wyatt’s hand, “Thank you…this information will prove most useful to our cause. I wish you the best of luck…and if you are able to secure the release of your friends, might I suggest you journey back here? John Fraser has relocated his post just a few miles east of here. I will be traveling to see him shortly before I return to Williamsburg, I’d be happy to make the necessary introductions - he could always use some help, particularly around harvest time. Though I do advise,” he said with a frown, “that you make your way to Fort Cumberland as soon as possible. With war on the horizon, it will be the safest place.”

“Th…thank…thank you.” Wyatt stammered, “That would be…”

“Oh please, don’t mention it…really in times such as these we Englishman have got to stick together, haven’t we?”

Wyatt nodded, “Yes sir…Colonel…?”
“Alexander McKee, at your service.” the officer said with a bow.

Wyatt knew that name…he couldn’t remember why he knew that name…but he knew he knew that name. Figuring it would come to him later he shrugged it off and went to work securing his disguise. The Native Americans, it seemed, preferred the European style of dress, so the trade of Wyatt’s plain outfit for the furs, coarse shirt and pants was all that was left to finish the transaction. Not only was Wyatt supplied with a full arraignment of a fur vest, coat and even a hat, the Indians gave him use of one of their canoes so that he could make his way back across the Monongahela to the fort. Unlike his trek southward, the voyage back up the river took less time, rowing as he was, with the current instead of against, but even so…rowing for miles on his own through the serpentine bends of the Monongahela had all but exhausted him by the time he finally reached Fort Duquesne.

Towering above him on his right were the high mountain peaks, where he, Lucy and Rufus had once spied on the fort, and though Wyatt was not one to get spooked by much of anything, he couldn’t help but feel unsettled by their dark looming shadows as he rowed slowly past them in his tiny canoe. Nearly an entire day had passed since Wyatt last saw Lucy and Rufus alive, and though he refused to even consider the possibility that he might well be too late, he couldn’t help but feel a mounting sense of dread as he silently maneuvered his boat to shore.

After securing his boat at the dock, Wyatt eased his way onto the shore, taking care to mimic the attitudes and actions of the other French trappers around him. He didn’t speak a lick of French, after all, and the last thing he needed was to be roped into a conversation and have his cover completely blown. Since the fort doubled as a trading post, his presence, thankfully, was nothing out of the ordinary and soon he found himself within the walls of the fort itself, without so much as a second glance drawn his way.

By now, evening had fallen and as the last vestiges of light streaked across the sky, the French soldiers were busing themselves with lighting torches and fires throughout the fort…something that worked to his benefit. Thus occupied, it allowed him more freedom to search than he might normally have had, since their attentions were focused elsewhere. Despite that freedom, however, there was no sign of either Lucy or Rufus and while he repeatedly willed himself not to panic, his inability to readily locate them had him more than a little desperate.

As casually as he could, he wandered among the tents and the buildings that he could readily access but nowhere did he find any indication that there were prisoners in the fort. He saw a few women in the back freely handling the washing and the cooking, but he highly doubted Lucy would be among them considering she was an accused spy. No. As spies, Lucy and Rufus would be secured somewhere….and as Wyatt’s eyes scanned the far wall, he realized where they could be. The interior portion of the fort, the military headquarters, would be the most secure area of the entire place, but as such, it was a place Wyatt would not be able to enter, given that he was clearly not dressed as a French soldier.
Wyatt leaned up against the balustrades of the interior wall, studying the movements of the soldiers as they made their way in and out, as they patrolled along the interior gate and the upper wall, trying to memorize the pattern and the timing so he could somehow find a window to slip in without being noticed. His musings, however, were interrupted by the call to dinner which sent many men, trapper and soldier alike, racing towards the large cauldrons near the kitchens.

Taking the opportunity in their absence to search a little more thoroughly, Wyatt scoured the now nearly vacant areas of the fort desperately, looking for any sign of either Lucy or Rufus, anything to indicate that they were still alive, when the sounds of loud laughter and jeers caught his attention. At first, Wyatt nearly dismissed it as normal dinner time ruckus…a chance for the soldiers to kick back and relax after hours on duty. There was something, though, in the the way the men were talking that made Wyatt’s hair stand on end. It was lecherous and taunting…and reminded Wyatt strongly of how that one asshole had spoken to Lucy when they had first been captured.

Wandering towards the grouping of men, Wyatt’s suspicions were confirmed when he saw the soldiers hounding the women dishing out their meals. Though most of the women looked used to it and gave as good as they got…one woman did not…and she seemed to be the one bearing the full force of their attention. Even though she shook off their advances time and time again, soldier after soldier teased and harassed her. It wasn’t until Wyatt got into the meal line and a few soldiers parted that he realized the woman was Lucy.

He hardly recognized her.

No longer in her underwear (thank God), she was dressed in a drab colonial get up that had her looking just like every other woman in the place. Her hair was mostly hidden beneath a reddish scarf and while she appeared to look unhurt, the amount of hands currently wandering all over her body, made Wyatt want to beat the shit out of every single man in the place.

Knowing that he was going to have to keep his emotions in check if they had any chance of getting out of all of this alive, Wyatt could do little more than watch as countless men harassed her as she tried to serve them dinner. He could see the tension in her face at every lewd comment tossed her way and though he wished she would look up so that he could catch her eye, she kept her eyes and her head determinedly down, refusing to look at any one of the men who grabbed her around the waist and nuzzled their damn faces in her neck.

Surrounded as she was by soldiers, Wyatt knew he couldn’t call out to her – that would be bad for them both. He thought about getting in line and whispering to her, but that too, seemed like it might be too risky. He had no idea how Lucy would react to seeing him and given that she was currently rebuffing every advance and attempted advance made towards her, to have one seemingly well-received would certainly raise suspicions.
No. He needed to blend in and try to get her alone.

Taking his place in the service line, Wyatt watched and waited, gritting his teeth angrily at every indecent proposal thrown her way until finally, he was near enough to touch her. With a firm, but gentle hand, he gripped her arm, hoping that that action would make her look up at him, but to his ultimate frustration, it did not. Instead, Lucy onlyducked her head away from him and attempted to tug her arm out of his grip. Refusing to let her go, Wyatt pulled on her arm, this time actually making her stumble towards him as he attempted to get her the hell out of that proverbial meat market, when a French soldier came rushing forward, knocking Lucy’s arm out of his grip and loudly admonishing the others, calling for them to disperse as he took Lucy by the hand and led her away.

Wyatt should have been grateful that somebody was looking out for Lucy…he knew that…deep down he knew that Lucy’s safety and security was the priority in this situation. But as he watched as the French soldier led Lucy away, offering her food and a blanket as he sat next to her by the fire, he couldn’t help but hate the guy…especially when he noticed that Lucy had absolutely no problem looking at him.

“Asshole” Wyatt breathed out under his breath as he took up a new position closer to the fire so that he could keep an eye on them.

*Her*…he mentally corrected himself.

The two of them sat huddled close to one another, talking…and as Wyatt crept nearer hoping that he might be able to hear something he could understand, he realized that Lucy was crying and it absolutely killed him to stand helplessly by watching someone else attempt to comfort her.

That was his damn job.

Okay, maybe it wasn’t his *job*…but she was *his* friend, *his* team mate…and dammit, he should have been the one sitting next to her, comforting her…not this jackass. Hell, these assholes kidnapped her…in her underwear…and shot *him*…why was she even giving them the time of day?

And where the hell was Rufus?

His disgust at the situation had set him to brooding…and he was only getting more indignant with
every passing moment as he watched and listened to them murmuring words to each other he didn’t understand – Lucy, offering up grateful smiles to the soldier who was now nudging his soup bowl at her.

Damn it.

He wanted nothing more than to bust up their little dinner date, but he knew that was probably a sure-fire way to get them both killed and as he had no idea where the hell Rufus was, he figured he was just going to have to stick it out. So instead, he settled himself down next to one of the tents, shooting scornful glares in the direction of Lucy and her 18th century boyfriend in the hopes that she might pull her eyes away from that jackass long enough to see him sitting right there, practically in front of her.

When she did eventually lift her eyes to scan faces of the soldiers among the torch-lit grounds of the fort, Wyatt sat up, alert and ready…half hoping she would recognize him, half-hoping she wouldn’t. He had no idea how she would react, after all, and the last thing they needed was a blown cover…but in the end, her eyes passed over him, dismissing him as a nameless face in a crowd of other men and soldiers…and though he should have felt relieved that even Lucy didn’t recognize him in this get up…he wasn’t. It just made him all the more irritated, particularly when she went back to muttering with her French companion.

He was just about to storm off in search of Rufus and leave her to her new-found confidante when he stood up suddenly and left Lucy sitting alone by the fire. Wyatt watched him as he walked by, a thoughtful frown on his face, and though he wondered vaguely where the hell he was going and why he would leave Lucy behind after all the harassment she had received, he knew that with him out of the way, he could finally get close to Lucy.

No sooner had Wyatt begun making his determined way towards her than another French asshole was suddenly there at her side…but he wasn’t just sitting next to her. Oh no….this sonofabitch had his hand planted firmly on Lucy’s thigh…and though Wyatt knew causing a scene with this soldier wouldn’t be the best thing in terms of securing their escape, he also felt like it was incumbent upon him to teach him a thing or two about personal space.

Lucy, however, seemed to have the situation well under control…much to Wyatt’s surprise and admiration. He had been on several missions with Lucy, had seen her stare down the barrel of Nazis gun, brave the firepower of the Mexican army, and had even seen her covered in the blood of Abraham Lincoln, himself…but somehow, seeing her wrench that soldier’s hand off of her thigh and roughly throw it back at him, had him standing almost dumb in awe of her. As she continued to defend herself against his advances, Wyatt actually laughed with the other men surrounding the scene when the soldier lunged for her, only to fall short and crumple to a pathetic heap on the ground.
He didn’t laugh long though.

Almost immediately, Wyatt noticed the fury in the man’s eyes and saw the subsequent danger to Lucy, who was now surrounded on all sides by people who didn’t give a damn about her or her virtue and therefore would do nothing to help her when that asshole retaliated.

As swiftly as he could, therefore, Wyatt pushed past the gathered soldiers and grabbed a hold of Lucy just before the sonofabitch dove for her again. He hadn’t intended to stay among the crowd, but that action had caused quite a scene and as soldiers cheered, Wyatt quickly took a seat pulling Lucy onto his lap so that he could talk to her low enough so that only she could hear.

The problem was, Lucy thought he was just another asshole.

Despite his grip on her waist, Lucy fought against him with a fury he didn’t know she was even capable of. With so many soldiers around, however, he could hardly call out her name to calm her down. Instead, he attempted to pull her back against him so that he could quietly tell her not to worry, that it wasn’t some groping jackass who had a hold of her…it was him. He had just managed to press her up against his chest, had his mouth on the shell of her ear, when she rocked forward in an attempt to break free of his grip. In vain, Wyatt tried to pull her back up against him, but Lucy was having none of it, she threw herself forward, writhing this way and that on his lap…

…and oh dammit…this was a bad idea.

Springing to his feet, Wyatt hoisted her up in the air, determined to just carry her the hell out of the there…and from the whistles and cat calls erupting all around him, he felt pretty confident that not one of these assholes would come to her defense, even if he hauled her, kicking and screaming, right out of the front gate. Tightening his grip on her, Wyatt walked backwards through the crowd of soldiers, grunting as Lucy repeatedly jammed her elbow into his ribs.

Not that he blamed her…but it was starting to hurt like hell.

“Lucy! Relax…it’s me!” he whispered harshly, but she was leaning too far forward and the shouts from the crowd were far too loud for her to possibly hear him. Once again, he desperately tried to pull her back into his chest so that he could get her close enough to whisper reassurances to her but Lucy took that opportunity to abandon pummeling his ribs and instead, began pounding the hell out of left shin. The shock and pain from the blow to his leg caused him lose his grip on her and before he even realized what was happening, Lucy went tumbling down to the ground. “No,
wait…Lucy!” he gritted out as loudly as he dared, but it was no use, Lucy had already begun scrambling away from him and was soon surrounded by a jeering and laughing crowd, completely lost to Wyatt’s view.

As he fought to make his way back to her, however, her French defender suddenly reappeared, doing everything Wyatt wished he could do in that situation…okay, well minus a few ass-kickings. To his credit the soldier looked furious at what had befallen Lucy in his absence…and while Wyatt knew Lucy would have been just fine if she had just let him take off with her…the French officer didn’t know that. Therefore, Wyatt had to begrudgingly appreciate his attention and concern.

What he did not appreciate was the way the French soldier was currently shooing him away from Lucy, yelling at him with words he did not understand, as Wyatt tried desperately to get her to at least look in his direction. Lucy, however, kept her eyes firmly trained on the ground, hugging herself and flushing from humiliation and while it frustrated the hell out of Wyatt, he knew it was his own damn fault.

He had obviously scared the hell out of her.

But what else could he have done? There was no way he could communicate with her in English surrounded, as they were, by Frenchman. There was no way he could carry her off without her or her boyfriend putting up some kind of a fight. And so now, as Wyatt watched helplessly as the soldier ushered her off to God knows where, leading her gently and heroically through the gauntlet of lecherous assholes currently staring daggers at them, he felt like maybe this rescue was going to be a hell of a lot harder than he thought.

Dammit.

Dammit.

DAMMIT.

Wyatt rubbed a rough and across his face, frustrated beyond belief, but more determined than ever to get his team back. Huffing out a heavy breath, Wyatt stalked after them, muttering angrily to himself, frantically trying to come up with some distraction that would enable him to get closer to Lucy when he stumbled upon a scene that made him even more pissed than he already was; Lucy, having her ankle…the ankle he had practically begged to help her with…wrapped.
“Are you serious?” Wyatt mumbled irritably under his breath.

Maybe, Wyatt thought irritably, if he had asked to bandage her ankle in French, she wouldn’t have been so damn stubborn. As it was, he found himself glowering, watching as the two of them sat huddled together, talking, as the doctor slopped some kind of paste all over her swollen ankle and started dressing her injured foot. Pacing back and forth now as the two of the chit chatted into the night, Wyatt had just about had his fill when he heard Lucy gasp out a name that made him stop in his tracks.

Rufus.

He hung back, watching and waiting, as Lucy and the French soldier gathered some provisions and made their way across the fort to the very place he would not be able to follow…the interior military compound.

Dammit to hell.

He watched them both disappear through the gate, nearly panicking at the idea of Lucy being somewhere, alone, with that French jackass. He desperately sought to find another way in, a weakness in the wall, a place where he could climb over, but it was no use. He was not getting into that part of the fort…not dressed as he was anyway. Agitated and nervous, yet knowing he had to keep his emotions in check so as to not draw unwanted attention to himself, Wyatt hid in the shadows near the interior gate, half wondering if Lucy was being kept imprisoned in there…or if maybe whatshisdamnface had actually invited her over to his place for a night cap….and while he dismissed that last thought as ridiculous, just the hypothetical notion of that scenario playing out behind 12 foot walls that he could not enter was enough to just about make him lose his damn mind.

It was with a massive sigh of relief, therefore, when what, to him, felt like a damned eternity later, Lucy emerged from that inner fortress, unscathed…even though the French jackass was not trailing too far behind.

But damn it all if she didn’t look happier.

Wyatt didn’t want to think about the myriad of reasons of why that was…his imagination certainly wasn’t doing him any favors…but neither were his own two eyes. The two of them slowly meandered their way through the fort, looking completely oblivious to everyone else but each other. A nice leisurely stroll in the moonlight…didn’t mean anything, Wyatt repeatedly told himself…he was just protecting Lucy from any further harassment. But that repeated self-
assurance hit a snag when the duo stopped suddenly in front of a small, plain cabin and the French soldier pressed his lips against Lucy’s outstretched hand.

What in the actual hell?

Wyatt’s insides twisted furiously as the French officer gallantly bowed to her before he walked away, leaving her standing by her doorway, staring after him looking, Wyatt had to admit glumly, gratified.

And yes…it bothered him. Clearly, this asshole was just trying to manipulate Lucy…or maybe this was some weird Stockholm Syndrome thing…or maybe he was just a charming French speaking sonofabitch who had just happened to sweep Lucy Preston off her damn feet.

Either way, Wyatt hated him…and now more than ever he wanted to get her the hell away from this damn fort.

Throwing all caution to the wind, Wyatt stealthily moved towards the little house Lucy had entered just moments before, and once assuring that the coast was clear, slowly opened the door, “Lucy?” he whispered. But when the door flung open, it was not Lucy who was standing at the threshold greeting him. No. It was a surly looking woman who whacked him with a broom while screeching at him in French before slamming the door on his face. Shaken but not deterred, Wyatt made his way around to the back of the house, hoping to find a window to crawl into or at least find some way that he could send a message to Lucy when none other than Lucy’s favorite Frenchman spied him and came predictably running to her defense.

“Qu’est-ce que vous pensez faire là-bas, monsieur?” he shouted…but as Wyatt hadn’t the faintest idea of what he was saying, he merely rolled his eyes and shrugged his shoulders in return. This response was not deemed acceptable to the French soldier who continued to angrily scold him, “Vous ne trouverez rien là-bas, mais des ennuis si vous continuez à harceler cette femme.”

Wyatt wanted nothing more than to take his frustrations out on this man. It was partly because of him, after all, that he hadn’t been able to successfully get near enough to Lucy to talk to her…and after witnessing him fawn all over her all night, he would’ve loved nothing more than to take this guy down a couple notches. Yes, Wyatt realized that to this soldier, he was essentially the rooster caught in the hen house…skulking around the girls’ dormitories, as it were, in the middle of the night. But that was just the thing…he wasn’t. Wyatt was pretty damn sure that if Lucy knew he were standing right outside her…whatever the hell this was…she’d tell this asshole as much. As it was, he knew that he had to play nice and so if this jackass wanted to play the part of Lucy’s guardian angel, he would just have to let him.
With a sneer, Wyatt shrugged once more and made to stalk off, but the soldier grabbed at his arm roughly, gritting out, “Vous n'êtes là que parce que nous tolérons votre présence. Si vos manières non civilisées continuent de se manifester avec mes soldats, je veillerai personnellement à ce que vous et vos compagnons de commerce soyez bannis de ce fort.”

Hand to hand combat training in Delta Force, had taught Wyatt how to quickly and successfully break someone’s arm with one rapid motion and as the Frenchman’s grip tightened on his bicep, he was very much tempted to demonstrate just how well those lessons had been received. It was only the fact that this soldier had helped Lucy that made Wyatt reconsider decommissioning the asshole but given that he had repeatedly thwarted every damn attempt Wyatt had made at getting Lucy the hell out of there fort while cozying up to her himself and was now currently breathing down Wyatt’s neck about it, took all the self-control he had not to essentially beat the shit out of him right now and go on his merry way.

Instead, though somewhere in the back of his mind he knew he shouldn’t, he glared angrily at the military officer and muttered the only French phrase he knew, the one Lucy had taught him not so very long ago, “J'ai couché avec ta mère.”

The effect was immediate.

Before Wyatt could even feel the tiniest tinge of regret for losing his cool, he was being dragged off across the fort, but not to the exit…no, they marched him right past the main gate and into the holy of holies…the military stronghold within. With an angry shout, accompanied by what Wyatt could only assume were threats of punishment, the officer wrenched open a heavily barred door to what appeared to be a small guard house and shoved him within, angrily communicating to the guard what his offenses were. While he was thus engaged, Wyatt’s eyes scanned the small, dank, dimly lit building, hoping to find a way out of this mess, inwardly berating himself for being so damn hotheaded. Instead of a way out, however, Wyatt spied the only thing…or rather person…that could bring a smile to his face in his current situation.

As the door to the cell swung closed Wyatt approached his friend and team mate who, upon his arrival, had shrunk back to the far corner of the prison, concentrating on his manacles and was now nervously fidgeting as Wyatt crouched down next to him, “Look…um…if you don’t mind…it’s not very bright in here,” Rufus began, “and you’re…” he looked up in annoyance as Wyatt’s shadow completely blocked out his only source of light, only to drop his mouth open in shock as he gasped out, “Holy shit.”

“Hello, Rufus.” Wyatt smirked in amusement.

“Holy shit!” Rufus exclaimed again, his eyes flying open in surprise, “You’re…you’re alive? I knew it! I knew they couldn’t kill you!”
“Got pretty damn close,” Wyatt muttered with a sigh, motioning for Rufus to give him his bound wrists, “These shouldn’t be too hard to pick,” Wyatt muttered, “you got a…”

“Got a hairpin right here.” Rufus announced handing it to a confused Wyatt, “not mine…that’s Lucy’s” he said in explanation before gasping out, “oh my God, Lucy! Have you seen her yet?”

Rolling his eyes with a scoff, Wyatt took the hairpin from Rufus and began to work on his cuffs, “Yeah, I’ve seen her…”

“Well…what did she say?” Rufus asked, “I bet she was relieved to see you. She came in here just a little while ago, looking like…well…you saw what she looked like.” Rufus heaved out a sigh, “Good thing she’s got at least one of these French dudes on her side…I guess he’s been keeping an eye on her…”

“Yeah, he’s keeping an eye on her all right.” Wyatt grunted as he twisted the pin in the lock, “A little too much if you ask me.” Rufus looked up at him with raised eyebrows, a shit-eating grin spreading across his face.

“What’s the matter, Wyatt?” Rufus asked glibly, “Jealous?”

“What the hell do you mean, jealous?” Wyatt snapped, “I just don’t like the idea of her getting too close to people who have been trying to kill us for the past few days, that's all.”

“This guy is different, though” Rufus assured, still smiling at Wyatt, “I mean, he gave her his coat when she was walking around in her underwear, he wouldn’t let any of those handsy jackasses come within two feet of her without tearing them a new one…come to think of it,” Rufus mused, “he’s kind of like a French version of you.”

Wyatt stared daggers at Rufus for a moment before continuing on with his work, “Yeah well, forgive me if I don’t like the guy.”

“Because he’s into Lucy?” Rufus asked unapologetically.

“No!” Wyatt answered a little too quickly, “Who the hell do you think put me in here? I wasn't
even doing anything wrong.” Wyatt lied.

Rufus shrugged, rubbing his newly freed wrists as he took in Wyatt’s full appearance, “Maybe it’s because you look like an extra in Deliverance…who the hell are you supposed to be, anyway? Daniel Boone?”

“Very funny, Rufus.” Wyatt said with a roll of his eyes, “Do you want to get the hell out of here or not?”

“Mmmm…tough call, I was really hoping to be sold into slavery.” he quipped sarcastically. As Wyatt went to work on the cell door, Rufus rubbed his face anxiously, “Look…I uh….I know I shouldn’t ya know…tell you how to do your job or anything…but…how exactly are we gonna get out of here? We are literally surrounded by a damn army….and they’re not just going to let us walk out the door…”

“I don’t know, Rufus.” Wyatt sighed in exasperation, “I’m making this up as I go along…it’s not like I’ve got a hell of a lot to work with here…”

“Don’t you think we ought to…I don’t know…come up with some kind of plan first?” Rufus asked him anxiously.

“Don’t you want to get out of here?”

Rufus gaped at him. “Is that really a question you’re asking me? Look around you, Wyatt.” he demanded. “This place is not exactly the Hilton…hell, it’s not even the Motel 6…that prison cell in Jersey? A million times better than this. He shook his head frantically, “You smell that? I’ve been sitting in this disgusting, unsanitary, disease ridden hell hole since this morning…risking dysentery or the bubonic plague or some other backwoods sickness because these people don’t know the first thing about personal hygiene but given that they’re gonna put me on a boat tomorrow and send me off to some slave auction, I’d be alright with sucking it up for a little while longer if it means I’m not gonna get pumped full of musket balls because you decided to wing it.”

“So…yes?” Wyatt asked, a sardonic smirk pulling at his lips. Turning back to the lock once more, Wyatt tried to reassure Rufus, “Look, I may not have a plan…but I got this far, didn’t I?”

“You got thrown into prison, you mean?” Rufus reminded him.
“More like saving your ass from prison,” Wyatt remarked as the sound of a metallic click brought a triumphant smile to his face. Swinging open the door to their prison with a look of smug satisfaction, Wyatt motioned Rufus towards the exit, “I’ve got a boat waiting just outside the fort and…” he trailed off, turning to Rufus suddenly, “Wait a minute…you said they were putting you on a boat tomorrow?”

Rufus stared back at him blankly, “Yeah…I mean…that’s what Lucy said…but you’re not gonna let that happen…right?” Wyatt frowned, rubbing his chin thoughtfully as Rufus began to panic, “Right, Wyatt?”

“You know…you’re right…” Wyatt mused, “…we’re not going to be able to just waltz out of here…” he frowned thoughtfully, “I could get us past a couple guards…but we’d still have to make it to the main gate…” Pulling Rufus back into the cell, Wyatt shook his head, “New plan…I’m gonna put you on a boat tomorrow.”

“And just how are you going to pull that off?” Rufus asked as Wyatt settled himself down in the corner near door to the guardhouse.

“You’ll just have to wait and see.” Wyatt said with a shrug, but at Rufus’ glare he added encouragingly, “C’mon Rufus…when have I ever not gotten us out of a tight spot before?”

Rufus wanted to point out that 1754 was one hell a tight spot that they had yet to escape from, but since it was kind of on him to repair the LifeBoat and there was no way in hell he would be able to do that sitting in a jail cell…or living life as a slave…he figured he would just avoid pointing that out for the time being and trust that whatever Wyatt was planning would work.

Hell, just the fact that he was sitting across from him, alive and not dead in the middle of the damn forest, was already such a vast improvement than what he believed to be a hopeless situation an hour ago, that arguing with him over the details of how seemed pointless.

So he didn’t.

Instead, he followed Wyatt’s example, finding a comfortable corner to settle down in…and waited.

And waited.

And waited.
It was hours before the lock slid open on the door to the guardhouse…and from the looks of the bright beams of sunlight now streaming in through the small barred windows, it was well into the morning. Wyatt swiftly and silently got to his feet, bracing himself against the wall behind the now open door as the guard stomped into the room, barking loudly to Rufus in French, looking somewhat confused at his lone presence within the cell. Before he even had a chance to react, however, Wyatt had him in a rear naked choke, causing him to thrash against his unseen attacker, but to no avail. Seconds later, the guard lay unconscious at his feet.

“Is he dead?” Rufus asked breathlessly.

“No.” Wyatt grunted as he moved the soldier into the cell and began shedding him of his clothes. “Help me get his uniform off, will ya?”

“What are you gonna do?” Rufus asked as he began freeing the soldier of his boots.

Wyatt paused in his actions and stared at Rufus, disbelieving, “I’m gonna give him a bath,” he snarked, “what do you think I’m gonna do? I’m gonna change into his uniform and get us the hell out of here.”

“And what happens when he wakes up?”

Wyatt chuckled mirthlessly, “Let’s just hope we’re long gone before that happens.” Bitting his lip in thought, however, Wyatt switched gears, “Hang on…here…start putting these on him” he ordered Rufus, throwing his discarded trapper outfit at him. “…and the handcuffs…give me those….and that other set there on the wall…get me those too.”

Rufus quickly complied, all too eager to assist Wyatt in doing whatever he could to escape but no sooner had he returned to his arduous task, then the soldier began to stir. “Uh…Wyatt?” Rufus voiced nervously, but Wyatt was already at his side, slamming his fist into the side of the man’s head, until he lay silent and still once more.

Taking off his neckerchief, Wyatt tied it around the guard’s mouth before tightly securing the man’s wrists and ankles and burying him partially in the hay. “That ought to hold him.” Wyatt observed with a sigh. “Alright…” he began, “you stay here…”

“What!?” Rufus exclaimed, “You’re kidding, right?”
“I have to go find Lucy…I can’t go walking around the fort with you.” Wyatt explained as Rufus stood staring back at him completely dumbfounded and absolutely on the verge of a panic attack. “Look, I’ve got the key,” Wyatt reminded him, “I’m just gonna go and talk to Lucy, see if we can figure out a way to get her out of here and then I’ll come back for you.”

“Uh-huh and what happens when some other soldier comes barging in here and sees me sitting here with this guy…looking like this?” Rufus exclaimed hotly. “Hell, what happens if he wakes up?”

“Hit him again.” Wyatt said with a shrug, “Look, I’m not going to be gone long, okay? I promise. I just need to get Lucy the hell out of here too and I can’t do that with you trailing along behind me.”

“And what if you get caught? What if…”

“Rufus, relax.” Wyatt assured him, “You think this is my first time infiltrating an enemy base?”

“Yeah, but…”

“Look, I get it, I don’t speak French and we are a little out of our element here…but this

“Alright,” Rufus conceded with a sigh, “but if these jackasses sell me…”

“They won’t.” Wyatt assured him. “I promise, I’m not gonna let that happen.” With that solemn pledge, Rufus shakily consented to allow Wyatt to leave him alone in his prison while he went off in search of Lucy. Locking him back in his cell, Wyatt nodded at his friend, “I’ll be right back…I swear” he stated before slipping out of the guardhouse door and to the fort beyond.

To his immense relief, no one paid him much attention as he exited the guardhouse. Wyatt almost couldn’t believe his luck, but once he stepped through the gates to the more civilian side of the fort, he understood why. It was clear that some sort of shipment must have come in; crates, large and small, were being stacked all around the entrance as soldiers, tradesman and the like were bustling to and fro. In fact, so active was the fort that Wyatt half imagined he and Rufus could waltz out of there and no one would be any wiser.

But he still had to find Lucy.
Taking care to keep his head down, Wyatt made his way through the lively camp, following the trail he had followed the night before, in search of Lucy. He spied several women at wash tubs, some hanging laundry, others tending chickens…but Lucy was nowhere to be seen among them. Cursing his luck, Wyatt tried to nonchalantly search in tents and buildings, but given the stern looks he was receiving from the formidable woman who had scolded him the night before, he figured a soldier’s presence in that area of the fort wasn’t exactly seen as acceptable.

Dammit.

Not willing to give up just yet, Wyatt made his way back to the house where he had last seen her, thinking that that was as good a place as any to search, but to his utmost frustration, it was empty.

“Where the hell is she?” Wyatt gritted out under his breath. By now, he had been gone far longer than he had anticipated. Not daring to waste a moment’s more time, Wyatt rushed back to the guardhouse, only to find to his utmost horror, the door standing wide open. “Shit!” he exclaimed breathlessly as he quickly made his way to the open door, silently praying that Rufus was still inside.

But he wasn’t.

“Shit!” Wyatt exclaimed again, racing frantically out of the empty guardhouse, only to be held up by a few soldiers who accosted him with angry, accusatory questions he didn’t understand. Shaking his head at them, Wyatt roughly pushed past them, rushing out of the interior gate and out into the bustling fort beyond, where scores of traders, Native Americans and soldiers were standing in large groups, talking among a myriad of crates and supplies. Carving a path through them the best he could as angry shouts trailed behind him, Wyatt stumbled out of the main gate, only to witness Rufus getting loaded onto a large flat supply barge. “Shit!” Wyatt exclaimed again as he raced towards the dock, hardly caring that he was pushing and shoving people as he made his way towards the boat.

He was just about to call out for Rufus to jump in the damn river when the frantic scream of an all-too familiar voice sounded far-off beside him. “Rufus!!! Rufus!!” Lucy’s cries pierced the air around them like a bolt of lightning, causing everyone standing without the fort to look in her direction as she desperately fought her way towards the dock.

Wyatt started towards her, but then remembered Rufus…and oh hell, how was he going to get them all out of this mess? A scream from Lucy caused a general stir as two soldiers grabbed onto her and began dragging her, literally kicking and screaming back into the fort. As much as Wyatt wanted to go to her, he knew that this was a perfect distraction.
Rushing the dock, Wyatt knocked several soldiers into the river as he fought his way towards Rufus, grabbing him roughly by the arm, and pulling him towards the opposite end of the long dock with a frantic jerk. Practically tossing Rufus into his waiting boat, Wyatt cut the rope with one swift flick of his knife, before tossing his friend an oar, “Move!” he ordered as the confusion on the docks turned to realization.

“What about Lucy?” Rufus asked, turning back to see her struggling against several soldiers, “Wyatt…look at her…they’re…they’re”

“I know, Rufus.” Wyatt growled, “There’s nothing I can do about it right now, okay? Row!”

Doing as he was told, Rufus quickly rowed alongside Wyatt, the swift, north flowing current carrying them away from the French fort at a dizzying pace. “Wyatt, we have to go back and get Lucy…we can’t just leave her there.”

“Do you honestly think I don’t know that?” he spat out he rubbed a frustrated hand across his face, “I’m thinking, alright?”

“They’re not gonna let you back in that fort...” Rufus said with a nervous shake of his head.

“I’m just gonna need a distraction…” Wyatt mused.

Wyatt didn’t want to leave Rufus, but he had no choice. Even after his daring rescue on the docks, he was still in a French uniform and therefore, could hopefully, still blend in.

He obviously couldn’t arrive by boat, though. Pulling the canoe up on shore, Wyatt broke off a few limbs, hiding it from view, so that if the French did come after them in search of Rufus, they would (hopefully) bypass this particular spot near the river. Here, there was a mass of large rocks in which Rufus could safely shelter himself, but just to be sure, Wyatt left him with a pair of flintlock pistols, an extra knife and a few words of encouragement, “Just stay hidden…chances are, if they come looking, they’re gonna sail right on past this place…they wouldn’t think we’d stop this close to the fort.” Wyatt began to walk away, but turned, “I’ll be back with Lucy as soon as I can...just...just...”

“I’ll stay right here.” Rufus promised. “Go get her, Wyatt…and be careful.”
The wind had picked up considerably and given the heavy scent in the air and the darkening sky, Wyatt knew it wouldn’t be long before he would have to contend with a storm. Rushing through the woods, Wyatt made his way back to Fort Duquesne as quickly and as silently as he could. He didn’t have to run very far before he found himself facing the formidable gates of the French fort and while he was relieved that he had no trouble getting to the fort, he had no idea how the hell he was going to get in. The gates, which had been wide open previously, were now unmercifully closed against him. He needed in…but how the hell was he going to do that? Racing along the outside of the walls, he looked for any kind of weakness that he might be able to manipulate to his advantage. Find one he did, a small break in the balustrades…but it did him little good. No way in hell could he fit through the small opening…but it did allow him to spy into the interior of the fort and what he saw made his blood run cold.

Lucy, bound to a damn whipping post.

Shit.

Desperate now, Wyatt raced his way over to the main gate again, his eyes darting around the ground for anything he might be able to use to help him break into the fort. The grounds, which had been full of traders and soldiers, previously, were now eerily empty…everyone apparently distracted by the soon-to-be spectacle within. Ropes, pick axes, shovels, hammers littered the ground all around the exterior of the fort, but none of them would be sufficient to take down the thick wooden gates. Wyatt had just decided he would try to climb over the damn wall when the smell of smoke caught his attention.

Turning a corner, Wyatt found to his utmost delight and relief, a small campfire, still burning, with a pot of melted metal bubbling just over its surface…completely unattended. Not wasting another moment of time, Wyatt gripped one of the burning limbs, not giving a damn about the intense heat radiating from it, and quickly jammed it into the small opening he had previously used to observe the horrifying scene within. Thankful for the strong wind, Wyatt watched as he flame eagerly licked at the dry balustrades, consuming them in just a matter of seconds.

It wasn't long before the cry of alarm sounded from within and Wyatt waited impatiently by the gate until the doors swung open and crowds of soldiers, tradesman and Indians rushed forward, eager to do what they could to save the fort from destruction. Taking advantage of the pandemonium, Wyatt fought his way through the onslaught of terrified people, pushing against them as he attempted to make his way into the fort to the spot where he knew Lucy was.

The smoke, however, was thick…and the wind wasn’t doing him any favors now. Having a general idea of where he had seen her, however, helped. Stumbling in the general direction of where he had seen her bound, Wyatt made his way towards the center of the courtyard only to find,
when he arrived at the post, that Lucy was no longer there.

Panic nearly overtook him as he stood, peering through the clouds of suffocating fumes, in search of her. “Lucy!” he yelled out, hardly caring if anyone heard him…but the screams and shouts from the soldiers working to put out the fire were so numerous, his voice was lost among them. He raced from one corner of the fort to the next, crashing through every tent, every building until finally he heard her screaming out.

Racing towards the sound of her voice, Wyatt growled in fury at the scene that awaited him when she finally came into view. Lucy was flat on her back on the ground struggling against a French soldier, lying on top of her trying to pin her arms down to the ground. “No means no, asshole.” Wyatt growled as he charged at him, but before he could reach her, Lucy had somehow managed to knock the asshole off of her and was scrambling away.

As desperate as Wyatt was to get to Lucy’s side, there was no way in hell he was going to pass up an opportunity to teach that sonofabitch a lesson. The moment he reached the asshole, therefore, Wyatt gripped him roughly by the shirt collar and gave him one swift sucker punch to the face. By now, however, Lucy was being trailed by two other soldiers. Not wasting another moment, he charged after them, lunging for them angrily as they sought to apprehend her. The ensuing fistfight was an easy enough win for Wyatt, but the smoke had all but suffocated him. Coughing and wheezing, he stumbled out of the gate, seeing to his horror, that she was shin deep in the raging river…as a bolt of lightning streaked across the sky. “Lucy!” he tried calling out to her but to no avail, his voice was still grappled from the effects of the fire and the thunder currently booming across the sky made equally sure that she would not hear him.

Racing forward, Wyatt caught her around the waist, still coughing and sputtering as he tried to pull her to the safety of the shore, but no sooner had he dragged her out of the river than she turned and….

“That’s when you stabbed me.” Wyatt spat out angrily, flinging his arm at her in an attempt to emphasize the point.

“Wait a minute,” Rufus interrupted, “you stabbed Wyatt?”

“How was I supposed to know it was you?” Lucy argued hotly, “After everything I had just been through?”

“Which…if you think about it….was kind of Wyatt’s fault.” Rufus pointed out glibly. “I mean, all those times you thought…well…it was really you being the handsy jackass…”
“Fine…you want to make me out to be the bad guy? Fine.” Wyatt grunted out angrily, “I was just
trying to save your damn lives…and I’d think you, especially, should remember that Rufus
considering without me you’d be well on your way to God knows where right about now.”

“And believe me, no one appreciates that more than I do, Wyatt.” Rufus agreed, “but come on,
man…you have to admit…you can’t really blame Lucy for stabbing you…I mean…”

But Wyatt was in no mood to admit anything. Instead, he shifted away from the two of them
brooding darkly as the pounding rain gave way to a gentle shower, the tell-tale sounds of thunder
rumbling off somewhere in the distance as the black clouds above them drifted away to reveal a
night sky filled with twinkling stars.

Gripping an oar, Wyatt maneuvered the boat to the far shore, unsure of how far they had traveled
North, knowing that their best chance at shelter lay somewhere in the opposite direction.
Considering they had a long way to go and Lucy was in no condition to walk that far, Wyatt
deemed (hoped) that their best option was to paddle back the way they had come, staying close to
the further shore and slinking past Fort Duquesne in the dead of night. He hoped then, they might
escape detection.

Urging both Lucy and Rufus to get some sleep, therefore, Wyatt worked against the current, taking
them back along the winding path towards Fort Duquesne. It was hard work, fighting against the
strong current, but Wyatt was frustrated and this work, though difficult, allowed him the chance to
burn off a little steam and get lost in his own thoughts.

Yes, he knew that he had added to Lucy’s misery…but he hadn’t meant to…and it pissed him off
that after working so hard to find his way back to them, he was greeted with a damn knife in the
arm.

But that wasn’t all that was bothering him.

Seeing Lucy depend on someone else for help, seeing her rely on someone else’s protection,
unnerved him in a way that took him completely by surprise. Rufus could shoot him all the shit-
eating grins he wanted but Wyatt knew…he wasn’t jealous. No…no way in hell was he jealous.
Lucy could cozy up to anyone she wanted…just as long as that someone hadn’t tried to kill him…
and didn’t speak French…and…wasn’t a complete jackass.

Okay…maybe the guy wasn’t a jackass, he did protect Lucy…and so he really couldn’t hate the
guy for that…but just as he thought that, the image of him kissing Lucy’s hand popped into his brain again and had him rowing with even more vigor than before.

Just as he hoped, they slipped past a quiet Fort Duquesne in the dead of night, the smoldering ruins of the far wall filling the air with the scent of charred wood and ash. If there were any guards on post that night, he didn’t see them. He figured the French would be too occupied with the safety of their army than to worry about a small canoe on the far side of the river anyhow, but given that they had been blindsided by the French before, he couldn't help but breathe out a grateful sigh of relief when the drifted silently past, without so much as a peep from the denizens of Fort Duquesne.

By the time he followed the sharp turns and bends of the river to the small peninsula he had taken off from the afternoon before, Wyatt’s arms ached terrifically. The pink light of dawn was just beginning to stretch forth across the sky and though he would have loved to collapse in a heap where he sat, Wyatt was determined to get his team to safety. Gently shaking both Lucy and Rufus awake, Wyatt whispered, “Come on you two…get up, we’re here.”

“Here? Here…where?” Lucy asked with a yawn, looking around, bewildered.

“Home.” Wyatt said simply.
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Nothing could have surprised Alexander McKee more than to see Wyatt leading his ragtag group up the forest path so soon after he had left them…particularly after the rough storm of the previous night. Wet, muddy and cold…and all in piss poor moods…the three friends slumped their way into the village looking more than a little worse for wear. Colonel McKee did not waste any time; he quickly ordered blankets and provisions as he ushered them over to a fire where they could both warm and dry themselves.

“My heavens,” he exclaimed as he passed a mug of coffee to Wyatt “I must say, young man, I held out very little hope of ever seeing you again. This is absolutely extraordinary. However did you manage it?”

Wyatt hemmed and hawed, not comfortable discussing his heroics in the best of circumstances, but even less so when everything had gone to absolute crap. He cast an uncomfortable glance towards Lucy and Rufus, both of whom were huddled underneath their respective blankets nursing their own mugs of coffee, and shrugged, “It wasn’t easy, I’ll tell you that.”

Alexander McKee took in Wyatt’s French uniform and bloodied visage “Seems you are far more resourceful than I gave you credit for…and a Quaker, at that.”

“A what?” Rufus nearly barked out in laughter, before Wyatt silenced him with a stern glare.

“Really,” Wyatt dismissed, still glaring at an amused Rufus, “it was just a matter of blending in and trying to find these two so we could get the hell out of there.”

“But to have moved about the fort freely, without garnering any suspicion…you must speak some French?” Colonel McKee asked as he offered them all a bit of fried beef.

Wyatt shrugged, “No…that’s Lucy. I just tried to keep my mouth shut and tried not to draw any unwanted attention to myself.

“You speak French, my dear?” Colonel McKee asked pleasantly as he handed her a slice of frybread. She took it gratefully and nodded. “Well, that explains why you weren’t immediately sold off to some tribe. You should consider yourself very lucky, you know.” Colonel McKee
observed to Wyatt as he took a place next to him, “These abduction cases rarely turn out well…my own mother’s family you know, were taken by the French and handed off to the Indians…she ended up being raised by the tribe…but that was after her own parents were slaughtered practically in front of her.” He frowned thoughtfully after taking a drink of coffee, muttering almost to himself, “She told me just before she died that she had to sit and watch them clean and dry the scalps of her family…could easily distinguish her mother and father’s hair.” He shuddered at the memory, “Horrific business.”

Rufus gaped at him, the frybread he had been eating suspended halfway between his open mouth and his lap as he began looking around him nervously, half-expecting, it seemed, to be tomahawked and scalped at any moment. Lucy, too, appeared to have lost her appetite, her own piece of frybread lying forgotten by her side. Instead of cowering away, however, she leaned forward in awe, staring at the British officer with a new fascination.

“You’re…you’re Alexander McKee, aren’t you?” Lucy gasped in disbelief.

The Colonel looked at her in confusion and surprise, “I’m terribly sorry, have we met before?”

Embarrassed, Lucy shook her head, “No…I…I just…I just…” she cast a nervous glance towards Wyatt who was shifting uncomfortably, “I…I’ve heard of your father,” she explained. “he’s a famous Indian agent himself, isn’t he?” she asked.

Clearly impressed…or at least fairly flattered that she knew of him, Colonel McKee smiled broadly, nodding enthusiastically as he answered, “Yes, indeed…my father established great relations with the Indians. In fact, my step-mother is the daughter of Pride Opessa, the great chief who…

“Yes…signed the treaty with William Penn in 1701.” Lucy exclaimed, nodding excitedly. “He really tried to make Pennsylvannia the “last delightful asylum” for Native Americans. It’s a shame that his steward didn’t uphold many of the statutes he put forth.”

Colonel McKee marveled at her knowledge, “I say, you certainly seem to know more about this business than I do.” He chuckled, “Your parents must have done much to forward your education, to be so well versed in these complex and, dare I say it…ugly matters.”

“Yes.” Lucy responded with a self-conscious flush, “my…my mother was very strict when it came to my education.”
“I see.” Colonel McKee replied with a smile, “Mothers are like that, you know? My step-mother taught me everything there was to know about the Shawnee, the language, the culture…I owe my own success to her guidance and connections.” He chuckled, “And my father too…he was quite the fur trader. I learned a bit of the trade, myself…but I daresay my friends are a bit more practiced than I.”

“You’re friends?” Lucy asked.

“George Croghan, William Trent…and John Fraser…you’ll be meeting him later this morning. I believe he can be of some assistance to you and your husband, here.”

Wyatt, who had been taking a long draught of coffee, choked on his drink immediately, coughing and sputtering all over a highly-amused Rufus. Ignoring him, Wyatt turned a panicked eye towards Lucy who was looking just as mortified as he was. “Um…uh…” Wyatt stammered uncomfortably, “We’re…I mean…I’m….I’m…"

“He’s…uh…my brother.” Lucy answered for him, her cheeks flushing furiously.

“Oh is that so?” Colonel McKee replied, looking both embarrassed and astonished, “I’m sorry…I…just assumed…very little family resemblance, after all.” He chuckled nervously, “Well, in that case, I think you’d be delighted to know, Miss that these parts are not without eligible bachelors.” He leaned forward towards her and whispered clandestinely, “My aide de camp is a fine, upstanding young man.”

“I’m….I’m sure he is.” Lucy replied awkwardly as she cast sideways glance towards Wyatt even though he refused to even look in her direction. In an attempt to change the subject, she pressed, “What…um…kind of assistance could your friend offer us?”

Alexander McKee eyed the two of them curiously before offering her a genuine smile, “Well, as I was telling your brother yesterday,” he said with a nod towards Wyatt, “my dear friend John Fraser is always in need of extra help, particularly around the harvest. I’m sure he can set you up with a place to live for the time being…but my advice still stands, “he said seriously to Wyatt, “you’d be wise to seek shelter at Fort Cumberland as soon as you are able. After what you told me yesterday, I have no doubt that the Governor will want to act quickly. War will be upon us soon…you mark my words.”

Lucy’s eyes darted up in alarm but Wyatt, not seeing her, scoffed, “Too bad they can’t do something now…they could practically walk right into Fort Duquesne with that wall down.”
“What do you mean?” Colonel McKee asked, suddenly interested.

“Well,” Wyatt explained with a shrug, “in order to get Lucy out, I needed a distraction…so I set the fort on fire. From what I could see last night, a whole section of the wall has collapsed.”

“Interesting.” mumbled the British officer thoughtfully, “very interesting, indeed.”

But Lucy didn’t think it was interesting…a fact she made known the minute they began their four-mile trek to John Fraser’s home. “What were you thinking, telling him that?” Lucy hissed at Wyatt as she ran to catch up with him.

“What?” Wyatt answered defensively, stopping dead in his tracks looking both offended and uncomfortable. “I never told him we were…” he stammered awkwardly, “ya know…I never said…that you and I were…”

“No…not…not that.” Lucy interrupted him self-consciously, dipping her head down to hide the flush that was spreading on her cheeks.

“Oh…” Wyatt grunted, as he turned to follow the group again. “Well…what…"

“I mean about the wall!” she spat out in exasperation, chasing after him again, “Wyatt, the British aren’t supposed to capture Fort Duquesne until 1758 and then…”

“So they get it a few years earlier…what difference does it make?” Wyatt spat out grumpily, annoyed that she was giving him such a hard time.

“It could make a huge difference.” she cried passionately as Wyatt rolled his eyes, “Need I remind you that all it took to completely erase my sister from history was Flynn saving the Hindenburg?”

“What do you want me to do, Lucy? Huh?” Wyatt groaned in exasperation. “Would you rather I had left you in that damn fort with those French assholes? Is that it?”
“I didn’t say that.” Lucy answered irritably, “I just think we need to be a little more careful about changing history since we’re…I mean, obviously, we’ve been here longer than we should have been, anyway…but still, we should try not to change anything…if we can help it.” she added, meeting Wyatt’s glare with a look of grim determination.

Wyatt stared back at her for a few moments before shaking his head in frustration and stalking away. He had been punched, kicked, stabbed and now he was being lectured that his rescue operation had probably screwed up history. Was it too damn much to ask for a little gratitude?

“What’s the matter with you?” Rufus asked, frowning at a brooding Wyatt.

“Nothing’s the matter with me.” Wyatt spat out, quickly glancing over his shoulder at Lucy who was following along behind looking just as angry as he was.

Seeing this, Rufus nodded knowingly, “You’re still mad she stabbed you, huh?” Wyatt huffed out a breath, but didn’t answer, so Rufus cleared his throat and tentatively continued, “You know…when she thought those French soldiers had killed you,” he let out a short laugh, “I thought she was going to kill them.” Wyatt rolled his eyes, obviously not taking him seriously, but Rufus maintained, “I mean it, she went absolutely bat shit crazy when she thought you were dead.”

“So?” Wyatt shrugged.

“So…” Rufus urged, “I’m saying you should probably cut her some slack. I had it pretty easy in that place…I was locked away…those soldiers didn’t bother me. But Lucy…Wyatt…I know you didn’t like her hanging around with that French soldier, but if he hadn’t been looking out for her… I…I don’t even want to think what could have happened to her in there.”

Wyatt swallowed hard remembering, with a pang of guilt, how, when he had finally made it into the fort, he had found her, completely surrounded by lecherous assholes who didn’t know a damn thing about personal space. He had hardly recognized her then, he had never seen her looking so defeated and broken down…

But Rufus was right…she had her French boyfriend watching out for her…so much so that he couldn’t even get near enough to talk to her. Given her vulnerable position, he should’ve been counting his lucky stars that someone had cared enough to protect her when he couldn’t…. but no matter how much he reminded himself of that fact, he could not forget the way she had passed him over in favor of that damn French soldier…hell, even when they were trying to escape it was him she was most concerned about.
If it had been the other way around, Wyatt thought bitterly, he would have never gotten chummy with any of the assholes who had shot at her. He turned around to glance at her once more only to find that she was now chatting idly with Colonel McKee’s “fine and upstanding” young aide.

Dammit.

Brooding, Wyatt followed right behind Alexander McKee who led them on down a well-worn path through the woods, to where the home of his friend, John Fraser, lay just beyond the next ridge. Situated near a clear running stream, the two-story cabin was relatively large, sitting on several acres of land, most of which contained fields of corn ready to be harvested and surrounded by a large split rail fence. They hadn’t even made it through the gate before a rugged frontiersman with a thick Scottish accent, made his way out to greet them.

“Glad tae meet ye.” he said as Colonel McKee made the necessary introductions. He warmly shook each other their hands. “Any friend of Alexander’s, is a friend of mine. Though you all look to be on the right side of miserable if I’m being perfectly honest.” he added as he eyed their muddy appearances and torn clothes. “I daresay you’ve seen better days.”

“I was hoping you might be of some help to them, John.” Colonel McKee replied. “I’m afraid they have found themselves on the wrong side of the French…”

“I cae see that.” he chuckled, noting Wyatt’s muddy French uniform, “didn’t care for Army life, I see?”

Wyatt looked down at his clothes, somewhat confused, before shaking his head in realization, “Oh no…I mean…I’m not…I just…”

“I’m afraid the French abducted his…um…sister and manservant, John…nearly killed him in the process, from what I understand.” Colonel McKee said with a meaningful nod.

At that, John Fraser’s jaw tensed, “Is that so?” he asked through gritted teeth.

“Yes, but as you see…he managed to infiltrate their ranks and rescue them from Duquesne…but more importantly, I’m told he managed to do some considerable damage to the fort’s defenses…burned down an entire wall.”
“You don’t say?” John Fraser replied, clearly impressed. “Well, that earns you a meal at any rate. Would you stay for supper?”

“Supper would be much appreciated, I think…and perhaps maybe a wash and a change of clothes.” Colonel McKee replied jovially, “However, I was hoping you might be able to offer them a place to stay until they are able to find safe passage home…or at least until they can travel onward to Fort Cumberland.” Colonel McKee supplied.

“I’d not advise traveling that far so close to the frost.” John Fraser said with a shake of his head, “and definitely not without protection.” he said more solemnly with a nod towards Lucy “It’d be a fair shame to save this lass only to have her taken again.”

Wyatt startled at that, turning instinctively to Lucy who didn’t seem at all taken aback by the inference that she, especially, would be in danger if they did try to make the trek to Fort Cumberland. In fact, she almost looked like she fully understood the meaning behind the warning…and while Wyatt understood that she was vulnerable, he didn’t quite understand why he would assume Wyatt’s presence wouldn’t be enough to keep her safe…or why Lucy would apparently agree with him.

Did he think he wasn’t capable since the French had already taken off with her? Is that what Lucy thought? That he couldn’t protect her?

Wyatt inwardly bristled at the thought that he would ever…it wasn’t like he meant for her to get taken…but that was just it…she had. He had lost her…and it was only by the greatest of miracles that she wasn’t lost to him forever like Jessica was.

Not that she was anything like Jessica, he reminded himself.

John Fraser frowned at the three of them, “Well, I don’t take to trusting folks so easily, especially these days…but as you are clearly no great friend of the French and come upon the recommendation of my good friend here, I think I might be able to set you up in a place. Tell me,” he asked Wyatt, “how good are you at hunting game?”

“I’m pretty handy with a gun, if that’s what you mean.” Wyatt answered with a shrug.

In answer, John Fraser gave a quick nod before asking, “And farming? What kind of experience
do you have with that?"

“I used to help my grandfather on his ranch.” Wyatt offered.

“Is that so?” John Fraser exclaimed in astonishment. “A cattle ranch?” he asked further prompting Wyatt to nod slowly, his eyes darting to Lucy in hopes that he didn’t just step into something in terms of historical impossibilities…but from the look of franticness in her eyes, he was guessing he had. He was about to switch gears in an attempt to bypass his historical faux pas when John Fraser pressed further, “A New York lad, then?”

Wyatt barked out a laugh and shook his head in the negative, but Lucy quickly jumped in, shooting Wyatt a stern glance as she answered shakily, “Yes…from…from Montauk.”

“Beautiful country.” Colonel McKee mused thoughtfully, “It’s a shame our friend Mr. Trent isn’t here to meet you, he hails from New Jersey, you know, and spent a good deal of time in New York as a boy. He would’ve enjoyed reminiscing with you all.”

Lucy gave a nervous chuckle and shot an incredulous looking Wyatt a furtive glance before John Fraser clapped his hands together and announced, “Well then, Matthew,” he said to Colonel McKee’s aide, “will you go inform my man to draw up a few baths while we get a move on? There’s a good lad.” He said motioned for the rest of the group to follow him, “I’m sure you’ll be wanting to see the house before you decide you want to take it on.” Mind, the place is a wee bit run down, but you look like you don’t look like a lad who’s afraid of a bit of hard work.”

“No, sir.” Wyatt answered promptly.

Nodding at his response, John Fraser ushered them through his gates and down a narrow lane through his open fields, “It’s the next farm over…I just acquired the land from a good friend of mine. He decided he’d rather go out a’warring than dig around in the fields all day…. can’t say I blame him” he added with a wry smile. “It’s devilishly hard work.” He turned to Wyatt sizing him up, “But I daresay you’ll be up to the task…particularly with your experience. Of course, out here, you don’t have those stunning ocean views that you’re used to in New York, but it’s beautiful country, this.” he added as he pointed out the sweeping view of the winding Monongahela far below them.

The view was undeniably beautiful. Up on a hill, as they were, overlooking a wide and glittering creek that cut through the hills; a tributary of the mighty Monogahela that wound like a large silver snake in the distance amid the red-gold hues of autumn leaves. Wyatt, however, could not comment further on how it compared to his grandfather’s “ranch”…because the ranch he knew
sure as hell didn’t have ocean views…something he was quick to point out to Lucy the moment John Fraser and Colonel McKee were out of earshot.

“New York?” he hissed as they fell into step after Colonel McKee and John Fraser, “My grandfather is probably rolling around in his grave right now. Whoever heard of a damn cattle ranch in New York?”

“Actually,” Lucy said with an indignant huff, “The oldest operating cattle ranch in the United States is in New York…it’s been around since 1648 on Long Island,” she turned to give him a reproving glare, “besides, I had to say something before you blurted out something about being from Texas…that would have been very bad seeing as it doesn’t even exist yet.”

“I wasn’t going to say I was from Texas.” Wyatt snapped back, his anger and frustration growing as she cast him a doubtful glare, “I wasn’t!” Wyatt maintained…but he knew Lucy knew he was lying.

The truth was, the New York comment had seemed so damn ridiculous and so offensive to his Texas pride, it had absolutely superseded any logical mandate that he had to keep up with some nonsense historical backstory. It wasn’t like he didn’t know better, he thought ruefully. He may have not been an historian, but he, just like every other proud Texan knew that Texas didn’t become a state until 1836. Before that, he knew it had passed between the Spanish, the French and the Mexicans…but he had no idea when or how…and what the hell they even called it…but no way was he going to give Lucy that satisfaction.

Not when she had been so damn testy all morning.

“Besides you’re one to talk,” he spat out, “what was all that about Alexander McKee back there?” Wyatt shook his head incredulously, “It was like you were reading off his entire biography.”

Lucy gaped at him indignantly, “I was just…he’s a…” she huffed out a breath, “don’t change the subject.” she replied irritably. “I was just trying to help…what difference does it make anyway? It’s not like you’re actually from New York.”

“And you two aren’t actually brother and sister…or married for that matter.” Rufus piped up behind them, “but you sure as hell are acting like an old married couple right now.”

If anything could get the two of them to stop arguing and retreat to their respective corners, it was
Wyatt could not have cared less about water pumps or corn harvests, but since he wanted nothing
to do with Lucy or Rufus at the moment, he pretended to be interested. Both men seemed to be
grateful for his company, including him in their conversation, asking his opinion on the placement
of new fields and stables. John Fraser seemed to be a likable enough guy, and while Wyatt knew
nothing about it apart from what Colonel McKee had told him, as he listened to the two of them
talking, he couldn’t help but feel that out of every possible person they could have possibly run into
in all of this 18th century wilderness, they had lucked out in finding this one. Not only was he a
successful tradesman and courageous frontiersman, he was also apparently a skilled gunsmith…
something that immediately drew Wyatt’s attention.

“Well, certainly.” John Fraser answered with a nod. “I can’t very well make guns if I don’t have a
place to tinker them out, now can I?”

Wyatt stopped dead in his tracks, looking back towards Rufus, as both John Fraser and Colonel
McKee halted beside him in surprise. “Do you think you could…I mean, would it be possible or…
you see….Rufus…”

“What about me?” the time travelling pilot asked as he reached the chatting group of men.

“He has a forge.” Wyatt explained with a meaningful look. “I thought maybe you’d want to
learn...I mean, if Mr. Fraser, here is willing to teach you.”

“To be a gunsmith?” John Fraser asked in confusion.

“No...um...to use a forge.” Rufus answered with a breathy laugh. At John Fraser’s continued confused expression, Rufus stammered, “I...it’s just that I’ve been...um...trying to develop my skill set...” he looked to Wyatt and an approaching Lucy for help but they looked about as lost for words as he was. Looking back to John Fraser awkwardly, Rufus shrugged as he made a stab at an explanation, “you know...so I can be more useful to these white folks here.”

Wyatt had to bite back a bit of a laugh as John Fraser nodded, seemingly impressed, “Ambitious, willing to learn...I like a man who doesn’t limit himself. You remind me a good deal of my man, Thomas...he’s brilliant...smart as whip...you two should work well together. I’ll introduce you and he can show you the ropes.” he promised as he led them on down the narrow country road that cut through his property. Fields stretched out wide to the left of them, all of them full and ready for harvesting; to the right, and endless array of red and gold leaves stretching out as far as the eye could see. It was absolutely beautiful and if they hadn’t been completely out of place in this century, Wyatt thought, it wouldn’t have been a bad place to settle down.

They walked until they reached a small hill where a ramshackle cabin stood defiantly against a large tree that had toppled over and wedged itself into its rustic shingled roof. “She’s a sturdy house, that.” John Fraser said with a nod, “I daresay you’re up to the task of fixing the place up and if you’re willing to help me out with my trades and my crops, I’d be most happy to have you. At any rate, it’ll do me a favor...I won’t have to fix this place up myself.” He added good-naturedly.

“We’d be happy to stay.” Wyatt said with a determined nod, casting a quick glance towards an anxious looking Lucy and Rufus.

“Alright then, well you lot have a good look around, get familiar with the place. I’m going to show the Colonel the plans for my new water pump. We’ll be back directly.”

Once they were well out of earshot, Wyatt turned to Lucy and Rufus with a shrug, “It’s not much...but it’s a hell of a lot better than sleeping outside.”

They were standing just apart from him staring at the ramshackle cabin. The house...if one could call it that, was situated nicely, with a garden in the back, a few goats and chickens running about the place and a root cellar...but it was hardly what anyone would deem “up to code”.
In fact, it was downright dilapidated.

Most of the windows were broken, the door was hanging off of its hinges and of course, the tree through the roof was the proverbial nail in the coffin in terms of making this place almost completely uninhabitable. But beggars could not be choosers and Wyatt, more used to rough condition than the other two, quickly reminded them of that fact. “Look, you two…I get it…it needs work…”

“Work?” Rufus asked him incredulously, “No. No. The faulty light switch in my apartment? That needs work. This? This is what you call condemned. How the hell are we supposed to live in this?”

“We fix it up.” Wyatt spat out in exasperation. “I’m sure he’s got tools…you heard him, he has a forge…”

Rufus shook his head, “You’d be better off burning this place to the ground and just building a brand new one…look at that damn tree!”

“It’s not that bad, Rufus.” Wyatt maintained, “Look, he said as he stepped into the house, “It’s barely poked a hole in the ceiling. We just need to remove the tree, patch the hole and fix the door…”

“Yeah and what about the windows?” Rufus barked out. “You do realize we’re living in the 18th century, right? It could take months before you can get glass in these things…”

“So we use the shutters until we can get some glass.” Wyatt snapped back, but Rufus was looking around the cabin with disgust. Not only was it covered in dirt and grime, but it was filled with bird feces, nests and the skeletons of many small animals.

“This is gonna need a hell of a lot of Lysol.” Rufus quipped as he picked up a dusty pot from off the floor, revealing a litany of roaches scurrying off to find a new place to hide. Dropping the pot with a clang, Rufus bolted out of the door, muttering about “finding a damn broom and some bug spray” leaving Wyatt looking towards a pensive Lucy who was slowly making her way around the cabin, clutching her shawl tightly around her shoulders.

“It’ll be fine.” Wyatt assured her roughly, “You’ll see…it’s not that bad. And look, there’s already some furniture in here.” he said as he picked up a dusty old chair that had toppled over, “It just
needs a little sprucing up.”

Still not saying a word, Lucy meandered her way outside and part way down the hill, sighing as she looked out at the winding Monongahela far in the distance. Wyatt followed after her, pointing out the garden, the goats and the chickens, the abundance of firewood…really anything to convince her that this place could be a suitable home, finding himself oddly anxious for her approval….and irritated as hell that she and Rufus both seemed, again, to be showing so much ingratitude. When she still didn’t answer him, Wyatt looked around helplessly, in search of anything else that might be used as a selling point when his eyes fell on a small green shrub near the base of a large elm tree that Lucy was standing near. Smirking, he stooped down and picked off a stem, sniffing it before handing it over to her, “Look,” he said with a nod, “there’s even mint.”

Lucy turned to face him suddenly, the memory of that conversation which now seemed so long ago, playing through her mind. Taking the sprig of leaves from him, she held it underneath her nose, breathing in the sweet, fresh scent, a slight smile playing on her lips which made Wyatt breathe out a sigh of relief.

That is until Lucy suddenly broke down in a fit of tears.

Frustrated beyond belief now, Wyatt threw up his hands, “I don’t know what the hell you and Rufus expect” he shouted, “we’re in the middle of nowhere…out in the damn wilderness, two hundred and sixty damn years before any of us were even born! I’m doing the best I can, okay?”

He was about to storm off when he heard Lucy’s small voice, quavering with emotion, “That’s not why I’m…” she sniffed, before hiccuping, “It’s perfect.”

“What?” Wyatt barked out, turning to her incredulously.

“The house…it’s perfect.” Lucy said as more tears spilled onto her cheeks. “I love it.”

Wyatt stared back at her completely confused, “If you love it,” he asked dubiously, “then why the hell are you crying?”

“I don’t know.” Lucy shrugged as her bottom lip quivered. “I guess, I just…I can’t believe any of this is real. Just a few hours ago I thought I had lost everything.” she sobbed lightly as she explained through a voice thick with emotion, “A chance to get back home, Rufus…you…”
tears came heavier after that, so much so that she had her face completely buried in her hands as Wyatt made his way back over towards her, almost begrudgingly wrapping her up in his arms as she sobbed into his shoulder, “I never thought I’d see either one of you ever again…”

Wyatt sighed heavily, feeling like a complete ass for even thinking that Lucy didn’t give a damn. He may have only known her for a few months, but he knew her well enough to know that out of all of them, she was the one who probably cared the most – not just about history or these missions…but about the team…about him and Rufus. He tightened his grip on her as his own raw emotions threatened to give way, “Well, if it makes you feel any better…I thought I had lost you both too…” he admitted ruefully.

He pulled away from her slightly, wanting to give her a reassuring smile, but instead, his expression dropped into a horrified grimace. Her face, which had been covered in dirt, was now streaked with mud as she wiped away at her tears, allowing him to see for the first time, the outlines of a bruise along her cheek bone. Cupping her face in the palm of his hand, he gently turned her face to examine it more closely, “Who did this to you?” he gritted out angrily.

Flushing violently, Lucy tugged her chin out of his hand, “It doesn’t matter…”

“The hell it doesn’t, Lucy.” Wyatt hissed. “Who hit you?”

“Who do you think?” Lucy gasped out through her tears, “When they tried to take off with me and Rufus…after they…after you…I mean, when I thought…” her lip trembled violently, not allowing her to get the words out.

Wyatt ghosted his fingers over her cheek, remembering what Rufus had said about Lucy’s reaction to his apparent death. At the time, he thought Rufus was just trying to make him feel better…but now, seeing this he knew she must have put up one hell of a fight. While he felt a tug of gratitude towards her, the sight of that bruise filled him with an anger he wasn’t quite prepared for. “Which one of them did this?” Wyatt gritted out angrily.

“Wyatt…”

“Which one?”

“The same one who shot you, okay?” Lucy relented with a sigh, “But it’s okay…”
“No it’s not okay, Lucy.” Wyatt fumed, “What else did that sonofabitch do to you?” he gritted out angrily.

Lucy stared up at him, her big brown eyes brimmed with tears, “Nothing.” she said softly, shaking her head slightly. “Not anything you didn’t see for yourself, anyway.” She sighed as she gave his arm a reassuring squeeze, “I gave him a scar of his own…and with any luck a big bruise to go along with it when I was trying to escape the fort…”

Suddenly filled with guilt over…pretty much everything she had been through the past few days…Wyatt pulled her close again; hugging her to him in an attempt to make up for all the hell she had experienced when he was helpless to do anything to assist her. “I’m sorry, Lucy.” He sighed, “I didn’t mean to make things worse…I was just trying to get you the hell out of there.”

“I know.’” she whimpered out through her tears. “I just wish I would’ve known it was you.” She let out a mirthless chuckle, “It would’ve saved us both a lot of trouble.” He couldn’t help but agree with her there. How much smoother would that rescue had gone had he been able to talk to her? “Wyatt?” Lucy’s muffled voice sounded from his shoulder, “I…I meant it…back there…I… I didn’t mean to stab you.” she said quietly, “If I had known…I mean, if I thought it was you I would never have…”

Wyatt sighed heavily, “It’s alright, Lucy.”

“No, it’s not alright.” she maintained, pulling herself away, “What if I hadn’t stabbed your arm? What if I had actually hurt you…”

“You don’t think that hurt?” Wyatt asked her incredulously, though a teasing smile played on his lips.

“You know what I mean,” Lucy said with a reproving glare, “I could have killed you Wyatt.”

“Come on, Lucy,” Wyatt urged playfully. “Give me a little credit. I mean, I survived a shot to the head, didn’t I?”

Lucy’s eyes darted to the scar along his temple, her fingers brushing lightly over the wound, sending a shiver down Wyatt’s spine, causing him to tighten the hold he had on her waist. “You almost died.” she trembled out, “that’s not anything to joke about, Wyatt.”
“Lucy…” Wyatt sighed, but she was crying again. Pulling her in for another hug, Wyatt tried to assure her, “It barely broke the skin…”

Lucy, however, just gripped onto him tighter, sobbing into his neck, “I’m so glad you aren’t dead,” she gasped out in a trembling voice.

“That makes two of us, ma’am” Wyatt muttered with a smirk. As he stood there, holding her, rubbing her back, all the anger and frustration he had been feeling earlier melted away until he was sorry he had ever been angry with her to begin with. He didn’t understand why she seemed to have this effect on him, why her tears reduced him to putty in her hands. If it had been Rufus who had stabbed him, for example, he would have told him to go to hell and moved on. But with Lucy…well, with Lucy things were different…even though technically, she was the same to him as Rufus was…just a teammate, a friend…someone who would work by his side for a little while, until the next mission would inevitably call him away to some other location…some other team.

And damn it all if that thought hadn’t tugged at his heartstrings again. He had been so ready to give up this team, this mission, when they first arrived here…but the thought of trusting anyone else to their care, even someone he trusted as much as Dave Baumgardner, was unthinkable…and it made Wyatt grip Lucy just a little bit tighter.

He couldn’t. He knew he couldn’t…but someday this all would be over…and what then?

But that was just it…what if there wasn’t another mission…another team? What if this was it? Stranded here, as they were, they could very well be stuck here for the rest of their lives…just three friends trying to survive in a century in which they didn’t belong.

But he didn’t want to think about that.

Instead, Wyatt gave Lucy one final reassuring squeeze as she continued to hiccup little sobs into his shoulder. Hating to see her work herself into such a frenzy over nothing more than a little graze, (even though he knew it was probably more of a culmination of every shitty thing that had happened to them since that landed in this century) Wyatt turned his head and pressed a kiss to her temple in an attempt to give her a final assurance that everything would be okay. It seemed the most natural thing in the world to do under the circumstances, but the moment his lips touched her skin, he knew he had gone one step too far.

He had held Lucy’s hand, hugged her…hell, he had even slept next to her…but he had never…never kissed her before….and even though this could hardly count as a kiss, the tension that immediately sprung up between them would say otherwise. Lucy, who had been sobbing
gently into his neck, had gone stock still, hardly even breathing as they stood there together in the shadow of the elm tree. He too, froze…not knowing what the hell to do, not wanting to pull away and deal with the inevitable awkwardness that was sure to follow…so he just stood there…with his damn lips stuck to her head like a complete idiot.

Wyatt was inwardly kicking himself when Lucy slowly backed away from him, her stunned yet curious expression causing his ready apology to get lost somewhere in the restrictive confines of his throat. He worked his jaw open and closed, but no words would come. Her eyes, still shimmering with tears, darted over his face, narrowed in concern or confusion…Wyatt wasn’t sure which. Possibly both…since right now he was sure he looked like a fish out of water, stupidly opening and closing his mouth in the hopes that something sensible might just tumble out of it. His fingers danced nervously along her torso, striking Wyatt almost violently with the realization that he was still holding on to her….and even though he knew he should step away, re-establishing a safe distance between them…he couldn’t seem to move.

And Lucy didn’t seem to mind.

Her fingers tentatively inched their way from where her hands had fallen on his biceps back to his shoulders, each delicate touch sending shivers down Wyatt’s spine as his gaze drifted away from the endless abyss of her caramel colored eyes to the inviting pink of her gently parted lips. Lucy swayed towards him, ever so slightly, and he felt his brain go a little fuzzy. As he leaned forward to close the small bit of distance left between them, he knew, somewhere in the back of his mind, that kissing Lucy would be a very bad thing…though for the life of him, he couldn’t quite remember why.

That is until the unwelcome sound of laughter, followed by the abrupt halt of two pairs of footsteps brought him back to his senses and the horrifying recollection that Lucy was supposed to be his sister.

Startling away from her, Wyatt turned to find Alexander McKee and John Fraser resuming their steady march towards the small little hut, calling out their apologies as they came, “So sorry…we didn’t mean to…uh…interrupt.” Colonel McKee offered gallantly with a bow towards Lucy who, by now, retreated all the way back to the front of the house, looking absolutely mortified.

Wyatt inwardly groaned as he stammered out an attempt at an explanation, “I was just…uh…she was crying…so I was…I was just…”

“No need to explain.” John Fraser said with a reassuring smile, though Wyatt felt far from reassured, “you’ve all been through a very trying ordeal…but it’s nothing that can’t be helped by a wee bit of supper and a good wash. Come along then,” he said as he motioned for them to follow him, “let’s uh…get you settled, shall we?”
Though Colonel McKee and John Fraser tried to engage both Lucy and Wyatt in conversation, neither one seemed much inclined to talk, and so an awkward silence prevailed all the way down a winding path until they reached John Fraser’s home. From the little they had seen of it earlier, at a distance, it appeared to be a large, rustic cabin…upon closer inspection however, it unequivocally proved that though John Fraser was, by all rights, an outdoorsman, he was not opposed to the finer things in life. The ornate and solid front door opened to a large, high ceilinged foyer flanked by a sitting room and a stately dining room on either side. The large staircase and its beautifully carved bannister were “the products of artisans from Philadelphia”, he informed them, “highly recommended by my friend George Croghan.” he added, with a nod.

As John Fraser’s well-dressed wife came forth to meet them, Lucy and Wyatt shifted uncomfortably, feeling suddenly self-conscious about their wild appearance. Apart from being absolutely coated in mud, leaves and dirt, both of their clothes had suffered rips in several places, something Mrs. Fraser was quick to point out. “I’m afraid these will be very difficult to mend, though you are welcome to try.” she added with a kind smile to Lucy.

“Me?” Lucy asked blankly, “Oh…no…I’m…I’m no seamstress. I can’t even thread a needle.”

Mrs. Fraser and her housekeeper exchanged bewildered looks, before she nodded to her husband, “Well then, we’ll just have to find you something more suitable to wear, won’t we?”

“Already on it, my love.” John Fraser said with a bow to his wife. “I’ll send Margaret to fetch a change of clothes for our new friends here.”

Handing Lucy off to his wife and their housekeeper, John Fraser showed Wyatt into his own personal washroom, which contained a large wooden tub already filled with steaming water, a small shaving table with a mirror and large fireplace. It looked nothing like any bathroom Wyatt had ever seen before…and as he walked over to the open shaving kit and picked up the straight razor, he was pretty damn sure this was going to be one hell of a learning experience for him.

More than an hour later he emerged, washed, clean-shaven (though not without a few nicks) and in a new set of functional clothes, feeling better than he had in days. John Fraser and Colonel McKee, who had been conversing quietly together in the corner, startled at his changed appearance, both of them remarking, in their good-natured ways, that he now “almost” looked like a gentleman. Wyatt wasn’t quite sure whether that was meant to be a compliment or a criticism, so he just shrugged it off as best he could and set to pacing the sitting room waiting for Lucy…trying not to be bothered by the fact that Colonel McKee’s aide seemed to be doing the same thing.

Wyatt had no idea how many minutes passed by before one of John Fraser’s servants opened the
door to the sitting room to announce the arrival of the ladies. John Fraser’s wife entered first, greeted warmly by her husband with a bow and a kiss on the hand which she returned with a gentle peck on the cheek. The housekeeper entered next, looking behind her and urging, Wyatt could only assume, Lucy along into the sitting room…and while Wyatt had been anxious for her arrival only minutes before, he now found himself dreading it…as all eyes seemed to be fixed on him as he waited for her to emerge through the double doors.

Even caked in dirt, Lucy was pretty…but it had been so long since he had seen her not covered in mud and leaves, that the vision of her walking through the double doors of the sitting room, wearing a pretty blue gown with her hair clean, dressed and coming down in neat ringlets had him almost at a complete loss for words.

“Aren’t you just lovely?” Colonel McKee exclaimed as he offered her a bow and a kiss on the hand.

Lucy kept her face down and averted away from all the attention, particularly that of Wyatt who, after being goaded by John Fraser to comment on her appearance, stammered out, “You…um…you look really nice.” Lucy thanked him quietly, still looking as self-conscious as she had outside of the cabin and Wyatt was content to just let her be…except that Colonel McKee and John Fraser kept looking at him…like they were waiting for him to do something else. Wyatt had no damn idea what else he was supposed to do until Colonel McKee’s aide stepped forward, bowed to Lucy and kissed her hand. Not wanting to be one-upped by some brown-nosing jackass, Wyatt awkwardly grabbed her other hand, kissed it and quickly dropped it again…something that seemed to satisfy the expectations of the other men in the room as they nodded at him pleasantly and returned to their own conversations.

He had every intention of stepping away from her, especially now that Colonel McKee and John Fraser were no longer staring him down, when Lucy mumbled quietly, “You shaved?”

“Huh?” Wyatt startled, “Oh yeah…” he muttered diffidently as he rubbed at his chin, “it’s not the…what?” he asked as Lucy quirked her brow at him.

“You’re…you’re…here…” she said with a sigh, pulling out a handkerchief from a deep pocket in her skirt, “you’re bleeding.” she explained as she began dabbing away at the nicks peppered along his cheek and chin.

He breathed out in exasperation as she swabbed at his face, particularly when he noticed that once again, he and Lucy were becoming the center of attention. Reaching up, he placed a gentle hand over hers, stilling her work and directing her focus away from his many blemishes. As their eyes met, he found himself stumbling over his words, feeling suddenly self-conscious, “I…I can…I can do that.”
“Oh…right.” Lucy replied with a flush as she too noticed the many eyes directed towards them. “Sorry.” she muttered, handing him her handkerchief.

As Wyatt moved away to the mirror to take care of his bleeding face, Colonel McKee approached Lucy, waving for his aide to join him, “She certainly is a vision, don’t you think so Matthew? And quite the scholar…do you know she knows more about the 1701 treaty than I do?”

“Oh it’s…really…nothing.” Lucy stammered, “I just…”

“No…Wyatt didn’t think, but he said nothing.

“He attended Harvard, you know? One of the best in his year…he has a bright future ahead of him.” Colonel McKee nodded meaningfully to Wyatt as he continued, “All he lacks is marriage to a good woman.”

Wyatt huffed out an exasperated breath, “And let me guess, you think that woman is Lucy?”

“Well…she certainly has some desirable qualities.” Colonel McKee said with a broad smile, “Unless, of course, there’s a reason she might not want to leave the care of her…brother and establish a home of her own?”

Wyatt shifted uncomfortably under Colonel McKee’s watchful eye. Yes, there was a damn good reason that Lucy shouldn’t get married off by some colonial matchmaker…she didn’t belong here. None of them did. But he couldn’t very well tell them that. Instead, he watched Lucy laughing lightly as Colonel McKee’s aide chatted her up, and then followed right behind them as he led her into the dining room…and then glowered at them all through dinner as he sat next to her regaling her with some damn story about his old college days.

By the end of dinner, Wyatt was in a horrible mood…one that did not improve with the removal of Matthew the Harvard graduate asshole, who - by some miracle, got sent off to run some menial errand for Alexander McKee. Lucy too, and the rest of the women also removed themselves from
the dining room, leaving only Wyatt, John Fraser and Alexander McKee to cap off the evening with a bottle of whiskey.

Approaching him tentatively, Colonel McKee offered him a tumbler and took a seat beside him… something Wyatt was not necessarily opposed to, but in his piss ass mood he really wasn’t in a socializing disposition. Small talk was not his strong set even in the 21st century…but here in 1754? What the hell was he supposed to say to these people?

He just wanted to drown his frustrations in a glass or two of whiskey and call it a night.

Hoping that the two men would decide to converse together and leave him the hell alone, he took the proffered tumbler of whiskey, but no sooner had he taken a swig of the amber liquid than Colonel McKee cleared his throat and with an appraising eye assailed, “So…enlighten me if you will…I don’t believe you ever told me exactly what it was that brought you to these parts?”

Wyatt frowned slightly, not quite sure of what to say. He couldn’t tell them the truth, that was for damn sure…but he knew, given the current geo-political climate, there had to be some reason why he, Lucy and Rufus would be wandering around the forests of Western Pennsylvania without so much as compass between them. Trying to think of what little he knew about American history Wyatt shrugged, “Same thing that brought you all out here, I imagine. Just looking for a chance to make my way in the world.”

“A man of vision and adventure” John Fraser said as he lifted his glass to him with a nod, “now that’s something I can drink to.”

Wyatt joined him in downing another swig of whiskey, but Colonel McKee resisted, instead choosing to press on with his questions, “And your…uh…sister?” “Why is she here?”

Wyatt narrowed his eyes as he drummed his fingers against his glass…half wondering why the hell he was being interrogated like this, but finding he was too irritated to care. Scoffing, Wyatt replied bitterly, “Not to get married.”

“I see.” Colonel McKee mused thoughtfully. “You don’t approve of Matthew, I take it?”

“Doesn’t matter if I approve.” Wyatt grumbled, “She can do whatever the hell she wants.”
“You have no say in the matter?” Colonel McKee pressed.

“Why would I?” Wyatt asked, “If she wants to settle down here in the 18th…” he cut himself off, rubbing a rough hand over her face, before turning to Colonel McKee with a sigh, “Look, Lucy is perfectly capable of making her own decisions…she doesn’t need my permission.”

“She’s obviously well-educated.” Colonel McKee agreed, “Knows her history, can speak French…yet it is curious that you do not possess the same skills.” Wyatt paused mid-drink, choking slightly as he turned his full attention to the British officer who continued to ruminate over the puzzling story they had presented him, “Seems awfully strange that so much attention should be lavished on the daughter’s education and upbringing…but not the son’s.”

Shit.

Wyatt set down his glass with shaking hands, frantically trying to come up with some excuse as to the obvious difference in their education, “Well…” he stammered, “I…um…I was always busy helping…you know…my grandfather…on his ranch…he swallowed hard, clenching his eyes shut as he added ruefully, “um…in New York.”

“Ah yes…Montauk, was it?” Colonel McKee said with a nod, “Tell me, were there many Frenchman who came to do business at your ranch?”

Wyatt stared back at him blankly, “No…”

“Then what was the purpose of your sister learning French?”

“I don’t know” Wyatt spat out irritably, “why don’t you ask her? She’s the one who studied it.”

“You know,” John Fraser piped up thoughtfully, “the lass does strike me as someone who reads a great deal. Did you hear her chatting away with Matthew about Shakespeare and Homer and all of that?”

“Exactly.” Wyatt grumbled. “She just likes to learn.”
“But not the basic things?” John Fraser said thoughtfully, causing Wyatt to gulp nervously, “She stood right out there in my hall and admitted she doesn’t know how to even thread a needle.” John Fraser observed in astonishment, “what lass doesn’t know how to do that?”

“So she doesn’t like to sew…” Wyatt argued with a shrug, “there’s gotta be some other women who don’t…”

“Her parents obviously took great pains to see that she was raised in intellectual circles, trained her in a foreign language, saw to it that she understood the ins and outs of history and current affairs,” Colonel McKee outlined, “but didn’t find it necessary to instill in her basic skills such as needlepoint…why would they ever agree to send her out into the wilderness, unmarried…unprotected?”

“She’s not unprotected.” Wyatt spat out, “she has me.”

John Fraser exchanged a look with Colonel McKee before smiling at Wyatt in amusement, “Indeed, she does…but not as a brother, I think.”

Wyatt made to argue, but Colonel McKee stopped him, “I think it’s abundantly clear the two of you are no relation. The lack of similarity in your looks, the difference in your education and skillset, the fact that you stated you have no responsibility towards her choice of husband…if you really were her brother, you would feel compelled by duty to make sure she was well looked after.

Wyatt gaped at the two men now eyeing him with mounting interest…hardly believing what was happening. He had been ambushed. They had completely set him up to catch him off his guard and wriggle the truth out of him. How the hell did he not see this coming? Wyatt shook his head, trying in vain to argue against, what he knew to be, cold hard facts. He was not Lucy’s brother…not by a long shot…but somehow, he had to convince them that he was. “Listen, when I said I didn’t care…I do…I just…Lucy is her own person and I…”

“I don’t think either of us are arguing that you don’t care about the lass, lad.” John Fraser quipped with a smile. “We both saw how you held her earlier today.”

“No, look, she was upset…she was crying…I was just…” Wyatt countered awkwardly, but he knew his argument was failing.

John Fraser offered him a sympathetic frown, “I’m a man who has lived, loved and lost…and I
know from my own experience that a girl like that wouldn’t just leave a life of comfort and ease and trade it for one such as this unless she was…compelled to.”

Wyatt stared back at him, offended, “I…I didn’t force her to come here, if that’s what you’re implying.”

“Not at all.” Colonel McKee assured, “What John and I are suggesting is that perhaps the two of you found yourself in a…bit of trouble?”

Wyatt’s mind was racing. Trouble? Yes, the reason they were here was because they found themselves stranded by a time traveling asshole…but it wasn’t like he could tell them that. What the hell kind of trouble did people get into in the 18th century? What possible reason could someone like Lucy have to follow someone like Wyatt out into the middle of nowhere, away from her family, her friends…

Oh.

“No.” Wyatt assured. “No…it’s nothing like that. Lucy and I…we’re…we’re…I mean, she’s not…we’re not…”

“Married?” John Fraser supplied with a nod to Colonel McKee, “just as I thought…well that would explain the running, but I have to tell you sir, as long as the young lady is under my roof, her honor and virtue are my responsibility…there will be no…”

“No!” Wyatt stammered out, “There’s nothing like that…I mean…you don’t have to protect her virtue…because…because…” Wyatt swallowed hard, before adding with a relenting sigh, “she’s my…my…wife.”

“My dear fellow, do you really expect us to believe that?” Colonel McKee asked dubiously. “Why all the secrecy if she were really your wife? Why does she not wear a ring” Wyatt had no answer for that, so he said nothing. “No,” Colonel McKee proclaimed sagely, “I imagine this is an elopement gone awry.” “Parents didn’t approve? What was it son, your Quaker upbringing? Money? Position?” When Wyatt didn’t answer, he plopped a comforting hand down on his shoulder and gave it a squeeze, “I see…opposed on all counts, was it?”

“It’s complicated.” Wyatt finally muttered softly, “I was…I was married before…and Lucy…she was…she was engaged.”
“Ah I see…she jilted her fiancé…and your first wife…she is still living?” Colonel McKee pressed.

“No.” Wyatt said with huff, “She…she died.”

Colonel McKee quickly turned to his friend, who raised his glass to Wyatt with a frown, “Aye…I understand that all too well, lad. I lost my wife about a year ago today…never thought I’d find another who could take her place.”

“Yes,” Colonel McKee agreed sadly, “losing Jane was hard on all of us. It’s horrible, the way she was killed.”

“What happened?” Wyatt asked quietly, knowing all too well what it meant to lose a wife.

“She was traveling home from Fort Cumberland.” John Fraser said with a sigh, “when she was beset upon by a tribe of Indians…possibly a few Frenchman too, from the looks of it.” He took a drink of alcohol before he continued ruefully, “I should hae never let her travel without me.”

“You can’t blame yourself, John.” Alexander McKee urged. “That road was well traveled…it’s only here now that it has become so hazardous.”

John Fraser shook his head, “I don’t think I will ever forgive myself for neglecting my duty as a husband to a fine wife…but I thank God every day that he saw fit to bless me with another.” He nodded to Wyatt, “You marry that lass of yours…a fine woman like that deserves nothing less.”

“Yes, but I do encourage you to make things right with her family.” Colonel McKee urged, “Think of how worried they must be…”

Wyatt gave an imperceptible nod of his head as John Fraser continued, “Aye…make things right, marry the girl…but until then, she’s under my protection. There’ll be no living in sin under my roof or on my property. I’ll send her straight back to her parents and fiancé if I see any hint of that going on, you understand?”

Wyatt stammered out some sort of incoherent agreement, his brain reeling too much to string many words together before he downed the rest of his whiskey in one gulp.
How the hell did this happen?

Lucy had gone from his team mate, to his sister, to his (sort of) wife in one damn day….and she had no idea. They should have just been honest from the start. Why the hell did he even agree to be her brother in the first place? Her nearly black hair, her dark eyes, her porcelain ivory skin stood in sharp contrast to his own features…and even if they hadn’t, Colonel McKee was right...she was in a completely different league than he was...no way in hell did they belong to the same gene pool. There was just something about her, the way she carried herself, the way she talked…that made it abundantly clear she was far more refined than he was…even if she was the clumsiest person he had ever met in his life.

But as ridiculous as it was to think that Lucy could ever be his sister, it was nothing to the crazy idea that someone like Lucy would ever leave a life of ease and comfort to run off to struggle in the wilderness with someone like him. It wasn’t like he suggested it...they had…but what could he do? He couldn’t tell them the truth…and if he had told them they weren’t married…had no intention of being married…well, what would that mean for Lucy in this day and age? Traveling alone, unchaperoned with not one, but two men in the 18th century wilderness? Wyatt may not have been up on the social mores of the day, but somehow, he understood that was probably frowned upon.

No…whether he liked it or not they were going to have to go on with this charade. He was going to have to “marry” Lucy…before they sent her off to God knows where or married her off to someone else.

He just had no idea how in the hell he was going to tell her.

Chapter End Notes

Lots of history! John Fraser and Alexander McKee are both actual historical figures. Alexander McKee was an Indian agent in the French and Indian war and yes, he was married to Nonhelema and yes his step mother was the daughter of the chief who signed the treaty with William Penn. John Fraser did own land that was taken by the French to become Fort Machault (the unfinished fort from the beginning of this fic) and he did relocate to Turtle Creek about 11 miles south of Fort Duquense...which is where I have them in my story. He was also a gunsmith and did have a forge. In fact, he had a forge at his home near where Fort Machault would be established and the French took it over.

When I as doing all my research for this story, all of these figures, William Trent, George Croghan, Alexander McKee came up in the narrative...all at different times
that had them away from this area during the time we’re discussing. It was by a lucky circumstance I fell upon the story of John Fraser and his ties to Fort Machault, etc....and so when trying to get Rufus to learn how to be a blacksmith, I felt, given his proximity to the fort, his sad tale regarding his first wife and the fact that he had a forge, he was the perfect historical figure for our team to find some solace with.

I DID take a few liberties in this chapter. While Alexander McKee's mother WAS kidnapped and taken in by the Indian tribe that abducted her, the story he tells our time team is actually that of Mary Jemison who was kidnapped by the French and their Native American allies around the time of Braddock's defeat in 1755. Her story was extremely graphic (if you ever get a chance to read her full account, please do; the details I included came from her account about her parents scalps) and seeing as that was pretty much the norm for this day and age, I just decided to dramatize Alexander McKee's mother's tale a bit for the purposes of this story.
The other liberty I took was the account of John Fraser's first wife, Jane. She was abducted in 1754, but I changed it to a year before for the purposes of this story...and hopefully you'll understand why as this story develops. I thought it gave him a nice understanding with Wyatt in that regard, particularly since both of their wives found themselves alone, on the side of a road before meeting their fate.
The cattle ranch in New York...also true...it's the oldest cattle ranch in America....who knew, right?
I think that's all the history I covered in this chapter...and I hope you enjoyed it.

As always, thank you for reading!
Greetings readers!

I realize it has been FAR too long since I have updated this fic and believe me, it was not done intentionally. I had 75% of this done almost two months ago now, but we received some shocking and overwhelming news from the military that has literally flipped our lives upside down and moved everything in my life to the back burner as we prepare for this next phase of our career in the Air Force. It's a good thing for my husband...but I'm not sure how I feel about it yet. Some folks know what it is, but until we have official word (we pass every test and jump every hurdle) I can't really say much other than it's another overseas move...and that in an of itself is just enough to make me want to crawl in a corner and hide...those moves are SO difficult and stressful. Additionally, this development uncovered an issue with our daughter's health and so again, it just contributed to my writing being put on the back burner. Add in the holidays and the fact that we took a much needed family vacation in the midst of all of this and well...you get a fic that hasn't been updated in almost two months.

The good news is, this chapter has been split...because MY goodness it was coming on to nearly 20k words and I just could not hit you with that all at once. So, this is the first half of that enormous chapter and the second half, is ALMOST done, so you should be getting another update shortly...it definitely won't be two months. I AM still working on both What Might Have Been and Once Upon a Highway...as I said, I will not totally abandon my fics...but again, my life has been a bit CRAZY these past few weeks so I'm writing when I can. Thank you so much for understanding. I hope you enjoy this update.

For the first time since they arrived in 1754, Rufus had gotten a filling meal and a good night’s sleep. It may not have been the best night of sleep he had ever had, but since he was neither sleeping outside on the cold, damp ground, in a cave, or in a filthy jail cell he could hardly complain about the lumpy 18th century mattress he was offered as a bed.

In fact, he was hardly in a position to complain about anything given the living hell they had suffered through since landing in this century. Though he was absolutely annoyed as hell that he was not allowed to eat dinner with Lucy and Wyatt in the main house, he was offered a comfortable seat by a roaring fire in the kitchen and given a hearty helping of stew, fresh baked bread, and a nice helping of gin to wash it down with. Fully satisfied and comfortable for the first time in days, Rufus found that he was having a very difficult time trying to stay awake and so no sooner had he begun to nod by his place by the fire, then he was led to a loft above the kitchen where a pallet had been laid out for him, complete with a nice heavy quilt that he wasted no time snuggling under.
Even though he was awoken well before the crack of dawn by the crowing of a rooster, he hardly minded. He felt well-rested, warm, content…and with the aroma of bacon and eggs wafting up from the floorboards below, the promise of yet another warm and hearty meal, Rufus could hardly wait to start the day. Emerging from his second story room, however, he was handed a large bowl of grits and bacon, instead of his expected bacon and eggs, and while it was a disappointment, he found that given his nearly non-existent breakfasts of the past few days…this was still a vast improvement.

Stepping out into the cool crisp morning, Rufus situated himself on a soft patch of grass overlooking the creek, marveling at the fiery hues of the forest illuminated by the rising sun. He vaguely wondered what had become of Wyatt and Lucy, but seeing as they had both been at each other’s throats the day before…and well, pretty much since they arrived in this century…Rufus was happy to enjoy his breakfast alone…in the relative peace and quiet with no one…

“Rufus!”

Dammit. He hadn’t even had one bite of his breakfast when Wyatt came racing over to the small patch of grass he had commandeered as his picnic spot, looking like he hadn’t gotten one single wink of sleep the night before.

“There you are!” Wyatt exclaimed breathlessly as he approached him in complete agitation, “What the hell man, I’ve been looking all over for you.”

“Well, good morning to you too.” Rufus deadpanned as he took a spoonful of his grits.

Wyatt paced in front of him, rubbing a rough hand across his face, “I…I’m sorry, man…I just don’t know what to…I need your help.”

“Are you serious?” Rufus groaned, his mouth full of food, “the sun isn’t even up yet.”

“I know…I know, man.” Wyatt replied anxiously, plopping down on the ground beside him “I…I haven’t been able to sleep…I don’t know what the hell I’m going to do.”

“I told you you were biting off more than you could chew with that house. If you think I’m crawling on top of that damn cabin to move that tree, you got another thing coming…”
“No…it’s not…” Wyatt began shaking his head frantically before clenching his eyes shut and admitting, “I gotta marry Lucy.”

The generous portion of grits and bacon Rufus had, up to that point, been thoroughly enjoying went spewing forth over John Fraser’s back lawn. “You, what?!” he exclaimed, coughing.

Sighing heavily, Wyatt covered his face with his hands, “I have to marry Lucy.”

“I thought she was supposed to be your sister?” Rufus asked incredulously.

“She was.” Wyatt responded glumly. “But…dammit…I don’t know what happened…they started asking me about her speaking French and what she was doing out here and…I didn’t know what to say.”

“So…you told them you were married to your sister?”

“No.” Wyatt spat out defensively. “They figured she couldn’t be my sister because she knows French and I don’t.”

“Uh-huh…” Rufus replied doubtfully, “why do I get the feeling there’s more to this story than you’re telling me?”

Wyatt shifted uncomfortably, “No…I mean…okay, they were trying to fix her up with that Matthew guy….you know, Colonel McKee’s aide? And I um…told them I didn’t give a damn what Lucy did….I don’t, Rufus.” Wyatt added meaningfully as he let out a disbelieving snort. “And they didn’t think her brother would say something like that and now…I don’t know…they think we were shacking up together out there in the woods, running off to get married…I don’t know…”

“So instead of correcting them and telling them that Lucy is just your friend, you told them you were shacking up with her in the woods? You do realize that kind of thing wasn’t exactly PC in this day and age, right?”

“It wasn’t like that!” Wyatt exclaimed as he leapt to his feet and began pacing nervously again, “I tried to tell them Lucy and I weren’t…you know…but they…they didn’t believe me…” Rufus shrugged and nodded in apparent agreement as Wyatt continued, “I mean, why else would she…I
mean it’s not she would ever…I couldn’t tell them the truth.”

“So instead, you lied and made Lucy out to be like some 18th century floozy?”

“I told you – I told them it wasn’t like that…I told them Lucy was engaged….”

“Wait a minute…you brought up the fact that she’s engaged to some guy she doesn’t even know? What the hell, Wyatt? She doesn’t even know his last name!”

“I know that Rufus.” Wyatt gritted out, “But…what was I supposed to say, huh? You know Lucy and I aren’t…I mean, it’s not like I could tell them…I was just trying to get them to understand that we…I mean, she wasn’t…”

“Into you?” Rufus asked as Wyatt nodded. “And that’s supposed to make this better?” Rufus chuckled, “So not only do they think that Lucy ran off with you, they think she was playing fast and loose with her fiancé?” Wyatt groaned and covered his face with his hands once more as Rufus shook his head, “Does Lucy know about any of this?”

“No, she doesn’t know about any of this” Wyatt sighed in frustration. “And like I said, I told them nothing was going on between us, okay?”

“But they didn’t believe you.” Rufus reminded him, trying hard to hide a smirk.

“No…they didn’t believe me.” Wyatt sighed as he sank down on the ground again, “And the worst part is I can’t even get Lucy alone to talk to her about all of this…”

“Why not?”

“Because,” Wyatt explained in exasperation, “They went through this whole thing last night about protecting her damn virtue. If they think anything funny is going on between us they’re gonna send her back to her family.”

Rufus narrowed his eyes in confusion, “What family?”
“You know…” Wyatt shrugged, “her “family”…the one she ran away from…”

“But…she didn’t run away…”

“You know what I mean.” Wyatt snapped, clearly frustrated. “It’s not like we can tell them that. I mean, what the hell was I supposed to say? Huh? That the reason we’re actually here is because we were stranded by a damn psychopathic jackass, hell bent on destroying history as we know it?”

Rufus chuckled to himself, trying but failing to suppress a smile as he quipped, “So basically you’re telling me that you feel like you need to marry Lucy because if you don’t some stuck up Puritan white folks are going to send her back to her family…that doesn’t exist?”

“Or marry her off to somebody else.” Wyatt amended quietly.

Rufus barked out a laugh, “And there it is.”

“There what is?” Wyatt snapped.

“You…marring Lucy because you’re afraid some 18th century Romeo is gonna come along and sweep her off her feet.” Rufus mused noting that Wyatt’s attention was suddenly caught by Colonel’s McKee and his aide de camp who had just emerged from the house. “You didn’t like her talking to that brown-nosing British dude, did you?”

Wyatt turned and stared at Rufus incredulously. “That…that’s not…look, I don’t want to marry Lucy, okay? But I don’t have a damn choice.” he gritted out in frustration, “If they think we’re…you know…messing around, we don’t have a place to live anymore.”

“Or at least Lucy won’t.” Rufus corrected him, before adding with a devilish smirk, “But I hear there are some “fine and upstanding” young men around these parts…I’m sure she could find someone who…”

Wyatt silenced him with a hard stare, “She doesn’t belong here, Rufus. None of us do. She can’t get married off to some…some…”
“Certain British officer who went to Harvard?” Rufus mimicked as Wyatt rolled his eyes, “You know...I may be going out on a limb here, but I think Lucy knows that, Wyatt...why the hell would she run off and marry some guy she doesn’t know in 1754?”

“I don’t know...why the hell would she stay engaged to a guy she doesn’t even know in 2016?” Wyatt countered bitterly.

Rufus chuckled dryly, amused at the brooding look on Wyatt’s face as he recalled Lucy’s fake fiancé. “Maybe,” he suggested with a shrug, “Lucy actually likes the guy...I mean, some version of her agreed to marry him, he can’t be that bad, right?” he cast a sideways glance at his friend who let out a derisive snort, “What? Have you met him?”

“No.” Wyatt admitted. “But you said it yourself,” he added defensively, “she doesn’t even know the guy’s last name.”

“Yeah, but that was a while ago.” Rufus dismissed, “if this guy really is head over heels for Lucy...I mean, he is her fiancé...you don’t think that maybe she could have found that out by now? Gotten to know him a little better? Maybe decided she might want to marry him after all?”

“What the hell does it matter, Rufus?” Wyatt hissed irritably. “We may never get back there...and so we just have to deal with...whatever the hell this is...”

Rufus nodded thoughtfully, “You’re right. We may be stuck here for the rest of our lives...so what happens then?”

Wyatt turned to look at him blankly, “What do you mean? If we’re stuck here for the rest of our lives then we just need to do the best we can to survive...under the circumstances. Together.”

“Uh-huh...and Lucy? What about her?”

“What about her?” Wyatt asked with a shrug.

“Well...”Rufus began tentatively, “Don’t you think she has the right to...ya know...be happy?”
Wyatt narrowed his eyes in confusion “What the hell do you mean by that?”

Rufus shrugged indifferently, “Well…if she marries you…then that’s it.” He devoured another helping of his grits before adding smugly, “She’s stuck with your grumpy ass for the rest of her days.”

“What the hell are you trying to say, Rufus?” Wyatt spat out defensively, “I told you…I have to marry her…if I don’t then…”

“I’m saying that if we’re stuck here for the rest of our lives,” Rufus argued, talking over him, “Lucy deserves a chance to have a real marriage with someone who actually wants to marry her…because he loves her…not because the lie they told didn’t hold water.”

Wyatt gaped at him, “So…what, I’m supposed to just leave her alone, unprotected?”

“No.” Rufus maintained seriously, “I’m just saying that you should probably ask her if she wants to be in a pretend marriage with you.” Rufus shrugged, “I mean, don’t you think she should have some kind of say in all of this?”

“Have a say in what?”

Wyatt and Rufus both jumped at the sound of Lucy’s breathless voice as she came walking briskly towards them, carrying a small box. Scrambling to his feet, Wyatt stammered nervously as all the blood drained from his face, “Uh…uh…nothing. Ru…Rufus was just saying how you uh…how you would…um…like to have a say in…” Wyatt desperately looked to his friend who was staring at him with a mixture of pity and amusement, “um…the…the house.” Wyatt lied. “You know…” he cleared his throat, “since you’re…going to be…um…living there and everything.”

Lucy slowed to a stop, her wary eyes darting between Wyatt’s panicked face and Rufus’ amused one. “I’m sure whatever you do will be fine.” she said with marked confusion before adding suspiciously, “Are…are you feeling alright? You seem a little…jumpy.”

“I’m fine,” he answered with a shrug, “you just…um…snuck up on me that’s all…” he let out a derisive laugh, “You nearly gave me a heart attack.”
“Well, I was looking for you….” Lucy said apologetically, “I didn’t see you at breakfast and they told me you had already gone out…” she shrugged indifferently, “I just saw you two sitting over here and thought I’d just…here,” she said as she plopped down on the ground next to Wyatt’s feet, “I found a medicine kit, we should probably take care of your arm,” she opened it up and began looking through the vials, “and I want to put some medicine on your head wound too.” Wyatt, however, practically bowled Rufus over in his attempt to put as much distance between him and Lucy as possible…something that did not escape her notice, “What is wrong with you?” she asked in concern, “Don’t tell me you’re afraid of a little iodine?”

“Huh?” Wyatt answered, attempting, but failing to look aloof as Rufus worked overtime to stifle a laugh, “Nothing is wrong with me…I just…I...uh…need to um get started on the getting the cabin ready to live in.” he said with a grim determination, “Can’t sit around here all day…”

“But the sun is barely up.” Lucy answered suspiciously, “And I know for a fact you haven’t even eaten breakfast…”

“Not hungry” he responded with a shrug, slowly backing away.

“Yes, but Wyatt…” Lucy grunted as she got to her feet, “you really should…”

But one look at the approaching figure of John Fraser and Wyatt was hightailing it towards the barn, leaving Lucy standing next to Rufus looking completely bewildered, “What was that all about?”

Rufus dished out another spoonful of grits and shrugged, “Don’t ask me. I try not to get involved in the concerns of you white folks.”

Rolling her eyes at him, Lucy made to chase after Wyatt, but John Fraser voice called out to her, “Ah, there ye are lass. The wife was hoping you’d join her…she’s a quilting today and could really use a hand.”

“Oh, but I don’t…I mean…I never…” Lucy stammered.

“Well, then…no better time to learn.” John Fraser said with a pleasant nod, “I hardly need to tell ye, this isn’t fine city living…if you’re going to survive out here on the grand frontier, you need a little more than book learning to help you get by.” He held out his hand to usher her back to the house, “Come on, then…there’s a good lass.” Lucy begrudgingly packed up the medical supplies,
taking care to offer a smirking Rufus a glare before she made her way past John Fraser and back to the house, “You’ll find Mary in the sitting room…take care not to dawdle, she’s most anxious to start.” he called after her. Turning to Rufus, he clapped his hands together and announced, “Now then, you wanted to learn how to be a blacksmith…”

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Wyatt had not even the slightest desire to talk to Lucy about the possibility of marriage…and that is why for the next several days he spent as much time as he possibly could working on the cabin. He knew that eventually he was going to have to come clean with her, somehow explain what had happened…because if he didn’t…well, things were bound to get even more awkward than they already were.

Where would she live, for instance, if he did not marry her?

John Fraser and Colonel McKee had made it abundantly clear that they would never allow Lucy to live with him in the cabin unless he “made a lady” of her and while Wyatt knew that with him, her virtue was absolutely protected…they sure as hell didn’t. Wyatt then considered that maybe Lucy wouldn’t have to live with him at all. John Fraser’s house was large, comfortable…and hell of a lot nicer than that tiny dilapidated cabin. There, she was reasonably well protected…but what kind of asshole would they take him for if he refused to marry Lucy after dragging her out in the wilderness away from her fake fiancé and fake family? Hell, would they even allow him to stay on with them after essentially leaving Lucy high and dry to fend for herself…after he “ruined her reputation?”

And what about Lucy? Would they really allow her to stay on with them, unmarried, unprotected…a “runaway” with a family probably worried sick about her in…wherever the hell she said they were from New York?

Probably not.

He knew he was going to have to talk to Lucy…ask Lucy to marry him…but that was just it. Rufus was right – if this was it – she deserved to be happy. She deserved a chance at a real marriage with someone who…well, someone who wasn’t him…because he could never have that again…no. No way could he betray Jessica’s memory like that.

Still, the idea of asking Lucy to be his wife…even if it was just playing a role…scared the shit out
of him like nothing had ever done before. If she said, “yes” then he was going to have to come to grips with the fact that he was actually going to be marrying Lucy and that they would be husband and wife, quite possibly for the rest of their lives. While he entertained no hopes of anything beyond a platonic relationship with her…he couldn’t help but remember that since they arrived in this damn century he had come close to kissing her more than once. While he was sure it was just adrenaline and overwrought emotions that led to those moments of weakness, his confidence that he would be able to resist being tempted into something more with her was a bit shaky…particularly when he considered that they could be stuck in the 18th century indefinitely. To live side by side with a beautiful woman whom he respected, admired…what if something did eventually happen between them?

Nope. That would never and could never happen.

Besides, she could always say “no”…

Oh damn.

As terrified as he was of actually marrying Lucy, the thought of her refusing to marry him made him physically nauseous. It wasn’t like he would blame her. They were so different…she was an Ivy-League trained professor with a world class mother and he…he was the product of a world class sonofabitch who barely scraped by in his studies. Even in the best of circumstances he couldn’t imagine that she would ever…but these weren’t the best of circumstances, were they? No, this was total desperation…and if being one of the last men on Earth that she could ever reasonably marry without screwing up some space time continuum garbage wasn’t enough to earn him a trip to the altar, well…he didn’t think he’d ever get over that rejection.

So he did what any reasonable man would do under the circumstances - he avoided the issue altogether and tried not to think about it.

Because Rufus point blank refused to give him a hand with the roof, Wyatt was forced to borrow a few of John Fraser’s field hands to help remove the tree. Just as he suspected, the damage to the roof wasn’t that bad. The beams had suffered very little damage and the hole that had been formed, though larger than he had imagined it to be, was still manageable. From sun up to sun down he worked on making the small house habitable. First, patching up the hole in the roof, then moving onto the broken door, cleaning out the dirt and debris from the cabin, and repairing the stonework on the old fireplace. By the end of the week, hours and hours of manual labor, the house was looking halfway decent, though, Wyatt surmised, it could do with a bit more furniture.

There was only one bed in the far corner and while it was in decent shape, he had to tighten the sagging rope springs and soon afterwards opted to replace the soiled mattress. That had been early
on in his cabin repairs, sending him to John Fraser’s home in search of a sturdy sewing kit and some canvas in which to make a new one where he narrowly avoided Lucy who had tried to corner him right before dinner. Feeling as though the less time they spent together, the less likely it would be for someone to make some comment about their “relationship” before he was ready to talk to her, Wyatt took care to avoid the house as much as possible, only sleeping or stopping by there when absolutely necessary.

With only one bed in the house, Wyatt worried that Lucy would feel uncomfortable…and while he would absolutely let her have the bed, he knew her well enough to know that she would take issue with him sleeping on the floor. A new bed, therefore, would have to be made first…or at least a small cot to place in the small loft so that he would have a place to sleep without infringing upon Lucy’s privacy.

That is, if she even agreed to marry him.

There was also no place to sit or eat and so a table and chairs too, would have to be in order before he offered to bring her there to live. At John Fraser’s she had all the luxuries that this place would probably never afford…and while he didn’t want Lucy to wear out her welcome, he at least wanted to make this place as comfortable for her as he possibly could…feeling that he could hardly ask her to marry him if he was going to make her eat on the floor.

Which put him in mind of a plan.

To make it work though, he was going to need help. So, he made his way down the winding path across the fields to the forge where he found Rufus busily hammering away as an older man offered him advice.

“Nah, not like that…remember what I taught you? You got to hold it firm, so it don’t roll on ya.”

“Dammit, I’m never gonna get this.” Rufus replied with a huff as he wiped his brow and set to work hammering again.

Wyatt had not just been avoiding Lucy for the past few days, he had also been avoiding a certain time machine pilot. After their last conversation, especially, he hadn’t really been in the mood to talk to him anymore about his plans as far as Lucy was concerned. He knew Rufus was only looking out for Lucy’s best interest, but the fact remained he had gone to Rufus for help…and instead, he had literally run away from that conversation feeling even more anxious and upset than he had been at the start of this whole mess. Between him accusing Wyatt of being jealous of the Harvard asshole and proclaiming that Lucy wouldn’t want to be stuck in a loveless marriage with
him for the rest of her days, Wyatt had decided that he would just figure things out on his own.

But it was a week or more since he had last seen his friend, and so it was with more than a little awkwardness that Wyatt cleared his throat and muttered in greeting, “How’s it going, Rufus?”

Stopping mid-strike, Rufus turned to look at Wyatt with an incredulous glare, “How’s it look like I’m doing?” he grumbled, pointing out all the twisted and ruined bits of metal dotting the floor around him. “Where the hell have you been?” he continued as he turned back to his work, “Haven’t seen you for days.”

“I’ve been busy.” Wyatt said off-handedly, “Listen, Rufus…

“Dammit to hell!” Rufus gritted out, dropping the hammer with a clang as he shoved his sore and swollen thumb into his mouth. “I suck at being a blacksmith.”

“You just need to practice.” the older man assured him as he swept up the discarded and twisted bits and placed them in a box. “It’s like you always tell me…you’ve got to walk before you run.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Rufus dismissed, examining his worried thumb and wiping his brow. “Tom…this is Wyatt…Wyatt, this is Tom.” Rufus announced making the introduction.

“Glad to meet you.” Tom replied with a smile and firm shake of Wyatt’s hand. “Don’t let what he’s saying fool you none…he’s doing a fine job for never having worked a forge before…seems right at home in here.”

Rufus shook his head doubtfully, but the truth was though he hadn’t expected to enjoy blacksmithing at all, he found the work to not only be challenging physically, but mentally challenging as well. He knew very little about the profession…thinking that it really only required mindless hard work, a lot of strength and the ability to withstand a hell of a lot of heat. He discovered, however, as he took his first rudimentary lessons, that there was an art and science to it all – the manipulation of different metals with various degrees of heat and cooling – the precise way one had to hit the metal in order to shape it…all of those skills made him feel almost like he was back at MIT, just learning the laws of thermodynamics and creating different engineering models in the lab until all hours at of the night.

Though, he had to admit, he preferred his air-conditioned lab to the hot, stifling, smoke-filled forge.
But that wasn’t the only reason he felt oddly at home in the forge.

When John Fraser first brought him to the forge about a week prior, Rufus had felt more than a little out of place. The tools were large and archaic, nothing like what he was used to working with in the lab at Mason. The supplies, rudimentary at best…making him doubt he could ever fashion anything to repair the LifeBoat.

And then there was Tom.

If anything could make Rufus feel like he was in no way cut out for this skill, it was meeting Thomas Fuller. Built like a linebacker with more muscles than Terry Crews, Tom was about as intimidating to Rufus as Wyatt had been when he first met the Delta Force soldier. Just as he doubted he could ever be a soldier and protect the Vice President in 1865, one look at the immensely strong Tom and Rufus thought that they could very well be stranded for fifty years before he ever managed to be a blacksmith.

Far from being brutish and intimidating, however, Tom was kind and welcoming. What’s more, he was probably one of the most brilliant people Rufus had ever met in his life.

Not long after their introduction, John Fraser turned to Tom to ask him what he had figured the distance was between two plots of land he had recently acquired. Rufus was hardly paying attention to their conversation, far too busy trying to get acquainted with his new workspace, but when Tom answered with a very specific number, Rufus was intrigued.

“How’d you do that?” he asked incredulously.

“How?” Tom asked with a shrug.

John Fraser smiled broadly, slapping Rufus on the back as he explained, “Tom, here, is a bit of a human calculator. He can figure things just by looking at them…does all kinds of math right in his head, without writing a thing down…it’s incredible.” Rufus’ skepticism must have shown on his face because John Fraser chuckled in amusement and asked, “You don’t believe me, do you?”

Rufus shrugged, “Well, it’s not that, but…”
“How are you with numbers, Rufus?” John Fraser asked pleasantly.

Rufus scoffed slightly. He was only a graduate of MIT, had only earned top marks in all of his math classes since second grade, including advanced Calculus and Trigonometry….but it wasn’t like he could tell him that. Instead, Rufus shrugged, “I do alright.”

“Alright then, Tom, Rufus.” Mr. Fraser had announced with a mischievous twinkle in his eye when he first introduced the pair, “how about we play a game of sorts?”

“What kind of a game?” Rufus asked nervously.

John Fraser, seeing his apprehension, immediately eased his fears, “Oh no need to be anxious, my friend…you seem a smart fellow, you said you were good with numbers, yes?”

“Yeah.” Rufus shrugged, hardly knowing how any of this was relevant to his learning how to be a blacksmith.

John Fraser pursed his lips together and began walking around the forge, his brow furrowed in thought as he made a few notations on a notepad he produced from his pocket. Finally, he turned to both Rufus and Tom and offered, “Suppose I am a man who has lived 70 years, 17 days and 12 hours…how many seconds will I have lived?” Rufus, completely taken aback by the question, stared at John Fraser who kindly offered him some paper in which to work out the problem. Pulling up a stool, Rufus sat at a roughly hewn counter and began working out the figures, noting with confusion that Tom flat out refused the paper Fraser offered him, instead, he stood against the wall, his face screwed up in thought.

After several minutes, Rufus stood up from his desk and announced, “It’s 2,209,032,000 seconds.”

“Very impressive.” John Fraser said with a nod, “What do you think, Tom?”

Tom frowned slightly and shook his head, “No sir, that number is too low.”

Taken aback, especially since Tom hadn’t even worked out the equation, Rufus presented him with his figures, “It’s not too high. There are 31,536,000 seconds in a year. You multiply that by 70 and you get 2,07,520,000 seconds. There are 86,400 seconds in a day…multiply that by 17 and you have 1,468,800 seconds….12 hours is 43,200 seconds…you add that all up and…”
“No sir.” Tom said with a respectful quietness, “the answer is 2,210,500,800 seconds.” When Rufus made to argue with him by showing him his math again, Tom shook his head with a smile, “You forget the leap years.”

Rufus sat back absolutely astounded that Tom had worked out such complicated math in his brain. “How….” he stuttered looking at once from a proud John Fraser back to Tom with a newfound respect.

Tom shrugged while John Fraser chuckled, “He’s a certified genius. Never spent a day of his life in a school room…doesn’t even know how to read or write, but like I said, he can figure unlike any one I ever saw.”

Rufus was more than little inclined to agree, he had never met anyone who could do that kind of math completely in his head and remember to figure in the leap years….it seemed almost inhuman…and yet here he was, a slave…with no formal education, no chance to make something more of himself even though his natural ability to compute rivaled some of the best minds Rufus had known in MIT.

Bothered by this, Rufus took Tom aside when John Fraser left them alone. “Didn’t you ever want the chance to go to school?”

“What for?” Tom asked with an amused chuckle.

“What for? Are you serious?” Rufus exclaimed in total disbelief, “You…you could be the most brilliant man this century ever saw…”

“Nah…” Tom dismissed as he set to work hanging tools, “It’s best I got no learning - many learned men be great fools.”

Rufus stared after him, wanting to argue, but knowing in all truth, that Tom was right. There were plenty self-proclaimed genius’ in the world who were nothing more than educated idiots. Still, he could not support the logic behind the reasoning. “How can you…how can you limit yourself?” he asked him seriously, “If you had a formal education…hell, if you only learned how to read or write…you could be…you could be…the next Einstein.”

“Einstein? Who’s that?”
“Uh…nobody.” Rufus dismissed awkwardly.

“Well he must be somebody for you to think so highly of him.”

Rufus pressed a hand against his forehead, rubbing it in exasperation, “He’s just a really smart man who…will one day change the world of science and physics.”

“Will change?” Tom scoffed doubtfully, “He ain’t done it yet?”

“Not yet, no.” Rufus replied with a hint of smile.

“Well then how do you know he will?” Tom said with a shrug as he threw a metal rod in the fire, “Nobody can guess what a person will or won’t be just because they’s smart.” He shook his head, “No…books and figuring may be alright for some folks, but I prefer to spend my time being active and useful.”

“By being a slave?” Rufus couldn’t help but blurt out. Tom looked sharply at him, but said nothing more as Rufus continued passionately, “Doesn’t it bother you that you…you could run this whole place?”

“I do.” Tom said with a shrug, “Master Fraser relies on my calculations to plant his fields, survey his land, put up his buildings, figure his finances…”

“Yeah, but don’t you see how screwed up this is?” Rufus demanded passionately, “With your mind…with even just a little education you could be…”

Tom looked at him with pity, “I gets treated with kindness and respect here…which is a lot more than a lot of other folks can say. You know as well as I do, this is just the way things is….no amount of learning can change that.”

Rufus had always considered slavery as one of the greatest sins perpetrated on the human race…his race, in particular. But until recently, that sin was fairly far removed. Sure, he’d come across some racist asshole every once in a while, but until he stepped foot in that time machine, he had never been forced to come face to face with the real-life victims of the institution. He had felt
so incredibly small, standing before those soldiers in 1865, taking down their letters…knowing that they had actually taken up arms, risked their very lives for the freedom they had just won. Listening to them as they spoke so casually about their families being sold, seeing the pain behind their eyes…he realized that he had never quite appreciated just how horrible reality was for the men and women who came before him. It was one thing reading about the injustices and indignities they had suffered…but hearing it, seeing it first hand?

Well, that was something entirely different.

“Let me ask you a question.” Rufus urged as he picked up the tongs while Tom worked the bellows, “Do you think it’s a waste of time…me, learning how to a blacksmith?”

“Course not.” Tom said with a smile, “It’s a useful skill to have.”

“Well, so is reading and writing.” he maintained as Tom scoffed. “Listen,” Rufus urged, “I know you think there’s no point to learning…but you have no idea what being literate can do for you…the things you will be able to discover…the places that you can go, just from reading a book.”

“I don’t know…”

“I’ll help you.” Rufus promised. “You teach me how to be a blacksmith…and I’ll teach you how to read, write…I’ll teach you scientific theories, and physics…and….”

“What good would it do to learn about science and physics?” Tom laughed.

“You’ll be amazed.” Rufus promised, “Everything you do, building, measuring, hell, even heating up this metal has a basis in science. When you understand the how and the why…it will open up your mind to endless possibilities.”

“Like what?”

“Well,” Rufus shrugged awkwardly, “take me, for example. I…I helped build something revolutionary…something that could change…has changed the world….”
“Uh-huh, then why are you here and not off in Philadelphia or Williamsburg or some high and mighty place like that?” Tom asked doubtfully.

“Because,” Rufus answered with a frown, “I um…got stranded here. There’s this psychopath who is using my invention to do some very bad things.”

“Don’t sound like it should have been invented then.” Tom replied with a shrug, “Or at least you should probably have taken better care of it.”

“Right.” Rufus muttered before pleading with Tom again, “But that is exactly why I need to learn to be a blacksmith…so I can…so I can get out of here and help my friends track this guy down and stop him. But if I’m going to be here, working alongside you for…” he added with a serious nod, “I want to do some good. Let me help you…let me teach you…please. It’ll make all of this worth it.”

Tom stared at him thoughtfully, shaking his head at him in amusement before finally relenting, “Alright, fine. Seeing as how you’re likely to bug me the rest of my days until I agrees.” he said with a sigh, “I’ll let you teach me some reading and writing…but first, let’s see what you’ve got.” Tom interrupted, nodding towards the fire. “That rod ought to be fired up real good by now.”

Taking the tongs, Rufus quickly transferred what had been a small metal rod over to the anvil where it glowed red, illuminating a waiting Tom’s face. “We’ll start with something easy.” He pulled a curved piece of metal from off the wall, “Basic coat hook.” He set the finished piece down on the anvil and pointed to it, “First things, first. You want to make sure you have a good hold on it before you start hitting it.” he taught Rufus, “Otherwise it’s just gonna roll on you.” Rufus adjusted his grip on the tongs and nodded, “Keep your back straight…that’s right...now when you hit it, make sure you keep a good arm on that grip.”

After several rolls, a few burned fingers, and a lot of teasing from Tom, Rufus finally managed to hammer out a slight bend in the rod. It, however, had been excruciatingly difficult work. Over the next few days, he could barely lift his arms, every muscle seemed to scream in protest as he withdrew rod after rod from the raging fire in the hopes that maybe he might hammer out something that remotely resembled a coat hook. He would have lost all hope if it hadn’t been for Tom standing by his side, encouraging him…and though he was physically exhausted at the end of every evening, nothing could have kept him from keeping good on his promise and teaching Tom that basics of reading and writing.

…until Wyatt walked in one afternoon.
“Did you need something?” Rufus spat out in annoyance. “Or did you just finally decide to come out of hiding?”

“I haven’t been hiding.” Wyatt stated with an indifferent shrug. “I told you – I’ve been busy… working on the cabin….”

“Uh-huh.” Rufus acknowledged with a knowing nod, “And I’m guessing you haven’t talked to Lucy yet, have you?”

Wyatt colored slightly as he admitted, “No…but like I said, I’ve been busy.” he added defensively, “In fact, I was hoping you could help me out…”

“If you think I’m going to talk to her for you, you’re out of your damn mind…”

“No.” Wyatt hissed, “Look, I can’t very well move us into a place that doesn’t have any damn furniture in it, can I?

“What do you need?” Tom asked politely, wiping his hands on his apron.

“Wyatt shrugged, “I was hoping maybe you might be able to help me out with some wood, files… really anything you got. There’s a few things in the cabin, but not nearly enough to you know… make it feel like home.”

Rufus snorted out a laugh, “It’s gonna take a hell of a lot more than a couple pieces of furniture to do that.” Wyatt ignored him as Tom motioned him over to a corner and began showing him slats of wood and carving tools he could use. Satisfied that Wyatt was capable of helping himself, Tom went back to the bellows as Rufus snuck over to Wyatt’s side and hissed, “You do realize that when you finish with that house, they’re gonna expect you and Lucy to tie the knot, right?”

Wyatt rubbed a hand across his face as he groaned, “I know, Rufus.”

“Oh-huh. And did you also know that when two people get married, they’re both…you know… aware of the impending nuptials?”
“I know, Rufus.” Wyatt gritted out angrily. “I just… I want to make things… I mean, I can’t expect her to marry me when I don’t even have a place to call home, now can I?”

Rufus, however, wasn’t deterred. Leaning forward, he hissed at Wyatt, “You don’t even know if she wants to marry you.”

“Uh-oh… women trouble?” Tom asked, heading over to their little group.

Wyatt cast an uneasy glance towards Rufus’ new friend and shrugged, “It’s…it’s complicated.”

“Well, if there’s a woman involved that ain’t no surprise.” Tom said jovially as he passed between Wyatt and Rufus to pick a tool off the wall before heading back to work the bellows again.

Rufus watched to make sure Tom was well out of earshot before he turned back to Wyatt and hissed, “How could you not have given Lucy a heads up about all this yet?”

“Dammit, Rufus.” Wyatt spat out, “It’s not that easy, okay?” He began pacing nervously in the forge as he explained, “How the hell do I even bring it up? We’re not… I mean, we never even…” he rubbed a rough hand across the back of his neck as he muttered helplessly, “I don’t even have a damn ring.”

“You need a ring?” Tom piped up as he approached the two men again, “That ain’t a problem, I can fix one up for you, real quick.”

Wyatt stared at him, disbelieving…and slightly terrified, “What?”

“Sure, it ain’t no hard thing.” Tom declared as he grabbed one of the smaller pieces of twisted metal Rufus had discarded earlier, tossing it in the fire, “It won’t be nothing fancy, but it’ll get the job done.” he added with a wink.

Wyatt watched in awe as Tom worked the bellows furiously, making the fire roar back to life with a vengeance. Minutes later, Tom was deftly shaping the metal around a mandrel, hammering away with skill and determination that made Rufus feel wholly inadequate by comparison. With a hiss and an explosion of steam, Tom dunked the mandrel into a tub of cool water, before pulling it out
with a flourish and dropping the finished ring onto Wyatt’s palm.

Tom was right. It wasn’t anything fancy, but there was a sort of rustic beauty to it that gave it a uniqueness that Wyatt, at least, appreciated. It certainly wasn’t anything like the rock her fake fiancé had given her back in 2016, and well, if he had to choose a ring for Lucy, this wouldn’t have even made his list…but, as he had said so many times since they landed in this century, beggars could not be choosers.

He swallowed hard as he looked at it, hardly believing that this was actually going to happen…not wanting to even think about the implications of what this might do for their relationship as team mates, friends…co-workers. If they got married, how would that change the dynamic between them? If she refused to marry him…how could he ever live with himself knowing that even in their most desperate circumstances, Lucy couldn’t bring herself to become the wife of a reckless, hotheaded, jackass?

“Um….tha..thanks” Wyatt stammered as tucked the ring into his pocket with shaking fingers. “Wh…what do I owe you?”

Tom barked out a laugh, “Not a thing. That’s nothing but a bit of old scrap metal…glad to put it to some use.” He offered him a broad smile as he offered up encouragingly, “I don’t think you have a thing to worry about. If you really have been working to fix a place up for her, well, she’s bound to feel it,” he motioned to his chest, “right here. Women are funny in that way, love a place to call their own, you know?” He smiled at Wyatt again, nodding towards the unseen ring in his pocket with a wink and muttered, “Just call it a wedding present….from me, to you and your woman.”

Wyatt nodded to him awkwardly, pale and anxious, as he fidgeted nervously by the forge door.

“You gonna be okay?” Rufus asked him in a low voice.

“I…I don’t know if I can do this, Rufus.” Wyatt admitted weakly. “I never…I mean, after Jess…I just…I never…”

“Hey,” Rufus consoled, “It’s Lucy…I think she’ll understand, Wyatt. Just…just tell her what happened and…”

“Yeah.” Wyatt gulped. “Look, um…I want to get the house all ready before…you know before I do any of this…” he stammered with a wave of his hand, “Lucy deserves that much, anyway.”
“I mean it, Wyatt…you better talk to her.”

“I will.” he promised “I just…I want to do this first, okay?” he assured as he stood by rubbing his knuckles while Rufus resumed his work. “I have a plan all worked out.”

“Yeah, okay.” Rufus called back to his friend, “but don’t come crying to me when she skins your ass alive when she finds out about all this from someone other than you.” Wyatt chuckled mirthlessly, but still didn’t leave the forge. Turning to face his friend, Rufus shrugged, “Was there something else you needed?”

“Yeah.” Wyatt admitted, “I could…I could use some help. I don’t know the first thing about building furniture.”

“And who do I look like to you?” Rufus asked him hotly, “Bob Villa?”

“Come on Rufus, you’re an engineer” Wyatt whispered harshly, leaning towards his friend so Tom couldn’t hear, “you built a damn time machine…you don’t think you could help me out with a table and some chairs?”

“Oh alright.” Rufus spat out in annoyance, “But you damn well better talk to Lucy…or it won’t just be her you’re gonna need to hide from.

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Lucy had never been one to shine in the domestic arts. In fact, Home Economics was the only class she very nearly failed in high school. It had been years since she held a sewing needle and while her lack of skill was definitely on display in terms of stitching…it was her fingers that bore the brunt of her deficiency. “Ouch!” she cried out, once again bringing her finger to her mouth, after somehow managing to stab herself with a pin for what seemed like the fiftieth time that day.

“Do not set your hand there, dear.” Mrs. Fraser cooed gently, “Can you not feel where the needle will protrude?” She asked, shaking her head as she handed Lucy another thimble. “Perhaps you should just place them on all your fingers, until you get the knack of it?”
Feeling absolutely humiliated, Lucy took her advice, shoving thimbles on all of her fingers, feeling that if she never saw another quilt in her life it would be too soon. It had been well over a week, almost two since she was first recruited to assist Mrs. Fraser and though she appreciated being included, she couldn’t help but think that she was hindering, rather than helping her work. In fact, Mrs. Fraser and her housekeeper, Mrs. Poe, had all but completed the entire quilt while Lucy was still struggling with the same small corner she had been seated at since she started this mess.

“I don’t think I’ll ever get the knack of it.” Lucy muttered ruefully as she took her needle in hand once more. Her thimbled fingers were red and swollen from the almost endless amounts of needle pricks she had suffered over the last few days, her back and neck ached from hunching over the quilt day in and day out, and her eyes ached, straining to follow the tiny line of thread as she fed it in and out of the blocks of fabric. Yet, no matter how hard she tried, Mrs. Fraser’s keen eye would find something amiss and before Lucy knew it, she would venture over with her dratted scissors and undo all the work Lucy had struggled to accomplish with one devastating snip.

“Now, now, dear.” Mrs. Fraser tutted, “It’s not all bad. You’ve improved a great deal since…well, since you’ve started out.” Looking to her companion for further encouragement, Mrs. Fraser added, “Hasn’t she, Mrs. Poe?”

Mrs. Poe didn’t even glance up from her work, but merely snorted and called out in a very unconvincing tone, “Aye…that she has. A great deal.”

It was bad enough that Lucy was stuck doing something she had neither the inclination nor the skill to do, but she felt all the more frustrated by her situation every time Mrs. Poe assessed her in this way. Mrs. Poe was an older woman, with a severe eye and a no-nonsense air. She wore her greying hair in a tightly wrapped bun at the nape of her neck and with her spectacles poised on the tip of her nose, Lucy was put strongly in mind of the stereotypical library spinsters every time she looked at her. While she wasn’t as kind as Mrs. Fraser, she was kind enough…but still, Lucy couldn’t help but feel that she had it out for her some reason. She had no idea why that might be other than she ran a tight house and kept them all on a very strict schedule and at times, Lucy tended to arrive at mealtimes a few minutes late. That, Lucy surmised, might have been frustrating for someone like her, but there was also something else. Lucy suspected that, despite her best efforts to conceal it, Mrs. Poe knew she wasn’t overtly religious because every morning, without fail, she all but forced Lucy to read out recitations of prayers and scripture before they started quilting. It wouldn’t have been so bad…except that the choices of scripture she had her read seemed to drive home the fact that Mrs. Poe believed she was…well, a heathen.

Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.
If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

On and on it went, every morning and while Lucy understood that religion was a bedrock of daily life in this century, she also couldn’t shake the feeling that Mrs. Poe was preaching at her, something Mrs. Fraser all but confirmed earlier that day when she leaned over and whispered, “Just remember, His grace is sufficient for all, love. He perfects our weaknesses…all of them.”

Though she hadn’t the foggiest idea as to what she meant by that, Lucy was grateful for Mrs. Fraser’s comparable kindness and warmth. Even though she was about ten years younger than herself, she had such a command of her household that it gave one the impression that she was older than she actually was. Still, while she tried her best to make Lucy feel welcome and at home, her topics of conversation were limited to domestic issues and things Lucy was not at all familiar with or interested in - which made their conversations more or less one sided.

Truth be told, though, she was growing tired of the company of both women. Mrs. Poe had made it more than obvious that for whatever reason she did not like Lucy and while Mrs. Fraser tried to make up for that with her own attentions, it just wasn’t enough to keep Lucy from wishing that she had someone…anyone else to talk to. It had been days and days since she had even seen Wyatt or Rufus and while she understood Rufus’ absence, she could not for the life of her understand why Wyatt would abandon her the way that he had. She knew he was probably busy getting the house ready, but it did not explain why she hadn’t even laid eyes on him since he had practically run away from her that morning almost two weeks ago.

Well, that wasn’t entirely true. She had seen him briefly one evening, just before dinner, making his way down the hall, but before she could race after him, she was intercepted by Colonel McKee who led her determinedly away into the dining room where she found herself facing a flushing and indignant looking Matthew.

While Matthew was still very much the gentleman he had first appeared to be, that night and well, these past few evenings he was far more aloof than he had been that first night they had arrived, talking to Colonel McKee or Mrs. Fraser rather than to her.
Not that she minded very much…but she got the distinct impression that he was trying to avoid her…especially since he did not elaborate on any of his responses to her many questions and instead of sitting next to her as he had done the first night, he positioned himself as far away from her as possible, flushing whenever she looked his way.

But why?

Had Wyatt said something to him? Did they have a fight? Was that why Wyatt was no longer eating dinner with them?

“My dear, you’ve gone and tangled yourself all up again.” Mrs. Fraser clucked at her, drawing her out of her musings as she once again brought forth the scissors and amended Lucy’s mistake.

Lucy muttered an apology, though she hardly felt sorry. She hated this. To be stuck doing something so…ugh…just because she was a woman. She would have much rather milked cows or collected eggs, fed chickens…really anything other than needlework. Hardly able to help herself, Lucy blurted out, “Don’t you ever get tired of this?”

“What, dear?” Mrs. Fraser asked, chuckling. “Fixing your mistakes? We all need a little help when we first start out.”

“No.” Lucy corrected, blushing slightly “I mean, sewing…every day…for hours at a time. Don’t you ever wish you could…do something else?”

Mrs. Fraser gaped at her incredulously, “Like what?”

But before Lucy could respond, Mrs Poe tutted back, looking at her severely, “Idle hands are the Devil’s tools…you should remember that, lass, when temptation comes a calling.”

Lucy, again, rolled her eyes at Mrs. Poe’s fire and brimstone speeches as Mrs. Fraser once again took up Lucy’s defense, “Now that’s hardly fair.” she clucked at her housekeeper, “she’s been working her fingers to the bone, poor dear and,” she muttered quietly, “it’s not as if he’s been around much for her to be tempted by.”
Lucy looked up sharply at that, wondering who she could possibly mean, but at that moment, Matthew entered the sitting room, took one look at her, and quickly retreated to the far side of the room. It was just as well, Lucy thought, considering that she knew Colonel McKee had it in his mind to play matchmaker…and from what she was gathering from this conversation, it appeared that thought had crossed Mrs. Poe and Mrs. Fraser’s mind as well.

“Goodness,” Mrs. Fraser gasped out in surprise as Matthew quickly took his leave, “you’d think the room was on fire…”

“Well,” Mrs. Poe observed with a pointed glare towards Lucy, “you can’t blame the lad. The works of her flesh are manifest, after all.

Lucy had absolutely no idea what Mrs. Poe meant by that, but given the unmistakable flush of embarrassment that spread across Mrs. Fraser’s face as she offered Lucy an apologetic glance, she had no doubt that she hadn’t meant it as a compliment.

Feeling that in this case it was better to keep her mouth shut and focus on her poor handiwork, Lucy merely rolled her eyes slightly and set back to stabbing herself repeatedly with the sewing needle…that is, until Mrs. Fraser spoke up. “That’s quite enough, Mrs. Poe,” she said with a firm rebuke, “We all of us have our weaknesses…”

“Deficiencies, more like.” Mrs. Poe muttered back.

Absolutely fed up with all of the abuse she was receiving over her poor needlework, Lucy threw down her hands in exasperation, and exclaimed, “Look, I get it. I’m not the ideal 18th century woman…”

Mrs. Poe interrupted her with another snort of laughter. “My dear, you’d hardly qualify as a lady with all the flaws in your character…”

“That will do, Mrs. Poe.” Mrs. Fraser scolded firmly, but Lucy was wholly offended now.

“I’d hardly call them flaws.” Lucy snapped back angrily, “Some women are raised with certain skills, others are brought up on something else entirely. I may not be a shining example of a lady in your book, but I’m proud of what I have accomplished in my life. Not many women have done what I have.”
“To be sure.” Mrs. Poe said coolly before turning to Mrs. Fraser and tutting, “I told you, didn’t I? The girl isn’t sufficiently humble...she needs the fear of God put in her. How she can boast about her weaknesses…you’d think she’d be ashamed of herself…but no, look at her, God save us, she’s puffed out like peacock, like she hasn’t a remorseful bone in her body.”

“And just what should I feel remorseful about?” Lucy retorted angrily, “Just because I don’t fit into some narrow definition of what you think a lady should be?”

Mrs. Fraser flushed furiously and quickly resumed her work, but Mrs. Poe cast a steely eye towards Lucy, “I’d hardly call it narrow, m’dear. Generations of women have been brought up knowing what it is to be a lady…and I’m afraid that despite all your fancy learning and French speaking, your parents were woefully deficient in your proper education. That much is clear.”

“That’s enough, Mrs. Poe.” Mrs. Fraser warned, before turning to Lucy sympathetically, “It’s likely true that her parents should have been stricter with her in respect to giving her…shall we say…something better to do. Perhaps then she wouldn’t have found herself out here so far away from home.” she nodded at Lucy who eyed her curiously, “But it is up to us to look after her now and I don’t believe for one minute that she is wholly lost. Are you, dear?”

Lucy shrugged, hardly knowing what to say. Mrs. Poe, however, snorted out a laugh, “She has to know she’s lost in order to find her way, Mary…and I’m afraid, the pride in her won’t let her admit it.” Feeling a fury build inside her, Lucy bit her tongue not wanting to argue any more with this impossible woman, but Mrs. Poe, seeing that she had struck a nerve pressed on, although this time, it was with a bit more kindness, “I am hard on you, m’dear because it is my God-given duty. The book of Titus teaches us - The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children,To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. Can you not see the error of your ways? Can you not see that you have sinned?”

Lucy scoffed and rolled her eyes, absolutely fed up with Mrs. Poe equating her poor housekeeping skills to a damnable offense against God. “Well you know what they say,” she gritted out as she shoved her sewing needle through the fabric with more force than she intended, “practice makes perfect.”

At that, both Mrs. Fraser and Mrs. Poe dropped their own work and stared at her in utter shock and disbelief. “Surely,” Mrs. Fraser began tentatively, “you don’t mean that?”

Lucy stared back at her in confusion, “Of course, I do.” Lucy said with a shrug, “How can you
possibly get better at something if you don’t practice?”

“But…” Mrs. Fraser began, looking towards a now praying Mrs. Poe, “don’t you agree it would be more prudent to…I mean, what would your husband say?”

“I don’t have a husband.” Lucy murmured, her concentration wholly focused on the quilt now, “but if I did, I would hope that he would appreciate any effort I made at bettering myself, be it mentally or physically.”

An audible gasp from Mrs. Fraser had Lucy looking up from her work once more in surprise as Mrs. Poe crossed herself and exclaimed, “Oh Saints preserve us!”

Completely confused, Lucy gaped at the two women, hardly understanding how they could at once insist on her learning how to sew and quilt and on the other, finding it wholly offensive that she should practice. “Am I missing something, here? Lucy asked. “I thought you wanted me to learn how to sew?”

Coloring once more, Mrs. Fraser straightened her apron and cleared her throat, “Heavens yes, but… my dear,” she stated more quietly, “one should not be practiced in….the physical…until marriage.” Lucy’s mouth hung open at her words, completely dumbfounded in shock as Mrs. Fraser straightened back up and added with a sympathetic nod, “I daresay if you are indeed ignorant of such things, you can hardly be held accountable for your past actions. The most important thing is that you know now and can make amends.”

Lucy gave an imperceptible nod of her head, watching as the two ladies exchanged awkward glances and shifted slightly away from her, hardly knowing what to think. Surely they didn’t mean that. Why on Earth would they think that she…granted it wasn’t like she hadn’t…but they didn’t know that. When would it have even come up? Why would it have even come up?

Of course, this was the 18th century…and Lucy had spent the whole of their first night in a new house, among new people, talking to Colonel McKee’s unmarried aide de camp. While she didn’t think she had done anything inappropriate for the era, she thought that perhaps she might have been too forward, too talkative…and while that might not have raised any kind of suspicion in regular people, it might have been just enough to send the prudish Mrs. Poe into a fit of holy hysteria.

The rumor mill probably took care of the rest.
They sat in awkward silence for almost an hour, and while Lucy was grateful that she was no longer having various scriptures and veiled insults thrown her way, she hated *all* of this—particularly now that she knew everyone in the house considered her their resident Jezebel. As much as she would have loved never to broach the subject of her sex life with these women again, she was dying to know *why*. Had she said or done something? Was it because she had survived her ordeal with the French? Maybe they thought she had…ugh…whatever they thought, it didn’t matter. But she was still determined to talk to Mrs. Fraser about all of it later, away from the judgmental scowls and comments of Mrs. Poe.

Hardly able to stand the uncomfortable silence any longer, Lucy resolutely decided that she would *try* to befriend these women…make them see that whatever they believed, they had misjudged her and her intentions. With that in mind, Lucy cleared her throat and observed to Mrs. Fraser kindly, “You are so good at this…do you do many quilts?”

To her immense relief, Mrs. Fraser didn’t flinch away from her as Mrs. Poe did. Instead, she offered Lucy a sweet smile and nodded kindly, “Not as many as I’d like…truth be told, I hadn’t planned on doing another one this year…it’s much nicer to sew outside during the summer. But seeing as you’ll be needing one…”

“Me?” Lucy asked incredulously, hardly believing that Mrs. Poe, especially, would waste any time doing anything for her. “This is for me?”

“To be sure, my dear,” Mrs. Fraser answered her, surprised. “You cannae be married without something proper for a wedding bed, now can ye?”

“Ma…married?” Lucy stammered, her heart pounding in her chest. “Wh…what do you mean, *married*?”

Mrs. Poe snorted with laughter, casting Mrs. Fraser a meaningful look, but Mrs. Fraser ignored her, instead, smiling with a nod towards the gentlemen assembled by the fireplace, “There’s no use playing coy with me, lass. I know all about your little *arrangement*…though I must say, it’s a wee bit irregular, and it may not have begun on the right foot…but I’m pleased to hear it’s going to be made right.” Mrs. Poe let out a scoff, but Mrs. Fraser dismissed her with a wave of her hand, “I dare say you could use some looking after, especially after seeing you in such a state when you arrived, poor dear. I thank the good Lord above that he has seen fit to bless you with some good friends and fortune after everything you’ve been through.”

Lucy gaped at Mrs. Fraser who had turned her attention back to what Lucy now knew was her “*wedding*” quilt. Panicked, she glanced down at her hand to see if she had accidentally forgotten to remove the monstrosity Noah had given her, but no…her finger was bare. So why on Earth would they think she was going to be getting married?
And to whom?

When they had first met Colonel McKee, he had mistakenly believed she and Wyatt were already married… but they had corrected that… as far as he knew, they were brother and sister. So who else could they think she was marrying? Confused, she chanced a look towards the men gathered near the fireplace – chatting and laughing amongst themselves and she couldn’t help but wonder what little arrangement Ms. Fraser could be talking about…and why she thought it was so irregular.

Irregular, how? Why?

She knew Colonel McKee had been trying to promote a relationship between her and his aide de camp… but… she had never agreed to anything. They had never even discussed anything close to a relationship at dinner that night. But just then, Matthew turned to look her way, flushing self-consciously as he did so, before turning to talk with the other gentleman again.

Oh God.

If they believed Wyatt was her brother and that she was available…could they have made some sort of deal with him?

No, Wyatt would never have done that.

Unless…

What if they had somehow convinced him that it was the right thing to do? That for whatever reason she would be better off married? That wasn’t an unusual sentiment in the 18th century…but why on Earth would Wyatt ever agree to it?

She thought back to the last time she had talked to him…how he had nearly run Rufus over in his attempt to scramble away from her. His early morning departures, his late-night returns well after supper…it was clear now, he was avoiding her. Why?

What had Rufus said that day? Don’t you think she should have a say in all of this?
What if…oh God…what if?

“My dear,” Mrs. Fraser tutted, grabbing the scissors once more, “you’ve tangled yourself up again.”

A disbelieving scoff escaped Lucy’s lips as she allowed her work to fall from her shaking hands. It couldn’t be true…it couldn’t. How could Wyatt do this to her…especially when they were trying to make it back home? Had he given up hope? Did something happen to convince him that this was it? They were permanently stuck in the past? But even if it were it and they were stuck here…why on Earth would he have done something like this without telling her? Why wouldn’t he have even mentioned it to her…asked her if she was even interested in marrying some man she didn’t even know? He knew how horrified she had been about Noah…so how could he do this?

Anger, panic, and resentment like she had never known coursed through her veins as she considered how he had essentially sold her off without so much as a word to her about it. Maybe he hadn’t meant for it to happen…maybe he hadn’t realized until it had all been arranged…Mrs. Fraser had called it irregular, after all…but still, the fact that he had been hiding instead of trying to figure out a way to get her out of this mess…

“My dear, are you feeling alright?” Mrs. Fraser asked with concern, “you’re looking awfully pale.”

Lucy startled to attention, her breath coming in quick short pants as she felt the walls closing in. She wasn’t tangled up in a mess, she was back in that sinking car, trapped, numb…suffocating.

She stumbled as she attempted to stand on quaking knees, “I…I need to get out of here.” she gasped out, nearly tripping over her own feet as she made her way towards the door, “I…I think I’m going to go for a walk.”

Mrs. Fraser exchanged a bewildered glance with Mrs. Poe as she called after a quickly retreating Lucy, “You’ll want a shawl or you’ll catch your death…it’s frightfully chilly out there.”

But Lucy hardly cared – wind, rain, snow…nothing could have prevented her from heading out the front door and into the early evening air. She was half tempted to make a run for it – head out into the unknown away from matchmaking British officers and gossiping women. But it was no use…she couldn’t survive out here…not on her own. So instead, she marched with determined swiftness down the winding dirt lane to where she was sure she would find the one person who was probably responsible for all of this.
A few words on Thomas Fuller. He was an actual person, though he actually lived in Alexandria, VA. I really wanted Rufus to have someone historic to connect with in this fic and while I was at Williamsburg on one of our trips down there, I learned about a black blacksmith who had risen through the ranks and had become quite successful...if I'm remembering correctly, he was even able to earn his freedom. The reason I don't know for sure is because while I was looking up that story to verify its facts, I came across ANOTHER story, that of Thomas Fuller. The man was a certified GENIUS...and because the time table matched, and because he was even noted to do astronomy related computations...I mean, things our computers have to do...I transplanted him here to be a friend to Rufus. I imagined them working together to do all of these technological advancements on the farm. I've provided a link to his amazing story...bear in mind, this is just ONE link to his information...there are several out there on the interwebs which give more or less data about him, depending on the source. The leap year story is one that ACTUALLY happened and while he was a slave, his owner's treated him with comparable kindness and refused to sell him...for obvious reasons. Thank you so much for reading and for your patience.

https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/fuller-thomas-1710-1790/
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Turn it…no, not that way…the other way!”

Wyatt cursed as he set the solid wood table down on the threshold of the cabin, wiping his brow with his sleeve and staring daggers at Rufus who was sitting on a newly finished chair directing Wyatt and Tom as they attempted to move the last bit of furniture into place. “You know,” he gasped out, “this would be a hell of a lot easier if you weren’t just sitting on your ass watching us do all the hard work.”

“Wa…I beg your pardon.” Rufus spat out, clearly offended. “You asked me to help you build furniture…not to move it. Anyway, you two seem to have it pretty much in hand…all you need to do is tilt it just a little more…”

“Shut up, Rufus.” Wyatt gritted out as he nodded at Tom and lifted the table once more, heaving it up on their forearms as they maneuvered their way through the door, until finally setting it down with a large thud in front of the fireplace.

“See, nothing to it.” Rufus quipped as he carelessly cracked open a walnut, allowing the shells to tumble from his hand onto the floor.

“Do you mind?” Wyatt snapped at him, pushing Rufus off the stool, “I mean, seriously man, it’s not like I didn’t just clean this place up or anything.”

“What the hell, Wyatt? It’s just a couple of shells.” Rufus asked incredulously, but seeing Wyatt bending over to pick them up, he stopped him, “Hey…it’s okay. I’ve got it…I’m a big boy, you know…I can clean up after myself.” Rufus eyed Wyatt suspiciously as he began straightening up the stools around the newly placed table, looking at it from different angles, “What is with you?”

“What?” Wyatt asked defensively, “I just…I want to make sure everything looks alright.”

Rufus bit back a smile as Wyatt took a sanding block and began buffing out a sharp edge on the table, “She’s gonna love it, man.” he assured him gently.”
“Huh?” Wyatt asked, somewhat startled. “That’s…I just…this edge was a little rough…that’s all.” he explained with an indifferent shrug, before smirking smugly and adding, “Last thing we need is for you to get another splinter.”

“Yeah, whatever.” Rufus grunted as he pushed himself off the stool with a huff, “You’re nervous as hell and you just don’t want to admit it.” Wyatt shook his head in disagreement, but Rufus plowed on, “It’s Lucy, Wyatt…you don’t think she’s going to understand?”

Yeah…it was Lucy…and sure, she would understand, but that wasn’t the problem.

Not that he would ever tell Rufus, but Jessica had been the only real girlfriend he had ever had. Meeting, as they did, in high school…he really didn’t date around much…and the times he did go out with someone else, it wasn’t very serious. Jessica had been it for him. She was the one who had stood by him through all the shit with his father and later, when his Grandpa Sherwin died, it was Jessica who he had turned to in his grief. Marrying her was just the next logical step in their relationship; they had both graduated, he was joining the Army…why wouldn’t they leave that dusty West Texas town together?

It made sense. It felt right. It was easy…comfortable.

Life on their own, in a new town, with all the pressures that came with being a newly married couple took their toll…more so when combined with frequent absences, training missions and deployments. Jessica had wandered…and while he sure as hell didn’t blame her for her moment of weakness, his hotheadedness had gotten the better of him that stupid night at the bar. When she was murdered, Wyatt had felt like he had failed on so many levels…and so for him, moving on was never an option…particularly since Jessica’s killer was never brought to justice. How could he be expected to start over again with someone new? To forget? How could he live a life with someone else after abandoning his wife the way he had? How could he betray her memory? What kind of asshole could get over something like that?

Especially when it was his fault?

Yet here he was, on the brink of proposing to another woman. Granted, it wasn’t like this would be a real marriage…but if they were stuck here…if this was their future, his hope of somehow saving Jessica was gone and with it, any chance to bring her killer to justice.

And then there was Lucy.
Suppose Rufus was right and she really had fallen for her newfound fiancé? Yeah, he had never so much as laid eyes on the guy, but from the rock he had given her, Wyatt imagined he was…well, everything he was not. Lucy was a well-educated daughter of a highly respected and world renown historian…she wouldn’t just marry anybody. No, this guy had to have been just as well brought up as she had been, rich, and probably just as much of a know it all as she was. They were probably compatible…more so than he would ever be with Lucy…they would have had to have been, otherwise, Wyatt thought, she would have ended it right away.

Instead, she had kept that ring on her finger.

Not that it mattered much…as it was, she may never get back to him…and what’s more, if they were stranded here for the rest of their lives, she would never have the chance to save her sister. For Lucy, this wasn’t about understanding that they were in a difficult and awkward position, it was about coming to terms with the fact that she might never get what she was fighting for. As devastating as that would be for her, Wyatt figured the consolation prize she might have had with that Noah guy was also gone. Instead, she was being more or less forced into a marriage with him…a reckless, hotheaded sonofabitch who could never, truly be married to her.

It wasn’t fair and he knew it.

That was why he was doing his damndest to make everything perfect for her. He didn’t want to disappoint her any more than she would be should the worst-case scenario come to pass. Like Rufus said, she deserved to be happy…and while he couldn’t offer a marriage in the true sense of the word, he could at least give her a half-way decent proposal and a somewhat comfortable place to live.

That was better than what he had offered Jess when they first started out.

“Hello? Wyatt? You still with me?” Rufus asked, waving his hand in front of his friend’s face.

“Huh?” Wyatt startled, looking self-conscious, “Oh yeah, sorry. I was just…um…thinking.”

“Well I hope you’re thinking about what you’re going to be serving up for dinner tonight,” Rufus said as he slapped him on the back, “you promised, remember? You said after we finished helping you fix all this up, you’d…”

“Yeah, yeah.” Wyatt sighed heavily, “But I thought I’d do that tomorrow, ya know…invite Lucy
“You are seriously not thinking about asking her to marry you when we’re sitting right here?” Rufus interrupted incredulously.

“No!” Wyatt responded in defense, “I just thought…well you know, they won’t let her be alone with me…”

“Oh-huh, so Tom and I are your damn chaperones, is that it?” Rufus spat out, “Why don’t you just march over to that house and propose to her there?”

“Because,” Wyatt gritted out, “they think we’re already…you know” he added with a meaningful look towards Tom.

“Engaged?” Rufus asked as he narrowed his eyes in confusion. When Wyatt shot him an incredulous glare, he realized that he was concerned about discussing too much in front of his new friend. Shaking his head dismissively, Rufus assured him, “You don’t have to worry about Tom, he won’t say anything.”

Skeptical, Wyatt raised his eyebrows, but Tom nodded at him reassuringly, “Gospel truth, my lips is sealed.” He nodded towards Rufus, “What you and your lady friend do is your business, not mine…nor anybody else’s.”

Wyatt acknowledged him gratefully with a short nod, before turning to Rufus and explaining, “Engaged or not, they’re not about to let me walk off with Lucy alone…and even if they did, you don’t think they’d say something about…you know…the wedding?” He shook his head ruefully before adding gruffly, “Besides, that Harvard asshole is still there.”

“What difference does that make?” Rufus shrugged, “I would have thought you would’ve loved a chance to show him up…I mean, if he was fawning all over Lucy like you said he was…”

“I just don’t want an audience, okay?” he sighed, throwing his head back in exasperation, not wanting to elaborate for Rufus why that would be a bad thing. As much as Wyatt would’ve loved the opportunity to show up the “fine, upstanding young man” that had essentially tried to sweep Lucy right off her that first night at dinner, he had no idea what Lucy would say. If she said “no” that brown nosing sonofabitch would be the last person on the face of the Earth he’d want witnessing the rejection.
“You don’t want an audience,” Rufus mused doubtfully, “but you want me and Tom here?”

“I wouldn’t do it in front of you, I’d...you know...ask her after dinner...walking her back up to the house.”

“I still don’t see why you couldn’t do the same thing right now,” Rufus huffed, “just go to the house and ask to go for a walk with your would-be fiancé...nothing strange about that.”

“Except that Lucy doesn’t know she’s my would-be fiancé.” Wyatt reminded him, still not wanting to risk the embarrassment that would follow if she flat out told him to “go to hell.” “C’mon man, it’ll be fine. I’ll make dinner here, you can bring Lucy with you and then when you finish, you can just head off back to the forge and I’ll offer to walk Lucy back to the house and talk to her on the way.” Rufus rolled his eyes as Wyatt continued, “It’ll be perfect because it will be us, ya know...celebrating the fact that we finished this place....and they won’t suspect anything funny is going on and...”

“Fine, fine.” Rufus breathed out impatiently, “Keep stalling all you want, but dammit, Wyatt...if you don’t talk to Lucy tomorrow...”

“I will.” Wyatt promised, but with another stern glare from Rufus, he assured, “I swear.”

“Alright, just so long as you understand that if you don’t, Lucy may or may not receive an anonymous letter telling her she better come down here and kick your ass.” Rufus nodded as he began helping Tom collect the tools from around the cabin.

“Here, let me go grab that box from outside.” Wyatt announced, “It’ll be easier for you to carry all this stuff back.”

Stepping outside, he breathed in the cool evening air, feeling at once relieved that they finally had a decent place to call their own and terrified for what tomorrow would bring. He was standing on a precipice of sorts, staring into an uncertain future either with or without Lucy Preston. He never would have imagined all those months ago that he would ever be in this position with the bossy know-it-all professor ranting about historically inaccurate underwear.

Yet here he was.
Of course, it wouldn’t be a marriage in the real sense of the word…this wasn’t like how it was with Jessica. This was strictly a marriage for survival. With winter coming on fast and Rufus still struggling to be a blacksmith, they needed a place to live…and well, they couldn’t live here unless he did right by Lucy in the eyes of John Fraser.

Still, it was a marriage…and while he respected and cared for Lucy, marriage was just something he had never intended on doing ever again…especially when he now had the means to possibly go back and save Jessica…well, if Rufus was able to fix the time machine, anyway.

Of course, there would only be a marriage if Lucy agreed to marry him.

The sun was beginning to dip towards the horizon as Wyatt made his way down the little hill to where a large rustic box was laying empty under the elm tree where, Wyatt remembered with a smile, Lucy had broken down in tears almost two weeks ago. They had been through so much since they landed in this century, he could hardly blame her for crying. Hell, he had been nearly emotional himself when he thought about how close he had come to losing both members of his team. They might drive him nuts more often than not, but they were…well, they were the only family he had left.

Wyatt sighed as he took in the autumn hues spread out before him, a tapestry of red and gold cascading down the hillside towards the river valley below. The crisp air was sweet and musky and he had to admit, even as a proud West Texan, that given the choice, he’d take this scenery over that of a barren plain dotted with scraggly mesquite trees any day of the week…it really was beautiful.

As he crouched down beneath the elm to pick up the remaining tools scattered here and there, he couldn’t help but think of how he had very nearly kissed Lucy…well, he had, didn't he? Sort of…right on the side of her head…like an idiot.

He had never really been good with women…Jess being the one exception. She had befriended him in high school, hadn’t given a damn that he was from the wrong side of the tracks…she wasn’t exactly high society herself. He had nothing to prove with her, no damn stereotype to overcome…they were cut from the same cloth and so when it had come to asking her out, it was done with little to no awkwardness.

It just sort of happened.

When he asked her to marry him, though…he was nervous as hell. Even though he was 99% sure she would absolutely say yes, his terror at asking her to be his wife nearly ruined the entire
He tried to make it romantic, tried to recreate one of their most poignant moments together…but then he had lost the damn ring and…

“You!”

Wyatt let the saw he was holding tumble out of his hands and bounce against the jumbled knot of roots at his feet as he startled to see a fuming Lucy marching her way towards him looking uncannily like his old Basic Training Drill Sergeant.

He had never been more terrified in his life.

“I thought I’d find you here.” came Lucy’s sharp and breathless voice as Wyatt scrambled to his feet. Unlike her greeting nearly two weeks ago, this one was filled with unmistakable disdain and anger. Huffing towards him, her eyes flashing with a fury he had never known, she spat out, “What did you do?”

Wyatt stumbled backwards until he was smack up against the trunk of the tree, staring at Lucy in near panic before Rufus’ voice drew his attention away from the fuming historian who was now merely a few feet away from him.

“Hey, Wyatt?” Rufus called, unconcernedly, “are you gonna bring in that box or…oh.” he stopped short at the sight of Lucy, feeling at once the tension in the air. Chuckling nervously, he nodded towards her, “How…how are you doing Lucy? Come to check out the new digs?”

“Did you know? Did you know about this, Rufus?” Lucy rounded angrily on the time machine pilot, “Huh, did you?”

“Oh shit.” Rufus’ eyes widened in fear as he leapt behind Tom. “Dammit Wyatt!” he called from over Tom’s shoulder, “I told you you needed to tell her about this whole marriage thing!”

“Dammit, Rufus.” Wyatt cursed under his breath, raking a frustrated hand over his face.

Turning once more to Wyatt with daggers staring straight into his soul, Lucy gritted out, “So it’s true?! This is what you and Rufus were talking about that morning?” she admonished angrily, “How…dare…you.”
'Lucy…” Wyatt replied meekly, but she talked right over him.

"I tried to tell him." Rufus called out again, still hiding behind the much larger Tom, "Tell her, Wyatt...tell her how I told you that you needed to say something. Go ahead!, tell her!"

“God dammit, Rufus!” Wyatt spat out, “Will you shut the hell up? You’re just making things worse!”

“Oh, it’s already worse.” Rufus chided to Wyatt as he skirted past Lucy towards the dirt path beyond, urging Tom along with him as he yelled back to Wyatt, “I told you you should have come clean ages ago...it serves you damn right. C'mon Tom" he urged, "we don't be around for this." Waving a frantic hand towards Wyatt and Lucy, Rufus called out, "See you later! Lucy, I give you full permission to kick his ass...then maybe next time, he'll listen to me."

Lucy, however, hardly acknowledged Rufus’ departure, she was still staring coldly at Wyatt, who was now pacing nervously under the tree. “How could you?” she hissed, her voice faltering with emotion.

Wyatt swallowed hard as he attempted to stammer out an explanation, “I…I know, Lucy, that’s why I…that’s why I…”

“Have been avoiding me?” she finished for him as he stared blankly back at her, ‘I cannot believe you did this. I cannot believe you, of all people, are treating me like…like some sort of commodity. How could you?” she asked through angry tears.

“Lucy…” Wyatt groaned, “It wasn’t like that…I didn’t mean for it to happen…I mean, at first, I really didn’t think it was a big deal, because…you know” he suggested weakly, “we’re friends.”

Lucy scoffed in astonished disbelief as she turned away from him, clearly offended. “Friends don’t do this, Wyatt. I cannot even believe you can say that when you didn’t even give me a choice.”

Nervous now, Wyatt threw himself in front of her, doing his best to argue his case, “You’re right….I should have talked to you…but dammit Lucy, I was…I was so nervous about telling you…I didn’t know what you’d say.” Lucy stared at him incredulously and Wyatt quickly added, “but…but then I talked to Rufus…and he told me that I should ask you first, because you know…you deserve to be happy.”
Lucy turned her head slowly to glare at him, “Really? It took talking to Rufus for you to come to that conclusion?” Wyatt swallowed hard and cast his eyes down to the ground, thoroughly ashamed as she continued hotly, “We’re talking about marriage, Wyatt! How could you plan out my life for me like that? And then not even tell me?”

“I was going to tell you…I mean, I was going to ask you…”

“When?” Lucy snapped, turning to offer him an incredulous stare, “On my wedding day?”

“No.” Wyatt said defensively, once again stumbling backwards away from her, “I was going to do it tomorrow.” he said with a nod towards the house, “I… I just wanted everything to be perfect…I know it’s not what you would call ideal…”

“Not ideal?” Lucy scoffed, “Wyatt…you’re asking me to marry someone I don’t even know…”

“C’mom Lucy,” Wyatt replied in a soft voice laden with hurt, “that… that’s not true…”

…and for what?” she continued angrily, completely ignoring his weak attempts at a rebuttal, “What’s in it for you? What kind of deal did you make in all of this?”

Wyatt gaped at her, “No…nothing.” he stammered as Lucy rolled her eyes doubtfully, “Nothing, Lucy…I swear…well, I mean except that we will get to live here.” he added as he pointed to the cabin. Lucy let out a disbelieving scoff as she brought her hands to her face, prompting Wyatt to continue desperately, “I’m…I’m just doing this to protect you….and come on, it’s not like it’s really any different than you being engaged to that guy back in 2016. You don’t even know his last name.”

It was only took about a fraction of a second for Wyatt to realize that he had gone too far. Lucy slowly lowered her hands and stared at him with cold fury, angry tears staining her cheeks, “This is nothing like that and you know it.” Lucy gritted out softly, sending a chill up Wyatt’s spine. “It’s not my fault some…some other version of me got engaged to Noah…and it’s not his fault either. No one arranged that marriage for me…I, at least…well, at least some version of me had a choice in the matter. Some version of me actually loved him. This? What you are asking me to do?” Lucy turned away from him in anguish as more tears pooled in her eyes, “It’s impossible. I won’t do it.”
“Fine.” Wyatt spat out, hanging his head down in shame, “If you don’t want to marry me, you don’t have to…”

“Well, thank you very much, that’s just…wait…what?” Lucy hiccupped in surprise as she quickly turned to face him, a few stray tears still glistening on her cheeks.

“You don’t have to marry me.” Wyatt breathed out as he leaned his head back against the tree in frustration and embarrassment, “Rufus was right, I should’ve just told them the truth…I just…I screwed up, okay?” He muttered unable to raise his eyes to meet hers. He made to step away from her, but Lucy was there, blocking his escape, looking completely flabbergasted.

“You…you were going to ask me to marry you?” she asked tentatively in a hushed voice.

Wyatt stared back at her in confusion, “Well, yeah…who the hell did you think I was going to ask you to marry? Rufus?”

Lucy let out an incredulous laugh, “Oh my God…I thought…” she breathed out an actual sigh of relief, feeling incredibly silly that she ever would have suspected that Wyatt would have had her married off to some stranger. It wasn’t until she began thinking why she wouldn’t have automatically assumed Wyatt was the groom to be that she remembered, “Wait a minute” she asked, her eyes narrowed in confusion, “…don’t…I mean, aren’t we supposed to be brother and sister?”

“Yeah, about that.” Wyatt muttered darkly as he raked a hand across his face and sat down, “Um…they know we aren’t related.” Lucy offered him a questioning glace as he explained uncomfortably, “Something about you speaking French and me not knowing what you know…anyway…that’s how this all came about…they um…thought that you and I were…well, that we had, ya know…run off together,” Wyatt shifted uncomfortably, his face flushing as he continued rapidly, “I um…tried to tell them that it wasn’t like that…but…”

“Oh.” Lucy replied self-consciously, as the realization of what their relationship was believed to be suddenly dawned on her. Instead of erupting into a furious tirade about her ruined reputation, as Wyatt believed she would when she found out about all of this, she let out an amused laugh. “Well,” Lucy sighed heavily as she sat down beside him in the shade of the tree, “that explains Mrs. Poe.” She quirked her eye at him playfully and murmured, “So what, you were going to make an honest woman out of me, is that it?”

Wyatt shrugged sheepishly, feeling his tension slowly disappear, “Yeah, something like that.” He let out a mirthless chuckle, “I’m…I’m sorry, Lucy. I should have said something earlier. It just…
it happened so fast and I… I didn’t know what the hell to do.”

Frowning, Lucy nodded, “A head’s up would’ve been nice…it would’ve made things a lot less awkward for me in there.” she said with a nod towards the Fraser home. “Do you know Mrs. Poe had me reciting scripture every morning in an attempt to save my soul?”

Wyatt barked out a laugh, “No, she didn’t?” he asked incredulously. “Are you serious?”

Pursing her lips together Lucy nodded, “Oh yes, she did. Of course, I didn’t know why at the time…I guess that explains why Matthew practically runs away from me any more too.”

While Wyatt didn’t see the problem with this latest revelation, feeling oddly relieved that in his absence the fine, upstanding young man had been keeping his distance from Lucy, he also couldn’t help but be annoyed at the way Lucy had been treated, “Jesus,” Wyatt breathed out in annoyance, “don’t these stuck-up assholes have anything better to do with their time?”

“Oh sure.” Lucy answered with a glib smile, producing her red and swollen fingers, “quilting. But really, Wyatt what do you expect?” she added with a sigh, “It’s not like they have much to entertain them out here…we’re pretty much their reality TV.”

Wyatt rolled his eyes, unable to contain his annoyance and frustration. With shaking hands he reached into his pocket, “Well, all the more reason to…dammit!”

“What?” Lucy asked blankly, scrambling to her feet as Wyatt frantically searched through the leaves surrounding them.

“The ring.” Wyatt explained as he frantically swept his hand across the ground, the setting sun making it more difficult to see clearly in the shadow of the tree. “I dropped it …dammit, where did it go?” he spat out, his frustration clearly mounting.

“Wyatt,” Lucy breathed out, crouching down beside him as he continued to search, “It’s okay… you didn’t need to…”

“Yes, I did, Lucy.” Wyatt maintained gruffly. “If we’re going to be here for the rest of our lives, you at least deserve a half decent proposal…and I can’t even do that right…God damn it.” He spat out in frustration, “this was not how this was supposed to go.”
Lucy reached out and put a gentle hand on his cheek, calling his attention from the ground to her, “I don’t care.” she said plainly, “I appreciate what you were trying to do, Wyatt…but you don’t have to do this…”

“Lucy,” Wyatt sighed in exasperation, “this isn’t 2016.”

“I’m well aware of that, Wyatt.” Lucy maintained, “but…”

“Which means, we can’t live together…I mean, you can’t stay here with me unless…I mean, John Fraser made it pretty damn clear that he wouldn’t stand for that…even though…you know, we aren’t…” Wyatt cleared his throat nervously as he pressed on, “if we want someplace to live, we have to do this…whether we like it or not.”

Lucy frowned slightly, hugging her arms around her defensively before stating quietly, “Well…I guess that’s settled then, isn’t it?”

Wyatt sighed, “That’s…that’s not what I meant. I just meant that…I can’t protect you if you’re off someplace else…and I don’t even know if they’d even let us stay here if…you know, if I don’t marry you after dragging you out here away from your family and fiancé…”

Bewildered, Lucy stared up at Wyatt, “What are you talking about?”

“Well, you know…” Wyatt explained, his face flushing furiously, “they think I dragged you away from your parents to…ya know…elope.”

“Okay…” Lucy nodded in understanding, “but what…what’s this about a fiancé?”

Wyatt sighed and dismissed her with a wave of his hand, “It’s nothing…I just…I might have told them that you were engaged…to you know, try to convince them that there was nothing going on between you and me.” he stammered uncomfortably.

“You told them about Noah?” Lucy asked incredulously, her voice filled with annoyance.
“No.” Wyatt spat out defensively, “I just…I tried to explain that there was nothing going on between the two of us…and well, they didn’t really believe me…I mentioned you had a fiancé…and they just assumed…”

“What? That I left him to run off with you?”

“Something like that, yeah.” Wyatt admitted sheepishly as Lucy covered her face with her hands in apparent frustration and embarrassment. “Look, the point is, John Fraser thinks that we were already running off to get married. If I don’t marry you after all of this” he cleared his throat before muttering sheepishly, “they’re um…going to send you back to your family.”

“What?” Lucy asked in confusion, “What family?”

Sighing in exasperation, Wyatt declared, “You know…your family. In New York?”

Lucy stared back up at him blankly, clearly confused. “Wyatt…I don’t have any family in New York.”

“They think you do!” Wyatt practically yelled, startling her. “And if I don’t marry you now after all of this…look,” he pressed, “we have no idea how long we could be here…Rufus may never be able to fix the Life Boat…we could be here for the rest of our lives…”

“But marriage, Wyatt.” Lucy replied in a small voice, “That’s…”

“I know.” Wyatt agreed grimly. “But Lucy…what else can we do? I know I’ve seen enough of how things work in this century to know that you…well, that you need…” he rubbed the back of his neck uncomfortably as he tried to explain, “I mean, this isn’t 2016…you…well, women don’t really have…”

“I know.” Lucy replied glumly. “But Wyatt…”

“I…I don’t expect anything from you Lucy…I mean, this wouldn’t be like a real marriage…it’s just…you know…something to keep you close enough so that I can do my job and keep you safe.” Lucy frowned slightly as Wyatt let out a derisive laugh, “Well, as safe as we can expect to be in the middle of a damn war with small pox and whatever else this century can throw at us.” He fidgeted nervously beside her, growing uneasy at her silence. “But…you know…if you don’t want to do
“I understand,” he stammered, “I mean, we could be here for the rest of our lives…and I can’t…I mean, I wouldn’t…if someone else came along who you would rather….”

Lucy stared back at him blankly, “What?”

“Well, you know” Wyatt shrugged uneasily, “you deserve a chance to be happy, Lucy.” He explained, recalling his conversation with Rufus, “And…if you marry me…you wouldn't...I mean, I could never…”

He trailed off not sure what to say…or rather, how to say it. For him, Jessica was his one and only…even if they never made it back to the present, he could never betray his dead wife’s memory like that. This marriage was strictly one of convenience and security…but he figured saying that mid-proposal would be probably be in bad taste.

Lucy, however, seemed to be completely aware of his internal dilemma. With more compassion than he felt he deserved, Lucy tilted her head sympathetically and replied, “It’s not just about my happiness, Wyatt. I mean, what about you? Isn’t this going to be difficult for you?”

Wyatt looked up at Lucy thoughtfully, hardly believing that in all of his worry over this whole situation, he had never really considered his own happiness. He had been so worked up over what Lucy would say and the thought of possibly betraying Jessica’s memory…he hadn’t really spent much time on how being married to Lucy would make him feel…and now faced with that question, he felt that it was hardly one that needed asking. He had made up his mind a long time ago that he would never find happiness with someone again…so that was already a moot point. Yet, even as that thought crossed his mind, he recalled how relieved he had been to find Lucy alive, how grateful he had felt to her for saving him at the Alamo…for needing him…for making him feel more than just the hired grunt he believed he was…and suddenly he couldn’t imagine how being married to Lucy would ever make him unhappy.

Not wanting to dwell on that thought…nor the small little stirring in his chest that had accompanied it, Wyatt shrugged indifferently, “It’s just part of the job…ma’am.”

Part of the job.

Lucy swallowed hard as she considered the choice before her. Marrying Wyatt would certainly fall into the category of things she thought she’d never do…but then again, so had time travel…not that that had worked out in her favor at all. Since stepping into that time machine she had lost her sister, discovered her father wasn’t her father at all, and now found herself stranded in the 18th century looking at the very real possibility that this would be it. As a woman, 1754 wasn’t exactly
the most progressive of years and Wyatt was right…since they had landed here she had been reminded of that fact at almost every turn. Being married, therefore, would offer her a different level of protection and well, status than being unmarried afforded…but this was Wyatt.

She hardly needed to remind herself that she was already more or less in love with him…and that was a problem, because she knew that he would never feel the same way about her. He said it himself…this was just part of the job…he could never…and while he hadn’t finished that sentence, it didn’t take a Ph.D to know what the general direction of his thoughts were in regards to this whole messy situation. Still, what were her options? Stay single? Could she rely on the hospitality and good will of John Fraser and his wife to allow her to continue living there, under their roof…indefinitely? Would she even want to? Just the thought of spending every waking moment with Mrs. Poe….

“O…okay.” Lucy stammered out quietly, hardly believing the words that were coming out of her mouth as she stood up on quaking knees, “Let’s…let’s do it.”

“Really?” Wyatt asked, immense relief readily apparent on his face. “You…you don’t mind?”

Lucy shrugged, trying to seem completely at ease…even though she so wasn’t. “It’s just part of the job, right?” she asked more to her feet than to Wyatt, “It doesn’t mean anything.”

Flinching slightly, Wyatt let out a small scoff, “Well, I wouldn’t say it doesn’t mean anything. I mean, I do care about you, Lucy.” he offered, not daring to look at her, “If I didn’t, I wouldn’t have even…I mean…don’t let it get to your head, but I wouldn’t have done the same thing for Rufus.”

Lucy couldn’t help but smile at that, feeling that maybe this wouldn’t be such an awkward arrangement after all. Nothing, really, would change between them. They were still friends…and they both cared about each other. Living together in their current circumstances just made sense…and it’s what they would have done anyway if they had been able to go with the story that they were brother and sister. No, this wouldn’t be any different than any other mission they had gone on where they had pretended to be something they weren’t.

Except that this time…they might not get to go home. And if they didn’t make it home…they would have to go on pretending.

For months.
“Aha!” Wyatt announced, scrambling to his feet, “Found it.” He tentatively stepped towards Lucy, awkwardly holding out the ring Tom had made her. Sighing, Lucy reached out to take the ring with some hesitation, given her latest revelation, when Wyatt pulled it away. “Um…” he began nervously, “should I…I mean, do you want me to…”

“No.” Lucy replied uncomfortably as she quickly shook her head, “it’s okay, Wyatt…you don’t have to…” But Wyatt was already half-way to kneeling and the sight made Lucy even more sure she had made a horrible mistake in agreeing to this. If she was thinking that being married to Wyatt wouldn’t somehow fundamentally alter their current relationship, she was definitely having second thoughts about that now…at least in regards to her feelings. She was already struggling, trying to keep her feelings at bay, how much harder was that going to be now?

She didn’t really have much time to think about that, though, because Wyatt was taking her hand in his…which, Lucy noted with some surprise, was shaking just as much as her own.

“No, Lucy…it’s fine.” Wyatt maintained as he settled onto his knee. “You deserve an actual proposal…not some jackass just handing you a ring.” He smirked slightly as he added, “Otherwise I’m no different than that other guy you’re engaged to…” Lucy offered him a sardonic glare, but Wyatt wasn’t moved by her annoyance. Instead, he pressed the issue further by teasing, “…except, of course…you know my last name.” Lucy was about to jerk her hand away with an annoyed huff when Wyatt’s expression changed. The mischievous gleam in his eye, the devilish smirk were both gone, replaced by a look of pure what could only be described as pure terror as he stammered, “Will you…um…I mean would you…”

In that moment, Lucy’s heart nearly broke in two. She knew that by marrying her, he was putting himself through a considerable amount of emotional pain and while she felt immensely guilty for being, essentially, the “other woman”, she was beyond grateful that he was willing to go against his own heart and marry her to keep her safe.

“…would you…no, that’s not what I wanted to say…I mean,”

“Wyatt,” Lucy sighed, interrupting him “it’s okay…I’ll…I’ll marry you.”

“Oh…okay” he muttered, his brow furrowed with emotion as he slid the rustic ring on her slim finger. “Um…thanks.”

For as small as it was, the ring was surprisingly heavy, and though it was fairly plain, the metal
twisted and spiraled around the band, giving it a simple beauty that was unlike anything Lucy had ever seen before. “Wyatt…” she gasped in surprise, “you shouldn’t have.”

Still not looking at her, Wyatt shrugged, “You needed a ring. Sorry, it’s not…ya know…fancy or anything…”

“No, it’s perfect.” Lucy assured him…and it was that simple assurance that drew his gaze from his worried knuckles to her face. Though her attention was currently drawn to the rustic ring now gracing her finger, he found himself almost dumbfounded by the hint of a soft smile pulling at her lips as she regarded it. He had been almost too embarrassed to give it to her, knowing as he did, that it in no way measured up to her other engagement ring…but yet here she was…admiring it. He hadn’t expected that.

“You made this?” Lucy asked, pulling her eyes away from the ring to find Wyatt gaping at her slightly.

“Yeah…um…well, I mean, I didn’t.” Wyatt admitted, as he rubbed the back of his neck anxiously, “Rufus’ friend…in the forge…Tom? He…um…he made it…it’s just a bit of scrap metal.” Wyatt dismissed as he continued with a shrug, “Like I said, nothing fancy.”

Scrap metal or not, Lucy appreciated the gesture more than words could say. It was clear to her that Wyatt was not comfortable with this arrangement, and while that caused her an understandable amount of hurt and pain, the fact that he had considered her enough to have a ring made touched her deeply. “Thank you, Wyatt…it’s…it’s beautiful.” she murmured quietly.

He quirked his lip in a lazy half-smirk before responding with a hefty dose of boyish charm, “No problem…ma’am.”

They stood awkwardly side by side for a short while before Wyatt snapped to his senses and offered to show her the finished cabin. Lucy, still admiring her ring, followed in his wake as he nervously pointed out the changes he made, the sturdy shutters that would help block out the harsh wind, the repaired fireplace, the new table and chairs…”

‘What’s this?” Lucy asked moving past the table towards a far window in the corner, well…what had been a window anyway. Instead of a flush window like the others, this one was a bay window, jutting out of the wall, surrounded by two other glass windows encircling a planter box.
“Oh that.” Wyatt smiled to himself, as he expounded, “That was Rufus’ idea.” Making his way towards the window, he explained, “This is a greenhouse of sorts. We um…moved the windows that still had glass over here so as to make this little nook for this little garden here. Took some time to build this out like this, but between Rufus and Tom…” Wyatt gingerly touched the sprig of green sprouting out from the soil, “Thought it would be nice to grow mint and a couple of other herbs in here…ya know…with winter coming on and everything.”

Lucy shook her head in astonishment, her eyes glistening with happy tears as she smiled at Wyatt gratefully, “This…this is all so…so…”

“Hello? Any one at home?” John Fraser’s voice called through the open door of the cabin causing Wyatt to stumble about five steps away from Lucy, lest he be accused of doing “anything funny.” Stepping over the threshold, John Fraser gave a low whistle, “I see all your hard work has paid off?”

“Thank you.” Wyatt said with a nod, rubbing his hands together uneasily as he explained, “I…um…Lucy was just…she came by, so I was just showing her the house.” He was kicking himself for inviting her in, wishing he had just walked her back to the John Fraser’s house and been done with it. If they had, indeed, been harassing Lucy for her “behavior” what the hell would they think now? He cast an anxious glance towards her waiting for the admonishment that was sure to come for for being together…alone…in the evening.

The admonishment, however, did not come. Instead, John Fraser walked about the cabin, inspecting all of Wyatt’s handiwork with admiration before turning to Lucy with a friendly bow, “The wife sent me off to fetch you…terrified you’d lost your way and would catch your death of cold, but I see you have found a way to keep yourself warm.” he added with a smile.

Lucy’s mouth hung open in shock, feeling the awkwardness all the more as Wyatt cleared his throat and moved further away from her, “Well…I was just…I mean, he didn’t…I mean…we didn’t…he was just showing me the house.”

“No need to explain, my dear. It wasn’t that long ago when I was a courting my lass, you know. And seeing as we haven’t seen this young man in a while…” he smiled at Wyatt as he looked around the cabin, “you’ve done a fine job in here, lad…must be quite anxious.” he added with a wink. “But who wouldn’t be? She’s quite the treasure.”

“Thank you.” Lucy muttered quietly, her face flushing in embarrassment as Wyatt fiddled with a latch on one of the shutters. Clearing her throat, she stepped away from the little greenhouse and made her way to John Fraser, “I guess I should be heading back now. Dinner must be almost
“Aye, that it is.” he nodded at her pleasantly, before turning to Wyatt with a frown, “And...uh...will you be joining us tonight, now that you don’t have all of this keeping you knocking away at all hours?”

Wyatt gaped at him, “Well...I...I mean, sure...I just...I need to take these tools back to the forge first. Rufus and Tom will be expecting them...I mean, they’ll be expecting me.”

Truth be told, Wyatt doubted Rufus gave one single damn about whether or not he showed up with the tools that evening or not. After leaving him to face Lucy’s wrath alone, he figured the time machine pilot would be too busy congratulating himself on his own escape to care much about what had become of his not so fortunate friend. He, however, did not have any desire to walk back to the house in the moonlight with Lucy and a nosy John Fraser. Hell, he didn’t really have a desire to go to dinner either, but after hearing a bit of what Lucy had gone through over the past several days, he figured he’d be the biggest jackass on the planet if he made her suffer through all of that alone...especially now that they were “engaged.”

“Fine...just fine,” John Fraser declared with a happy nod, “I think I may speak for the young lady here when I say your presence has been sorely missed.” He tipped his hat genially as he led a flushing Lucy out of the door, “I’ll be sure to tell the misses to set another place at the table for you. Come along, my dear.”

Lucy stepped out into the night behind John Fraser, still reeling from everything that had happened since she stormed away from his home earlier that evening...the weight of the ring on her finger serving as a gentle but firm reminder that she hadn’t dreamed up the whole thing. Looking over her shoulder she could see Wyatt standing under the elm tree, a large box in his hand, staring after them as they made their way down the moonlit strewn path. Stopping suddenly, Lucy quickly turned and jogged back to a bewildered looking Wyatt.

He was just about to ask her if she had forgotten something when, without a word, she leaned forward and planted a gentle kiss on his cheek. A warmth spread through him, such as he hadn’t known for many years, but before he could even process what she had done and what it could mean, the kiss was over. Just as quickly as she had arrived, Lucy spun around on her heel and rushed back to a smiling John Fraser, leaving Wyatt staring after, completely transfixed.

Chapter End Notes

Happy Timeless Movie Anniversary!!!
This, as you might very well remember, used to be part of the last chapter...but as you see, it is fairly long and really can stand on its own quite nicely. I debated for months (I have been at this fic for a LONG TIME now) how I wanted/needed this proposal to happen...it was one of the very first things I worked through before even writing the first chapter, so FINALLY having it out in narrative form is such a relief.

I really hope that you all enjoyed this update...I don't anticipate being able to update again until after Christmas sometime, so Seasons Greetings to all of you! May your holidays be filled with love, laughter and happy memories.
How the hell did he get into this mess?

Wyatt paced nervously outside of John Fraser’s home as scores of people he did not know filed into the front door and into the elaborate drawing room beyond.

It wasn’t supposed to be like this.

Wyatt figured, when he proposed to Lucy, that at worst they would have a small little “wedding” ceremony with maybe just Rufus and Tom as witnesses and that would be it. They would fulfill what was expected and required of them and be on their way. At best, he thought that perhaps he could convince Lucy to “elope” with him and they would return as “husband” and “wife” and no one would be the wiser.

John Fraser and Colonel McKee, however, had had other plans…and it had all come to a head the previous evening.

“I hope you don’t mind,” Colonel McKee announced as he poured out some wine for himself after dinner, “but I have taken the liberty to write to a minister friend of mine from Philadelphia and as it turns out, he’ll be arriving tomorrow. If you aren’t opposed,” he added with a raise of his glass towards Lucy and Wyatt, “he can have the two of you married before supper.”

Choking on her own glass of wine, Lucy turned to a pale looking Wyatt who stammered out nervously, “Well, Lucy…Lucy and I were just…I mean, you didn’t have to go through all that trouble…”

“Oh, it was no trouble at all!” Colonel McKee assured. “Happy to do it…I’d say you two have waited long enough, no sense in putting it off any longer now that you have a home to call your own, now is there?”

Unable to come up with any reasonable explanation as to why they couldn’t get married in less than 24 hours, Wyatt sucked down the whiskey he had been drinking and exchanged an uneasy glance with an equally mortified looking Lucy. Yes, they had both understood that this was the best course of action for them in this era…but they had technically only been “engaged” for two
days…and well, everything was happening way too fast.

Things did not improve as the night wore on.

Wyatt had taken to sleeping in the cabin, on his own, since he had begun the repairs. True, some nights he had still come back to the Fraser house for rest, late in the evenings, but more often than not, he found himself too tired to make the trek back and therefore curled up in a coarse blanket by his very own fireplace. He had every intention of doing the same thing that evening, feeling it was only fitting since it would be his last opportunity to have the house all to himself, when he was suddenly cornered and whisked away up the stairs by Mrs. Fraser and the ever-infuriating Mrs. Poe.

No amount of arguing, thinly veiled threats, or outright demands would cease the two women in their work, and so finally, Wyatt succumbed to what they insisted was a necessary tradition… though he could not imagine what maniac had come up with something so barbaric and asinine. Once done, they wished him a pleasant evening…he, however, did not return the sentiment as he lay there, absolutely humiliated, waiting for the inevitable…

“Oh my God.”

A nightgown clad Lucy had stumbled into the room, candle in hand, staring open-mouthed at Wyatt, lying on her bed, stuffed and sewn into a burlap sack.

“Don’t say it.” Wyatt warned, refusing to even look at her.

“You know,” Lucy teased as she attempted, but failed to stifle a giggle, “if I had my phone right now, this would be all over Instagram.”

“I swear to God, Lucy if you say a word about this to Rufus…”

My lips are sealed.” Lucy assured, desperately trying to keep from laughing, “although…”

“Dammit, Lucy!” Wyatt grunted as he tried, but failed to squirm up to a seated position, “You say one word and I will roll myself right out that window.”
“You’d have to open it first…” Lucy teased with a serious nod, “and seeing as you are tied up at the moment…” Wyatt breathed out a curse as he jammed his head back on the bed, wiggling furiously in an attempt to break free of his bonds. Clearing her throat as she pursed her traitorous lips together, Lucy set her candle down on the nightstand and took in the scene before her. Wyatt, red-faced, was staring up at the ceiling, looking murderous. It was clear to her that there must have been a struggle, pillows were strewn all over the room, the blankets on the bed were a tangled mess, the pewter water pitcher from her dry sink had toppled to the floor next to his jacket and shoes. “I see you didn’t go down without a fight.” Lucy noted with a quirked lip.

Wyatt scoffed as he continued to fight against the confines of his sack, “What the hell kind of tradition is this anyway?” he gritted out. “I thought these self-righteous jackasses didn’t believe in this kind of stuff? Can’t see the bride before the wedding and all of that?”

“It’s called bundling.” Lucy replied as she straightened up the room. “People used to do it for all sorts of reasons…She sighed as she placed the pitcher back on the dry sink, “If men and women who weren’t married were ever forced to stay in a room together…”

“Don’t look at me, I was trying to go sleep in my own damn bed!” Wyatt spat out as he twisted in his bundling bag once more.

Ignoring him, Lucy continued, “…but in the 18th century, there weren’t many inns…when people traveled they often stayed in other people’s homes. Bed sharing was common and so bundling was something of a necessity so that…people could still get a good night’s sleep without, you know…anything happening.”

“You think I’m going to get a good night’s sleep?” Wyatt asked her incredulously, “Lucy, I’m in a potato sack. I can’t even move my damn arms.”

“Well, it was also used as a courtship ritual.” Lucy explained, refusing to look at Wyatt, “it was a way for couples to spend some time alone together without…you know…getting into mischief.”

Raising his eyebrows, Wyatt scoffed, “So you’re telling me that sewing people up in sacks is how people dated in 1754?”

“No.” Lucy grunted as she pulled the tangled covers from underneath Wyatt’s bound body and spread them out over the bed, “but it wasn’t very common for two courting people to get much time alone…young ladies were expected to go out with a chaperone. So, bundling,” Lucy explained, “was a way for them to talk without someone else hanging on every word they said.”
“And they did this every night?”

“Not every night…but for special occasions if say…you and I were in a normal relationship…and it was Christmas and you happened to be staying over at my house…”

“Or were just about to get married.” Wyatt muttered in a low, dismal tone.

“Yeah, that too.” Lucy agreed quietly as she sat down on the edge of the bed, feeling a renewed sense of trepidation over their impending nuptials. Like Wyatt, this latest revelation had thrown her for a bit of a loop. It wasn’t so much the idea of living with Wyatt, pretending to be a happily married couple, that had her so anxious. She was sure that despite the roles they were being forced to play, they would be able to carry on as usual…well, as usual as it had been since they landed in this century, anyway. Things would most certainly be awkward given the circumstances, but they were both adults and professionals…there was no reason why living together would change any of that.

This was about survival…not about anything else.

Living with Wyatt too, meant that she wouldn’t be under the constant and watchful eye of one Mrs. Poe whose daily reminders that she was inevitably on her way to Hell made her almost grateful that they were getting married sooner rather than later.

Almost.

Obviously in order to be married, they had to go through a wedding…and Lucy, for all her internal resolve that she could and would maintain a professional relationship with Wyatt despite her own feelings, knew that if there was any one time in this whole ordeal that her heart might be exposed for what it truly was…this would be it. Between exchanging vows that to him, would mean nothing (and really, should mean nothing to her) and having to endure the congratulations and well-wishes of people who were none the wiser, she wasn’t sure if she would be able to keep herself from getting caught up in…all of this.

But she had to.

Wyatt had made it more than abundantly clear that he would never, could never…even if they were stuck here for the rest of their lives, ever betray the memory of his dead wife.
She understood that, to a point.

Losing Amy, Lucy knew the pain, the guilt, the anger, that accompanied her erasure. She blamed Flynn. She blamed Mason. She blamed Homeland Security. She blamed herself, of course… because if she had never stepped foot in that time machine…

But she had, and Amy was gone…and while she held out some vague hope that even if she never were to get back to 2016, Agent Christopher would make good on her promise and restore her sister, Wyatt had no such hope…no such promise. For him, being stranded here meant that any chance he might have had to either save his wife or bring her murderer to justice, was essentially gone…and now, to add insult to injury…he was being forced to marry someone he did not and could not ever love.

Yes, she cared for Wyatt…and yes, he had admitted that he cared about her…but to hope that anything more would come out of this arrangement was only setting herself up for heartache and humiliation.

She had to keep it together.

“You okay?”

“Huh?” Lucy startled. “Yeah, I’m…I’m fine.” she sighed as she stepped out of her slippers. “Just thinking about tomorrow.”

“Yeah.” Wyatt said shortly. “Listen…” he said after a short pause, “I’m sorry about the whole surprise wedding thing…I should’ve told him that we would figure out something ourselves…”

“It’s okay, Wyatt.” Lucy sighed turning slightly to look at him. “I think it’s best if we just get it over with…don’t you?”

Wyatt frowned thoughtfully and shrugged, though the gesture was hardly discernable from the confines of the sack. “I guess you’re right,” he sighed, “no use dragging this out. The sooner we get the hell out of this house, the sooner we can stop having to put on this ridiculous act.” he added with another rough squirm against his bundling bag.
Lucy knew he was in an understandably bad mood, confined as he was…and yes, this whole thing was ridiculous…but given that she was already feeling awful for putting Wyatt through so much guilt and…well, humiliation, his words stung a little bit more than they probably would have normally. Not wanting to risk him seeing the hurt in her face, she quickly blew out the candle and clambered into bed beside him, accidentally kicking him as she tucked legs under the covers.

“Sorry.” she muttered…for more than just the inadvertent strike.

Wyatt merely grunted in response and shifted further away from her.

The darkness did not serve to lessen the awkwardness of their current situation, instead, it seemed only to heighten it. Yes, they had slept beside one another countless times, particularly over the last few weeks…but they had always been accompanied by Rufus. Now, as they lay side by side, in the same bed, on the eve of their wedding, tension seemed to fill every inch, every nook and cranny, of that nearly pitch black room.

Perhaps their uneasiness wouldn’t have been quite so apparent if the silence wasn’t so deafening. It was as if both of them had decided to stop breathing. Not a grunt, a sigh nor a shaky breath escaped either of them…and both of them too, seemed to be reluctant to move, afraid, it seemed that to do so would either disrupt the silence or make the other all the more aware of the other’s presence.

Wyatt, however, uncomfortable for more reasons than just sharing an actual bed with Lucy, could not stay silent and still for long. Letting out a frustrated grunt he desperately fought against the confines of his sack, cursing when it still did not give way. “How the hell am I supposed to sleep in this damn thing?”

“I don’t think you’re meant to sleep.” Lucy sighed, sitting up in bed, “I mean, come on, Wyatt…if we were…you know, actually a couple…sleep wouldn’t exactly be high on our priority list the night before our wedding…”

Though she couldn’t see Wyatt’s face, Lucy had a hunch he had just rolled his eyes by the exasperated huff that escaped him as he gritted out angrily, “I don’t know, if we were actually getting married, I think I’d be having second thoughts if your family stuffed me in a damn sack…maybe this was their idea of a shotgun wedding. Groom couldn’t very well leave the bride at the altar if you’ve got the poor bastard sewn to the damn bed.”

Feeling even worse, Lucy desperately tried to help Wyatt get more comfortable. Blindly she reached out for him in the dark, attempting to pull at the bundling bag in an attempt loosen it, but
her efforts were met with even more frustration on Wyatt’s end when she wound up accidentally hitting his nose.

“Ow! What the hell, Lucy?”

“I’m sorry!” she hissed, “I was just trying to…do you have a knife or something to cut this with?”

“If I had a knife, I wouldn’t be in this mess to begin with.” he spat out. “Do you honestly think I would’ve let them do this to me if I had any means to defend myself?”

“Like you would have pulled a knife on an elderly housekeeper.” Lucy scoffed in disbelief, “Wyatt, you had a gun and Judith Campbell got the best of you in Vegas.”

“Hey, she hit me from behind.” he gritted out defensively “How the hell was I supposed to know she was going to double cross us?”

Rolling her eyes, Lucy went back to work on trying to assist Wyatt. Her fumbling fingers tugged and yanked at the coarse fabric, but still, it would not budge…much to Wyatt’s great frustration. “Will you…just stop, okay?”

“Wyatt,” Lucy sighed in frustration, “it’s not like this is easy for me eith…”

“What the hell did they stitch this damn thing up with?” he spat out as he kicked violently against the sack before collapsing back onto the bed. “Dammit, they aren’t messing around, are they?”

Lucy let out a scoff, “If Mrs. Poe had anything to do with it, she probably stitched that thing up five times over…just to be sure.”

“Like she needed to do that.” Wyatt grunted out in exasperation, “It’s not like that would ever happen.”

He knew almost the moment the words has left his mouth that it had come out the wrong way. Of course, he hadn’t meant it like that. Lucy was…well, she was attractive, and yes, he had admired her from time to time…particularly when she was wearing a corset…but he would never…he
respected her too much to…ugh. He should’ve corrected himself, he knew he should have…but his bad mood, his current situation, and his anxiety over what the next day would bring had him caring less about Lucy’s feelings and more about his own present discomfort.

That is until her quiet voice piped up beside him, detached and cold, “Goodnight, Wyatt.”

Shit.

He should have tried explain…but really, what was there to explain? Lucy knew this was a marriage of convenience…that their relationship was strictly platonic…why the hell would what he said bother her, then? He thought she would…and well, should be relieved…to be able to breathe easy knowing that he didn’t expect anything like that from her just because they were getting married. Hell, he thought he was being a downright gentleman. Huffing out a grumpy breath, he flipped over onto his side, his back towards Lucy, praying that sleep would come sooner rather than later.

Eventually sleep did come, but it was far from restful. Apart from being completely uncomfortable physically, Wyatt now had to contend with this whole situation that had sprung up with Lucy—as if it weren’t going to be awkward enough getting married to her in less than 24 hours.

Why couldn’t those 18th century assholes just leave him the hell alone?

It was no surprise then, that he woke up in less than a stellar mood, grimacing at the sunlight pouring through the thin drapes at the window. Rolling over, he was going to nudge Lucy awake, apologize for being such an ass…and then ask her to get him a knife to cut him out of this thing, but he found, much to his surprise, that her side of the bed was completely empty.

A little put out that she left him alone to fend for himself when he was so damn helpless, Wyatt groaned as he squirmed into a sitting position, swinging his legs off the side of the bed, literally bound and determined to hop his way out of the room if he needed to, so that he could find Lucy and make things right with her before they met at the altar. He had just managed to get on his feet when the bedroom door swung open, announcing the arrival of Mrs. Poe and the housemaid, Margaret.

His sour mood returning full force at the sight of them, Wyatt barked “Where’s Lucy?”

“Aren’t we the anxious groom?” Mrs. Poe tutted as she directed Margaret to set down the tray of
coffee and toast on the dresser. “Don’t you worry about her, she’s in good and proper hands…and will be until the minister arrives.” she added with a reproving glare.

Wyatt rolled his eyes and huffed out an exasperated breath, “I just…dammit, I just need to talk to her.” he spat out as Mrs. Poe forced him to sit back on the bed.

“There will be plenty of time for talk when you’re married.” she clucked as she produced a small set of scissors, “but until then, there’s no seeing the bride until you’re standing before the minister…and that’s final.”

Wyatt didn’t give a damn about Mrs. Poe or her admonitions, but given that he was kind of at her mercy, he kept quiet…lest she decide it was best to just keep him in his bundling bag until after the wedding. Biting his tongue, therefore, Wyatt didn’t make a peep as Mrs. Poe carefully cut away at the seams of the burlap sack until the material began to fall away, allowing him to feel like he could fully breathe for the first time in hours…though he was still a far cry from comfortable.

He had to see Lucy. He had to start this God forsaken day…their wedding day…off on a better foot than how he had left things last night.

Things were already awkward enough as it was.

Once free from his confines, therefore, Wyatt quickly crossed the room to the open door only to be called back by an annoyed Mrs. Poe, “And just where do you think you’re going?” she asked with an irritated air. Wyatt turned to look at her incredulously, but she was too busy fluffing the pillows to notice or care about his expression. “I told you, there’ll be no seeing your intended until you’re standing before the minister…it’s tradition…and I intend to see to it that you are keeping with tradition.” She nodded towards the breakfast tray, “I brought you a wee bite to eat, when you finish that, you can go straight to Master Fraser’s wash room and make yourself presentable, I’ve left a fresh suit there for you. Lord knows we can’t have you looking like a hooligan on yer wedding day.”

Begrudgingly, Wyatt slowly made his way back into the room, angrily taking a seat in a rickety chair by the fireplace to have his meager breakfast. His tantrum didn’t faze Mrs. Poe in the slightest, however, she cast him an admonishing glare and continued her work, ordering Margaret to sweep the hearth as she finished making the bed.

Wyatt had no intention of keeping with any kind of tradition in regards to this wedding. Apart from them being silly superstitions, this marriage was just a ruse anyway, so why the hell would it matter if he saw Lucy before she came waltzing down the aisle? Especially since he had slept next
to her the night before? It didn’t make any sense and Wyatt had had enough of this 18th century bull crap to last him a lifetime. Draining his coffee mug, Wyatt made his way to the door, assuring Mrs. Poe that he would go straight to the wash room to clean up...a promise he had no intention of keeping.

Making his way down the stairs, however, he noted with confusion and a fair bit of alarm that the entire household seemed to be abuzz with activity and excitement. Servants were bustling to and fro, carrying portions of smoked meat through the house to the kitchen beyond, hauling clean linens up and down the stairs, and moving furniture. The house was in such an uproar, in fact, he doubted he could find Lucy if he wanted to. “What the hell is all of this?” Wyatt murmured as he took in the chaotic scene around him. Hoping to hell it wasn’t all for their impromptu wedding, he zigzagged his way through the hall to the dining room where he found, much to his disappointment, that Lucy was nowhere to be seen.

Breathing out a curse, Wyatt wandered aimlessly around the house, trying to figure out what the hell was going on and where she could have gotten to, when he ran headlong into Mrs. Poe who was appraising him sternly over her small spectacles. “I thought I told you to wash up?” she all but growled at him.

“I was just…” he began in utter frustration, “What is all this?”

“Never you mind.” was her curt response. “That’s Mr. Fraser’s business, not yours. Now get in that wash room before I drag you there myself.”

Seeing that there was no use in arguing, Wyatt turned on his heel and made his way to John Fraser’s private quarters, where the sight of his new suit sent his stomach dropping down to the floor boards.

This was actually happening.

He tried not to dwell on the fact that fairly soon he would be married again...to someone who was not Jessica. He tried not to think about the fact that should Rufus never be able to fix the time machine, he would be married to that someone for the rest of his life. He tried not to think about what would happen if Rufus fixed the time machine and they miraculously made it back to 2016. What the hell would happen then? Would he and Lucy get divorced? How the hell would that even work? What lawyer would recognize a marriage contracted in 1754?

The more he tried not to think about the wedding, the more he did...so much so, that by the time he tried to shave, his hands were shaking so much he figured he would forego the shave rather than
risk cutting his own damn throat. When he finally emerged from the wash room, however, he was horrified to see that not only was the house still in complete disarray, but one look through the window showed a whole train of wagons and horses slowly making their way up the winding path leading to John Fraser’s front door.

What the hell was going on?

Stumbling his way outside, Wyatt wound his way through a litany of excited and near frantic servants and field hands until he came upon an exasperated looking Rufus, who was hauling buckets of water to troughs that were now set up along the perimeter of the house.

“Rufus!” Wyatt called out, jogging towards him, “What the hell is all this? What, did they invite the whole damn county?”

“You don’t know?” Rufus asked in surprise, letting out a derisive scoff.

“Know, what?” Wyatt asked his anxiety slightly mounting.

“The British are coming.” he replied dryly. “A whole company of soldiers…due to arrive here any minute. I got the heads up at about 4AM this morning…been filling water buckets for hours.”

“What the hell for?”

“Well, I’ve got to fill up these water troughs for the horses…”

“Not that.” Wyatt snapped impatiently, “Why is a whole company of soldiers coming here?”

Rufus shrugged, “You think they tell me those things? I just got the notice at about 4AM that I needed to get my black ass out of bed and start filling up water troughs. You want to know why, I suggest you talk to your good friend the Colonel or Mr. Fraser over there,” he indicated with a nod, “You look like hell, by the way. Aren’t you at least gonna shave for your wedding?”

Not even responding to Rufus’ comment, Wyatt quickly made his way across the vast yard to where John Fraser was directing the placement of a few crude benches. Upon seeing Wyatt’s
approach, his face brightened to a smile, “Ah! Wyatt, good to see you.” He patted the arms of his new suit, carefully assessing its fit, “Not bad…if I do say so myself. I wasn’t sure of your measurements, so you’ll have to forgive length of the sleeves, but I daresay it will do the job.”

Torn between his eagerness for answers and his hope to not sound ungrateful, Wyatt sighed, “Yeah…thanks…I mean…I appreciate the suit…but…”

“Oh don’t think of it, my boy.” John Fraser happily replied, “It is nothing, really nothing. It was the very least I could do for you given how hard you’ve been working. Can’t have you married in rags, now can we?”

“Listen, about that…” Wyatt began.

“Aren’t getting cold feet now, are ye?” John Fraser teased.

“No.” Wyatt tried to explain, but once again John Fraser interrupted.

“Oh good, glad to hear it. Yer lass is a rare treasure…would hate to see her heart broken.”

Wyatt raked his hand over his face in frustration, knowing that Lucy was probably still hurt over what he had said the night before, knowing that by now, that hurt had probably turned to anger, knowing that whatever the hell was going on with these soldiers would probably upset her even more, and knowing that if he didn’t talk to her soon this wedding was going to be a disaster, especially if all of these people were going to be there.

“Yeah, Lucy’s great.” Wyatt muttered in response before quickly adding with a nod towards the approaching soldiers, “What is going on here?”

“Oh! You’re in luck, m’boy…as you can see we’re to play hosts to a few guests…your wedding should be quite the lively affair.”

“I can see that.” Wyatt murmured, his eyes drifting around the chaotic scene before him. “But what…um…what brings the soldiers here? I mean, there’s not a fort around here for miles, is there?”
“Not unless you count Fort Duquesne,” John Fraser acknowledged, “which is precisely why they’ve come.” He motioned for Wyatt to follow him to the front of the house where the first travel weary group of soldiers were slowly making their way through his front gate, “You see, Colonel McKee sent notice that first evening of your arrival to our chaps down at Fort Cumberland, letting them know that, thanks to you, the French fort was now vulnerable and open to attack.” He chuckled, “They’ve alerted the folks in Williamsburg, but sent out this advance group to assess the situation so that a battle plan might be formed. If all goes well and the Governor approves, we’ll have recaptured that position before Christmas and you will have the thanks of King George, himself.”

While Wyatt personally wanted to see the French army get their asses thoroughly kicked by the British as a recompense for what they had put them all through since arriving in the century, he also knew this was not how this story was supposed to go. The fact that he was apparently responsible for this radical change to the timeline didn’t serve to make him feel any better about things. On the contrary, he knew damn well that if Lucy knew about this, she would likely skin him alive…hell, how pissed had she been when he set fire to that fort?

He was going to have to fix this, but he was going to need her expertise and advice.

Doing the best he could to keep his mounting panic at bay, Wyatt shrugged off John Fraser’s praise, hoping to appear humbled by it rather than absolutely horrified. “Tha…thanks…but really…any of you would have done the same if you were trying to save…well, you know.”

“Aye, that I do.” John Fraser said solemnly, “All too well.” He let out a shaky sigh and gripped Wyatt’s arm, “Never forget how lucky ye are to have found your lass, alive and well – so many haven’t been so lucky. It’s a gift, my boy. A true gift.”

Wyatt merely nodded in response, unsure of what else to say…after all, once upon a time he had not been so lucky…but then again, neither had John Fraser. “Speaking of Lucy,” Wyatt began weakly, “have…have you seen her? I need to talk to her before…ya know…before…”

“I’m afraid I can’t help you there, m’lad.” John Fraser said with a chuckle. “Even if I knew where your girl was, the wife would have my hide if I let you lay eyes on her afore your wedding.” He shook his head, “I understand your eagerness, but its best you go find something to occupy your time until this afternoon.” He gave Wyatt’s cheek a good-natured slap, “Why not a shave? That will soothe your nerves and quiet your mind for a while.”

Hardly able to agree with John Fraser on that end, Wyatt thanked him for his time and quickly made his way back to Rufus who was now working the water pump, filling yet another bucket. “I see you still haven’t shaved.” Rufus grunted in welcome as he picked up the now full
bucket and replaced it under the spout with an empty one. “You know, I get that this is difficult for you, but you could at least act like you want to marry Lucy…”

“Rufus,” Wyatt breathed out completely ignoring his comments, “these soldiers are here to attack Fort Duquesne.”

“So?” he shrugged.

“So? So according to Lucy, that’s not supposed to happen for like another few years.” Wyatt spat out impatiently, desperately watching as scores of solders began making their way onto John Fraser’s land.

“Who besides Lucy cares when it happens?” Rufus muttered grumpily, “1754, 1758, we kick their asses out of Pittsburgh either way. Besides,” he added with a grunt as he lifted the now filled buckets, “with us trapped here like we are, Flynn is probably off screwing up history as we speak. Nothing that happens here is gonna make much difference if Flynn is off to God knows what in the Mothership.”

Wyatt shot him a sardonic glare, “Yeah, well don’t let Lucy hear you say that. You know how she gets about this stuff.”

He followed Rufus to a nearby trough, too anxious to offer his friend any assistance, something Rufus was quick to point out, “These aren’t heavy or anything.” he griped, “I haven’t been hauling about fifty of these back and forth all damn morning.”

“Oh sorry, Rufus.” Wyatt muttered, grabbing the bucket from Rufus’ left hand, “I just…I’d feel a hell of a lot better if I could just talk to Lucy. Something tells me she’s gonna want to know about this.” He grunted as he heaved the bucket upwards and emptied its contents, “Where the hell is she anyway?” he asked anxiously, “I haven’t seen her all morning.”

Rufus sighed heavily as he nodded towards a building behind them, “I saw her go in there with that grumpy looking housekeeper about 20 minutes ago, but I wouldn’t…hey, Wyatt! Wyatt!”

Wyatt, however, was in no mood to listen to Rufus lecture him about some stupid tradition about seeing the bride before the wedding. He had heard enough of it this morning from Mrs. Poe and John Fraser. Given this new development, he was more anxious than ever to talk with her, even if it meant getting a tongue lashing from Mrs. Poe.
Quickly making his way to the door, Wyatt pushed it open without ceremony, halfway daring the housekeeper to jump on his case. Upon entering, however, he immediately regretted it. The moment he crossed the threshold a panicked squeal met his ears, followed by a frantic blur of skin and limbs tumbling clumsily into a large basin of water.

Horrified, Wyatt hastily shut the door and turned to find Rufus standing at his elbow with a wide grin plastered on his face. “I tried to tell you, man,” he said in a voice filled with amusement, “Lucy’s getting ready for the wedding…said she was gonna take a bath.” He waited for Wyatt to respond, but he didn’t…he just stood looking completely shell-shocked, too dumbfounded to even speak. Chuckling devilishly, Rufus chided, “You saw her naked, didn’t you?”

“I…um…” Wyatt began, but no other words would come.

Rufus watched him with amusement as he quickly made his way off the small porch, practically running from the scene as he disappeared amongst the throng of newly arrived soldiers. Chuckling to himself, he muttered. “That would be a yes.”

“Where is he, Rufus?” Lucy gritted out as she paced around the dining room. “He should be here by now. We were supposed to have this thing over with 15 minutes ago.”

Rufus, not nearly as anxious as Lucy, shrugged indifferently, “So it’s a little past time.” he sighed as he checked his watch. “That McKee guy said four…it’s not even 4:30 yet.” Lucy paused mid-pace and glared at him before he consoled, Look, I’m sure he’s just getting ready…or I don’t know, maybe he went and drowned himself in the river…”

Looking murderous, Lucy flushed and gritted out angrily, “Are you trying to be funny…because that is not funny.”

“Oh come on, Lucy.” Rufus urged, hopping off his perch on a hard stool so he could wrap her up in a hug, “So he saw you naked…”

“Oh God” she whimpered, covering her face with her hands.
…it’s no big deal.” Rufus continued over her, “You didn’t think something like that was bound to happen sooner or later out here in Deliverance country?” Lucy shot him another sardonic glare as he continued, “I mean it, Lucy. Look around you. I’m kind of impressed it didn’t happen sooner…we were all sleeping, eating, going to the bathroom…washing outside…hell for a little while there I thought we’d be doing the whole Naked and Afraid thing 18th century style.”

“Naked and Afraid,” Lucy scoffed, rolling her eyes at him, “really, Rufus?”

“Yes, really. Hell, Lucy, you were already running around in your damn underwear.”

“Yes, but I hardly think we were quite at Lord of the Flies level desperate.” she replied offhandedly as she set to pacing the length of the room again. “It was just…”

“Lucy…we ate snake.” Rufus deadpanned, interrupting her, “I don’t know about you, but that’s pretty desperate in my book.” Scoffing impatiently, Lucy began chewing her lip and her thumb as she continued to peek out of the window in search of a returning Wyatt. “Relax…he’ll be here.” Rufus assured, pulling her back into another hug, “Besides,” he continued, “whatever his hang-ups are about this whole thing – he wouldn’t just leave you hanging at the altar.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that.” Lucy muttered, looking miserably at the clock on the mantel.

“Oh come on, Lucy.” Rufus urged, “When has he ever not come through?”

“Yes…but that was before,” Lucy said meaningfully, “you know…”

Shaking his head, trying desperately hard to stifle a laugh Rufus quipped, “Wyatt is a red-blooded male…and I know, speaking as a red-blooded male myself, that seeing a woman naked…”

“Don’t even say it, Rufus.” Lucy spat out, pushing him away as her face flushed with embarrassment, “I mean, how did he even…why would he…why didn’t you stop him?”

“I tried!” Rufus hissed defensively, “You know how damn stubborn he is, “I need to talk to Lucy” he mimicked, “didn’t give a rat’s ass about what I had to say. Look,” Rufus urged in an attempt to lessen her fears, “he probably went off trying to figure out what to do about this whole army situation and lost track of time.”
“Do you really think it’s true? That they’re going to attack the fort?” Lucy asked anxiously.

“I don’t know,” Rufus muttered thoughtfully, “Wyatt said they were…that’s why he wanted to talk to you.”

“Me? Why me?”

“Um…because you’re the expert in all this?”

Lucy shook her head at him incredulously, “This? Oh no, no, no…I don’t know the first thing about what to do about this. This is not supposed to happen. Nothing like this is supposed to happen until next summer and even then…” she shook her head anxiously as she tried to explain, “when the British forces try to attack Fort Duquesne, Louis Coulon heads them off miles from here, nearly wiping out all the British officers in the process…including General Braddock….and even then, the British don’t officially declare war on the French until 1756.” Lucy pressed her fingers to her temples, willing herself to stay calm, “I can’t believe this…this whole thing is a disaster.”

“Hey…don’t…don’t….” Rufus urged helplessly. “When…when Wyatt gets back here, we’ll figure something out…just like we always do.”

“And just how are we supposed to stop an attack, Rufus?” she asked nervously. “Have you seen how many soldiers are out there?”

“Maybe it’s not as bad as all that…I mean, we don’t know for sure that they’re going to attack the fort. Hell, the French may have already rebuilt that wall…”

Lucy, however, wasn’t listening. Instead, she was back to pacing and wringing her hands anxiously as she obsessively looked out the window. No matter what Rufus tried to assure her of the contrary, Lucy had all but convinced herself that Wyatt had made a literal run for the hills. It was Michael Garrison and the prom all over again…except this time, her “date” hadn’t just left her pathetically waiting for a limo that would never come. Oh no, this was much worse. Wyatt had seen her naked and now had essentially left her at the altar.

Humiliation didn’t even cover it.
Rufus, still trying to ease her fears, stopped her mid-pace, “Lucy, I’m telling you…you have nothing to worry about. He’ll be here. It’s Wyatt…the same guy who burned down a French fort to save your life.”

“Yes, and that is the whole reason all of this is happening. We’ve changed history, Rufus. What are we going to do?”

He frowned, letting out a heavy sigh, just as unsure about what to do as she was. Squeezing her shoulders bracingly, he suggested, “Look, why don’t you go up and get dressed…”

Lucy’s eyes darted to his in panic, “I am dressed.” she gasped, “Oh my God, I look awful don’t I?”

“No…Lucy…no…you look fine. “ he assured, “It’s just…”Rufus narrowed his eyes in confusion, “Aren’t….aren’t you supposed to be wearing white on your wedding day?”

Back to pacing again, Lucy waved away Rufus’ concern, “No…wearing white to your wedding wasn’t a commonly practiced tradition until Queen Victoria wore white to her wedding in 1840.” she explained anxiously as she chewed her thumbnail, “In these days, women just wore the best dress they owned…and this…this is the only dress I have that’s not caked in dirt or torn to shreds.” She stopped and looked anxiously out of the window again, “Ugh…where is he?”

As if in answer to her question, Colonel McKee burst through the dining room door, dressed in his military best, looking relieved, “Oh my dear,’ he sighed noting her obvious upset, “it’s alright…everything is all in order. Your young man is waiting for you now if you’re quite ready…”

Exchanging an uneasy glance with Rufus, Lucy nodded, shakily taking Colonel McKee’s arm as he led her off to the drawing room where a large crowd of officers were assembled. As she emerged though the double doors and the whole room stood to attention, she immediately regretted ever agreeing to this whole charade. Wyatt, too, looked as if he were having second thoughts. He was standing at the front of the room, looking very much like he was about to be sick; his face was flushed, somewhat sweaty and absolutely tattered with bloody scars. Though he was facing Lucy, his eyes were trained on anything and everything but her.

“Oh God.” Lucy moaned as she and Colonel McKee slowly made their way through the crowded room, down the narrow aisle to a waiting Wyatt, feeling very much as if she were headed to her execution rather than her wedding. Colonel McKee patted her arm, “He’s alright, my dear…had a little trouble with his razor, apparently…that’s all.” When she merely gulped in response, he patted
her arm once more as he assured her, “You’re doing just fine, my dear. We’re almost there.” But that assurance was almost completely lost on her as her quaking knees nearly gave out from underneath her. Gripping tighter onto Colonel McKee’s arm, Lucy kept her eyes on the floor, silently praying that she would make it through the ceremony without passing out, crying or throwing up…or any of combination of the three since she felt like she was on the verge of a complete and total nervous breakdown.

By the time she reached the altar, she was trembling so much that when Colonel McKee handed her off to Wyatt she stumbled sideways into him. “Sorry.” she muttered quietly, wincing at the way Wyatt stiffened the moment she touched him. He gripped her arm unceremoniously, breathing out a curse when Lucy accidentally stepped on his foot as they both made their way towards the minister.

The ceremony, itself, was hardly a fairy tale. Wyatt looked just as mortified as she felt, possibly even more so as he was nearly incoherent, stammering over his vows. Lucy didn’t fare much better reciting hers, but she, at least, could manage small glances up at Wyatt. He couldn’t even look at her, and while she figured that must be due in part to what had happened earlier, she knew, especially after what he said the night before, that getting married to her was the last thing he ever wanted to do.

But here they were.

Sure, this had been his doing…but given the choice she was sure that Wyatt would have preferred they remained brother and sister rather than become man and wife. Which is why it came as no surprise to her that when the minister declared them as man and wife and told Wyatt he could “kiss the bride” he looked as if he had made the biggest mistake of his life.

Wyatt was, indeed, regretting all of this…even more so after what had transpired that afternoon. Seeing Lucy…well, seeing Lucy was something he had never intended to happen and while it was his own damn fault for not knocking first, he couldn’t help but feel a little irked that it would not have happened at all if these 18th century superstitious bastards wouldn’t have been so damn hung-up on keeping traditions. Hell, none of this would have happened if they would have all just minded their own damn business in the first place.

Really, what did it matter if Lucy was just his friend, his sister…or whatever? Yes, okay…it was a different era with different social codes and what not, but dammit…nothing was happening between him and Lucy…so why the hell did they have to pretend there was?

True, she would be better protected as his wife…especially if they were stuck here indefinitely…but theirs was supposed to be a platonic relationship. And kissing Lucy…especially after…well,
that was decidedly bordering on the not platonic.

Why the hell did he ever think this was a good idea?

Somehow, in all of his thinking this whole marriage thing through, he had failed to remember this one little detail…the kiss. Blanching, Wyatt turned to Lucy and for the first time since she entered the room, actually looked at her. Dressed in the same pale blue dress she had worn the first night they arrived at John Fraser’s home, Wyatt couldn’t help but admit to himself how pretty she looked…something that came stupidly stumbling out of his mouth the moment she took a tentative step towards him. “You look beautiful…uh…your, um…dress, I mean.”

“Huh?” Lucy’s mouth dropped open in stunned surprise, her face flushing with a sudden self-consciousness, “Oh…um…thanks. It’s really the only dress I have.” she muttered almost inaudibly in dismissive explanation.

Wyatt nodded, unsure of what to do…feeling a hell of a lot more awkward with her than he ever had before. He had spent a good portion of the afternoon desperately trying to rid his brain of the image of her completely nude. He went for a run, a swim, nearly freezing to death in the process, spruced up the cabin…and finally, he stumbled his way into the soldiers camp where he downed a few good swigs of whiskey before attempting and failing to finally shave his face.

But it hadn’t done any damn good.

He couldn’t bring himself to kiss her…yet as Colonel McKee cleared his throat, he knew he was going to have to. Letting out an anxious sigh, he stepped forward…but Lucy, it seemed, was just as unwilling to kiss him as he was her…which, considering what a jackass he had been the night before…and the fact that he had walked in on her naked wasn’t really wasn’t much of a surprise. Feeling like he should do something, despite the fact that Lucy was refusing to even look up from the floorboards, Wyatt took her hand in his and, as he had done their first night at John Fraser’s, planted a small kiss on her knuckles…hoping that that act would suffice.

It didn’t.

Groans could be heard throughout the room and though Wyatt didn’t really give a damn about putting on a show for any of these people, he figured his small gesture hardly sold any of them on the idea that he and Lucy were madly in love with one another. Lucy, too, seemed to be thinking along the same veins because much to his surprise, she made a quick step forward and landed one quick peck on his lips before quickly stepping back again, blushing furiously.
Stunned and more than a little uncomfortable with the whole thing, Wyatt stood awkwardly beside her as the room erupted into applause. He hardly processed the events that followed—the handshakes, congratulations, the signing of the marriage certificate, before he was being shunted off towards the smoke-filled lounge where the officers had assembled. He had no idea where Lucy had gotten to, and though he vaguely understood that he should probably be with her, he was still too damn mortified to care. The whole thing seemed like some kind of bizarre dream—or nightmare—he wasn’t quite sure which as Colonel McKee and John Fraser took him aside making clandestine comments about how he “needn’t worry about starting work around the farm straightaway.”

“I dare say, you’ll have other things to keep you plenty occupied.” Colonel McKee chuckled with a wink.

Wyatt didn’t need him to elaborate on what those “other things” were…and he didn’t want to. This whole situation was getting more awkward by the second as soldier after soldier offered him a drink, shook his hand, and made certain comments about Lucy’s figure, that, if she were really his wife, would have earned them all an ass-kicking.

But she really was his wife, Wyatt recalled with a groan.

They were married.

Probably for the rest of their lives.

And he had seen her.

Naked.

With a shaking hand, he grabbed a proffered drink and downed what tasted like a mixture of rum and hard cider…whatever the hell it was it was…it was strong, warm…and oddly thick. Wyatt gasped and coughed as the liquid burned the back of his throat and sent his head reeling. “What the hell is that?” he managed to croak as he handed off the now empty tumbler.

Laughing heartily, Colonel McKee slapped him on the back, “Surely you’re joking?” At Wyatt’s blank expression, he shook his head and brought forth another tumbler filled to the brim with the frothy concoction. “It’s an old family recipe.” Colonel McKee added with a wink, ”It’ll do you a
world of good….perfect for a night like this.”

Wyatt wasn’t quite so sure he agreed with that statement, but as Colonel McKee was nudging another tumbler towards him, he took it, albeit reluctantly, feeling that he would much rather have a whiskey. His desire to forget this whole damn day, however, far outweighed his objection to the given method. Taking another swig, Wyatt grimaced as he gulped down the potent beverage, feeling again, a sudden rush of lightheadedness as he coughed his way through the after-effects. Deciding it would be safer to get the hell out of there before he lost his senses completely, Wyatt staggered away from the gentlemen as best he could, all of them laughing as he made his way out of the room.

“Ah! There he is, my dear.” John Fraser pointed out to an anxious looking Lucy the moment Wyatt emerged from the lounge. “I told you he was probably having a few drinks with the officers…just a bit of fun, is all.”

Upon seeing Wyatt, Lucy looked both relieved and mortified, but it was nothing to how Wyatt felt looking at her. Between the mishap that morning, the kiss, the alcohol….and the conversations he had just suffered through, his mind was now firmly planted in the damn gutter and there was no way in hell he was going to make it through the rest of the night without making a complete and total fool of himself.

That is, if they didn’t get out of there as soon as possible.

Away from all of this, he figured, things would be back to normal. It would probably take a while to get the image of naked Lucy out of his head, but, he figured, getting back into a normal routine with Lucy…as his team-mate, co-worker and friend, his respect for her would duly supplant the carnal baseness of his current frame of mind.

It was all this pretending – that’s all this was.

“Where have you been?” Lucy hissed out as she quickly made her way over to him. “Do you have any idea what I’ve been going through?”

“Can’t be any worse than what I just went through.” Wyatt muttered back sluggishly.

Narrowing her eyes, Lucy admonished, “Are…are you drunk?”
“No, I’m not drunk.” Wyatt spat out in annoyance, “but if we don’t get the hell out of here soon, I’m gonna be.” Gripping Lucy, by the elbow he urged her towards the hall, “C’mon, let’s go.”

“Leaving so soon?” John Fraser called after him with a grin, “Why, my boy we’ve hardly celebrated! We have a whole evening of dancing and games…”

“Oh John, do let them be.” Mary Fraser admonished, hitting him with her fan, “they’ve just married after all, it’s only natural for them to want to be alone together.”

The thought of being alone with Lucy suddenly didn’t sound as appealing as it had just moments before and so Wyatt dropped her arm and exchanged an uneasy glance with her as he stammered in explanation, “Oh no…it’s okay…we can stay if you…”

“Don’t be silly, my boy!” John Fraser barked out in laughter, “Of course you want to be alone with your new wife, and I don’t think any lad here will think the less of you for it.” He took a hearty sip of the concoction Wyatt had been given and muttered quietly to him, “They’ll be rather envious, I’d wager.”

If the allusions to sex with Lucy had made him uncomfortable surrounded only by men, it was nothing to how he was feeling now…with her standing right beside him. For one brief moment, he harbored a small hope that she hadn’t heard, but one quick glance in her direction revealed the horrifying truth that she absolutely had. There was no denying the furious blush that spread across her cheeks and the awkward way she attempted to act as if nothing had happened. If Wyatt hadn’t been so damn mortified himself, he would have noted how cute Lucy looked when she was rattled, but now was definitely not the time to dwell on her more endearing qualities.

With grim determination, Wyatt gripped Lucy’s elbow and merely offered John Fraser a terse nod in return as he made to lead her into the hall and out the door, but Lucy dug in her heels and held her ground. “Thank you, both.” she said to the Frasers, “For…for all of this…I don’t know how…we can ever repay you for your kindness.” She looked at Wyatt for support, but as he refused to look at her, she continued, “You gave us a place to stay…you did all of this…”

“Don’t think of it, my dear.” John Fraser dismissed with a shake of his head, “It’s not often we get to host a wedding…and to do it with such fanfare as this? It has been our immense pleasure.”

“Indeed, it has.” Mrs. Fraser assured. “I’ve been very grateful for your company and I do hope that you will come by as often as you are able to visit.”
“I’d…I’d like that…thank you.” Lucy nodded with sincere gratitude, but not before Wyatt was once again, attempting to lead her away from the party. “Are you really going to attack Fort Duquesne?” Lucy couldn’t help but ask, as he managed to move her a few steps closer to the hall. John Fraser looked at her in surprise, her anxiety clearly on display as she exchanged a nervous glance with Wyatt, “I mean,” she continued, “that’s what…that’s what I heard.”

Chuckling and shaking his head, John Fraser took Lucy’s hand in his, Now,” he said with soothing kindness, “don’t you give any of this ugly business another thought. You two go off and enjoy yourselves…you’ve been through enough where those French are involved. I have it on good authority,” he said with a nod towards the newly arrived Colonel, “that there’s a good chance we can clear those French rascals out of here before the week is out. Then we can all breathe a little easier.” Lucy made to argue, but John Fraser patted her hand and offered her a small wink, “Best be off now,” he whispered, “your man seems a bit anxious to have you all to himself.”

Wyatt breathed out a curse as he tugged Lucy’s arm once more causing her to stumble as they made their way towards the door. “To the happy couple!” John Fraser announced as they made their way out of the room amidst cheers, whistles and cat calls, Wyatt’s mortification rising with every step until they finally made their escape out the back door.

“Jesus, he breathed out “don’t these people have anything better to do?”

“Yes.” Lucy huffed out as she jogged to keep pace with his long, determined strides, “apparently, they’re going to drive the French out of Fort Duquesne. Wyatt, what are we going to do?”

“I really don’t give a damn about that anymore, Lucy.” Wyatt responded as he continued his relentless march towards their cabin, “I say let them drive those assholes out of here…John Fraser’s right, we’ll all be able to breathe a hell of a lot easier without their army sitting a few miles upstream. I mean, let’s not forget, they think we murdered that…that…jackas”

“His name was Nicolas,” Lucy gritted out, “and believe me, no one would love to see them as far away from us as possible, but Wyatt…”

“But what, Lucy?” Wyatt spat out in exasperation, turning towards her, “We are stranded in 1754…we may never get back to 2016. I think we need to start focusing on what would make our lives better here, not…”

“Wyatt!” she hissed incredulously.
“I mean it, Lucy.” Wyatt said with a determined shake of his head, “We need to start coming to grips with the fact that we could be here…” he trailed off, not able to quite come to grips with that grim reality himself. “Besides,” he added after a few beats, “Flynn has probably screwed up the timeline a hundred times worse by now. What the hell difference does it make if this doesn’t go off exactly the way it’s supposed to, huh?” he asked hotly, “The French lose the war, don’t they?”

“Well…yes, but…”

“But nothing.” Wyatt dismissed, “Lucy, it’s not going to make one damn bit of difference when this…”

“It could make all the difference in the world, Wyatt.” Lucy urged passionately as they approached the cabin, “Listen to me,” she urged, “the whole reason our Revolution begins is because of this war. The cost of protecting the colonies from the French for almost 10 years…it’s what leads the British government to begin taxing…”

“And who is to say that still won’t happen, huh?” Wyatt began as he threw open the door to the cabin. “This war could last just as long, Lucy…we have no idea…and if we aren’t going to make it home, we sure as hell don’t need to worry about it.”

“Oh, that’s a fine thing to say.” she snapped back, “I thought as a soldier you would at least have some pride in your country, some sense of duty.” That had obviously hit a nerve. Wyatt turned to face her, a cold fury written all over his face, but Lucy was not deterred, “You are still a soldier, Wyatt. This is still your country…don’t you want to make sure that everything you ever fought for still exists 200 years from now?”

As much as Wyatt would have loved to argue with her, he knew she was right. As pointless as it seemed to keep caring, he still had a duty to try…even if they may never know whether it would make any difference at all. Bowing his head in defeat, he muttered, “You’re right. I’m sorry…I just…”

“I know.” Lucy murmured back quietly, “But Wyatt…if we can at least make sure this doesn’t change too much…maybe if we do get back…the present won’t be too different, even with Flynn running unchecked with the Mothership. Maybe…maybe we’ll still be able to fix things.”

Wyatt couldn’t help but let out a small chuckle at Lucy’s seemingly unending supply of optimism. After everything they had been through, the impossible odds they faced in returning back home, she still held out hope that they could somehow find their way out of this mess. He couldn’t help but admire her for that. “Well,” he said with a sigh and a slight smirk, “what good is a time
“machine if you can’t use it to fix your regrets, right?”

Lucy smiled at him in return as he ushered her through the door to their new home. A cheerful fire was roaring in the fireplace, dried flowers were in a vase on the table, and the quilt she had labored over was neatly draped across the bed. Stopping short at the sight before her, Lucy gasped before turning to Wyatt with a look of utmost gratitude, “How…how…did…did you do this?”

Wyatt shrugged sheepishly, his cheeks flushing violently, “Well…after…ya know,” he stammered, “I…felt bad about what happened…and I wanted to try to make it up to you and so I thought I could at least get the place looking…” he quickly crossed the room, desperate to get away from her as he pointed out the quilt, “They gave me this at the house…I really didn’t do much…I just…spruced the place up a bit…that’s all.”

Lucy pursed her lips together and smiled, chuckling to herself as she remembered all the unnecessary worry that quilt had caused. “Well,” Lucy began with a smirk, “you did give me a bit of a shock…”

“I know…and I’m…God, Lucy…I’m so sorry.” Wyatt stammered out, unable to look at her. “I was just…I was an ass last night and I wanted to apologize and then the soldiers came and…” he swallowed hard before continuing, “I…I should have knocked, I’m sorry.”

Lucy nodded, feeling suddenly uncomfortable being alone with Wyatt in a fire lit room. Trying to brush off her uneasiness, she shrugged, “Well…if it’s all the same to you,” she said, looking more to her feet than to Wyatt, “I’d just like to forget it ever happened.”

“Uh…yeah…yeah…sure…me too.” Wyatt stammered awkwardly, though he knew that was going to be a hell of a lot easier said than done…especially in their current surroundings. It hadn’t occurred to him, when he was setting all of this up earlier, that it would border on the romantic…but hell, if it wasn’t painfully obvious now. It wasn’t enough that he had seen Lucy naked earlier, but now here she was standing before him, his wife, on their wedding night, bathed in glowing firelight…and the result was absolutely breathtaking.

Shit.

He must have been staring, because Lucy suddenly turned away from him awkwardly, looking as if she would rather be anywhere but there. As if to assure her that he had no intention of breaking his promise that theirs was a platonic marriage, Wyatt pointed out, “Um…you…you’ll get the bed, of course…I’m…I’m sleeping up there…in the loft. I figure…you’d…you’d be more comfortable that way.” Rushing forward suddenly he lifted a small trunk from the foot of the bed and flipped it
open, “Oh and I almost forgot,” he stammered nervously, “that housekeeper packed you a nightgown and another dress in here…so…you…you…ya know…”

“Don’t have to sleep in my underwear?” Lucy answered with a chuckle. “Really, Wyatt…thank you for all of this…I know this isn’t easy for you.”

“It’s fine.” Wyatt answered with gritted determination, “It’s just…part of the job, right?”

“Right.” Lucy breathed out, before turning around, her eyes narrowed in confusion, “Where…um…where should I change?” she asked, lifting the nightgown.

“Oh.” Wyatt answered blankly, “I…I didn’t…shit…I can…I can step outside…”

“Okay.” Lucy nodded awkwardly as Wyatt began making a beeline to the door. Before he was able to make his escape, however, she called back to him, her voice thick with apology, “Wyatt? It's just….my dress…and the corset…I can’t…I’m sorry.”

Running a rough hand over his face, Wyatt breathed out a curse before turning on his heel and marching back towards a sorrowful Lucy who offered apologetically, “If you can just…loosen it…I think I can manage the rest…”

“Fine.” Wyatt said curtly, impatient for this whole ordeal to just be over with. He waited as Lucy turned away from him and quickly removed her bodice and skirt, until she was standing awkwardly before him dressed in only her chemise, petticoat and corset. Inwardly cursing, Wyatt rubbed a rough hand over his eyes before clearing his throat and setting to work on the tight knots securing her corset. He tried to keep his focus on the knots…and only the knots, but the more he tried to focus, the more his traitorous brain kept sending him back to fateful moment inside the bathhouse. As he worked to loosen her binds, images of her bare skin flashed unbidden in his mind, until his fingers began to shake, finally giving way as they fumbled uselessly against her corset strings.

“Wyatt?” Lucy asked tentatively, slowly turning her head, “Did…did you get it?” she asked, before turning fully to face him.

God, how he wished she hadn’t done that.

Standing this close to her, with the firelight dancing across her features, he was completely
mesmerized; transfixed by the incandescent glow alight in her dark brown eyes. Those eyes that had sought his so many times on countless missions, those pleading eyes that had pulled him back from the brink in 1836, those eyes that seemed to somehow pierce through his armor and see right into his very soul. There was no denying that Lucy had some kind of hold on him...something he could not readily explain...and did not want explained.

That would only complicate things.

She was his friend, his team-mate...and yet, as he stood there before her, fighting an unholy battle within himself, a part of him knew that an explanation wasn’t really necessary. He just couldn’t bring himself to admit it.

“Wyatt?” Lucy asked tentatively, her brow furrowed in confusion. “Are you having trouble with the knot again?”

Swallowing hard, Wyatt managed to nod in affirmation, desperate for her to turn away from him so that he might at least having a fighting chance against...whatever the hell this was. But she didn’t. Instead, she reached out and squeezed his arm, a look of genuine concern on her face as she asked, “Are you feeling alright?”

No, he wasn’t feeling alright. He could feel himself slipping. The self-control he had exercised for years, the armor he had so proudly worn out of guilt, duty and devotion was now cracking under the penetrating gaze of one tiny, brunette historian. He needed out, he needed air, he needed....

“Lucy! Wyatt! You got to come quick...we’ve got a problem!” Rufus bounded through the door frantically, breathless and panting, holding a stitch in his side as Wyatt and Lucy jumped apart in shock at the sudden intrusion.

While Wyatt took a moment to pull himself together, Lucy rushed forward in concern, “What? What’s wrong?” she asked, panicked. “Rufus, what happened?”

“The French.” he gasped out, almost painfully, “They just showed up out of nowhere...started shooting the place up, set fire to the camp.”

Without a moment’s hesitation, Wyatt quickly made his way to the door, followed directly by Lucy who peered over his shoulder into the dark night beyond. Except it wasn’t dark. Just beyond the
small ridge, a faint orange glow illuminated the night sky, bringing into sharp focus the dark shapes illuminated in its fiery glow, battling in its wake. Clenching his jaw, Wyatt turned and retrieved his knife and handgun from the corner, before handing a similar handgun to Rufus “You two stay here,” he ordered with grim determination, “shoot anything that comes through that door, you hear me?”

Rufus looked back at him blankly, but it was Lucy who responded, stepping towards him, “What are you going to do?”

“What do you think I’m going to do?” Wyatt asked incredulously, “I’m going to help.”

“What? No! Wyatt, they’ll kill you.”

“Haven’t killed me yet.” he said with a sigh as he added more bullets to his clip. As Lucy made to argue, he cut her off, “What the hell am I supposed to do Lucy? Sit here and do nothing while the French burn up the whole damn countryside? Kill our friends? Destroy the British army?” He offered her a meaningful glare as she continued to battle with him, “I’m still a soldier, Lucy…don’t I have a duty to protect my country?”

“Yes, but Wyatt…” Lucy attempted weakly, knowing full well it was no use. He had used her own words against her, after all…and she knew, of course, that he was right…they could not stand by and let the French destroy everything and everyone they had come to rely on. And if the French defeated that company of British soldiers tonight, what would happen with the rest of the war? No, they had to do something…but Wyatt couldn’t afford to fall into French hands again. None of them could. “I’m going with you.” Lucy demanded.

“The hell you are.” Wyatt spat back. “You and Rufus are staying right here…I’ve got enough to worry about without…”

“They could easily find us here, Wyatt.” Lucy argued again, “And besides, you’ve…you’ve been drinking…you’re not in any state to…”

“I’m fine.” Wyatt dismissed as he marched towards the door, but Lucy barred his way causing him to throw back his head in exasperation, “Lucy…what the hell do you think you’re doing?”

“You’re not going out there alone.” she demanded.
“I won’t be alone.” he reminded her, “There’s about a hundred or so soldiers out there…”

“Who have also been drinking…”

“It’s the 18th century, Lucy.” Wyatt quipped sarcastically, “everybody has been drinking. Now get out of my way.” he demanded, but still, she refused to move. “You’re not coming and that’s final.” he argued, his voice filled with frustration.

“You don’t get to tell me what to do.” Lucy gritted back.

At that, Wyatt smirked. “On the contrary, ma’am,” he began brazenly, “an hour ago, you stood before everyone in that room and promised to obey me.” Lucy’s jaw dropped open in indignant horror as Wyatt turned serious again, “Now, go on…let me do my job.” he pleaded. Furious tears sprang to Lucy’s eyes as Wyatt turned to their friend, “Rufus?” he called as the time machine pilot slowly pulled her away from the door, “Keep her safe.”

Rufus nodded his assurance as Lucy called after Wyatt desperately, “Just…just be careful…okay?”

“You too.” Wyatt replied with a serious nod, before stepping off the small porch and disappearing into the blazing fields beyond.

Chapter End Notes

I would like to thank you all once again for your great patience. Things have been very hectic around here since the holidays and will most likely remain so until we can get all of the medical things ironed out for my daughter and whatever this means for our next assignment. Red-tape is a very real and frustrating process and we are currently in literal limbo until all of these details get squared away and those details require lots of paperwork, meetings and phone calls...so again...it's just nuts over here, so I am so so appreciative of your patience and continued readership. I hate leaving you all hanging...and yes, I know I'm still working on both WMHB and Once Upon a Highway...but those are taking a bit of a backseat to this story (though I should be updating Once Upon a Highway soon)

Now for the actual story notes: They're MARRIED. No it isn't the wedding of ANYONE's dreams...but that was by design. The whole situation is extremely awkward for both of them and they're both silently struggling against their own growing feelings for one another.

The drink that Wyatt had is an actual 18th century drink called flip. It's was made with
eggs, cream, pumpkin or molasses and rum, beer and then it was stirred up with a red hot poker to make it frothy and warm...it was very popular in its day.

If you thought we were done with the French, think again! This is the French and Indian war after all and Wyatt's actions have consequences. We'll see what those are in the remaining chapters. Just a side note: I finished the last chapter of this fic at the same time I finished the very first chapter....so now we're just working our way to the end.

I hope you enjoyed this update. Thank you again for reading and I hope you have a great day.

And those of you who review, thank you. Your words really do inspire me and lift me up during these very stressful times. Some days it is hard to find the willpower to write after a very long and frustrating day of dealing with government officials, so when I get those comments of encouragement, they do help. So again, thank you.
The stinging smell of smoke assaulted Wyatt’s nostrils the closer he came to John Fraser’s home. Coughing and choking as he raced along the road, he could feel the intensity of the battle before he ever even laid eyes on it. The sound of musket fire, echoing across the western Pennsylvania hillsides, resonated deep within him - every crack, every explosion seeming to rattle him to his very core. The warmth from the fire, too, could be felt long before he even ascended the ridgeline. It would have been enough to make any man anxious for the fate that awaited him beyond these hills, but it was a fate Wyatt was determined to meet with a vengeance.

When Wyatt left Lucy and Rufus behind in that cabin, he had done so with an anxious determination to help the people who had done so much for them in their hours of need. As Lucy had not so subtly reminded him earlier, he was a soldier and he had a duty, not only to protect his team, but to also protect history…and the people in it. He would be lying, however, if he claimed that was the only reason for his unwavering resolve to charge headlong into battle.

The truth was that though Rufus’ interruption filled him with a decent amount of trepidation over the situation unfolding at John Fraser’s home, it had also been one of welcome relief.

Lucy had been too damn close…and undressing her was not the way he needed to end a day that had been filled with images of her naked body, countless innuendos, and too much…way too much alcohol. Hell no…that would have just been asking for trouble. What he needed was a distraction…and taking out his frustration on the French couldn’t have been a more perfect one.

After chasing them through the woods like animals, nearly killing him, trying to sell Rufus into slavery, putting Lucy through absolute hell with all the abuse she was forced to endure at their hands, in short…after everything damn thing they had done to them since they landed in this century, he was more than happy for the opportunity to give them some of their own back.

But it was a hell of a lot tougher than he imagined it would be.

When he finally arrived on the scene, it was complete and total pandemonium. He was no stranger to war and had seen his fair share of chaotic battlefields, but in all his years and training as a Delta Force soldier had he ever witnessed anything quite like this. The entire British camp was engulfed in flames that were spreading rapidly to the surrounding fields and outer buildings of the farm. The unfortunate British soldiers who were caught unawares by the attack, frantically ran from the
scene as fire consumed them…and this only served to spread the fire even further. Those who weren’t caught up in the inferno were engaged in desperately fierce hand to hand combat even as agitated horses broke free of their hitching posts and ran freely around the property, whinnying and tossing their heads nervously as they trampled over the wounded and dying. The cries from the horses and the wounded men were nothing to the blood-curdling screams from the Native American warriors, however. Their shrill battle cry had been enough to make Wyatt’s hair stand on end - but seeing them in action, mercilessly killing and hacking away at the British soldiers they ambushed from the shadows, was something he wouldn’t soon forget.

Despite the horror before him, he nevertheless dove into the fray, holding his own against Frenchmen and Indian alike, soon working in tandem with British soldiers to drive a good number of the French off the property and back down to the river. It hadn’t been without a few close calls, but he had emerged from the heat of battle relatively unscathed.

That is until he came back on the scene to find a whole new wave of French soldiers had descended on the farm, picking off soldiers and civilians alike attempting to put out the fires that were now consuming much of the property. Taking cover behind an overturned wagon, Wyatt found himself next to a slightly frazzled looking Colonel McKee who was rapidly firing musket shots with devastating accuracy into the bodies of their would-be attackers. “Wyatt, my lad!” he said with much surprise as he reloaded his gun, “what on Earth are you doing here? You should be with your wife.”

“And miss all this fun?” Wyatt scoffed as he made a few shots of his own, “wouldn’t dream of it, sir. Where the hell did these assholes come from anyway?” he spat out as he ducked to miss a musket ball aimed at him, “We just pushed a whole mess of them back down to the damn river.”

“Over the fields.” Colonel McKee said with a nod, “They appear to have used a flanking maneuver. I must say, they definitely had the element of surprise.”

Wyatt was inclined to agree with him, though he was in no position to discuss the French battle strategy, he was out of musket shot and while he still had his own handgun, he thought that pulling it out in front of Colonel McKee would probably not be the best idea in terms of keeping their cover. Throwing down his now useless weapon, he turned to Colonel McKee, “Where does John keep his extra guns? The ones he makes?”

“The barn.” came Colonel McKee’s short answer, “but you’ll be hard-pressed to get there without some sort of cover.” he pointed out seriously, “they’ve got that whole area pinned down something fierce.”

“Then I’ll just have to be careful.” Wyatt said tersely, preparing to run.
Seeing that he was serious, Colonel McKee ordered two of his men to go with Wyatt, instructing them to bring back as much ammunition as they could carry. With the promise of help, Wyatt took off as fast as his legs could carry him. Though the smoke and haze made seeing potential dangers difficult, it also made him difficult to spot. He, therefore, reached the barn with very little difficulty, handing off weapons and bags of ammunition to the men who had followed him. Once resupplied, they made their way back out and into a virtual firestorm. Musket fire exploded all around them, forcing them back into shelter of the barn as they did their best to return the volley.

Above the din of the sounds of battle, Wyatt could hear panicked screams and shouts that made his blood run cold. They weren’t male…they were female…and his mind immediately went to Lucy. Peering through the smoke, Wyatt could just make out the shadows of skirted figures, cowering as they were being dragged from the kitchen…which was now ablaze with fire. Frantic, Wyatt bolted from the safety of the barn, only to find that it was not Lucy at all, but Mary Fraser and her maid, Margaret being pulled from the kitchen by John Fraser who was shouting that Mrs. Poe was still inside. “I’ll get her, you get them to safety.” Wyatt called as he dove in the building, finding the housekeeper cowering in the corner with a half-filled water bucket and a rag placed over her mouth, coughing and sputtering uncontrollably “Come on!” he shouted, “we need to get you out of here!”

Grabbing her by the arm, Wyatt pulled her out of the blazing building and quickly made his way to the woodshed where a bloody John Fraser had barricaded his wife and her young maid. He turned to thank Wyatt for his efforts and bravery when a ruckus erupted near the forge, drawing their attention to that side of the field.

It was Tom battling off five Frenchman as they charged towards the yard of the forge armed not with muskets, but with torches, ready to burn it to the ground. “Not again, you bastards!” John Fraser growled angrily as he took off running at high speed to aid his blacksmith, who was, at that moment, loading a musket in a desperate attempt to defend his ground.

“John, wait!” Wyatt shouted, racing after him, but John Fraser was already half-way to the battle erupting in front of the forge. Tom had taken down two Frenchman already and was battling a third when John Fraser arrived, but the torches they were carrying had caught the wooden colonnade on fire, threatening to engulf the roof. Throwing himself, into the fray, John Fraser shot with his flintlock, only to have it misfire and burn his hand, causing him to drop it as the Frenchman now turned on him. Seeing that the two French soldiers had pulled out their flintlocks, Wyatt quickly pulled out his own gun, pausing slightly as he fired two shots that dropped both of them before they even had a chance to so much as aim. Charging forward, Wyatt found John hovering over Tom, desperately attempting to rouse him as the forge rapidly burned around them. “John!” Wyatt shouted over the roaring of the flames, “we need to get the hell out of here!”

“Not without Tom!” he yelled back as the blacksmith shook his head and attempted to get to his feet, stumbling as he did so.
Desperate to get them both to safety, Wyatt rushed forth through the heavy smoke, his lungs burning from the poisonous fumes, as he attempted to help John Fraser get a disoriented Tom to his feet. The roof creaked and groaned ominously around them, but nothing would deter John Fraser from his efforts. Desperately, Wyatt got himself under Tom’s arm, lifting him from the floor with a grunt, but no sooner had they made to cross over the threshold of the yard than the entire overhang, consumed in flame, collapsed upon them with a fiery crash.

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“Where do you think you’re going?”

Lucy, clad in her nightgown, had just finished stepping into her shoes securing a heavy shawl over her shoulders when Rufus stepped in front of the door to the cabin, blocking her intended path. Not at all dissuaded by this action, Lucy tossed her head back defiantly, “I am going to find Wyatt, Rufus.” she replied haughtily though there was a touch of anxiety in her voice, “It’s been hours.”

“Nu-uh, no way,” Rufus spat out as he shook his head emphatically, “I let you out of here and Wyatt will kick my ass from here all the way back to 2016.”

“Yes, I mean it, Lucy.” he grunted as he wrestled her arm away from the handle, “Wyatt told me to keep you safe and that is exactly what I’m going to do,” he gave her a meaningful glare as she threatened him, adding, “Yeah, whatever Lucy…he’s a hell of a lot scarier than you.”

Resigning with a heavy sigh, Lucy stomped to the far side of the room and plopped down on the bed, “He could be in trouble, Rufus.” she argued nervously, “he could be hurt, shot…what if he needs our help? Huh? I really don’t want to be a widow on my wedding day, you know.”

“I’m sure he’s fine.” Rufus assured her, though the strain in his voice bespoke his own anxiety over the situation. Wyatt had been gone for a long time, though that was hardly surprising. They could hear the sounds of musket fire echoing across the fields…they saw the tell-tale signs of fire, heard the screams from the horses…but it had been at least an hour since an eerie silence had fallen
over the Pennsylvania wilderness…and yet, there was still no sign of the Delta Force soldier. Rufus shrugged uneasily, “I’m sure he’s just…you know…helping out with the wounded…or something.”

“Or he’s wounded.” Lucy muttered as Rufus toyed with the now dying fire in the fireplace. Unable to stand it anymore, she darted back towards the door, this time reaching the handle before Rufus could bar her way. He did, however, grab her elbow as she made to leave, causing her to turn back to him with pleading eyes, “We have to check, Rufus…please.” she begged, “I can’t just sit here and do nothing.”

Rufus bit his lip in thought, obviously conflicted. His mandate from Wyatt was to protect Lucy…but what if she was right? What if Wyatt did need their help? What if he was lying out there, somewhere in a field and no one thought to look for him because he was supposed to be “enjoying his wedding night?” Peering out of the window, he noted that the sky, though hazy from the remnants of smoke, was no longer an ominous shade of orange. “Okay,” he nodded slowly, releasing her elbow, “fine…but I’m going with you.”

Grateful for both the company and the support, Lucy breathed a sigh of relief as Rufus opened the door and ushered her out into the cool, dark night. As swiftly and silently as they could, they made their way together down the winding dirt path, over the ridge to where John Fraser’s home lay beyond the fields…fields that were now a smoldering wasteland.

“Oh my God” Lucy gasped as they took in the ghastly scene of destruction before them. Scattered flames still dotted the now scorched landscape, a grim reminder of what had been wrought by the French ambush. While John Fraser’s home still loomed proudly in the distance, the dying bits of firelight cast unnerving shadows across the devastation that lay in its wake. The forge, kitchen and wash house had all but been laid to waste; their ruins stood like blackened skeletons stretching their haggard limbs towards an even darker sky. Scorched and smoking fields seemed to stretch on forever. Horses ran through the grounds, agitated and confused, tossing their heads back nervously as they wandered aimless, through the once pristine yard that was now littered with the wounded, dead or dying.

“Rufus,” she gasped, her lip trembling at the sight, “there’s…there’s so many of them.”

“Yeah.” he replied thickly as he scanned the grounds, the groans from the wounded sending a chill up his spine. As Lucy let out a little whimper beside him, Rufus gripped blindly for her hand, doing his best to offer her some kind of comfort…though he was just as horrified as she was.
“Come on,” she urged, her voice quavering with emotion, “Let’s…let’s see what we can do to help.” With shaking knees, they made their way down the lane until they reached the first line of casualties. Desperately hoping she wouldn’t find Wyatt among them, Lucy made her way through the lines scanning the faces of countless men…some French, some Native…but mostly British. Some of them reached out to her, tugging at her nightdress with bloodied hands as they writhed in absolute agony, while others stared off in the distance, their vision caught by something unknown and unknowable, their labored and shallow breathing signaling the rapid approach of their untimely ends.

Stumbling and tripping her way through the casualty ranks, Lucy attempted to comfort those who pleaded with her, but she was no doctor…she had no training in any of this. “I…I’m going to get you help.” she promised time and time again, but out here in the wilderness, she wasn’t sure what kind of help that would even be. A few field hands were offering water to those who wanted it, but beyond that, she saw very little in the way of triage. Looking to Rufus helplessly, she cried, “I…I don’t know what to do…he’s not here.”

“Well, that’s a good thing, right?” Rufus offered as he swallowed hard.

“Is it?” she cried, almost panicking now, “Where is he? Rufus, the French could have taken him, he could be out there in a field somewhere…hurt…dead…dying…”

“Hey.” he soothed, gripping her arms, “Listen to me, Lucy…it’s Wyatt…okay? He…”

“…always comes through.” she finished for him, with a determined nod of her head. “Right…he’s fine…he’s fine.” she muttered repeatedly as if trying to convince herself of that fact.

“Come on,” Rufus urged as he spied a couple of soldiers carrying a wounded man into the house, “maybe he’s inside…”

With a renewed sense of hope, Lucy followed Rufus into John Fraser’s home only to find herself filled with a renewed sense of trepidation and dread from the chaotic and grisly scene inside. Blood pooled on the floorboards in the hall, seeping out from rooms that had become makeshift surgeries. Soldiers were rushing throughout the house, carrying bandages and sheets, ripping them to shreds in a frantic attempt to burgeon up their dwindling medical supplies. The sights and smells were enough to overwhelm anyone, but it was the screams of the wounded as desperate measures were undertaken to save their lives that nearly sent Lucy reeling.

Feeling her swoon, Rufus gripped her arm tightly and ushered her towards the front of the house where, it appeared, the recovering soldiers were resting, lying on the floor of the room where her
wedding to Wyatt had taken place. “Heavens, child!” came Mrs. Poe’s voice as Lucy looked helplessly around the room, “What on Earth are you doing here?” she exclaimed as she laid down her tray and rushed to Lucy’s side. She was more frazzled than Lucy had ever seen her; her usually tight bun was now loose with strands of her greying hair haphazardly falling in strands about her shoulders. Her dress was marred with blood and gore and while Lucy didn’t look much better, what with her traipsing through the ranks of the dead and dying earlier, to see the typically starched and pressed Mrs. Poe looking wholly disheveled was enough to make Lucy gape at her awkwardly as she pulled her towards an unoccupied corner of the room. “You’re in a right state.” she clucked as she dipped a rag in a water basin and began washing the blood and dirt from Lucy’s hands, “You aren’t hurt, are you?”

“No.” Lucy assured her breathlessly, her eyes now darting around the room,

“Did those French ambush your place the way they did our’n?” Lucy shook her head in reply, not able to find her voice…but Mrs. Poe had no problem finding hers. With a look of sharp rebuke she shook her head and muttered, “Then there was no call for you to run out of doors dressed only in your nightgown, land sakes, child…will you never learn?”

Of all the times Lucy had suffered under the appraising and critical eye of Mrs. Poe, this proved to be the most insufferable. Already on edge, Lucy was in no mood to be the housekeeper’s punching bag…especially not in a time like this. “Where’s Wyatt?” she snapped, but almost immediately she felt guilty for her outburst, as Mrs. Poe, far from retorting back with another quip, offered her a sympathetic smile.

“Of course, you’d be worried.” she answered softly, patting her hand gently, “You’ll have to forgive this old woman, my dear…it’s been a long time since I was newly married.” Sighing as she dried her hands on her apron, she nudged Lucy through to the next room, motioning for Rufus to follow, “He was knocked about a bit, but he insists he’s fine.” she promised as she nudged her into the next room, “it was mighty surprise seeing him join the fighting, being a Quaker and all…but he saved more than a few lives tonight.” she explained as she continued to usher Lucy along, “Master Fraser’s included…”

Lucy wanted to ask her the specifics of Wyatt’s heroics, but at the moment she hardly cared. As they crossed over the threshold of the dining room, there was Wyatt, dirty and bloodied, but very much alive, working in tandem with, whom Lucy could only suppose to be, the military surgeon over the pale and agonizing figure of John Fraser.

“What…what happened?” Lucy asked breathlessly.

“I hardly know myself.” Mrs. Poe admitted quietly, “Your man was getting all of us to safety when Master Fraser saw that the French had Tom cornered in that forge of his.” She shook her head, “He
ran right out into harm’s way to save him…and so too, did Mr. Wyatt, there.” She let out a shaky sigh as she wiped her eyes on her soiled apron, “We watched as that whole place collapsed all around them, thinking the worst…but then, like a miracle, here he comes,” she said nodding towards Wyatt, “dragging Master Fraser to safety, with good old Tom following right behind.” Lucy exchanged an anxious glance with Rufus before Mrs. Poe added in explanation, “They all got a little singed…but Master Fraser…”

A blood-curdling scream and curse filled the room, causing Lucy’s stomach to turn as John Fraser writhed in pain on the dining room table. “We’ve very nearly got it John.” the surgeon was calling out to him soothingly, “Just a little more and we’ll have it out.”

The “it” he was referring to, Lucy noted for the first time as the surgeon moved slightly, was a large splintered piece of wood jutting out of his leg. Seeing this, however, proved to be too much for Lucy. She felt her knees give way and was vaguely aware of some sort of commotion around her before a strong odor assaulted her nostrils and she found herself half sitting, half laying on a chaise in the hallway with Mrs. Poe waving a small vial in front of her face.

“What the hell, Rufus?” Wyatt was arguing loudly from the doorway to the dining room, “I thought I told you to keep her away from here?”

“Have you met Lucy?” Rufus exclaimed defensively, “You know how stubborn she is…”

“Wyatt,” Lucy argued weakly, dismissing Mrs. Poe’s admonitions that she sit back and rest with a wave of her hand, “we were worried…what did you expect us to do?”

“I expected you to do what I asked you to do.” Wyatt gritted out as he threw his head back in frustration, “This isn’t any place for…”turning towards her in annoyance, his eyes widened at the sight of blood streaks all over her nightgown, “What happened?” he asked in concern as he stepped towards her anxiously, “Are you hurt?”

“No, I’m fine,” she dismissed, “but you’re not.” she noted, observing just how “singed” he actually was. The entire right side of his shirt was completely burned away, revealing blistered and bleeding skin all along his torso, “Wyatt, you’re hurt…you need….”

“Dammit Lucy…” he breathed out, tired and exasperated, “You shouldn’t be here.” he argued, “I told you to stay at the house.”
“And I told *you* that you can’t to tell me what to do.” she spat back at him, digging her heels in stubbornly. “I waited for you for *hours*, Wyatt. Anything could have happened to you…how was I supposed to know whether…” Tears sprang to her eyes as she gritted out in a voice thick with emotion, “I mean…we already thought you were dead once…”

“Lucy,” Wyatt groaned, “I told *you*, I would be fine…”

Looking up at him sharply, she shook her head in disbelief, “Well, I’m sorry…but it’s kind of hard to believe that when we’ve heard *nothing* from you…”

“Look, I’m sorry about that, alright?” he maintained as more injured soldiers came filing in. Seeing this, Wyatt rubbed a hand across his face, “Look, just…just go back to the house, alright? I’ll be back there as soon as I can.”

Rufus nodded and made to leave, but once again, Lucy dug in her heels. “No.” she said with a determined scowl, “I want to help.”

Wyatt let out a derisive laugh, “You got to be kidding me? Lucy, you literally *just* passed out.”

“So?” she argued weakly, attempting, but failing, to get to her feet, “There’s got to be other things I can do…right?” she asked with a hopeful look to Mrs. Poe. “Making bandages, giving out water…”

Wyatt looked wholly unconvinced, but anxious to get back to assisting himself, he finally nodded in resignation, “Fine….do whatever the hell you want” he said with a huff, “but if you pass out again…you’re done.” he added with a meaningful nod to Rufus, “I mean, it…if she so much as flinches, she goes straight home, you got that?”

Rufus nodded in agreement, “I got it…” he assured Wyatt who nodded and turned back into the dining room, “but it’s not me you have to worry about.” Rufus muttered when he was out of earshot, “It’s *her*.”

With Wyatt back assisting the military surgeon, Mrs. Poe turned to Lucy, “Come on then, dear.” she urged, helping her off the couch, “There’s plenty of work to go around, no sense sitting here all day.” With a heave she pulled Lucy to her feet, steadying her as she wavered slightly on the spot.
It took her a few seconds to get her bearings, but once the room stopped spinning, she cast an anxious glance towards Rufus who was observing her intently. With an indignant shake of her head, she pointed an accusing finger at him and retorted, “That doesn’t count.”

With a doubtful sneer, Rufus scoffed, “Sure it doesn’t.”

“It doesn’t, Rufus.” she maintained, “I feel fine. I just…got up too soon, that’s all.”

“Whatever you say, Lucy. It’s just my ass Wyatt’s going to kick if anything happens to you.” he murmured sarcastically.

“Rufus,” Lucy maintained, “I’m fine. I promise. I wouldn’t have even passed out if it weren’t for…I mean, I just wasn’t expecting…”

“The splinter from hell?” he offered as Lucy nodded in agreement, swallowing hard, “yeah, that makes two of us.”

“Are you two going to stand around talking all night or are you going to get to work?” Mrs. Poe barked out to them from the doorway of the lounge, “There’s a good number of lads here who could do with a drop of tonic…and that’s not counting the poor souls outside.”

Exchanging an anxious glance with Rufus, Lucy swallowed hard again, determined to prove she was made of firmer stuff as she called to the housekeeper, “We’ll be right there.”

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Wyatt’s entire body felt like it was on fire. Every move he made was excruciatingly painful, but much as he had done countless times in the field, he ignored his own discomfort and focused his attention on the bigger picture…and the bigger picture here was making things right.

It was he who had burned down that wall of Fort Duquesne, after all and it was because of that vulnerability the British soldiers ventured from Fort Cumberland and set up camp here. Wyatt was positive, given that that camp was the first area hit in this ambush, that the French only attacked them because they were tracking the British army.
But ultimately, it was because of him.

Them.

And after the kindness that John Fraser and Colonel McKee had bestowed upon them over the past few weeks, he could hardly sit by and allow them to suffer for the mistakes he had made.

Not that saving Lucy was a mistake…but maybe he could have found another way in…or maybe he could have just kept his damn mouth shut and not told Colonel McKee how he had managed to get her out of that hell hole. But it didn’t matter now, did it? The French had anticipated the British strategy, made their preliminary hit…and well, now, the only thing that mattered was fixing it…and that’s exactly what he intended to do…one bloodied soldier at a time.

He was no medic, that was for damn sure, but being in the US Army meant you got a crash course in self-aid buddy care for those all too often moments in the field where the only person you had to rely on was you…or the guy next to you. He knew the basics of first-aid and then some…could patch up a bullet wound, set a broken bone, hell, he had even delivered a baby…but musket balls and hatchet wounds were a whole different beast. Upon impact, the balls would flatten, leaving large gaping wounds…it was essentially like being hit by a small cannonball and the devastation they caused, for some, gave them no choice but to take the affected limb…if there was any limb left to save, that is. All too often, those who had been struck by musket fire were led into the house, cradling nothing but a bloody stump.

It was nothing like Wyatt had ever witnessed before.

The musket may have been inaccurate as hell, but it was devastatingly deadly.

As he worked into the night, cleaning and sewing up wounds, applying tourniquets, and treating burns, he would catch small glimpses of Lucy running in and out of rooms with fresh bandages or a pitcher of water, surprising him with how well she was handling the grisly scenes all around her. True, she looked a little pale…but given that she was absolutely not used to this, it was hardly surprising. As the night wore on, Lucy was called upon to assist the surgeon with some of the lesser wounds…small burns and grazes…freeing up Wyatt to handle the tougher scenarios. In the quiet moments in between patients, however, he would glance over to where Lucy was learning how to make a paste or a salve and smile, hardly believing that the woman who could hardly stomach seeing the bullet in his gut in 1865, could be playing nurse in a makeshift 18th century hospital.

“What on Earth could you possibly be smiling at?”
Startling, Wyatt quickly set to washing his hands in a rough basin as Rufus set down a fresh supply of boiled water. Eyeing him suspiciously, Rufus cast a quick glance to where Wyatt had been looking only to see Lucy, carefully wrapping the arm of a wounded soldier. “Uh-huh...nevermind.” he said with a slight chuckle.

Pretending he didn’t hear him, Wyatt dried his hands and coughed before asking, “You need me to um...help you with the rest of that water or...what?” he asked in annoyance as Rufus kept smiling at him. “Seriously, man...what?”

“You...looking at Lucy...and smiling like some lovesick creep, that’s what.”

“I don’t know what the hell you are talking about, Rufus.”

“Oh don’t give me that.” he hissed back at him as Wyatt crossed into another room in search of somebody...anybody else to work on, “You’ve been making eyes at Lucy since we got here...hell, since before we got here...don’t think I don’t know that you weren’t out of your mind with jealousy when ol’ Ian Fleming was in that Nazi castle holding her hand.”

Wyatt stared daggers at Rufus as he spat out defensively, “He was an asshole. He almost got her killed. Hell, he almost got all of us killed.”

“Uh-huh,” Rufus nodded in total skepticism, “and the seatbelt thing, what is that?”

Wyatt stared back at him blankly, “What seatbelt thing?” he asked with a shrug.

Rufus gaped at him in disbelief, “Oh come on, Wyatt...you buckle her in every damn time we get in the Lifeboat...like she can’t do it herself.” Rolling his eyes, he muttered, “She’s only a grown-ass woman.”

“She can’t do it herself,” Wyatt snapped back, clearly uncomfortable with this conversation, “she can’t...get the straps right.” he reasoned awkwardly as Rufus looked at him, highly amused, “I’m serious.” Wyatt maintained hotly, “If we waited around for Lucy to buckle herself in, there’d be no reason to even go on a damn mission, Flynn would have changed history and come back by the time she got it right.”

“Okay, okay...whatever you say.” Rufus gaped, “no need to get all upset.”
“I’m not upset,” he spat out as he began backing out of the room in an attempt to get as far away from Rufus as possible, “I just don’t know why the hell you have to make a big deal about it.” Before Rufus could respond, Wyatt quickly turned to find refuge on the other side of the house, only to run smack dab into Lucy.

“Watch out!” she exclaimed, but it was too late—she fell right into Wyatt…or, rather…he fell into her, the armful of bandages she was carrying falling in piles at her feet. “Sorry,” she muttered, I didn’t see…are…are you okay?” she asked Wyatt in concern, seeing that he was now clenching the doorway, his face contorted in agony.

“I’m fine.” he gritted out through his teeth…but that was clearly a lie. It was blatantly obvious he was in pain and Lucy immediately called him on it.

“You are not fine.” she admonished, “Wyatt, you need to have those burns checked.”

He knew she was right, of course…but right now, especially after his conversation with Rufus, he was much more concerned with getting the hell away from the both of them. “I promise.” Wyatt grunted as he allowed is hand to slip from the doorframe, “I’ll put something on them before we go, alright?”

Lucy rose to her feet as Wyatt made to move past her, “That’s not good enough, Wyatt. You should have put something on it right away…you could get an infection, or…”

“I’d probably get an infection anyway,” Wyatt jabbed, “look around this place, Lucy…it’s not exactly sanitary.”

“No…and well, the medical practices are a bit…medieval,” she conceded, “but, Wyatt…”

“Lucy, it’s fine.” he maintained as he skirted past her…knowing full well that he was not fine.

Not even by a long shot.

He had burns before and while they had hurt like hell, this…this was something different. He had been distracted from his own suffering while working on the soldiers. His guilt for being
somewhat responsible for all this mess…and his concern for John Fraser’s condition had allowed him to work through his own pain and focus on helping others. With those distractions gone…and now, with this unfortunate run-in with Lucy, he was very much aware of the throbbing pain in his side as he clandestinely swiped some bandages and ointment from an open medical kit and headed to the only place he figured he would find some privacy….John Fraser’s wash room.

Hissing in pain, he removed his shirt, gasping as pieces of it stuck to his charred skin as he tried to pull it away from his body. He skin was dark red, nearly black in some places, with yellow pustules forming over the worse parts. He knew he needed to clean the area and then put something on to help soothe the burn, but he was pretty sure iodine wasn’t going to cut it. He picked up the second bottle he swiped, “Calomel” he muttered, “What the hell is that?”

At a loss of what to do, Wyatt tried to clean his wound with soap and water, thinking that would be the next best thing….but though there was fresh water in the basin and a large bar of soap readily available for his use, try as he might, he could not quite reach all of his seared skin. Cursing, he threw down his wash rag, rubbing a hand over his face as he contemplated what to do. Stepping forward, he opened the door to the washroom slightly; he could see Lucy talking quietly to Mrs. Fraser, the doctor cleaning his instruments…and Rufus collecting an empty water bucket from the room just opposite the washroom door. “Rufus!” Wyatt hissed, “Rufus!”

Stopping mid-stoop, the time machine pilot whirled around in confusion until he saw Wyatt peering at him from the crack in the door, “What are you hiding from in there?” he asked as he stepped forward.

“Look, you gotta help me, alright? I don’t want these doctors touching me…and you’ve helped me before…”

“Oh no.” Rufus nearly shouted in panic as Wyatt shushed him, “No…uh-uh…pulling that bullet out of your gut in 1865 was the limit to my non-career in medicine. I told you then that I was never doing that again, and I meant it and if you think for one minute that I’m…holy shit, Wyatt!” he exclaimed as Wyatt pulled him into the washroom and shut the door. “I thought you said you were fine?” He eyed his blistered skin in alarm, “That…that’s…”


“And what the hell am I supposed to do, huh?” Rufus exclaimed anxiously, “I don’t know a damn thing about burns…I mean…what the hell do you do for something like that anyway? Ice? Where the hell do you find ice in 1754?”
“Just…just help me clean it.” Wyatt pleaded, “Okay? That’s all I’m asking.”

Rufus glared at him, but finally offered with a resigning sigh, “Fine…but that’s all I’m doing.” Taking the washrag from the basin where Wyatt had dropped it, Rufus gingerly applied it to the garish scarring along Wyatt’s side. He had barely touched his skin, when Wyatt gritted out in pain, causing Rufus to drop the rag in a panic, “No man…I can’t…I can’t do this.”

“C’mon Rufus.” Wyatt gasped out as he breathed through his teeth in agony, “just…”

“No.” Rufus demanded, “Hell no…” he said as wrenching open the door, “I’m not a damn doctor, Wyatt! I told you after pulling that bullet out of your gut that that was the last time, and I meant it.” Stumbling after him, Wyatt tried to pull him back into the room, but it was no use, his boisterous exit had made a scene and now all eyes were on him as he stood awkwardly in the hall, gripping his ruined shirt to his chest.

“My dear man,” the surgeon said, eyeing him sympathetically, “that’s one nasty burn you have there…better let me have a look at it.” he added, ushering a furious Wyatt into the dining room.

Eyeing Rufus murderously, Wyatt shook his head, “No…it’s…it’s okay…”

“Nonsense, m’boy.” the surgeon replied with a scoff, “you’ve helped others all evening…now it’s your turn.” With more than a little force, he pushed Wyatt down on the table, calling for fresh candles and bandages as he peered at Wyatt’s side through tiny spectacles. “This is going to need a good scrubbing…it appears there’s some piece of linen seared to the outer layer of skin.” he explained as he straightened up and nodded towards his assistant, “I think a good dousing of vinegar is in order, my dear.”

Wyatt turned quickly to see Lucy standing over him with a mixture of horror and validation on her face. Panicking slightly, he sat up abruptly, “No…not her…”

“She’s your wife, isn’t she?’ the surgeon cried incredulously.

Coloring, Wyatt gaped at him, “Yeah…but…but…she doesn’t have the stomach for this sort of stuff.” he explained weakly as Lucy rolled her eyes and went to work preparing the work station.

“Oh tosh.” the surgeon replied, she’s been assisting me all evening…and she’s got quite the knack
for it. Though I will say,” he whispered to Wyatt clandestinely, “she is a bit despotic…all but demanded I wash all my instruments in boiling water…whoever heard of something so trivial?”

Wyatt chuckled to himself, finding it nothing short of hilarious that even in the 18th century Lucy had a reputation for being a bossy know it all…though in this case, he was kind of grateful for her high and mighty stubbornness.

That is, until she turned it on to him.

“Turn over, Wyatt.” She ordered coolly, eyeing him with an “I told you so” look that should have filled him with a considerable amount of humility.

But it didn’t.

Huffing out a breath, Wyatt flipped over onto his side, now angrier at himself than ever over waiting to have his own injuries attended to. If he had done it when he had first pulled John Fraser out of that fiery mess, he wouldn’t have to be laying here, bare chested, while Lucy ran her delicate fingers along his side, tenderly picking off bits of the shirt that had seared into his skin.

Once finished with that torturous task…torturous for more reasons than one…Lucy dipped a large sponge in a vinegar solution, nodding at the doctor to brace Wyatt’s arms as she applied it to his skin. The effect was immediate. Wyatt arched off the table, all but howling in pain as Lucy attempted to clean the wound. “I’m sorry, Wyatt…I know it stings…” she began weakly, but he was having none of it. The vinegar only served to make his pain that much worse and it was all the doctor could do to keep him still on the table. “Rufus!” Lucy cried as she attempted to press the sponge to him again as Wyatt writhed in pain and fought against her.

“What do you need?” he asked breathlessly, coming to her side.

“Hold him.” she requested, “I can’t…I can’t clean his burns if he doesn’t stay still.” But even with the added help of Rufus, Lucy was having a difficult time…not only because he was fighting her, but because it was Wyatt…and seeing him in pain like this was more than she could handle. With tears in her eyes, she stumbled away from the table as Wyatt lay on top of it, gasping for breath and clenching his teeth through what she imagined to be unbearable pain. “Isn’t there something you can give him to…to take the edge off?” she asked with pleading eyes.

The doctor stepped away, wiping his brow from the exertion, “I don’t think I have much laudanum
left in my stores…but we could certainly try.” At that, Wyatt shot Lucy a look that made it damn clear he was not interested in trying what he knew, from every Western he ever watched with his Grandpa Sherwin, wasn’t a good thing.

Laudanum?” Lucy croaked, casting an apologetic glance towards Wyatt. Swallowing hard, she nodded, “Um…okay…let’s…let’s try it.”

“Hmm…the doctor replied as he searched through his medical bag, “Fresh out…but perhaps I still have some more in one of my other kits. I’ll be back in a moment.” he promised as he disappeared down the hall.

“Laudanum?!” Wyatt exclaimed with a hiss as he sat up on his elbows, “Are you freaking kidding me, Lucy?”

“What else are we supposed to do, Wyatt?” she argued weakly, “You need something for the pain…and it’s not like they have any aspirin around here.”

“What the hell is laudanum?” Rufus asked, confused.

“Opium.” Lucy and Wyatt answered together. “Think of it like the heroin of the 17th century…highly addictive” Lucy explained as Rufus blew out a low whistle. “It was used as a type of cure-all drug…people used it for everything from headaches to depression…”

“To getting high.” Wyatt grunted as he attempted to roll himself off the table. “No way in hell am I taking that stuff.”

“Then you’re just going to have to deal with the pain, Wyatt,” Lucy gritted out in frustration, “but I can tell you right now, we haven’t even started on the hard part yet…I’ve barely touched you.”

“You’ve touched me plenty.” Wyatt assured her, as he shot her a scathing look. “Who the hell puts vinegar on a burn? You realize that’s like pouring lemon juice on a papercut, right? A very large and painful papercut.” he emphasized meaningfully.

“I know…and I’m sorry…but I’ve diluted it as much as I can. The book says it helps pull the inflammation out and prevents infection.” Lucy assured him as she produced a small medical journal from the open medical kit. “And we can’t afford for any of us to get an infection. I mean,
anti-biotics won’t be around until 1928.”

“Let me see that…” Wyatt scoffed holding his hand out for the book, “you really believe this stuff?” he asked her in a voice filled with skepticism. “My God, Lucy” he quipped as he perused through the pages, “this thing says that for an upset stomach you need to administer an enema of hot milk and oats.”

“An oatmeal enema?” Rufus observed with a shudder, “Breakfast will never be the same again.”

“I didn’t say everything in there was a good idea,” Lucy defended, “but…vinegar was used as a disinfectant of sorts in these days…I don’t see how it could hurt…”

Wyatt glared at her incredulously, “Trust me,” he spat out, “it hurts.”

“Wyatt,” Lucy sighed heavily, “We don’t have much to work with here, okay? I’m doing the best that I can…if we don’t do anything about your burns, you could die.” Her lip trembled slightly with emotion as she fought back the tears now pooling in her eyes again. Seeing this, Wyatt let out a curse and laid back down on the table with a hand over his eyes. “We’ll…we’ll figure out a way through this, okay? I don’t want to hurt you…and if he has laudanum, it will help. I don’t think one dose…” Wyatt let out a disbelieving scoff as she pleaded, “Please, Wyatt…just take it so you can get through this…I promise, I won’t let you become an addict.”

“Is that supposed to make me feel better?” Wyatt asked her incredulously as the doctor came in, shaking a small vial at them.

“You are in luck, son, I think I was able to scrape together a healthful dose from what was left in my other stores,” he announced, “should be just enough to ease your suffering, young man.” Casting an uneasy glance towards a desperate looking Lucy, Wyatt finally let out a resigned sigh and sat up, allowing the surgeon to administer the dose of laudanum, “There we are,” the doctor declared, as Wyatt laid back down, “that should set you right in a few minutes.”

Lucy exchanged a nervous glance with Rufus before the doctor ordered her to begin making a poultice, “Honey, a drop or two of lavender….” Peering over his spectacles at Wyatt’s burn again, he furrowed his brow in thought, before adding, “I think we might also make an oatmeal paste to go along with that…I’ll go see if the housekeeper can spare us a cup or two of oats.”

“Just as long as I’m not getting an enema.” Wyatt murmured the moment the doctor left the room.
“How…how are you feeling?” Lucy asked anxiously, looking at Wyatt as if he might start convulsing at any moment.

He peered at her from under the hand that was back to resting over his eyes, clearly not at all happy with the situation. “Peachy.” he muttered angrily.

“You know,” Lucy began, attempting to make him feel better, “as awful as laudanum is…some of the greatest minds in history used it regularly. Marcus Aurelius, Florence Nightengale, Charles Dickens…”

“Lucy Preston, are you seriously promoting recreational drug use?” Rufus quipped with a laugh, “Isn’t that a little too gangster for Stanford?”

“I am not.” she maintained, coloring slightly, “I just…I’m trying to make light of this whole situation. Some of the greatest imagery that ever came out of literature was because of opium.” Lucy explained as both Wyatt and Rufus raised their eyebrows skyward, “You know we may never have gotten Frankenstein’s monster if it hadn’t been for laudanum? Almost all of the Romantic poets and writers were…”

“Addicts?” Wyatt offered glibly, casting her a sardonic glare, “I’ll try to keep that in mind when I’m…”

“Tripping?” Rufus teased as Wyatt cursed and put a heavy hand over his eyes again. “Look on the bright side, man” he offered, “at least it’s not like how it was in 1865, right? I mean…digging that bullet out of your gut was bad enough for me….it must have been hell for you. At least this time you have some pretty kick-ass pain-killer….and you weren’t even shot.” he added awkwardly as Wyatt glared at him.

“He’s right, Wyatt…it could be worse.” Lucy urged. “You could have been killed…or…or…”

“Impaled…like John Fraser.” Rufus offered as he absent-mindedly twirled the empty laudanum vial in his hand.

Wyatt merely let out a heavy sigh, wishing the two of them would just leave him alone. It wasn’t
that he didn’t count himself lucky for his near escape…he did. The moments he spent trapped under that fiery rubble, while flames licked at his skin, had been some of the most desperate of his life. Not just for himself…but for the people he was trying to help.

John Fraser and Tom.

Still, even after pulling John Fraser from that rubble to safety, his own welfare took a backseat to that of those around him. John’s horrific injury, the countless dead and wounded lying about the vast yard…all his fault…the French had attacked because of something he had done. He had changed history and was now seeing, first-hand the devastating consequences that had come from being so damn reckless. Just as with Syria…and the Alamo…he couldn’t leave good men to die…not for something he did…and while he knew there was somebody counting on him…someone who needed him…that someone wasn’t there to pull him back from the brink this time. Now, as he lay on the table waiting for the laudanum to do its work, he was overcome with the one emotion that had been battling its way to the surface the second he laid eyes on Lucy in the midst of all this hell.

Shame.

He had put aside his own needs out of guilt…forgetting that he also had a duty to his team. Seeing her and Rufus, worried sick and pale, horrified at the grisly scene in John Fraser’s home, he was not so subtly reminded that he had essentially forgotten them….and had almost failed them.

Again.

For Wyatt, it didn’t matter whether he was impaled, shot, stabbed, or burned to a crisp…the result was the same…he had been reckless. He had given no thought as to what could have happened to Lucy or Rufus if he had been killed…he just ran headlong into danger without considering the deeper implications…and then continued to endanger himself after it was all said and done by refusing to have himself checked out. He tried to deny it, threw himself into the work of helping others, telling himself the pain wasn’t that bad, but once it became clear to him that it was that bad, he knew that he had royally screwed up. His recklessness had endangered all of them. Lucy was right – he could die…and then what the hell would happen to them?

He didn’t want to think about it…but seeing her worry just made it all that much worse. Which is why he didn’t want her anywhere near this room.

A few minutes passed in awkward silence, Wyatt refusing to so much as glance at either Rufus or Lucy so as not to see the anxiety so evident on their faces, while they paced nervously around the room. Finally, however, the surgeon returned having procured the oats, though not with some difficulty.
“I do apologize for keeping you waiting,” he explained, “in all this confusion, it was nearly impossible to find anyone with a key to the storage cabinet.” He produced a small sackcloth and called Lucy over, “Now my dear…we’re going to make a simple paste with this. Once we clean the wound with vinegar, we’ll slather it with this paste and let it sit on the wound for….oh, a good quarter hour, at least, before we rinse and dress it with the poultice and bandages.” At Lucy’s confused expression, the surgeon added, “The oats will help soothe the skin from further irritation after we clean it, you see.”

Nodding in understanding, Lucy began following the doctor’s instructions for the paste, stirring it as he made his way towards Wyatt who was looking far more relaxed than he had been earlier. With a gentle hand, the doctor tapped Wyatt’s burn gingerly, testing for a response...when he received only a slight grunt in return, he nodded to Rufus, “That looks to have taken effect…let’s proceed, shall we?”

Gripping the sponge that Lucy had discarded in the small basin of vinegar and water, the surgeon went to work, skillfully cleaning away the debris from the oozing burns all along Wyatt’s torso. When he reached a point where the skin had broken, Wyatt jerked in pain, prompting the doctor to call to Lucy to help them keep him on his side and calm.

Wiping her hands on a fresh towel, Lucy quickly made her way to Wyatt’s side, where she noted that his eyes were somewhat glassy and unfocused. Taking a deep breath, she tentatively placed her hand on his arm in the hopes that by doing so, it would prevent him from flinching out in pain and hurting either Rufus or the surgeon. She was so focused on keeping him still and watching the progress of their work, that she didn’t notice - until she moved to swipe a stray hair out of her eyes - that Wyatt was looking at her…with a dopey grin plastered on his face.

Startling slightly, she offered him an awkward smile in return as the doctor announced, “I think that’s as good as we can do…now,” he said to Rufus, “if you’ll be so kind as to hand me that oat paste…”

“See?” Lucy muttered to Wyatt, casting him a quick glance, “That wasn’t so bad, was it?”

“No, ma’am.” he said a little too happily as the doctor began slathering his side with the poultice.

Squirming, Wyatt let out a laugh as he attempted to wriggle his arms out of Lucy’s hold. “Wyatt,” Lucy grunted as she struggled to keep him still, “what are you…stop wiggling so much.”
Still giggling, Wyatt let out a sigh as Lucy readjusted her hold on his arms, “Just a little bit longer, okay?” she assured him as the doctor began directing Rufus to lay wide strips of muslin loosely over the paste. “You’re almost done.”

“Okay, Lucy,” he nodded lazily, offering her another dopey grin. Feeling that there was no longer a reason or need to restrain his arms, Lucy sat back with a huff and cast Wyatt a wary glance as he continued to smile at her.

“You seem to be in a better mood.” Lucy observed with an amused smile. “Maybe we need to drug you up more often.”

“You have pretty eyes.” he observed sluggishly, completely bypassing her observation as he turned his head to better look at her.

Lucy gaped at Wyatt, her face coloring slightly at the sight of his sappy face still grinning at her stupidly, hardly knowing how to respond. Exchanging a quick look with a highly amused Rufus, she cleared her throat, biting back a laugh as she nodded, “Thank you, Wyatt…I…I think you have pretty eyes, too.”

Looking as if he had never heard anything so wonderful in his life, Wyatt beamed, “Thank you, ma’am.” he replied happily, before pausing suddenly with a serious gasp, “But you don’t like it when I call you ma’am.”

“No.” Lucy said, now flushing a deep shade of red, “It’s okay, Wyatt,” she murmured quietly, “you can call me ma’am if you want to.”

“But nobody else?” he asked seriously, leaning forward with a whisper, “Not even Rufus?”

“That’s right.” Lucy nodded, pursing her lips together, desperately trying to keep herself from bursting out laughing…and she wasn’t the only one. Rufus had his hand drawn up to his mouth, openly chuckling as Lucy approached him with an admonishing scowl, “Stop it, Rufus.” she reproved with a hiss, poking him in the ribs, “He’s drugged…we shouldn’t be making light of…all of this.”

“Speak for yourself,” Rufus jabbed, “seeing Wyatt…bad ass Wyatt all hopped up on opium?” He shook his head and let out a soft chuckle, “I’m just sorry I don’t have popcorn.”
Nudging him in the ribs again, Lucy turned her attention back to the doctor who was directing her to begin applying the honey mixture to the strips of bandage, “Honey will help prevent an infection and soothe the inflamed skin…” he was explaining before a commotion sounded behind them.

She should have known better than to leave Wyatt unattended in the state that he was in. No sooner had she gotten up that he had rolled off the dining room table, apparently in pursuit of her, landing halfway on the chair she had been sitting in and halfway on the floor, looking absolutely confused as to how he got there. “Wyatt!” Lucy exclaimed, but as she made to go help him, Rufus stopped her.

“I got it, Lucy.” he assured as he quickly made his way towards his hopeless friend. “Come on, buddy.” Rufus quipped as he wrapped Wyatt’s arm around his neck, “let’s get you back where you belong.”

“Where’s Lucy?” Wyatt groaned as Rufus helped him back onto the table.

“She’s busy.” Rufus quipped, “But don’t worry, I’m gonna be taking good care of you, okay?” he asked as Wyatt clumsily swung his legs back onto the table. “Just don’t say anything about my eyes and we’ll be good.”

“What’s wrong with your eyes?” Wyatt asked in confusion.

“Uh…nothing.” Rufus said with an awkward frown, “I just thought you might…” he began, but after another warning look from Lucy, he shook his head and muttered, “you know what? Never mind.”

“Lucy has pretty eyes.” Wyatt offered with another dopey smile.

“So I heard.” Rufus acknowledged with a nod, trying to look as solemn as he could…but failing miserably.

“She told me she likes my eyes.” Wyatt continued with a boyish smirk.

“I heard that too.” Rufus said with an exaggerated nod, clearly enjoying this far more than he knew he should.
“Do you like my eyes?”

“Let’s not make this weird, Wyatt.” Rufus frowned, desperately fighting back the urge to laugh. “If Lucy likes your eyes, then I guess they’ve got to be pretty fantastic.”

Seemingly satisfied with his answer, Wyatt laid his head back down on the makeshift pillow of extra linens they had propped under his head. Before the fifteen minutes were up, he tried several more times to get off the table, but each time was prevented from doing so by Rufus, who remained dutifully by his side until finally the doctor deemed Wyatt was ready to be bandaged up.

As the doctor rinsed off the excess oat paste and patted his torso dry, Lucy carefully brought over the bandages she had prepped for dressing Wyatt’s burns. “Now,” he declared, “what we’ll need to do is wrap each strand all the way around the torso, like so…” he demonstrated on the first one, “and when we start the next strip we hold it in place here and overlap them slightly…well…you get the idea.” he added as he stepped away to allow Lucy full access to Wyatt’s side.

Swallowing hard, Lucy anxiously worked to wrap the second band around, keeping her right hand tenderly holding the bandage in place as she attempted to work the strip around Wyatt’s torso… which was easier said than done. Feeling slightly awkward as she worked, more so because Wyatt was gazing at her with a slack-jawed expression…Lucy cleared her throat awkwardly and offered him a nervous smile, “You still doing okay?” she asked warily.

“I’m just fine…ma’am.” he responded, beaming at her again.

“Great.” Lucy nodded awkwardly, before stepping back slightly, fidgeting nervously, “Rufus, you know what? This might be better if you do this…my um…my hands are all sticky.”

“Are they supposed to be sticky?” he asked in confusion.

“Well, yes…because of the honey, but…but the bandage keeps getting stuck underneath him and I can’t…I can’t really lift…”

“Perhaps we should stand him up…” the doctor supplied, “Here, I’ll help the young man keep him steady for you, dear.” he assured Lucy, before turning to Wyatt and inviting, “Let’s get you on your feet, shall we?”
Wyatt almost sprang to his feet, causing both the doctor and Rufus to chuckle at his eagerness. “Hold on there, cowboy.” Rufus quipped, “don’t go jumping fences just yet. We still have to put you back together.”

With Wyatt standing, it was easier, but not any less awkward than it had been with him lying down. Wrapping her arms around Wyatt’s bare torso repeatedly was not exactly how Lucy had planned on spending her wedding night with him...though the irony was not lost on her. Still, he was injured and drugged…and while she knew he couldn’t help it and was far from being in his right state of mind, the way he was looking at her, all dopey grins and sheepish smiles, made her legs feel just as wobbly as Wyatt’s were at the moment.

Once done, she breathed out a sigh of relief only to find that they now had the added problem of getting Wyatt home. With every bed, sofa and floor space covered with the recovering wounded, they could hardly stay there…but with Wyatt in the state he was in…how would they ever make it back to their cabin?

Deciding she would go find a solution…if for any reason than to just put some distance between herself and Wyatt, Lucy left him in the care of Rufus and went in search of a way home. With Mrs. Fraser tending to her husband and Mrs. Poe tending to the many wounded with Margaret, Lucy reasoned that her best chance of finding something…or rather, someone to help her would be from any number of the uninjured soldiers currently patrolling the grounds.

With her shawl wrapped tightly around her shoulders, Lucy stepped out into the moonlit night, shuddering as a bitter gust of wind met her head on. The scene, though still dismal, was a far cry from what it had been earlier. The wounded soldiers that had been lying haphazardly in disorganized rows were either recovering somewhere within the warmth of John Fraser’s home, or comfortably resting around a few small campfires that now dotted the landscape. Those who had been killed had been moved…and Lucy could see, even in the dim light of the moon, John Fraser’s field hands digging graves, off in the distance.

Not wanting to disturb the wounded, she made her way towards the barn, where she was told, the officers had set up new headquarters. She hadn’t gotten very far, when she saw Tom, his arm in a sling, his head bandaged, clearing out the wreckage around the forge. Seeing her, he waved with his uninjured hand, “Evening, Miss…”

“Lucy.” she offered, stepping towards him, “And you’re…Tom?” she asked tentatively as he nodded in return, “I’ve heard a lot about you from Rufus…it’s nice to finally meet you.” She smiled as she waved her ringed finger at him, “I…um…hear I have you to thank for this.”
“Aww…twasn’t any trouble at all.” he dismissed with a sheepish smile, “Like I told, Mr. Wyatt…it wouldn’t be proper for you not have a ring.” He frowned slightly before asking in a subdued tone, “How is he?”

“Better.” Lucy assured him, “He…um…finally got himself looked at after…” her eyes scanned over the ruined building before her, “is this where it happened?”

“Yes’m.” Tom replied with a nod. “Mr. Wyatt saved my life…and Mr. Fraser’s too. I wouldn’t be standing here right now without him.” He leaned forward with a grateful smile, “I hope that will excuse him…being that it’s your wedding day and all.”

“Oh,” Lucy startled, grateful for the darkness to hide what was bound to be an unmistakable blush in her cheeks, “No…it’s…it’s okay” she assured, “helping others…it’s what he does best.”

“Not many folks is like that.” Tom nodded thoughtfully, “most is just for themselves.” He grunted as he picked up another piece of smoldering log and tossed it aside, “He’s a good one, your man.”

Lucy smiled and offered him a small nod, hardly feeling that she could acknowledge Wyatt as her anything. Their marriage was a sham, after all…and he had made it more than abundantly clear that this was just about the job. “How…how are you?” Lucy asked kindly. “Were you hurt badly?”

“Nah.” Tom said with a fierce shake of his head, “Just a shoulder that got out of joint and a couple of scraps and burns. Nothing that won’t heal.” He shook his head, “Master Fraser, though…”

“He’s doing much better.” Lucy assured him, “He um…had the…” she swallowed hard, not wanting to conjure up the mental image of his injury, “they fixed his leg.” she said finally, “he’s resting well, and the doctor thinks he’ll make a full recovery.”

“Praise Jesus.” Tom replied quietly.

Lucy’s eyes fell once more on the ruined building before her, eliciting a feeling of dread within her. “The…um…the forge?” she asked tentatively, “Will it…will you be able to…I mean, it’s not completely lost, is it?”

“Nah,” Tom replied with a shake of his head, making his way through the rubble to where the oven
still stood, nearly black against the dark sky. “Most important parts are still here,” he explained as he tossed debris away from the hearth, “just got to clean the place up a bit.” He turned to offer Lucy another smile, just as another harsh breeze had her gripping her shawl tighter, “Hey now, you best get back up to the house...you’ll catch your death out here.”

“I’m trying to find some way to get Wyatt home,” she explained, “he’s...he’s not able to walk in his condition...I just don’t know what to do....”

“Oh, that’s easy,” Tom said with a smile, “what you need is what them French call a travois.” He nodded towards the barn, “Mr. Fraser has a fair few already done up...good for moving crops and things.” he explained as they walked there together. “I can have one hitched up on old Rose...she’s a good mule, won’t go getting all skittish on you.”

“Could you?” Lucy asked breathlessly, “That...that would be...” she nodded at him gratefully, “thank you...really.”

“Least I could do” Tom replied with a shrug, “After him saving my life and all.”

When Lucy arrived back at John Fraser’s home with Rose and Tom, Colonel McKee welcomed them with a bow, “I’m terribly sorry that this bit of unfortunateness has sullied what had been a beautiful day.” He kissed her hand and led her into the house, pausing just before the dining room door when he added, “Though I must say, your husband saved the lives of many tonight...for a Quaker, he’s certainly adept.”

Forgetting that Wyatt had apparently claimed he was a Quaker, Lucy let out an incredulous laugh, only to catch herself at Colonel McKee’s puzzled expression. “I’m sorry...” she muttered, clearing her throat awkwardly, “I...um...yes for a Quaker, he’s very adept.”

Loading Wyatt onto the travois was a bit more difficult than she had anticipated. He was halfway asleep by the time she walked into the dining room and trying to convince him to walk as Rufus bore him up was getting them nowhere. Unable to carry him on his own, Rufus engaged the help of a few officers who conveyed Wyatt outside while Lucy received extra bandages and ingredients to dress Wyatt’s burns. She was just about to head out herself, when Mrs. Poe stopped her, “Wait m’dear...don’t go just yet...I have a few things for you, myself.”

Following her to the storage room, Mrs. Poe took out an old key and fitted it into a wall cabinet. Inside were a variety of herbs and spices, all labeled in her careful hand. Retrieving an empty bottle, she poured a white powdery substance into it and explained, “I heard that doctor say they were out of laudanum...afraid that’s common around here.” She tightened the lid of the now filled
jar and handed it over to Lucy, “This is white willow bark…it’s not as strong as laudanum, but when my rheumatism is giving me fits, this does help with the pain. Just a scoop or two is all you need…with a bit of gin or water. I prefer the gin.”

Touched by her thoughtfulness, Lucy made to thank her, but once again, Mrs. Poe stopped her, “And here,” she said, retrieving a few books from across the room, “take these, I’m afraid you need them more than I do anymore.”

Lucy glanced down at the battered books in her hand, “The Compleat Housewife” she read off as she looked at the next one, A Book of Herbal Remedies”

“Those books will give you the practical education you didn’t receive” she explained in a gentle voice, “who knows,” she added with a smile, “we may make a lady out of you yet.”

Far from being offended by the gifts, Lucy hugged them close to her chest, grateful that she had something tangible to read and study to possibly help make her life in this century easier. “Thank you.” she whispered, “I…really, thank you.”

“Pishtosh,” Mrs. Poe replied as she led her back into the hall, “it’s nothing, my dear. Happy to help. After what your husband did tonight, it’s the very least I could do.”

Thanking her again, Lucy made her way to where Rufus and the soldiers had loaded Wyatt onto the travois. After some concern that Wyatt may roll off on their way back to the cabin, it was decided that Lucy would ride with him in the travois while Rufus led Rose to the cabin. Though she wasn’t keen on holding onto a drugged Wyatt, she nevertheless situated herself next to him as Mrs. Poe handed her back the supplies she had received, “Take good care of him now.” she said in a motherly tone, “and don’t hesitate to come a calling if you need anything else.”

“Th…thank you, Mrs. Poe.” Lucy responded uneasily as Wyatt rolled over and nestled himself into her neck. Feeling oh so uncomfortable with this, Lucy sat up…which only made Wyatt slide down a little further…into her chest, “Um…okay…this is not what I had in mind.” Lucy muttered before nudging him as roughly as she dared, “Um…Wyatt?”

“Hmmm?” he hummed sleepily.

“I’m…I’m just gonna move you a bit, okay?”
“Mmmkay, Lucy” he murmured as she, with the help of Colonel McKee and a highly amused Rufus, readjusted Wyatt’s position to where he was laying somewhat sideways, his head now comfortably resting on her lap. With that mortification over, Lucy breathed out a sigh of relief, much more at ease with his current position – that is until she looked down and her heart caught in her throat. There, in the soft light of a dying moon, Wyatt’s face was calm & contented as he lay there, softly dozing….and she couldn’t help but smile as she softly brushed a few strands of hair off of his forehead.

“And now that he’s in good hands, he can finally rest,” Colonel McKee observed with a smile, “You know he wouldn’t hear of bothering with his own injuries until everyone else had been looked after?” he added with a nod of his head, “He saved many lives tonight…I will never forget what he did for my dear friend, John.”

“Nor I.” Mrs. Poe agreed with a grateful smile, “That’s a fine man you have there, lass.”

Lucy proudly looked down at Wyatt, gently threading her fingers through his hair as he slept, her heart filled with gratitude that after all of this hell…he was safe. Injured, but safe. She had been so frustrated with him, angry that he hadn’t thought of what she or Rufus might have done without him…angry that he hadn’t gotten taken care of sooner…angry that he hadn’t thought to let them know he was okay…but all of that faded away as she considered how selfless he had been…to do so much to help so many. She knew he wasn’t really hers, that this sham of a marriage was just a job requirement…but in that moment, she didn’t care. With an appreciative smile, she looked up at the kind and thankful faces of Colonel McKee and Mrs. Poe. Nodding, she whispered, “I know.”

Chapter End Notes

They actually used vinegar to clean and soothe burns back in the 18th century... (OUCH) and they also used honey. They used other things too...like LEAD. And there were disagreements as to whether or not to use cold compresses or hot compresses, and of course, whether to blood-let or not to blood let.  

Forensics on musket fire is pretty gruesome. They were indeed like small cannonballs and could easily take off an entire limb if it someone in the right place. It was very fortunate for many people that they were so inaccurate.

Both books that Lucy received were actual books...The Compleat Housewife was published in 1727 and lists everything from making ketchup to medicine...and I thought giving Lucy a how to book would be the perfect way to turn her into a domestic wilderness goddess - though she's still going to need a hand here and there. . I hope you enjoyed this update. Thank you for reading and have a great day!
When Lucy and Rufus brought a drugged and injured Wyatt back home to the cabin, they did so with the understanding that it was most likely going to be a long road to recovery. They had no way of knowing exactly how serious his burns were given the limitations with which they were faced in the 18th century…and those limitations further prevented him from getting the care he so desperately needed. Still, even without knowing the full extent of his injuries, they had both received a pretty up close and personal view of his blistered side, and it was fairly clear, without the benefit of medical technology, that Wyatt’s condition wasn’t the most ideal.

And as it turned out, they were right.

Wyatt awoke the next morning groggy, sore…and understandably out of sorts. The laudanum had worked wonders for his pain the previous evening, but now in the light of morning, he was feeling the aftermath of his heroics and then some. Not only did his side throb and ache with a pain like he had never known, his head felt like it was about to split in two...making the sunlight currently pouring in through the window and Lucy's incessant humming, enemy number one. Cursing into the pillow he now had splayed over his face, he made it abundantly clear, albeit a bit muffled, exactly how he felt about his current situation.

Lucy who had, until that point, been humming and busily attempting to make a breakfast of porridge on the open hearth of the fire, quickly and loudly made her way over to him, knocking over a chair as she attempted to check on his condition, “Wyatt? How...how are you feeling?” she asked breathlessly, tugging at the covers.

"Just leave me alone> came the muffled response...but then, as if suddenly aware of his vulnerable situation, Wyatt sat up with a jerk, looking with some confusion at his bandaged side, before sneering and yanking at the strips of medicated cloth, “What the hell?” he gritted out, “You’re not supposed to wrap a burn this tight…it needs to breathe. Now wonder it feel like my side is on fire.” Cursing and hissing with pain as he continued to try to loosen his dressings, he continued ranting, “This is exactly why I shouldn’t have had that laudanum last night…neither one of you knows a damn thing about first aid.”

Affronted, Lucy bristled, “Well...look...I didn’t...the doctor...you...you weren't making any complaints last night’ she finally stammered out, but at Wyatt’s incredulous gaze she amended, “okay...well, I guess that’s not really fair...you were sort of out of it...but Wyatt, the doctor said...”
Ignoring her, Wyatt continued pulling at his bandages until he paused suddenly in disgust and pulled his hand away in confusion, “Why the hell am I so sticky?”

“That would be the honey.” Lucy replied sheepishly as he breathed out another curse, “Honey is supposed to be really good for healing burns,” she exclaimed defensively as pulled the book Mrs. Poe had gifted her out of her pocket. Opening it, she turned to a page she had marked, “Look, it says here that…” But Wyatt wasn’t listening. He was hissing in pain as some of the bandages began to pull at his sensitive skin. “Don’t…don’t do that.” Lucy admonished, grabbing a wash rag from the basin, “You’re going to irritate your skin, Wyatt…”

“It’s already irritated.” he growled out, determined to take matters into his own hands…but it was no use, Lucy was already swabbing away at his side, gently pulling off the strips as she cleaned away the residue from the honey, sending shivers down his spine for more reasons than just the cold water.

Noticing how he tensed every time she touched him, Lucy narrowed her eyes at him in concern, “You’re not going to start flailing again, are you?” she asked warily.

“That depends,” Wyatt scoffed, “you’re not going to douse me with vinegar again, are you?”

Shaking her head, Lucy sighed, “I was just following the doctor’s orders, Wyatt” but at his derisive laugh, she conceded, “I know, I know…18th century medicine is more or less a….”

“A crock?” Wyatt grunted as she hit a particularly sensitive spot on his torso.

Lucy stilled for a moment, allowing him to breathe through the pain, before continuing with a sigh, “You know, vinegar actually is a good cleansing agent…”

“Yeah?” Wyatt replied sarcastically, “so is soap.”

Ignoring him, Lucy continued, “…for this day and age it was a go-to to help prevent the spread of disease. Do you know that Abigail Adams scrubbed her entire house with vinegar when smallpox broke out during the early days of the Revolutionary War?”

Gritting his teeth as she continued to work the sponge over his inflamed and tender side, Wyatt gasped out, “Fascinating.” Though Lucy knew he hardly meant it. Offering him a look of
admonishment, she ceased her ministrations along his torso and made her way over to the open hearth of the fire…something Wyatt was immensely grateful for until she returned a few moments later with a steaming mug in her hands, “Here…drink this.” she ordered.

Remembering that Lucy had all but forced him to take laudanum the previous evening, Wyatt eyed her suspiciously as he took it from her. “What the hell is this?” he asked gruffly, flinching away at the bitter stench emanating from the hot liquid inside.

“Medicine.” Lucy replied curtly, but at Wyatt’s indignant glare, she assured, “It’s not laudanum, okay? It’s some sort of willow bark…thing.” Again, she picked up the book of herbal remedies and flipped to a marked page, “See?” she pointed out, “white willow bark…it’s got salicin in it…and Rufus says that means it’s basically aspirin.”

“What the hell does Rufus know?”

“Quite a bit, actually.” the man himself answered as he descended down the ladder from the loft, “Good morning, by the way…who needs an alarm clock when I can wake up to all of this?” he grunted as he forewent the final rungs and landed deftly on the floor next to Lucy. “For your information, Wyatt, I took a biochemistry class at MIT with an entire lab devoted to medicinal compounds.”

“Uh-huh…I thought you were an engineer?” Wyatt replied skeptically as he continued to frown at his mug.

“I am.” Rufus assured with a meaningful nod, “But that doesn’t mean I didn’t have other interests…and by other interests,” he added with a nod towards Lucy who was handing him a cup of tea, “I mean, a very fine young woman named La-kesha who just happened to be a Biochemistry major.”

“This wouldn’t be the same young woman who inspired your militant phase, would it?” Lucy asked with a teasing smile, as she turned to dish out a bowl of porridge…not noticing that Wyatt was now looking at the two of them growing curiosity.

Rufus, however, did notice.

Nodding to Lucy, he replied, “Yup, same one.” before turning to Wyatt in short explanation, “See all the fun you missed out on in 1972?” When that earned him a reproving glare, he leaned
forward with a devilish smirk and whispered, “You know how it is, though right? When you’re trying to impress a girl you like? Especially if she has pretty eyes.” he added meaningfully.

Wyatt gaped at him, not having the first clue as to what he meant by that comment and pretty damn sure he didn’t want to know. Given that he was sure it had something to do with his laudanum induced stupor, however, he quickly set the mug down on the small nightstand and scooted away from it as if it were poison.

Chuckling at this, Rufus lifted the mug and handed it back to Wyatt, “If Lucy wanted to take advantage of you, she could’ve done it last night when you were flying high as a kite. Anyway,” he added picking up Lucy’s herbal remedy book, “This white willow bark stuff is the real deal… Lucy’s right…salicin is basically aspirin…it’ll help with your pain. Unless, of course,” he said as a broad smile stretched across his face, “you want us to dig you up some more laudanum? It may be dangerous as hell…but it definitely made you more likable.”

With that threat, Wyatt quickly downed his medicine…gasping and choking at the bitter taste as Lucy came back to his bedside with a bowl of lumpy porridge, “Are you hungry?” she asked handing it to him.

Eyeing the grey substance with a frown, Wyatt was going to absolutely refuse, but seeing the look of hopeful expectation on Lucy’s face, he relented with a sigh…though he immediately regretted his decision the minute he took a bite. Swallowing hard and grimacing, Wyatt handed her back the bowl as he exchanged a glance with Rufus, “Uh…it’s okay…I’m um…not that hungry.”

“Wyatt,” Lucy admonished, “you need to eat. How else do you expect to get better if you don’t keep your strength up?” Nudging Rufus in the ribs, she added, “Tell him.”

Rufus, who had been silently chuckling behind his hand, quickly cleared his throat in an attempt to muster up a somewhat serious response as he nodded solemnly, “Oh yeah…totally. You should eat that all up, Wyatt. In fact,” he added as he began to put his coat on, “you should eat mine too…”

“Aren’t you going to have breakfast?” Lucy asked, looking concerned.

“Who, me?” Rufus asked as he began backing his way out of the door, “Nah…I’m…I’m good. If I get hungry, I can always whip up some eggs or something over at the farm…probably need to get an early start anyway.” he explained awkwardly, “lots of repairs that need to be made, after all.”
With one last fleeting look towards a very much offended Wyatt, Rufus exited the cabin and made his way towards the farm leaving Lucy to shut the door behind him with a sigh, “Oh well, I guess I can always save the rest for tomorrow…” Turning back to Wyatt, she nudged his bowl at him again, urging, “Eat…it’s probably best to have something in your stomach anyway…who knows what that willow bark stuff will do.”

Begrudgingly, Wyatt dipped his spoon back into the porridge, grimacing in disgust at the concrete like consistency. “Don’t we have any…butter…or syrup…or…bacon…or…anything else?” Wyatt asked hopefully.

Lucy gaped at him and rubbed her hands on her apron nervously, “Well, we do have that goat…but I mean…I don’t know how to…I guess I could try to…milk it?” though she looked like she would rather not. Biting her lip anxiously, she scanned the scant supplies they had on their shelves and gasped out in relief, “Oh, I do have honey…will that work?” Desperate for anything that would make his breakfast more palatable, Wyatt nodded, putting a heaping spoonful of the amber syrup into his bowl, doubtful that it would make much difference. “Don’t use too much of that,” Lucy called out as she bent over a roughly hewn bowl, putting drops of medicine into a paste, “I’ve got to use some for this salve for your burns.”

“Lucy….” Wyatt tried to protest, but she shook her head at him determinedly.

“I know what you’re going to say, Wyatt…but I’ve looked it up,” she added with a nod towards her book, “they use honey all the time on wounds…and I’m pretty sure I remember reading something similar in 2016 that said that honey had anti-bacterial properties.”

Much to his consternation, her fingers were soon back on his bare torso, tenderly caressing his inflamed skin with the salve that, to his immense surprise, did seem to offer some relief. That is until she hit a point where his skin was broken and bleeding. Hissing in pain, Wyatt flinched away, gripping onto the sheets causing her to mutter apologetically, “I’m sorry, Wyatt…I know it hurts….I know…this is nothing like what we have at home, but it’s the best that we’ve got here.” She sighed as she sat back from her work, lightly laying a few loose strips over the wounded area. “On the plus side,” she observed with a smile as she wiped her hands clean on the wet washrag, “it doesn’t look as red as it did yesterday…I think it might actually be helping.”

That small bit of optimism served Lucy well all through the morning and afternoon, but by evening it was clear to her that something was not right. Wyatt, despite many attempts to humor her, had hardly eaten anything all day and was now in the middle of a fitful and restless sleep. Watching him anxiously, Lucy mentioned her concerns to Rufus the moment he walked in the door.

Though he was hardly as anxious as she was.
“No offense, Lucy,” he retorted, “but you aren’t exactly the greatest cook in the world.” he said with a shrug, earning him an eyeroll and a look of severe approbation, “I mean, it.” Rufus maintained, “I didn’t think you could screw up porridge but…damn.”

“Well excuse me if I don’t have anything that even comes close to resembling a modern kitchen around here.” she hissed angrily, “I’m doing the best I can, okay?” She glared at him meaningfully, before redirecting his attention back to Wyatt, “But I’m telling you, Rufus…something is not right.” she persisted, “he’s…he’s…just look at him, he wasn’t in that much pain this morning. Something is wrong.”

True enough, Wyatt was visibly restless…and sweaty. Not knowing what else to do, Lucy dipped a towel into a basin of water in a desperate attempt to soothe him, only to find, to her horror that he was burning up. Panicked, she looked to Rufus who looked about as helpless as she felt. Her mind racing, she urged him to hold Wyatt down while she removed the bandages to check his burn, “How can you tell if a burn is infected?” she gasped out anxiously.

“Do I look like a doctor to you?” Rufus asked with a bewildered shrug, “I don’t know a damn thing about…” he picked up Lucy’s remedy book and began flipping through pages, finally reading off, “what does his skin look like?”

“Red.” Lucy answered shakily, “But burns are normally red, aren’t they? That doesn’t mean…”

“Um…is there anything coming out of it?” Rufus asked looking up from the book, “Like is it…oozing?”

Lucy shook her head, “I can’t tell…but there…there are definitely blisters though…look at them,” she pointed out anxiously, “they’re all…yellow and swollen.”

“That can’t be good.” Rufus muttered, quickly making his way to the bedside. He went back to looking through the book, “You think we should drain them…or…”

“I don’t know,” Lucy moaned, “what does the book say?”

“Leeches or blood-letting.” Rufus replied dryly, “I’m gonna go out on a limb and say we don’t want to do that.”
“Probably not.” Lucy agreed, biting her lip before muttering, “Wyatt would know.” She locked eyes with Rufus who nodded anxiously, “He knows all about first-aid…he said so.” Desperate to know what to do, she began shaking him, “Wyatt, Wyatt…you have to wake up…”

Disoriented and definitely not in any mood to have his sleep disturbed, Wyatt blindly swatted Lucy’s hands away, “What the hell?” he groaned as he attempted to move his body away from her, “Leave me alone”

“No, Wyatt.” Lucy urged, now lightly smacking his face repeatedly, “Come on, you need to wake up…I need you to tell me what to do.”

Opening one bleary eye, Wyatt breathed out a curse. “Dammit, Lucy…can’t you see I’m sleeping?”

Ignoring his complaints, Lucy pressed anxiously, “Wyatt, it’s your side…I think…I think it’s getting infected. There are these yellow…Wyatt?” she shook him awake again, “yellow blisters all over your burn…”

“Ugh…’S’normal” Wyatt mumbled, falling back to sleep, but Lucy again, shook him awake.

“Wyatt, no.” she breathed out uneasily, “You also have a fever.”

Groaning, Wyatt rubbed a rough hand across his face, trying, but failing to sit up, until he finally sighed in resignation and did his best to reassure her, “Lucy…my whole side looks and feels like it’s been beaten with a damn branding iron…that’s gonna take a toll, okay?” She swallowed hard and nodded, blinking back tears as Wyatt, who could see she was hardly convinced, continued, “Look, I’ve seen it a lot of times in the field. Guys would end up getting burned…and a lot of times they’d have a fever…but no infection, okay? It’s just the body natural response to…to your skin being on fire…okay? It’s trying to heal itself.” He patted her hand reassuringly and attempted to get comfortable again, but once again, Lucy shook him awake.

“But Wyatt,” she breathed out, ‘what about these blisters? They look…they look bad. Like worse than they did yesterday, bad. Should we drain out the pus? Or…”

“No!” Wyatt exclaimed, lifting his head off the pillow and looking really awake for the first time since she first tried to rouse him. “That’s one sure way to get an infection…just…just leave them alone, okay?” Lucy made to argue, but Wyatt silenced her with a shake of his head, “Lucy, the
best thing for me right now is to get some sleep, alright? Stop worrying…and just…just leave me alone.”

Lucy sat back, anxiously biting her fingernails intermittently exchanging nervous glances with Rufus and looking at Wyatt’s sleeping but ever restless figure. “What if he’s wrong, Rufus?” she whispered, “What if it is an infection?” She got up and began pacing the floor in front of the bed, watching as Wyatt grimaced in his sleep. “What if he goes septic? He could die, Rufus - there are no antibiotics…”

“Hey, hey,” Rufus soothed, jumping up from the bed and putting an arm around her, “Lucy, it’s gonna be okay, alright? Remember what Wyatt said? This is normal…we just have to trust that he knows what he’s talking about.”

Lucy nodded, “Yeah…yeah…okay…you’re right.” she acknowledged with a half a smile, “Maybe…maybe things will be better tomorrow.”

But they weren’t.

The next day, Wyatt’s fever persisted throughout the day, even after taking the willow bark tea…and while his burns didn’t look any worse than they had the night before, they didn’t look any better either. Poring over her book, Lucy was sitting at the table making a list of different herbs she was determined to try in an effort to help him, when Rufus came bounding through the door with a loaf of bread and a basket of different bottles, “I got those herbs you asked for,” he said with a sigh, as he started emptying the baskets contents on the table, “Milk thistle, ginger, garlic….dried onion…” he paused, narrowing his eyes, “What the hell are you planning on making with all of this?”

“They’re for Wyatt.” Lucy murmured, still looking over her book.

“Lucy,” Rufus muttered softly, “look, I get that you’re worried about him…hell, I am too…but I think maybe you should try to relax…”

“Relax?” she asked with an incredulous laugh, explaining to Rufus that once again, Wyatt had hardly touched his food all day…and okay, maybe she burned the bread she had tried to make but he hadn’t even touched his eggs.

“You mean these things?” Rufus asked dubiously holding up two brown discs that looked like…
well…”actual crap, Lucy…they look like actual pieces of crap.” he added meaningfully as he threw them back down on the plate, “Can you really blame the guy?”

Rufus was just teasing…Lucy knew that…but after being alone with Wyatt for days, seeing him suffer and get sicker with each passing day, despite everything she had tried, her nerves were about as raw as the blistered skin on Wyatt’s torso. “Fine. I can’t cook, alright? I don’t know the first thing about burns or infections…or herbal medicine.” she sobbed, “I’m not…” she stopped, catching herself. She had almost said Jessica, realizing that in these quiet, anxious moments – alone with Wyatt, her mind had inexplicably wandered to his first marriage. She wondered if Jessica had ever sat by his bedside and took care of him when he was sick? If he would have eaten the food she had prepared? If she knew more about first aid…or was she just as clueless as Lucy was when it came to…all of this?

It had begun as an innocent musing, more out of curiosity than anything else…but then it had grown and festered until Lucy had built Jessica up to be an almost superhuman figure, capable of eradicating disease, whipping up a gourmet dish and knowing exactly what to do in any type of emergency situation. Because really, as Wyatt’s wife, she would have to be something really special, wouldn’t she? Was it any wonder then, that her purely speculative supposings made her feel like a complete failure in comparison to the phantom woman whom, she knew, would always be first in Wyatt’s heart and mind?

Not that she could begrudge him for that…it wasn’t like she was really married to him, after all.

Still, her emotions were in tatters…the anxiety over Wyatt and the constant reminder that she wasn’t up to the challenge of this role of wife and caretaker leaving her on the brink of a complete and total breakdown. Shaking her head as tears began to spill out of her eyes, she made a mad dash for her shawl, “I can’t do this anymore.” she gasped, “I’m going to get the doctor.”

“No…Lucy!” Rufus hissed, grabbing her by the elbow, “What the hell is he going to do? You know better than any of us – these 18th century doctors are basically glorified butchers.”

“He can at least let me know if this burn is infected or not.” she responded hotly, “and then, I don’t know…maybe we can try to think of something…maybe Mrs. Poe has some other herbs…something I’ve missed…” she muttered mindlessly as she wrapped the shawl around her shoulders.

“You can’t go out there by yourself.” Rufus reasoned, “Wyatt will kick my ass if…”

Lucy rounded on him, “We have to know what we’re dealing with, Rufus. I can’t just sit here and
do nothing while Wyatt…”she fought back tears as she explained in a quavering voice, “if I do nothing and he dies…I’ll…I’ll never be able to forgive myself.”

Rufus turned back to look at Wyatt – he was clearly suffering, just as she had said…and even if he was desperately trying to be optimistic about his friend’s condition, Lucy was right, if he really was dying and they did nothing…how could they ever forgive themselves? Giving a resigned sigh, he released Lucy’s elbow, “Alright, fine…just…just be careful, okay?” he replied, “I mean it, if anything happens to you, Wyatt will never forgive me.”

“Just try and keep him comfortable.” Lucy said with a determined nod, “I’ll be back as soon as I can.” Rufus watched her go with more than a little trepidation. After being witness to the French ambush, he wasn’t naïve enough to think something like that couldn’t happen again. It wasn’t a very far walk to John Fraser’s farm…but in the growing dark of evening he couldn’t help but keep his eye on Lucy’s retreating figure with a growing sense of dread until she finally disappeared over the ridge line.

Turning back to a sleeping Wyatt, he shrugged and muttered with a sheepish smile, “Don’t blame me…she’s your wife, man.”

When Lucy had arrived at the farm, she found, much to her consternation that the surgeon had taken off for Fort Cumberland that morning with a whole cart full of the severely injured soldiers in search of much needed supplies. Upon seeing Lucy, so desperate and anxious, Mrs. Poe volunteered her own services, having, by her own admission, “nursed many a sick and injured back to health.”

Even though Lucy knew that she already had her hands full with Mr. Fraser and the other wounded at the farm, Lucy was grateful to receive any help…especially since Mrs. Poe, with her cool and collected manner seemed to dispel all of her fears and anxiety over Wyatt’s condition with her mere presence and her assurances that she could help.

However, it wasn’t long before she had regretted ever making the trek…

“Why did you not come to me sooner?” Mrs. Poe asked with a disapproving frown as she peered with disgust into the pot of porridge still hanging over the fire. “I knew ye were a bit off-footed when it came to domestic matters, but I didn’t know ye were this deficient.”

Rufus was too late in hiding the laugh that escaped him at that assessment, causing Lucy to glare at him angrily as Mrs. Poe continued with a sigh, “The key to a good porridge, my dear is butter…and it appears you have none.” Shaking her head in disapproval, she threw her hands up in exasperation, “No matter, that can be amended…you,” she said pointing to Rufus, “I’ll need you to run back to the farm and fetch some…just find Margaret, she’ll help you. But before you go,” she added with a solemn frown, “let’s see what can be done about your Master, here.”
Mrs. Poe gently lifted the dressings lying loosely along Wyatt’s side, peering over her spectacles at the blisters peppered all over his burn. “I see what you mean, dear…it certainly turns ones stomach.” She pressed lightly along his side and Lucy noted with horror, a bit of blood and pus oozing from one of the more affected areas of his torso. “We need to draw out the toxins…” she murmured, as she pulled out a small knife from her apron and began puncturing Wyatt’s blisters.

Panicked, Lucy threw herself in front of Wyatt, “No! What are you doing?”

“Did you or did you not come to me asking for help?” Mrs. Poe asked with more than a little impatience as Lucy stammered her rebuttal. Talking over her, the housekeeper sighed, “We need to draw out the toxins or they will just sit there and fester…trust me, my dear I’ve lived longer than you have and have dealt with far worse cases than this.” Walking over to the table, Mrs. Poe pulled out a few jars from her basket, waving her free hand dismissively as she explained, “Just a wee bit of wheatgerm, lard and some plaister…should do the trick…be a dear and go dish me out a bit of water from the cistern.”

Still hovering over Wyatt’s still form, Lucy shook her head as she tried to remember what plaister and wheatgerm were used for. “Plaister? What’s….what’s…”

“Never you mind, m’dear.” Mrs. Poe dismissed, “If you want your husband set right, then I’m going to need you to fetch me that water.” As Lucy begrudgingly did as she was told, Mrs. Poe turned to Rufus with her empty basket, “And you - go fetch us that butter, some more oats, a flask of bone broth, a bushel of peas and a slab of ham.” She shook her head and muttered, “No use patching him up if he’s just going to starve to death…oh and young man?” she called after a retreating Rufus, “Have Margaret send you back with three or four loaves of bread and some cheese – that will set your stores right.”

"Oh...well, Rufus picked up some bread from the farm earlier," Lucy explained weakly, "and I...well I made..."

Mrs. Poe cast her a withering glare, "This?" she asked as she picked up the blackened loaf, "this isn't bread and that?" she added, pointing to the loaf Rufus had brought with him earlier, "That has turned, I'm afraid...though, I don't expect you'd know the difference, would you?"

Lucy huffed out a silent, but indignant breath as she turned on her heel and marched out onto the porch, followed by an equally indignant Rufus who accosted her the minute the door shut behind them, “What the hell, Lucy?” he hissed at her as she made her way to the cistern, “Didn't Wyatt specifically say not to drain those blisters?”
“I know, I know!” Lucy spat out in frustration, “It just….it happened so fast. I didn’t think she was just gonna start cutting them open…who does that?” She let out an anxious breath as she ran a hand through her hair, “What are we going to do now?”

“We?” Rufus chuckled darkly, “You mean, YOU. I didn’t go running off to get the advice of some 18th century Neanderthal.” He shook his head and pointed at her meaningfully, “No, no…that was all you. I told you not to go messing around with these people. Besides,” he added as he lifted the basket and began walking down the path, “I’ve got errands to run…so you know, have fun with that.”

“Rufus!” she hissed after him, but he didn’t so much as turn to glance her direction as he marched resolutely towards the farm. With a heavy sigh, Lucy stomped towards the cistern and dished out a bowl of water, only to find upon returning to the cabin that Mrs. Poe was now scraping her ruined porridge from earlier into a trough along with what was left of her burned bread. “That can go to your goats.” she said with a meaningful nod to Lucy, “though I don’t think it’s even fit for their consumption.” Taking the water from Lucy, she poured it into a small bowl and mixed it with a powdery substance and a slab of lard and began warming it over the fire.

“Um...what exactly is that?” Lucy asked, flinching away from the stench of melting animal fat.

“Just something my mother taught me years ago, mark my words, this is the quickest way to draw out the bad blood.” she insisted as she stirred the concoction into a thick, glossy, and slightly sweet-smelling paste. “Once this cools,” she explained after taking it from the fire and setting it on the table, “it’ll need to be spread over his burn liberally…and you’ll want to leave this on for a few hours so that it can draw out the inflammation.

Hardly comforting her, Lucy watched helplessly - about a half an hour later, as Mrs. Poe took the wheatgerm concoction and carefully spread it over Wyatt’s split and bleeding skin. His muscles twitched, but otherwise, he did not stir from her ministrations…something that both worried and comforted Lucy. The fact that Wyatt hardly noticed or cared that the most sensitive spot on his torso was now being lathered with yet another paste had, of course, unnerved her….but she was also grateful that these attentions went unnoticed because she was not prepared, either emotionally or physically, to hold him down again.

Now,” Mrs. Poe said as she wiped her hands on her apron, “let’s get you situated.”

She stayed for hours, even after Rufus returned, teaching Lucy how to bake bread over the hearth fire, how to make cheese and butter from goat’s milk, and even how to make a decent pot of porridge. When she finally did take her leave, she nodded to the tureen of bone broth and stated
seriously, “You make sure you feed him that broth at least four times a day…spoon feed it to him if you must, but make sure he takes it. Nothing better to strengthen up the constitution.”

When the door finally closed behind her, Lucy let out a ragged breath as Rufus gaped at Lucy, “I don’t want to sound ungrateful for you know…her feeding us and all, but seriously, I thought you were bossy…you’ve got nothing on that woman.”

“Gee, thanks Rufus.” Lucy grunted as she slumped down on one of the stools around the table. “I guess I just needed some reassurance.” she admitted as she covered her face in her hands, “I don’t know what I’m doing, Rufus…and this,” she added motioning to Wyatt, “this is so beyond anything I’ve ever dealt with. It’s one thing to wrap people’s burns and give them water…but this?”

“I know.” Rufus muttered softly. “And you know, she may be a bit…much, but you know, she really did seem to know what she was doing. I think you made the right call.” he added with a serious nod.

“Really?” Lucy asked hopefully, dropping her hands from her face.

“Yeah, really.” Rufus assured her, “I mean, I really wish she hadn't messed with Wyatt's blisters like that…but who knows? Maybe that really was the right thing to do…and at least we’re all set for food for the next few days, right?”

Lucy let out a mirthless chuckle, “Yeah…don’t get too excited.” she warned. “You are looking at the woman who can barely use a microwave...much less nurse anyone back to health.”

“Come on, Lucy.” he urged, "if I can learn to be a blacksmith...which, by the way is the hardest thing I have ever had to learn in my entire life...you can learn to cook like an honest to God pioneer woman.” Lucy offered him a slight smile before shaking her head despondently. "I mean, it Lucy," Rufus insisted, "you're one of the smartest people I know...and yeah, you might not be the best cook right now...but that doesn't mean, after some practice you won't be able to get the hang of it."

“I know.” Lucy answered with a nod as she rubbed her temples, “but without Mrs. Poe standing right beside me, barking out instructions..."

"You don't need Mrs. Poe," Rufus insisted, "sure, she's great for advice...but Lucy, you're the one
"Yeah, well, cooking is one thing." Lucy replied glumly, "I just...I just hope whatever she did for Wyatt actually helps...because I really don't know what else to do."

“What did she put on him anyway?” Rufus asked.

“I don’t know.” Lucy breathed out as she pulled her book towards her, “She called it plaister…but I’m not seeing anything like that listed under the “p’s.” She bit her lip in thought, “But I know I’ve seen it somewhere in here…”

As Lucy continued to flip through the pages, Rufus cut himself off a thick slab of bread, “Well, she may not be much of a doctor, but the woman can cook...even if this bread’s a little on the stale side.”

“That’s the one she said was moldy.” Lucy reminded him, not looking up from her book, “Remember?” she added with marked annoyance, “She said I wouldn't know the difference?”

“Oh yeah.” Rufus chuckled as he discarded the slice he had been eating and moved to a different loaf, “Just ignore it, Lucy...you're not that bad...the pea thing you made tonight was pretty damn good.”

"Hmmm...yeah that pease pudding. It reminded me of pea soup." she added with a grimace, "Not the biggest fan, but as we are well aware, beggars can't be choosers."

"That's for sure." Rufus agreed, "But given that we started out in this century scrounging for berries in the middle of the woods? I'd say we are a hell of a lot better off now than where we were...and once you get that goat milking down? I know you don't want to do it," Rufus added as Lucy looked up from her book and glared at him, "but I’m not even going to lie, I cannot wait for that to happen...and not just because it’s going to be freaking hilarious. Homemade butter? Cheese? Being able to have a nice glass of milk instead of...nasty ass water and alcohol? That’s gonna be…"

“Oh my God!” Lucy gasped, throwing the book down and stumbling towards the dry sink, “Rufus, we need to get that paste off of Wyatt.”
“Wha…why? What is it?” he asked completely bewildered as she gracelessly dunked a rag into the wash basin and tossed it to Rufus, who was standing closer to him.

“It’s lead.” she sobbed, “It’s white lead plaister…they used it as a cure-all…”

“Holy shit!” Rufus exclaimed, “You mean…?” Ripping back the covers, Rufus pulled away the bandages and as quickly as he could, wiping away the paste frantically, but it was clear…the damage had already been done. Wyatt’s skin was even more blistered and far angrier looking than it had been before. Wyatt, too, was groaning miserably in his sleep, his face contorted in pain as Rufus worked to clean away any traces of the plaister. “Why the hell would you use lead as a cure-all?”

“I don’t know.” Lucy sobbed as she brought forth another rag to cleanse Wyatt’s torso. “They used it in all sorts of things…paint, makeup...medicine...Oh my God, what have I done?”

“As much as I’d like to say I told you so,” Rufus replied with a grave look of concern, “I…won’t..” He swallowed hard as he took in the reality of Wyatt’s scalded torso, “you…you couldn’t know what she would do, Lucy.”

“Yes, I could.” Lucy gasped out through tears of frustration and despair, “You said it youself....I know more than anyone what these people were capable of in terms of medical knowledge...I should have listened to you…I should have listened to Wyatt.” She let out a helpless cry of despair as she muttered with a shake of her head, "He’s worse and it’s all my fault.”

Rufus couldn’t really argue with her there. Whatever anyone wanted to say about the situation, it was decidedly worse than it had been. Not only were Wyatt’s blisters now open, exposed and vulnerable to infection…he now had possible lead poisoning to contend with. Almost hating to even ask the question, Rufus winced as he turned to Lucy, “How long was that stuff on him?”

“A couple of hours.” she replied shakily.

“Okay…okay.” Rufus replied in a voice of forced calm, “Let me think…people get lead poisoning all the time…I mean, not as much as they used to, but it still happens. It doesn’t necessarily mean he’s gonna die from it.” At Lucy’s whimper, Rufus continued quickly, “I think…I mean, I can’t be sure…because it’s been a few years since I took chemistry…but I seem to remember my Professor saying that you could fight the effects of lead poisoning with iron and calcium….so cheese.” he said as he lifted up the block he had retrieved from John Fraser’s farm. “And you can get milk from the goats…”
“Okay.” Lucy nodded anxiously, “but what about everything else?”

“We’re just going to have keep doing what we’ve been doing, Lucy…and just hope for the best.”

But as the night wore on, Wyatt’s fever spiked and the way he was shivering even wrapped as he was in the quilt had Lucy in near hysterics. “He’s getting worse, Rufus. He’s getting worse.” She caressed Wyatt’s sweaty brow as she gritted out through angry tears, “Flynn really did know what he was doing when he stranded us here didn’t he? No parts to fix the LifeBoat, hundreds of miles away from any city, there are no real medicines for disease, no antibiotics…Wyatt was right,” she said with a shaky sigh, “it’s 1754…if we make a mistake, we die.” She let out a shaky sigh as she muttered quietly, "He's going to die, isn't he? He's going to die because of me."

For a long while, Rufus said nothing, his gaze fixed on the table in front of him. But as Lucy let out a strangled sob as she pressed a wet cloth to Wyatt's forehead, he suddenly turned to her with a look of realization on his face, “Not necessarily." he said slowly as Lucy lifted her tear stained eyes towards him, "It’s 1754…antibiotics won't be officially discovered until 1928.”

Lucy let out an almost maniacal laugh, “What do you think I’ve been saying for the past few hours, Rufus? We’re totally screw…”

“No.” Rufus interrupted, slowly shaking his head at her as he lifted the moldy loaf of bread, “they haven’t been discovered yet…doesn’t mean they don’t exist.”

It took a few seconds for Lucy to register exactly what it was that Rufus was saying, but when it finally did click into place, she scrambled away from Wyatt and wrenched the bread from Rufus’ hand, “Oh my God, of course! Why didn’t I think of this before? Even the Ancient Egyptians…” she began, but she shook her head at Rufus anxiously, “But Rufus are you sure you can…”

“We did this in my medical compounds lab,” he replied with frantic nod, “it’s really not that difficult…if you know what you’re doing.” At Lucy’s anxious glance, he assured, “And I know what I’m doing…believe me, I really wanted to impress that girl.” Picking up a damp rag, he carefully wrapped the moldy loaf and placed it in a warm alcove above the fireplace, before turning to Lucy with a smile, “Move over, Alexander Fleming…we just invented penicillin.”

Chapter End Notes
Sorry for taking so long to update this...I actually had this chapter DONE and ready to go last week...and then I went to proof it and I hated the way it was set up. The first part of what will be the NEXT chapter was originally the opener for this one with all of this chapter serving as a flashback...and it just didn't work. Because of the changes and rewrites I had to make, it pushed me back in getting this updated for you...but the good news is, I've got most of the next chapter already written (97%)...so you won't have to wait long for the next update! (YAY)

I have been up to my eyeballs in reading all about 18th century remedies. Yes, they used white lead as a cure-all....and as some of you know they used it in makeup - it's what made QEI go bald and gave her skin that oh so healthy white chalky glow. You CAN make your own penicillin and the Ancient Egyptians actually would put moldy pieces of bread on wounds to heal them....isn't that the craziest thing? It took thousands of years for Western Civilization to catch up to what the ancients already knew. Blows my mind.

White Willow Bark actually is like a natural aspirin...and I thought it would be a good fit for Rufus (who is a scientist after all) to sort of be a bit of a know it all when it comes to these compounds - more so than Lucy who would only be concerned with the historical aspect of it...so anyway, I brought in his militant crush to sort of round out college experience a bit. (shrug).

Also, Wyatt's burns...a lot of burn victims do have fevers that manifest about 16 hours after injury...as well as blisters and things...and it's as Wyatt said, it's the body's natural response to being burned...just try to regulate itself. So yes, Lucy kind of over-reacted, but you really can't blame her. It's the 18th century after all.

I'm going to work this week on finishing up the next chapter of Stranded and the next chapter of Once Upon a Highway. I only have two more chapter updates for that fic before it's finished and then I'll go back to working out the rest of WHMB. That one only has 2 or 3 more chapters left in it as well (one that is and has been 90% finished for a LONG WHILE now), but it's just a complicated ending and needs more attention than I have to spare for it right now with these two other fics in the works....there's just not enough time in the day.

With all of that said, I hope you enjoyed this update. It was more Lufus than Lyatt...I know...but I promise, it's coming.

Thank you for reading!
Chapter 21

The storm blew in from out of nowhere.

Much like the French attack, there had been no sign, no indication of its arrival; It just exploded onto the scene with a violent fury that left Wyatt desperately scrambling through the fields as thunder and lightning exploded all around him. He was grateful that his navigational instincts had been honed after covering this ground so many times, but even so, the driving wind and rain made it nearly impossible to find his way…much less find Lucy.

He shouldn’t have let her go to the farm…he was feeling better and needed the exercise, but she had overruled him…insisting on getting the water herself…which, given the fact that it was currently pouring - was more than a little ironic. Now, with the worst storm he had ever seen in his life blowing through this God-forsaken country like a freight train, he was kicking himself that he had ever allowed her to convince him to stay in that damn bed.

A dull pain throbbed in his side while he ran through the sodden fields, his feet sloshing through pools of standing water and mud, absolutely soaking his stockings and covering his shoes in mucky grime. She had already been gone too long before the storm blew in…he had already been getting anxious…but now? Now, he needed to find her, and quickly…but as desperate as he was to get to Lucy, he was trying his best to not over-exert himself, knowing full-well that she was right; he was not yet completely healed from his last run-in with the French, despite his repeated insistence to her that he was fine.

When he had raced out into the storm, he had imagined he would find Lucy struggling along the path, on her way home, but after no sign of her on the muddy lane, he was convinced that she must have been at John Fraser’s farm when it had hit and had taken refuge there. He was prepared to find her safe and sound…and absolutely fuming that he had been so reckless, running out in this dangerous storm…but he considered he would rather risk a lecture from Lucy Preston, than deal with the guilt that would certainly come if anything had happened to her because he hadn’t.

Either way, he knew he wouldn’t be able to rest easy until he knew she was safe – and so with no sign of her as he crested the hill to the Fraser farm, he figured after coming this far…he might as well just keep going.

Racing through the back gate to the Fraser farm, Wyatt peered through the relentless wind and rain towards the water pump, where predictably, there was no sign of Lucy. Hardly surprised, he made his way to the house where, dripping wet and panting, he burst through John Fraser’s back door and found himself face to face with a confused and alarmed Mrs. Poe.
“Gracious me!” she exclaimed, “What brings you here when it’s raining pikels out there?”

Clutching his side, Wyatt swallowed hard, gasping for air as he explained in one word, “Lucy.”

“She hasn’t got the sickness, has she?” Mrs. Poe asked in concern. “Some of the soldiers…”

“No,” Wyatt replied, his anxiety mounting, “she came to get water…but…then the storm hit…” he looked at Mrs. Poe desperately, “are you telling me she isn’t here?”

“I certainly haven’t seen her.” Mrs. Poe answered with a shake of her head, “T’aint anyone been at that water pump since noon…I know because Tom was making repairs to it just before the heavens opened.”

“Shit.” Wyatt cursed, making his way back out of the door and onto the porch, followed closely by Mrs. Poe. “Lucy!!” he called out, but once again, his voice was lost in the din of howling winds and rain.

“Have you checked the barn, dear?” Mrs. Poe shouted at him over the screaming wind, “She can’t have gotten very far…unless…” she wrung her hands in concern as Wyatt turned to stare at her, “Well you know since that night there have been attacks all up and down this side of the river?” she asked anxiously, “I…I don’t mean to be the bearer of ill tidings but Mr. Fraser just received the report not one hour ago…another raid just five miles from here…a whole family killed right in their home, God save them.”

Horrified, Wyatt didn’t even respond, he raced back out into the storm, heading straight for the barn…but he knew, even before he got there, Lucy wasn’t inside – the doors were mercilessly closed and locked from the outside.

Desperate now, he sprinted back down the muddy lane, his feet sticking fast in the ruts and grooves carved out by the storm, splaying at odd angles each time they made contact with the soft ground. The wind blew hard against him, cutting through him like a knife, chilling him to his bones. Far from deterring him, it only served to urge him on that much faster.

He had to find her.
“Lucy!” he shouted - his voice, however, was drowned out by another loud crash of thunder sending him into a state of full-blown panic. Was Mrs. Poe, right? Had the French made another sneak attack? Had they ambushed them again and disappeared with her into the storm? Frantic, he raced down the lane towards their cabin, hoping that maybe they had just somehow missed each other in the storm. “Lucy!” he called out again, now absolutely terrified that he had lost her.

And then he heard it.

The faint sound of his name sounding over the howling winds as he was sliding down the hill towards the cabin. He tried calling back to her, but his voice was lost in the gale-force winds, carrying it off to some other corner of the rolling fields and forests surrounding them. “Lucy!” he shouted in reply, terrified that he had imagined it. “Lucy! Lucy!” Every second feeling like an eternity as he waited in vain for her to answer him.

A feeling of dread and hopelessness nearly overpowered him as he opened the door to their cabin, finding it unnervingly empty. Breathing heavily, he wiped the dripping water off of his face and peered back out into storm, silently resolving to petition John Fraser to order a search party when he heard it again, the faint sound of his name…stopping him dead in his tracks.

“Wyatt!”

It louder this time…but there was something else…something more frantic in her voice that unnerved him more than he already was. “Lucy?” he called out, scanning the storm-tossed hillscape for any sign of her.

He waited with bated breath, praying to God he wasn’t losing his mind, when a definitive “Wyatt, I’m here!” reached his straining ears. Desperate, he followed the sound of her voice, racing as fast as he dared down the hillside to where he found her, next to the creek and sprawled underneath a fallen tree, her ankle trapped beneath one of its heavy limbs. The muddy ground in front of her bore evidence of the multiple attempts she had made at trying to pull herself free and the closer Wyatt got to her, he could see that she was not only freezing, but absolutely exhausted. “I can’t…it’s stuck.” she gasped out in explanation, as he knelt down beside her.

Wyatt took her face in his hands as if to convince himself that she was real, overwhelmed with relief at finding her relatively unhurt after thinking the worst just moments before. “Don’t worry Lucy, I’m gonna get you out of here…I’ve got you.” he promised, but she shook her head at him anxiously.

“No, Wyatt…you can’t…you’re not….”
“I’m not going to leave you out here in this storm,” he dismissed with a huff as he threw himself against the limb, using all of his weight to move it just enough for her to wriggle her ankle free.

Muddy and shaking from both the cold and her over-wrought nerves, Lucy tried to stand, but stumbled the moment she put weight on her foot. Seeing this, Wyatt reached out for her anxiously as she tumbled back to the ground, “Lucy!”

“I’m sorry, Wyatt.” Lucy groaned, as she scooted herself backwards onto a patch of grass, “I…I don’t think I can make it up that hill…”

“Here…” he instructed with a sigh, “put your arms around my neck.” When she made to argue with him again, Wyatt threw her arm over his neck himself and scooped her up into his arms. “I told you,” he said with a huff, “I’ve got you, ma’am.” Staggering uphill towards the cabin, laden down as he was with Lucy was difficult, the muddy slope of the hillside hampering his efforts considerably. His side screamed in pain, but he hardly gave a damn, he had to get them both to safety. Nearly falling several times, he fought against the wind, rain, and slick mud to carry Lucy back home, but of more concern for Wyatt was how cold she felt in his arms as the icy rain pelted against them mercilessly. “We’re almost there…” he muttered in her ear as he staggered forward with her, “just…just a little further.”

He could feel her shivering against his chest as he raced to the still open door of the cabin. Upon entering however, he noted with alarm, that their fire was almost dying. Setting her down on a roughly hewn stool, he quickly fed the flame, willing it to spring back to life so that they could both dry out and find some much needed relief from the unrelenting cold that was, even now, piercing through every crevice of the rustic house and chilling them to the bone.

“I’m so cold.” Lucy moaned, shaking violently.

“I know…I know.” Wyatt nodded, quickly setting more wood onto the fire, “I’m trying, Lucy…just…just hang on, okay?” Blowing at the glowing embers, he willed them to ignite, cursing at how long it was taking, until finally a small twig caught and soon erupted into a full-blown flame. Sighing in relief, he turned to Lucy and knelt before her in concern, “How’s your ankle?” he asked.

Unable to speak, Lucy merely shook her head, prompting Wyatt to quickly remove her shoes and stockings to ascertain the extent of her injury. Her feet felt frozen, and though she didn’t seem to mind as he attempted to quickly warm them in his hands, the moment his palm closed around her bruised ankle, she let out hiss of pain as she jerked away from him. “Sorry….” he muttered, “but I need to check if its broken.” As gently as he could, he rolled her ankle one way, then the other, his
hand tenderly massaging the bone as she tightly gripped both sides of the stool, “It seems fine… probably just sprained” he said, finally with a sigh as he gently dropped her foot, “but you’re freezing, Lucy…we need to get you warm.”

Rushing towards the small chest by the bed, he pulled out a fresh set of chemises and petticoats as Lucy shakily attempted to remove her soaked clothes. Turning, Wyatt could see her struggling, “here…let me help you.” he offered as he pulled at the strings securing her bodice at the front until it fell open at the shoulders allowing him to lift it up and over her head.

He rubbed her arms roughly as he handed her a new chemise., “Here,” he suggested, “uh…put this on, and then you can slip out of the other one.”

Dutifully, Lucy complied, anxious to get out of her wet garments as soon as possible and into something dry. As the spoiled ones fell to the floor with a unceremonious splat, Wyatt quickly scooped them up and draped them over a chair near the fire before making quick change of his own top. As Lucy made to change out of her petticoat however, the weight on her ankle proved to be too much and she stumbled forward into Wyatt.

“Whoa…hey…are you okay?” he asked in concern, pulling her out from his chest, rubbing her arms as he did so. She, however, seemed to want to stay buried there…and as cold as she was, he really couldn’t blame her. He hugged her close, roughly rubbing his hands up and down her back and arms until he could feel her warmth springing back to life beneath his fingertips. Breathing out a sigh of relief, he slowed his work, but didn’t cease caressing her arms and back even as she pulled slightly away from him.

A hair’s breadth apart, they stood together in front of the budding fire, neither one feeling compelled to move away…and neither one wanting to.

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“Wyatt…” she began, but no sooner had his name escaped her lips than his own were crashing against them. He groaned as she pressed herself closer, her mouth moving in concert with his own as his hands drifted up her back and buried into her wet hair.

“Wyatt.” she gasped as he abandoned her lips to pay due reverence to her jaw and neckline.

The battle that had been raging within him for days, months…years even…had finally been won… but not by him. Somehow, she had fought her way through every obstacle, every barricade, every wall he had built around his heart since Jessica’s death and lodged herself deep within…and no matter how hard he tried to push her out…she just would not budge.
Not that he was complaining.

He made quick work of her sodden petticoat, allowing it to collapse into a heap at their feet as he wrapped his arms around her waist and began walking her backwards to the bed, his mouth fused to hers once more. With one hand, he gently supported her back, easing her down as his other desperately clawed at the hem of her chemise, pulling it higher and higher…

“Wyatt!”

He sat up with a start, his heart pounding fast in chest as Lucy stood over him, gently caressing the side of his face, her eyes narrowed in grave concern. “Are you okay?” she asked breathlessly, “It’s your side, isn’t it? Is it hurting you again?”

Gripping her hand momentarily, he took in his surroundings, completely confused. Sunshine was pouring in through the open windows of the cabin, there was not a cloud in the sky, he was in the bed…and Lucy…Lucy was standing over him…

Fully dressed.

Oh shit.

Groaning he held his head in his hands, pressing his palms to his eyes as he desperately attempted to knock the mental image of Lucy writhing beneath him out of his sex-starved brain.

It had been fifteen days since the results of his heroics against the French ambush had landed him in this bed and while he had resigned himself to the necessity of sleeping in the bed early on in his recovery, it was now becoming a bit of a liability…not that he could do much about it. It still hurt too much to lift his arms to clamber up to the loft himself and he wasn’t about to ask Lucy to sleep up there…

Because she was claustrophobic…of course.

Forced to sleep next to her, therefore, Wyatt spent every restless night breathing in the sweet honey and lavender scent of Lucy’s hair, waking up to the feel of her cold feet entangled with his own,
and finding himself huddled against her in an attempt to stay warm after she stole all the damn covers. But that wasn’t even the worst of it – his injury meant that he was also forced to surrender himself over to her medical ministrations…her fingers dancing all along his bare torso…several times a day…every damn day…for two weeks.

Torture didn’t even begin to cover it.

Completely oblivious to Wyatt’s inner struggle, Lucy continued to fawn over him anxiously “Wyatt? What’s wrong?” she asked again as she moved her hand across his face in concern, checking for fever. “Are you in pain?”

Flinching away from her, Wyatt retreated to the middle of the bed, desperate to keep as far away from Lucy as possible…at least until he got himself under some semblance of control. Lucy cast him an admonishing glare as he did so, turning back to the table and producing the medical kit, “I knew it.” she said with a shake of her head, “You should have taken that willow bark tonic last night. I know it tastes gross, Wyatt…but you always wake up in pain when you don’t…”

“I’m fine.” Wyatt grunted out, his head still buried in his hands, too mortified to even look at her.

“Mmmmmhmmm” Lucy hummed doubtfully as she made her way over to the table mixing some acrid smelling liquid into a paste. Setting it down on the small table next to the bed, she added, “I think I’ll be the judge of that. Take off your shirt.”


“Why?” Lucy asked incredulously, “You were groaning” she explained, “Deny it all you want Wyatt, but I know you are in pain. Come on, we need to check those burns…let me see.”

“No,” he shook his head frantically, retreating further away from her, “Just…just leave me alone. It’s fine. I’m fine.”

“You don’t look fine.” Lucy said appraisingly as she sat down next to him on the bed, “you’re all flushed and sweaty again. Wyatt…” she urged anxiously, reaching for him again, “you had an infection…it could have come back…”

“Dammit Lucy, trust me.” he spat out as he swiped her hand away from him, “It’s not an infection.
I’m fine.”

“Okay…it’s not an infection,” Lucy scoffed, her voice dripping with skepticism, “but you still need to have your bandages changed, Wyatt. The doctor said every…”

“What the hell does he know?” Wyatt spat out, “You said yourself that 18th century medicine was a crock.” he added as he scrambled out from underneath the covers the minute her back was turned.

“Not all of it.” she maintained as she began coating fresh bandages with the paste she had mixed, “Cleaning your wounds? Making sure you have a fresh bandage on? Those are pretty standard for the 21st century, Wyatt” she argued before turning and finding, much to her surprise, Wyatt out of bed. “What are you doing?” Lucy asked him blankly.

“What does it look like I’m doing?” Wyatt grimaced as he limped his way over to the corner, “I’m getting the hell out of here.”

Wincing, he shoved on his jacket and slipped into his shoes as Lucy protested, “No, Wyatt…you can’t…you aren’t in any condition to…”

“Just leave me alone, okay?” Wyatt demanded as he flung open the door…only to find Rufus awkwardly standing there before him, his hand poised as if to knock, “What the hell do you want?” he spat out.

“Well good morning to you, too.” Rufus sneered as he crossed his arms over his chest, “Woke up on the wrong side of the bed again, I see.”

“Good morning, Rufus.” Lucy called from over Wyatt’s shoulder, “I was just trying to give him his medicine…”

“And I told you…I’m fine.” Wyatt gritted out again.

Lucy swapped a meaningful eye roll with Rufus, “Oh yeah,” he quipped sarcastically as he pushed his way past Wyatt and into the cabin, “anyone can see you’re just fan-freaking-tastic.” Taking a spoonful of porridge out of a bowl on the table, he nodded towards Lucy and asked with a mouthful
of food, “Seriously, is he always this grumpy in the morning?”

“Yes.” she supplied implicitly over Wyatt’s emphatic “No.”

“Uh-huh.” Rufus replied doubtfully, “Forgive me if I don’t take your word for it, man.” he added as he slapped Wyatt on the shoulder and sat down at the table with a groan.

“How are things at the forge, Rufus?” Lucy asked handing him a jar of honey.

“It’s going.” he replied with a heavy sigh, swirling honey into his porridge. “With Tom’s shoulder still healing and a whole literal army demanding supplies every damn day…” he groaned again and rubbed his arm, “I am now an expert on musket balls and horseshoes.”

“Musket balls and horseshoes aren’t going to get us home.” Wyatt reminded him gruffly.

“You don’t think I know that?” Rufus snapped, “I’m trying, okay? It’s not as easy as it looks, you know.” He cast Wyatt an annoyed grimace before turning to Lucy. “Listen, I didn’t mean to interrupt your um…quiet morning at home… but I just wanted to let you know that I talked to John Fraser and he thinks it’s best if we dig out another water pump before the frost sets in.”

Wyatt turned to Rufus in confusion, “Whoa…whoa…whoa…what are you talking about?” he asked, “What’s this about a water pump? I thought you were learning how to be a blacksmith?”

Rufus gaped at Wyatt, “I am.” he answered slowly, somewhat annoyed by his interruption. “But the one at the farm is all jacked up right now and with you all laid up and the French doing their thing, Colonel McKee thinks it’s a good idea if no one goes traipsing down to the river or the creek…especially alone…you know they lost two more soldiers this week?” Rufus added with a shake of his head.

Lucy shot an anxious glance towards Wyatt and muttered, “Mrs. Poe stopped by this morning and told me a whole family had been killed…about five miles from here.”

Uneasy for more reasons than one, Wyatt clenched his jaw and looked out of the window as Rufus whispered tensely “Just between us…this whole thing with the French is making me really nervous…even more now that Colonel Whatshisface is taking all of his troops back to Fort Cumberland for the winter.”
“What!” Wyatt barked out, looking even more anxious than he had before, “since when?”

Rufus gaped at him before stammering, “Si…since a letter came in from Williamsburg telling them they needed to prepare to m…meet some big wig General and his army.”

“Not General Braddock?” Lucy asked, turning towards him suddenly with a gasp.

“Yeah, that’s it” Rufus replied with a shrug, “Why?”

“Because,” Lucy groaned, “he’s not supposed to land in Virginia until February…he’s not even supposed to be here until July when he leads his disastrous expedition against the French….and they don’t even get this close. They French head them off before they get anywhere near Ft. Duquesne.”

“Define disastrous.” Wyatt asked tersely.

“Disastrous in that just about every British officer is killed…including Braddock.” Lucy explained as she paced in front of the fireplace, “George Washington barely escapes…he’s shot through his coat three times…ugh…this…this is not good.” She bit her thumb anxiously and muttered, “This could change everything.”

“Let’s not panic, yet, okay?” Rufus replied, trying to calm her down, “for all we know it could still happen the same way. They’re only a couple mon…seven months early, right? And with winter coming,” he encouraged further, “they probably won’t do a damn thing but sit around that fort, roasting marshmallows and telling stories by the fire. I mean, who attacks in the dead of winter?”


“You think?” Rufus asked incredulously, “Who the hell attacks on Christmas?”
“If the British are sending Braddock now,” Lucy murmured thoughtfully, “they must be planning an attack, especially if they’re recalling these troops…if the French find out, it’ll be war.

“It was already war.” Wyatt griped impatiently.

“Not officially.” Lucy argued.

“Official or not” Wyatt spat out, “these two have been going at it for months now. So, what if the dates change a bit? War is going to happen whether we like it or not…and if it’s all the same to you, I’d rather not be here when it happens.”

“But Wyatt,” Lucy pleaded, “what if this battle does happen early and Washington is killed? What happens then? Or what if Braddock survives? You know Washington’s leadership after Braddock’s death is what earns him the respect that elevates him to lead the army during the Revolution?”

“Look, you two.” Rufus interjected, “I get it…this isn’t exactly the way the story is supposed to go…but we could be worrying ourselves over nothing. There’s no guarantee that they’re going to attack early, right? He may just be coming to get the lay of the land. Besides, we’ve got more important things to worry about right now,” he added as he took another bite of porridge, “like, where do you want your water pump?”

“We’re supposed to be trying to figure out how the hell we’re going to get out of here.” Wyatt spat out coldly, “Not…not putting in plumbing!”

Rufus and Lucy exchanged astonished looks before she narrowed her eyes at him in confusion, “Wyatt…we still have to live…”

“We’re not going to be doing much living if we’re stuck in the 18th century for much longer.” he growled, storming out of the door in a huff. Clothes all askew, limping slightly and favoring his side, Wyatt made his way through the yard and down the well-trodden path towards John Fraser’s farm, leaving a bewildered Lucy and Rufus in his wake.

Shaking his head slowly in disbelief, Rufus turned to an equally stunned Lucy and scoffed, “What the hell is his problem?
“I’m not sure.” Lucy said slowly, her eyes narrowing as she watched Wyatt’s retreating figure slowly but surely make his way up the small hill towards the ridgeline.

Rufus scoffed, “For a guy who spent two weeks fixing up this house…”

“I don’t think it’s about the house.” Lucy interrupted thoughtfully as she turned back towards the table with a sigh, scraping the paste she had made into a small jar. At Rufus’ puzzled expression she explained, “I think it’s getting to him…being stuck here.”

“And what the hell does he think it is for us? A vacation?” Rufus spat out at her incredulously.

“No.” Lucy said with a shake of her head, “But…I think…with his burn…he’s been really worried…we all were.” She looked at Rufus with a frown, “He could have died, Rufus…I mean, we almost killed him for heaven’s sake.”

“We?” Rufus gaped at her incredulously, “Oh no, no…there was no “we” about it. That was you and ol’ Nurse Ratched.” Rufus chuckled darkly as he dove into a bowl of porridge, “If anything, I saved his life…and you’d think he’d be a little more grateful.”

Lucy sighed heavily as she set aside Wyatt’s unused medicine thinking over everything that had transpired over the last two weeks.

Wyatt had been very sick…even after they began feeding him the penicillin and taking a page out of the Egyptians book and applying it directly to his skin, there were some nervous moments where she and Rufus had both been really concerned that they might just lose him…that they had been too late. But then, after many sleepless nights sitting by his bedside, spoon feeding him bone broth and penicillin, he finally turned a corner. Having fallen asleep at the dining table, poring over a new remedy book she had borrowed from Mrs. Poe, Lucy was startled awake one morning by Wyatt’s groggy voice, “What the? Um…does anyone want to tell me why I’m laying on…what is this? Bread? And…wha…why the hell is it moldy?”

Relieved to hear Wyatt’s voice after so many days of sitting helplessly by his bedside, Lucy launched herself at him, wrapping her arms around his neck…taking him completely by surprise. “Oh my God,” she sobbed as she pressed her hands to his face and forehead, “I can’t believe it…you…you don’t have a fever anymore.”

“I told you that was…”he began but as tears began to well in Lucy’s eyes, he groaned in
understanding, “Do I even want to know?”

As it turned out, he did not want to know.

The minute he found out that Mrs. Poe had cut open his blisters, he cursed and threw his head back admonishing Lucy for not trusting him or his training. “What the hell, Lucy? Didn’t I tell you…”

“Yes, but Wyatt,” she explained running her hands through her hair, “you were completely out of it…and you were…you were getting worse, okay? I just…I panicked, alright?”

“You could have killed me.” Wyatt spat out angrily, “I told you to just leave me the hell alone…why didn’t you trust me enough to know that I knew what I was talking about?”

Lucy stared back at him, feeling her error all the more with the utterance of that oh so significant word – trust. Why hadn’t she learned her lesson from 1972? Not trusting Wyatt with the journal, with Flynn…even her deal with Agent Christopher had almost ruined their relationship forever. And now, she had again, second-guessed him…had chosen to carve out her own path, her own solution to a problem, despite the fact that Wyatt had told her a fever after a burn was absolutely normal.

And he was right – she had almost killed him in the process.

“I’m…I’m so sorry, Wyatt.” Lucy began quietly in a voice quavering with emotion, “But seeing you…laying there like that…I just…”

“Hey, look who’s finally up!” Rufus called as he walked through the door, setting down his bag and moving to shake Wyatt’s hand. “How are you feeling, man?”

Lucy pursed her lips together and moved to heat a kettle as Wyatt rolled his eyes, “I’d be a hell of a lot better if I didn’t know what you all put me through these past few days.”

Rufus turned to Lucy with a tense smile, “He found out about the lead poisoning, huh?”

“What!” Wyatt growled.
“Rufus!” Lucy gritted out meaningfully, before turning to Wyatt with an apologetic shake of the head, “Nothing - it’s nothing…we fixed it, okay?”

“Fixed what?” Wyatt demanded.

“It’s just…well, Mrs. Poe might have put a lead-based salve on your burns to try to draw out the infection.” When Wyatt cursed, Lucy quickly added, “But as soon as I found out what it was, we took it off…and Rufus…”

“Rufus saved your ass.” he said meaningfully as he sat down on the stool Lucy had vacated earlier, “You’re welcome, by the way.” he said as he nodded towards the slice of bread lying by Wyatt’s side.

“What? For this?” Wyatt asked incredulously.

“That, I’ll have you know, is some first-rate topical penicillin my friend.” Pouring himself a bit of milk from the ewer they had cooling on the windowsill, he added as Wyatt raised his eyebrows at him, “That’s right, I made penicillin.”

“Moldy bread?” Wyatt asked dubiously.

“Yeah, where do you think penicillin comes from?” Rufus scoffed, “The bread was the easy part…”

“And my idea.” Lucy interjected as she began preparing a mug for Wyatt, “Well…technically it was the Ancient Egyptians. They used to cover wounds with moldy bread to help them heal.”

“Yeah, but actually purifying it and getting it to where you drink it down without gagging? That took some serious skill.”

“Wait a minute,” Wyatt interjected slowly, “are you telling me that I’ve…I’ve been drinking mold?”
“Pen-i-cillin.” Rufus corrected, “Purified mold…healthy mold…okay, yes…mold…but it worked, didn’t it? You’re not lying there looking…”

“So let me get this straight,” Wyatt grunted as he attempted to sit up, “you two took it upon yourselves to ignore everything I said, cut me open, gave me lead poisoning and then fixed it all by…”

“Inventing penicillin.” Rufus finished for him, “yeah, like I said…you’re welcome.”

Wyatt stared back at the two of them incredulously as if he wasn’t sure whether to be furious at them for not listening or impressed by their quick thinking and innovation.

For Lucy’s part, she didn’t blame Wyatt for being angry, nor did she hold it against him for grimacing every time she presented him with a cup of “hot mold.” It wasn’t like it was the most delectable thing in the world, after all. As Rufus had stated when he strained the first batch of moldy bread through a bit of cheesecloth…sugar would kill the penicillin…and so there wasn’t much else they could do to make it more palatable…and given that it was literally moldy bread, mixed with hot water, a bit of vinegar, and pressed into a tea, she imagined it didn’t taste very good.

She did her best to try to make it up to him, though.

After all their arguments about trust since before they even landed in this century, Lucy felt compelled more than ever to prove to Wyatt that she did trust him…and that he could trust her…and that despite her many short-comings she could be every bit of the wife her phantom version of Jessica was. When she wasn’t fawning over Wyatt’s burns or offering him medicine, therefore, she was giving him bone broth to eat, helping him get comfortable, or working on improving her domestic skills which, at the moment, included baking bread and cooking dinner.

She could feel Wyatt’s gaze follow her as she moved about the cabin, studying her, watching her as she prepared his medicine, tended to his torso, kneaded the dough, greased the pans or ground meal. When, at last, she finally placed a tureen in front of him with a slab of fresh baked bread and a bit of butter, he looked up at her in confusion, “What is this?”

“Your…your dinner…buttered grits and ham.” she responded sheepishly, “If…if you don’t want it, I can…I can get you some more bone broth…I just thought, well, I thought that you might want something a little more solid…since…”
“You made all of this?” Wyatt asked, an unreadable expression on his face.

“Well, yes” she flushed self-consciously, “Mrs. Poe didn’t just come to slice up your blisters, you know.” she added with a teasing hint of a smile, “She also gave me a few pointers when it came to cooking some basic dishes…like porridge and grits…and stew.” When Wyatt continued to stare at her with narrowed eyes, Lucy made to move the tureen away from him, “It’s okay if you don’t want to eat it,” she assured, “it’s probably not that good anyway…”

“No….no it’s fine.” Wyatt responded, looking at her curiously, “I just…I can’t believe I’m about to have actual food,” he admitted with a smirk, still looking at her inquisitively, “it’s been a while.”

Wyatt ate - for the first time since his injury…and while seeing him clean his bowl boosted Lucy’s self-confidence in the way of meal preparation, the fact that his appetite had once again, returned allowed her – for the first time in days, to breathe a sigh of grateful relief.

It did not, however, prevent her from doing everything she could to make up for almost killing him. With dinner done, she set aside a bowl for Rufus, who she imagined would come in sometime late in the evening, keeping it warm in the alcove above the fireplace. Storing the rest of their meal in a pot, she took it outside in the cold night air, securing the lid tightly with a few strips of cloth so that they could enjoy it the next morning for breakfast. She also took to gathering eggs, milking their goat and feeding their chickens before she came inside and found that Wyatt had once again, fallen asleep.

Pressing her hand to his forehead, Lucy breathed another sigh of relief to find that he was still mercifully cool to the touch…but she had spent so many evenings sitting by his bedside, worrying over his condition, it was hardly surprising that she found herself, hours later, startling awake, wrapped in her shawl and curled up in the rocking chair beside the bed.

At first, she thought it was the dying fire that had awoken her, the bitterly cold wind driving into every slight crack and crevice of the poorly insulated cabin, making it uncomfortably cool. She moved to throw another log on the fire, when she found her hand gently seized by a very much awake Wyatt who was lying there, looking at her…with the same curious expression he had worn before.

“Wyatt?” she whispered, “What’s wrong? Did…did you want something for your pain?”

“Lucy,” he whispered back, “You don’t have to worry about me anymore, okay? I’m fine. You need to sleep too.”
She nodded and shrugged sheepishly, “It’s just…just…force of habit…I guess.” He released her hand as she made her way to the fire and threw on a few more logs. Turning once more, she noted that Wyatt was still watching her, as if he suspected she would return back to her chair to obsessively watch over him, denying herself some much needed rest…and he would’ve been right. Unable to return to what had been her bed for several days, therefore, Lucy motioned awkwardly to the ladder, “I’ll just…um…yeah…”

“Isn’t Rufus up there?” Wyatt asked dryly.

“No…he um…he came by for dinner not long after you fell asleep,” Lucy explained as she began climbing the ladder, “he has an early day tomorrow so he’s just going to sleep in the barn with Tom. Oh…there’s…there’s not enough room to…” she stammered as she awkwardly surveyed the tiny loft, “okay, um…I’m just gonna change down here…and then I’ll….

“Lucy,” Wyatt breathed out in sleepy exasperation, “just get in the bed…it’s fine.”

“You mean…with…with you?” she stammered.

“Yeah…why not?” Wyatt asked with a slight shrug, “It’s not like we haven’t slept next to each other before…besides, it’s pretty tight up there…not exactly the best place for someone with claustrophobia.”

There were plenty of good reasons why not…all of them surrounded by the fact that for all intents and 18th century purposes. Wyatt Logan was her husband…and she was hopelessly head over heels for him…and that would typically be an issue in a typical marriage situation. But theirs was not a typical marriage…and their relationship, at times, hardly bordering on the platonic.

He could infuriate her more than any man she had ever known – his stubborn, reckless, hot-headed behavior drove her up the proverbial wall. But then there were times, like now, where his concern for her, his thoughtfulness, his care…overrode every maddening thing about him and in those moments…especially when he looked at her, she could hardly breathe.

She knew her heart was in serious trouble…pining after something that could never be…because even if they never did make it back to 2016 – it had been agreed, this was just part of the job.
Besides, even if one day, something did eventually happen between them here in the 18th century, Lucy knew that for Wyatt...it would be settling. He had made it abundantly clear that Jessica was the only woman he could ever love...and she didn’t think that being stranded in the 1700s for the rest of his life would change that. He had lived for five years, after all...still pining for her...and Lucy knew, he always would.

There just wasn’t room enough for her.

“Lucy,” Wyatt’s voiced called again, his half-closed eyes peering at her in the firelight, “get some sleep...or I won’t be able to.”

Resigning herself with a sigh, she quickly made work of her bodice...easier now since this particular dress laced in the front, and slipped into bed next to him, almost immediately regretting that she had done so when she realized how small the bed actually was. If Wyatt noticed any discomfort, he didn’t let on, he let out a sigh of his own as he murmured a sleepy, “Night, Lucy.” and settled further underneath the covers.

She turned her head to respond in kind, but instead, a stammered apology came out, “I...I’m so glad you’re okay, Wyatt. I...I’m sorry for not trusting you. I should have.” She nodded and blinked away the tears as she pressed on, “I just...when you weren’t getting any better, I didn’t know what else to do...” she sighed heavily before adding with a scoff, “I’m just not cut out for all of this.”

Wyatt sighed heavily before replying matter of factly, “Yes, you are.” When Lucy didn’t respond, he turned back to face her and explained, “Lucy, I’m okay, I’m alive...thanks to you and Rufus.”

“But Wyatt,” Lucy argued, “you were right, I mean, you know all about first-aid...way more than I do...and I still...I didn’t trust you.” she sighed and muttered ruefully, “It’s just like the journal all over again...”

“No, it’s not.” Wyatt interrupted, “Look, I know I got upset...and I’m sorry, about that, okay?” He let out a curse as he tried to explain, “I need to be able to count on you...but...that’s just the thing. You screwed up, yes...but you two did fix it. Hell, you made penicillin...you figured out a way to make this place a hell of a lot safer for us...without my help.” he added meaningfully. “I’m not mad.” he assured her, “I’m impressed.”

“Really?” Lucy asked him dubiously, “because you...you really didn’t seem impressed.”
Wyatt rolled his eyes, “Well that stuff isn’t exactly tasty, ma’am.”

“Well, we tried our best…” Lucy shrugged, before adding with a slight smile “but beggars can’t be choosers, right?”

“Right.” he nodded, with a soft smile of his own before clearing his throat and adding seriously. “Now come on…it’s late…you need to get some sleep.”

Smiling to herself, Lucy snuggled deeper into the covers, feeling like for the first time in a very long time, she might actually have a good night’s sleep. With the bed being no bigger than a modern-day full size, however, she found that no matter how hard she tried to keep from brushing up against Wyatt’s arm, she did…until finally, with a sigh, he lifted it and drew her into his side. At first, she tensed at the gesture – not wanting to give into it too much, for obvious reasons. Given all the anxiety she had suffered over the past few days, however, she found that being held by Wyatt was just what she needed. He made her feel safe, warm and content…in a way that no one else could….and he must have felt so too. No sooner had she settled her head onto his shoulder, he began to breathe deep and slow, his steady heartbeat lulling her right to sleep with him.

And such had been their arrangement from that day onward, lying side by side, huddled against each other, both of them taking comfort in the presence of the other as they drifted off to sleep.

But then reports starting coming in of more French attacks, announcing random acts of violence against settlements, women and children slaughtered in the dead of night by their native allies and it all seemed to be weighing heavily on Wyatt’s mind. For the past few days, his sleep was back to being restless and fitful…and though he no longer showed any sign of fever, he would wake up…as he had done this morning, flushed, agitated and sweaty. Oftentimes, Lucy would try to wake him, calling his name, soothing his worried face with a caress of her hand and sometimes, this would work to calm him. Other times however, it just seemed to agitate him all the more.

Like it had this morning.

“He’s under a lot of pressure” Lucy muttered as she cast Rufus an apologetic frown, coming out of her reverie, “I think with all of these reports coming in…he’s afraid…being injured like he is, he won’t be able to protect us. And now, with the troops headed back to Fort Cumberland,” she added with a sigh, “I think he’s feeling it all the more.’ She shrugged as she continued, “At least with them here, we had a little more protection.”

“Let’s not forget that the whole reason the French attacked in the first place was because those
troops came here.” Rufus reminded her.

“And they came because of what Wyatt did to save me.” she retorted back as she wiped her hands on her apron. “And knowing Wyatt, he’s probably kicking himself for that too.” Grabbing her shawl, she announced with a sigh, “I’m gonna go talk to him.”

“Better you than me.” Rufus scoffed derisively as he sat down at the table and emptied another bowl of porridge into his own, “Since he’s not eating this, I’m just gonna finish it up, okay?”

Casting him a withering glare, Lucy wrenched open the door and made her way out into the leaf-strewn fields. Winter was definitely coming fast upon them, the chill in the air and the nearly bare trees providing enough evidence of that fact as she raced along the road in a desperate attempt to catch up to Wyatt. She could see him, slowly making his way up the hill in front of her, the determination in his step only hampered by the pain he was visibly still feeling as he limped along the path. Quickening her step as she pulled her shawl tighter around her shoulders, Lucy called out, “Wyatt! Wait!”

He stilled, but not without obvious irritation. Throwing his head back in exasperation, he huffed out a hard breath before turning towards her, “What do you want, Lucy?” he groaned.

Panting slightly from the exertion of chasing after him, she breathed out, “Do you want to talk about what’s bothering you?” She eyed him curiously even as he refused to look at her, “What was all of that about back there?”

Keeping his eye trained on the distant tree line, Wyatt replied with an indifferent shrug, “Nothing’s bothering me.” He turned to her roughly, impatient to get some distance between them, and barked, “I just want you to leave me alone.”

Lucy stared back at him and scoffed, shaking her head in frustration. He was about to just resume his march to John Fraser’s house, when she rounded on him angrily, “You know, you talk to me all the time about trusting you…but you know what? Maybe you should trust me too.”

“I trust you.” Wyatt spat out defensively, turning to her once more, though that admittance was met with a disbelieving scoff from Lucy. And really, why wouldn’t it? After all, it hadn’t been so long ago, that he explicitly announced that he could not trust either of his teammates…that their deception had called everything he had once believed into question. Hell, he had even been prepared to leave them, these missions, this whole time traveling mess - because of that fact…and yet, now he was expecting Lucy to believe that he had suddenly had a change of heart?
Maybe he had…but with the dubious look Lucy was currently shooting him, he was pretty damn sure he hadn’t really done a good job of showing it.

Wholly unconvinced, Lucy shook her head in disbelief and scoffed, “If you trust me, then why won’t you talk to me? Or Rufus? Wyatt,” she pleaded, “I know something is bothering you… almost every night this past week you’ve been tossing & turning, groaning in your sleep…and I think I know why.” He flushed and looked away, unable to look at her without recalling the way her phantom self had gasped out his name as he trailed slow kisses up her neck. Rubbing a rough hand across his face, Wyatt willed those thoughts away, inwardly cursing at himself for being so damn weak when Lucy, who had been studying him with a severe eye, sighed and admitted in a small voice, “Wyatt, it’s okay. I have them too.”

Dropping his hand from his eyes to his mouth, Wyatt gaped at her for a long while seemingly unable to even string two words together as his brain flitted through a chaotic series of panicked questions - *Could she…how did she kn…what had she heard…did she…?* Desperate to get out of this horribly awkward situation, Wyatt dropped his hand from his jaw and began to shuffle backwards away from her, stumbling a few times as he did so. They couldn’t talk about this…no, it would completely ruin their professional relationship…hell, forget about professional relationship…he was pretty damn sure he would never be able to look her in the eye again, let alone live with her.

Which, given the subject matter at hand, seemed kind of silly…she was his *wife*, after all.

“Wyatt,” Lucy almost pleaded, stepping towards him, ‘it’s okay…you don’t have to be embarrassed.”

In a last-ditch attempt at nonchalance, Wyatt ducked his flushed face downward and shrugged though he stammered nervously, “Um…I don’t know what…what do you mean?”

Offering him a knowing smirk, Lucy shrugged, “It’s only natural, Wyatt…being stranded here like we are…dealing with everything we have dealt with.” With a dark chuckle she added, “I mean, you were almost killed for heaven’s sake. *Twice.* That can trigger all sorts of…things. She reached out and gave his arm a reassuring squeeze as she nodded to him meaningfully, “It’s nothing to be ashamed of, okay?” Wyatt swallowed hard, his eyes fixed on her nimble fingers gripping his arm. “Really, Wyatt,” Lucy continued, “you’re only human. I mean, just because you’re Delta Force doesn’t mean you can’t have nightmares.”

Wyatt couldn’t help but let an incredulous laugh. *Nightmares*. She thought he was having nightmares. While a part of him wanted to admit that yes, what he was experiencing were
absolutely nightmares in terms of...because he would never...another part of him...the part of him that got a little weak in the knees every time she got close to him, the part of him that couldn’t bear to think of actually leaving the protection of his team...of her to anyone else...not even someone he regarded as highly as his old buddy, Bam Bam...that part of him knew that in no way, shape, or form, could those dreams be considered nightmares.

True, they may have scared the hell out of him in more ways than one; she was always in some kind of danger...and he was always desperate to get to her....that, in and of itself was a living nightmare, having lost one wife because of his carelessness. But they also scared the hell out of him because of the deeper implications. Stranded as they were, married as they were...these “nightmares” would only serve to make their living and sleeping situation a hell of a lot more awkward than it already was.

And he couldn’t risk that.

But he also couldn’t deny that there was something in his feelings for Lucy that spoke to something more than just friendship. Yes, she was his wife...but more than that – she was Lucy. Lucy, the woman who had risked it all to save his life at the Alamo. Lucy, the woman who passionately defended him in front of Homeland Security. Lucy, the woman who had double-crossed Garcia Flynn in order to rescue him from that run-down hotel-room in 1972. Lucy, the woman who had, for the past two weeks, stayed up til all hours watching over him, nursing his injury, feeding him - making him feel wanted and cared for in a way that...he hadn’t felt in a very long time.

And that was the problem.

Because he loved Jessica.

Whatever this...this...was with Lucy had just been brought on by their current, desperate situation and the fact that he hadn’t lived with or been cared for by a woman since Jess died. That would naturally lead him to...wasn’t there that whole Florence Nightingale effect thing? Yeah...that’s what they called it in Back to the Future, right? When Marty McFly’s mom got the hots for her son? Yeah...because she was taking care of him after her dad hit him with the car.

Except no...that wasn’t the same because he was the one who...

Dammit.
Clearly all of this had been brought on because of the ridiculous role playing they had been forced to take on for this mission. His brain was just understandably confused. Add to the fact that Lucy had been taking care of him, nursing him back to health and well, when it came right down to it, he had seen her naked and that certainly didn’t help things. Of course, being here, with no real distractions, being forced to keep in close contact and proximity, seeing more of each other than they ever had before - would lead to some sort of primal attraction…solely based on instinct.

That’s all this was.

He just needed space - fresh air, sunshine…maybe some light exercise to help clear his head and get him thinking rationally again. So, if Lucy wanted to think that he was suffering from nightmares, why the hell would he bother to correct her? It didn’t mean anything…and like she said, given their current situation…it was a perfectly natural reaction to everything that they had been going through. Being cooped up with her for two weeks while she ran her fingers over his torso?

What the hell did he expect to happen?

Feeling a bit better about his problem, but still unable to meet her eye, Wyatt frowned, easing his arm out of her gentle grip, “You’re right.” he muttered softly.

“Right?” Lucy asked in confusion. “About what?”

“I um…I guess I have been feeling a little stressed.” he admitted with a shrug. “Tends to happen when you’re all cooped up…” he chuckled mirthlessly, stepping further away from her, “you get a little stir crazy.”

“So…you’re okay?” she asked, looking wholly unconvinced as Wyatt still refused to meet her eye. “You’re…you’re not in any pain?”

“Dammit, Lucy” Wyatt breathed out in exasperation, “how many times do I have to tell you? I’m fine.”

“Okay….you’re fine….but Wyatt, you still need to have your bandages…Wyatt?” she called after him, but it was no use, he was already stalking away down the road, silently determining to not ever let Lucy come anywhere near his torso again.
At least for the time being.
Wyatt figured that the simplest way to distract himself from his unnerving attraction to Lucy was to keep himself busy…preferably away from her.

Knowing all too well that John Fraser had suffered a grisly injury to his leg that would prevent him from effectively managing his farming and trading empire, he therefore set out to help rebuild and replant John Fraser’s farm. After all, he was only had a roof over his head because of John Fraser and his kindness and it had been agreed before any of this happened that in repayment of that kindness, Wyatt would help work the fields, hunt or do whatever else needed to be done. In his mind, therefore, he was killing two birds with one stone; fulfilling a promise to his 18th century landlord and more importantly, keeping himself at a safe distance from Lucy.

When he arrived at the farm, however, he found that in the way of replanting, much of that work had already been accomplished in the two weeks he had been recuperating…thanks to Rufus’ ingenuity.

Since fire had consumed much of John Fraser’s fields, they had to be plowed and replanted all over again…a grueling task in the best of times, but with winter coming on fast it was imperative that it be done…and fast. As Wyatt discovered, however, Rufus…with the help of Tom, had made this task simpler by fashioning a seed drill out of a few old rusty wheelbarrows.

“He just saw this picture,” Tom explained tossing Wyatt a farmer’s almanac, “and said he could build a better one…and damn it all if he didn’t. We done seeded three times as many rows with his as we could with the one old Mr. Tull invented there.”

“Mr. Tull?” Wyatt asked, before he peered at the small lettering beneath the illustration featured broadly on the first page of the almanac and chuckled, “Jethro Tull? You got to be kidding me…”

“Why? You know him, too?” Tom asked innocently. “Rufus said the same thing…”

“Huh?” Wyatt asked blankly, “Oh, no…it’s just…that name,” he explained awkwardly, “it just…it reminds me of…I mean, I’ve heard it before…” he continued stammering, before shaking his head with another chuckle and dismissing, “You know what? Nevermind.”
“Well, if you know anything about farming, you should know that name.” Tom replied, eyeing him suspiciously, “Jethro Tull is all anybody ever talks about in these almanacs…he had all kinds of ideas for measuring the compounds in soil to make it better for growing, and hoeing by horse, and using drills, like this here.” He said patting the seed drill. Glancing uneasily at Wyatt, Tom explained in a hushed voice, “I hope you won’t say anything…Rufus and I have an agreement, you see. He’s…teaching me to read and I’m teaching him about blacksmithing.”

Wyatt stared back at him for a moment in confusion before realization dawned on him. Handing Tom back the farmer’s almanac, he assured, “Um…you don’t have to worry, I won’t, um…tell on you or anything.”

Tom nodded back at him appreciatively, “It’s not that I think Master Fraser will care, but I…I don’t want anybody thinking I’m flittin’ away my time on useless things…especially when there’s so much work to be done.”

“I don’t think it’s useless.” Wyatt answered with a shrug, “And besides, that’s why I’m here…I mean, to help out with all the work that needs to be done.”

Tom eyed him warily, “Aren’t you still hard up, yourself?” He nodded towards Wyatt’s side, “I don’t reckon you ought to be wearing yourself out seeing as how you’re still blistered and such.”

“I’m fine.” Wyatt huffed out impatiently, frustrated that everyone seemed to be worried about his damn side. “I know what I can handle, I just…I want to do my part, okay? So, what can I do?”

Tom rubbed a rough hand over his chin, still eyeing Wyatt thoughtfully, “Well, I suppose getting the kitchen and washroom back to working order is something you can lend a hand with. Mind, there won’t be much help for you until the plantings all done…but there are one or two young ‘uns that’ll be able to share the load.”

“I don’t mind.” Wyatt assured him…and he didn’t. Sure, he was used to being part of a team, but right now, his greater concern was less about teamwork and more about keeping himself busy…and distracted.

Setting straight to work, therefore, Wyatt immediately began helping to rebuild the burned-out kitchen. Most of the debris from the fire had already been cleared away, though there was still some work to do on that front. The stairs and loft above had all but been destroyed and needed rebuilding and though the massive hearth escaped a lot of damage, the chimney had cracked and
split in several places and was in dire need of repair.

It was hard work, but much like his earlier repairs on the cottage, he found the labor satisfying and fulfilling. It filled his days from almost immediately after sun-up to long past dinnertime when darkness, alone, would send him limping his way back down the lane where he would find Lucy…quietly practicing whatever new skill she was determined to learn out of the book she had received from Mrs. Poe.

He never asked what she was up to and she never seem inclined to share. If she asked about his day or how he was feeling, he merely grunted in response, desperate to keep his distance from her in all aspects of their relationship. She would eye him suspiciously in those moments, but if she had any idea as to the why he was avoiding her, she didn’t let on, nor did she press him to talk…and he was pretty damn grateful for that. After scarfin down whatever Lucy had prepared for him, he went straight to bed. Being so exhausted from a hard day’s work, his sleep was deep and thankfully, dreamless. He hardly noted or cared that Lucy was curled up beside him and if, in the morning, he woke to find himself wrapped around her, he would simply get up and set off again before she stirred, all while trying to keep himself from dwelling too much on the fact that that waking up with Lucy nestled in his arms was the best damn part of his day.

Trying to avoid Lucy at all costs, therefore, Wyatt spent the next week working from sunup to sundown on John Fraser’s farm…and for the purposes of curing him of his “nightmares” as Lucy had called them, it seemed to be a winning formula…even if a part of him did feel like a bit of an ass.

One day, however, things changed.

Instead of remaining at home at a comfortable distance from Wyatt, Lucy began making trips to the farm herself. He would see her, while he was working, side-eying him with concern as she made her way to the main house. At first, he didn’t think much of it—she would occasionally come to Mrs. Poe for supplies or herbs…but when it happened three days in a row, Wyatt began to get suspicious.

“Why is Lucy here again?” he remarked to Rufus one afternoon by the water pump.

Looking over his shoulder to where Lucy had just disappeared into the house, Rufus shrugged, “I don’t know…maybe she just wants to help out too.”

Wyatt scoffed, “Yeah, right. Help with what?” Shaking his head, he was making his way back to the unfinished kitchen before he turned around and argued, “She’s spying on me…isn’t she?”
Rufus stared back at him with narrowed eyes, “Spying on you?”

“Yeah,” Wyatt spat out, “Because she’s all worked up about me not being well enough to do anything but lay in that damn bed all day.”

“Well,” Rufus suggested weakly, “you are working an awful lot for someone who was as badly injured as you were. Don’t you think you should…I don’t know…take it easy?”

“I know my limits.” Wyatt remarked with an eyeroll.

“You knew your limits in the 21st century,” Rufus reminded him, “Out here? Wyatt, we were lucky that penicillin worked for you. Seriously man, you could have…”

“I’m fine, Rufus.” Wyatt gritted out as he stomped his way back towards the kitchen, angry that both of them seemed determined to coddle him like a child.

That anger didn’t subside that evening, either. Walking into the cabin, his nostrils were immediately assaulted by the pungent odor of whatever Lucy had cooking over the hearth…though, he noted, with relief, it didn’t look like it was dinner as his own was already laid out and waiting for him. “Sorry about the smell,” Lucy began, noting Wyatt’s reaction, “but I’m…”

“Look, I don’t give a damn what you want to do to fill out your day, but will you please stop coming by the farm, it’s pretty damn obvious what you’re doing.”

Lucy narrowed her eyes in confusion, “What do you…” she began, completely bewildered, but Wyatt cut her off roughly as he buried himself under the covers.

“Just leave me the hell alone.”

But yet the next day, just like clockwork, there was Lucy, basket in hand, slowly making her way through the yard, taking care to cast a nervous glance his way before making her way into John Fraser’s house.
And it annoyed the hell out of him.

It wasn’t like he didn’t know his own limits…he was a soldier for Christ’s sake. He knew he needed to be careful and he was being careful – he made absolutely sure not to lift anything too heavy or push himself too much, relying on others to do the work he knew would push him past the point of his current ability. Why? Because he knew one false move would land him right back in that damn bed…which was the whole reason he was out here to begin with.

Well…that and he was helping out his fellow man, dammit.

He did his best to ignore the growing resentment he felt as he continued working well into the evening, trying his damndest to finish the kitchen as soon as possible so that he could go work on something else that wouldn’t require him to be in a position where Lucy could easily keep tabs on him. He’d work in the fields, the woods…hell, he would freeze his ass off and check on all the fish traps in the river if it meant she couldn’t watch every damn move he made.

The sun had just dipped below the horizon, marking the end of another workday when John Fraser came limping towards him, his weight supported a roughly hewn cane. Peering up at Wyatt, who was making his way off the newly built roof, he remarked kindly, “So it is true…I have you to thank for this new kitchen?”

“Well, not just me.” Wyatt grunted as leapt down to the ground in front of his landlord, “I had some help every now and then.”

“A beautiful job you’ve made of it too.” he noted as he assessed the newly built walls. “I sincerely hope you didn’t do all of this because you believed I expected it of you?” John Fraser asked him with concern. “You aren’t well, yourself and…”

Dismissing any concern for his own health, Wyatt wiped his brow and muttered, “It’s nothing…I just thought that you could use some help.”

“That’s very kind and thoughtful of you, sir.” Nodding at him, John Fraser added, “All this hard work deserves a bit of celebration, don’t you say? Would you join me in the drawing room for a drink?”

Wyatt readily agreed, immensely grateful for an opportunity to unwind given his piss ass mood from earlier…but almost immediately after the whiskey had been poured, he regretted it. Now
seated comfortably before his fire, John Fraser assessed Wyatt with a frown and remarked, “I’ve been told that you have been working on my farm day in and day out for almost two weeks now… even,” he added quietly, “on the Sabbath.”

“Winter is coming.” Wyatt began gruffly, “It’s gonna be a hell of a lot harder to fix this place back up when…”

“A hearth fire is fine for cooking the necessities as I’m sure you and your wife are well aware.” John Fraser dismissed with a wave of his hand, before continuing with a meaningful nod, “How is your wife by the way? I cannot believe she is too pleased about how hard you’ve been working considering…” he made a gesture to Wyatt’s side as he added, “in fact, I’d say she was rather put out that you have spent so much time here – tending to my house, while you neglect your own.”

Wyatt’s grip tightened on his glass, absolutely furious that Lucy had apparently gone out of her way to snitch on him. Wyatt breathed out a curse and rolled his eyes, “Look, I told her…”

“It is not that I do not appreciate your kindness” John Fraser offered with a grateful smile, “Indeed, I wouldn’t be alive today if it weren’t for the service you rendered me. But I can manage well enough…I have field hands to do the work that I cannot…you have your own injury and a new wife to look after.”

“She can look after herself.” Wyatt muttered roughly, still furious, but that reply earned him a look of reprobation from his host.

“I hardly think I need to remind you of the dangers we face here.” he responded sternly.

“That’s not what I meant,” Wyatt groaned, feeling like he was getting the reprimand of his life… when all he wanted was some damn space. “Look, I just wanted to help out. I couldn’t stand being cooped up in that bed all day…it was driving me out of my damn mind.” he argued desperately.

“I sympathize, I do.” John Fraser assured him, “There’s nothing more exhausting to the body or spirit than not being able to enjoy the thing you once did. But I cannot…”

“I can plough.” Wyatt insisted. “I can hunt…whatever you need, I want to do my part – just like we agreed before all this mess. We wouldn’t even have a place to live if it weren’t for you…”
“But my boy, you have your own injury to consider…” he reminded him, “and a new wife…I cannot allow you to neglect either.”

“Don’t worry about me,” Wyatt huffed out impatiently, “I’ll be fine…and Lucy…she’ll understand.” he assured him, though from the look on John Fraser’s face, Wyatt was pretty damn sure he knew that Lucy wouldn’t.

“No.” John Fraser said with a determined nod, “I would love to humor you my boy, but I feel that you have done more than enough labor for a few days. It’s best if you go home and rest up, get your full strength back, maybe fiddle around in that quaint little garden of yours and then come to me after you’re well and healed and you can be sure that then, they’ll be plenty of work for you to do.”

No matter how many times Wyatt tried to assure him that he was willing and absolutely able to do his share of the work, John Fraser refused his help time and time again, all but ordering him to go home to his wife and enjoy his new marriage.

Yeah, right. Wyatt thought grumpily as he trudged his way out of the door.

If he had been angry before, it was absolutely nothing to what he was feeling now. Stomping his way back through the fields, his mind was abuzz with the not-so crazy notion that he had been right…Lucy had been spying on him and this was the result. She had obviously spent her days watching his every damn move so she could complain to John Fraser that he was…what had he said? “Neglecting her and their home?”

What the actual hell?

Hadn’t he fixed up that place, basically on his own, so that they could have a roof over their heads? Hadn’t he tried his damndest to make their cabin as comfortable for Lucy as he possible could, given their awkward situation? Hadn’t he married her so that she would be protected in this damn century?

By the time he arrived back at the cabin, he was fuming so much that when he burst through the front door, he didn’t even miss a beat before spitting out angrily, “Why the hell did you have to go tattling on me to John Fraser?”

Seated at the table, Lucy exchanged a look with Rufus, both of them in the middle of their dinner,
before shaking her head, “I… I don’t know what you…”

“Don’t give me that.” Wyatt snapped back, “I’ve seen you… coming over to the farm, watching me… and apparently telling anybody who will listen how I’m neglecting you and…”

“Wyatt, I…” Lucy began in bewilderment, pointing to a box in the corner.

“Do you want to know why I go to that farm every damn day?” he continued furiously, “It’s because I can’t stand to be here. In this bed. Day in. Day out. It’s driving me out of my damn mind. I need space…” he explained with a shout, “and the minute I get that space… there you are looking at me like I don’t know how to take care of myself.”

“Hey, now.” Rufus interrupted, “Why don’t you just chill out man? We’re both worried about you, okay? You don’t have to…”

“I told you to leave me the hell alone.” Wyatt continued, completely ignoring Rufus. “Why can’t you just do that?”

Lucy, face flushed with anger, stared back at him coldly, “I don’t need your permission to leave this house. If I want to go to the farm, I can…it has nothing to do with you. For your information I…”

“Oh yeah, you always go to the farm… because you and Mrs. Poe are such good friends, right?” Wyatt interrupted with an accusatory scowl.

“As a matter of fact, we are…. and I like to talk to Mary Fraser.” Lucy snapped back, hotly “She understands what it’s like to…” Biting her lip, Lucy shook her head, not daring to admit that while Mary Fraser was nice to talk to, one of the main reasons she liked to talk to Mary was because she felt a sort of kindred connection to her, both of them being the second and not quite so great as the first, wife in the respective relationships. “It’s not easy being the only woman in this group, you know.” she finally answered with a shaky voice.

“So you admit it?” Wyatt accused, “You have been complaining about me to…. to… everyone?”

“No!” Lucy exclaimed, but at Wyatt’s doubtful scoff, she continued with a shrug, “They asked me how you were doing and all I said, was that I hoped you wouldn’t get yourself sick again… you
come home so exhausted, Wyatt.” she urged gently, “You hardly eat your supper and then you’re up and gone again before I can even make you breakfast.”

“You know I’m not completely helpless?” he bit back with a snarl, “I can get my own damn food. I don’t need you taking care of me, alright? I know my limits…”

“Well, excuse me for trying to help.” Lucy shot back angrily, “I mean…isn’t that what I’m supposed to do here?” she said as she pulled the worn and dog-eared copy of *The Compleat Housewife* out of her apron and flinging it angrily on the table.

Seeing it, Wyatt scoffed, before rolling his eyes and jabbing “You aren’t really my wife, you know?”

It took less than a millisecond after those words left his lips for him to regret ever saying them. Not only was there an audible gasp from Rufus, the pain etched on Lucy’s face was such that he might as well have slapped her. She hadn’t asked to be his wife…that had been his doing…his and this damn century that neither of them belonged in. He threw his head back in exasperation, angry at himself for losing his temper, angrier still that he had obviously hurt her. “Dammit, Lucy…I’m sor…” he made to apologize, but she was already making her way around the table and reaching for her shawl. “Look, I…I…didn’t mean to…”

“You don’t have to say anything, Wyatt.” Lucy responded tersely as she adjusted her wrap around her shoulders and pulled open the door, “I think you said enough, don’t you?”

“Where are you going?” he asked, his shame mounting with every step she took away from him.

But she didn’t respond. With not even a glance behind her, Lucy pulled her shawl tighter around her shoulders and stepped out into the night, shutting the door behind her with a deafening click.

Wyatt stood, staring after her, kicking himself for flying off the handle, completely oblivious to Rufus’ continued presence until the scrape of the heavy chair against the bare floorboards alerted him to the fact that he wasn’t alone. Pushing himself away from the table, Rufus stood and silently picked up his own hat and coat and made his way to the door. “I…I didn’t…” Wyatt began weakly, but Rufus cut him off with a shake of his head.

“You said you wanted space,” he replied with a meaningful look, “Looks like you got it, man.”
“I just don’t understand why she had to keep checking up on me every damn day.” Wyatt spat out defensively. “You saw her…she was always there….”

“Yeah, she was.” Rufus snapped back, “but you didn’t give her a chance to explain herself, did you? No,” he continued hotly, not waiting for Wyatt to respond, “you had to make out like it was all about you. Well, I’ve got news for you man, Lucy and I may have spent a lot of time taking care of your ass these past few weeks, but we do have other things going on in our lives here that don’t involve you – and maybe, if you had actually been around here and hadn’t been so busy trying to get all that space you wanted, you’d know what those things are.”

“What…”

“Oh no,” Rufus spat out with a shake of his head, “You don’t get to ask those questions now… especially not to me, when the one you should have been asking was Lucy…instead of busting in here like a complete jackass and accusing her of spying on you.”

“She was spying on me.” Wyatt snapped, frustrated that what seemed so obvious to him, was completely lost on Rufus. “How else can you explain the way John Fraser came up to me today? Telling me I had better look after her and this place instead of helping him out at the farm?”

Scoffing, Rufus wrenched open the door turning to Wyatt with a meaningful glare as he replied, “She didn’t rat you out to John Fraser, “ he said meaningfully, “I did.” At Wyatt’s surprised expression, he explained with a jeer, “I told you we were both worried…but you still took it all out on her.” Shaking his head, he added gruffly, “After everything she did for you, too.”

Wyatt, feeling completely abashed now, stared back at Rufus, speechless. He hadn’t even considered that it might have been someone else…he had just automatically assumed it was Lucy…and that made him a complete and total ass. Rufus was right, after everything Lucy had done for him over the past few weeks, how the hell could he have treated her that way? And why? Because he was mad that she was hanging around the farm when he was trying to avoid her? Trying to avoid her over something that wasn’t even her damn fault.

Rubbing a rough hand over his eyes, Wyatt let out a heavy sigh, “I need to talk to her.” he muttered as he stalked towards the door, but he was stopped by Rufus’ outstretched hand.

“You know what?” he said with a quirk of his lip, “I think it’s best if you give her some space for tonight because, “ he added coolly, “if she’s feeling a quarter of what I’m feeling towards you right now, she’s not going to want to even be in the same room with you.”
And with that, Rufus turned on his heel and slammed the door behind him, leaving Wyatt alone to consider just how big of an ass he had really been.

______________________________________________________________________________

“I…uh…hope I didn’t come at a bad time?”

John Fraser was standing in the doorway of the cabin, a kindly expression on his face as he considered a disheveled looking Wyatt sitting miserably at the table, nursing a steaming mug of something he wished was a hell of a lot stronger than tea.

The sun was shining brightly, the promise of an unseasonably warm day doing nothing to lift Wyatt’s mood as John Fraser shuffled his feet awkwardly on the front porch waiting his answer.

Wyatt merely grunted in response, not feeling up to conversation, but grateful for the presence of anyone after being left so utterly and completely alone the night before, with nothing but his regrets to keep him company.

Of course, that had been his own doing…and, richly deserved…so he sure as hell couldn’t blame either Lucy or Rufus for that.

Taking Wyatt’s grunt as invitation enough, John Fraser limped his way into the house, a package tucked under his arm as he made his way over to the rocking chair – the very chair, Wyatt noted with a pang of renewed guilt, that Lucy had practically lived in while nursing him back to health. Groaning as he eased himself down to sit, John observed with a light laugh, “I see you took my advice, though I’m afraid you might have misunderstood me, my boy. When I said your wife needed looking after,” he said with a serious nod, “I didn’t mean that I should be the one performing that duty.”

Wyatt kept his eyes fixed on the table before him, fully prepared to get another well-deserved reprimand from a man whom he had come to respect and admire more than anyone else in this century. “I know.” he replied quietly.

“She was in a right state, last evening.” he continued with a frown, “Reminded me a bit of my own wife when I drag my muddy hunting boots all over her newly swept floors.”
The attempt at levity wasn’t lost on Wyatt, but he wasn’t in the mood to joke about what had happened the previous evening. So instead, he just sat there with a scowl firmly planted on his face.

“Do you know,” John Fraser said quietly when Wyatt didn’t respond, “your wife worried herself sick over you for…oh, well over a fortnight? If she wasn’t at my door herself, asking for more herbs and things from our stores to ease your suffering, she was sending your man over. I don’t know that I’ve ever seen someone so committed to nursing someone through a sickness as she was.” He chuckled as he shook his head, “I almost thought I was going to have to order the latest medical journals from Leiden just to satisfy her.”

Wyatt swallowed hard, his guilt compounding.

“I didn’t mean to upset you, lad…” John Fraser admitted with a sorrowful sigh, adding in explanation, “when I asked you to come home to your wife, I thought you’d welcome it…but I stand by what I said, even without a word from your man, I would’ve come to you myself. You worked yourself too hard.”

“I was just trying to help.” Wyatt responded flatly.

“My dear boy. A man who had had such a close brush with death…on his wedding night, too – wouldn’t be too quick to leave the arms of his new wife as you have been. Indeed, I hardly think you can have spent more than an hour’s time with her in a day, can ye?” When Wyatt didn’t respond, he nodded sagely, “Aye, I didn’t think so.”

“I was cooped up with her the whole time I was stuck in that bed.” Wyatt replied defensively, already feeling that maybe it was better to be alone with his miserable thoughts, after all.

“Cooped up?” John Fraser replied with raised eyebrows, “That hardly seems the language of a man madly in love with his pretty new wife. Indeed,” he remarked sagely, “a poor way to repay her after all the trouble she took to get you well enough to get out of that bed…and from the looks of it,” he added with a nod towards Wyatt’s bandaged side, “you still aren’t quite well enough to have done the work you did…I cannot believe she even allowed it.”

“She didn’t.” Wyatt said with a scoff, his guilt mounting. He knew, of course, that Lucy had stayed pretty much by his side since that awful night…but he had no idea that apparently during those times where he had lost himself in sleep, she had been doing everything she could to help ease his pain.
And how had he treated her?

No...he wouldn’t think about it, because feeling guilty over his ingratitude towards Lucy was just playing into the idea that she meant something to him...and right now, he was trying to make it very clear to his deeply confused brain that that was absolutely not the case. She was just Lucy – his co-worker and teammate.

Certainly not his wife...or anything else like that.

“Well, as you say.” John Fraser observed with concern, “she didn’t allow it, so how can you go against her wishes so implicitly? And at risk to your own health and well-being too? My dear boy, does she mean so little to you?”

“No.” Wyatt replied before stammering “I mean, yes...I mean, no...I mean...” he breathed out a curse as he held his pounding head in his hands, “It’s complicated.”

John Fraser observed him for a moment before asking with a quiet nod of understanding, “Because of your deceased wife?”

Wyatt slowly lifted his head out of his hands and glanced over at John Fraser. There was no judgement in his voice, no look of condemnation in his face. Why would there be?

He was a man who understood more than anyone else he had ever met, what he was feeling.

Nodding slightly, Wyatt swallowed hard as a flurry of emotions fought their way to the surface, filling him with a sense of conflict he didn’t think was possible where Lucy and Jessica were concerned, “Yeah.” he replied quietly, “yeah...that’s...” shaking his head, Wyatt looked at John with confusion, “How do you...how can you...” he stammered, not quite sure how to articulate his question, “be married to someone else...you know, move on...without feeling like...like you...like you are betraying their memory? Especially when...” he bit his lip, biting back his tears as he admitted ruefully, “it was my fault that she died. I left her alone.”

“I don’t think you ever quite ‘move on,’ as you say.” John Fraser replied softly, “A part of you will always grieve them, love them...but,” he added with a voice full of emotion, “another part of you still has to live, my boy...even with the guilt of knowing that things might have been different...if you had been there.”
Wyatt swallowed hard and nodded thinking over how he had “lived” these past five years...if he wasn’t combing through every piece of evidence searching for Jessica’s killer, he was on some dangerous assignment taking his continued frustration over the lack of any substantial leads out on any jackass with an IED. His eagerness in battle had earned him a reputation for bravery, but for him, it was nothing more than an empty accolade.

What good was bravery when you couldn’t even bring you wife’s killer to justice?

Seemingly reading Wyatt’s thoughts, John Fraser considered him for a moment before observing, “I haven’t known you long, to be sure, but from what I’ve garnered - you take very little heed for your own safety and well-being. The way you charged into Fort Duquesne, the way you handled yourself in battle...saving my life and Tom’s, the way you work yourself to the bone, ignoring your own injury” he acknowledged with a meaningful nod. “While some may say it makes you brave, others might consider that...a bit cowardly.” Wyatt looked up at him sharply, but John Fraser went on undeterred, “A man who has nothing to lose is hardly as brave as the man who has everything to lose and still marches into battle, aye?”

Wyatt said nothing for a while as he thought over John Fraser’s gentle, yet pointed reflections. Initially his pride refused to believe that he was anything less than the brave and decorated Delta Force solider who carried with him a reputation for reckless bravery that had earned him more than one medal and commendation letter. Hell, the whole reason he had the job at Mason was because no one else would do it...at least, that was what he had been told. “It was dangerous” they had said. “Extremely risky” he was warned, but yet he jumped at the opportunity to lay his life on the line...not because he was braver than any of the other men in his platoon...but because he just didn’t give a damn.

His thoughts drifted back to that awful moment at the Alamo, when, in the heat of battle, he was faced with standing his ground and dying or escaping - knowing that when they got back to Mason, he was done for. A failure in every sense of the word, he would have been kicked off the team, sent back to Pendleton with a red mark on his folder...and left alone...again. It was a no-brainer for him. He would rather die with some meaning and escape his miserable existence then even entertain the thought of facing another dangerous assignment, with another team...praying that one of these times he wouldn’t get so damn lucky and “survive.” Hell, he was hardly living.

But Lucy wouldn’t let him.

*What about us? We’re counting on you.*

*The next guy’s going to handle it.*
I don’t want anybody else. I trust you. You are the one that I trust. Rufus needs you. I need you, okay?

He had wanted to die among the heroes he had, until that day, only read about – not because of bravery or some damned romantic idea of an honorable death…but because he had nothing else left to lose. He thought, at the time, he was being noble…but John Fraser was right…he was a coward. He had only been thinking of himself and his own grief and failures…until Lucy took his face in her hands and made him realize that after five years of not caring and having nothing to live for...he suddenly did.

“My wife,” John Fraser continued wistfully, pulling Wyatt out of his thoughts, “she was the best kind of woman. Tough as nails, but with the kindness and patience of a saint.” He frowned as a darkness clouded over his features, the same darkness of guilt and regret that Wyatt knew all too well, “I was occupied with my own affairs the day she left the Fort. She was weary of fort life and I was trying to establish new connections, new trading partners…far too concerned with business than to accompany her on that trip back home… and I tell ye lad, there isn’t a day that goes by, that I don’t grieve for that short-sightedness on my part.” He let out a shuddering sigh, “When I finally made my way home and found that she hadn’t arrived before me, we sent the search party out and found…well,” he cleared his throat, “it was clear she wouldn’t be coming back home ever again.”

Wyatt nodded in understanding, before responding quietly, “My wife and I had a fight. She… hadn’t been faithful.” he admitted with a pained voice. “…I tried to make it work, but one night we were out at a party and…there he was.” Wyatt sighed heavily, “I got so angry, seeing that sonofabitch…I acted like an ass. She was embarrassed, we left…but then she asked me to pull over the car….the carriage to let her get out so she could get the hell away from me.” He scoffed and he shook his head at the memory of his reckless foolishness, “I drove off and left her there. I drove off.” he admitted ruefully, clearly hating himself even now for that decision, “When I came back for her…she was gone.” Wyatt frowned as he blinked away his tears, “I should’ve never let her out of my sight.”

John Fraser eased himself out of the rocker and joined Wyatt at the table offering his shoulder a comforting grip as he slid onto a stool across from him. “It’s a hard thing to go through, to be sure. I wouldn’t wish it on my worst enemy…not even the French.” he added with a teasing smirk.

Wyatt let out a small chuckle, but otherwise kept his head bowed as the memory of Jessica’s death weighed heavily on his mind, reminding him of why it was so damn important that he get out of this century…to change that night. To fix that one regret.

He had explained that much to Lucy almost as soon as he met her...though he wasn’t sure why. She had been moaning about her historically inaccurate underwear and berating him over bringing
a modern gun to 1937…a gun that had saved her ass more than once on that mission, irritating the hell out of him. But when she asked about why he was so desperate to save Kate Drummond, he… let her see that side of him that he fought so hard to keep hidden. That vulnerable, weak side, weighed down by sorrow, regret and a hell of a lot of guilt.

At the time, he had regretted opening up to her…it was none of her damn business, after all. But then they had come back to find her sister had disappeared, and he saw in her the same desperation and fear he had felt that night when Jessica was murdered…and well, he couldn’t help but feel a tug of sympathy for her…especially when no one at Mason seemed to give a damn.

Lucy had been right. Changing history, even just a little bit, had had devastating consequences and while he had scoffed and rolled his eyes at her in that hanger, her sister had vanished into thin air. He could have been more focused on that mission, more concerned with finding Flynn than saving Kate Drummond in his weird desperate attempt to make up for not being able to save Jessica…and maybe, just maybe they would have realized Flynn’s plan sooner. Maybe just maybe Amy Preston wouldn’t have disappeared. Hell, he didn’t know. He just knew they were a team…and they were going to fix it…as a team.

Besides, he had thought at the time, if they could save Amy...maybe there was hope that he could somehow save Jessica.

“How long since your wife passed?” John Fraser’s voice called him once more out of his thoughts.

“Five years.” Wyatt admitted with a gulp.

“That’s a mighty long time to carry around that burden.” John Fraser with a sad smile, “And even now, with the gift of a new wife, a chance to start over, you still feel like you have nothing to lose? Nothing to fight for?”

Figure out what you’re fighting for and you’ll be okay

Wyatt smirked at the memory of getting Lucy “over the hump.” She had been terrified…and rightly so. She wasn’t trained to be a damn spy, hell, she didn’t even speak or understand German, yet here she was, about to march straight into a castle full of Nazis. She may have needed that pep talk, but she knew what she was fighting for. She was fighting for history, for the people in it, for every damn person that could be erased from the future, from someone else’s family just because Garcia Flynn wanted to stick it to this Rittenhouse.
Lucy had plenty to fight for, that’s why she was still on these missions.

But why the hell was he still around?

He could’ve packed it in any number of times before and since the Alamo…but here he was, stranded in 1754 with a team that…now that he really thought about it, he had never really appreciated. Sure, they had betrayed his trust, lied to him, kept secrets from him…but they had also saved his ass…more than once.

He thought about every rule he broke for them since they began these treks through time. His objective had been clear – to take out Garcia Flynn. No excuses. No explanations. But time and time again he found himself caught between his objective and the protection and well-being of his team…something that had been explained to him, was not the priority.

Not that he ever told them that.

Shit.

He wasn’t any different than Lucy or Rufus. He had kept his own damn secret where these missions were concerned. He had flown off the handle like a damn hypocrite the minute he found out about Rufus’ spying and Lucy’s chats through time with Flynn forgetting that he himself hadn’t been completely honest with either of them about his own role on the team. He wasn’t their protection…he was just the damn hired gun.

Except that he wasn’t…or at least, Lucy didn’t see him that way. She had told him as much, hadn’t she? She didn’t give a damn that Bam Bam was waiting in the wings, ready to take his place. She didn’t want anybody else.

She trusted him.

She needed him.

He had gone so long without anyone seeing him as more than just a soldier, a grunt – he had almost forgotten what it felt like to…to be needed and cared about.
"I imagine that is why you rushed off as you did, on your wedding night?" John Fraser observed, calling him once more out of his reverie. "You gave no thought for your new wife - only your grief?"

That wasn’t true.

While Wyatt had welcomed Rufus’ interruption given the awkward situation he and Lucy had found themselves in, he had charged into battle not because he didn’t care, but because he did. For the first time, in a long time, he charged into battle because he had everything to lose – his home, his family, his new-found friends…he was fighting to survive.

He was fighting for them.

Yet even as he thought that, he knew it was a lie…that it was hardly the first time since starting these missions that he had felt that way. He might have been pissed as hell at Lucy and Rufus when they first landed in this damn century, but when he lost them to the French that awful, awful night? The desperation he felt? Hell, he would have burned that entire fort to the ground if he had to, just to get her back…

Them back, he mentally corrected himself…but even as he did, he knew that it wasn’t Rufus who dominated his thoughts while he was racing through the woods in a desperate attempt to bust into that damn fort…it was Lucy. His concern for her and her welfare had far exceeded that of his concern for Rufus. Maybe it was because as a man, he felt some kind of primal need to protect Lucy…or maybe his concern for her stemmed from the fact that she had been half-naked when she was abducted. Either way, she was the one he was desperate to find safe.

Not Rufus.

Hell, even after seeing that she had some kind of security in the form a French officer, he still couldn’t leave her side. He didn’t go off and look for Rufus, he didn’t take the opportunity to do a bit of reconnaissance. No, he watched over her…not trusting her protection to anyone else but himself.

And really, wasn’t that why he couldn’t truly think about actually leaving the team?

Somewhere along the way, he had started caring again…not about himself or the missions…but about them. They were more than his team, they were his…family. He might have started these
missions out of grief and a certain sense of self-destruction, but now he absolutely had something to fight for. Not history, not a chance for Mason to get back his time machine, not for or against whatever the hell this Rittenhouse was…

He was fighting for…her.

And Rufus, he admitted begrudgingly…but mostly, for her.

It was Lucy who had made him feel needed and wanted in a way that he hadn’t felt…hell, if he was being honest…since even before Jessica died. It was Lucy whose protection and well-being was first and foremost in his mind. It was Lucy whose opinion mattered more than anyone else’s had in a long, long time.

“Son?” John Fraser once again, gently called him out of his reverie.

“Where is she?” Wyatt asked, looking up at his forgotten companion suddenly desperate, “Lucy? Where is she?”

“Mrs. Poe has her doing the laundry, I believe.” he responded with a nod, producing the small, yet heavy package he had carried in and handed it to Wyatt, “She uh…asked me to leave this here - some more tallow.” he explained, “you wife had been helping keep my stores of candles filled so that Mary can spend her time fussing over me. I tried to tell her it wasn’t necessary to worry herself so much, but truth be told, we would have been completely at a loss without her daily deliveries.”

“She was making candles.” Wyatt responded flatly, his guilt and shame weighing heavily on him like the solid block of fat he now held in his hands.

“Aye.” John Fraser replied. “She came to the house one day in search of supplies and found Mrs. Poe and Margaret in uproar. She offered to help take some of their burdens off of them. It was the one job she felt she could do with little trouble.” he offered Wyatt a meaningful nod as he added, “Fine girl, that lass.”

“Yeah.” Wyatt breathed out, remembering how he had accused her the night before…realizing now, how very wrong he was.

“It’s not my affair.” John Fraser said as he leaned forward in his chair, arresting Wyatt with a kind,
but serious gaze, “And Lord knows, I have my own faults…but, I feel it incumbent upon me, as someone who has loved and lost to remind you, son. There’s a fair few well-bred women who would follow a man out into the wilderness like she had done. Even less that would have had the grit and determination to nurse you back to health.” He added with a good-natured chuckle, before adding softly, “She cares about you a great deal, lad…you can’t let the grief of your past blind you to the path set before you now.”

Wyatt considered this, hardly knowing what path did lay before him now.

For years, he had rejected any idea of…trying again. While his marriage to Jessica may have not been the picture-perfect fairy tale he liked to remember, he had failed in the worst way as a husband and his wife was murdered because of it. Guys like him…they didn’t get second chances…hell, he didn’t even deserve a second chance.

Yet, here was a man who had similarly lost his wife…a man whom he respected and admired, who had somehow found the strength and determination within himself to let go of his guilt and remarry again, even in a place that had to remind him every damn day of what he lost…and how he lost it.

He had no such real hope with Lucy. What John Fraser didn’t know of course, was that Lucy hadn’t really followed him into the woods. She hadn’t really left her fiancé to run away with him. Hell, there was nothing even between them except a fake marriage and a couple of NDAs at Mason. As far as he knew, Lucy saw him as only a friend and a teammate…and after his jackassery of the night before, he wasn’t sure he even still qualified for either of those positions. Besides, their arrangement had been clear – this was a marriage of convenience…one that was strictly platonic…one that was only arranged to help them survive the 18th century until Rufus fixed the Lifeboat or, they died of any number of diseases or afflictions common in this era…which, in the case of Jane Fraser, could involve a torturous death at the hands of Native Americans.

But the thought of possibilities…no matter how unlikely it seemed…hell, something he had never even considered before any of this…was now suddenly and enticingly open to him. Maybe he did need to focus on the path set before him. Lucy, for whatever reason, was his wife now. All he had to do was…

Move on.

Chapter End Notes
Greetings readers!

I don't know what week of quarantine we're in now....I've sort of lost track, but I hope
life has been treating you all well, despite the chaos in the world right now.

I apologize for the delay, I truly lost track of time...my mother had pneumonia (not
COVID), I was in a one on one language class that was taking up three hours of my
day ever day, I was homeschooling, and then I got sucked into the drama of the Joe
Tiger King documentary...and well, before I knew it, my day was gone and I'd only
gotten to write two paragraphs. I have been hitting the writing HARD this weekend, so
hopefully that means I can update again *soon* - though with as nutty as life has been
these past few weeks, don't quote me on that...because who knows what other
craziness 2020 has in store for all of us??

Now for the story notes: Leiden was actually THE place for medical training in the
18th century, I make one small reference to it in here and so I wanted to explain WHY.

As for Lyatt - I realize this is a SLOW BURN of epic proportions but it is meant to be
that way, not to be torturous, though I admit, it is a bit, but I promise I'm not trying to
be cruel - I'm trying to be true to the characters and the show..and while that may have
you throwing up your hands in exasperation, I promise you by the end of this thing,
you'll understand why....though I will say, I dropped a big hint a few chapters back that
no one as yet has picked up on....at least, I haven't received any comments about it. I
wrote the LAST chapter of this fic at the same time as the first....so every torturous
Lyatt moment is one step closer to getting us to that end...but I promise you, there will
be plenty of heart fluttering moments before we get there - not to torture you, but to
build up this relationship of trust and understanding that we love so much.

Wyatt is finally starting to sort through his feelings. He's not quite at that "OMG, I'm
in love with Lucy moment" but he's starting to consider the possibility of moving on
WITH HER...and while that may seem like we're moving at a snail's pace, we really
aren't in the confines of this fic...though, I have been writing this for, what? A year
now? YIKES. We're actually not too far from the end...I think I have maybe 4 or 5
chapters left - again, don't quote me, I always tend to misjudge the length of my
chapters (this one, for instance, was supposed to include what will be in the next
chapter). What I think will take a paragraph or two inevitable turns into 5k
words....other things that I think will take up half a chapter end up taking only a couple
of paragraphs. So again, don't quote me...it just depends on how the narrative flows.

I know I said this before but John Fraser was a real person, he actually did have a wife
named Jane and yes, she was lost to him on the road to Fort Cumberland. The location
of where he lives, his ties to George Croghan and Alexander McKee (though I don't
know the full extent of their friendship and camaraderie) is also historically accurate
and so when writing this and seeing his story, realizing that he was within miles of our
Time Team during the 1754 mission, I had to include him here FOR WYATT for
THIS chapter especially. I needed somewhere for the team to live during this whole
debacle....I couldn't have them living the entire time in the woods given the very real
dangers present for them there (seriously, if you read anything about this time in
American history, it's abductions and gruesome murders left and right...it was pretty
bad out on the frontier.) and so when I stumbled upon John Fraser he was the
PERFECT fit. His farm & forge had been taken over by the French (at the beginning
of this fic - where they were building Ft. Machault) and had sent him to Turtle Creek (where they are now) where he operated his trading post and made his own weapons...all well within traveling distance for our team during this mission...and of course, the sad tale of his wife (more on that tale in the next chapter) that paralleled so well with Wyatt's just made him the ideal historical figure to include to give Wyatt someone to relate to that would move his relationship with Lucy forward.

Okay, that's all I've got for now. I hope you enjoyed this update and thank you so much for reading! Stay healthy and safe!

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