

SPINE OF THE ANTIQUARIAN



Gabriola, BC Canada V0R 1X4

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Spine of the Antiquarian

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DEDICATED TO JUDY

Noir Intelligence Series

The Black Hat
Spine of the Antiquarian

SPINE OF THE ANTIQUARIAN

BOOK TWO
of the
Noir Intelligence Series

A Novel

H.B. Dumont

CHAPTER 1

Alexandra Belliveau was acutely aware that in the duplicitous world of espionage and intelligence, nothing exists in the absence of context. More importantly, intelligence and context are askew in the world of espionage where there are truths, partial truths and make-believe truths.

“Mount up, *mon colonel*,” Alexandra called as she fastened the strap on her helmet. Her Harley-Davidson purred. “I’m really looking forward to a relaxing ride with no time constraints or work deadlines looming – especially not having to second-guess the menace of invisible shadows and having to stare at nothing while being wary of everything. Retirement is looking good.”

This ride would also be a celebration of her divorce from André. For the first time in their relationship, he had agreed with her on all the terms she had proposed. Not only had he not contested the divorce, but he had directed his solicitor to speed up the proceedings. It was an acknowledgement that nothing had gone wrong with their marriage. She had not *failed*. It was wrong *before* they exchanged vows and remained disastrous throughout.

The divorce decree brought a mixture of freedom and fear – freedom to move on with her life unencumbered by a tether to long-ago partisan pledges, fear that had haunted her since childhood, flooding the void with the all-too-familiar feelings of abandonment and loneliness. Childhood was a time she wanted to forget.

She pined for a fulfilling personal relationship that had been beyond her grasp but not beyond her desire. She remained naïvely hopeful but astonished that she could still be lulled by those little girl fairy tales. She took a deep breath to stave off the palpitations

as she reminded herself ruefully that this distortion had become the norm. But it was not normal.

She looked at Paul Bernard who wore an affectionate grin as he courteously bowed. His mere presence awakened the *joie de vivre* she had not experienced for a very long time. The yoke was hers to discard or retain.

“Absolutely! You can rest assured I will be completely focused on your profile from the rear perspective, AV,” Paul replied as he secured the strap on his helmet and turned on his communication system. He had called her AV the first time they had met as young teenagers and experienced the emotions of puppy love in Montigny-lès-Metz. AV were the initials of the name she shared with her grandmother – Alexandra Vanessa. “I’ll follow Alexandra the distinguished dragon slayer anywhere she wants to lead me,” he declared into his microphone to test the system.

“Don’t get distracted. I need your attention on the road,” Alexandra breezily replied as she adjusted her microphone. Privately, she relished his compliment. Not once in her 25-year marriage to André had he ever flattered her in such a personal manner.

“Are you reading me, Paul?” she asked. How she looked forward to being able to speak with him for the entire trip. André disliked motorcycles with a passion, especially Harley-Davidsons which he said emitted the most disturbing, uncivilized noise. At one point in their marriage, he threatened to leave her if she didn’t sell her bike. She lamented the fact that she never took him up on his offer. Instead, she parked her bike at her friend, Josephine’s place.

“Loud and clear. We have communications, madame. Lead the way.”

“Roger that. We’ll stop around Trier for coffee and again closer

to Mechernich. That should put us in Cologne in plenty of time for dinner.”

They had planned to drive east out of Luxembourg City on the E44 and then cross into Germany before going north at Trier on Highway 60.

This road trip would be the first big ride since the fateful morning when the black Mercedes had rammed her Harley-Davidson in Garches south-west of Paris, and Thon had abducted her. Paul had rescued her while other Harley riders distracted her abductor.

“How are you feeling? Is your bike handling okay?” Paul enquired cautiously. Although her bike had been repaired, he remained concerned for her safety.

“I’m all right. No shaking or noticeable vibrations from Sophia. She’s actually riding very smoothly for a 1972 classic that survived a round in the ring with a heavyweight.” Perhaps there was some irony in the fact that the California Highway Patrol had originally owned her Harley. It had been sold to a CIA agent at a State asset disposal sale. He brought it with him when he was assigned to Western Europe.

As they rode, they debriefed the events of that calamitous day in Garches before engaging with their secondary purpose, which was to find out as much as they could about Kurt Welter, the World War II Luftwaffe fighter ace. His surname was the same as that of Michel Welter, the Luxembourgian medical doctor and politician whose name was on the street sign in Luxembourg City where she had lived as a child. Kurt Welter had been credited with shooting down 63 Allied aircraft on 93 missions. It seemed strange to Alexandra that Welter had survived all those air battles only to be killed in his car at a railway crossing after the war. She had pondered whether the politician and war hero were related or whether their last names were merely coincidence.

This question was one of the loose ends from Thon’s murderous

rampage. Perhaps it was nothing, just serendipitous, a false interlude. But maybe it was important. It needed to be checked out. Caution if not due diligence was in order.

Her mother's tenant in the house on 47, rue Michel Welter had been one of Thon's victims. Alexandra had been the last intended target as the daughter of a former member of the French underground resistance, the *Maquis*, during the war, and subsequently a French counterintelligence agent.

But as providence would have it, Alexandra survived and Thon died at the hands of one of his own Fourth Reich neo-Nazi soldiers. Thon, whose actual name was Ludwig Rudolf Heydrich, was from Trier. Neither she nor Paul had any intention of stopping at Trier to locate the farm where he grew up in order to honour his death. Instead, they would raise a middle finger in an appropriate biker salute as they rode by. The white-hatted good guys and gals had been victorious over the black-hatted bad guy.

They stopped for coffee just north of Trier as planned. The late morning fall air was still fresh with a soft haze. The rising sun brought welcome warmth but wispy clouds high overhead were mares' tails, the harbinger of a change in the forecast. It could be a great day for a ride if the clouds swung east. Their mantra, as newly minted retirees, was to take every opportunity to stop and smell the roses, so to speak.

As Alexandra swung off her bike and removed her helmet, she was greeted with a friendly "How are you, Alexandra?"

Looking in the direction of the familiar voice she recognized an associate dressed in biker leathers. They had never ridden together although they had exchange stories of some of their exciting biking destinations.

"Franz, I see you're still riding a Beamer." Her comment was in jest. He extolled the virtues of the BMW as a yuppie bike while

she was an ardent Harley aficionado. “I’d like to introduce you to a colleague and friend, Paul Bernard.”

“Nice to meet you, Paul. A colleague of Alexandra’s is a friend of mine. Did you own your Harley-Davidson before you met Alexandra or has her mystical spell drawn you over to the dark side of the Harlistas?”

“Alas, I’m a willing victim of her incantations. She actually helped me select this Road King from the Place de la Bastille Harley-Davidson dealership in Paris. She also educated me about those Harley wannabes who jealously critique the Hog mystique.”

“Oh, she has cast you under a spell with her renowned charismatic biker charm, her lifeforce,” Franz countered with a grin.

“In Latin, lifeforce is referred to as *spiritus* and she does have that enigmatic spirit. I imagine you’ve experienced it too, Franz.”

Ending the joust with a friendly smile, Paul put out his hand. “Very nice to meet you.”

“So, Alexandra, are you still fighting crime as a forensic psychologist and teaching the techniques of the trade to up-and-coming academic protégés?” asked Franz.

“I’ve just retired and this is my inaugural ride as a retiree, well, semi-retired and quasi-employed biker. What about you?”

“I’ve recently cut back my hours to part-time. I wanted to get a few more rides in before packing the bike away for the winter. If the truth be known, I’m seeking refuge from the clamour of clients constantly requesting clinical counselling for psychological ailments of their own making. I can’t talk now, as I have to be back in Bonn late this afternoon. I’d very much enjoy getting together to explore semi-retirement options. I’ll send you an email. Are you back in Paris?”

“No, I bought a place in the old city of Luxembourg but I have

the same email address. Look forward to renewing contact. Take care and ride safe, *mein freund*.”

As Franz rode off, Paul commented, “Pleasant guy. I imagine he’s a psychologist also.”

“Yes, he’s a clinical psychologist,” Alexandra explained as they entered the café. “We met at a European Conference on Psychology and Behavioural Sciences in Geneva a few years ago.”

“Geneva is a lovely location for a conference. We should put it on our list for destination rides.”

“I agree. But let me tell you a bit about Franz. He has an interesting background. His family was and remains devotedly Christian. After Hitler became chancellor in 1933, Christians like his family who spoke out against Nazi doctrine were on the hit list for the concentration camps. So, his grandparents and their extended family moved to Switzerland. Although Switzerland was supposedly neutral, it was awash with spies of all stripes – German, Russian, British, French, Italian and every other nationality. After the war, his immediate family moved back to Germany, to Bonn. Many of his cousins are Swiss citizens, some of whom work in the Swiss banking system.”

“Good. We can add Bonn to our riding schedule. I’d like to chat with Franz about his thoughts on Germanic culture.”

“You would really enjoy hanging out with Franz and his wife. She is an addiction and trauma counsellor and an absolutely lovely lady. They are just salt-of-the-earth people, honest, hardworking, professional and unquestionably ethical in their personal and professional lives.”

“I’ll reiterate his words – a colleague of Alexandra’s is a friend of mine. Hopefully, our paths will cross again soon.” Paul had limited his social life to those in his own profession, rarely venturing into new social circles. After Suzette became pregnant

with their first son, she declined to accompany him to office functions including the Christmas party.

Despite and perhaps because of the calamitous events in the weeks following their reunion at her mother's funeral, Paul had not had the opportunity to meet AV's friends with the exception of Josephine who preferred to be called Jo. She seemed to be AV's oldest and closest confidant. Jo, he found out later, also rode a Harley-Davidson. When they first met, Jo alluded to some of the escapades that she and Alexandra had shared when they cruised the streets of the 5e arrondissement while students of the Université de Paris-Sorbonne. There was one more friend he needed to spend social time with to learn more about his puppy love. But that could wait.

* * *

“BONJOUR, C'EST AULNE” – *HELLO, THIS IS Aulne.*

“J'écoute” – *I'm listening.*

“Они едут в Линденталь” – *They are going to Lindenthal.*

“Да. Принято” – *Yes. Acknowledged.*

CHAPTER 2

As Paul picked up his coffee mug, Alexandra noticed that, for the first time, he wasn't wearing his wedding ring. Had he kept it on since Suzette's death perhaps out of loyalty to their marriage vows or was it a deeper duty to his Pope and Church? And why was he no longer wearing it?

"Do you remember when we were speaking with Roger d'Estaine, your mother's neighbour on rue Michel Welter and he said he thought I was your husband? I asked myself, what if?"

"Yes, I remember and I also thought, what if?" *How many times have I asked myself that question*, she pondered. She grieved and wept on long lonely nights too many to count since they first met as young teenagers in Montigny-lès-Metz, and were subsequently separated by events beyond their control.

She hesitated as a raft of emotions emerged that were more intangible than explicit. The moment seemed appropriate to bring clarity to their evolving relationship.

"We can't live in what-ifs from the past," she stated as if reflecting on a client's declaration, she now being her own psychologist. With a pause to catch her breath, she boldly qualified her response.

"But we can now plan for what-ifs in the future. So, what if we spend the rest of our days together not only as business partners in the game of sleuthing but also as soul mates?"

Paul reached across the table without hesitation, took her hands in his, stared into her hazel eyes and replied simply yet deliberately: "Yes, nothing would make me happier, Alexandra Vanessa."

He relished the sensation of her name rolling off his tongue as

he had done an infinite number of times since they had first met as teenagers.

“I can’t imagine a more fulfilling way to launch our retirement than to commit to a business and intimate partnership with you physically, mentally, spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually,” he added.

Feeling his passion, she maintained his gaze and allowed silence to fill the void. Together, their hands held a multitude of undeclared pledges of endearment.

Paul continued, “The day you accompanied me to see my father that first time after your mother’s funeral, he asked if you could excuse us as he had something personal to discuss with me.”

“Yes, I remember,” she acknowledged.

“After you left the room, he told me that in those few moments he saw us standing beside each other, he knew we were meant to be together. He knew it all those years ago when we first met in Montigny-lès-Metz. He said we were soul mates who had been torn apart due to extenuating circumstances. He gave me permission to leave Suzette. In fact, he told me to apply for a legal separation from Suzette so I would not end up on my deathbed wishing for a fulfilled life that I had never experienced with her but was within my grasp with you. He said the Pope wasn’t always right and I should ultimately divorce Suzette. Fate pulled us apart when we were young teenagers and providence has brought us together. I struggled with the whole concept of the sanctity of the marriage vows but now I agree with my father that the Pope isn’t always right.”

Holding her hands more firmly, he looked at her in earnest, not seeking acceptance of his commitment but affirming his resolve. She reciprocated with the smile of a princess invited to dance by her Prince Charming at her debutant ball.

“To be perfectly honest, the first thought that went through my

mind when I saw you at your mother's funeral reception was *foxy lady*. The second thought was, *candens es* which is Latin for you are hot. I fell in love with you when we first met in Montigny-lès-Metz all those years ago and have loved you ever since. It was *un coup de foudre* – love at first sight. You were in my mind every step as I ran all those marathons. My marathons were your marathons, my time to be with you exclusively. I could hardly constrain myself when I saw you at the funeral. So, there you have it, my hot foxy lady.”

After what seemed to be an infinitely long pause, Alexandra professed the emotion of a lifetime of passion unfulfilled.

“You can't imagine how I have longed to hear those words, how many days and nights you have consumed my thoughts. Right now, you had better let go of my hands so we can mount up and ride. If you don't let go, I'm going to start crying and not stop forever, at least.”

As she stood up, her cellphone buzzed with an incoming message.

“Some habits die hard, and technology has become most intrusive,” she muttered with a tinge of frustration.

The incoming message was tagged “urgent” from Alder. She leaned over and whispered into Paul's ear. She allowed the intimacy of the moment to linger.

“Let me respond to a priority call from Tom Hunt before we mount up. Interesting that he is using his code name.”

As she spoke with Tom, Paul watched a TV monitor in the café that was showing synagogues under attack in the United States.

The sub-script trailer read: *Terrorists attack synagogues in New York, Washington, Chicago, and possibly other unconfirmed locations*. Within seconds, the update visual tape at the bottom of the monitor read: *Police now confirm additional terrorist attacks in Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Dallas and Miami*.

A despondent library-like hush consumed the café as all patrons fixed their attention on the muted monitor. No one looked away, not even Paul whose focus jumped from the words at the bottom of the screen to the images of synagogues on fire, injured people laying on the ground and emergency vehicles arriving on mass.

Alexandra closed her cell phone and looked in astonishment at Paul, at the TV and then again at Paul. Her emotions ran the gamut from the freedom and exhilaration she knew from riding her Harley on the open highway to the satisfaction she knew from outwitting criminals as a forensic psychologist. Although she had never come so close to death as when she mentally duelled with Thon and his henchman while staring down the barrel of the pistol pointed at her head, she was aware that her lifestyle had taken a toll on her physical and emotional health. She was acutely aware that she needed a break that only time in the Harley saddle could provide. Yet she found herself awestruck as she stared at the images.

“Tom wants to meet us immediately,” she whispered to Paul. There was no intimate pause. “There is some indication that these attacks were motivated by Thon’s death. A neo-Nazi group with connections to Islamic terrorists is claiming responsibility in retaliation for a supposed US-led assassination of their leader. Tom is on his way to Luxembourg. He said he has been in communications with Sir James Pennington who advised that the radar is up at MI6 and Mossad. I confirmed we could meet him at my place. So much for our relaxed inaugural retirement ride.”

Alexandra took a long deep breath. The memory of the gnawing pain from years of migraines and the faint scent of trepidation lingered. She became numb with the images from her past as they merged with the sights from the present. She and Paul were being drawn into a future marred with violence exponentially more devastating.

“Truths of those times are masked in the mists of the Moselle,”

her mother had faintly whispered under her breath when Alexandra had asked what her mother had done when she was younger. “Your roots are those of Charlemagne and your dynasty Merovingian. In them you will discover your strengths and unearth the truth.”

Alexandra started to learn some of the details of what her mother had done at her mother’s funeral. Only then did she come to realize just how prophetic and ominous her mother’s words had been. The arcane world of espionage and intelligence was in her DNA, part of her destiny. Like arctic wolves, you can lock them up but you cannot silence their howls.

Tom’s phone call reminded her that she and Paul would not be able to leave her mother’s world behind. *But would working with Tom shed more light on her mother’s warnings and would that increase or decrease the relentless headaches, the manifestation of her stressors?* she wondered.

CHAPTER 3

“I like your new digs, Alexandra,” Tom commented. “I especially like the two Dutch paintings at the entrance.”

“Thank you. Paul got them for me as a house-warming gift when we were in Amsterdam picking up my things from the apartment on Amstel and from my office at the university where I was teaching.”

“I commend you, Paul. You are a connoisseur of the brush. Are you a collector of paintings or other forms of art yourself?”

“I have some. In my youth, I also collected coins, stamps and rare books but haven’t pulled them out of storage for many years. That’s one of the items on my to-do list now that I’m quasi-retired and supposedly have more time on my hands.”

“Rare books? I’m intrigued. We should chat about an antiquarian collection that Major Mike Murphy left me. I’ve been slowly but selectively adding to it with signed first edition first prints. Collecting isn’t so much a problem for me. Finding a safe place to store them is my challenge because I travel so much, spending days, weeks in hotel rooms.”

“That’s interesting. Sir James Pennington referred to his antiquarian collection,” Paul replied. “In her Will, Alexandra’s mother, Maria, left a box of antique books for her, some of which I recognize as being most collectable and valuable. One in particular is a very fine first edition, first print of the *Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexandre Dumas. Maria also left a fine first edition of *The Three Musketeers*.” Paul raised his voice in order to get Alexandra’s attention. “May I show Tom the Alexandre Dumas books your mother had?”

“Certainly,” Alexandra replied from the kitchen. “They’re still in the box in the hall closet. It’s on my to-do list to sort through

them.” She popped her head around the corner and looked at Tom. “My mother left me a note in the box that explains something about an Antiquarian Book Collectors Club, which she belonged to with Sir James and Major Mike.”

Paul delicately retrieved the novels, which were individually wrapped in tissue paper and enclosed in separate paper bags. Alexandra’s mother, Maria, had taken great care to ensure that each was preserved in as pristine condition as possible. She had known quality when she saw it. Quality equated to value monetarily and from a collector’s perspective.

“Oh, Alexandra,” Tom exclaimed in admiration. “These are in excellent condition for their vintage. This *Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Three Musketeers* are indeed first editions both first published in 1844. Very nice!” he purred.

“I’ve recently come to appreciate that. Paul has agreed to educate me more about the world of antique book collecting. I’ve done some surfing on the web and am amazed at the value of select rare books. I just need to find the time.”

“Most people I know who have retired say the same thing about time that seems to be elusive,” Tom retorted. “Most commented that they seemed to have had more time when they worked.”

Paul chimed in with a sigh. “I thought I would be able to throw out my calendar but that hasn’t been the case thus far. Now that Alexandra and I are settling into the Luxembourg lifestyle, trips back to Paris to visit her daughter, Collette, and my son, Jean, in addition to riding time on the biker circuits, are the new reality. You realize, Tom, that your call to meet us cut short our inaugural retirement ride. That should tell you something about how seriously we interpret your invitation to a business relationship with a couple of recently retired pensioners.”

“I’m very much aware of that, Paul, and appreciate you taking the time to meet me. I can assure you that you will not be bored on

the one hand or having to live out of suitcases on the other hand. You will have time to ride, and to collect and organize your book collections.”

“Coffee is served, gentlemen. Sorry about the absence of chocolate éclairs or croissants and Camembert but no time to shop. Let’s talk business, especially the issue of the neo-Nazi attack on the synagogues and the allegation against the United States in retaliation for the so-called assassination of their leader, Thon, that sexually inept psychopathic pervert. What a disgusting joke he was.”

Her anti-Nazi vitriol defined her position. While working, she had to be politically correct with some language she used when in public. In the privacy of her own home, she could be more exact with her adjectives and adverbs.

“Well,” Tom chuckled, “this attack is an interesting twist of history.”

“Elaborate, please,” Paul asked. He had gained an appreciation of ancient history while travelling throughout the Mediterranean, specifically Greece. Defining historical events as twists would be subjective interpretation in what was supposedly an objective discipline.

Tom elaborated. “At the end of World War II, one of America’s pledges to the free world was to de-Nazify Germany. But there were too many political and economic reasons not to follow through with that promise. A most prominent motivation not to comply was General Patton’s decree that some senior ex-Nazis were to be employed as governing officials – *Bürgermeister* – in German communities as a means of controlling the population. Others were employed as spies under the Purple Primer Program promoted by the United States and England. Only a few select U.S. politicians and semi-informed mandarins were aware of the rise of the Fourth Reich from the ashes of its predecessor, or at least

were open to its possibility. This was part of the motivation for the Marshall Plan.”

“Ah, now I understand your reference to the intrigue associated with the Fourth Reich movement. I sense there is more skullduggery than meets the eye,” Paul commented. “Victors tend to write the history books.”

“You’re correct. So now the neo-Nazis of the Fourth Reich have struck in the heart of the American homeland supposedly in tandem with Islamic terrorists.”

“And the strategic motivation is what?” Paul queried further.

“All along, we have suspected the Fourth Reich was financially backing some Middle Eastern terrorists with proceeds from wartime stolen Nazi gold to use against the West, particularly the United States. But we don’t know why, and that has been worrying. So, isn’t this a tempest in a teacup?”

“I see your point,” Paul acknowledged. “From a strategic perspective, I understand the implications in the current and evolving global arena. But what’s the connection with Thon?”

“No sane person would kill their golden goose. Does that suggest Thon wasn’t the golden goose in the neo-Nazi vision of the Thousand-Year Reich? The alternative is that his murderer, a supposed loyal soldier of the Fourth Reich, was insane. We suspect there was a third option, an alternate political motive in his murder – to create a political maelstrom manifested in the attacks on the synagogues. History twisted, manipulated.”

“How do we fit into your plans for a tentative partnership?” Alexandra queried. “Remember that Paul and I are quasi-retired and looking forward to putting in some serious Harley saddle time.”

“Your reputations as recently retired professionals are your quintessential strengths because you are known for just that, and only that. Thus, you won’t be suspected as recent members

of the retirement community. You're local, known specialists in your own disciplines. As a result, you have your cover. You both have foundational and, in some respects, detailed knowledge of neo-Nazis. We will train you in the art and science of intelligence gathering. In addition, we will increase your knowledge of terrorism."

"Okay, but we aren't just a couple of carefree retirees," Alexandra qualified. "We have family. What we do will affect others. This reality certainly struck home with my mother's death. My and Paul's upbringings were warped by our parents' roles in espionage and policing. Paul and I became further entwined and, I surmise, remain entangled in Maman's world of French counterintelligence. My daughter, Collette, and Paul's son, Jean, through association, have been affected – Jean more so than anyone else, having been shot and nearly killed by Thon's Fourth Reich henchman at the warehouse in Versailles."

"Let me take you back to your mother's funeral," Tom responded. "I've been watching you two dancing in unison since the funeral reception."

Observing Paul and Alexandra subtly glance at each other with his revelation, Tom continued.

"Yes, I was there because we had a feeling Thon might show up and might strike again. We didn't have a positive ID of him but were hoping we could pick up on the unusual behaviour of any attendee. It wasn't until after the reception we realized that Thon had been present, disguised as a blonde female with bright red lipstick."

Again, Alexandra and Paul exchanged a quizzical expression.

"The head of security at the Hôtel Novotel in Luxembourg where you stayed and the waiter at the Café Kaempff-Kohler are also team members. They were planted to keep you under surveillance, as much for your protection as the tentative capture

of Thon. We sensed you had become aware of their presence. Well done on your perceptiveness. The clerk in the jewellery store is also on the team. She had to introduce herself to you to initiate the relationship. She continues in that capacity as your neighbour, still watching over you.”

“And Sir James?” Alexandra queried. “He retired from MI6 so was no longer on active service. He and my mother maintained contact more as friends than as colleagues, along with Major Mike Murphy.”

“You can take the boy out of the country but you can’t take the country out of the boy. Although formally retired from MI6, he remains an integral part of the intelligence team. As you know, Alexandra, your mother, Sir James and Major Mike Murphy worked together during the Cold War. Your mother had met Major Mike in 1943 when he was working with the military OSS – the USA’s Office of Strategic Services. He later joined the CIA. Subsequently, Major Mike introduced me to Maria and Sir James as his protégé.”

“Is that why Sir James was at the funeral?” Alexandra asked.

“Partially. He wanted to pay his last respects to a dear colleague. He was also another set of trained eyes watching over you. You need to know that although Thon is now dead, other threats continue. Hence, you need to remain cautious and cognizant of your surroundings at all times. Always remember what your mother repeatedly told you, Alexandra, to be ever so careful about what you say regarding those times when she was a member of the French Resistance, the *Maquis*, and later French counterintelligence. You are your mother’s daughter and, as a result, you have been drawn into her duplicitous world of espionage. The Third Reich has morphed into the Fourth Reich and today’s neo-Nazis are equally violent and deadly as the world has just witnessed with these nine attacks on the synagogues.”

“And my daughter, Collette?” The worrisome tone of her question and the expression on her face were clear.

“We deduce the threat against your Collette has been minimized in one sense with Thon’s death. But she too needs to maintain situational awareness. As you have asked her on numerous occasions, she needs to keep her radar up. By virtue of being your daughter and present at the scene when Thon was killed, she faces a threat regardless of what may surface from your association with me.”

Alexandra paused and with a deep resigned sigh acknowledged her new world. She recalled how her mother would silently whisper under her breath when she asked about those times when her mother was younger.

“Truths of those times are masked in the mists of the Moselle,” her mother would repeat.

It was now readily apparent she had been drawn deeply into her mother’s vortex, her world of intelligence, of lethal intrigue, as had those around her. The singularity of black and white had been dwarfed by countless shades of grey. Retirement would be defined by this new reality.

“I don’t think I need to remind you, Paul, of the requirement to be aware of your environment too,” Tom continued. “Your own work gathering evidence at scenes of war crimes and presenting it as a witness at the International Criminal Court in The Hague is known. But your close association with Alexandra has left you in the thick of it.”

“If I wasn’t aware before, I certainly am now,” Paul confirmed as he looked at Alexandra and reached over to take her hand.

“Where she goes, I go, and that’s a given. We are business and committed life partners.”

“I’m aware of that, Paul,” Tom acknowledged.

“So, what’s your assessment of the risk to my son, Jean? You know about his relationship with Alexandra’s daughter, Collette.”

“The risk to Jean is lower than for you and Alexandra but still significant because of his relationship with Collette. In addition, he has his own profession as a systems analyst with the Prefecture of Police in Paris recently seconded to the Police nationale. The two of them need to keep their respective and collective radar up. I would recommend the four of you meet in private to discuss the New World Order which continues to define us and others in our respective orbits.”

“Hmmm,” Paul murmured under his breath. “The New World Order, new relationships, new friendships, new professional affiliations. And I once thought the most significant decision in my retirement day would be whether I should play a round of golf or not. Why do I get the feeling life has only just begun?”

Tom smiled, confirming Paul’s observation. “I’d like to invite you both to Langley, Virginia for an initial intelligence briefing at the CIA headquarters. Your function would be just to gather intelligence and report back. It’s important to note that intelligence isn’t necessarily evidence and vice versa. You can then think about what a working relationship might look like. We can chat thereafter and, if you are committed, we’ll provide you with an advanced briefing on intelligence gathering and terrorism. Thereafter, we’ll return to Paris and Luxembourg where we can work out details of the strategy and our relationship.”

“Paul and I have talked about what a partnership with you might entail. We have tentatively agreed to explore a proposal that you might offer.”

“I sensed that, Alexandra. In anticipation of your acceptance, I booked our flights and hotel reservations. Here are your tickets and confirmations. Just ensure your passports are up to date. We’re living in the post-9/11 world of enhanced security.”

“Might I conclude that Thomas A. Hunt, Deputy Chief of the Los Angeles Police Department, has at least one other persona?” Alexandra responded inquisitively.

“It’s all about relationships,” Tom conceded as he gave Alexandra a furtive smile. “I acknowledge that I’m in the presence of the master of professional affiliations and relationships. I wouldn’t be surprised to hear you have already woven this topic into your university curricula, Alexandra.”

“*Touché, mon ami,*” Alexandra chuckled as she returned his grin. “It forms the foundation of the art and science, and the sensing of forensic psychology.”

“And that’s why I need you on my team,” Tom confided. “You’re the best in your respective disciplines. You have a brilliant mind and an uncanny awareness of the senses, Alexandra, like your mother. With Paul’s proven experience under fire and subsequent reputation with the International Criminal Court in The Hague, and as your sleuth partner, it doesn’t get any better.”

“One question, Tom,” Paul asked, his eyebrows raised. “Since 9/11, I understand that U.S. Homeland Security has been on high alert and attuned to possible attacks on U.S. soil. How did this neo-Nazi attack on the synagogues go undetected?”

“These Aryans were on our radar but not highly profiled by U.S. Homeland Security folks because the FBI and other law enforcement agencies had been focused on Middle East Islamic terrorists. After the synagogue attacks, they taunted the FBI with a note stating that nine synagogues had been targeted because nine is symbol of the ceremonial menorah with its nine-stick candleholder lit during the celebration of Hanukkah. The note also warned that more synagogues would be attacked. Suffice it to say, the Aryans are now high on the watch list. This is where Alexandra’s experience as a forensic profiler in the context of European cultures will add considerable value. As you are keenly aware, nothing exists in the

absence of context. Your hands-on knowledge gathering evidence and intelligence will be vital.”

Alexandra trusted her instinct, her *shrew*, but the stakes that Tom was offering were higher than she had experienced before as a forensic psychologist working for the Prefecture of Police in Paris and the Police nationale. She needed confirmation. Paul agreed.

“Okay, Tom, we’re tentatively in. But before we go to Langley, I’d like to invite you to dinner to meet Collette and Jean. They need to know who we will be working with in order to gain confidence. They don’t need to know who you work for, besides the LAPD, but they need to be able to put a face to a name, just in case.”

“That’s understandable,” Tom replied. “When and where? I suggest we meet in private away from prying eyes and attuned ears.”

“I’ll call my friend Jo and set it up for her place if that fits, Tom. I’ll send you an e-invitation to confirm the time and date.”

“Someone’s at the door, Alexandra,” Paul called out.

“Can you answer it?”

“Alexandra Belliveau?”

“Yes,” she replied.

“We have a plant for delivery.”

“I didn’t order a plant.”

“It’s a gift from Josephine Desjardins.”

“Okay. Put it by the window.”

She opened the envelope that accompanied the plant. “Happy Homecoming,” signed Josephine.

“Weird,” she murmured.

Paul looked at her curiously.

“It’s signed Josephine. She never uses that name with me. It’s always been simply Jo. Just seems odd.”

“I must get back to Paris,” Tom announced as he climbed awkwardly out of his high-backed chair.

“Sore hip?” Alexandra observed sympathetically.

“An old KGB combat injury. One got away and I am left with a reminder of my mortality and a constant cue to be vigilant about a rematch. I don’t need a meteorologist to tell me the weather is changing.”

After Tom left, she re-examined the card that came with the plant.

“Strange that it says Josephine.”

“Give her a call to thank her.”

“I’ll ask her at dinner, if I remember.”

CHAPTER 4

Dinner with Tom was described to Collette, Jean and Jo as just a social event to celebrate their new business and personal relationship, and possible new business partnership with Tom. Alexandra asked Jo and Collette to describe their impression of Tom. Paul asked Jean for his assessment too.

They were assembled at Jo's by the time Tom arrived.

"Tom, this is my daughter, Collette, and Paul's son, Jean," Alexandra announced.

"I'm pleased to meet you. Jean, I hope you're recovering from your wound. I've never been shot but understand that it can take a while to recover all your energy and endurance."

"I'm probably eighty percent back. Hopefully, I'll be close to one hundred percent recovery with continued physiotherapy. Most importantly, I'm able to ride my Ducati on very short outings now, just around the block."

"I understand you'll receive an award for your bravery in taking down the neo-Nazi at the Élysée Palace when your father was inducted as a *Commandeur de la Légion d'Honneur*, and for helping to save Alexandra's life at the warehouse in Versailles."

Jean acknowledged with a nod and a humbled smile. He was his father's son, not wanting to be publicly acknowledged for deeds of excellence.

"And, Collette, I understand that you'll be graduating this fall with a Master of Psychology degree."

"Yes, that's correct. I'm looking forward to working as a forensic psychologist like Maman. I'm currently completing my practicum with Frederik Jorgensen's psychology firm where Maman worked."

“Like mother, like daughter. I’m confident you’ll be successful.”

“Do you remember Josephine Desjardins, Tom?” Alexandra asked. “You briefly met Jo when you came over to become reacquainted with Sophia, my bike. Jo also rides a Harley.”

“Yes, I do remember. May I personally thank you, Jo, for providing a safe haven for Alexandra and Collette during those threatening days when Thon was closing in for the kill.”

“Life has always been interesting since our early days together when Alexandra and I attended classes at the Université de Paris-Sorbonne. It seems like only yesterday since we attended lectures in the Grand Amphitheatre and cruised the boulevards and back streets of the 5e and 6e arrondissement on our Harleys.”

“So, Jean,” Tom asked, “what’s it like to be the sole Ducati rider in this extended family of Harley-Davidson enthusiasts?”

“It’s a challenge leading them but soon I’ll be joined by Collette. I’m teaching her to ride and she’ll buy a Ducati too.”

With the attention focused on Jean, Collette said, “We were holding back on this news until I had my licence. Now you all know that the competition is on. Jean and I will be flying the Ducati colours.”

“Okay, but before the jousting gets too far along, let’s sit down for dinner to celebrate Alexandra and Paul’s business partnership,” Jo announced.

“And another relationship,” Paul quietly whispered in Alexandra’s ear as he slid his hand down the small of her back, pulled out her chair and pushed it in behind her, before taking his seat close beside her.

Table conversation was relaxed and cordial as banter came easily. Tom’s finesse in social dialogue accompanied by his warm and disarming smile eased his acceptance as just another member of the extended family, like a distant favourite uncle come to visit. Conversation seemed to center on where Alexandra and Paul

planned to ride from the old city of Luxembourg, perhaps in the company of a couple of Ducati aficionados.

After dinner and after Tom had departed, Alexandra quietly confided in Jo and Collette, saying that she and Paul were seriously considering a business relationship with Tom to expand their police clientele to include the LAPD. It might also involve other major law enforcement agencies in the U.S. In addition, Tom could introduce them to some of his colleagues at Interpol.

Jo replied, "Yes, I get nothing but good vibes from Tom."

Collette took longer to respond and asked if she could think it over for a moment. She took a deep breath and closed her eyes, then opened them to finally confirm:

"I think so, Maman."

In quiet confidence, Alexandra asked Paul, "Thoughts, partner?"

Paul pondered Collette's reserved response and her mother's reflection. "So, what are you thinking?"

"Collette has inherited the *sensation of the mind* as my mother called the heightened intuitive awareness that I inherited from my father and mother. I trust Collette's feelings as much as I trust my own. Like mother, like daughter. There's just something out there that I'm stuck on." She paused for a brief moment before asking Paul, "What are your senses telling you?"

"I trust Tom. I would definitely want him on my team if I were asked to lead another foray to gather forensic evidence from another war crime scene anywhere in the world. I'm completely confident he would have my back if push came to shove. More notably, I would trust him with your life. Having said that, there is something mysterious about him. Perhaps that just comes with the territory, the arcane art of espionage and intelligence. I was exposed to a bit of it on those evidence-gathering missions working with interesting people in interesting places."

As they left Jo's, Alexandra asked, "You're confident about our relationship with Tom. Is that correct?"

"Yes, I'm confident," Paul confirmed. "My interpretation of my own intuition has increased considerably since being involved at the periphery of your mother's world of counterintelligence and Thon's murder, not to mention learning from you. If you're still uneasy, why don't you meet Collette and ask her why she said, 'I think so,' rather than an unequivocal yes? I can come with you if you wish."

"Good idea. I'll ask her now and set up a lunch. That will give her more time to reflect. And, yes, I want you there, mon colonel. I need your thoughts. If we enter into a formal contract with Tom, we need to be completely confident with each other as much as my mother, Sir James and Major Mike were. I'll also send off a coded message to Sir James mentioning that Alder has made contact and ask him for his endorsement of the proposed business relationship. I'll ask him if there is any indication of monkshood flowers as there was with Francine Myette."

"Although I didn't ask Jean for his assessment of Tom, I can now ask him about his sense of Tom's honesty. Jean isn't highly intuitive but he can certainly read people as possible opponents in life's game of chess. Since fine-tuning his psychological profiling software program for the Police nationale, he has developed a parallel program that examines future intent grounded in historical behaviour. I'll ask him to conduct a profile of Tom."

"Thanks. The more input we have, the better our ability to complete a comprehensive profile of a future business partner. This should be easier than completing the forensic psych profile of Thon. It'll also be less deadly if we make an error in judgement, although intelligence gathering will no doubt have its own perils."

AT LUNCH, COLLETTE RECONFIRMED HER QUALIFIED ENDORSEMENT OF Tom.

“He’s a white-hatted good guy as you say, Maman, but there is just something about him that is a bit distant. I enjoyed speaking with him at dinner. He’s charming and he made me feel relaxed without any glib pretence of being too slick. I wouldn’t have any qualms about you working with him. I’m confident he is as honest as the day is long. But... there’s just a *but*.”

“So, why the hesitation, dear?”

“Not knowing anything about his background, I’d hazard a guess and say Tom was an orphaned child. I say that from an intuitive psych assessment. I think he really enjoyed being invited to dinner with our extended family because, perhaps, he never had that inclusive relaxed, warm family experience while growing up. He has instinctive high emotional intelligence, and finely tuned social intelligence skills that may not be innate but rather learned. Orphans make the best espionage agents because they have fewer links that can get in the way of working in a secret environment. That’s why I sense he is more than a Deputy Chief of Police of the LAPD.”

“Thank you, dear, for your straightforward analysis. I’ve no doubt you’ll pass your practicum with honours at Fred’s firm.”

“I agree with your mother’s assessment, Collette,” Paul added. “You are already a talented forensic psychologist. I have complete confidence in Tom also and agree there is a reserved *je ne sais quoi* about his persona, yet no red flags.”

After Collette left, Alexandra asked,

“Thoughts? What is Jean’s assessment?”

“As I just mentioned to Collette, I’m comfortable. Jean said he had no reservations at all.”

WITH THIS FEEDBACK, ALEXANDRA AND PAUL MET Tom again and formally accepted his offer to engage in a business relationship.

“I passed the family acid test?” Tom responded with a chuckle. “I’ve checked out okay with all the psych assessments for honesty and integrity. Woohoo!”

His new business partners smiled in acknowledgement of his astute observations.

“You have also passed my acid test for thoroughness and caution,” Tom retorted. “So, let’s work out some details. I’ve taken the liberty of forwarding your files to my colleagues who are duly impressed with your collective accomplishments, integrity and diligence. Our focus now will be on gathering intelligence on the funding source for the Fourth Reich, what we perceive to be the stolen Nazi gold. This is what consumed most of your mother’s time in French counterintelligence, Alexandra. You may find some comparisons with your mother’s life.”

She smiled. She felt closer to her mother now than she did when she was a child. Although she loved her mother and was confident that her mother loved her, there were those times when she felt abandoned. Reflections on those lonely times made her heart sink. She gained comfort from being close to Paul.

Tom continued, “We need to reach into the core of the neo-Nazi psyche in their world, which is devoid of ethical feeling and compassion. Their source of funding will be their Achilles’ heel. Now, it’s on to Langley.”

As they parted company with Tom, Alexandra suggested they needed to call Sir James and confirm a date for a visit, just to relax. She felt safe behind the ramparts of his cottage and protected in his presence.

“We need to spend a little R&R downtime with him in Dover at his cottage overlooking the Channel. He left us an open invitation and I can hear the comfy chair in his sunroom calling me back.”

“I agree,” Paul replied. “He mentioned your mother found solace sitting in that chair and you found the same serenity when we first visited. We also owe him a more detailed explanation of the fate of Thon – how *la princesse, la chasseuse de dragon* – the princess dragon slayer, single-handedly saved the world from that monstrous murderer. In addition, I need to thank him for your amulet and for my ring.”

“It was a team effort. I couldn’t have done it without you and the Harley cavalry that came to the rescue.”

“I’d like to stroll in his English garden again and hear more about his belief in the spiritual world of the Druids and Wicca. Since receiving his gifts and experiencing their powers, I’m now convinced, like Sir James, our lives are controlled by forces in our environment that are all interconnected. As my father correctly pointed out, the Pope is not always right.”

“Let’s go back to Luxembourg. My *shrew* is telling me we should sort through the box of rare books my mother left for me, before we go to Langley and before we visit Sir James. I’ve become more conscious of the fact that life moves in a rhythm, like the seasons. There is a need for balance between the past and the present, and the present and the future.”

Paul reached for her hand. He was again humbled by the courage and wisdom of the dragon slayer. He quietly savoured the balanced unison he fleetingly experienced with her all those years ago in Montigny-lès-Metz before their puppy love had been abruptly interrupted. The experience of their first kiss was still as alluring today.

“Je t’aime, ma princesse,” he softly whispered in a sincere expression of adoration, again sealed with a kiss.

“Je t’aime aussi,” she quietly replied in a down-soft voice reinforced by an extended embrace.

Oh, how I missed this closeness, she reflected. In all their years

of marriage, André had never spoken to her in such a genuinely loving manner. If she died tomorrow, her life with Paul, although brief at this juncture, would be fulfilled in every respect. She would never again experience the dreaded loneliness and paralyzing angst she had felt as a child and in her marriage.

“To bring more balance, may I suggest we move you into my apartment when we return to Luxembourg? It’s more spacious. We can leave your place vacant for now. Jean and Collette can stay there when they come to visit, and perhaps Jo.”

Alexandra wrapped her arms around him and as she kissed him she asked, “Does that answer your invitation?”

Why? she asked herself. She recalled the lyrics of the song by the same name sung by Betty Carter, perhaps made more famous by Louis Armstrong. Was her marriage to André a failure because of her shortcomings as a partner? She had often questioned her own inability to engage in a meaningful relationship because of her upbringing.

Although she loved her mother and believed her mother loved her, work took her away from home. Alexandra kept coming back to this doubt. Did her mother really love her? Did she really love her mother or is that something everyone said to avoid the reality? Growing up, she didn’t know why her mother had to travel so much. It wasn’t until she was well in her teens that she started to appreciate her mother’s work and the sacrifices her mother had made in the service of the Republic of France. Yet, she still felt inadequate in relationships. Had her marriage to André dissolved as a result?

CHAPTER 5

“We’re at a bit of a disadvantage, Tom,” Alexandra commented. “You know more about us than we know about you. So, what’s your background, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“I don’t mind at all. I could describe my life as nomadic at best. My father was U.S. Air Force and flew Mustangs during the war. He met my mother in England. In 1945, they had a daughter who died at birth. I understand my mother suffered severely from postpartum depression. After the war, they moved to Berkeley, California where his family was living. I was born a few years later. My father reenlisted in the Air Force when war broke out in Korea. He was shot down and killed by a MIG in 1953. On hearing this news, my mother curled up in a ball and died of a broken heart. I then moved in with my grandparents in Berkeley. My grandfather had been American Ambassador in Russia, Morocco, Algeria and France. He and my grandmother were fluent in French and Russian. So, in that household, I became fluent in both languages.”

“I was wondering where you learned French,” Alexandra remarked. “And may I compliment you on your pronunciation which is exquisitely continental. Most Americans destroy the French language!”

“*Merci beaucoup*,” Tom replied with a quiet smile.

“I attended the University of Southern California at Berkeley where I completed an undergraduate degree majoring in Business Finance. In my final term, both my grandparents died within a few months of each another from lung cancer brought on by years of smoking. Being the only child and only grandchild, I inherited their estate and my parents’ estate, which had been held in trust until I was twenty-one.”

“That’s very much like my situation with my aunt and uncle who raised me except they were killed in a car accident by a drunk driver,” Alexandra confided, in acknowledgement of their shared experience.

“It’s unfortunate we have that in common. My grandmother had been an avid reader and book collector. While in Moscow, she acquired first Russian-edition copies of Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace*, and Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, *Demons* and *Brothers Karamazov*. They all became very valuable, as did her first French-edition copies of Alexandre Dumas’ *Three Musketeers*, and *The Count of Monte Cristo*. She picked them up when they lived in Paris. She also acquired a first edition, first print of Charles Dickens’ *Tale of Two Cities* in very good condition, in addition to a few other valuable collectables.”

“Ah, now I know how you recognized my copies of *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Three Musketeers* from my mother’s collection.”

“Yes, but your copies are in far better condition than mine. Let me carry on with my tale of several cities. I’ll get back to the book collecting that will tie into my life’s adventures.”

“I’m all ears. Curiosity is my middle name,” Alexandra rejoined.

“I’ve ridden motorcycles since I was a kid. My first bike was a Honda 50 and then I upgraded to a Honda 90. I was part of the ‘60s California surfer scene. That’s where I found my passion for motorcycles. The sun, the surf, the girls, it didn’t get much better. But the Viet Nam war was at full throttle and I was attending university. I joined the California National Guard to fulfill my military obligation rising to Second Lieutenant. After graduation, I joined the California Highway Patrol because they had Harleys. And, yes, your Sophia was my CHP bike. After a couple of years of brainlessly giving out speeding tickets, I realized my career wasn’t going anywhere so I joined the LAPD. Early on, I must have

impressed someone because I was quietly asked to apply for the CIA, which I did. I think being fluent in both French and Russian helped, as we were in the midst of the Cold War. In addition to being trilingual, I was well read in French and Russian literature and culture.”

“May I ask a more personal question, Tom? Were you ever married?”

“Yes. We met at Berkeley. Her name is Stephanie and she was a surfer girl from Jenner, a small town on the coast west of Santa Rosa. She wanted to return to Jenner after graduation and be an elementary schoolteacher. I wanted to travel. We separated when I moved to LA but briefly got back together. I actually thought we were over the worst. But then when I joined the CIA we separated again. Technically, we never divorced, which gives her my health benefits and she’d be the survivor for my pension. We’ve kept in contact over the years with the odd Christmas card. I have one of those non-descriptive post office box return addresses. I sense she thinks that I’m still distant.”

“Have you ever thought of getting back together?”

“To be honest, until I met you and Paul, the thought never crossed my mind. I was too focused on the job. Domestic distractions can have fatal consequences in this profession as you can appreciate. However, seeing how happy and peaceful you are together has caused me to ponder the possibility as of late. But I came to my senses and realized my lifestyle is still just too unpredictable.”

“I’m sorry to hear that but I fully appreciate your work and its demands. I understand from speaking with Sir James that you were a close associate of Major Mike Murphy. How did that happen?” Alexandra followed up.

“Major Mike was my CIA field trainer, so to speak. His background, as you may know, is French. His father had been an

American journalist who covered World War I and the Paris Peace Talks in Versailles in 1919. His mother was a French schoolteacher. Major Mike's early upbringing was in Paris where he attended school. Because of the French connection, Major Mike and I hit it off, speaking French much of the time, to the irritation of some of our unilingual CIA colleagues. He was also an ardent book collector as I discovered later. Apparently, his mother had many books, being a French grammar teacher and avid reader. Mike inherited her collection, which he left to me when he died several years ago. To my knowledge, he was never married and had no family."

"Interesting," Paul commented. "After our dinner meeting at Jo's, Alexandra and I went back to Luxembourg where we sorted through all the rare books Maria had left to her. In the box was a note on letterhead from Sir James referring to the Antiquarian Book Collectors Club, the ABC Club. He, Maria and Major Mike were founding members. They were the only three members as far as I can determine. Do you know what that was all about?"

"The plot thickens, *mes amis*. Let me back up a bit. I became Major Mike's protégé. He took me to Europe where I learned the tradecraft. Mike introduced me to Sir James and Maria, explaining they were the only two people he fully trusted. As you may know, Major Mike served with the OSS, the Office of Strategic Services, during the war. He was one of the Allied Intelligence officers in Northern France coordinating with the French Resistance, the *Maquis*, for the Normandy invasion in June 1944. That's where he first met your mother, Alexandra. She was a member of the French Resistance at the time. After the war, he became one of the initial members of the CIA in 1946. The Americans, British and French Intelligence Services were on the trail of the stolen Nazi gold and other treasures. Perhaps serendipitously, Sir James and Maria were also collectors of rare books. When you get the opportunity, have

Sir James show you his first edition collection of Charles Dickens' novels."

"We contacted Sir James and set aside some time to visit and just relax at his cottage in Dover after we return from Langley," Alexandra commented. "He mentioned he wanted to show us his collection and explain its value. I got the impression he was talking beyond just monetary. We're captivated, having examined my mother's collection, and now hearing the story about Major Mike's books which he left to you."

"Apparently Maria came up with the strategy that the three of them should form the ABC Club as a cover to locate art and other valuable artefacts which the Nazis had stolen. She figured some of those Nazi conspirators were filthy rich and would not want to convert their acquired treasures into cash for deposit in banks. If they did, it could easily be tracked. They knew there was a considerable number of stolen gold bars purported to be in some Swiss banks and the Vatican bank."

"Am I correct in saying these monies are still housed in a select few Swiss banks?" Alexandra asked.

"Yes, but we'll get to that later. Let me first take you back to your mother's strategy. She believed the now-rich Nazi thieves would arrogantly display and gloat over their stolen treasures, but only at their private estates. If Maria, Sir James and Major Mike presented themselves as antiquarians with considerable collections of rare and valuable books, they might be able to weasel their way into the inner sanctum in the clandestine realm of these ex-members of the Third Reich. That was the motivation to form the ABC Club. But Major Mike died before they could advance the plan. Sir James retired from MI6 soon after Mike's death. That just left Maria who was suffering from poor health by then."

"So, where does that leave us, Tom?" Alexandra enquired. "Do we want to resurrect the ABC Club as a means of intelligence

gathering? Paul and I are committed to riding our Harleys as part of our retirement plans. Could you see us riding to antique bookstores and making it known we are in the market for rare collectables?”

“That’s an option I haven’t considered! You’re a step ahead of me, Alexandra. Let’s propose this to my colleagues.”

“I have a question, Tom,” Paul probed. “You are supposedly a deputy chief with the LAPD as far as Interpol is concerned. How?”

“Technically, I am a reserve police officer with the LAPD and hold the honorary rank of Deputy Chief. Few in the police community know otherwise. Thus, if anyone calls the department, they will confirm my status and explain I have been attached to Interpol.”

“Now that’s convenient. As you say, we live in a New World Order that requires new world strategies. The white-hatted good guys and gals need to become creative in order to increase the provision of security.”

Paraphrasing the Chinese proverb, Tom added, “We live in interesting times.”

“I’m not certain of the date of that proverb,” Paul replied. “But there is a similar Latin expression dating back to the time of St. Ambrose – *si fueris Rōmae, Rōmānō vīvitō mōre; si fueris alibī, vīvitō sicut ibi* – if you are in Rome, live in the Roman way; if you are elsewhere, live as they do there. Colloquially interpreted, when in Rome, do as the Romans do.”

“You’re good, Paul. I need to hang out more with you and Alexandra to learn about the classics. Your collective knowledge would complement your cover of being intellectual antiquarians seeking literary cultural artefacts. One can’t quickly gain the level of knowledge you have acquired over a lifetime. Combine that with your recently registered Black Hat Photography business, Paul, and you have an ideal intelligence gathering cover. You really are a diamond duo extraordinaire.”

On their way to dinner, Alexandra thanked Tom for the candid exposé of his background.

“That helps us to gain a better appreciation of who you are and how we can best work together.”

“*Je vous en prie, mes amis* – you are welcome, my friends,” Tom enunciated in a cultured Parisian-flavoured accent, then turned to motion to the waiter for more coffee.

Alexandra quietly whispered to Paul, “My Collette is very perceptive. She sensed that Tom may have been orphaned and he was.”

“Like mother, like daughter in more ways than one,” Paul echoed in a soft voice. “She seems to have cast a spell over my Jean as her mother has cast a spell over me. I am a willing participant in your spells not just for the world of the Harlista.”

Slightly more loudly, Paul said, “Now that Tom has placed the ABC Club in context, I’m really looking forward to talking more with our colleague in Dover. I’d like to get a clearer perspective of the ABC Club. What are your thoughts?”

Alexandra let the question hang for a moment before responding, aware of the diminished privacy of the public space.

“Every time I hear more about my mother, the more I find myself wishing I’d had greater awareness of her work. But then again, I might not have been able to appreciate the extent of the field had we not experienced Thon’s threat firsthand. As she reminded me on several occasions, I had to have lived through a lifetime of constant alertness due to ever-present fear to understand the intervening variables operating in the environment.”

“We can’t live in the world of past what-ifs as you correctly identified, madame. We can only consider how to make the most of our present and future together.” Paul gave her a gentle reassuring hug.

Tom nodded his agreement, accompanied by the subtle smile which had come to define his character.

CHAPTER 6

We live in interesting times and it's about to become increasingly interesting, je pense, Alexandra considered with a silent foreboding, sensed but not felt, suggesting a fault line on the horizon. Red sky at night, a sailor's delight. Red sky in the morning, a sailor's warning. She had never been to sea, nor could she remember ever meeting a mariner and asking him about seafaring folklore. For whatever reason, this nautical verse resonated in her mind. *The premonition wouldn't be immediate but impending,* she thought. *Catastrophic when it occurred, as if linking aftershocks to a single abrupt shift in two tectonic plates.* Those in the trajectory of her orbit would be impacted by the enigmatic gravitational forces of quantum physics. All but one would rise on the flood tide.

She scanned the array of images projected on the monitor of her mind in the context of her intuition, her *shrew*. She thought about Paul whose radar was up but detecting nothing out of the ordinary. It just seemed odd. *Where could they be safer than in Tom's company in the CIA complex?* She had Paul. The omen seemed beyond the safety he could assure, beyond the power of the amulet which Sir James had given him to hang around her neck.

Your roots are those of Charlemagne. Your destiny Merovingian. In them, you will discover your strengths and unearth the truths, her mother had proclaimed. Her voice was not so much a warning but a challenge to seek the truth despite the omens, which would come her way. She questioned the inherent message. Was the fault on the horizon aligned with another beacon? She was still unsure of the path she was taking. Lately, she seemed compelled to second-guess rather than probe for answers. There was a difference. Her

intuition had yelled out a warning when she and Paul had driven to Dieppe immediately after her mother's funeral to verify the facts regarding the murder of her mother's tenant, Madame Deschaume. This current sensation was a call to seek out the truth which, by its very nature, was shrouded in the cloak of the grim reaper.

Here you are again, Alexandra Vanessa, taking on the world single-handedly, she ruminated. You have done it all by yourself because, although there were others like Jo, there was only one person I could trust: myself. It was less complicated, more predictable, she supposed. Yet in those moments, especially at night, she yearned for the company of her puppy love. But it had been her decision to entertain those fantasies, which she could also dismiss with the same finesse as she could summon them. As long as she could keep reality and escapism separate, she would succeed. The adjustment from solo to duo was proving to be challenging.

Now, the self-talk. *There is Paul, your new business and committed life partner. So, when the questioning moments occur, like now, seek Charlemagne's truth with Paul.*

CHAPTER 7

Cordial but cautious, Alexandra deduced as she shook hands with Tom's colleagues. They all seemed to dress alike having shopped in the same Middle-America department store. Tom was the exception. His clothes were more continental as were Paul's. She hadn't noticed the variance before. In retrospect, she wasn't impressed but acknowledged her preference, perhaps bias, for quality and excellence in taste. That was one of the attributes that set Paul apart from other men – his dress, deportment and demeanour. For their own safety, she hoped that CIA agents working in foreign jurisdictions would be more attuned to environmental nuances and less inclined to comply with cookie-cutter standards. She would compare her first impressions with Paul's. For now, she sensed he was in accord with her initial assessment of their hosts.

"I'd like to introduce you to Helena LeDuc," Tom announced. "Helena is a member of the Iroquois Indian Band and holds dual citizenship from the United States and Canada as a result. She had an informal relationship with the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service in Montreal while attending Laval University. Then she completed post-graduate studies in political science at the University of Geneva which Henri, Grand Duke of Luxembourg, also attended."

Tom's director interjected, "Helena will be continuing graduate studies at Frankfurt University. Ideally, you may have an opportunity to become better acquainted."

Alexandra extended her hand in greeting, "*Je suis honoré de vous rencontre* – I am honoured to meet you, Helena." It dawned on her that none of Tom's colleagues had greeted her or Paul in French. An oversight or hubris intent? She recalled Tom explaining

that his colleagues had taken exception when he and Mike Murphy had spoken in French. In contrast, all of Alexandra's colleagues were perfectly bi-lingual. Many were fluent in three languages, with a working knowledge of others. She wondered how Helena felt, surrounded by unilingual associates. It was readily apparent that she did not feel wholly welcome. She and Paul would take the opportunity to engage in conversations that mattered while Helena was in Frankfurt attending the university. In doing so, they would cultivate a contact, an informant, more willing to engage in conversations that mattered because of common cultural interests than business requirements.

Paul bowed slightly, following Alexandra's lead. "*Bonjour*; I too am pleased to make your acquaintance. Dual citizenship. Are you permitted to elaborate?"

"In Canada, I'm referred to as French Canadian and Iroquois First Nation because I was born to Iroquois parents and grew up in the Province of Québec. In the United States, I'm called an American Indian because Iroquois traditional lands are in what is now New York State. I hold dual citizenship because the traditional Iroquois Nation land base spans the current international border. Also, my mother was born in what is now called the United States of America and my father was born in what you call Canada."

"How do you wish to be addressed?" Alexandra asked.

"That's respectful of you to ask, Alexandra. Thank you. I prefer just Iroquois because that's who I am. I don't wish to be political but it's difficult to avoid."

"And I thank you. In continental French tradition, I bow in honour of your culture," Alexandra replied.

A warm welcoming smile rose from her lips to her eyes. "I never was a CSIS agent, instead a member of their watcher service because I supposedly didn't meet the qualification standards. Go figure with my background," Helena grinned with a sarcastic tone.

“I just reported what I saw, what my handler asked me to look out for. At an early age, I learned that I needed to adapt or die. Many of my people have not changed and, as a result, our people are dying.” Her summary comments drew bored expressions from agents in the room.

“Helena has recently joined the CIA as an analyst,” the director added. “She’s here at this briefing because she will be joining Tom and, as I understand, possibly working with the two of you.”

“I’m deeply honoured by this opportunity,” Helena acknowledged. “Your mother, Alexandra, was an accomplished professional from all I hear.”

“Only recently have I gained a better understanding of her work with French Counterintelligence and with the French Resistance, the *Maquis*, during the latter years of the Second World War. I have followed in my mother’s footsteps.” Alexandra couldn’t help but notice some of Tom’s colleagues become disinterested and withdraw from the conversation.

“I’m intrigued,” Paul commented. “With your background, Helena, multi-lingual in Iroquois, English, French and German. I’m dumbfounded as to why CSIS didn’t offer you employment. But as Tom has commented on several occasions, welcome to the new world order which requires new ways of dealing with new threats.”

The formal briefing lasted all day with presentations from an array of experts on the Fourth Reich and the neo-Nazi movement, and its suspected and confirmed links with Middle East terrorist cells. Of greatest value was information on the surveillance and information gathering techniques that Alexandra and Paul would employ. They were reminded they were not employees of the CIA but instead confidential informants. They would be compensated accordingly.

Evening briefings were more relaxed with a greater opportunity

for Q&A. Helena expressed interest in the ABC Club. Tom announced he had some business in Langley so wouldn't be returning to Paris with them. He would meet them after they returned from their trip to Dover to visit with Sir James.

Alexandra passed Paul a note suggesting they not debrief in their hotel room but go for a walk. He nodded, agreeing that the room could be bugged.

Once away from their hotel, Alexandra asked, "What do you think?"

"A foreign environment, not conducive to improving collegial relationships," Paul replied. "In brief, I wouldn't trust most of them. Tom, yes. Helena, probably. We need to re-think our business model. Everything Tom asks us to do we carefully analyze, knowing that direction comes from his superiors who have their own agendas."

"I agree. I remain confident that Tom would not knowingly set us up. But he has divided loyalties to his oath of allegiance, and to us by virtue of his connection to Major Mike and through him to Sir James and my mother. He might hesitate if push came to shove and that might have serious if not fatal consequences. We need to have a confidential conversation with Commandant Benoit Parent."

"And with Sir James," Paul confirmed. "His counsel, his wisdom are becoming increasingly indispensable." Sir James would be their Yoda, their Jedi Master and connection to the Force.

Alexandra reflected on her feelings of being left alone by her mother and having to become self-sufficient. There was Paul now to consider. He had confessed his love to her in the love letters he had written and again lately filling the gap left by her marriage to someone she didn't love, never did. But her mother had kept the old letters from her to Paul. Alexandra thought that if there was one person she should have been able to trust, it would be her mother. But her mother had betrayed her, kept her apart from her first love,

or so she thought. All those years, she had dreamed about Paul. But as the years passed, he seemed to fade from her memory. Was she alone again, abandoned, having to be self-sufficient once more? This returning anxiety was making her wonder whether she could ever experience true love with a devoted partner. Was she just fooling herself? Should she express her doubts to Paul, suggest a trial separation just to test the veracity of their commitment to one another? Given the brevity of their reunion after all these years, could their relationship survive a separation? Was she projecting onto Paul her doubt regarding Tom's commitment to her, to them? Complete commitment seemed like a concept she had never known.

“BONJOUR, C'EST AULNE.” – *HELLO, THIS IS Aulne.*

“J'écoute” – I'm listening.

“Они возвращаются в Париж” – They are going to Paris.

“Да. Принято” – Yes. Acknowledged.