An aerial, high-angle photograph of Paris, France, at night. The city is densely packed with buildings, many of which are illuminated with warm lights. The Eiffel Tower stands prominently in the center, its structure brightly lit and glowing against the dark sky. The sky is filled with dramatic, dark clouds, with some light breaking through, creating a moody and atmospheric scene. The overall color palette is dominated by dark blues, greys, and the warm yellows and oranges of the city lights.

A PROMISE TO DIE FOR

A Novel

In its shadows, the City of Light hides deadly secrets.

STEPHEN HOLGATE

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PROMISE
TO
DIE FOR

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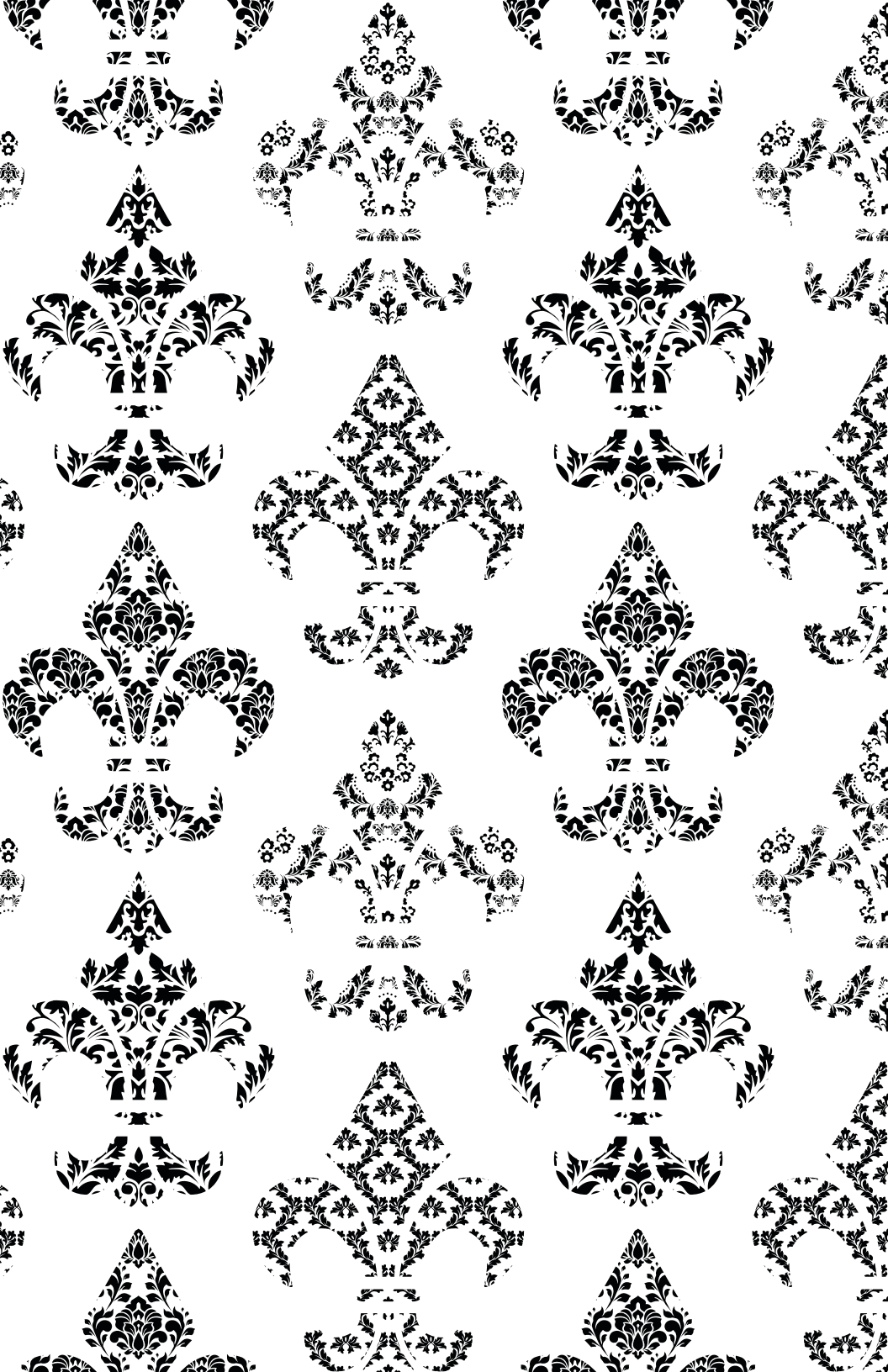
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For Felicia,

who has always believed in me

more than I have.





CHAPTER ONE

A SUMMONS



I HADN'T REALIZED I'd fallen asleep until the cab driver said, "We've arrived, sir."

Struggling with the cobwebs clouding my mind after the all-night flight from Portland, I blinked vacantly at the quiet residential street, bleak and drained of color in the early-morning light, trying to recall where I was and what I was doing here, feeling that I had come so far so fast that I'd left some important part of myself behind and needed to wait for it to catch up.

Yes, Arlington, Virginia. Curt Hansen was dying. And he said he needed to see me.



His call had caught me raking leaves at the back end of my property outside Eugene, Oregon. At first I didn't recognize the thin and weary voice.

Cancer, he told me, leaving him no more than a few weeks.

“Curt, I’m sorry.”

He grunted to deflect the inadequacy of my words.

“Sam, I need to ask a favor.”

“Of course, Curt, anything.”

“It’s not something I can explain over the phone. I know it’s asking a lot, but could you come out and see me?”

There are some requests you can’t turn down.

“I can catch a flight to DC out of Portland. When do you need me?”

“How soon can you come?”

Taken aback by his urgency, I said, “What’s today, Friday . . .?”

Curt chuckled faintly. “It’s funny how we lose track of the days when we retire.”

“I can catch a red-eye tomorrow night, be there Sunday morning.”

“There’s something I’ve left too late, Sam. Something important.”

“I’ll book the flight today and can—”

“Sam, you don’t understand what I’m asking of you. You’ll need to bring your passport. You may be gone for a while.”



Despite all my years in the foreign service, with its eight-, ten-, twelve-hour flights, I’ve never learned to sleep on a plane. I’m too tall for the seats, and at fifty-three I don’t curl up as well as I used to. So, while my fellow passengers dozed in the darkened cabin I had a lot of time to think about my friendship with Curt Hansen, and to wonder what it was he had left too late—and why it might require me to travel overseas.

We had served together for three years in Pakistan, not a long time in the course of a normal life, but life in an embassy doesn’t follow a normal course. Deep friendships are forged with a speed

and intensity unknown to those who don't live and work in a small, close community far from home.

I'd served in Islamabad as the embassy's public affairs officer, in charge of press relations and cultural programs. Curt headed up the Admin section.

With the many small grants my office awarded to universities, and the needed repairs to our aging library, we had worked together often, adapting to each other's contrasting natures.

Within the service I had a reputation as a straight arrow, something I found both flattering and a little embarrassing, as if it spoke less to virtue than to a failure of imagination, a certain naiveté. Curt was what a scientist might call a free radical, doing whatever he thought needed doing and however he wanted to do it.

The truth was I envied guys like Curt, who treated the rules as mere suggestions drafted by a bunch of constipated desk jockeys back in Washington. While the rest of us toed lines as straight as those on our pin-striped suits, Curt approached his work like a pirate approaching a wallowing merchant ship. He would cut a corner here, ignore a reg there, bend rules that hindered his intent. The rest of us gasped. We tsked. We loved it.

In fact we were all complicit in his buccaneering ways. If we agreed not to look too closely, Curt would get us larger budgets, better housing, and cheaper contracts than we deserved. "All for the greater good," he'd say with a wolfish smile.

Still, while I took a guilty pleasure in watching Curt's unorthodox approach, and happily benefited from his rules-be-damned style, his practices made me uneasy, and I kept him at a little bit of a distance.

We served in Islamabad at a dangerous time. The war next door in Afghanistan stirred fierce psychic winds among the Pakistanis, engendering deep but conflicting emotions of horror, religious pride, and a fear of—or yearning for—instability.

With security tight and knowing that Washington might any day issue orders to evacuate family members, I received a call from a man representing, he said, a small delegation visiting from Peshawar that wanted to open an American library and study center in their city.

Peshawar lies on Pakistan's border with Afghanistan at the edge of the Hindu Kush, which means "Killer of Hindus." It's a tough neighborhood. The region had for centuries defied whatever central government might lay claim to it. I'd visited the city a couple of times, briefly and nervously. An air of the Wild West hung over the place. Soldiers and tribesmen walked its dusty streets, assault rifles slung over their shoulders as casually as an American might carry a laptop to work—and more necessary to their professions. An office worker isn't going to die for lack of a laptop.

Wanting to set up an American center in the middle of this scene was an odd notion, but if it worked out, I'd earn professional favor for establishing an outpost of American influence in a sensitive region. So I told my caller to stop by my office on Monday morning.

He said that, unfortunately, his group would only be in Islamabad for two days, and their schedule was already crowded. He asked if I could meet them at our library on Sunday afternoon.

The American Library in Islamabad was located nearly a mile from my office in the main part of the embassy. To encourage walk-ins, the library kept security loose, posting only two unarmed local guards, a mockery of the main embassy's Fort Knox-style security with Marines, soaring concrete walls and armed checkpoints. The embassy security officer hated our light hand, but with the ambassador on our side he could only mutter and let us have our way. On a Sunday afternoon the place would be deserted, even our rudimentary security reduced to a single guard.

Thinking we'd be discussing budget, staffing, and rental of a building in Peshawar, I asked Curt to join me.

“On a Sunday afternoon? This is too weird, Sam. You’re sure you want to do this?”

When I told him it was important, he laughed and said, “Okay, I’ll be there.”



Curt and I met at the library a few minutes early. I unlocked the door, turned on some lights and waited for our visitors to arrive. We didn’t have to wait long.

We heard the chanting first. I couldn’t make out the words, but it didn’t sound friendly. Moments later they appeared on the street in front of the building, not four men as promised, but a couple hundred, young and angry, their rage leavened only by their delight in suckering two American diplomats into a trap.

This didn’t seem like the moment to remind Curt that you’re more likely to die in the foreign service than in the military.

For a moment we felt more abashed at our foolishness than actually frightened, though the balance would quickly shift.

Our security guard had already made like a shooting star and disappeared over the horizon. I didn’t blame him. The few dollars we paid him wasn’t enough to get killed protecting a couple of infidels from an angry mob.

I rushed to the front door just in time to bolt it shut and keep the mob from simply walking in and killing us. By the time we thought to run out the back door, they had curled around the building, blocking any attempt to flee.

Momentarily checked by the locked doors, some of them began to throw rocks at the reinforced windows. A few of the biggest men put their shoulders to the heavy security door, trying to bash it in. Someone threw a Molotov cocktail at Curt’s car and it quickly went up in flames. A moment later mine joined it, the two cars putting out

billows of black smoke. Another of the homemade bombs shattered against a window in a starburst of yellow and blue.

I grabbed a phone and tried to call the Marine at Post One, the main entrance to the embassy, to tell him we were under attack, but the line had gone dead. Curt and I both tried our cell phones, but reception at the center, always iffy, failed.

With no way to get the embassy's attention we could do little but watch our attackers through the spiderweb cracks appearing in the windows and wonder how long it would take them to break in.

Curt said, "I'll bet they're not even from Peshawar," a remark that doesn't sound so funny now, but actually got a laugh out of me at the time.

The young men who made up the mob had probably thought they would get in easily. A few rocks at the windows and presto. Frustrated that their assault might take some unexpected effort, they tossed a couple of homemade fire bombs onto the roof. We soon heard the crackle of a spreading fire over our heads. A few wisps of smoke seeped downward, carrying the smell of gasoline and burning tar.

As we began to cough from the smoke, I recalled that the building had been issued one of the embassy's two-way radios, kept in the head librarian's office. Working to control my panic, I turned it on and tried again to tell the Marine at Post One that we had an angry mob breaking in, the place was on fire, and we needed help, fast. But the fire on the roof must have taken down the antenna and I got nothing but static.

Over the shouting of the mob we heard more stones crash against the windows, saw the cracks growing deeper. The men attacking the front door had scavenged a wooden beam from a construction site across the street and were using it as a battering ram, the front door shaking in its frame with every blow. Behind us, we could hear others trying to break through the back door.

Though he might have justifiably lit into me for dragging him into this ambush, Curt took it in with as little complaint as Captain Kidd resigning himself to a final downturn in the play of odds. His remarkable calm helped steady my own nerves. I don't think I could have held myself together without him.

Perhaps twenty minutes had gone by since the mob appeared. We could feel the heat from the fire on the roof and the smoke curling through the room burned our lungs. Our phone calls and radio message had failed to get through. We could expect no rescue.

Without a word, we solemnly shook hands, a gesture that would raise a cynical hoot if you put it in a movie but affirmed a solidarity and, yes, a sense of honor we could not have put into words. It calmed us both as we prepared to die. I thought of my wife, Janet, and our son, Tom, and how hard this would be on them.

We took the first spatter of gunfire as an escalation of the attack, the mob resorting to Kalashnikovs to finish breaking through the windows. Instinctively, we dropped to the floor.

The gunshots continued. The cries of the mob rose to a climactic pitch. I pressed my face against the carpet, tried to control my ragged breath and racing heart.

The unexpected tramping of many feet brought our heads up, both of us thinking the door had given in and we had only moments to live.

As we raised our eyes, though, the howling voices outside were descending into knots of confused shouting and cries of alarm. The popping of gunfire grew closer. Through the cracks in the windows, the forms of our attackers fractured into rapidly shifting shards of color and then vanished, replaced seconds later by slowly moving blocks of khaki.

It was the Molotov cocktails that had saved us. The Marine at Post One saw the black smoke rising into the sky, put that together with the puzzling attempts to contact him, and called for help. His

intuition saved our lives. And from that day on I've never said a bad word about the Pakistani army, which quickly responded to the Marine's call and drove the mob away, saving our unworthy behinds.

As the burning roof began to cave in, Curt and I scrambled to our feet, unlocked the door, and tumbled outside, hardly able to grasp the fact that we were still alive.

Over the next few days Curt and I received an outpouring of affection and thankfulness from the embassy community at our escape. People were kind enough to ignore the fact that my folly in agreeing to walk into a trap was the only reason we'd needed to escape.

Everyone wanted to hear our description of the attack and of our rescue, and we both developed narratives rich with hair-raising detail and self-deprecating humor.

Yet, when we were around each other—and with so many administrative matters to take care of in the wake of the library's destruction, we spent a lot of time together after the attack—we never spoke of it. Perhaps we had no need. More likely, we knew that, despite the tales we shared with others, there was no way to put into words what had happened to us. Only we knew.

A few weeks later we both got medals for valor from the Department. Though awarded with no apparent irony, I felt embarrassed, as the whole mess had been due to my poor judgment. On the other hand, I thought Curt's medal well-deserved. He had sensed the risk and agreed to come anyway.



Whatever the trauma of our shared experience, its terrors didn't so much change us as make us more deeply who we had been before. Curt, feeling indestructible now, became even less bound by regulations clearly meant for lesser beings, while I turned perhaps more

cautious and rule-bound—in short, an even bigger bore. Curt and his wife, Taylor, started spending almost every weekend with Janet and me, sometimes at their house, sometimes at ours. Our wives understood we were still working through what had happened that day.

Though a good sport about all of it, Janet didn't much care for Curt. "He's a charming man," she said. "Women know not to trust charming men."

In fact, Curt already had one divorce behind him, and we hoped, a little forlornly, that our own stability might help keep him and Taylor together, or at least reduce their constant bickering.

By contrast, ours was an extraordinarily happy marriage. Though Janet never loved foreign service life, we loved each other, and that love grew deeper every year. We dreamed often of retirement, of going home to Oregon and leading a quiet life, free of the stresses, dangers, and constant uprootings of the foreign service.

Diplomatic careers often work out as a long exercise in irony. The fallout from our misadventure at the library in Islamabad propelled me to quick advancement within the service, while Curt did little but tread water. Fairness would have demanded the opposite. After a tour as head of public affairs in Cairo, I landed the plum post of Deputy Chief of Mission in Tunis, the number-two position in the embassy.

Despite the imbalance of our professional rewards, the bond we'd forged with Curt and Taylor remained strong even after we'd moved on to new posts, sustained by frequent emails and occasional phone calls.

Other, more treasured, bonds proved far too fragile. Four years after we'd left Islamabad, while we were posted to Tunis, Janet was killed in a traffic accident. To lose her was like losing my own life.

Our son, Tom, was riding with her. He escaped serious injury, but fell into a deep depression that took months to overcome—if one can ever overcome something like that.

An embassy community is an extraordinarily close one, and my colleagues, American and Tunisian, shared our grief. Curt heard about Janet's death and called from Riyadh, offering to come out on the next flight if he could be of any help. I was deeply touched but told him I was heading out the next day, back to Oregon and a cemetery outside Salem, Janet's home town.

After the funeral, Tom and I returned to Tunis. While Tom finished high school, I went through the motions of work, but living in the place we'd shared with Janet made me feel like the last ghost in a haunted house.

I was only fifty, but my twenty-five years of service allowed me to take retirement. I bought a couple of acres outside a small town less than thirty minutes from Eugene and put Tom into the University of Oregon. My three years back home had healed the worst of the wounds. I'd made some friends, got recruited for the local library board, and become active in environmental issues. The foreign service gradually became a memory, something I used to do.

Then Curt's call came, and I was once again on a plane heading toward Washington.



While the taxi idled outside Curt's place, I paid the cabbie, giving him, in my muddled state, a huge tip.

"Shall I wait?" he asked hopefully, no doubt hoping he might get the chance to drive me somewhere else before I came to my senses.

"Yeah. But I may be a while."

He beamed with pleasure. "That's not a problem, sir."

Leaving my suitcase in the car, I made my way up the walk and rang the bell. A young woman in nurse's scrubs answered the door.

"Sam Hough," I told her. "I'm here to see Curt."

"Come in," she said. "He's been awake for hours, waiting for you."



CHAPTER TWO

“AN ADDRESS IS ALL I NEED”



THE CURTAINS WERE still drawn, lending Curt's sickroom a gloom only slightly eased by a lamp that shared a nightstand with pill bottles, a glass of water and other odds and ends, its disorder somehow a measure of his illness.

Curt lay in a hospital bed, the head cranked so he could sit up. His sandy hair had thinned, and his face, always heavily lined, looked older than his years. He smiled as I came in.

“Sam, it's good of you to come.”

Given the long flight and my lack of sleep, I felt pretty wan. Curt joked that I looked worse than he did. In fact, the glow from the light gave his features a deceptive rosiness. I wanted to tell him that cancer seemed to agree with him.

He waved me into a chair at his bedside.

We spoke awkwardly at first, skipping over the present, avoiding the future, and speaking only of the past, of our days in Islamabad and people we'd known there, rehashing stories of life overseas. I

reminded him of how he had once managed to hide from visiting inspectors a small slush fund used for irregular purchases.

Curt smiled. “You disapproved of that particular shenanigan, as I recall.”

I had to chuckle at the vision of my buttofdown self. “The truth is I always envied your ability to ignore the rules. You were like one of those great chefs who don’t bother with recipes anymore.”

“Maybe the envy went both ways. You played it straight and excelled. I couldn’t have done that. The Department favors guys like you. You’d have made ambassador in a few years.”

I shrugged off the compliment. “I couldn’t stay after Janet . . .”

“Yeah.”

He winced as he shifted position, waving me back into my seat when I rose to help him. When he’d settled back into his pillows, he took a deep breath and said, “I’ve been a rogue, Sam. Bigger than you realize. I’ve got a lot of regrets.”

Knowing I had to be thinking of his failed marriages, he shook his head. “No. It’s not what you suppose—not directly anyway.” He paused, putting his thoughts together. “I have to admit I grew bitter after Islamabad. Despite everything I did, I wasn’t moving up the ladder. The front office always loved the way I got things done. But after I’d delivered what they wanted, the ambassadors felt they had to spread a bunch of ‘tsk-tsks’ across my yearly review.”

I tried to make light of it. “I guess I was always pretty orthodox. Some people just called me naive.”

“No. You were always wiser than me. I wasn’t wise. Maybe that’s why my career didn’t go as well. And maybe that’s why I couldn’t stay married. I mean, Taylor put up with Islamabad mainly because of you and Janet. When we got to Morocco a few years later, she hated the place. Pretty soon she decided she didn’t much care for me either. She went back to the States and filed for divorce.” He tried to make like it was no big deal, but the pain in his face didn’t come

entirely from the cancer. “Rabat was a bad time for me. My career was going nowhere, and after Taylor left, I went home to an empty house every night. I’m not much good at staying married, but I’m no good at living alone either.”

“I met a young woman.” He cast a tentative smile, looking for my reaction. “My section held a reception to thank some of the local contractors we worked with. One of the Moroccans, Miloud Benaboud, owned a transport company we used now and then. He brought his daughter with him. Chantal.”

It seemed to comfort him simply to say her name.

“She was smart, charming, attractive. I fell in love.” Curt made a wry smile. “I still can’t imagine what she saw in me. We began to spend a lot of time together. She didn’t tell her father. Our relationship became . . . intimate. I asked her to marry me. She told me no, I didn’t really mean it. Maybe she was right. Or maybe I should have insisted, and I failed some test when I didn’t. Our relationship cooled after that. By that time my posting to Morocco was nearly over. I was heading to Paris as the number three in the Admin section there.”

He fell silent.

If this was the whole story, I didn’t get it. I said, “And that was the end of it between you two?”

Curt’s face twisted in annoyance. “Of course not,” he snapped at me. He closed his eyes and gave a little shake of his head. “Sorry, Sam. I . . . sorry. No, that wasn’t the end of it. Before I left Rabat, Chantal asked to see me one more time. A way of closing out the books, I figured. We met at a favorite café, overlooking the river. It was strange. Though she was the one who asked to get together, she seemed a long way off, had this look in her eyes like she wanted me to understand something. We had a short, awkward conversation about nothing in particular. The whole time I felt we were circling around some topic, some issue I couldn’t figure out. That was the last time I saw her.”

He passed a hand over his face. I could see how hard this was for him.

“A couple of years go by. Then a guy named Rick Ziglinski, who’d succeeded me in Rabat, came though Paris on his way to Washington and asked me out to lunch. A courtesy call, nothing more. He’d gotten to know my old contacts, of course, I asked him about Miloud Benaboud, thinking he might have mentioned Chantal to him and he could tell me how she was doing. At the mention of Miloud, Rick went quiet. I asked him what was wrong. He told me Miloud was furious with me, lashing his tail around, threatening to cancel his contract with the embassy. I asked Ziglinski what it was all about. He says, ‘Jesus, Curt, I thought you knew.’ ‘Knew what?’ I asked him. He told me the whole story. Chantal had gotten pregnant. I was the father. I was floored. Her behavior at that last meeting suddenly made sense. She’d needed me to ask her what was wrong, let her know I cared. I’d have done it if I’d only known. When I didn’t ask, she was through with me.”

His voice had grown softer as he spoke, and his last words were almost inaudible. I felt helpless in the face of my old friend’s pain, physical and spiritual.

“Of course, when Miloud found out about the baby, he was enraged, humiliated. He threatened to kill me, kill her, sue the embassy. Out of shame, he disowned her and packed her off to France to have the baby. It was a boy, Ziglinski told me. They were living in Paris with a cousin who’s apparently part of a really bad crowd.”

He had become. increasingly wound up as he spoke. But now, as if suddenly remembering how sick he was, he closed his eyes, exhausted by the effort of telling his story. I started to say something sympathetic, but he waved me down and continued.

“At the time Ziglinski told me all this I still had a few months left in Paris. I should have spent them looking for Chantal. For the boy. My son. But I was too ashamed. Yeah, pretty cowardly. I left

Paris and took up my assignment here in Washington. I kept telling myself I needed to go back and find them. But then this hit me, hard and fast.” Curt looked at his form under the thin blanket as if it belonged to someone else. “I got too sick to work and had to retire. Now I can’t do any of the things I meant to do.”

However much this mess was Curt’s own fault, I still felt awful for him.

“What is it you want me to do, Curt?”

“I need you to find the boy.”

Only sleep deprivation can explain my surprise. He hadn’t called me all the way to Virginia, passport in hand, simply to tell me this tale.

“Find the boy for me, Sam. He must be about five now. You know I never had any kids with Taylor or Ann. He’s the only thing I’m leaving behind in this world. And I have to take some responsibility for him. Find out where he lives. Give me an address.” He lay back, looking at the ceiling.

“My exes get alimonies from me. They’ll get my pension and the life insurance. That doesn’t leave much. This house, some savings. I want the boy to have them. My lawyer tried to talk me out of giving it all to someone I’ve never seen and can’t locate. But I’m insisting. Like I say, Ziglinski told me he thought this cousin of Chantal’s is part of a bad crowd in Paris. I want something better for the boy.”

“Curt, I’m not sure I’m the one to—”

“Go to Paris. Find the boy. My lawyer says all I need is an address. He can arrange the rest from here.”

“That’s it? His address?”

“My lawyer has contacts in France. He’ll work with them and get it done.”

“Can’t I just get a phone number?”

“No. I have no idea what her number is. Anyway, if you call Chantal and she knows it’s about me, she probably won’t speak to you.”

Curt had made a life of playing things fast and loose. It had cost him two marriages and professional success. But whatever Janet might have thought of him, I'd always felt he was at heart a decent guy. And this, about his son, was eating him worse than the cancer.

"I know it's a lot to ask," he said.

"I'd be nuts to take this on, wouldn't I?"

He gave a flash of his old charming smile. "You'd have to be."

But I'd already made up my mind. "I'll do whatever you need me to do."

The enormity of the promise hit me only after I'd made it. Once said, though, there was no taking it back.

He reached up and gripped my hand. "Thanks, Sam. I'd ask someone at the embassy to do this, but all the Americans I knew there are gone. And I don't want to tell any of the local employees about this. They looked up to me, and . . . well, I don't want them to think so poorly of me now. Bad for the raj," he said, trying to make a joke of it.

I told him not to worry.

"You don't know what this means to me." He must have seen something in my face as I tried to take all this in. "I know it's too much to ask. But I haven't got anyone else to turn to."

"I'm glad I came. But how do I do this? Where do I start?"

Gritting his teeth against a spasm of pain, Curt leaned over and drew a couple of pieces of paper from the mess on the nightstand and handed one of them to me.

"I've got two addresses here. One is a shipping company out by Charles de Gaulle Airport. When we had the occasional truck shipment from Rabat to Paris, this is where Miloud would send it. Maybe someone there will know something about Chantal. The other address is a garage near Montmartre. When Miloud's drivers needed to spend the night in Paris, he would have them leave their

trucks there. There might be someone at the garage who can tell you something.”

I looked blankly at the piece of paper. Two addresses, no names. No guarantee anyone will know what I’m talking about.

“I’m sorry I don’t have more, Sam. Not even phone numbers for them. But I think you might have better luck just stopping by and asking.”

“And if they don’t know anything?”

“This might help,” he said and handed me the second piece of paper. It was a photo of a young woman seated at a table in what appeared to be a crowded restaurant. She looked to be in her early twenties, round faced, with lively, intelligent eyes full of good humor. At the edge of the photograph was Curt’s hand resting on hers, wearing the sort of fancy signet ring a guy like Curt would wear.

“This is Chantal, a few years ago. If those other two places can’t give you anything to work on, maybe you could ask around the Montmartre area—in shops, restaurants. A lot of North Africans live around there, especially at the bottom of the hill, an area they call la Goutte d’Or.”

“A drop of gold.”

“Yeah. Funny name for a neighborhood. Someone may recognize her, give you some idea of where she lives. But you have to be discreet. She’s probably there illegally.”

“I’ll be careful. And what’s the boy’s name?”

Curt dropped his gaze. “I don’t know.”

His words hung in the air. To get past them, he reached toward the table again and gave me a third piece of paper. It was a check for five thousand dollars.

“What? No, Curt. I can’t.”

“You have to. Booking a flight this late and getting a hotel, you’ll run through this pretty fast.” He tried to smile. “We both know a

foreign service pension doesn't go very far. I can't ask you to spend your own money. Take it."

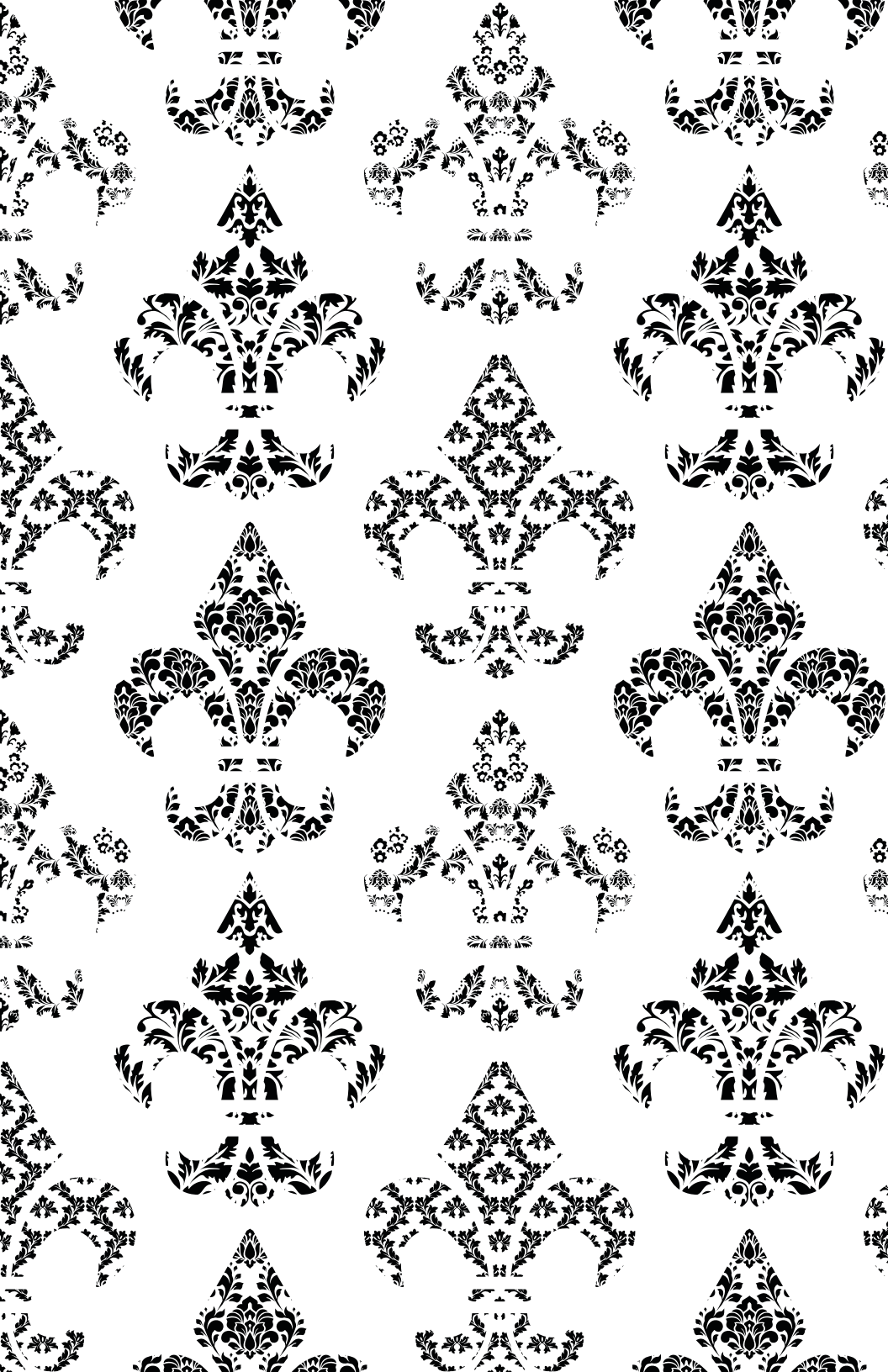
The gesture seemed excessive. He wanted this too much. His desperation was frightening to see. But who am I to judge the yearnings of a dying man?

Reluctantly, I took the check, setting the seal on my offer to help.

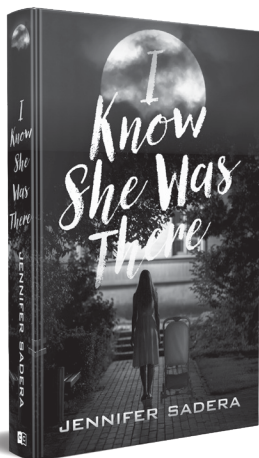
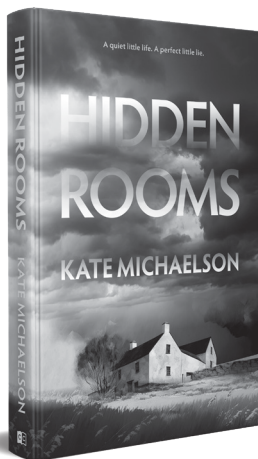
A few moments later the nurse poked her head in the door and asked Curt if he needed anything. I knew she was telling me it was time to go.

Curt thanked me again, and I repeated my promise to do everything I could. Neither of us had to say I didn't have much time.

There was another thing that didn't get said. Curt's request opened up a different possibility for me, something entirely apart from finding the boy, a possibility I hadn't allowed myself to consider for many years. No, Curt couldn't have known that I had my own, very personal, reasons for going to Paris.



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YOU DON'T IGNORE A MAN'S DYING WISH.

Retired diplomat Sam Hough finds himself on a transatlantic flight to Europe when he makes a seemingly innocent promise to find the five-year-old son of a dying friend. A son that Curt had only recently learned about.

In the seamy neighborhoods of Paris, Sam quickly learns that those who agree to help him soon disappear. Those who stay refuse to help him, and still others want to kill him rather than help him find the boy. Was Curt being completely honest with him or did he purposely leave vital details out? But if so, why? His search through the narrow streets of Paris leads him to rekindle a long-lost romance and into a maze of suspicion, betrayal, and growing danger.

In its shadows, the City of Light holds deadly secrets. Sam must get to the bottom of what's really at the heart of Curt's mysterious request before his promise turns into an epitaph.



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