

# Marcel's Letters

## DELETED SCENES

*My editor at Skyhorse didn't make structural revisions to the book; that is, the arc of the story remained the same. He did, however, suggest cuts with the goal of reducing the total word count. For example, early on in the manuscript he told me to eliminate a couple of paragraphs with general WWII history; he noted if someone was interested in general WWII history they could read a textbook. And he told me to trim down a part in the book where my description of the font was too detailed. Cuts are never easy to make, which is why working with a skilled editor is so helpful.*

*In Deleted Scene I, he helped me see the scene wasn't offering anything new. That is, by page 111, the reader already knew the kinds of things I was doing to find answers. And readers already knew I was shorting myself on sleep in a quest for answers.*

*In Deleted Scene II, he felt the side story didn't add to the tension, instead it interrupted the narrative flow.*

*I hope you enjoy reading these deleted scenes—and getting a peek into what happens during the editing process.*

*-Carolyn*

## DELETED SCENE I: PAGE 111

*Text shown in blue is text readers can find in the book; text in black is the scene that was deleted.*

Images of Berlin seared into my brain like an iron brand scarring flesh. German soldiers sprinted past buildings engulfed in flames. A woman cradled a child as she skittered past bodies abandoned in the street. Legs with feet still laced into boots laid in a gutter, the torso nowhere to be seen. Men and women in tattered clothes cleared mountains of brick with shovels and bare hands. Cables and axles had been rolled together and tossed like balls of yarn. Buildings were fleshless skeletons, with trusses and beams jutting out like bare ribs.

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Before I got out of my car, I swung a coat of gloss over my lips. I presumed I was going to stand out anyway, so I tried to embrace it.

As I walked to the Fort Snelling Visitor Center, my assumption was confirmed: I was bobbing

in a sea of old men. Most wore street clothes, but a few wore military jackets or hats emblazoned with unit patches and awards. I made my way to two men sitting behind a folding table outside the auditorium entrance. After handing over \$5 for a ticket, I extracted a stack of canary-yellow papers from my purse.

“Do you have a table where I can set these?”

The gentleman behind the cash box stared at me for a few long seconds. I presumed he thought I wanted to sell life insurance, reverse mortgages, or something of the sort. “What is it?” he gruffed.

“I’m looking for information, and this—”

He reached forward with an open palm and I handed over the papers. When he finished reading my flyer, he looked up with narrowed eyes. I wondered if he had been a sniper during his military career.

“What is it?” the man to his right asked. The man behind the cash box handed the papers over without breaking eye contact with me. After a moment, the second man looked up with the same bewildered stare.

“I am looking for information on 1943/1944 aerial bombings of the Daimler-Marienfelde factory in Berlin,” the flyer stated. “Do you have any information?” My contact information was listed at the bottom. I did not have a clear expectation of what might come of the inquiry. But I had to ask. I was willing to look foolish if the outcome was an answer.

“You are...?” the man behind the cash box stammered. I knew what he wanted to ask: why the hell would a 42-year-old woman be asking about an aspect of World War II history so specific, so violent, and so obscure. He never finished his question. “You can put them over there,” he said as he pointed to a folding table that held the evening’s program and other brochures.

As I made space on the table, the man from behind the cash box appeared at my side and gestured for me to follow. We walked across a vestibule to a man standing behind a line of tables selling recordings of previous lectures. “She’s got a question for you,” the man stated before walking away.

The man behind the table read the flyer. “This is a pretty specific request,” he said with a gentle smile. “But I’m guessing you already know that.”

He wrote down the email of a man, but he did not sound confident he would be able to help, and apologized for the lack of other ideas. I took the slip of paper and thanked him anyway. The night’s presentation was about to begin, so I followed the shuffling crowd into the auditorium and claimed a seat in the last row of one of the side sections, the invisible, anonymous place where I am most comfortable. I noticed just a couple of other women, wives or daughters of the men they sat next to, no doubt.

The evening’s lecture was part of a long-running series on World War II. That night, the presentation was not related to the STO or even French World War II history. But I stayed hoping the lecturer might provide new ideas of places to search.

Once the presentation got under way, I began to nod off. I dug my fingernails into my hands in an effort to stay awake, but it was useless.

I fell into a deep, black, exhausted sleep.

## DELETED SCENE II: PAGES 179–180

*Text shown in blue is text readers can find in the book; text in black is the scene that was deleted.*

“Most of Marcel’s letters begin ‘*Mes chères petites.*’ Do you see that?”

After a few seconds, Kim confirmed, “Yes.”

“Were they written 1943, 1944?”

She recited some dates: May 1944. January 1943.

“That was the month he started his conscription,” I whispered in astonishment.

Silence enveloped the line, as if both of us were trying to determine the next step. “Can I buy them from you?” I asked. The words sounded as fragile as an eggshell.

After a slight hesitation, Kim slowly said “no.”

My heart plummeted as I tried to make sense of her refusal. Her voice sounded laced with irritation, as if she could not believe I asked. *Why would she call to tell me she had them, then?* Hearing Kim claim she had more letters—then hearing I could not buy them—was confounding. It seemed cruel.

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One Saturday morning—years before the first white hairs began to frost Hoover’s muzzle—he chased a rabbit out of our yard. Hoover was young and strong, and he was gone like a shot. Aaron yelled for him to stop, to come back. After a futile attempt to chase after him, Aaron ran back to the house, frantic for help. Our baby was gone. Aaron jumped in his truck, I jumped in my car, and we crisscrossed neighborhood streets, looking for any flash of black fur.

Eventually, I spotted Hoover on the far side of a busy intersection, cars and minivans racing between us at full speed. I pulled my car to a stop and flung the door open. Impulsively—foolishly—I yelled for him. When he heard my voice, his ears perked and he stood tall as if he thought, “what a coincidence; you’re here too!” He rocketed my way just as a cluster of cars entered the intersection.

I squeezed my eyes shut as I realized I had just beckoned him to his death. *No, no, nonononono* the voice inside me screamed. I waited for the screech of brakes, the thud of his body. He was so close, but I could not get to him in time. I was certain I would never again rub his silken ears or receive his whiskered kisses.

Kim’s quiet “no” brought me right back to that intersection: Marcel’s letters were so very close. But I would never hold them. I would never see his words of love.

After an unbearably long silence—it felt like minutes, though it was probably only seconds—Kim followed the word “no” with the kind promise: “I will give them to you.” When I heard those six words, I felt the same mountain of joy as when Hoover ran to my open car door and jumped inside.

“Really?” I asked, as if I needed confirmation I had not misunderstood.