

THE ENCOUNTER

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Chapter One

My name is Caroline. I'm 28 and dreading reaching 30. I don't really like men so I guess that's why I'm still a virgin. But I want to have a child, to be a mother; to have a son or daughter, especially a son; just the one, but I will need a man to supply me. I don't want any enduring relationship, so I don't want marriage, but where do I find a suitable male?

I live in an appartement on the Place de la Republique, opposite the Moderne Palace Hotel. My appartement is above a wine bar, but the wine there is awful, even the Cotes du Rhone. So I take the metro to beside the Gare du Nord in the 10th arrondissement and go to a bar, Henri's Bar, a short walk away. There the Cotes du Rhone is perfect and sometimes the Nuits St. Georges or Pommard.

I was born in Dorking in Surrey. My mother was French and my father English. He was a stockbroker in the City. I never knew him because he died when I was one year old, but he left my mother very wealthy and upon her death, me too. Hence my appartement in Paris. I love Paris. Thus I can afford to be a one-parent mother.

Henri's Bar is not very large, so all the clientele are within earshot of each other. You can sit at the bar or at a few tables to the left of the entrance. I was sitting at one of these tables when a man came in and sat at a table near me. When he entered, Henri greeted him with acknowledgement and respect, so he must have been a regular, but I had not seen him before, and I found myself taking interest in him. Henri addressed him as Freddie. He was slim, tall and dark-haired and aged about forty. I decided right then that he would be the mate to give me a child.

The next time I went to Henri's I was dressed to attract – a very short mini-skirt, because I have good legs and like to display them. I also have a cute bottom, but I would not display this. I have small boobs, but they are round and firm. Not in Paris, but in London I would be described as 34-24-36. A size 12 or maybe 11.

Freddie was not there, so a disappointment after all my effort, but I learnt that his full name was Freddie Neale. I have never known a Freddie before. Henri, who was now recognising me as a regular, gave me a warning. Be careful with Freddie. He can be very unpleasant. He killed a man in London. This did not deter me; it intrigued me.

I went to Henri's a few days later, again dressed to kill. This time Freddie was there, sitting at his same table. I sat at the next table and crossed my legs invitingly, but he completely ignored me. Why is it that men I don't want are attracted by me and then when I want one he acts as if I did not exist? I remembered Henri's warning about him. I studied him as best as I could, concealing myself now behind a copy of French Vogue. Freddie did not look a hard man to me, but appearances can be deceptive.

I got up to leave. I wasn't going to flaunt myself anymore. To hell with you, Freddie, I'll find another mate.

Just before I reached the door, he spoke: "Hello, Caroline," he said.

I ignored him and walked out, closing the door behind me.

Chapter Two

We were having dinner in the Ritz in the Place Vendome. Although I had visited the cocktail bar, I had never dined there before. I preferred the Georges Cinq. The dining room in the Ritz made me think of Princess Diana. She had her last meal there before she died.

“Henri told me you killed a man.... in London.”

He looked at me for some seconds. I was amazed how gentle his eyes were. “I had no choice,” he said. “He was a killer. If I hadn’t killed him, he would have killed again. It wasn’t nice. It was horrible.”

I had wondered how Freddie had traced me to my appartement in the Place de la Republique. Henri did not know where I lived, so he could not have told him. Later Henri told me that Freddie knew people in intelligence and national security in both France and England. I found this a bit frightening, that they should know of me and my whereabouts and share it with Freddie. Big Brother! Henri had warned me to go careful with Freddie, but this latest knowledge made me feel even more excited in his company. A killer and maybe a spy!

It was a Wednesday evening about 7.30 pm when my doorbell rang. I looked through my peephole and recognised Freddie. I opened my front door. “Hi,” he said. “Hi,” I replied and opened the door wide and stood aside and waved him in.

It was approaching midnight when we finished at the Ritz. How would we get a taxi now? The Parisian taxi drivers have a reputation and it’s not good. Even the mayor has complained about them, but a taxi arrived for us immediately we reached the main entrance to the Ritz. It sped us to the Place de la Republique and my appartement. I expected that Freddie would invite himself in and I wanted him to, but he didn’t. Before bidding me good-night and giving me a gentle kiss on the cheek, he just said or asked: “Same time next Wednesday, for the Georges Cinq?” I nodded, rather feebly and he departed without another word.

I went inside, very disappointed, and threw myself on the bed and almost cried.

Chapter Three.

My name is Freddie Neale. Some of you may remember me from the incident in North Harrow last year. I had been recalled, against my better judgement, by the Blue Brigade and sent from my home in Paris back to my old house in North Harrow. That situation resulted in me stabbing and killing a man in Station Road. But that is history now.

Having retired and received a packet of money left in my appartement by the Blue Brigade for services rendered – blood money – most days I go to Henri’s Bar close to where I live near the Gare du Nord. Henri’s is normally a male preserve; old geezers and geezers growing old. One afternoon a girl, blonde, maybe late twenties, with nice legs ventured in and sat at a table near to me. When she left, Henri informed me that she was called Caroline. He did not know her surname, but that would do.

The next time I visited Henri’s she was there again, appearing more sexy in a short skirt showing off those luscious legs.

I was tempted to speak to her, but there were warning shots across my brain. At the age of forty I had enjoyed many relationships with varying females, some older than me, some much younger than me. At this moment in time I was not seeking any romantic action. After the incident in North Harrow I was looking for a bit of the quiet life. And there was something dangerous about the look of this particular girl. I got the impression that she would eat you and spit you out once you had fulfilled your purpose. Also I am very fickle with females, never wanting to settle with one, always being attracted to another. Only once did I really fall in love and that was eighteen years ago and I blew that. We were both engaged, but not to each other. The last time I heard from her was that she was married and living in Milford Haven.

Therefore, I did not respond to the obvious overtures from this blonde in Henri's and ignored her. It was only when she was leaving that I was tempted to greet her and, thankfully, she completely ignored me.

There was a few days interval before I next visited Henri's. I did look to see if the girl was there, but I was not really disappointed when she was not. But then I started to weaken; against my better or more cautious judgement I was becoming intrigued by her and a desire to conquer was looming on the horizon. It was then that I made a phone call to a contact in the Blue Brigade to obtain details about her, including name and age and address.

Chapter Four

The night in which Freddie Neale relieved me of my virginity there was a severe thunder storm with sheets of lightning flashing across the window. I had felt a little apprehensive, maybe a little scared, but very excited as he lowered his body onto mine to mount me. There was an explosive eruption with some pain and a little blood, less than I had expected. I don't think I experienced an orgasm, but his penetrative thrusts filled my body with stimulating ecstasy and I moaned and shrieked with sexual pleasure. He came again and again and it was hours before we relaxed in satisfaction upon the bed.

This temporary pleasure was exotic, but had he fulfilled the purpose for which I wanted him? Will he provide me with a baby? Sad how many women who want children can't have them and women who don't want them, have them and then kill them through abortion. I guess children can't just be ordered like a commodity.

Chapter Five

I must have been exhausted by my efforts because when I awoke it was daylight; the storm being replaced by sunlight streaming through the windows. I felt along the bed beside me, but it was empty. I tried the bathroom and the lounge, but she was not there; she had flown the nest. I learnt from the concierge that she had taken a taxi back to Republique. We had dined in the Georges Cinq. I had paid in advance for the room there – you can get quite a good room at the Georges Cinq for about two thousand euros. It is the hotel in Paris – 31 Avenue George V, off the Champs- Elysees. Although built in the nineteen- twenties, it has an eternal look about it. It is my favourite. So I left the Georges Cinq and took the metro back to the tenth arrondissement. I called in at Henri's on the way home.

Laporte was there, sitting at his usual table. I do not like Laporte. I detest him, a minor player in the Blue Brigade, the messenger boy.

"Hello, Freddie," he greeted me.

"Hello, yourself."

He gave me his benevolent smile. Does a crocodile smile before it eats you?

"Have you ever been to Monaco?" he asked.

"No."

"Would you like to?"

"No. I wouldn't appreciate it."

"Caroline does. She goes there."

I stiffened. He was up to something again. The last time he was, it resulted in me killing a man in North Harrow. The first and, I intended, the last and only time for that to happen.

"Monaco. The home of multi-million pound yachts, maybe billion pounds, some of which never go to sea. Just there for show."

"Really," I said. "I had a rowing boat once. In Cornwall. It sank."

"Have you ever read Chesterton – Father Brown?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I liked the bit about where to hide a murdered body. The answer – on a battlefield."

"I hid mine behind a wall in Station Road."

"Very resourceful of you."

"What's this about Caroline and Monaco?"

"I wondered if you knew about it."

"She's got plenty of money from her parents, so what's the mystery if she likes to go to Monaco?"

"Not that much money from her parents – expensive having and mooring a yacht in the principality. Sorry, I've got an appointment in the city centre. Got to dash. See you again, Freddie."

And he was gone before I could say another word.

I said goodnight to Henri and made my way back to my appartement. It would seem different now; you could place all of it within the suite at the hotel. As I approached it there were warning signals.

Waiting outside my entrance were two figures whom I soon recognised as I drew closer. They were Jonathan Steiner and Julian Sinclair, senior members of the Blue Brigade, but in

the so-called outer circle. The two were inseparable and were known as the terrible twins. As usual it was Steiner who led and spoke as I approached.

“Did Laporte mention Chesterton and where to hide a murdered body. That’s one of his favourites. He should have mentioned where to hide multi-million pound yachts. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Russian oligarchs are having their very expensive yachts being impounded and seized under various sanction laws around the world. They would like somewhere to hide them, to conceal them from the authorities. That where La Mer Solutions comes in. Problems present opportunities and La Mer Solutions saw an opportunity and a lucrative one at that. For a considerable fee they will make your expensive yacht disappear.” Steiner paused for a while. “Caroline is involved with La Mer,” he continued.

“You better come indoors,” I invited them.

We sat down. “Drinks? Beer, whisky, wine?”

“No thanks.”

“Now tell me what this is all about.”

Steiner sat back in his chair and relaxed. I remembered then that he neither drank nor smoked. He lived on his nerves which were always high-tuned. “A lot of these so-called communists in Russia, oligarchs,” he explained, “have become multi-millionaires, multi-billionaires from oil profits. Mainly on oil sold to the United States of Europe – the so-called European Union. Representatives of a Russian oligarch who wants to hide and keep his yacht – large things to hide – contact Caroline in Paris. She contacts some people in Monaco – high up on the hierarchy there, but not known to any of the royal family there, and they arrange to swap an existing yacht moored in Monaco with that of the Russian. Very large and rewarding cash involved.”

Steiner stopped and looked across to Sinclair who continued the narrative. “The problem is that we do not know when they are going to make a transfer. You are close, very close to Caroline. You could observe her for us and let us know when she is on the move.”

“The last time that I acted as an observer for you, look what happened.”

“That was very unfortunate.”

“Strange enough,” I ventured. “I think she may be heading for Monaco next Tuesday.”

“Why do you think that?”

“She has a one-way ticket, Air France, to Tarbes. I think she may be covering her tracks. Tarbes is deep in the south, near the Pyrenees. You can fly from there to Marseilles and Monaco.”

Chapter Six

Throughout my “cloak and dagger” escapades I have always maintained security precautions. I am fortunate to have long blonde hair and loose hairs from this have been handy to stick across drawers and cupboard doors. As my appartement is very secure and alarmed, I only do this when expecting visitors.

It was quite a shock to discover after a visit by Freddie that the hairs on some of my drawers had been torn away and the drawers opened, including the vital one. I opened the drawer. My Air France ticket was still there, but it must have been examined. Freddie had been the only visitor. It must be him. He must go... permanently.

Chapter Seven

I took the metro to La Republique. Caroline greeted me warmly and we kissed. “Come in, lover boy,” she encouraged. “Let’s stay in tonight. I am cooking a real French meal, poulet au rotir and we have Chablis to applaud it.”

Sitting beside her on the sofa, I reflected that on top of everything else she was a good cook. The Chablis at the dining table had been superb. She now offered me a red wine, a Pommard. “Just got to get something in the kitchen,” she spoke softly.

Whilst she was gone, I picked up the glass of Pommard and sniffed its nose. It was good – vintage. I was about to take a sip when something stopped me. Maybe it was that overwhelming air of caution or sense of danger in bedded in me in my years with the Blue Brigade.

I suddenly realised the danger in my glass of wine. Poison, said to be the woman’s method. I went to the bathroom and poured the wine down the sink. When I returned to the bedroom, she was pointing a Derringer at me, just like the silly little gun with the man in Station Road. The gun is tiny, but at close range it can kill a man and so easy to conceal on a female person.

I had never been so energetic before. I grabbed a pillow and dived under the bed. What protection would a pillow provide and I was without my trusted Bowie. Under the bed, with the pillow in front of my chest, I was shaking, waiting for her to appear beneath the bed and shoot me.

Everything had gone quiet, nothing was moving. Where was she? Was she playing with me, torturing me? Then I saw a trickle of blood slowly crawling down the side of the bed. I couldn’t understand it. I waited. Eventually I summed up enough courage to appear above the bed. Caroline was lying there, at an awkward angle. Then I saw the method used to kill her and I recognised the trademark. It couldn’t be. He was no longer active. I slowly crawled up from under the bed and looked about me. There he was, standing by the door. It was some time before I could force myself, make myself, to recognise him. He looked

gaunt, haggard, old, at death's door. But it was him. Patto. Vincente Patto, the master of the Mexican stiletto.

It had been horrific, the encounter between Caroline and myself. Maybe I should avoid Henri's. Once a meeting there had resulted in me killing a man and another meeting there almost got me killed.

A day later, however, I was again sitting in Henri's. Laporte was not there, thankfully, and Caroline would never appear there again. At my table were the terrible twins. There was an almost empty bottle of Cotes du Rhone on the table. Soon Henri would bring another.

Steiner was frowning. Caroline's death was not within his plans. He had been intending that she would lead him to the gang involved in the switching of yachts in Monaco. But all was not lost. Now that it was known that she had been due to travel next Tuesday gave Steiner the knowledge that another Russian owned yacht was about to enter and be hidden in Monaco waters. The Blue Brigade would be in the Principality ready to intercept it.

I leaned back in my chair. The second bottle of Cotes du Rhone had arrived and it tasted good, especially as Steiner was paying for it. I loved Henri's. It was my second home.