

I. December, 2001

The man with hair as white as snow-topped mountains scraped yellow-tinged nicotine fingers across a heavily pockmarked face. He pulled the hood of the red velvet robe over his face, leaving only a hooked Roman nose peeking out, a jot of dew hanging off the edge. He sucked it in, inhaling the crisp, damp air of the cellar and he smiled, glancing up, his eyes flickering in the swaying light provided by the solitary candle-lit candelabra which illuminated the room. The only sound emanated from the five men, standing on the lines of the pentagon, their breathing rapid, like children too excited to control themselves, their fingers twirling against the ties of their cassocks as if eager to rip open a present in front of them. One of them sucked in a hungry tongue, flapping against thick lips. He looked to the white-haired man, eyes imploring him. *Is it time? Can we begin? I'm hungry.* The white-haired man pushed a smile away from his face, aware it was not proper for him to show amusement or any emotion for that matter. There was a time and a place, and this was certainly neither of those. They were on hallowed ground, and respect and protocol must be upheld. *Respect the sanctity of those we represent.*

His head jerked upwards, tired, too-white eyes scanning the ceiling, searching for something, anything, which might indicate a change. He was not even sure what had caught his attention, if anything had at all, but he knew they had to be on high alert. There was too much at stake. There was too much to be lost. He shook his head, irritated at himself. They were forty-feet below ground, solid concrete wrapped the cellar, accessed only by a narrow, twisting stone stairway, cracked by the feet of hundreds of years' worth of light-footed zealots, each silently coming down to the sacred space for reasons so secret they were barely spoken of, and certainly never beyond *The Circle*, the group of men who had been entrusted with *The Secret*. He alone had the key, and it never left his person, tied around his neck with a simple piece of string. He had locked the door behind them, as he always did, and there was no reason to believe anyone even knew of the existence of the cellar, the entrance to it obscured by a bookcase. He knew his imagination was carrying him away; it was only natural. He could taste what was to come, like salt from the sea blown into his face, and his appetite, like his compatriots, was whetted. There was something about savouring the moment. It was part of the ritual after all, but knowing what was coming, knowing what the reward would be, was consuming. He wanted it. They all wanted it.

He turned, stepping into the pentagon. 'Frères,' he said to the four men around him. 'Bienvenue to this very special evening. I know how eager you are to begin,' he stopped, thin lips twisting into a smile, 'as am I, but I beg your indulgence because there are protocols to be followed. Transcribed by our forefathers and created to ensure our lineage continues.' He paused. 'There are, of course, those who seek to stop us, to see darkness where there is really only light, because through their own blinkered reality they project the darkness from their own souls onto us, what we do. The goodness we do, the greatness. Join me,' he said, outstretching his hands, the four men reaching across the pentagon and joining together, 'in our mantra.' He closed his eyes, clearing his throat.

*le pouvoir de l'amour
le pouvoir de la création
coule à travers le lien sacré entre nous
nos doigts enlacés
notre sang combiné
nos âmes brûlantes du feu du Tout-Puissant
nous faisons ce que nous devons faire*

on s'enflamme, on exhume
on boit
on se régale
ENSEMBLE,
NOUS PRIONS POUR CE QUI DOIT VENIR
AMEN

The white-haired man could not help smiling, filled with the pride of all the men who had come before him. He had begun his journey, barely a child himself, unsure of the path which was being laid down in front of him. Unsure of the wisdom of the words spoken, the truth they told, indoctrinated as he had been by the stiff formality of his upbringing. His brothers had spoken to him, whispering into his ear. *There is a distinct path. There is a different story no-one had told you. Come with us and we will show you.* He had not wanted to, his soul seemed to scream in protest, but in that cellar, in the darkness, he had seen the light. He had seen the glory and all it had to offer. He had tasted the immortality. He smiled at his brothers. The men he had chosen to stand by him. To share in the glory. Finding them had been the hardest part. When one person left the pentagon, they had to be replaced, and it was not something to be taken lightly. The position was for a lifetime, and once in, only death would allow a person to leave. He had chosen wisely, fixated by a flick, a spark in the eye, telling him they shared a secret, a bond. The brotherhood had survived for Millennia because of the bond, the trust, and the careful choices made by the leader. The white-haired man folded his hands in front of him, his attention drawn to the whimpering in the middle of the pentagon - a sprawling mass of naked limbs, slowly awakening and the dawning realisation appearing. It was almost time. He smiled at his brothers and they all lowered their heads, eyes wide and bright as they watched. Beneath them, on the cold, stone ground, naked limbs sliding, two eyes snapped open, wide and terrified.

The white-haired man laughed, his voice light like a breeze on a summer's afternoon. 'Frères. It is time. Time to feast and honour those who came before us. This is the Annunciation!'

The five men dropped to their knees, their cassocks covering the naked young woman lying in the pentagram, her pointless, desperate screams echoing around the cellar. The white-haired man laughed, pressing his lips against the virgin skin. He sucked in scent through the hooked nose, his lips smacking together like a starving dog.

II. December, 2010

Cedric Degarmo sprinted along the alleyway, kicking cans out of the way, his feet slapping angrily against the wet cobbles. He pushed the air out of his lungs, sucking in damp replacement in order to keep going. The odour caught the back of his throat, and he fought the urge to retch. The smell he imagined was a mixture of sweat, vomit and sex, as pungent a combination as he had ever come across. He swallowed the bile back into his stomach. He did not want his first day as a rookie to be marred by forever being known as the young kid, fresh out of the national police college in Saint-Cyr-au-Mont-D'Or, the smell of carbolic soap still on his buzz-cut head, who threw up on his first chase. He narrowed ice-blue eyes, staring directly ahead, his ears focused intently on his surroundings as he tried to remember his training. *Isolate, separate.* Cedric knew he only had seconds to locate his prey before they would lose him in the night's mist. And there it was, only for the briefest of seconds, but it was enough for him to turn his head sharply and catch the slice of darkness moving across a shadow in the adjacent building.

'Lieutenant Intern Degarmo!' a woman's voice screamed from the darkness of the alleyway. Cedric did not stop. He could hear her running towards him, flat feet slapping unevenly against the ground. He cursed again at his damn misfortune for his first posting being under the tutelage of such an oddball. What was with the blue hair for starters? Like a weird Smurf with an enormous nose and green eyes, one of which seemed to be permanently veering in the opposite direction to the other. He had initially been pleased when told his first assignment was at Commissariat de Police du 7e arrondissement, situated as it was in a part of Paris swelling with tourist attractions such as the Eiffel Tower and the Louvre. He had imagined his days would be full of adventure. Instead, his first day he was ushered into a dimly lit hallway and told to wait. He had sat rigid for forty minutes, pretending he could not hear the argument being fought between his new Commander and Captain. A man and a woman whose boundaries did not seem to extend to keeping their private lives away from the Commissariat. After the row, which seemed centred around the stomach of Madame la Smurf, which he had assumed was because of her penchant for pastries, but was actually more to do with the child growing in it.

On his first day, Cedric had thought he would be ingratiated into a team with like-minded individuals, lean of body and focused of mind and to be told he would shadow a heavily pregnant Captain with blue hair was not how he imagined starting his career in the Police Nationale.

'Lieutenant Intern Degarmo!' came the scream again. Captain Charlotte "Coco" Brunhild skidded to a halt, pressing a hand against the wall of the narrow alley. 'Attend!' she exhaled, her other hand rubbing against her stomach. 'Mon Dieu, *attend!* He's only a goddamn fence, not Jack-the-fucking-Ripper!'

Cedric stared at her, blinking wildly, remembering all of his training whilst at the same time fighting every urge he had to ignore the oddball he had been assigned to. He stabbed his finger towards the building. *He's in there*, he mouthed. Coco turned her head, following the direction of his finger, her eyebrows creasing into a, *so what?* She gasped, watching helplessly as Cedric sprinted into the seemingly derelict building. 'Non!' she screamed, reaching down and pulling the radio hooked to her belt. 'Andre, send a unit to my location, the damn recruit has gone rogue on me,' she roared into the radio.

Andre, a seasoned dispatcher, cackled down the line. 'And what do you want me to do about it, *exactement?*' he asked, deadpan.

Coco sighed. 'Send someone to help,' she said pressing her stomach, 'I have the worst case of gas and can't run any further, not without leaving a mess behind me, at least.' She stopped, her eyes squinting with concern as she watched Cedric disappear inside the building. 'Cedric, just wait for back-up, you idiot!' She shook her head. The darkness of the night masked his retreating figure. She pulled herself erect and stumbled forward. 'Which part of *I'm heavy with child, so don't take off*, didn't the incompetent idiot understand?' she muttered to herself, smoothing down her woollen coat and staggering forward. She stopped again and pressed her stomach, wincing. 'You can't be serious, you brat, you're ten weeks early. You're just like your damned brother, Julien wouldn't wait for me to be ready to deliver either.' She lifted her head. 'Cedric,' she wailed. 'For the love of Dieu, wait!'

Coco pulled herself together, compartmentalising her pain and focusing on the situation. What on earth were they doing? It had started out very simply. A telephone call from an informant regarding a young punk selling a fresh batch of ecstasy fresh from Amsterdam. She had picked herself up, taken her protege and headed over to the address, hopeful they would arrest the perp and she would be home by six o'clock, her feet up and a bowl of popcorn nestling on what remained of her stomach as she watched *The Mirror has Two Faces* for the umpteenth time. Instead, there she was, in a seedy back alley chasing after two kids, one whose training should have taught him better. And to top it all, her body

was contracting in ways she was sure could only mean one thing, not the stitch from running she hoped it was.

‘Cedric,’ she wailed again, pressing a hand against the doorway and peering inside the building, her eyes straining to focus through the illuminating slices of moonlight. She stumbled inside, feeling the vibration of each step in agony. She focused her eyes until she could discern the direction of the retreating footsteps and stumbled in their direction.

‘I’ve got the bastard!’ Cedric cried.

Coco winced, moving as quickly as she could towards her intern, the indistinct echoes of scuffling feet and muffled grunts signalling to her a fight was in progress. She tried to recall what the young punk looked like and had a vague recollection of him being an emaciated dwarf with acne bigger than his biceps. Cedric Degarmo, on the other hand, was not the sort of man whose appearance could go ignored. As she stumbled forward, Coco chastised herself. She was *technically* in a relationship of sorts, and more importantly, she was probably *almost* old enough to be his mother, or aunt at least. So the fact he had cheekbones she could not believe were real, or blonde hair as lustrous as she had ever seen, or eyes as blue as Sinatra’s, or... She stopped herself, a wry smile appearing on her face. Only *almost*, she thought again and ran in his direction.

Rounding the corner, the moonlight opened up an enormous derelict room and she spotted them in the centre, Lieutenant Intern Cedric Degarmo straddling the back of a young punk, grinning up at her, as proud as she remembered her first two children Barbra and Julien were when they first understood the use of the big yellow potty was not simply to throw their urine at her.

‘I’ve got him, Captain Brunhild,’ Cedric beamed, pride evident in his voice for his first arrest.

Coco nodded, steadying herself against the wall. She was about to respond when her attention was diverted to what appeared to be a makeshift shelter in the far corner of the room, a carefully constructed row of boxes and crates, presumably assembled by a homeless person for a home. Most of the windows in the building were blacked out, with only slithers of light appearing through the cracks, but there was enough light shining from the street to illuminate the entrance to the makeshift home. She narrowed her eyes, shaking her head gently, sure the adrenaline and the uproar in her uterus were causing her imagination to run wild. She continued to watch, her eyes focusing on the other eyes, locked in a game of chicken. She tried to extrapolate the position and was sure it was too high to be a rat, a dog perhaps, she wondered. Either way, she inched towards it, conscious of not alarming whatever it was in case it was dangerous. The closer she moved, the more the light cleared the way and she gasped as whatever had caught her attention scurried away. She frowned, there was something about the way it moved which troubled her, not like a dog at all, more like... more like her son Julian when he was playing with their dog on the floor. It made little sense to her. A child could not be there, should not be there.

‘Captain Brunhild,’ Cedric called, the confusion clear in his voice, a tinge of panic indicating his uncertainty what to do with his captive, ‘where are you going?’

‘Ssh,’ Coco whispered, ignoring the pain in her stomach. ‘Salut,’ she whispered towards the mysterious set of eyes. ‘Don’t be afraid, I mean you no harm. I am a police officer, my name is Captain Brunhild, but you can call me Coco, all my friends call me Coco. Please don’t be scared,’ she added in the kind of tone only a well-practiced mother of troublesome toddlers could muster.

The silence was deafening, but she could hear the rapid movements of something pushing fearful bursts of air out of its lungs. Suddenly the scuffling indicated it was moving away and then it crashed against the edge, the makeshift boxes tumbling to the ground. Against her best instinct, Coco threw herself against the boxes, wrapping her hands around the tarpaulin. Instantly she could feel the body squirming beneath her and she knew exactly what it was. A child, more or less the same size as her ten-

year-old. She pulled the cover off her arms, fighting around the bundle, and she saw him for the first time. Eyes wide and terrified, too young to really understand what was happening other than he was in terrible danger, a rancid teddy bear clutched to his chest as if his life depended on not letting it go. She relaxed her grip, but not enough to allow him to wriggle free because she knew if she did he would be gone long before she had a chance to stop him. His scent hit the back of her throat, and she had to fight the urge to retch. She knew only too well from experience how little boys would do practically anything to avoid the dreaded bath-time, but this was different. She stole a look at the child and her response was that of a mother of two, almost three, not a police Captain. The tears swelled in her eyes. Whatever this boy was doing in a derelict building, she suspected he had been without care for several days.

She touched his hand and he snapped it away. She touched it again, moving her fingers against his skin as lightly as a feather blowing across the surface. He did not move and she could sense his pulse vibrating beneath wafer-thin skin, fast and thready. She forced herself to look into his eyes, to hold his gaze and to transmit the signal she knew he so desperately needed. *You are safe. You can trust me.*

Coco dropped to the ground with a thud, her free hand rummaging in the pocket of her overcoat, tracing through the hole in the bottom she had never fixed because it gave her extra storage space. She smiled as her fingers folded around a set of playing cards. When her eldest child was having a tantrum, Coco recalled the only thing which would placate her was a game of snap. She pulled the cards out and handed them to the child. He stared at them, grubby face crinkling into a frown.

‘You ever played snap, buddy?’ Coco asked, her tone gentle and soft.

The boy turned his head in her direction, eyes as wide as the moon, flicking over her, appraising every contour of her face. She let him, knowing he needed to decide for himself whether she could be trusted. It took him a minute before he took the cards from her, pulling them close to his chest as if gripping a priceless artefact. Coco pulled her hands away and moved them together in a gentle slap. The boy jumped and she quickly repeated the procedure and then again, noting his sense of growing wonder.

‘See, what you have to do is put the cards down one at a time, like so, see, this one is a roi,’ she said placing it on the ground between them, ‘this one a knave, and this one, ah!’ she cried slapping the third card down, ‘another knave, snap!’

The boy clapped his hands together. He dropped the teddy bear and immediately picked it up again. ‘Snap!’ he repeated, his voice croaking as if he had not spoken for some time.

‘Captain Brunhild,’ Cedric interrupted from across the room, ‘I don’t mean to interrupt your *tres* important interrogation over there, but I could do with a little help over here, y’know?’

Coco raised an eyebrow and smiled at the boy, tipping her head in Cedric’s direction. ‘Don’t listen to Monsieur Grouchy-Pants over there. He’s called Cedric, by the way, what’s your name?’

The boy gave her an unsure look and scuttled away, back into his makeshift home. Coco watched him and as she contemplated crawling after him she was reminded again of the impending drama circumventing her cervix. She turned her head sharply towards Cedric who was still struggling in his attempt to restrain the punk.

‘Instead of bitching, why don’t you handcuff the perp to the radiator over there, and get over here. We have a lost child and,’ she stared in horror at her stomach, ‘another child about to make a very unexpected appearance,’

Cedric’s eyes widened in horror, the realisation of what she was suggesting hitting him. ‘I’ll be right over, Captain,’ he spluttered.

Coco looked again at the young boy, the terror clear on his face and she knew whatever he had been through, whatever he had experienced and led to him being alone in an abandoned building, had

not been pleasant. She touched her stomach, hoping nothing similar would ever befall her own child. 'You'll be okay, kid,' she said towards the hidden child, hoping above all else it was true.

III. December, 2019

The sun sliced through the majestic spires of the Eiffel Tower. Beneath, a child played in the afternoon's light hue, throwing a rolled-up newspaper as a makeshift football, oblivious to the history of the post he used as a goal. A tourist lowered himself onto his haunches in an attempt to capture the excited toddler in his historical playing ground. He waved his hand, trying to catch the child's attention, but the child did not respond. The tourist followed the direction of his gaze. The child was shielding his eyes from the midday sun, looking towards the shadow from the Tower. The tourist scrunched his eyes, but they widened in horror when he realised what it was which had caught the child's attention. Tumbling towards the ground, as if in slow-motion was a person, his arms flailing from left to right, his mouth wide open, but there was no scream, no noise. As far as the tourist could tell, the person falling was smiling.

Captain Coco Brunhild stopped in front of the line of police tape and waited. Cedric Degarmo stepped past her, lifted the tape and stepped under, dropping it after him. Coco watched the junior Lieutenant with incredulity, her mouth pressing into a disgruntled tut. Cedric stopped, fixing her with a confused, *what?* Coco tipped her head towards the tape.

Cedric whistled. 'If I'd lifted it up for you, I would have gotten some withering look telling me how you're not an invalid and are perfectly capable of lifting a tape yourself, and don't deny it, you've been my boss for a long time. I know your moves and I know better than to fall into your mouth.'

Coco stepped under the tape, her ankle twisting as she navigated the pebbled pathway. She raised a hand to steady herself and Cedric lurched forward, catching her with his hand. She looked at him with surprise and then at his bicep, which was flexing and puzzled her. She supposed he was a handsome young man, with a sharp jaw and buzz-cut blonde hair and clear blue eyes. Definitely not her type, but he was, she supposed, not quite the ineffectual boy she still saw him as. He was a man, and after working with him for almost ten years, on his way to becoming a half-decent police officer.

'It may have escaped your attention,' she said huffily, extracting herself from his grip, 'but I have recently given birth.'

Cedric snorted. 'Believe me, I do know, the entire world knows! I even heard a rumour they were having news updates on CNN.' He shook his head. 'Nine months of mood swings, insane food cravings...' he grimaced, 'schnitzels with peanut butter? Varicose veins,' he paused and shuddered, '*haemorrhoids*. Believe me, Captain Brunhild, not only am I painfully aware you have recently given birth, I feel as if I have too, *again*.' His eyes flicked over her, 'and I still have nightmares about the last time you popped one out. My only solace is you're getting a bit long in the tooth for the procreating business so I may not have to go through it again.'

Coco suppressed a smile, remembering ten years earlier when on a seemingly routine bust, the child she was carrying decided to make his appearance almost two-months early, his first breath taken on the floor of an abandoned building into the arms of rookie cop Cedric, on his first week in the job. Coco had decided to name the child after him in an attempt to honour the man who brought him into the world, but all it had really done was to create an endless chain of gossip regarding the parentage. A fact which Cedric had, with too much gusto as far as Coco was concerned, gone to significant pains to

protest he had never, *would* never, go there. She took a moment to assess her appearance. Sure, at almost forty she had a few miles on the clock, and she knew her blue-dyed hair prone to frizz was not to everyone's taste, or the hook of her nose, nor her dress sense, but she happened to believe her quirks were exactly what made her attractive. Who wanted to melt into a crowd when you could stand out in it?

'Captain Brunhild,' a deep voice called out from the shadows.

Coco turned around, a smile appearing on her face when she saw the handsome face of Dr. Shlomo Bernstein beaming in her direction. He was a handsome man, with thick wavy jet-black hair and a rugged complexion. He reminded Coco of someone she had once loved very much, a man long since out of her life, but only physically. She had made a choice, believing Paris was where her future lay and tried not to imagine how different her life might have been if she had stayed. She waved at Shlomo. They had both begun their careers at more or less the same time and had formed an instant connection, like two square pegs trying to fit into a round hole. Their Jewish ancestry aside, they had more in common as people who refused to conform for the sake of fitting in.

'I had no idea you were back in the fold,' the doctor said moving to her and wrapping her in a tight embrace.

Coco shrugged. 'Hi, Sonny. Yeah, well, the powers that be realised the Police Nationale really couldn't do without me after all,' she paused and tipped him a wink, 'oh and if they didn't give a woman returning from maternity leave her job back eventually, they'd face a lawsuit. But,' she smiled, 'I prefer to think it was my insane crime-solving ability which tipped the scales back in my favour.' She reached into her pocket and pulled out a pair of latex gloves, flicking them quickly onto her hands, her eyes squinting in the direction of the forensics tent. 'So, what have we got, Sonny?'

He signalled for her and Cedric to follow into the tent, pulling the flap open. Coco gasped when she saw the body.

'He's a child,' she cried, forcing herself to keep staring at him. He reminded her of her second child, Julien, with more or less the same mop of blond hair swept high above his head. She had been at Julien for months to cut it, now she hoped he never would.

Dr. Bernstein shook his head. 'Not quite a child, Captain, but not far off it, I suppose. We're looking at late teens, no more I would imagine.'

Coco gave a tight smile. 'Honey, as far as I'm concerned these days, anybody under the age of twenty-five is a baby.' She shook her head, her eyes carefully moving across the body. 'But he really does look like,' she stopped, her voice breaking as she recalled that very morning when she wiped the jam from the cheeks of her own ten-year-old son. He had protested, but she could tell by the pressure of his cheek against her hand that he was not really so bothered. This child had blood on his cheeks and she had to fight every instinct she had not to spit on a tissue and wipe it away because it was not jam. *If only it could be jam.* She pushed the thought away, realising she was being paid to do a job, not be a mother, so she forced herself to keep staring at the young man, to really stare, to really SEE him. She guessed he was a little over 175 centimetres tall and bordering on being too thin, though it was the way most adolescent men appeared to her these days. He was dressed in tight blue jeans and a black-branded t-shirt, though both were ripped and torn, presumably by the fall, and they were covered in dirt and blood. His head lay turned to this side at an unnatural angle, a trail of blood spreading to his left like a scarf, an eye open in the blood's direction as if following its path. A snake of bruises spread around his neck like vines.

'Why are we even here?' Cedric asked with a tut. 'Some kid throws himself off the Eiffel Tower, it's sad I guess, but hardly worthy of the Crime Division.'

Coco turned her head sharply in his direction. 'And we're certain there has been no crime committed?'

Uncertain of her tone, Cedric glanced again at the young man's remains, appraising him with fresh eyes wondering whether they had missed something. The calls to the precinct had indicated it was nothing but a routine suicide. He studied the marks on the neck. Sure, he could see what the Captain was getting at, but just because he had bruises did not necessarily equate to foul play. He tapped his notepad. 'I have witness statements from half a dozen people who all pretty much say the same thing. The kid fell or jumped from the Tower.'

'Or was pushed,' Coco interrupted.

Cedric shrugged. 'Then why would he be laughing?'

Coco turned her head, laughing. 'Laughing? What on earth are you talking about?'

'At least two of the witnesses said he appeared to be smiling.'

Coco looked at the doctor for help. Sonny Bernstein shrugged. 'Don't ask me,' he said, 'I've long since stopped trying to understand human behaviour, but it's not too much of a stretch to imagine if a person is troubled enough to commit suicide, then seeing the end coming might be some kind of relief.'

'And what's your opinion, doc?' she asked. 'Suicide?'

Sonny glanced again at the young man. 'I couldn't say. I'll do the autopsy first thing tomorrow, we should know more then.'

'Did you find any ID?' she asked.

Sonny shook his head. 'Nope, all he's got in his pants are a packet of cigarettes and a condom.'

'Condom?' Coco asked sharply. 'Isn't that unusual?'

Cedric laughed. 'He's a kid. I'd be more surprised if he didn't have a condom.'

'Hmm,' Coco retorted, 'and no cell phone?'

Sonny shook his head.

'Now that is unusual,' she said. 'My eldest two would rather lose a limb than their damn phones.'

Cedric shrugged. 'Maybe it fell on his way down.'

Coco glanced around. 'Perhaps,' she agreed doubtfully, 'have uniforms do a wide search just in case.'

Cedric scratched his head. 'Really? All this for a jumper?'

Coco turned to him, fixing him with an icy stare. 'Suicide or not, there are likely people who care about him, are missing him. I'd rather the notification came from us rather than some John Doe bulletin on the ten o'clock news.'

'I'll run his prints and DNA, you never know, he might be in the system,' Sonny said.

Coco nodded and lifted her head towards the Eiffel Tower. 'Mon Dieu, I hate heights.' She gesticulated to Cedric. 'Let's go up and see if anyone saw anything. See you tomorrow, Sonny.'

Coco threw off her overcoat and flopped onto one of the chairs lining the wall of the morgue, a swoosh of angry air underneath her reminding her of the extra kilos she had gained. She looked to Cedric and judged by his smirk, he had seen it too. She hated the fact he ate nothing but junk food and yet never gained an ounce.

Dr. Bernstein finished washing his hands and began wiping them on a towel. 'How was the Tower?' he asked.

Coco visibly shuddered. 'Tall and windy,' she grumbled, 'and not a lot of use.'

'No witnesses?' Sonny asked.

‘Not a single one,’ Cedric replied.

‘They’re sending over CCTV footage today,’ Coco said, ‘so we should at least get an idea of who was coming in and out, but there are no cameras in the area we believe he jumped. What about you, anything from the fingerprints?’

‘Nothing from Europol or Interpol. I’ve taken blood samples, and teeth impressions and they’re running through the systems too but until we find something to match them with, there’s not a lot I can tell you of his origins.’

‘Damn,’ she said, ‘we’re monitoring missing person reports, from Paris and beyond, but no matches so far. What about the autopsy?’

Sonny moved around the table and pulled back the sheet covering the young man. Coco took in a sharp intake of breath and Cedric stumbled backwards. There was something about seeing him there, naked and vulnerable, which rocked Coco almost more than she could bear. ‘He was so young,’ she repeated.

‘But not so innocent,’ Sonny muttered.

‘What do you mean?’ she asked sharply.

‘Well, he was certainly very sexually active for a young man I believe to be no more than eighteen or nineteen.’

Cedric chuckled. ‘Are you kidding? When I was that age I was getting more ass than I knew what to do with.’

Sonny looked at him coolly. ‘I doubt your own ass had the same trouble, Lieutenant.’

Coco moved closer to the gurney. She could not take her eyes away from him. ‘What do you mean, Sonny?’

Sonny moved next to her. ‘Because of the stretching and scaring of the anal walls, I would say he was *extremely* sexually active. Of kids this age, I’ve only really seen this sort of thing before in rent boys.’

‘Putain,’ Coco muttered. ‘Poor kid. Any of it recent?’

‘There was spermicide present,’ Sonny replied, ‘so within the last twelve hours or so before his death, I would estimate, but no sperm or any other useable evidence. No hair or fibres and nothing under his nails.’

‘A drugged-up prostitute gets fed up of his life and kills himself,’ Cedric shrugged, ‘wouldn’t be the first, won’t be the last.’

Sonny shook his head. ‘We won’t know for certain until we get the toxicology report back, but I found no track marks, no obvious sign of drug usage. His nose is clear, but that’s not to say he wasn’t high on other substances.’

Coco sighed. ‘I almost hope the poor bastard was high, or what else would make him want to throw himself off the goddamn Eiffel Tower? What about the bruises on his neck?’

‘They’re just that, bruises. They didn’t kill him, there were no fractured bones, the bruises could have come from a struggle right before the fall, or within a day or so before it. I just can’t say with any degree of certainty.’

‘Suicide,’ Cedric said with a whine, ‘next.’

Coco shot him another withering look but did not respond. She turned to face Sonny again. ‘Can you send me the best cleaned-up picture of him you can, so I can at least try to get the poor kid identified. Somebody, somewhere, must be missing him.’

Sonny nodded. ‘I hope so, but...’ he stopped, dark eyes clouding, ‘let’s hope this one is different. Bonne journée, Captain, Lieutenant.’

Coco turned her head, studying the young man again. Cold, blue eyes staring towards the ceiling. There was something she could not put her finger on. Something which was troubling her. The hairs

on the back of her neck were tickling her. *There is something wrong here*, they were telling her. She shuddered, and this time not from the cold of the morgue.