

PROLOGUE



The telephone rang on an unseasonably cool Parisian Tuesday. As he sat in the apartment at his ornate Louis XV époque desk, he took the call that he had long expected, but desperately hoped would never come.

When he had started his new life several years prior, memories from yesteryear quickly faded. He reminisced of nothing from his previous existence.

Upon hearing the caller's voice, it was instantly and understandably clear that those to whom debts are owed do not just fade into the sunset. When that much money and power is at stake, such people could not be expected to disappear.

The sunlight peeked through the purple fleur-de-lys emblazoned drapes and reflected off of the gold leaf edges of the walnut desk into his eyes. The sharp brightness, combined with the message of the caller, caused him to feel an extreme nausea that he had not experienced since when he did devil's work. Because his new life was so worry free, he seldom spent a moment upset, anxious or afraid. In fact, the only concern that he possessed since moving on to his new life was that this very telephone call would come.

Judging by the look on her man's face as he spoke into the telephone, the unclothed brunette knew exactly who was calling. She also knew that her life was on the verge of changing for the worse. As she drew nervously on her Gauloise Légère and exhaled the smoke towards the immaculate 12-foot etched ceiling, she pondered whether she should, or could, extract herself from

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this situation. Such thoughts quickly evaporated as she realized that if she ran away, she would be caught and dealt with. When she accepted the life of near royalty many years prior, she knew that such luxuries could come to an abrupt end one day if a “contingency,” as her benefactor called it, occurred.

“When is this ‘messenger’ coming?” he spoke into the phone.

“What does ‘soon enough’ mean? I’m not going to deal with this nonsense! You’ve found me, and I ain’t goin’ nowhere, so let’s get this done with, so that you can take what you want and let me crawl back in my hole and enjoy what’s left of my retirement. I urge you to please keep in mind that I made myself very accessible to you. I could have disappeared to a place where you could not have found me. Your interests are still viable and protected. I’ve acted in good faith – so don’t you tell me how it’s going to be,” he yelled into the receiver, his face now bright red.

He looked impatiently at the brunette, and smacked his lips three times in rapid succession with his right index finger and middle finger together. She quickly obliged his request and placed a pack of Gauloises and a box of matches on the desk. With the telephone still affixed to his right ear, he looked down to the red package of cigarettes, and spoke into the phone, “Please hold on one second.”

She quickly realized her mistake, but it was too late.

Clutching the brunette’s mouth violently with his right hand, evocative of his former self, the silver haired man barked in horribly accented, but grammatically correct French,

“Conasse! Tu sais que je ne fume que les cigarettes américaines!”

After he shoved her towards the solid plaster wall that had stood since the 19th century, she quickly retrieved the proper American cigarettes from the lavish marble topped nightstand. With a trembling hand, she carefully placed that box in front of her man.

He lit a cigarette, inhaled the tobacco fumes, closed his eyes, collected himself, and exhaled. He picked the telephone receiver back up, and calmly said,

“I apologize for the interruption. I assume that you’ll alert me the moment you know when the messenger will be arriving. I can

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be reached at this number – and, as I said, I’m not going anywhere – I just want to be done with this and move on with my life.”

The brunette retrieved a bottle of scotch from another room and poured a stiff one into a highball glass for the silver haired man. As he hung up the phone, she handed him the glass.

“The day has arrived, my love,” he said, raising his glass, “let’s begin the preparations, shall we?”

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