

A JULIETTE HART MYSTERY--BOOK #1

# NOTHING

# TO

# FEAR

BLAKE PIERCE

NOTHING

TO

FEAR

(A Juliette Hart FBI Suspense Thriller—Book One)

BLAKE PIERCE

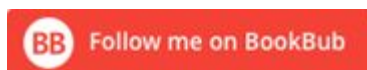
## Blake Pierce

Blake Pierce is the USA Today bestselling author of the RILEY PAGE mystery series, which includes seventeen books. Blake Pierce is also the author of the MACKENZIE WHITE mystery series, comprising fourteen books; of the AVERY BLACK mystery series, comprising six books; of the KERI LOCKE mystery series, comprising five books; of the MAKING OF RILEY PAIGE mystery series, comprising six books; of the KATE WISE mystery series, comprising seven books; of the CHLOE FINE psychological suspense mystery, comprising six books; of the JESSIE HUNT psychological suspense thriller series, comprising twenty eight books; of the AU PAIR psychological suspense thriller series, comprising three books; of the ZOE PRIME mystery series, comprising six books; of the ADELE SHARP mystery series, comprising sixteen books, of the EUROPEAN VOYAGE cozy mystery series, comprising six books; of the LAURA FROST FBI suspense thriller, comprising eleven books; of the ELLA DARK FBI suspense thriller, comprising fourteen books (and counting); of the A YEAR IN EUROPE cozy mystery series, comprising nine books, of the AVA GOLD mystery series, comprising six books; of the RACHEL GIFT mystery series, comprising ten books (and counting); of the VALERIE LAW mystery series, comprising nine books (and counting); of the PAIGE KING mystery series, comprising eight books (and counting); of the MAY MOORE mystery series, comprising eleven books (and counting); of the CORA SHIELDS mystery series, comprising five books (and counting); of the NICKY LYONS mystery series, comprising eight books (and counting); of the CAMI LARK mystery series, comprising eight books (and counting); of the AMBER YOUNG mystery series, comprising five books (and counting); of the DAISY FORTUNE mystery series, comprising five books (and counting); of the FIONA RED mystery series, comprising five books (and counting); of the new FAITH BOLD mystery series, comprising five books (and counting); and of the JULIETTE HART mystery series, comprising five books (and counting).

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## PROLOGUE

Lost? It was surely impossible! In Paris, her old home city?

Claudette Toussaint paused, shaking her thick brown hair, glancing back toward the alleyway that had led her into this narrow side street as she tried to fight the sense of disorientation. How could this have happened?

And why did she have the uneasy feeling that someone was following her?

She'd been so sure of her route twenty minutes ago. She'd crossed over the Champ de Mars, past the magnificent Eiffel Tower, where tourists were clustered even after dark, and had then veered south, past a few of the major hotels and into the narrower streets beyond.

And from there, she'd taken a wrong turn, gotten confused, and was now trying to retrace her steps and get her bearings, without a view of any landmarks or any idea where the Eiffel Tower was now.

Above her, on either side, the stone buildings were so close together you could have strung a washing line across the upper windows with ease. It gave this street a strangely claustrophobic feel, accentuated by the fact it was now fully dark.

There was nobody behind her, though. Nobody following. The streets had become much quieter as she'd walked, and now, the only person in sight was a woman heading purposefully along the crossroad holding a Galeries Lafayette carrier bag, her blonde hair flowing over her stylish dark coat. She glanced at Claudette as she passed, then turned right, and disappeared from her view.

She should have asked her for directions. Too late now. Letting out a frustrated breath, she decided it was typical that the one evening she decided to leave her almost-dead cellphone charging in the apartment, was the evening where everything went wrong.

Logic prevailing, Claudette tried to reassure herself that her earlier anxiety, her feeling of being watched, had just been a result of being lost. It was stupid to think she'd been momentarily scared, here in a part of the city where other women walked confidently alone, where there was clearly no danger. It must have just been that she felt spooked, after getting lost in a part of Paris where she'd spent years and thought she knew well.

Telling herself she was briefly disoriented, she then decided to think back on the route she'd followed and then reorient herself.

A glance at the road name on the building's wall helped her.

This was Rue Herbillon. She thought that rang a bell.

The boulangerie she was searching for must be somewhere down the next street, surely? She remembered the shop itself vividly from when she was last here. A tiny, hole in the wall bakery, from which the delicious aroma of baking bread emanated, filling the street with its seductive smell. If she got onto the right road, which she now thought she remembered, she might smell this place before she even saw it, in the cool, damp spring air.

Hearing a noise behind her, that sense of unease that hadn't fully dissipated sparked again, and she spun around.

But it was only the rattle of tires on the cobblestones.

Headlights gleamed, and she stepped hastily aside, moving to the narrow sidewalk, her boots slipping on the smooth, uneven stones, as a van turned past her and rattled slowly down the road.

She read the logo on the front. "*Plomberie*." A plumber's van.

This service provider surely knew the local roads? Perhaps he'd stop and help her.

"Monsieur?" she called. "Arretez, s'il vous plait? Je suis perdu."

But even her request to stop, because she was lost, didn't touch the heart of the dark-haired, sallow-faced man behind the wheel.

He gave her a world-weary shrug and drove on, rivulets of water swishing up from the wheels as he traversed a puddle. Only as he passed did she realize he was on the phone, talking rapidly into the speaker, unwilling to stop his conversation to help her.

"Cochon," she muttered. It made her feel better to call him a pig, made her feel like for once she could fling an insult, if only in that narrow alleyway, while talking to a random stranger who couldn't hear her and whose car had already passed.

Having a father who was a career politician meant she had to keep a tight rein on her tongue and temper, neither of which usually liked to be controlled. But since her father's appointment as an ambassador, which had taken the family to Italy, Great Britain, and Turkey in the past ten years, before arriving back in France, she'd had to learn some tough lessons in diplomacy herself.



Now, at the age of twenty-one and supposedly an adult, she was realizing the world wasn't free, and that she still couldn't do what she wanted or behave how she liked. Except now, briefly, and anonymously, to that inconsiderate driver who hadn't even bothered to help her. She stuck out her tongue at him, knowing he wouldn't even notice, that he had forgotten about her the instant he'd passed by.

Claudette stepped off the precarious sidewalk and back into the road, frowning in concentration as she pieced together where she was now.

She was becoming more and more convinced that the boulangerie was on the parallel street. So all she had to do was find the next cross street, and turn down it.

There was one, up ahead, and it seemed to go in the right direction - never a certainty in the warren of alleys and side roads that crisscrossed central Paris.

This tiny roadway was a footpath only, too narrow for any car to drive down. Ahead, she could see the crossroad at its end was wider and better lit, bustling with people and cars. But in this passage, she would be all alone. Was it safe?

Then she saw something, a few yards inside the alleyway, that drew her eye. What was that?

Curious, she walked into the alleyway to look.

It was a golden statue of a man, naked except for a pair of golden shorts. Absolutely lifelike, and life size, standing with his head raised, and his arms slightly bent, palms turned to the sky. The gold shimmered in the dim light.

She blinked. Had he beckoned to her? Or had she totally imagined that. It had been only a moment when she thought she'd seen his fingers move. But looking again, at that stillness, she decided she'd been wrong. She didn't think it was a real person.

What was it, she wondered. Was there a sculpture shop on the main street? Was this a discarded stage prop from the theater that she thought she remembered was close to here? Had it been thrown out into this alley? It didn't look damaged, though. Not broken in any way. In fact, it looked pristine.

There was something about its pose that intrigued her. A feeling of desperation restrained, of violence contained. It was beautiful, each muscle defined, but there was a definite element of threat there that brought her uneasiness bubbling to the surface again.

As she approached, wanting to look more closely, she frowned. It was incredibly lifelike. Surely it couldn't be a real person?

Why would a real person pretending to be a statue be here, in this narrow, deserted passageway? Why not posing on a pedestal on the main street nearby?

Besides, it was utterly still. This statue wasn't moving. Wasn't even visibly breathing.

The eyes would tell her, she decided, stepping closer.

How she wished she had her camera with her. Damn her phone's useless battery; she'd have loved to take a photo of it. Real or not, that pose was troubling and fascinating all at once.

She walked closer. Was it real?

"Es-tu vivant?" she asked aloud. Are you alive?

The statue remained immobile, and it was as if her words had no effect at all.

Touching him would tell her. The feel of flesh, or of cold, solid metal would decide this once and for all. Feeling suddenly impudent, as if she wanted to push the boundaries - or maybe it was that she was feeling more confident now that she had her bearings again - she stepped forward.

As she reached out to touch his arm, his hands moved. Faster than thought. Faster than she could imagine. In a golden blur.

Claudette would have screamed in shock, but she couldn't. His hands, those gold painted fingers, were wrapped tightly around her throat.

In a panic, she began to struggle, but although the fingers were flesh, they were as strong as steel, and her air was totally cut off. There was no escape. No way to scream. No way to breathe.

And finally, his gaze fixed on her.

The cold, merciless light in his eyes was the last thing she saw as darkness rushed in.

## CHAPTER ONE

For the past two months, FBI special agent Juliette Hart had felt as if she was tracking an elusive shadow. A disappearing demon. Until a new lead had brought her here.

Now, if this raid went the way she hoped it would, she would confront him at last.

"You can't vanish forever," she muttered, addressing this invisible man, nicknamed Goldenface by the team. Finally, they had a chance at catching this creepy killer who had terrorized the wider area. A month ago, there had been three murders in the space of a week, all the same MO. One in Brooklyn, one in lower Manhattan, and one in Jersey City.

She'd worked night and day on the case, desperately hoping for a breakthrough that would lead her team to this elusive killer. The murders had stopped, and he'd seemingly vanished. Now, finally, they had a lead that might bring them to his doorstep.

Taking a deep breath and checking her surroundings yet again, she stepped closer to the apartment building that was just a few miles from JFK Airport, so close that you could hear the roar of the airplanes overhead.

She felt the way she always did when she was getting close to cornering an adversary. It was a breathless blend of adrenaline, terror, and excitement. When she'd been a younger agent, that feeling had been overpowering. She'd felt shaken and unable to sleep for days after a job.

Now, at the age of thirty-three, she could handle the pressure better. That wasn't surprising, since she was so committed to her work and everything it involved, barely having a social life outside of it. That was something that occasionally worried her. She knew she needed to change things, to achieve a better balance in life. She loved cooking, and she'd always wanted to learn how to play a musical instrument, but somehow there was never time.

She breathed in and out, deeply, forcing herself to stay calm and focused, lifting a hand to brush away a lock of honey blonde hair that had come loose from her ponytail. Her eyes, a warm hazel green, were hidden behind dark glasses. She herself, at this stage of the mission, was in plainclothes, wearing navy chinos and a gray jacket, blending in with the stream of office workers who were leaving the commercial parts of the city and heading home.

They'd been hunting him for weeks, but it was only in the last few days that things had moved fast on the Goldenface case. At this very moment, at the FBI headquarters, they were organizing an emergency no-knock warrant that would allow her to do what she needed to - break into this apartment, and hopefully surprise the man inside.

Her partner, agent Evan Forrester, was around the back of the apartment building, watching the fire exit. She trusted him implicitly. They'd been in several tough situations in the fourteen months they'd worked together. Every time, he'd had her back and vice-versa.

Backup would be arriving any minute as soon as she'd confirmed the coast was clear and that he didn't have a lookout watching for the police.

They needed to corral this man, this killer. She had her gun and handcuffs under her jacket. She was ready.

Juliette looked around again, taking in every detail, every aspect of the scene. Movement caught her eye and her gaze sharpened. But it was only a cat, jumping down from a side wall and then leaping up, through the window of a neighboring apartment. For a moment, as she watched the animal, her face softened and she felt some of the tension inside her ease.

The cat had a collar, he looked well fed, and he was clearly going where he belonged. He had a home and he was okay, so she could put it out of her mind. In the past, she had been known to arrive back from takedowns with rescue animals in tow. Two of her police friends now had new pets as a result of strays she'd picked up, after the criminals were caught. But hopefully, she'd only be going home with one living thing today - and that was Goldenface, around whom, finally, the net was closing.

Turning her attention away from the cat, she refocused on the scene. Her phone buzzed, and after another check, she answered it discreetly. Nobody was watching her. She had good instincts and could usually tell if someone's eyes were on her. And nobody had come out of, or into, the apartment that was now in her sights.

"Any sign of him yet?" a man's voice queried.

"Nope. No sign," she answered. The caller was her boss, Mark Ebury, who had just landed from a high-level meeting in Atlanta. "We're watching the apartment. Awaiting the warrant. Backup's on its way."

"You sure it's the right place?" he asked.

"Yes. We got the lead earlier today. We've been tracking him down via his purchases. The stage make-up store in Newark was a definite match.

Unfortunately they didn't get video footage, but they alerted us last week, and told us that he'd called again, asking if there was more gold paint in stock. It was definitely the same person because the saleswoman asked him when he'd last bought from them. The store did a good job; they thought fast, and he slipped up."

It had been a stroke of luck for the team.

"So, we were able to get a cellphone number for him. We tracked it immediately, but it was turned off," she finished.

"How did you trace it there?"

"We kept checking up on it, every day, many times. We didn't leave it alone. The team kept working on it," Juliette said in a low voice. "We didn't give up on that phone number, and on Monday morning, we saw it was turned on and had come onto the network again. It wasn't on for long, but it was long enough for us to triangulate it, and now, here we are."

Juliette wished this could have been done faster, but it had taken a couple of days to pull this raid together. They'd watched the apartment on and off, but had seen no movement, no comings and goings. They'd concluded he was holed up in there.

Today, Thursday, they'd finally been able to go ahead with it.

"Sounds good," her boss said. "I'd better let you get on."

Her phone buzzed again with an incoming message.

"The warrant's just been issued, so we can go in," she told Ebury, her heart now beating faster because at last, after a frustrating delay, this raid could begin. The next few minutes would be where she could make a critical difference.

"Good luck. I'm sure I don't have to tell you how important this is," he said.

"I won't let you down," she promised. She hung up, and sent the message that would start this operation moving.

"It's clear," she messaged. "We can go in."

A lot rested on her shoulders now, and she concentrated hard on calming her mind, channeling the pressure she felt into a positive force. This was about saving the lives of future victims she didn't even know. She knew firsthand about the consequences of a violent murder. The families would suffer pain, grief, and loss that would never leave them.

A minute later, she saw the two armed officers who would provide backup approaching. Dressed in Kevlar vests, and with their weapons at the

ready, she knew she had an experienced team behind her and drew confidence from that fact.

“Morning,” she greeted them. “Let’s get this done.”

Now, it was time to go in. That also meant things could go badly wrong. She took off the plainclothes jacket she'd used for her ruse, and put on a Kevlar vest herself.

Her hand brushed against the holster that held her gun, and she felt ready.

This was it. Time to move into the place where he was hiding, and see what was there.

The officers nodded at her, and they all moved in. The door was locked, but Juliette had no intention of alerting the suspect by knocking on it. Instead, she backed up, and the officers took position.

The door was old and battered looking, as if this wasn't the first time in its long life it had met the edge of a boot. Juliette sized up the lock. At five-six, she was tall enough to kick in a door effectively, and she'd had lots of practice in the past. She might not be overly muscular in build, but she was deceptively strong for her size.

She jogged at it, then coiled herself, sprang, and let her foot lash out in a brutally hard, accurate kick.

With a splintering of wood, the door burst inward. Shoving it all the way back, gun at the ready, Juliette led the way in. Breathing hard, all her senses were on a razor’s edge of sharpness. What would she find? She knew she had to be ready for anything, but couldn't allow herself to act in the moment in such a way that would endanger anyone innocent.

Her first impression: it was deadly quiet in here. And very dark. The blinds were down, and muted light filtered in from the small gaps.

The apartment looked to be entirely vacant. No furniture, no bed, no belongings, or clothing on the dusty floor. The door leading to the tiny bedroom and bathroom was open. Nobody inside. She felt devastated. He’d been ahead of them and he’d fled the area, leaving nothing behind.

Nothing, apart from a few tins of gold stage paint, stacked next to the window.

Lying on top, she saw, with a sinking of her heart, was a cellphone, its screen blank and dead.

"Where is he?" one of the cops behind her muttered in a baffled voice. "He's gone? Moved?"

They were too late. She knew it with a terrible coldness. Had he left any clues? Was there any information on that abandoned phone?

A buzzing in her pocket. It was Ebury, calling her again. She picked up, feeling devastated that there wouldn't be good news to report. But before she could do more than say hello, Ebury spoke, his voice urgent and strained.

"Juliette, you need to get in here, now. He's killed again!"

As she took the news in with a gasp, he continued, doubling the bombshell.

"There's been an identical murder called in last night. In Paris, France."

## CHAPTER TWO

As she walked through the entrance door of the FBI's head office in Manhattan, Juliette felt utterly shocked by the news of this latest murder. She felt haunted, as if this was personal, as if those paint tins and that phone had been left there deliberately to taunt her, to show her how far behind she was, and that Goldenface was miles ahead.

Never mind miles ahead, he was a continent away. Goldenface had gone to Paris? Was this really correct? It couldn't be a copycat crime?

Questions whirled in her mind. She'd come straight from the scene, as soon as she and Forrester had completed the apartment search and put together their report. Forensic officers had still been there, hunting for any trace evidence, any fingerprints, that might narrow down this suspect. They had conducted the search mostly in silence, exchanging only a few brief words. She knew Forrester felt as devastated as she did.

In France? Surely not.

But it would explain that abandoned phone. He'd left it behind, jettisoned it. The battery had run down soon afterward and he'd been long gone. Now, she was wondering about that call he'd made last week to the stage make-up store. He hadn't needed more paint; he had been about to leave New York. It wasn't that he'd made a mistake because he'd known he wouldn't need the phone anymore.

Instead, she perceived it as a taunting message to the police, telling them how far ahead he was. Juliette felt sure of it.

Heading inside the tall building, with its workmanlike façade of dark concrete, and the U.S. flag flying from the top, Juliette went straight to the elevator and up to the third floor where her unit, and her boss Ebury, had their offices.

As she headed along the corridor, it felt like her heart was all the way down in the building's basement. She'd had hopes for this raid. Now, they were crushed. Worse, he was at large in another country and he'd killed again. Would this mean he'd resume the same pattern as before? Three kills in a week?

Please, no, she thought. We have to catch him first.

She went straight to the boardroom, knowing that the urgent meeting she'd been called in for would take place there.



Ebury was already in the room, standing at the far end of the long table, talking quietly to two of the other agents. He turned as she entered.

"Juliette. Come in, I need to brief you."

She moved over to the table, her heart sinking further as she saw the two men in suits who were also present. She knew them by sight, from security and crime briefings. Up until now she hadn't sat around a table with either of these two high level officials, one of whom was head of the international operations division of the FBI, and the other from the director's office.

Ebury made quick, brisk introductions. "Take a seat," he told her.

She sat down, next to him and opposite the other two men. The two men were murmuring to each other in low, urgent tones. Juliette caught her own name, and Ebury's, and the words 'interagency cooperation.'

"Shall we start?" Ebury asked, and in a moment he had everyone's attention.

"As you know, we're facing a serious problem," Ebury said, his face strained. "Goldenface has left the U.S. and crossed over to Europe. Last night he committed a murder in Paris."

"Is it definitely his work?" Juliette asked.

Ebury nodded. "I'll show you the photos. They were sent to us when the Interpol database picked up on the similarity in the crimes. Female, in her twenties, walking alone near a central area in the city, and you can see for yourself that the MO is identical. What makes it more serious, though, is that this time, he's killed a government minister's daughter. That's why they called us immediately."

"It's a high profile crime. We're doing our best to contain the information for now, but when it leaks out, it's going to be disastrous," the international operations director said.

Ebury turned the laptop in front of him toward Juliette, and she stared at the face shots.

This was the same MO. She saw it instantly, with a chill that seemed to freeze her entire spine.

What characterized Goldenface's crimes, apart from the extreme strength and swift brutality of the strangling, was the weird attention to detail he paid his victims afterward.

Just like the other three victims in New York and New Jersey, this woman in Paris had her face painstakingly painted. The gold stage paint looked like a second skin. Not a scrap of her own skin remained visible.

The killer had even daubed gold paint onto her sightless eyes, so that her stare was blank and fathomless, the eyeballs coated in glittering gold, the lips perfectly outlined, the skin a satin sheen of gold. It was as if he'd spent hours in a make-up studio perfecting the effect.

"It's the same guy. Too similar not to assume that, anyway," Juliette said.

And he'd killed a government minister's daughter? That was a political disaster. A high profile death. Was this killer a U.S. citizen who'd now moved to a new hunting ground? Or was he French, and he'd been conducting his spree in the U.S. before returning home? She wished she knew more.

"Has forensics picked up anything yet? Did he leave any clues in the apartment here?" she asked, feeling desperate for some lead, any lead.

"There's no forensic evidence in the apartment," Ebury explained. "Not so far. No trace, no fingerprints. No information at all on the phone; it was wiped clean of prints and data. The apartment was actually standing vacant for a few months, ready for repair. The owner, who's currently in Michigan, was shocked to learn it was being used."

Having that sort of local knowledge was making Juliette think he was likely a U.S. citizen who'd relocated to keep a step ahead of the police.

"Border officials? Passports? We know he was here last week when he made that phone call," she said.

Ebury sighed. "There have been more than fifty flights from New York to Paris since then. Thousands of passengers. But yes, passport control is going through every traveler who fits the parameters, along with the judicial police. However, we need more."

Juliette glanced at the other two men at the table. Both were watching her, their faces grave. She felt a sense of shame. They needed more because she'd been too slow. If only she'd managed to piece together Goldenface's location earlier.

"We believe that it's now imperative that the FBI steps in and offers our help," Ebury said. "A killer like this, crossing international borders, is a serious safety threat. On cases like this, we know we can add value and resources, and with an international reach, it will make it more difficult for him to flee elsewhere. But up until now it's always been problematic to get the different law enforcement agencies to cooperate. That's really the biggest stumbling block, but we feel that given the urgency of this case, and the political involvement, we can overcome it and offer our help."

"Yes, politics between agencies can be a big stumbling block." Juliette had personal experience of that. The daughter of a traveling diplomat, she'd spent her childhood all over the world, including a few years in France. She knew what it took to keep a cooperative atmosphere, especially when a crisis exploded.

That made her think of her father, and what had happened to him. She didn't allow her mind to dwell on that. It was too distracting now, when all her focus needed to be on what the next steps would be here.

"This case might be the turning point, I believe," Ebury said. "I've spoken to the French authorities and they have agreed we can send a small task force there, immediately, to assist. We all know this killer's interval and that it's an urgent matter."

Juliette felt her heart beat harder. Was this why she was here? Was she going to be a part of it?

He looked at Juliette. "You have international experience. You are proficient in a few languages, correct?"

She nodded. "I speak good French, and passable Italian and Spanish." She could understand people well enough in a couple of others.

Glancing to her left, she saw the director of international operations nod approvingly.

"That's why I want you on the team," Ebury said. "You have the international experience and exposure that's needed, and you can bridge the gap between the U.S. and France, between the various agencies."

The FBI director nodded. "This is a crisis situation, but it's also a big opportunity to make progress in fighting international crime, and overcome some of the historic barriers. The political situation means we have to act with speed and discretion. Can you handle that?"

Juliette met his gaze. She knew what he was asking her. To step away from her existing role for as long as it took to catch Goldenface. To join unknown partners in an unfamiliar environment. And despite what Ebury had said about the international authorities being able to agree, Juliette wasn't so sure. Personalities on the ground, the French police themselves, might resent the arrival of the FBI and she'd have to handle that, too. For a moment of uncomfortable self-doubt, she wondered if she was up to the challenge, especially given the stakes if she failed.

Then, she sat up straighter, remembering the tight timeframe of the mission and the urgency of the task. Resolve settled into her. This was her

chance. It was an opportunity that suited her skills, and it would allow her to use those skills to catch a killer that she thought was taunting the FBI deliberately.

"I can do it," she said. "I won't let you down."

"Good," he said. Then, briskly, he added, "Go and pack. You're going to fly out tonight. We need you there as soon as possible, and you'll be traveling with another two agents."

"Who are those, sir?" she asked. She guessed, with a feeling of disappointment, that Forrester, her current partner, would remain here and wouldn't be deployed in this new venture.

"You're my choice," Ebury said. "The director has chosen his preferred candidate to partner with you."

Was there something in his voice as he said that? A strange note she didn't really understand?

"We're currently finalizing the last team member," the director said. "One more call and it'll be confirmed."

Juliette nodded, and she got to her feet, feeling a strange mix of excitement and apprehension. She knew that it was a huge responsibility, but she also knew that she was up for this risky change. This was it - the beginning of a new mission, a mission that would take her to the other side of the world. She was ready for the hunt.

And she knew the success or failure of the team would hinge on her ability to track the cunning, cruel, and ruthless Goldenface killer.

## CHAPTER THREE

Two hours later, Juliette arrived at JFK, with a laptop bag slung over her shoulder and rolling her suitcase behind her. During the cab ride to the airport, her phone hadn't stopped beeping with information and updates. In just a few minutes, she'd be meeting two other people who were still strangers to her. They would be her critical partners in this new task force deployed to catch the serial killer. Juliette had no idea who they were, beyond their names.

Special Agent Wyatt Thompson was her partner, and Sierra Lowry, who didn't seem to be an FBI agent, was the tech specialist who'd be part of the task force. They'd all introduced themselves to each other via text. Now, they'd meet up in real life at the arranged rendezvous point - a coffee shop in the international departures hall. On the way, she went past the foreign exchange kiosk and exchanged some dollars for euros in preparation for her Paris arrival.

Then, Juliette headed to the coffee shop and, looking around, spotted the man she guessed to be Wyatt. He was sitting alone at a table for four, a rangy, tall, and broad shouldered man with a tanned face and brown hair cropped close to his head. She estimated him to be in his late twenties. He looked fit and lean, and there was a set to his jaw that told her he most probably had strong opinions and was confident in his abilities.

She walked straight up to him, seeing his gaze fix on her as she approached.

"You must be Wyatt?"

"And you're Juliette?" He stood, and she saw him assessing her, his gaze narrowing as he took in her appearance, her blonde hair tied back in a ponytail, her face free from make-up, apart from a touch of tinted ChapStick. She saw him note the small scar on her left hand that she'd gotten more than a decade ago, at the FBI training academy, when she'd fallen from a rope bridge onto a pile of logs. Breaking the fall with her hand had saved her from worse injury, but the cut, from a jutting branch, had taken weeks to heal.

"What's your background?" he asked.

"FBI BAU agent. I've worked with the Bureau for ten years. I have a psychology degree from Oxford University in England. I grew up all over

the world, as my dad was a diplomat," she said briefly. Memories of her dad surged. His kind face, his warm eyes, hazel green like hers. She couldn't bear to think about what had happened to him, that inexplicable, violent tragedy that had set her onto the path of law enforcement as a career. Until then, she'd had dreams of being a career psychologist, nurturing people and guiding them into their chosen life paths.

Well, actually, when she was very young, she wanted to be a woodland princess. Then, for reasons she couldn't remember, she'd wanted to work with polar bears in the Arctic, and as a teenager she'd longed to become a chef working on superyachts; but over the years, her dad had gently encouraged her into psychology as a career option that would make the best use of her abilities.

After that terrible morning, all her dreams had been shattered, along with so much else. She pushed the memories away, focusing instead on Wyatt.

His eyebrows rose. "Good," he said. "My background is FBI security services. I transferred there from the Army. I've spent three years in the Middle East."

That sounded positive, Juliette thought. They both would have different areas of expertise and knowledge. But then, Wyatt's next comment made her suddenly not so sure.

"I think this unit's long overdue and I hope it can continue beyond this case. My experience of international law enforcement is that they're usually below par. Disorganized, undisciplined, and, of course, corrupt. That's my opinion and I've yet to be proven wrong. We'll bring some order and knowhow to the table." He nodded proudly.

Juliette gave a tight smile, but inwardly she was cringing. This set of preconceptions was not going to get Wyatt off on the right foot, with anyone. Herself included. Ebury had emphasized the delicacy of the relationships and the need for diplomacy.

It seemed Wyatt had all the diplomacy of a charging buffalo, and now she understood why her boss had appeared dubious about him.

"I think it's important to be aware of the differences between our culture and others, and to make sure we are respectful of the host country's laws and protocols. We need to welcome expertise where we can get it. That's how we'll be able to get the most out of any investigation."

She smiled, to take the sting out of her words, but it seemed that her hint went straight over Wyatt's head.

"Absolutely. Coffee?" he asked, waving for the waitress.

"Sure," she said.

As they placed their orders, the third member of their team arrived. Juliette had a jolt of surprise as she saw her.

Sierra looked just out of her teens, if that. She was a petite woman, with a mop of dark curls framing her face. Among them was a bright pink streak. Her eyes were sharp and intelligent. She wore a leather jacket and had a backpack slung over her shoulder.

"Are you the FBI agents?" she asked. "I'm Sierra, the tech specialist for this mission."

"We are," Wyatt said, his voice a little gruff. "Wyatt Thompson."

Juliette smiled. Once she'd gotten over her surprise at Sierra's young age, she was taking in her air of competence which was far more important than years alone. "It's great to meet you Sierra. I'm Juliette Hart."

"It's a pleasure to meet you both," Sierra said.

Wyatt nodded, but Juliette could see that he wasn't entirely sure what to make of this young woman.

"So, what's your background?" Juliette asked, curious to learn more about her skills.

"I'm a hacker," Sierra said, a mischievous glint in her eye. "I specialize in breaking codes and systems, and I'm an expert at finding information where it's not meant to be found. I graduated very early, at twenty, and I'm now twenty-one. I've been working in the field for about two years now part-time, and I've been involved in some pretty big cases, some while I was at the university. I'm studying further and so my FBI connection recommended I join this team because I'm very flexible, and I have experience with French technology and systems. I'm not a French speaker but I can understand enough to get by."

Juliette felt a surge of admiration for the young woman before her.

"I'm sure you'll be an invaluable part of the team," Juliette said, smiling.

Sierra smiled back, and Juliette could see the determination and strength that lay beneath her youthful exterior.

She could sense Wyatt's skepticism, but Juliette was sure that this was a valuable asset for the team. She was young, but seemed super sharp, and having tech expertise was always a huge advantage in an operation. However, the rest of the operation would depend on her skills and Wyatt's as well.

With their coffees finished, it was time to get going. Their flight to Paris was in forty-five minutes' time.

Going through security was always a fast exercise when you were FBI and carrying a weapon. The three of them bypassed the queue, and after examining their paperwork, the security officials let them through. Passport control was similarly seamless, and then they were power walking to the boarding gate - where, Juliette knew from experience - armed agents boarded first.

They'd been booked into business class on the Air France flight, and Juliette took her seat with a feeling of relief.

She longed to be one of those agents who could survive on two hours' sleep a night, and was able to doze off anywhere, anytime. But the opposite was true.

She loved her sleep! If she didn't get eight hours, most nights at least, she felt like a zombie. And, contrarily, she found it exceptionally difficult to sleep on airplanes. For her to get sufficient shuteye, she had to be lying down. How she wished she was one of those wide awake superhumans.

Sinking back into the seat, knowing she could stretch out as soon as the takeoff was done, Juliette had the relief of knowing that when they landed in Paris, she'd at least feel well rested.

With a seriously devious killer to catch, and a partner who had no filter, she needed all the help she could get.

"What's on the menu?" Wyatt asked the flight attendant with a grin. "We got American food on this flight, or is it French only?" Perusing the menu, he frowned, and she could see that it wasn't to his liking.

"What is this? Shrimp? Asparagus? Zucchini caviar? Look here, can you just do me a plain cheeseburger? And I don't see Budweiser on this drinks menu. Any chance you can find me one?"

"Certainly, sir," the flight attendant replied, pasting on a smile.

Juliette had to stop herself from rolling her eyes. She had the feeling that for this case, she'd need to draw on diplomatic as well as detective skills. And meanwhile, Goldenface was at large in Paris - a city with endless nooks and crannies, twists and turns, a place that not even a local Parisian could say he knew intimately.

If he'd chosen a city where he could disappear easily, while preying on victims that suited his type, Juliette had to reluctantly admit he'd chosen well.



As soon as they landed, the hunt would begin. And Juliette promised herself, this time, he wouldn't escape their net.

## CHAPTER FOUR

What would happen next? Where would they go first? When she'd turned her phone off for the flight, Juliette still had no idea of the logistics. She hoped she could hit the ground running, but knew this was such a rushed decision that plans were still being made. They hadn't yet received a message about who would meet them, or what would happen next.

But all too soon, the bad news landed. As soon as she got a signal, she looked at her messages.

Ebury had texted, *"There's a complication. French authorities are insisting on being fully involved and fully in charge. Team meeting you at airport. I have to approve this, because they won't budge."*

It was frustratingly vague. She wished she had more information on what this involvement would mean, but guessed that if Ebury had known more, he would have said more. But the insistence on being in charge was a red flag. It might make it harder for them to work the way they needed to.

"We're going to have to meet up with the local police immediately," she told the others. Wyatt was sitting diagonally opposite her, and Sierra just behind her.

"What?" Wyatt was instantly suspicious. "Why?"

Already, Juliette's diplomatic skills were being tested. Now, she felt like she was the filter between her team, Ebury, and the unknown Parisian police contingent.

She couldn't let Wyatt get angry about this. That, she saw immediately. If he was angry, she guessed he would head into Paris like a charging bull, and that might damage relationships right from the get-go.

"It's their jurisdiction, and the French police are the ones who initially investigated the crime," she said. "So of course there has to be collaboration. They'll hopefully guide us and help us. They must have lots of information. We need to respect their protocols and stick to them."

Wyatt looked dubious. "Is it going to slow us down? Bureaucracy can be a huge stumbling block in places like this. I've heard bad things about the delays and the paperwork in France."

"I don't know if it'll mean more paperwork," Juliette admitted. "But ultimately, if we can work with them efficiently, it'll hopefully speed things up."

She glanced at Sierra. The young woman was listening to the conversation, seeming interested but carefully expressionless. She didn't have to say anything. Tech was tech and it usually transcended languages and protocols.

Wyatt grumbled something under his breath, but Juliette was relieved that it hadn't caused an actual flare-up. Given the importance of the mission, they needed to be working together, not against each other.

The flight attendant came around, clearing the trays, preparing for the landing. There was nothing to clear from Juliette's seat. She hadn't eaten any breakfast. Food, at such an hour? Their flight had landed at six a.m., French time, but that was still earlier by U.S. timeframes. No way could she stomach breakfast. While still half asleep, intruding on her dreams, she'd heard Wyatt complaining about the omelet and demanding grits.

"I think we need to look at this in a positive light," she said.

Wyatt rolled his eyes, but nodded. "Let's just push forward, and hope they don't cause too much of a delay," he said. "That's my take on this."

The plane touched down, the three of them disembarked, and they set off toward the meeting point.

As soon as she exited the aircraft, Juliette was immersed in the sights, smells, and sounds of Paris. Even within the airport, it felt unique and strangely exciting. Her dad's posting in Paris had spanned four of her teenage years. She'd loved the place.

Memories surged as they waited for their bags. Croissants had been her favorite food. She'd drunk illegitimate sherry glasses full of wine with dinner. At sixteen, her first kiss had been with a Frenchman who was a year older. Juliette had to admit that he'd set a very high bar. Even now, every time she thought back to those incredible moments, her stomach flipped the same way.

Perhaps that early experience was one of the reasons why, now, she felt as if she was fated to spend her life alone, that there would never be the right person, or the right time. Her relationships hadn't lasted. Her job had always ended up being more important than her lovers.

The team. Her team. That was her priority. And she'd wondered a few times if perhaps it was a deliberate protective mechanism, that she was scared of getting emotionally close to a partner. Maybe, even though her job involved danger, she felt safer keeping her real self hidden away.

Juliette forced herself back to the present, as her bag arrived. With their luggage in hand, they headed through passport control, and out into the arrivals hall.

The Parisian police contingent was waiting for them. There were three of them, all men, all dressed in dark uniforms and wearing sober expressions. Her eyes were drawn to them immediately. The French police did not look pleased to see them.

Juliette stepped forward and spoke in what she knew was well-accented French, addressing the officer in front, who was a tall man with dark, intense eyes, a hint of stubble that suggested he'd been working so hard he hadn't had time to shave, and an antagonistic expression on his otherwise strong featured and good looking face.

"Bonjour. We are the FBI task force from the United States, here to assist with your investigation into the Goldenface killer."

The man looked at her sourly.

"We are French police detectives from one of the elite serious crime investigation departments, and we will be overseeing your task force," he said loudly. Then, in a low voice and speaking very fast, he added, "If you had done better work, your killer would not have fled your home country to come here and terrorize us."

"What?" Juliette asked, astounded at his accusation.

The man looked briefly taken aback, as if he hadn't realized she could understand French even better than she could speak it.

Switching to heavily accented English, he said, "Come this way. We will go straight to the crime scene of yesterday. We will brief you in the car."

He whirled around and stalked out of the airport, with his other officers in tow.

"What did he say?" Wyatt asked loudly as they followed. "He hasn't even introduced himself yet."

Juliette shook her head. "Nothing important," she said shortly.

She'd been right to think she'd need diplomatic skills. But now, she realized it was time to add some steel and grit to the mix. They had a job to do, and she was determined to do it well.

As they hurried after the French police officers, Juliette could feel Wyatt's eyes still on her. But she didn't look back.

She had a feeling that thanks to the internal politics, this case would be more complicated than she'd imagined. And that made her even more

determined to get Goldenface. This time, he wouldn't escape.

And if they weren't going to be polite and ask for names, then she would. With that in mind, she sped up her walk, marching up to the bad-tempered French police detective.

"What's your name?" she asked him.

He glanced at her briefly.

"Lucien," he snapped.

She had no idea if it was a first name or a last name. Clearly, it was the only name she was going to get from him.

Juliette smiled, determined to break the ice.

"Well, Lucien, I'm Juliette Hart, and I'm happy to work with you," she said. "Wyatt Thompson is my partner, and Sierra Lowry is our tech expert."

Lucien nodded curtly, but he didn't reply. Juliette sighed inwardly, but she was determined not to give up. She knew how to handle difficult people. It was a skill she'd learned from watching her father at work, and she wasn't about to let this grumpy French gendarme get the better of her.

Luckily, Wyatt wasn't getting involved in this particular conflict, and instead was grilling Sierra about the tech demands of self-driving cars.

A floral whiff of perfume came to her from one of the shops she passed and she breathed it in appreciatively, feeling a moment of cheer as the smell distracted her. She adored the complex scents of a fine fragrance. She didn't buy much make-up, but perfume? That was her weakness for sure, and she had a few fine bottles at home. If she'd had the time, she would have gone in, tested a couple, to see what was available here.

In another life, perhaps, she thought wryly, knowing the pressure they were under now.

Lucien led them out of the airport and to an unmarked vehicle parked in one of the officially demarcated bays near the exit. They put their bags in the trunk, before climbing into the back seat. One of the officers got into the front with Lucien. The other peeled off to get behind the wheel of another car.

The drive to the crime scene was a tense one, with the French officers sitting in stony silence in the front. Juliette and her team, bundled together in the back, exchanged glances, and shrugged.

Lucien accelerated along the highway, then peeled off and wove his way into central Paris. Ignoring the interpersonal dynamics for a moment, Juliette stared out of the window, taking in the exquisite architecture, the

character of the closely packed buildings, the shop fronts and the apartment blocks, the gray stone frontages that turned to pale gold in the rays of the sun, the balconies and window boxes.

She'd hoped for a glimpse of the Seine River or that they would drive past the Arc de Triomphe, but their route led them a different way, and a few minutes later, the car was rattling over cobblestones, heading down a narrow road.

Crime scene tape fluttered ahead.

"Here," Lucien said in a clipped voice.

Juliette felt her stomach twist. This was it. This was the place where the Goldenface killer had committed his latest heinous act.

Now she would have to see if there were similarities between this scene and the ones in New York. And, if there were differences, why they were apparent.

Lucien's next comment didn't help her. As they ducked under the yellow tape and headed toward the crime scene, he said, in a loud voice, "Of course, you know that what this man is doing is impossible?"

## CHAPTER FIVE

"Impossible? What do you mean?" Juliette asked Lucien, but her stomach clenched in anxiety, because she was wondering if there was something about this crime scene that they didn't yet know.

He turned to glower at her.

"How can anyone do such a paint job in a busy street? That would surely have taken time? You saw the photographs."

She nodded. The paint job was a stumbling block, for sure. And they hadn't yet figured it out in the New York and New Jersey areas. All his sites had been close to tourist areas, or busy commercial hotspots, and yet he'd been able to paint those faces as if he was invisible. The bodies had been left in more secluded streets, and she guessed it would be the same here, but as for his method, she was unsure.

"I know. We also couldn't figure that out," she said honestly. "What do you think happened?"

He shrugged. "I am not the one who has to get answers. This case has been taken away from us and now the American FBI is here. Now, it is your job, to find out about the impossible."

Juliette felt another pang. Despite her best efforts, it was clear that their presence was deeply resented. And honestly, she thought, could they not have put an easier man in charge? It seemed that Lucien had a huge chip on his shoulder, and try as she might to stay calm, his arrogance was rubbing her the wrong way. And they'd known each other for only twenty minutes!

"It doesn't look so busy to me, not here," Wyatt chipped in, his tone of voice challenging. "Maybe I'm just comparing it to New York standards, but this particular road looks very quiet. Hella narrow. I guess you guys don't drive SUVs here." He stared at the alleyway critically, as if personally affronted by the lack of spaciousness that had forced them all to get out of the car and walk the last thirty yards or so.

"It's part of what we will need to figure out," Juliette hastily said, as Lucien turned to glower at Wyatt. "How he did this. The main road is busy, but this point in the side road looks to be much quieter."

At night, she could imagine that not many people walked down this narrow, twisting alleyway. But what if someone had? How would

Goldenface have handled that? Did he have some kind of method for ensuring his privacy as he painstakingly painted the dead women's faces?

The Goldenface killer had painted his victims' faces in detail and methodically. He had obviously planned his movements, and ensured enough time to do so, and still, no one had noticed what he was doing.

It had been the same in New York, she remembered. Quiet areas, close to busy tourist streets. How was he doing it?

Wyatt paced up and down, looking at the sightlines and the viewpoints offered by this tall-walled, dark alleyway. Sierra stood quietly, looking at the scene and tapping some information into her phone.

Lucien was still standing there, watching them. Juliette glanced at him, but it was clear he had no intention of offering any help or further information.

"What can you tell us about the area?" Juliette asked Lucien.

Lucien shrugged, as if he were reluctant to answer even this basic question.

"This is an old part of the city," he said. "It is always busy. There are residential apartments on the main street down there, a few hotels, a famous bakery, and some other food shops. It is not the high street, not one of the busiest areas of Paris, but it is well frequented by visitors all the same."

"And how did he follow her here?" Lucien spoke again, staring at her challengingly. "How did he manage to target this woman?"

"I don't think he was looking for her specifically," Juliette said.

Lucien's eyes widened. For a moment, Juliette thought she saw his nostrils flare in anger at being contradicted. It was not a popular point of view. Sierra's eyebrows raised, and Wyatt looked around, surprised.

"A government minister's daughter is murdered. And you think it is not intentional? The country is going to be in an uproar - but no, it was not meant to be?"

"The others, in New York and New Jersey, were ordinary citizens. Not related to each other, or to anyone with a high profile," she said calmly.

"Perhaps it is not even the same killer, then," he said.

Juliette shrugged. "We have to assume it is. The postmortem will tell us more."

She stepped back and took a few photos of the scene on her phone. The body itself had been placed a few yards down the alleyway, but it wasn't easily visible from the main road.



"Who found the body?" she asked.

"Did you not read the case file?" Lucien snapped.

Juliette nodded. "I read it. I was wondering if there was more information."

"The body was found by a street cleaner, later in the evening, sometime after ten p.m." Lucien said. He seemed to have calmed down a bit, but his voice was still clipped. "He drove the sweeping machine down this alleyway and found her lying there."

Juliette considered whether others might have passed by and, seeing that strange, gold-painted face, wondered if the woman was real at all and simply walked on by. Certainly, it seemed likely that a few people must have passed this way. And that, of course, was the advantage he had, in a busy tourist area, with so many strangers and out-of-towners who didn't know the area and who probably thought that it was a mannequin or sculpture, just one of the strange wonders of Paris.

Juliette stared at the place where the body had been, and shivered.

"We need to figure out how he got away with this," she said. "He was careful enough to paint the woman's entire face in gold. He must have known that it would take time to do it. There must have been some kind of system in place to keep people away."

"I've just walked the alley and looked at the lines of sight," Wyatt said. "Guess I was the first to do that as there wasn't any sign of it in the case file." He sounded smug.

"What did you notice?" Juliette asked, aware that Lucien was seething.

"There's not a good line of sight into and through the alleyway. Go and look. It's got a slight bend in it and it means that nobody passing by would have easily seen what was happening. So he would have been able to work out of plain sight. Maybe he barricaded himself off while he was doing it, or maybe he killed them and painted the faces elsewhere and then moved the victims. You'd have to walk in and be going that way, to notice anything."

"Why did Claudette go down here?" Juliette wondered aloud.

"Perhaps she was followed, and grabbed, or else taken down here." Lucien said. Clearly he was wedded to the theory that she'd been deliberately targeted.

Sierra looked up from her phone. "I've been looking up the area online, seeing where the tourists go that have mapped out their routes, and there are

two other parallel streets nearby, both of which have tourist attractions along them. So most tourists would choose other roads."

But once down this alleyway, Goldenface could work undisturbed, thanks to the cover it offered. Why had Claudette walked down it at all, though? Why not choose a busier road?

This was going to be a major stumbling block unless they could figure it out.

"Are there cameras in this area?" she asked.

"There is one all the way up there. At the corner of the main street," Lucien replied.

So it wasn't an area where there were many street cameras. They weren't going to get lucky with footage. Again, Juliette wondered if the killer had known this. Had he arrived in Paris and immediately set to scoping out the perfect destination? Or perhaps he'd been here before.

"His sites in New York were the same," she said. "No cameras nearby."

"We cannot place cameras on every street corner," Lucien said, sounding defensive.

"We need to find out how he knew to come here," Juliette said. "Was he deliberately avoiding the cameras or was it just a coincidence? Why this place?"

Paris was a big, complex city, confusing to the first time visitor and even to people who thought they knew it well. It seemed like he had intimate knowledge of each city. Enough to do what he needed to do.

Then, as she considered how the killer might have gained his victims' trust, another thought occurred to her, sudden and shocking. It was a theory she wanted to take further.

"If we're finished here, I want to go to the pathologist's office," she said quickly.

## CHAPTER SIX

The pathologist's offices where Claudette's postmortem had been done were a half-hour drive away, through dense Paris traffic. Impatiently, Juliette stared through the windshield. She couldn't wait to see if her theory was correct.

The stop-and-go drive had included a lot of horn blowing from Lucien, who drove exactly as she had expected him to - impatiently, erratically, and poorly. They'd left the tourist areas behind. Those gracious buildings, with their history and streets, their glowing golden stone, were behind them and they were now weaving their way into a more industrial zone, outside central Paris, with a mishmash of buildings that looked both old and new. Lucien pulled up with a jolt outside a gloomy looking building with a concrete facade and no visible signage outside, other than a tiny and almost unreadable notice board. You'd need to be in the know to see that this was where the postmortems were done, Juliette thought.

They climbed out. It was just herself, Wyatt, and Lucien. Sierra had gone ahead to the police station with the other officers, to start doing some background work on the case and the location, and the available camera footage.

This wasn't Juliette's favorite part of the job. It was something to get through, something that had to be approached with a calm mind, and it was, of course, a step that could provide answers.

Lucien led the way inside. As soon as the door had swung shut, Juliette shivered. Pathology labs were the same the world over. Laced with a sickly strong disinfectant scent, cold, and institutional.

Lucien marched over to the front desk. In rapid French, he asked for Doctor Maxime. The receptionist pointed to the back of the room, and replied, in equally rapid French, "room three."

They stopped on the way to put on the necessary PPE and then headed down the frigid corridor. Lucien stalked ahead. Wyatt followed behind, strolling along in a casual way that told her he was no stranger to what lay ahead.

She always felt a pang when she stared down at the bodies. It was such a final moment, that their life was over. That their hopes, dreams, their

feelings were all gone, and all that was left was the sadness and anguish of their loved ones.

Juliette shook her head slightly, and forced herself to focus on why they were here.

Lucien tapped on the door, and a moment later, Doctor Maxime opened it. He was a tall, slender man in his mid-fifties, with graying hair, glasses, and a solemn demeanor.

"We're here to discuss the victim in the Goldenface case," Lucien said.

Doctor Maxime nodded. "Yes, I've already done the postmortem. I can give you my findings."

He walked over to one of the steel tables and drew back the sheet. Feeling as if she was about to face down an unseen enemy all over again, Juliette stepped forward.

In the flesh, it was even more obvious that this work was identical to the New York crimes. The paintwork was just as detailed. The golden face paint had been smoothed over every inch of skin on the head and neck, even covering what she knew would be brutal, vivid strangulation marks on the neck.

"Strangulation. Very quick. She died from lack of oxygen. There's damage to her windpipe, but no evidence of a struggle, beyond one broken nail and a couple of black cotton fibers under her other nails. Also, some of that face paint is under the nail of her index finger. No other injury or damage. She was in good health at the time of her death," he said in accented English. Juliette felt grateful for the detailed report.

The woman herself looked young and pretty. Although gold paint covered her hair, Juliette could see that it was thick and shoulder length.

Glancing sideways, she saw that even Lucien was spellbound by the creepy sight of the artwork, which, of the group, only she had seen before.

It would have taken time. Without a doubt, they could all see this now.

Goldenface might have chosen these specific areas in both cities for their lack of surveillance cameras and their relative isolation, while being close to tourist hubs. He was a killer who had carefully planned out his killing spree. He had chosen these places for a reason, and it seemed to her that he had known the area well. He had knowledge of the streets, the alleys, and the locations where he could do his work undisturbed.

But was it a *he* at all? That was the question she now wanted to know.

"Could this killer have been a woman?" she asked the pathologist.

Lucien swung around, and even from behind his face mask she could see his disparaging stare.

"You think so? Why?" he challenged her.

"It's the way the paint has been applied. So accurate, so detailed."

"And you think a man is not capable of such finesse?" He sounded insulted.

"A woman might have more practice in putting make-up on," she countered. "And perhaps be able to move around more freely, without being noticed."

"That's for sure," Wyatt agreed, coming down in her favor. "If you're in a dark alleyway and you see another woman coming toward you, you're not going to run for it. Even if she's carrying a can of paint."

"I am telling you, she was grabbed elsewhere and transported there," Lucien insisted.

Juliette turned to the pathologist. She wanted to know his take on her theory.

"What do you think, Doctor?"

He shrugged. "It's certainly possible, but in terms of strength, he or she would have to be strong fingered to have done the strangulation so fast. In terms of height, the victim is five-foot-four, so the killer would not need to be especially tall."

"What about moving and carrying her?" Juliette asked, remembering that the three U.S. postmortems had been inconclusive in that regard. Perhaps this one would provide something more substantial.

"There's no evidence from the postmortem that she was moved after death. She might possibly have been, just after death, but if so, then she was moved by someone very strong."

"Why do you say that?"

"There are no scrape marks, no scuffs, no other areas of bruising, her shoes were still in place, her hairpins were still in place."

Juliette nodded. She saw what the doc was saying. The killer needed to be strong enough to strangle the victims, and might also have had the physical strength to move them after death without dragging or damaging their bodies.

"He, or perhaps she, is ice cold," she muttered, glancing again at that flawless paint job, and thinking of what it would have taken, after

committing such a violent crime, and in a public area, to have calmly and accurately applied that golden paint.

Lucien looked at her and for the very first time she saw agreement in his eyes.

"Yes. A cold mind, to have had such a steady hand," he said.

"Are we done here?" Juliette asked. She didn't know if there was any other information to be had. No trace evidence that could lead them directly to the killer, and no real answers. Only a firm conviction that these killers were one and the same person.

"I guess we are," Wyatt said.

As Juliette thanked the doctor and walked to the door, she asked Lucien, "Have her close relatives been questioned?"

She stepped outside the autopsy room, feeling relieved. Of course the question made Lucien feel annoyed.

"Do you think French police are incapable? Yes, we interviewed her father, and her mother. Both are devastated, of course, and pressuring the police for answers."

"What's her background? Is she a local?"

"They spent a few years in Paris but then moved away. They only arrived back in the country two days ago and were staying in accommodation set aside for politicians when they travel to Paris for work. She went out on her own. Her mother thinks she was looking for a bakery. She didn't have her phone with her."

Juliette nodded. As with the U.S. victims, the background was clearly going to offer no leads. Claudette hadn't seemed to be setting out to meet anyone, but to find a bakery instead. That was similar to the first three victims. All of them had been killed at night. One had been walking home from work late, one had been a tourist on her way back from dinner in Greenwich Village, and one had been a student, in the area to do a research project.

"We need to cast the net wider and see if this killer has caused trouble in the past," Juliette said. "Can we start with the police reports?"

"What do you want to know from those?" Lucien asked, as they walked into the fresh, cool air of outside.

"I want to see if there are any reports of tourists - particularly Americans - stalking women, or acting suspiciously. That's one angle we can use, if we assume that he's American and he came here to do another series of kills. A

foreigner might be more noticeable, so we might get a lead here that we didn't have in the U.S."

"Good call," Wyatt said approvingly, as Juliette continued. "And the other angle, which I'm sure Sierra is already researching, is the gold paint itself. He must have bought it here, because there's no way he could have bought it in the States and shipped it over, and it's not something you could easily take in your luggage. It's a forbidden substance on flights. Where did he get it from?"

"You're assuming this killer is American, then?" Lucien asked.

Juliette shrugged. "For the moment, let's follow that theory and see if we can rule it out."

At that moment, her phone rang. It was Sierra calling.

"How are things going your side?" Juliette asked, as she walked out into the pallid spring sunshine.

"I've been working here, and I've picked up something." Sierra sounded excited. "I've found a potential criminal who checks a lot of the boxes. And I know where he's likely to be."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Juliette felt motivated as she climbed out of the car after yet another breakneck, jerky drive through Paris, courtesy of Lucien. She couldn't wait to find out what their tech whiz kid had discovered. It might be the breakthrough they needed.

Now, having left the pathologist's offices, they were back in the more scenic part of the city. The police station, or Prefecture de Police, was located in a gray stone building, with an ornate wrought iron balcony on the second floor, and a trio of French flags fanning out on poles above the main doorway. Outside, two policemen were waiting, speaking on radios.

"Well, this is it," Lucien said, as he slammed the car door. "Let's go."

Juliette really didn't want to make comparisons as she walked past the waiting police, but she had to admit to herself that the Parisian police were more effortlessly stylish than their American counterparts. Perhaps it was their hats - sleek, dark berets with white piping. Perhaps it was the design of their uniforms, or maybe the way they wore them.

Even Lucien, in his plainclothes of dark jeans and a sleek black jacket, cut an elegant figure. Just a pity about his personality, she thought, as he marched inside without any attempt at collaboration.

"Come on, we don't have time to waste," he snapped, as Juliette hurried after him. "Meeting you at the airport has already taken too much away from my day."

Drawing in an outraged gasp at that cheekiness, she rushed through the doorway.

Once inside, they were ushered through to a large, open-plan office with a few desks, and a few uniformed officers sitting at them, all hard at work, some in small meetings, collaborating around tables. The air smelled faintly of good coffee.

At the far end, Juliette spotted Sierra, her tan face brightly illuminated by the screen in front of her.

"What have you got?" Juliette asked eagerly, hurrying over to her, aware of the curious glances of the other police as she passed.

"It's here. I've been taking a look at social media in the area, logging onto chat sites, and looking at news articles."



Wondering how much of this was legally done, and how much of it was gold-standard hacking, Juliette asked curiously, "And what have you found?"

"There have been reports and outcries in this area of Paris, within the 7th arrondissement, about 'un Amerloque' which is a rather disparaging term for an American," Sierra explained.

"What's he been doing?" Juliette knew the Eiffel Tower was in the 7<sup>th</sup> arrondissement, together with other tourist hotspots like the Orsay Museum, and the gardens at Rodin's museum.

"Apparently offering to take photos of people using their cellphones, but a woman reported here that he also looks at the information on the phone. Then, later, he stalks them, harasses them, and apparently even tried to grab someone earlier today. A few of the women have complained to the hotel managers where they were staying, and it's on local chat groups also."

"Thank you, Sierra," Juliette said, feeling a rush of excitement. "This is exactly what we needed. Now we just have to find him."

She felt enthused, as if they finally had a real lead. The French member of the team, however, was less convinced.

"The police know nothing of this!" Lucien announced. "Are you sure it's correct?"

"Yes," Sierra confirmed, giving him a cheerful smile. "It's all here. And what's more, there's a photo of him. It was taken by one of the victims. I've zoomed in and found his face. I'm going to share it on the screen now."

Looking appalled, Lucien turned away and began barking out questions in French to one of the other officers. "Is this true?" he was saying. "Has such a case been called in?"

Meanwhile, deciding that the evidence Sierra had obtained was more than enough without any official police reports, Juliette peered at the grainy image, her eyes widening as she took in the man's features. He was average height, with a strong build and a broad face. He was carrying a backpack that looked to be heavy and full. Perhaps it contained gold paint.

At any rate, the arrondissement of Paris where he'd been operating was close to the one where the victim had been killed. Perhaps that wider area formed part of the hunting ground he'd scoped out so far.

Lucien turned back to them, looking mutinous. "It does appear this case has just been called in," he said. "The report is brand new, so I didn't hear of it as yet."

"What matters is where we can find this guy now," Wyatt said, his voice urgent. Juliette could see he was eager to start the hunt.

And at least he'd gotten the discussion away from politics, and toward where it needed to be.

"Backpack, average height, blonde hair, stocky build. You can see his features fairly clearly from the photo," Juliette said as Sierra zoomed in.

"We need to get out there and look for him," Wyatt said.

"Agreed," Juliette confirmed. "He seems to have kept to an area he's comfortable with. If he's been hunting victims in the public places, or scouting for them, or even surveying the lay of the land, then we might spot him."

"If we triangulate the area between where he was last seen, and the recent crime scene, we could start searching there," Lucien added. "It's late afternoon. There will be people moving now, going to and from work, out to eat. We could pick him up if he's out again."

"So, what's the plan? Each take one main street and patrol it?" Wyatt asked.

"Sounds like a good idea," Juliette agreed. "Let's split up and cover as much ground as we can."

Now, Sierra switched views and focused on the map. There was Paris and, she had to admit, it seemed like a daunting task to try to find him. Look at the size of the city. Look at the mazes of streets, the hiding places, the Metro undergrounds, and all those highways branching out of it, leading to the rest of France, to Europe.

Then, Sierra zoomed in further, and Juliette forgot her misgivings as she scrutinized the map.

"Here are the main streets in this local area," their tech expert confirmed. "And a few of them have cameras. I can log into those, and keep a lookout for him. I've got AI facial recognition technology here and I'll try to use it on as much of the footage as I can livestream."

"Can you organize that?" Juliette asked Lucien.

"Of course," he said. "It might take a half-hour or so, but it will be done as fast as we are able." In French, he snapped out a command to the officer nearby.

Wyatt drew in a breath, and Juliette had the unmistakable feeling that he was going to say something about how it would have happened faster in

America. With that in mind, she said hastily, "Let's pick our streets. I'll take that one."

It was Quai Jacques Chirac, and she vaguely remembered the name.

"I'll take that one." Lucien pointed out Avenue de Suffran.

Already, Sierra was calling up the streets on the map, and as Juliette watched, the first of the camera feeds came through.

"Okay. I'll take that other one there." Wyatt narrowed his eyes. "Avenue de la Bourdonnais." His pronunciation made Juliette flinch, but at least he was giving it a go. "Is that a type of cheese?" he asked.

From his tone of voice, it was a genuine question. Juliette had to suppress a snort, but Lucien was clearly triggered.

"It is not a cheese! You want to spend all day here practicing your nonexistent French? Or go catch a killer? He could be there, now!"

He grabbed his laptop bag and marched out, with Juliette and Wyatt following behind. She felt encouraged.

They were going straight to this American's hunting ground. And, if their plan worked, they would soon have their suspect in their sights.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

By the time they reached the demarcated area surrounding the Eiffel Tower, reinforcements were being summoned, and communication equipment had arrived. Lucien pulled up with a squeal of brakes next to a white unmarked Renault.

They got out, and the Renault's doors opened. A stylish woman with dark hair pulled back in a ponytail and gold earrings, who looked far too glamorous to be a cop in plainclothes, got out.

"I have earpieces here. These are state of the art technology. Spy Bluetooth devices. They look like ordinary earphones, but you will be able to communicate with each other, and with your base at the Paris police station," she said, in clear but accented English.

Juliette accepted one of the tiny devices, and put it in her ear. She could hear the faint hum of the Paris traffic, but over and above that, she could clearly hear Sierra's voice.

"Come in. Are you hearing me there?"

"Loud and clear," Juliette said, appreciating the clarity of the transmission that was a hundred times better than the crackle of police radios, and had the advantage of being undetectable.

"Got you, too."

She looked around. Lucien and Wyatt were putting in their earphones, too.

Beyond them, seeming incongruous at this time, was the Eiffel Tower, its quirky steel structure silhouetted against the darkening sky. She stared at it, taking in its magnificence, its outline bright with twinkling lights, wishing she could have seen this incredible landmark again in happier times, instead of while trying to catch a killer that might be lurking nearby.

"Okay, so here's the plan," Lucien said. "We'll spread out, but stay in earpiece contact. Keep your eyes open."

"I'll be watching the camera feeds," Sierra said. "I'll let you know if I see him. I've got his face mapped out. He won't escape my AI."

"And he won't escape my normal human eyes," Wyatt said, nodding to the others before turning and marching off to his assigned street.

Juliette did the same. It was a block's walk to her street, which was a wide - by Parisian standards - avenue that was filled with activity, with

hundreds of people walking to and fro. Some, dressed in dark coats and carrying bags or briefcases, were clearly heading home.

Many others, wearing brighter clothing and carrying cameras, were walking more slowly, out for a stroll or shopping, or perhaps to have dinner at one of the many restaurants. The aromas wafting toward her were divine. She smelled perfectly cooked steak, fragrant bread, and she could imagine the menu options awaiting hungry diners. Escargots drowned in garlic sauce, crusty bread, and sumptuous Brie cheese, and of course the colorful flotillas of sweet macarons, with their delicious filling and crispy meringue shells, tempting passersby to the windows.

There was no shortage of places for her to look as she carried out her surveillance, knowing that he might be using these innocent throngs of tourists as his camouflage.

The street was crowded, and he could be lurking in the shadows, hiding away inside a shop, or even sitting in a restaurant. But Juliette reasoned that he would want to be somewhere he could see people and follow them easily. If he was on the hunt, he'd want to be able to move fast. She kept walking, casting her gaze left and right, scrutinizing every face.

There was someone that made her take note. A man, stocky and broad, striding down the sidewalk. She looked at him carefully, comparing him to the mental images that she had committed to memory and also stored on her phone.

No, she was wrong. This wasn't the same man. His face shape was different, and his hair was receding. Close, but not a match.

She heard snippets of conversation from the other three as she walked on.

"I'm not seeing him. He's not here." Wyatt's voice sounded disappointed. "I'm moving further on."

"I've got a hunch. I'm going to check out this side street." That was Lucien and her ears pricked up.

"Nothing on the footage, so far," Sierra said.

"He's nowhere in sight on this road. It's busy, and I'm looking carefully." She added her own findings to the general chat.

The minutes ticked past, and Juliette began to feel a sense of hopelessness as the sun started to sink lower in the sky. He could be anywhere in Paris. Or even outside the city. They might not find him until it was too late. She'd been up and down her street, and the side streets, in the

Eiffel Tower area, three times now. She started wondering if she'd turned back too soon, and that perhaps he'd gone further away from the tourist epicenter, because she'd combed the area as thoroughly as she could. And there was no sign of him.

The tower itself was now brightly lit up, a gold, glowing beacon of light in the Paris night. The air was now fragrant with the smell of braised steak. Every time she passed one of the restaurants, a rush of warm air laced with garlic and a hint of wine, filtered out. The work commuters were gone, and everyone now on the street was there to enjoy themselves, to eat food and drink wine and celebrate life, and vacation time, in Paris.

And then, Sierra's voice came through her earpiece, loud and excited.

"Guys, I've found him! No doubt at all. Exact match. My AI has picked him up."

Her eyes flew wider and she felt her heart speed up. She added her question, "Where?" to the excited queries of the other two.

"He's heading east, away from the tower, along the road parallel to where you are, Juliette. I think he's looking for tourists. He's about two blocks away from you, Juliette. I'm sending the GPS coordinates now."

Juliette felt a thrill of anticipation. She was going to get a chance to confront the killer at last.

"He's not far from me," Lucien said. "I'm going to move in. We need to keep him in sight and chase him down."

Juliette started to move, too, marching along the sidewalk, dodging tourists and locals alike, heading away from the tower and crossing the street to get to the parallel road.

She heard Wyatt's voice, his breathing audible over the radio, as he ran to catch up, too.

And then, Sierra's voice came through again. "He's stopped. I can see him. He's looking around. He's spotted something. He's moving again. He's heading south now, away from you guys!"

Juliette broke into a jog, her heart pounding. She was almost there. Almost within reach. But now, he was moving away, and she'd need to be alert enough to spot him from any angle. She could see his face in her mind's eye, his distinctive features, the look and shape of his head.

The sun was fully set now, and the air was growing chillier. But Juliette didn't feel cold. She was filled with adrenaline. This was the moment they'd all been waiting for.

She ran faster, her feet pounding on the pavement, her eyes locked on the entrance to the Place de la Bastille. And then, there he was. The American. Standing on the corner, looking around, perhaps searching for his next victim. He was watching a group of tourists closely who were about to pose in front of the Eiffel Tower, which could be clearly seen from here on the horizon.

Juliette broke into a sprint, her heart pounding. She was almost there. Almost within reach. She could see his face now, his distinctive features, the same ones she'd seen in the photos. He was exactly as described.

She could see Lucien approaching, his face intent and predatory looking as he, too, spotted their suspect.

"I've seen him. I'm thirty yards away."

"I'm about the same. Closing in," Juliette said.

"Let's take him down!"

Juliette jumped at the sound. Wyatt's voice was surprisingly loud. There he was, striding out from behind a pillar, approaching the American tourist with purpose in his stride.

But his voice had been too loud.

And clearly, the man they were chasing had an ear well attuned to the American accent.

His head turned sharply. He stared at Wyatt, taking him in, seeing the intent in his strides.

And then, he turned and ran.

Juliette gasped. She hadn't expected him to make a break for it. But he was sprinting away, dodging through the pedestrians, and weaving around the streetlamps, past the buildings, past the throngs of tourists who were milling around, staring up at the building and waiting to get in and taking their photos.

"Suspect escaping!" she said. "Sierra, see if you can track him!"

And then there was no time to do anything but chase him down.

The American was fast. He weaved through the crowd, ducking and dodging, every now and then glancing back to see if they were still following him. He almost rammed straight into a tourist and she yelled, swearing at him in colorful German, waving her arms so that Juliette, following, had to jump aside.

Resuming the chase, Juliette surged forward, her arms and legs pumping, her breath coming in short gasps, seeing Lucien sprinting alongside her.

But he was fast. Too fast. And he was gaining ground. And there were so many people around, congregating, moving slowly, getting in the way of their sight and their movement.

There was a real chance, Juliette knew with a flash of fear, that they might lose him in the dark and the crowds.



## CHAPTER NINE

They called him Goldenface. He knew that because he'd heard the police speaking about it.

That had been purely by chance. It was the closest he'd ever come to getting caught, and it had been back in New York, just after his second kill.

He'd hidden himself well, and followed his plan for leaving the scene, but had left a critical piece of evidence behind. Critical to him, anyway. Perhaps the police would never have noticed or seen it, but to him, it felt like a sharp glass fragment tearing at his mind.

So he'd gone back to get it, and they'd already been on the scene.

"It's another Goldenface kill," he'd heard the officer say into the radio, in worried tones.

He'd been worried, too. Secrecy and staying under the radar, staying disguised even when not in his golden skin, were vital to him. Luckily, he'd passed by, head bowed, heart drumming, and they hadn't realized or followed. And he hoped they hadn't realized that the small piece of evidence belonged to him.

Since then, he'd been more careful. As cautious as he could be.

Now, in the tiny Paris apartment that he'd rented a couple of months ago – just another way he planned ahead - he was washing off the paint.

He didn't use real paint, of course. For his own use, and to paint the faces of his beautiful statues, he used a high-end body make-up. He'd found a brand that supplied the perfect color, a dull gold with a very slight sheen to it. He couldn't always use it. It depended on the circumstances. Once, in the States, he'd used a different color on himself. He was sure the police knew what the paint was, that they'd analyzed the formula and tracked the supplier, but he'd planned very carefully and had bought more than he needed, over time.

He smiled as he thought about the message he'd left, flying all the way back to the U.S. to leave that phone in the apartment. He'd wanted to leave a breadcrumb trail. He was eager to tease them with his brilliance, and to take joy in the fact that they were blundering after him, too inept and too slow.

Although, perhaps, if they were faster, he might be able to arrange a special meeting here in Paris? There was one of the FBI agents that had

caught his eye. It wasn't a certainty that this could happen. But if the circumstances played out the way he thought they would, it would be nice to have. Something to remember. An experience that he could replay in his mind.

Carefully, using a special make-up remover, as the paint was waterproof, he was now standing in the shower and wiping it off.

It was a terrible feeling to rid himself of the thickly painted disguise. He felt that it was a part of him. That he was, in fact, that gold statue. When he put on the paint, it felt as if he put on a whole layer of power and invincibility.

He was disguised. He was a figure, an image, something that people would watch and wonder about. He wasn't himself anymore.

"I am strong. I am timeless. I am here to be admired." He muttered the words as he washed the gold away, looking with distaste at the color of his naked skin.

Just a structure. A metallic form, something stronger and more powerful than humanity, more timeless than a lifespan.

Like the Eiffel Tower, which he could see from his window.

Stepping out of the shower, grasping a towel, he slung it around his waist and walked over to that incredible view. There was the tower, strong, enduring, made of steel. Visible now as evening fell, there was a strange romance about it that pulled at his heart.

Statues, sculptures, structures. Their order and their indestructible nature spoke to his soul. That was why he created his statues, following the rules, the guidelines, that only he could see.

He was one of the immortal, he thought, with a swelling of pride. He was a figure in the night, an entity that would last longer than any of them.

Hunting down his statues in the States had been thrilling. It had taught him what his true calling was. But here in Paris, with its arts and culture, the history and workmanship evident in every angle, every direction, this felt like more.

It felt like he belonged here.

"It was such a good decision." He nodded in approval. "Coming here was the right thing, for sure."

It was an exciting city, and there was so much more of it to explore. Perhaps he'd take a walk now, scope out some more likely places where his next statue could be found.

He might even take the time to enjoy a meal, to experience what the tourists did. There were some good restaurants nearby. It would be a change, for a moment, to come down from his pedestal and to act like an ordinary person. Then, he could stroll through the streets, keeping an eye out for exactly the right place.

He knew what he needed, and where he had to go. He kept his props with him, in his bag. Everything he required was there, packed neatly away.

Of course, his hands did the most critical job of all, and he stared down at them in silent approval.

They were strong, long fingered, and yet sensitive. These hands could grab a victim and crush her to death around her neck in a few moments. Wrapped in gloves, it didn't matter if the victim tore or ripped at his fingers for a few seconds. He wasn't worried. They were cheap, ordinary gloves, to be found anywhere, and they wouldn't lead back to him. Look at all the street performers, after all. It was very common for mime artists and clowns to wear gloves.

It was only after death that the real mastery began. And then, he was ready, with his brushes and his sponges, putting the finishing touches, the artful highlights, and strokes to make his victims' dead faces appear exactly as if they had been molded from gold.

Goldenface. He nodded to himself. He liked that name. He liked the power and the danger it held.

Smiling, he thought of the Parisian night waiting to be explored, and the powerful addition he was going to make to what was already out there.

He glanced at the window again, and then away, and then at the bag that lay beside him. It would take him an hour to put on his disguise and apply that golden paint again. He was longing for it, but for now, it would be better to go out without it. Just in case. He needed to seem normal, ordinary, and not to attract attention. Another tourist, nothing more. Quickly, he dressed.

He headed out of his apartment, into the corridor. From somewhere, he could hear a shouted argument. Closer by, a baby cried. Life was going on and people were living it.

His mouth twisted as he hurried down the stairs. There was an elevator, but he never took it. He liked to walk and climb. To be fit and strong. That helped him in the moments when strength was needed. You could not neglect the health and power of your body.

Outside, the evening had cooled, and a breeze wafted across the road, bringing a delicious whiff of scents from the perfumery shop across the street from the apartment.

He was clad all in black, to blend in. If there was a color that defined Parisians, black was it. They loved their black coats, their dark pants, their black scarves, and gloves.

He smiled and allowed himself to breathe deeply. For a moment, he felt almost...normal. Just a regular guy, taking a walk in the night. No one was watching him. No one was suspicious.

It felt good. He needed to keep it that way. But at the same time, he couldn't forget that he was more than this.

Now, he brought the image of the map into his mind. He'd looked at it earlier and he had a good recall of the area, and of the streets. He knew where his next statue should be placed. The walk would allow him to assess the site in more detail.

He walked, winding his way through the streets, his eyes and ears open. He'd been careful to change his route each night, never taking the same route twice. After all, although he knew where the street cameras were, one still couldn't be too careful.

And as he walked, he felt that sense of power and freedom. He was a man invisible, a figure who created golden beauty, and the Paris night was his playground. His new hunting ground. A place where beautiful statues, and great opportunities, waited. Where he knew he could become more than he was now. He would channel the power within the city and let it feed him.

Purposefully, he headed off, ready to prepare for his next statue.

## CHAPTER TEN

This man was running over the bridge crossing the Seine River. The minute he'd seen that Wyatt was a plainclothes police officer, he'd taken off and was racing away. Fear clenched at Juliette's stomach as she raced in pursuit, because in the darkness, in this crowded area that was thronged with tourists, there was a serious risk he might get away.

The three of them were now in hot pursuit. She and Wyatt were at a big disadvantage, because this was a completely unfamiliar part of Paris to them. She recognized a landmark as she sprinted – Place d'Iema, housing the circular, pillared frontage of the Guimet Museum, and the imposing statue of a man on horseback. She recalled, from somewhere in her memory, that the statue was of George Washington. A surprising American presence in Paris – just like the man they were now chasing down. Their fleeing fugitive didn't stay in the crowded square but ran down an equally busy street.

Lucien would know the area well, but in the melee of weaving through the crowds and trying to keep this man in sight, she had no idea where Lucien was.

She ran faster, her feet pounding against the pavement, her breath coming in short bursts. It was a stop-start process. There were just so many tourists here. They were descending on the place in waves. Ahead was a gaggle of more than twenty schoolchildren, all wearing red hats. Beyond was a group of tourists with a guide explaining, loudly, about the history of the famous Eiffel Tower.

She kept her eyes fixed on the man they were chasing. He was still in view, little more than a shadow as he ducked around the side of a building and raced down an alleyway.

He clearly knew the area, and was familiar with the shortcuts, and again, she felt deeply worried that he had a big advantage here.

If he'd researched and mapped out this area then she might lose him.

"Police! Excuse me!" She heard a shout to her left and knew that Wyatt was wending his way through the crowds. He'd gone further over that way and it was a good decision, because the fleeing man was veering left. Now she was the one at a disadvantage, who was falling behind.

"Excuse-moi," she shouted breathlessly. As she fought her way through the crowds, she lost the man for a stomach clenching moment. A cab pulled up in front of her, and three elderly passengers got out, their backs to her, wandering across the sidewalk so that she had to skid to a stop and veer sideways to avoid them.

Gasping in a breath, she looked for the fleeing man again, but he was gone. Pressure bore down on her hard.

She couldn't afford to mess this up. Already, Wyatt's shout might have warned this man too early, and given him the few precious seconds he needed to get away. She knew that Lucien would hold this against them and say that the exercise had been incorrectly done.

But then, she saw him once more, darting around the corner of a building. He was running for his life, desperate to get away and disappear into the night. Stocky he might be, but he wasn't unfit. He was doing everything he could to avoid their chase.

Juliette put on a burst of speed, and this time, she felt she was gaining ground. She could see Wyatt, who'd crossed the road, pounding along the sidewalk. Should she join him?

No. This man was clearly sneaky, and if he suddenly darted right to avoid Wyatt, then she'd be in a position where she could take up the chase. They didn't want to leave an escape route for him to take.

"I'll stay this side!" she shouted, just to keep him in the loop if he heard. She didn't think he would, but to her surprise, the response came back.

"Okay. I'm keeping left for now!"

With Wyatt in the lead, all she could do was pursue him as fast as possible.

An outraged cry from up ahead told her that their fleeing fugitive didn't have the same consideration as she did for pedestrians who got in his way. Juliette heard a volley of swear words, angrily shouted in a woman's voice, and guessed that he was bumping, jostling, and barging his way through the crowds.

Hopefully, that would slow him down and give them more of a chance to catch him.

She was aware of the people around her, knowing that getting entangled in a crowd or colliding with someone could slow her just as easily. She had to remain hyper aware of her surroundings, but focused on her quarry. Now, further away from the Eiffel Tower, the crowds were thinning out and he

was gaining speed again. As she watched, he shot down a road to the left. Now, she was all the way out of this chase. Her judgment call had been wrong, though she'd still had to cover the base in case he'd veered the other way. Otherwise it would have left that escape route wide open.

But he'd gone left, and it was up to Wyatt and Lucien to keep pace with him.

Now feeling the pressure even more, Juliette watched for a gap to cross the busy road and then raced across it, leaping out of the way of a speeding cab whose driver wasn't slowing down for anyone, whether alive or soon-to-be-run-over. The angry blast of his horn followed her as she leaped across the gutter and onto the sidewalk. Then, she darted down the narrow road where this man had disappeared.

There was no sign of Wyatt or Lucien, no sound other than her own footsteps. She could no longer see the man she was pursuing, and felt worried that he'd had a bolt hole down here. If he'd disappeared into one of these closely packed buildings and slammed the door behind him, they'd be none the wiser.

Could she hear him?

Juliette stopped, her breathing ragged, looking around her frantically. The man had disappeared, and she was alone.

And the night seemed to be getting darker by the second. She could hear nothing nearby, only the sound of voices from the restaurant she'd passed a minute earlier, and the strains of music coming from a window somewhere above her.

She kept going, but more slowly now, her gaze darting around, searching the shadows and alleys. She might have been slower, but perhaps that gave her a chance to spot him if he had managed to duck out of Wyatt's sight.

Then, she heard a noise from up ahead. Footsteps. Scuffling.

Cautiously, Juliette jogged forward, her heart pounding. There was another crossroad in front of her, just a couple of yards wide. And there, sprinting down it, she saw a familiar figure. Wyatt. He must have spotted the fugitive. With renewed determination, Juliette started running as fast as she could, her feet splashing through a puddle on the cobblestones, and her footsteps resounding off the close, stone walls.

There he was! She had him in her sights again. The man had almost reached the end of the alleyway, but Wyatt was gaining on him, and Juliette was close behind.

As he rounded the final corner, she heard him give a cry of surprise. Rushing from the main road ahead, toward the alleyway's exit point, determination radiating from him, was Lucien. But in a flash, this fleeing man changed his plans. He skidded to a stop, veered hard right, and set off down the sidewalk with renewed speed.

With a disappointed oath, Lucien turned to run in pursuit, but Wyatt shouted out, "Hang on! I've got this!"

As Juliette jogged along, she saw now that the crowds were out of the way, her long-legged partner was capable of an astonishing turn of speed. He raced down the cobblestones, eating up the distance between himself and the fleeing man. He was going to reach him, and soon. He was leaving Lucien behind.

And then, Wyatt launched himself at the man in an all-American tackle, grabbing him around the legs, and causing him to crash to the ground.

Juliette's heart stopped for a moment as she witnessed it.

"Got you!" Wyatt cried, as the man shouted in panic.

Expertly, with the ease of long practice, Wyatt kept him down, pulling his arms behind him. By the time Juliette and Lucien ran up, Wyatt had him firmly handcuffed and was hauling him to his feet.

Juliette felt reluctantly impressed. That tackle had shown some serious technique and it had been very effective.

But Lucien looked darkly offended.

"I don't know what you are trying to do," he grumbled breathlessly. "Injure everyone? Get yourself a broken arm?"

Breathing hard, Wyatt shrugged, and Juliette was impressed all over again that he seemed to have shrugged off Lucien's criticism as if it didn't even affect him. "I got the suspect. Nobody's hurt. Now, where are we going to question him?"

Lucien, however, was not letting this go. He glowered at him, and then at Juliette.

"I have had enough of you two interfering in our case. You have added nothing of value. You messed up the approach to this suspect, and almost enabled this man to get away. Now you come with unnecessary theatrics in capturing him. This is not working. When we get back to headquarters, after we process this arrest, I am going to tell your bosses that you are not needed here." Staring from one to the other, he added, emphatically, "We, the French police, will do this alone."



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Juliette walked into the police station with a sense of deep foreboding.

This was all going wrong. Instead of working together, Lucien's resentment toward them had reached a head, and he no longer wanted them on the case at all.

She was sweaty, scuffed, and sick of this conflict. While the men were arguing about who should have done what, Goldenface was far ahead, and laughing.

She'd hoped that the conflict might have simmered down in the time it took them to reach the police station, but it hadn't. If anything, it had escalated.

While processing the American, whose name was revealed to be Ryan Blevins, Lucien had ignored the FBI agents and spoken only to the suspect.

He'd insisted on doing the search of his possessions together with a fellow officer and, hoping this would simmer the situation down, Juliette had agreed. She'd hoped with all her heart that the search might uncover something incriminating, but in the backpack, there had only been a camera, a couple of water bottles, and a girlie magazine. No gold paint.

Finally, he was ready to be escorted to the interview room. While the other police officers did that, Wyatt had done his best to redeem the situation.

"Look, all I did was ask the man a question," he said. "I couldn't exactly grab him before speaking to him, could I? You can get sued for that in the States, you know."

"You could have gotten closer," Lucien said through gritted teeth.

Juliette simply didn't know how to rectify this. The Frenchman was oozing resentment from every pore, and it was very likely that he was going to contact the FBI in the States and ask for them to be withdrawn. Now, Wyatt had given him an excuse, by approaching the suspect and identifying himself as police when he was still far enough away to have enabled him to run.

Instead of acknowledging that Wyatt's skillful tackle had redeemed the situation, Lucien was implying it had only made things worse. It wasn't fair at all.

But Juliette was deeply worried that an adverse report now, would backfire on them. It might mean this important task force was sent straight back home with their tails between their legs. It might mean that Goldenface got away, free.

Suddenly, Juliette decided she couldn't take this anymore. She and Wyatt had tried their best to be diplomatic and to smooth things over, to work with the French. They'd been bending over backwards, give or take a few unfiltered comments from Wyatt. But Lucien's arrogance and attitude was way out of line.

"You can go," he told them. "We will handle things from here."

Juliette felt temper surge within her. She swung around to face him.

"We're not going anywhere," she threatened. "We were called in to help catch this killer, and we're not boarding an airplane until he's under arrest. You can do what you want and say what you want, but you can't change that protocol, even if you try to manipulate the situation your way."

Hands on hips, she stared angrily at Lucien. She could hear the fury in her own voice. Her dad had always said she was a fireball when she lost her temper, and she could see Lucien looked startled. Even Wyatt stepped back, as if wanting to keep out of range of her death glare.

"This is a dangerous killer. Women have lost their lives, families are in mourning, the political scene is ready to explode, and you're trying to score petty points by saying Wyatt should have waited another two seconds before speaking to a suspect? Really?"

She glared at Lucien. To her surprise, now that she was spitting mad at him, she saw a hint of respect in his gaze. Maybe, even, a slight touch of embarrassment.

"Perhaps I overreacted," he mumbled. "It doesn't mean I need you here. You are not needed on this case."

"Oh, yes, we are!" Juliette gritted her teeth as she replied. "We are needed here. We've chased this guy for more than a month. We have an inventory of the scenes, we have maps of kills, we have so much intelligence on the sites and locations. We have a whole lot of potential clues that might just lead us to him, if we find a match here. And right now, I should tell you that if you submit an adverse report on us, I'm going to contact your bosses here in the French police. I'm going to tell them that you are arrogant, that you have not tried to work with us or be part of a team, and that your own behavior is what has sabotaged the case."

Breathing hard, she stared at him. She felt ready to bite him! That's how mad she was.

Lucien stared back, with astonishment in his eyes.

For a while the tension in the room felt tangible, a shimmering force. Wyatt was nodding in support, his face approving.

Then Lucien let out a breath, and shrugged.

"I was angry," he said. "This is a stressful situation for all of us. I agree that I spoke out of turn. I accept that you will be working with us."

He still didn't sound as if he liked it, but Juliette thought it was as close as she was going to get to an apology. Sensing that it was wiser not to dwell on this for now, she decided it was better to move on.

"We need to question him. What are we going to do about interviewing him?"

Wyatt cast a sidelong glance at Lucien.

"Isn't it obvious?" he asked. "He's an English speaking American. Juliette and I must interview him."

Lucien was gathering his anger again, to Juliette's consternation. "That, I cannot allow. This crime has taken place on French soil. I am the appointed representative to oversee the case. If he is found not guilty of this crime, he may be guilty of other offenses, and I will have to place those charges."

Now, he had a point, and Juliette knew she couldn't do a thing about it. He was right.

"I'm the psychology expert," she said to Wyatt. "I should probably be in there for the questioning."

Now, Wyatt was glaring at her! "I've done how many interrogations in the Middle East?" he shot back. "I know how to get into the mind of a suspect, playing nice guy and then tough guy. You gotta ease into things, make sure you have the suspect's respect, and then back off again and give them a chance to spill it out."

"Look, we can't all three go in there. Three officers to one suspect is going to be totally out of balance," Juliette protested.

Now, Lucien was smirking. "You see? You are blaming me, but the truth is you two Americans do not know how to work together. You are like children, no?"

Juliette jerked her head around, feeling furious by that unfair insult. Out of all of them, Lucien had been the most childish and moody, especially when he'd been provoking them.

With the clash of two male egos, and the success of the case hanging in the balance, there was only one person who was capable of defusing the surge of conflict.

"You're right, Wyatt," she said, causing both men to stare at her in amazement. "You've got more than enough experience. We still have our earphones in place, so I'll watch through the observation window, and if I think of anything, I'll let you know."

At least the atmosphere in the small side office was no longer glaringly hostile. Finally, it seemed they were over the hump of animosity that had almost destroyed their teamwork.

Lucien was already nodding. "It is a good plan," he said.

Wyatt looked from one to the other, then nodded. "Alright," he said. "Let's go get him." He put his earpiece back in, and so did she.

Trying to ignore how disappointed she felt at not getting to be face-to-face with this suspect, remembering that both Wyatt and Lucien were capable and experienced, Juliette went into the back room and looked through the observation window.

Perhaps this would all be for the good, she thought. If this was their suspect then it would be case closed, and it wouldn't matter who had asked the questions. If he was not, then she'd have a chance to see how Wyatt and Lucien handled the questioning.

And, who knew, maybe she'd even pick up a few tips along the way, she thought wryly.

The interview room was small and oppressive, the walls a dull gray that seemed to swallow up the light. Wyatt and Lucien sat across from the suspect, their faces set and determined.

He was a big man, Juliette noted, with a thick neck and broad shoulders, wearing a red plaid shirt, and with a tattoo on his right forearm. His eyes darted between the two detectives, and his hands shook slightly.

Glancing down at her phone as it buzzed, Juliette saw it was Sierra texting her.

*"How'd it go? You get him?"*

In the rush, there hadn't been time to update their IT and hacking expert. Quickly, while Lucien and Wyatt were going through the formalities, she messaged back.

*"We got him. Wyatt tackled him. Now they're questioning him. I'm in the back room, watching."*

She looked up again, as Wyatt and Lucien began to ask their questions. Lucien spoke first, his voice harsh and stern.

"Monsieur Blevins, you ran from the police."

"No, no, wait!" Immediately, the American suspect spoke in a harassed voice. "I didn't run from the police! I didn't know you were police! How was I to know that?"

Juliette saw Wyatt's lip curl, and he leaned forward, his face hard.

"Let's cut the evasion out, Blevins. As soon as you had an idea we were law enforcement, you set off at a hard run. We identified ourselves as police several times. You ignored us and did not stop!"

The man's eyes widened, and he glanced around wildly. "Okay, okay," he said, his voice trembling. "I'm sorry. I just... I just panicked. I was scared and confused. I didn't know what to do."

Lucien folded his arms. Juliette had to admit, that with his dark looks and that threatening frown, his presence was intimidating.

"Now you know what to do," he said. "You can answer our questions. Truthfully. No lies."

For a moment, Blevins stared at them mutinously. And then, with a sigh, he nodded.

"So, what do you want to know?"

"Why were you feeling so guilty? You ran from the police. What did you expect to happen?" Wyatt threatened.

Blevins looked down at his hands, and then back up at the two detectives.

"Look, I - er - I wanted to have some fun when I was in Paris," he stammered. "I was looking for - for the right lady. But I wasn't having much luck, and yesterday, someone said she was going to report me to the police for stalking her."

"You took details from the cellphones?" Lucien asked.

He shook his head, looking baffled. "No, no. I wouldn't do that. I don't have much knowledge of phones. But I did hear those women mention the hotel they stayed at, and I admit, I did go to the bar and try to get them to have a drink with me, when they came downstairs. Perhaps I was too pushy. They did seem offended."

Juliette's eyes narrowed. So he was giving an alternative reason? It certainly sounded possible. She didn't know if she believed it, and decided that the real crux of the matter would be if he had a confirmable alibi.

She was about to whisper to Wyatt, through her earpiece, that he should do this, but then stopped herself. Quit being so anxious just because you're not in there, she told herself firmly.

*"Is he guilty?"* Sierra messaged, obviously feeling as tense about this as she was.

*"Not as yet,"* she messaged back. *"He's given a reason for having run. It doesn't make much sense, but it's a reason all the same. Now alibi must be checked."*

Lucien spoke in a stern tone. "Your alibi for last night. Can you account for your movements? Was anyone with you?"

Blevins looked confused. "Last night? What time?"

"Just give us your movements, sir," Wyatt said.

The man seemed to relax a little, as if relieved that he wasn't being accused of something specific. "Well, I was at the hotel until about seven in the evening. At the bar, drinking, and talking to a few people. Then I met a friend of mine, who was also staying at the hotel, and we headed out to a restaurant: Pierre's. We met - er - we met two ladies there and made quite a night of it. I think we parted ways at about two in the morning."

Juliette watched as Wyatt and Lucien exchanged a look. She realized that, despite the tension between them, they were actually a good team. Despite their differences, they were working together, and she was glad she hadn't had to intervene.

She knew what they were thinking; if he was telling the truth, then there was no way he could have done what they were accusing him of. He wouldn't have had time.

Wyatt held up his hands. "Alright, Mr. Blevins. We'll check your alibi and get back to you. But if it turns out to be true, then you're off the hook."

Blevins nodded, looking relieved. "Thanks," he said. And then he added in a softer tone, "Look, I'm sorry I ran. I was just scared. I'll - I'll be more careful when I chat up the ladies next time."

Juliette knew that one or other of the men would now take the details, make a few calls, perhaps check the camera footage, and then if it all checked out, Blevins would be released.

But right then, her phone buzzed again.

It was Sierra.

*"I think I've got a breakthrough here. Call me, quick, when you can."*

## CHAPTER TWELVE

Taking out her earpiece so that she wouldn't interrupt Wyatt, Juliette got on her phone and called Sierra in a hurry.

"What is it?" she asked. "What breakthrough? What have you found?"

She was beginning to have serious respect for the techie's abilities. After all, twice now they'd been at a dead end, and twice, Sierra had come through with something.

"I've been researching the exact type of paint this killer used. I even called the pathologist's offices so that they could give me their input. And I've found out what brand it is."

"What is it?"

"It's a type of top quality body and face paint used by the theater, generally. They have a lot of colors and gold is one of them. The gold looks to be an exact match."

"And have they had any big orders? Where can you get it in Paris?" This could be a seriously strong lead. She felt excited.

"Several different shops. And online. I've called around all the shops and none of them have had any big orders. But here's what's interesting."

"What is that?"

"The company sales manager, who I spoke to just now, said they've sold about double the amount of gold paint that they usually would in the past two months. So, someone's been sneakily buying it up."

"Is that so?" Juliette felt worried by this, mostly because it showed the level of cunning and preplanning that they were up against. This killer looked to be a meticulous planner.

And the quantities equated to a lot of gold paint. How many victims, exactly, was he planning to kill? She remembered the paint cans in the empty apartment. He'd stockpiled there, too, so maybe he was doing the same here.

"We need to investigate that. He must have either ordered online to a French address, or else flown here sometime in the past couple of months, and bought up some stock. Maybe both."

"I've asked all the shops to send me any information they have. Unfortunately, there's no camera footage in any of the shops that goes that far back, and very few of them take any customer details. They're getting

the online orders for me, but that might only be ready tomorrow, as it's done through a different company. But I guess we keep trying?"

"I guess we do," Juliette said. "If you're done there, do you want to meet us here?"

"When I wrap up here, I'm going to stay with a friend tonight," Sierra said. "One of my university friends lives in Paris, so I'll go and have a drink with her and then sleep over."

"Okay. I think you can probably head off now, and we'll touch base tomorrow," Juliette said. There was nothing further for Sierra to do tonight. Already, the stores were closed and they would need to wait until tomorrow to get any further information.

She headed out of the back room, and came face-to-face with Wyatt and Lucien. Both looked disappointed.

"The alibi checks out," Wyatt said.

"Unfortunately, we have confirmed it beyond any doubt," Lucien agreed.

At least they were briefly united in their disappointment, she thought. The questioning had brought the two men together. But this was a huge blow. She'd felt they were so close to catching the killer, but now they were back to square one. It was late at night, and they had no leads apart from the paint.

"Sierra is researching the stores that sell the type of paint he uses," she said. "She might have more information on that tomorrow. But for now, I guess there's nothing we can do."

It felt frustrating to say that, as if she was admitting defeat, but Lucien nodded.

"I will go home, in that case."

"You live in Paris?" she asked.

He nodded. "I have an apartment just outside of the 11th arrondissement."

"Wife? Kids?" Wyatt asked. "Anyone special in your life? Or not?"

"I have a cat," Lucien replied defensively, with a flash of resentment in his eyes.

Wyatt raised his eyebrows. "Better get home to her, then. My wife and I have one of those. They don't like it when their humans arrive late."

"What kind of cat do you have?" Juliette asked, wanting details.

"She is a tortoiseshell called Mona Lisa, because I found her near the Louvre," he explained. "She's three years old. I rescued her when I was at a



crime scene. She was a kitten then, stuck up on the roof of a deserted building and crying loudly,” Lucien said. “We had to get a ladder to bring her down. She was starving and infested with fleas.”

For the first time ever, Juliette saw tenderness in his eyes.

“That’s exactly what I do!” she said. “I also rescue animals. I’ve found a cat and a dog when I’ve been out on crime scenes. I’m so glad you did that.”

Finally she could say something genuinely positive, and speak from the heart. She saw, again, the surprise in his eyes as he looked at her.

“That is good,” he said, sounding warmer.

“We’d better get going,” Wyatt reminded them, checking his watch, and bringing the conversation about rescues to a close.

“We can regroup tomorrow,” Juliette said. “First thing? Say, seven a.m. at this police station?”

“Okay. Speak then,” Lucien said. “You can take the keys to the unmarked, seeing your bags are already in it. Use it from here. I will take the Metro back home, and use my motorcycle tomorrow.” He handed her the keys before turning and striding away.

Juliette felt suddenly tired. It had been a long, exhausting day.

“Where are we staying?” she asked Wyatt.

“I’m looking here. I see they made the arrangements. We got booked into a hotel not too far from here. Looks like quite a nice place,” he said approvingly.

They headed back to the car, and drove to the hotel, which was a couple of miles away, and on the outskirts of Paris. She guessed that was a sensible decision, because there was convenient parking in a lot behind the hotel, and the place was bigger and more comfortable than the tiny hotels and apartments she’d seen in the city center. A spacious hotel in central Paris was only for the wealthy, and not those on a police budget.

Walking into the hotel, wheeling her bag behind her, she noticed a bar to the left.

“Hey, they have Budweiser in here! Look, there’s the logo!” Wyatt sounded amazed, as if this was the best thing to have happened to him all day. “The hotel bar has Bud? What a find! Look, I’ll meet you here in half an hour? Want a drink and a bite of food?” he asked.

“Sure,” Juliette said. She was starving, and after the stress of the day, she could use a drink. It would be nice to sit down, recharge, and get to know

her investigation partner a bit better.

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Half an hour later, Juliette was sitting at one of the wooden tables in the now busy and bustling hotel bar. She had a glass of white wine in front of her. French wine. She wasn't a connoisseur of wine, but enjoyed red or white, as long as it wasn't too sweet. Sitting opposite her, Wyatt had a Budweiser in a tall, frosted glass.

"Well, what a day," he said. "Cheers!"

"Cheers," she replied, taking a welcome sip of her wine as the barman brought menus.

"Interesting day. Pity we didn't get further, but I guess that's the name of the game. I mean, you can't win them all on the first day."

"No, you can't." Wanting to dig down a little more into his experience, she asked, "How many murder cases have you been involved in?"

"A few," he said cagily. "I've been more involved in the policing and security side, with my background in the army, so you could say I've been tangentially involved in a few. And you?"

"I've been investigating serious crimes ever since joining. I went straight into the BAU unit," she said.

He nodded. "I guess with your psychology background, that was a fit," he said.

"Yes," she agreed.

"And you've traveled around the world?"

She nodded. "My dad was a diplomat. So, yes. I had a nomadic childhood."

"Where's he now? Retired? Or still in that line of work?"

A thorny question. She sipped her wine feeling suddenly sad.

"He's dead," she said.

She saw a flash of sympathy in his eyes. "I'm sorry about that," he said. She thought he was about to ask her more, but then sensed that it was a painful topic and gave a small shake of his head.

They sat in a slightly awkward silence for a few moments, and then Wyatt's phone beeped. Looking down at it, his face warmed.

"That's my wife, checking in," he said. "Suzy's a Pilates instructor. She's heading out now to teach her afternoon classes. Mind if I message her

back?"

"Of course. You don't even have to ask," Juliette said. She watched him key in the message, still with that tender smile on his face.

As Wyatt texted his wife, who he clearly adored, Juliette felt glad the subject had veered away from her father's death. It had been terrifying and traumatizing, and she thought it had been the pivotal event that had set her firmly on a course in law enforcement. She'd wanted the power to find answers.

Her dad had been murdered, brutally, and she herself had narrowly escaped death, or so she always believed. Thinking back on that tragedy again, she felt sure her dad had taken secrets with him to his grave.

She'd never know what had really been going on in her father's life, although she resolved that, one day, she would find out. But she felt a shiver as she remembered how events had played out, and how that terrible crime had occurred - a crime that there were still no answers to, and no explanation for.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

What had her father been involved in, Juliette wondered, as she glanced at the menu while Wyatt texted his wife, looking at the words without even taking them in, because her mind was totally elsewhere.

Her diplomat father had definitely seemed distracted that day, worried about something, when he'd met her on the platform, after she'd come through to Munich via train.

Away on a break from university, she'd been pleased to have some vacation time with her dad, and explore the sights of the city with him, but he'd definitely seemed withdrawn and preoccupied, as if something was wrong.

The journey from Oxford to Munich had taken a full day, and by the time the train arrived it was late - already after nine p.m.

"Let's get some rest," he'd said, "and go sightseeing tomorrow."

"Okay," she'd said, feeling disappointed, because last time they'd gotten together late, in Milan, her father had taken her for drinks at one of the area's trendiest bars, and then they'd walked a mile in the dry, cold darkness, chatting and catching up and taking in the sights and sounds of the city at night.

But this time, he clearly wasn't in the mood. She'd gotten into the cab and they'd headed off to the hotel.

"I guess you want your own room?" he'd asked at the reception desk. "There is a two room, shared suite available."

"I want my own room," she'd insisted. She didn't want the suite. It was more fun to be totally on her own and able to call or text her friends late at night, and to stay in the bathtub or the shower for an hour if she felt like it without feeling she was being rude or selfish.

It chilled her to think that decision could have saved her life.

"There you go." He handed her the keycard. "See you at breakfast tomorrow. Eight a.m.?"

"Perfect, Dad," she'd replied. "Thanks!"

Once in her room, she'd done exactly what she'd been looking forward to doing. She'd gotten into the shower and stayed there for half an hour, giving herself a mini beauty treatment with the free gels and lotions. She was a student on a budget, after all.

Then she'd gotten into bed and spent the next hour or so chatting and messaging friends. She must have fallen asleep around midnight, and woke up with a jolt the next morning. Checking the time, she saw it was after eight a.m. She'd overslept horribly.

And her dad hadn't come knocking?

She'd scrambled out of bed, feeling bleary from her deep sleep, pulled on her clothes, and rushed down the stairs to the breakfast room.

Looking around frantically, she saw several surprised tourists and business people staring back at her. But she couldn't see her dad there.

Had he had a phone call or some urgent business to sort out? She'd run back down the corridor and up the flight of stairs to his room.

There, she'd knocked on the door.

No answer. She'd taken out her phone and called him. No answer.

It was at that time she heard his phone from inside the room, trilling loudly in the silence.

Already, Juliette had suspected something was wrong, but the sound of that ringing phone had cemented it in her mind.

Something was very wrong. The fear that had settled in her stomach had been like no other.

And even so, she had never, ever expected to see the terrible sight that awaited her when the reception staff sent somebody up with an access card and opened that door. The blood that had soaked the bed. The wounds in her father's neck and chest, that had cut and sliced the life out of him. The rust colored handprint on the wall that spoke of a desperate but futile struggle.

Juliette shook her head, letting out a deep breath, shaking the terrible memories away.

Wyatt glanced up from his phone apologetically. "Sorry about that," he said. "There was a lot to update Suzy on."

"It was no problem at all," Juliette said, feeling glad to be able to immerse herself in the present again. Conversation with her partner was a comforting option compared to revisiting the ghosts of the past that had surfaced again, despite all her efforts to keep them at bay.

"You looked like you were thinking about something serious there," Wyatt said, more perceptive than she had expected.

"Yes. I guess I was just going over a few memories, in my mind," she told him.

"Yell if you want to share any of your thoughts," he said.

She didn't. It was time to lock them up tightly again.

"I'd rather not dwell on them for now, but thanks for the offer," she said.

"Any time," he said agreeably. "What do you feel like eating? I think I'm going to risk the burger. I'm distrustful about eating burgers outside of the States, but let's give it a whirl. I think I have my anti-diarrhea tablets in my bag."

Juliette had to suppress a laugh at that. Really, her partner couldn't be more all American. She was sure he'd be pleasantly surprised by the quality of French food, but less sure that he'd admit to that.

"I'll have the onion soup," Juliette said. French onion soup, rich and sumptuous, had always been one of her favorites, and this one came with bread and cheese. That would do perfectly for her.

They placed their orders, and then Wyatt's phone beeped again.

"One last message," he grinned, looking down and texting a quick reply before putting his phone down. "That's it for tonight."

"How long have you two been married?" Juliette asked.

"We met when I was discharged from the army. She was in the apartment next door to mine. That didn't last long," he remembered with a grin. "We got to talking one day, outside the front door, and within about three weeks, we were a couple. We moved in together a month later and it's all been happiness since then."

He beamed with pride as he spoke, and Juliette felt warmly glad on his behalf.

"You're a lucky man," she said.

"I am. I'm grateful for every day I have with Suzy," he said, and Juliette couldn't help but smile. It was nice to know that true love still existed in the world, even after all the darkness and violence she had seen. Even if it didn't exist in her world which, right now, she had to acknowledge was better that way.

She felt a sense of relief that of the two men she was working with, at least one was very happily married; the other was a man that she still strongly disliked, although the cat conversation had redeemed him slightly, and who had clearly loathed her on sight. At least that meant there would be no emotional complications, she thought wryly. It was always simpler that way.

They had enough on their plates, after all, with hunting down this killer.

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The next morning, early, Juliette was yanked out of a deep sleep by an insistent trilling sound.

Was it her alarm, she thought, surfacing from the troubling, but intense, dream she'd been having. Opening her eyes, she saw that her hotel room, all the way at the end of a quiet corridor, was still fully dark.

No. It wasn't her alarm, she realized. Her phone was ringing insistently. Feeling worried now, she grabbed it up, trying her best to sound wide awake even though she was still far from it.

A ringing phone at this hour? Her stomach curled in anticipation as she took the call, struggling into a sitting position.

"Juliette Hart here," she said. Despite her best efforts, her voice sounded hoarse and sleepy. She dreaded what the news would be, at this time. It was very early. Her exhausted body and mind were telling her so.

The crisp voice on the other side sounded wide awake, intense, and very stressed. It was Lucien, she realized. And as he spoke, she felt the last vestiges of sleep fall away, and her heart start to pound fast.

"Juliette. There's been another body found. He's killed again, and we need to get to the scene. Now."

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Katarina Rodic was immersed in thought as she headed along the quiet roadway that led from the study center to the flat she shared with three other girls. The only good thing about this tiring walk was that it gave her a view of the Eiffel Tower, brilliantly lit, in the distance.

She'd found tonight difficult. Computer programming was the future, which was why she'd signed up for this evening course. After all, she didn't want to be a café waitress her whole life long. But she'd always thought she'd go for something different, like the arts. Theater called to her. She wasn't one for mathematical problems and cold, hard logic.

So she was struggling in this course. It just didn't make sense and she couldn't wrap her head around it.

She sighed, the tension in her shoulders so great it felt like she had a hundred pound weight on her back, instead of just her laptop bag. Perhaps it was time to give up, she thought. But then again, she was already so close to the end of the course, perhaps she could just push through and get the certificate.

If she could only figure out exactly how the lecturer had reached his conclusions today in the example he'd given. But it was a mystery to her.

"If I get the certificate, it means is that I'll have to spend the rest of my life doing that, as an actual job," she muttered. Suddenly, it was an intimidating thought.

"What's that?"

She glanced around. The guy behind her, Torsten, was closer than she'd thought. Close enough to hear what she was saying.

And to be honest, she'd found this guy, with his height, intense features, and his weird sense of humor, to be rather creepy. Maybe it was just that she wasn't in the right headspace. But she definitely hadn't meant him to overhear her now.

"Nothing," she said shortly, knowing the response sounded rude, but not caring.

"Oh, sorry." He looked apologetic. "I thought you were speaking to me."

"No, I wasn't. I was going over some things in my own head," she said.

He was looking at her with that piercing gaze, taking in her dyed red hair, pale clear skin, and her broad, pretty face. He was top of the class in



their computer programming unit. He didn't have any problems understanding the logic.

"Are you okay with what we learned today? I'd love to help you if - if you need it," he offered, now looking anxious.

It was very obvious that she was not okay with what they'd learned. Anyone could see that. But she also didn't want this guy helping her. She'd rather make her own way. She wasn't in the mood for people being kind. Most likely he just wanted to date her and wasn't offering any real help at all.

She shook her head. "No, I'm fine. I think I just need to take it slowly. I'll get it eventually."

"It's not a race," he said, with a small smile. "You don't have to be the best at it. It's just important to understand the basics."

"I've had the lecture already," she told him grumpily. "I don't need another one from you."

She'd thought that he might be offended. Even she was surprised at her own rudeness. It was like she was venting her frustration over the course onto him.

But he laughed. "I'm sorry. I won't ask again, but if you need help, I will gladly give it. Sometimes just a little good advice can go a long way."

He was being kind. But she didn't want his kindness. She wanted to be able to figure it out on her own.

"Thanks," she said, her voice as flat as her mood.

"No problem," Torsten said, and then, as if sensing her discomfort, he stepped back.

This was the point where he'd veer right, to go to the bus stop, but he didn't. He stood, hesitating.

"I know you're not really in the mood for conversation, but I - I was wondering if I should walk with you, just until you're back home?"

She stared at him incredulously. He continued, now sounding even more anxious.

"There has been - well, I heard in the online groups I'm on that there was a murder last night, near here. They're hushing it up because it was linked to someone high-profile. But all the same, it might not be safe to walk alone."

Now, she lost her temper. It was like this guy was trying every single angle with her when all she wanted was not to be with him. Was it that difficult to make out what she meant?

Angrily now, she turned to him.

"Did you not understand what I was saying? I don't want company and I don't want to talk to you. Yes, thank you for offering, etcetera, etcetera, but the answer is no!"

The words came out much harsher than she'd intended and she saw him flinch, as if they'd really hurt him. She felt bad for a moment, but then hardened her heart. He was just a creepy guy wanting to get into her pants. That was most likely his reason, and she was going to put him in his place.

"Okay," he said quickly. "Take care."

He turned away and began walking swiftly toward the bus stop.

Sighing, hitching her laptop bag up onto her shoulders again, Katarina plodded on toward home. She couldn't help feeling a bitter triumph that she'd hurt him. That was wrong, she knew. Perhaps she wasn't really a nice person at heart. Perhaps he was, a little voice inside her head started suggesting. Perhaps he was being a good guy and she was acting like a spoiled brat.

She shrugged as she stomped down the road. Who cared, seriously? Perhaps she should quit this entire farce of an effort to better herself and instead, do something totally different. Take up acting, perhaps. Or modeling, or go in that direction. It couldn't be harder than computer programming.

And then, as she glanced to her right, she saw something that intrigued her.

A gold statue was just visible down a narrow side road, posed just as if it was one of the Oscar awards.

Was the statue beckoning to her? For a moment it seemed as if it was. Then, when she looked again, she thought she must have been wrong, because it was completely still.

Fascinated, she stopped and stared. Then, with her curiosity surging, she made her way toward it. Was it real? She'd thought for a moment it was a discarded prop, something that had been left there because it was no longer used. But it was beautiful - if it was a statue and not real. Perhaps it was real, like some kind of street art? If so, why was the performer here, in this deserted alleyway?

Maybe that was something she could do. She'd always been interested in stage make-up. Perhaps that was what she could go into, and this statue had been placed here as a sign, to show her that she needed to change direction?

It didn't seem to be moving at all. She could see no sign that it was breathing. It or him, she wasn't sure. If it was a guy, he'd sure had a good make-up job done. The hands were encased in black gloves so she couldn't see them, and he was wearing gold shorts that looked a part of the whole ensemble, but everything else looked perfect, down to the last bulge of muscle and fold of skin.

But if it was discarded, what on earth was it doing here?

Suddenly, she wondered if she should hurry away, simply walk on by, and ignore it. The warning from Torsten echoed in her mind.

Torsten? What did he know, she thought scornfully. Maybe it was defiance at his words and his unwanted kindness that made her stop, stare, and finally, step closer and reach out a hand.

She was sure the statue was fake. But she wanted to be certain.

It was the last move she made. She didn't even comprehend how fast those hands moved. One minute the statue was staring ahead, immobile.

And the next, two strong, gloved hands were wrapped around her throat and squeezing, squeezing hard, so hard that she knew her moments were numbered, and she couldn't struggle; he'd caught her with no air in her lungs.

She tried to claw at him, desperately. He was alive and real. But as hard and unyielding as if he was made from stone.

That was the last thought Katarina had.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"Another murder?" Scrambling out of bed, her heart now racing, Juliette echoed Lucien's words, feeling appalled.

"Yes. Your American peacekeeping force has done nothing so far!" Lucien sounded livid. Juliette drew in a furious breath; her tiredness vanished, ready to argue this unfair accusation.

"Look, I thought we resolved this yesterday," she snapped.

But then, Lucien sighed. "I am sorry," he said. "That was not a fair comment to make at all. I apologize. I am feeling stressed, and I spoke in a way that was out of line."

"Apology accepted," Juliette said, surprised by how genuine he'd sounded.

"I am driving to the scene already. It's close to where you are, and if you leave soon, you might even get there first. But I am getting massive pressure from the French authorities. They are furious that this has happened again. They are looking for someone to blame, and right now, that someone is all of us."

Pulling on her underwear, Juliette could now understand the pressure he was under. She wanted to find the killer as much as the French officials did.

"I'll get there as soon as I can," she said. "Have you called Wyatt?"

"Not yet," Lucien said. "I called you first."

"I'll knock on his door," she volunteered.

"No, no need. I will call him as soon as I finish this call. And I will have a better check on my temper, I hope," he said ruefully.

Already, while she was talking to him, she was hopping on one leg, getting into her pants, trying to apply deodorant accurately.

"Okay. See you at the scene as soon as I can get there," she said.

Socks, boots, shirt, jacket. She did a quick check around the hotel room, deemed it to be clear, and rushed out. Only as she was rushing down the stairs did she finally get a chance to check the time.

Five-thirty a.m. At this hour, Paris was mostly sleeping. She had to face the possibility that this murder had occurred last night, and had only been discovered now.

Wyatt was rushing down the stairs as she arrived in the lobby, his face stressed.

"I couldn't believe it when I got the call from Lucien," he said, heading quickly to the exit door with her.

"Yeah, me neither," Juliette said. But, now that he was alongside her, she felt even more determined that they would catch up with this man.

"Let's go," Wyatt said, and they rushed out of the hotel, into the still, dark, early morning.

Following the coordinates, Juliette was shocked to see how close to the previous site this new murder site was. It made her feel another huge flash of guilt that they hadn't done enough, that if they'd tried harder, they could somehow have captured this killer.

It only took a few minutes for them to reach the scene, without the Paris traffic to cope with. Juliette saw the shimmer of red and blue lights in the humid air before they reached the street where the police and ambulance were parked.

They climbed out of their car at exactly the same time that Lucien pulled up on a motorcycle. Removing his helmet, he slung it over the handlebars before glancing at the two FBI agents.

"We have to hurry," he said, leading the way.

This was a recent crime scene, just the same as the ones she'd handled in America, only with an extra layer of the expressive French character that Juliette sensed immediately.

People were gesticulating wildly at each other. Cops were having arguments on the phone. The coroner, who must have just arrived, was lecturing one of the forensic officers in a loud, angry voice for some perceived breach of protocol. It was mayhem. Much more so than she was used to.

But amid the chaos, there was one constant. Putting on PPE before walking closer, Juliette felt her heart sink as she saw the body. Lying in a now familiar pose, it was the same as the others.

Goldenface had struck again, and now this woman's broad, attractive features were rendered weirdly alien by the perfectly applied layer of gold.

"Who is she? Who found her?" she asked in a soft voice.

Lucien was beside her, on his radio and phone. "She's Katarina Rodic, from Slovakia. As yet, I don't know where she lives or her occupation. She was found very early this morning, by a night shift worker coming off duty at a club, and heading home. We interviewed him and released him. He said

he noticed the gleam of gold, looked more closely, and called police straight away. This alleyway is not often used at night."

And yet, it was close to a major tourist street, just like the others.

Juliette was wondering if this killer had bought himself time by the gold painting of the face, and that someone who was rushed or incurious might just have passed by, assuming the body was a discarded mannequin or prop.

But how was he doing this careful, detailed work without being noticed? That was puzzling her.

"Cameras nearby?"

"I have told you this before," Lucien emphasized. "Paris is not festooned in cameras, especially not in the back roads. There are two on that main street. Nowhere else nearby."

Juliette turned to the coroner who had started work.

"Do you have an approximate time of death yet?" she asked.

For a while, he said nothing, just continued with his examination. His face was masked and his eyes looked down, but she got the impression that he didn't appreciate being interrupted in his work.

Eventually, he glanced up.

"Probably late last night. Maybe nine or ten p.m." he said shortly.

There was a laptop bag beside her, untouched and undisturbed. Had she been working, studying? Most likely she'd been doing one of the two, and heading home.

"I can provide more clarity on that," Lucien said, checking his phone. "There has just been a missing person report called in by her housemate. Katarina was attending a computer programming class last night. The class is a ten minute walk from here, and it ended at nine thirty. So her time of death would be about quarter to ten. I learned, from the housemate, that she always walked to the Metro station alone. She is the only one of the class who lives in this direction."

That was helpful, Juliette thought. At least they now knew when he'd struck, and that he'd definitely been on the lookout for a woman walking alone.

"Do you still think he's targeting people deliberately?" she asked Lucien. "This woman doesn't seem to have a recognizable name; she's not like Claudette. How would he know she was walking down a side alleyway?"

"He might have dragged her there," Lucien snapped. "So much is still unknown. Why are you pursuing this angle?"

"All I'm doing is trying to narrow down his habits. And as I've said, I think he's lying in wait for his victims. He's setting some kind of a trap, making himself invisible; or at any rate, he's doing something that makes them confident to approach him."

Lucien sighed. Juliette could see that although he deeply resented her presence at the scene, he was open to suggestions.

"I am sorry," he said. "I do not normally speak that way. I am under stress. Personally, and professionally. And having two American agents here is adding a whole new layer to this stress."

Juliette nodded, feeling sympathetic. She didn't know why he was under personal stress, but whatever the reason, at least he'd mentioned it.

"I understand," she said. "I just want to help. I think he's working according to a method that he's figured out is effective, and I think he's been doing this for a while. He knows what he's doing. We just have to figure out what the method is, and how he's managing to kill."

Lucien nodded, his expression softening.

"Yes, I know," he said. "We all want that. Now, let's get to work."

Juliette went back to join Wyatt and together they paced the scene, watching forensics at work, talking to the coroner, who was checking for any trace evidence, and surveying the scene as it grew lighter, hoping for some clues that he might have left.

It was getting light. The sounds of Paris were filtering into the gray, clear morning. Hooting of horns, the whizz of bicycles passing, a few strains of music from somewhere.

And crowds. With this murder having happened in the early morning, crowds were gathering, and Juliette knew that this kill, more than the other, would cause panic. There would be no way of hushing it up. Not after a young Frenchwoman rushed in, filming with her phone, and gabbling out in fluent French.

Lucien cursed. "These damned social media stars and their live footage!" Rushing forward, he turned her around by her shoulders, admonishing her in equally fast and fluent language.

"Get out," he was saying. "This is not the time or place for you to make a reputation, by feeding off tragedy. You want to be famous because a woman died? All you might do is leak information that will collapse our case! Get back and let the police work!"

As he herded her out, she glanced back and Juliette thought she looked shamefaced, as if Lucien's words had gotten through to her.

She paced the scene again, seeing that it was now fully light. They'd been there for longer than she'd thought, watching forensics at work, asking the coroner questions.

Now, forensics was packing up, and the body was getting loaded into the van, with the initial exam now complete and no hard evidence to be found.

But there was something else Juliette was hearing, above the hum of traffic and the sounds of the city coming to life.

It was piquing her interest and more than that, she realized, the sound she was hearing was giving her the kernel of an idea.

Leaving the scene, she walked down the alleyway to go and find it.



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The sound Juliette was hearing brought back so many memories of Paris in a rush. And more than that, it was giving her a new insight into how this killer might have hidden away in plain sight.

Violin notes, clear, sweet, and true to tone, were filtering through the morning air. She even recognized the tune. The melodious sounds of *La Vie En Rose*.

The player was a man in his twenties, a beret on his head, a backpack propped up against the wall behind him, and the violin case open in front of him. It already contained a number of coins and euro notes.

Standing and overlooking the square, he was immersed in his music, eyes half closed as he brought the melody to life. He didn't even glance at her, as he created the beautiful sounds. He was a talented player and, watching him, she yearned to be able to make the same magic. Would she ever be able to play a violin reasonably well if she took lessons?

Juliette watched him for a few moments, and as the yearning to be able to play so beautifully passed, her mind began whirring away, on a more productive tangent. She knew what she was thinking, what the implications of her theory were.

Beyond him, a duo of street performers was setting up in the center of the square. Their faces were white painted, their lithe, fit looking bodies were clad in black leotards and they wore black gloves. With colorful hoops as props, the preparations for their show were already drawing some interested onlookers.

This was life in Paris. In the public places, there were always street performers, buskers, musicians, acrobats and actors, mime artists and human statues. And now, Juliette was wondering if this was how this killer was disguising himself. Nobody would look twice at the violinist because they pigeonholed him as a street performer. He could have five cans of gold paint in that backpack, but all people would see or notice was the violin.

Had this been the killer's cover? Had he blended in with the street performers?

The idea kept growing in her mind as she walked back towards the scene. It would explain why he moved so quickly, why he seemed to vanish into thin air. It might even explain why he was able to paint his victims'

faces without anyone noticing. If they thought it was nothing more than the preparation for an act, people would walk straight past.

Juliette felt a thrill of excitement as she hatched the idea. This was it, the breakthrough she was looking for. She just had to convince Lucien and Wyatt that she was onto something.

She hurried back along the street, under the crime scene tape, and back to where they were standing, her mind working in overdrive.

"I've figured something out," she said.

Lucien turned to her looking hopeful. Wyatt raised his eyebrows.

"What?" they said in unison.

"I think this killer might be posing as a street performer. That's how he is blending in, and why his victims end up getting so close, with no struggle. People here see street performers as – I guess, the property of Paris," she tried to explain. "It's a normal thing to get up close to them, either to give money or take a better look, or photograph them. The public and the performers all know that's how things work."

"A street performer?" Lucien frowned. Juliette could see he was considering the idea, and that after his customary, immediate belief that the American FBI could not possibly be right, he was deciding it had merit.

"I guess it could be," he said. "We know he's smart and cunning, so this could be his way of staying one step ahead of us."

"I think it makes sense. Those fibers that were found around the victims' necks and under their nails - they're from gloves. A normal person out on the streets wouldn't wear gloves this time of the year. It's spring and not cold enough. But if a street performer, if a mime artist, if someone with their face painted wore gloves, you wouldn't worry about it for a moment."

Juliette paused, letting the idea sink in.

"He might have done something similar in New York and New Jersey. We brainstormed ideas at the time, that he'd disguised himself as a homeless person, or a busker. We just never found any evidence to prove it. Maybe, here, we can."

Lucien nodded slowly, his expression thoughtful.

Wyatt was more action oriented. "So if this is it, what are we going to do? What's our next step?"

Lucien shrugged. "There are hundreds of performers in Paris. Literally hundreds."

"Unlicensed, I guess?" Wyatt said, in a way that implied he'd expect nothing less of Paris. Lucien bristled.

"All street performers are licensed. They have to carry two different types of permits, depending on where they perform." He let out a breath. "However, yes, of course the killer himself, posing as a performer, would most likely have no license."

"So we need to track, and check, all street performers?" Wyatt said. "Or better still, should we pull them off the street?"

"No," Lucien began, and Juliette shook her head.

"At any rate, not yet. Because it seems he only strikes at night. All his kills have been after dark. It's morning now, so we could use the day to prepare, and research, and decide on our strategy," she said.

"A guy like that, he might have come to the attention of the police before now?" Wyatt said.

"Perhaps," Lucien agreed. "Many criminals begin with less serious crimes, as you know."

"So maybe we need to take a look at the records first, and see if there are any of your performers who've been given warnings for having no license, or who have caused trouble in other ways," Wyatt suggested. "Attacking tourists, violence toward women? That would be a kick-off point for us."

"We can start there," Lucien agreed.

Juliette nodded. "Let's head to the closest police station and take a look at those reports."

"I can also ask the local police for their input, see if any of them have seen someone suspicious around recently that they didn't report, but that was still on their radar," Lucien said.

"Good idea," Juliette agreed. "Whoever we're looking for would have spent a couple of months in the States recently, and now I'm thinking he could even have gone there to avoid trouble, after a minor arrest, and then come back."

She felt enthused by the possibility of picking him up this way. It made sense, based on his behavior and on the fact he'd seemed to vanish into thin air so far.

They left the crime scene, with its unanswered questions and its frustrating lack of trace evidence, and headed back to where they'd parked. Lucien got onto his motorcycle and Juliette and Wyatt got into the car.

The closest police station was ten minutes away, and in that time, Juliette saw no fewer than eight different street performers, buskers, and singers. Now that she was attuned to them, she found herself becoming more and more aware of their presence and numbers in the city. And that gold stage paint was surely a clue?

She arrived at the police station feeling excited and resolute.

"Let's get into the databases," Lucien said, nodding a greeting to the officer in the lobby before heading through to one of the offices.

"Will Sierra be able to help on this?" Wyatt asked, as they followed.

Juliette thought about it, but then shook her head. "She's got another job to do, trying to track and trace the sales of gold paint. I don't want to pull her away from that, and I don't think there's a faster way to do it than just plain old research by the three of us. We need to look into the records, track the performers, and see who's caused trouble, when, and why."

Juliette and the others settled down in an empty office and began their task, eager to see if their hunch was right.

"I'll look for the authorizations," Lucien offered.

"We'll go and search the cases," Wyatt said. There was a hint of uncertainty in his tone, and in a moment, Juliette saw why. Since most of the cases were in French, this was going to have to be done with her and Wyatt in tandem. She could understand the language; he couldn't.

So they took over two monitors in the back office of the police station.

Lucien logged onto one, looking through reports and permits and licenses, trying to find any suspicious activity or individuals. And Juliette, after being coached quickly on how to navigate it, went into the case files, briefly assessing each case at a glance and then, if it seemed relevant, translating the details for Wyatt, who was making notes and plotting everything on a map.

She felt a flare of excitement, because slowly but surely, it seemed they were making progress here.

Gradually, the patterns were appearing on the map, and the problem areas were becoming obvious.

Lucien was jotting notes with an intent expression on his face. Wyatt was plotting trouble scenes. And Juliette was scrolling through the cases, looking for all those that were relevant, recent, and in the right areas.

This was it. She'd found a case that she thought was extremely relevant. It had taken place the day before yesterday and it was literally a couple of

hundred yards from the first murder scene.

She sat back in her chair, turning to the others.

At exactly the same time, she and Lucien said, "I've got one!"

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Goldenface was waiting, and he felt a thrill of pleasure in the process it took, the stillness it required. He had trained himself to remain motionless for minutes, unmoving. It was a discipline and he was privileged to be able to practice it in this city, near the edifice he admired so greatly. To remain utterly still showed respect to the tower.

Of course, to provide statues as tributes to it showed even more respect.

He had enjoyed seeing Paris, its culture, its customs. He had grown to love the beauty of its cobblestones and the grandeur of its monuments. But he had also seen its darkness and its shadows, the things that lurked there, the secrets and the lies. He knew the city was full of coldblooded killers and predators. History had taught him he was not the first person in this grand city to claim others' lives for his own ends, and nor would he be the last.

The spring sun was high in the sky, and it felt good on his painted skin. Today, he was not gold. That, he saved for the hunt of his beautiful statues. Too much gold would be a giveaway after all. Today, his face was painted the purest white, with features like a ghost's inscribed. His hands were ghostly gray and he was wearing a gray metallic outfit that looked like snakeskin.

He had been standing here for some time now, and he had already noticed a few curious glances thrown in his direction. He was used to it, and it did not bother him.

People were unsure if he was a real statue, or a human being. That was how good he was. That was how still he could remain.

And he tested himself, pushed himself every time.

His body was fit and toned. No less was expected or required for what he did. He worked out every day. Not at a gym, there was no need for that. Gyms were for people who lacked imagination and initiative. That was his disparaging view. All he needed was a room, even a small one. He did the rest. Pressing against the wall. Star jumps. Lifting the end of the bed off the floor one handed and repeating it ninety times, until his sweat dripped onto the floor. Cleaning up was another workout in itself. He always respected his environment.

Today, he was ready. He felt the anticipation buzzing through him like electricity. His heart rate was steady, his breathing regular. He was ready to

take the next step, to move forward with his plan.

The only part of him that moved was his eyes, and by that, he was able to assess his surroundings. That was very important. Because police were always on the lookout and he needed to stay a step ahead. He was clever, observant, and intelligent, and he could evade their attention. That he knew. He'd seen other performers being corralled, checked, their papers scrutinized. It all took time. Many of them had no papers and the consequences were severe.

He had surveyed the square, his gaze moving from one person to the next, searching and evaluating. He was looking for undue attention paid to him, anything beyond the curious glances.

He was just another artist, just another face in the crowd.

He knew the police would be watching the area and the performers, but he was confident he could escape their attention. He had done it before and he would do it again.

After keeping ahead of his hunters for some time now, he thought he had a good idea of what he needed to do. He understood how to see movement out of the corners of his eyes, to assess, and to act. He knew the difference between the astonished stares of bystanders and the suspicious stares of people who might call him out or bring him down.

"Look! Will you look at that! Is it even real?" The accent was pure British, the speaker a middle-aged woman, holding her partner's hand as she stared at him.

"I think that's just a prop, Emily." The man paused. "At any rate, I think so."

Think so? That wasn't enough for him; it was an insult. He forced himself to keep even stiller, willed his muscles into a state of immobility. He felt at one with the structures of Paris, at one with the Eiffel Tower, its steel struts, like blades cutting into the air, lifting it high into the sky; and though it vibrated on a minuscule scale, it never moved. Never.

And nor would he.

"Yeah, it's a prop," the man said and they turned away, strolling along the walkway, stopping to laugh in astonishment at a pair of mime artists.

But his eyes, scanning the area, then picked up exactly the flicker of movement he did not want.

There were police here. Police.

And they were not just clearing out the area. Rather, the police he saw were paying very close attention to the street performers.

It was a level of scrutiny he did not like and it worried him. There was no reason for it, apart from that they were starting to think that street performers or artists, moving freely through Paris as they did, might be involved in these killings.

That was going to be a huge problem.

He felt an icy trickle of fear chill him. It was an effort to keep still, to keep himself from moving. Immobility and looking like a structure, a lifeless being of cold metal, took even more of his will power.

He watched them.

Without a doubt, they were on the hunt, and that meant it was time for him to go.

One breath, then another. Wait until the time is right. Don't move yet. He felt his heart rate slow, his breathing even out, the stillness returning. He wanted to wait until there were no eyes on him, and he was an expert at assessing the language of the crowds.

Not yet. Still a couple watching him, and the police were not close enough for him to panic - not yet at least. So he stayed still, drew on that iron discipline that would keep him immobile and which would also draw no attention to himself at all.

They finished looking at him and moved on, and their gaze left him.

Good. He was free to move without being noticed. Now, were there other police? Which directions were clear? He checked. He knew police were sneaky and that they sometimes liked to circle in and come from more than one direction at the same time. He needed to be very sure that his escape route was clear before he took it.

There were no police to the right.

So he made his move, his actions swift and practiced. He turned his back on the crowds and in one smooth movement he slipped the gray hooded sweatshirt over his shoulders, pulling up the hood. Then, he slipped out of the snakeskin pants, revealing the black running shorts underneath and his bare legs below. Legs he hated because they were so real, so human.

So unlike the steel legs of the tower that could endure against the whole of time.

But he had to do this to survive, to continue his work, until he reached a stage of hardness, of resolve, where he and the tower were as one.



After all, he had so much left to do, and it depended on him being able to move as he needed to.

With that in mind, he moved, quickly and quietly, blending into the crowd, vanishing into the shadows. Just a runner, with a hood low over his face, spindly pale legs, and a stooped demeanor so unlike the imposing stance of the statue.

And then, he was gone.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"Who's yours?" Juliette asked Lucien, feeling surprised and enthused, that they'd both hit on such a strong lead at the same time.

"It's a man called Giorgio Patron. He's not a performer, and was warned by police the day before yesterday, that he must not masquerade as one. He got angry and violent in response, so they arrested him and gave him an official warning. However, I've just called the local police, and they said he was lurking around yesterday, dressed as a juggler. I asked if the outfit included black gloves and he said yes, it was a clown's outfit with black boots and gloves."

That sounded extremely promising, Juliette thought.

"What area?"

"Half a mile from the Eiffel Tower, in the direction of the Arc de Triomphe," Lucien said.

Juliette and Wyatt exchanged glances. This was definitely a lead worth following up.

He showed them a few photos of Giorgio on the screen. He was a serious looking man with a lean face and narrow eyes. Juliette took note that in the first photo, his face was daubed with white paint, and his hair was slicked back under a big, colorful trilby hat in red and green.

"And where is he likely to be now?" Juliette asked.

"Probably, the same place. That seems to be his chosen area for setting up shop and trying to make a few quick euros," Lucien said, then hesitated. "Although maybe that's not the reason. Money, I mean."

"Maybe not," Juliette said.

Lucien glanced at her. "So, who's your lead?"

"My lead is a licensed performer who's caused problems in the past, getting violent and aggressive toward tourists, and women in particular," Juliette said, reading from the screen. "His name is Charl Dupont, and he seems to like performing in the Palais de Chaillot Plaza most often. He's a mime artist and he wears a silver suit and a black hat. I don't know about gloves."

"The Palais de Chaillot Plaza is a public square that overlooks the Trocadero Gardens and the Eiffel Tower some distance away," Lucien clarified.

"I see here that he was given an official warning by police three months ago. Since then, there's a note to say he's disappeared from circulation. But there's another, more recent note to say that he turned up again, the day before yesterday. He was seen in his old territory, and causing trouble again."

"Now that is interesting timing," Wyatt said, and from the meaning in his tone, Juliette knew he was thinking of the recent kills in New York. The disappearance of this suspect from Paris coincided with the timing of the murders in the U.S.

"We should probably split up and look for them separately," Juliette said. Time was not on their side here. The spring days were warm, but they were not long, and by the time they had searched the streets for these two suspects, it could already be getting close to evening.

"I will go to Giorgio Patron," Lucien said. "I know that area well. There are lots of side streets that a suspect could use to disappear, and it's not far from the plaza."

"In that case, we'll go after Charl Dupont," Juliette agreed.

Even though she knew that searching for these performers was going to be like looking for a needle in a haystack, she hoped that Sierra might be able to run a search on her software without taking too much time.

"We can track their phones, if they have them open," she suggested. "Do the two of them have valid cellphones? That would make it easy."

"I think they do," Lucien said, looking into the case file and the report. He showed her the numbers. "Not sure if they are valid, but they should be up to date, since both were in trouble recently."

Quickly, she called their tech expert to update her on the situation.

"Hello, Juliette." Sierra sounded upbeat and alert, as if she was focusing hard on her job at hand.

"We've got two suspects we need to follow," she said. "They're in different areas. We have cellphone numbers. Could you log into the system and triangulate the numbers, or else track them some other way, and let us know if you pick them up?"

"Sure," Sierra said. She sounded glad of the job to do. "I haven't been getting anywhere with the paint suppliers yet, and I'm wondering if it's a dead end. He seems to have hidden his tracks very carefully. So, at least this will give me something else to do."

"I'll send them now," Juliette said.

She sent both the cell numbers through to Sierra.

Wyatt looked down at the names.

“For safety, if one of these is not our suspect, we should clear these performers off the street tonight.”

Lucien shrugged. “We can consider it. But if you do, there’ll be an outcry. It will not be an easy situation.”

“If we don’t, there might be another murder,” Wyatt countered.

“Removing all street performers will not necessarily prevent that, and it could cause a worse situation. If people start to demonstrate, if they get angry, then our police will need to control that problem and not look for the killer.” Lucien’s jaw jutted stubbornly.

Juliette could see both sides of the argument.

“Let’s get out there, and talk to these two. If either of them is our killer, then the problem is solved.”

“If not, I still think we should get everyone off the streets,” Wyatt insisted stubbornly.

Juliette shrugged. Perhaps it would be for the best. Safety – and not allowing this killer to take another victim – was the priority here.

Then, with Wyatt walking alongside, she set off for the car, ready to drive to the Palais de Chaillot Plaza and see if she could spot Charl Dupont.

Paris was fully awake now. Shafts of morning sun were piercing through the light cloud cover, brightening the city, and bringing a warmth to the stone walls and the tiled rooftops. Also, on a less beautiful note, Juliette realized the streets were gridlocked with traffic. It was now nearly ten a.m. but it seemed that a large proportion of Parisians were still on their way to work, and using exactly the same road that Juliette was trying to fight her way along.

She could turn on her siren, but it wouldn't really make a difference. There was nowhere for the traffic to go. Sighing in impatience, she tried a side street that allowed her to get a lead, and then risked driving through an alleyway so narrow it felt as if the sides of the car would collide with it.

“These French,” Wyatt said in mystified tones. “Could have built the place bigger, couldn’t they?”

“Yes,” Juliette said, narrowing her eyes as she edged through the tunnel-like alley.

She came out, feeling relieved the car was still in one, undamaged piece, and found herself on a quieter road that led up to the square. There, she and

Wyatt parked, climbed out, and hurried to the square to start their search.

The Palais de Chaillot Plaza was a wide, open square, and it had the most magnificent view of the Eiffel Tower beyond. On this fine morning it was already crowded with tourists, taking in the view, cameras busy.

Juliette and Wyatt split up, walking in opposite directions around the perimeter of the square, scanning the faces of each person they passed, looking out for the street performers. She kept an ear out for her phone, knowing that Sierra's software would be working in the background, ready to pinpoint the cellphone numbers. There were a few performers already at work in the square, including a statue of a man in armor that Juliette thought was real until she passed close by. Then, its hand shot out, giving her the fright of her life.

Letting out a breath, she laughed, rummaged in her purse, and put a two euro coin in the hat in front of him.

Now, back to their silver-clad mime artist. Where could he be?

As Juliette was looking around again, her phone buzzed. Seeing it was Sierra, she quickly picked up.

"Listen, I've pinpointed your suspect. He's on the move, walking fast, away from the square, in the west direction."

"Thanks," Juliette said, feeling relieved that they had a lead on him.

She waved to Wyatt, who hurried over.

"He's been tracked, leaving the square," she said. "To the west."

She pointed, and they saw a narrow, twisting street lined with small cafés. Perhaps he was going this way to try to stay out of the eyes of the police and do his performance, which was not so much an actual performance as it was scouting for victims.

Juliette headed that way, her eyes peeled, looking for any signs of him.

Then, she saw him, catching her breath. He was performing near an outdoor café. The silver suit was gleaming in the morning sun. He was standing still, then slowly bending over, as if miming that he was being blown by the breeze.

Sierra had come through for them again, and she felt grateful beyond words for her tracking expertise.

Juliette rushed up to him. If this was their suspect, she was going to get as close as she could. She didn't want another chase through the streets of Paris.

When she was just a couple of yards from him, she spoke his name loudly.

"Charl Dupont? Is that you? We need to ask you some questions. We're the FBI."

Immediately, his head snapped around. He gazed at her, narrow-eyed, and Juliette saw a flare of anger in his expression.

Then, he lunged. But not away from her, not trying to flee.

He lunged toward her, hands outstretched, making a lightning fast grab for her neck.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

Lucien headed along the narrow side streets, watching carefully, hoping that the IT woman from the FBI team would come through with some tracking information on Giorgio Patron, the man who was posing as a licensed musician, without actually having the papers at all.

Technology would save time, but for now, he'd use his eyes and his instincts to spot the man, who might have his phone turned off, especially if he was playing music.

It was interesting that he'd been seen, and caused his trouble, away from the main squares where most of the performers congregated. Even so, there were crowds around. People walking, standing and talking on their phones, posing for photos. He turned his head, left and right, left and right, looking to see if he could spot the suspect he needed.

Under usual circumstances, Lucien would have assumed that Giorgio was trying to make a few quick euros from unsuspecting tourists, while keeping an eye out for the police, and that was why he'd chosen an area away from the main tourist square.

But now, he was wondering if this musician had a different agenda, and that his unlicensed playing was simply a front that he used, a reason to be out in public, so that he could identify and then hunt unsuspecting women.

"It's unacceptable," he said, striding down the side street with the man's facial features in his mind. "Unacceptable!"

He couldn't help feeling as if his life had been turned upside down in the past few days. It had been a whirlwind, complicated further by the unwanted arrival of the Americans.

Initially Lucien had been filled with resentment toward them. The woman had been too smart for her own good, while being smoothly diplomatic to him, and he'd wondered how long she could keep making lucky guesses about the case. Eventually he'd admitted to himself that she really was perceptive, and that, surprisingly, he enjoyed working with someone so quick-thinking.

The man, with his insistence on all things American had really rubbed him the wrong way. What an irritating agent Wyatt was!

Although Lucien had to admit, even though it had sparked a major war between the three of them, that tackle of Wyatt's had been something to

behold. His surprised mind had taken it in, the memory photographic, the American's coordination perfect.

And then, the woman, Juliette, had surprised him yet again by showing him her fiery side. That temper! Weirdly, the fact she'd shown that she was human and could get angry had made him respect her more. She was real; she was struggling to get this solved, just like him.

He remembered how she'd looked, with her eyes flashing angrily, and it had struck a chord in his heart. For the first time, he realized that she was beautiful and strong, a genuine person, not just someone sent from a higher power to stick a spoke in his wheel.

That time when she'd mentioned that she rescued animals had touched his heart, and he'd suddenly seen her in a different light. That had shocked him. It had been an intense, and unexpected moment.

He was dragged back to reality by the sound of guitar music. Was that the musician?

Lucien looked closely at the man with his back to the wall, playing a guitar fairly badly, with wrong notes aplenty. The features, were they the same?

No, that discordant guitar player wasn't him.

He moved on, and continued his search, staying alert and watching for anything suspicious. He was determined to find the musician, and get to the bottom of this case.

He hadn't expected to be working as a detective at this time, and in fact, he'd been ready for a promotion. Two months ago, Lucien had been offered the post of chief detective in the central Paris division. It was a very prestigious job and he'd been about to take it.

But then, disaster. His father had been attacked while walking home. Mugged, brutally beaten. The assault had caused a severe head injury and after a few days in ICU, he'd lost the battle. The swelling of the brain had been too bad. There was nothing that could be done. He'd slipped into a coma and died.

Lucien's mother, widowed, had needed the support of her only son, and so, feeling conflicted and angry and at odds with the world, he'd declined the job offer. No way could he support his mother and remain close to her, and take on the pressures of a new job.

And the question always lingered in his mind: had it been a random mugging? Or had one of the many Parisian criminals that Lucien had put



away during his career, gotten out again and done this for payback?

He was sure it wasn't so, but all the same, he felt a terrible wave of guilt every time he thought about what had happened to his dad, as if he himself might have caused this.

Lucien paused and looked around, his eyes scanning the street for any sign of the musician. Nothing. He sighed and continued, his steps determined, his mission clear.

He guessed the man's phone was not trackable or else surely he would have received the call by now?

And then, he saw him.

He was standing on a street corner, his hat in front of him, playing the clarinet with a fair amount of skill, reflected in the pile of money in his instrument case.

Lucien moved forward.

"Police," he said in brisk, sharp French, showing his badge. "Monsieur, are you Giorgio Patron?"

The man stopped playing. He stared at Lucien, horrified. He had a bushy head of curly hair, a round face, and wide blue eyes. He looked like a larger, darker, less innocent version of a cherub.

"No, no," he gabbled. "Please! No, my license is coming through. I have paid for it already. The application is done."

"It is?" Sidetracked by the compulsion to make sure this man really was legal, Lucien veered briefly off course. "Show me the proof."

He remained alert, watching the man carefully in case he tried to make a break for it. One high speed chase on foot through the streets of Paris had been more than enough for him recently.

But the man didn't run. He put his clarinet away, and he rummaged in his backpack, and then he handed over a piece of paper that Lucien recognized. It was, indeed, the proof of application to become a licensed street entertainer.

Even so, Lucien knew this man could be applying for a license while also killing young women on the side.

"I am investigating the recent murders in the area," he said. "You know there have been murders near here?" He looked at him closely to gauge his reaction.

"I - er - yes, I do know. You surely can't suspect me though?" Giorgio stared anxiously at Lucien.

"We are suspecting everyone until they are cleared. So, I need to know your movements yesterday, monsieur. In particular, last night." Lucien stared at him challengingly.

"Last night?" The man's face was contorted in concentration. "Yes, of course. I was playing, I remember, on the next street. But at about six p.m. I packed up and I went home."

"And who can confirm that?"

"My mother. I live with her. I am looking after her, as she has a broken leg."

Lucien couldn't help but feel a flash of sympathy. He knew what it was like, to be caring for your mother.

"I need proof, monsieur."

"Proof that she broke her leg?" The man stared at him wide-eyed.

"Proof that you were home," Lucien said impatiently. "What did you do at home? Make any phone calls? Anyone knocked on your door?"

"Ah. Well, I stopped on the way to buy groceries. And then, we watched a movie which I downloaded. And I also downloaded some music to practice, some clarinet tunes. I don't know if any of this will help?"

"It is something. I need more. Did you take any phone calls?"

Giorgio's face went slack with relief. "Yes. Yes, I remember now that the doctor called at about eight, to check how my mother was doing. I spoke to him for a while and then he spoke to my mother as well. So that, I can show you. I can give you his number. It's here, on my phone."

As Lucien had suspected, the phone had been turned off. Giorgio took it out of his pocket, turned it on, and then scrolled through. Looking very nervous, he showed all this proof to Lucien.

Lucien considered it, writing down the details, and then made a quick call to the police station to confirm that the incoming number belonged to an orthopedic surgeon. In just a minute, he got the answer – it did.

That was going to allow him to cross Giorgio off the list.

"All right. Thank you for showing me this. We need nothing more. Just get your papers organized and keep them with you."

He turned and strode away, back to the square where he knew the Americans were working.

But, as he rounded the corner, he heard a commotion, shouts, and angry cries. Something was happening in that square.

Lucien, feeling anxious, broke into a run.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

This man, this mime artist, was lunging straight for her neck. Juliette's reactions kicked in, well-practiced with her years of training, and she twisted aside. Only just in time to avoid what would have been either a karate chop or a desperate grab.

His arm lashed out at her, knocking her off balance, and she fought to regain her footing, jumping back out of reach, not wanting to escalate the situation but very aware that it might spiral out of control in a moment.

"You're all the same! All the same!" he yelled in a desperate voice. "You police. You want to get us off the streets. You encourage tourists to complain. You are the real troublemakers!"

"We are not looking to cause trouble. We're just looking to ask you questions," Juliette repeated again, in French, and in what she thought was a reasonable tone.

Other street performers were glancing their way now, and she heard murmurs of "American." The performers were seeing that these were non-French police involved, and they were clearly getting angry, perceiving that foreign police were interfering, that their income and their right to perform in public might be in jeopardy.

A man with a cello stopped playing and looked their way. Two jugglers in clown outfits paused their show. A black-clad acrobat, about to do a tumbling sequence across the square, hesitated and glanced around.

Juliette felt a chill, because if the performers were already angry, already on the defensive, what was going to happen if they did need to clear them off the streets? She had no doubt that if they tried to make tonight safer by hustling all the performers away and banning them from doing business, they were going to have a mutiny as the artists insisted on their right to earn a living.

And it might be starting right here.

She'd thought her question was reasonable, but clearly it was not reasonable enough. The man stared at her with an uncompromising glare. And then, with a cry of rage, he lunged at her.

She was ready to defend herself, but she didn't get the chance, because Wyatt leaped forward, grabbing the man's arms.

"Now, calm down, just calm down," he said loudly, holding the struggling man firmly.

Juliette wasn't even sure if he knew a word of English, and Wyatt's grip on his arms was causing him to struggle even more.

Now the performers were crowding around, and they were asking questions in angry voices. Juliette felt her heart sink. Just as she'd feared, this was going to cause major problems.

"Why is this happening? Are you threatening our livelihoods again?" the acrobat asked.

"We've gone to so much trouble to get our licenses. You police make the paperwork impossible! Now you are threatening us and questioning us?" The two jugglers looked furious.

The pressure was on. Now, they had an angry crowd to cope with, and they had to subdue and question this street performer. After all, he might be the guilty man; they might have found him.

"We will answer your questions in a moment," Juliette said in rapid French. "Please will you wait. This is not about the licensing or your right to be here. It's about the murders."

"And you blame us?" the clown shouted, outraged.

Meanwhile Juliette turned back to Charl. He was looking furious, but with Wyatt holding him tightly by both arms, he'd stopped struggling.

However, the way he had lunged for her neck had been a shock, and perhaps a giveaway.

Wyatt half dragged, half escorted the reluctant Charl away from the crowds.

He'd shown aggression and he'd shown motive. With a situation ready to explode, she now needed to urgently confirm his whereabouts at the time of the recent crimes.

Either he was guilty enough for them to bring him in, or he wasn't. If he wasn't, she didn't think that dragging him off to a police van would be helpful in any way. So, onsite questioning was the best way forward.

"Where were you yesterday evening?" she asked, once they were far enough away from the others to be out of earshot.

"Why should I tell you that?" he shot back.

"Because we are investigating a murder," she said calmly. "We are police, and we have powers to get the information we need to. It's up to you. You can answer us here, or we can bring you in and you might spend

the entire day in the police station even if you are innocent. If you tell us what we need to know, we will leave you alone."

Charl's expression changed slightly, and she thought he might actually be considering her words.

"You are not even the French police," he protested.

Juliette sighed. He was still being stubborn and uncooperative.

"We're the FBI," she said, her voice still firm. "And if you won't agree to being questioned here, we are going to take you in." She said the last part in English for Wyatt's benefit.

Wyatt nodded, and he tightened his grip on Charl's arm.

"Come this way," he said.

"Alright, alright. I don't want to go anywhere with you. I'll cooperate." With the threat on the verge of being carried out, she saw that Charl was now reconsidering the wisdom of his actions. "But what if I tell you and you still don't like the answers? Why are you picking on me at all?" he demanded.

Juliette could see clearly that he didn't trust the police.

"Unfortunately we do have a complaint against you already. You tried to attack a woman."

His eyes widened. "That woman from yesterday? She was trying to take money from my hat. She was a thief. All I did was warn her off. I am a performer and the money I make is mine! She tried to grab a handful of euro notes, right from out of my collection!" He glared at her. "Where were the police then? Where were you when my money was being stolen? You were nowhere! You don't want to help us. You just want to bully us!" He raised his voice, glancing back at the other performers, who were still gathered in an angry group.

That was a different story from what Juliette had expected. Was this man just thinking on his feet to save himself, or was he telling the truth? She didn't know, but she did know the alibi for the time of the crimes would provide the answer.

"Your movements yesterday?"

"I was performing, right here in the square."

"Until when?" Juliette pressured him. After he'd finished, when the crowds were thinning, was exactly when this crime had most likely occurred. That was now what she needed to check.

"Until nine," he said. "At nine, I left the square."

Katarina had been murdered at around quarter to ten. So his movements after leaving the square were important.

"And then where did you go?"

"I went home via the Metro. I live on the outskirts of Paris. The Metro station takes me straight to my front door, almost. I arrived home at half-past nine. I then went to a bistro across the road from my apartment block and I had dinner there. I saw a few friends, which I had arranged earlier. I can prove I was there."

Juliette nodded. "We need that proof."

"My Metro pass. I can show you the trip. I can show you the messages I sent to my friends, to meet them at the bistro. The barman knows me. The waitresses, too."

Now, at last, he was cooperating and Juliette felt glad. Finally, they'd made some progress. It seemed like this suspect could be ruled out, but she wasn't letting him go until she had confirmed that alibi. And luckily, their tech expert would be able to do that quickly.

"I need you to wait," she said.

She took screen shots with her own phone, of the evidence he'd given her on his phone. Then, quickly, she messaged Sierra.

*"We have an alibi that needs to be confirmed, by making a few calls and checking a few transactions. Here are the screen shots. Can you do it?"*

*"Sure,"* Sierra messaged back.

Meanwhile, Charl was starting to complain again, pulling away from Wyatt, who was holding him firm, with a frown on his face.

"You can't go yet," he said. "We need to get proper confirmation. Until then you're still a suspect."

"I am an innocent man and this is police abuse!" he shouted.

Juliette turned back to him, trying to keep as calm as possible.

"It's not abuse. We can't let you go until the alibi is confirmed. The woman who's working on it is very fast and I'm sure she'll do it in a few minutes. Please, will you be patient and continue to cooperate with us for that time?"

"Alright," he said, sounding resentful but calmer, and she saw that her logic had gotten through to him.

Juliette was relieved. She'd been concerned about the situation escalating. But now, she thought, they could get through this without any further trouble.

Until she looked over her shoulder, and saw that the opposite had happened.

A growing crowd of performers was now encircling them. She heard irate shouts from the musicians, the mime artists, the acrobats, the artistically painted statues. Someone threw an empty can of soda and it clattered down at her feet.

“We have heard a rumor you want to shut us down! That you are going to take us off the streets because of what has happened!”

That rumor was entirely correct. They had been considering that. Someone at the police station must have heard it, and perhaps passed it on to one of the performers, and word had traveled fast. But Juliette now saw it would be a terrible idea. It would, as Lucien had said, cause riots.

In fact, it already was.

## CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

Thinking quickly, Juliette turned to the colorful crowd, hoping to calm the situation down, but the woman in front, a tall, long-limbed woman in a bright harlequin costume, was shaking her fists violently.

"You are not even the French police! What right do you have to try to oppress us and tell us what to do?"

"We are working with the French police."

"You are forcing the police to take us off the streets?"

As Juliette took a breath, not sure how to answer this, she saw Lucien hurrying toward her, his face anxious.

"What is happening here?" he asked. "Calm down, people!"

"Why should we listen?" one of the performers shouted. "You are here to interfere with our work, to cause problems, to shut us down for no reason! We are innocent."

The anger was palpable. Juliette was impressed that Lucien remained cool-headed.

He murmured to Juliette and Wyatt, "We cannot shut the performers down. Trying to clear the city will cause riots. Our French people are passionate, and they protest quickly when they feel wronged. But perhaps what we can do is ask them to help us."

Juliette and Wyatt nodded in approval at that. It was definitely the wisest choice. They didn't want more trouble in this city, or police having to be deployed for other reasons.

Turning to the angry group, Lucien said, "Your livelihoods are not at risk. You will not be closed down. But we are going to be policing these areas very closely for the next few days. The criminal committing the murders in these arrondissements might be posing as a street performer."

There was a general murmur of disbelief.

"How could he do that?" the woman demanded.

"Easy. He could simply set up shop, and put on a costume to make sure people didn't realize his true identity," Lucien said. "After all, you all know about people who perform illegally, don't you? I know you all dislike the police checks, but imagine if the checks caught the criminal?"

There was silence. Juliette could see all the performers were considering these words.



"I don't know everyone," the woman said, "but I know a lot of the people who perform in these areas. We are - we are like a community. And if I see someone I don't know, I am aware of them."

"I also do the same," another man, dressed as a clown, said. "I know most of the others well. Occasionally I see a stranger and that is also, for me, a reason to watch them."

"You can help us," Juliette said, glancing at Lucien.

Juliette could see now that if the performers got angry, it would work in the killer's favor. It would divide the police and cause a distraction. That, they couldn't afford.

But working with the street performer community, alerting them to the dangers, asking them to help - well, that might just flush Goldenface out.

"If we find him, we can stop this killer," Lucien continued. "So right now, you can help us. You are a community, and you know each other."

"Yes," a mime artist dressed all in white, with a masklike face, said. "We do know each other, and we are like a family. We look out for each other and support each other."

"So help us then. You can help us."

"How?" a man in a spangled gold jumpsuit, queried.

Juliette stepped in, joining the conversation.

"We are looking for someone who might be posing as a performer, but who's most likely a stranger. He might have some skill, though - a musician, a juggler, a mime artist. He wears black gloves. And he has spent time in New York recently. This is what we know so far. What we're trying our best to do, is to stop more women from being murdered. Whatever that takes, we have to find this killer."

Now she could see that the street performers were starting to understand the seriousness of the situation.

"He might be hiding among you, pretending to be one of you. Are you going to protect a person like this, who's placing everyone's livelihood at risk?" Lucien asked.

"What if he kills your sister? Your daughter?" Juliette asked.

Wyatt was holding onto Charl Dupont's arm, firmly but without aggression, quietly restraining him while Juliette and Lucien spoke to the unhappy street performers.

Juliette was surprised. For the very first time it felt as if the three of them were working together. She didn't know how it had happened. Perhaps, in

the past few hours, they'd been able to put their differences and resentment aside and find common ground in their pursuit of this killer. She hoped so. Because she knew, for a fact, it would take every one of them to catch this man who'd evaded the top level FBI teams in New York.

The street performers listened, and one by one they nodded, understanding that this was important and that they had a responsibility to help.

"Please, help us find this man. If he's hiding among you, you need to expose him, because he's putting all of your livelihoods at stake."

The acrobat in a shimmering blue outfit, her hair drawn back in a braid, spoke first.

"I understand how serious this is, and I will volunteer to help. I have friends in many different areas. I will put the word out and ask them to keep alert and look for strangers."

"I will do the same," another one agreed. "But I want you to promise you will not take us off the street. This is a fine Friday in spring. To have to stay home tonight will affect us badly, especially seeing that tomorrow it is supposed to rain."

Juliette nodded.

"Please, everyone, I know this is a difficult situation for you. We won't remove you from the streets, but we need you to be our eyes and ears. The sooner we can catch this man, the sooner we can all get back to normal. We need to do this for everyone's safety. We understand that this is not an easy situation, but if you can help us by providing information, then we can all get back to our lives, sooner rather than later."

The performers nodded, clearly understanding the gravity of the situation. Juliette felt relief wash over her. It seemed like the street performers were really on board with helping them.

"There will be more police around, but I don't want you to feel threatened. They are going to be in this area to support us and look for the killer," Lucien explained. "We are deploying all the police we have available in this search. If you see anything, then call the emergency hotline, or else grab the nearest police officer and tell him what you have noticed."

"We understand," one of the women said, firmly. "We will help however we can."

Juliette wondered if this might mean a big break for the case. With street performers all over Paris as their lookouts, and extra police deployed to all the major tourist hotspots and patrolling the outlying areas, they might just get the break they needed. This could be the teamwork that would catch the killer.

Lucien read out the emergency hotline number for the police department. And then, the performers dispersed around the square, some begrudgingly, others with a newfound respect and understanding.

Juliette and Lucien watched as the crowd slowly disappeared.

"Well, I think that had a good result," Juliette said.

Lucien nodded.

"Yes. It did. I think we found a way to get the street performers to cooperate, and that could be very helpful in our investigation. If they are on our side, we might just be able to find Goldenface before he strikes again."

Wyatt's phone rang, and quickly, he answered it. Then he turned to Charl, letting him go.

"Charl Dupont, we've checked your alibi and it's all good. Thank you for cooperating."

Still looking grumpy, and rubbing his arms, Charl turned and walked away.

Juliette sighed. She felt as if they had made a lot of progress, but she was still worried that they were missing something. That there was an aspect of this case that she wasn't seeing, and if she didn't work out what it was, it would come back to bite her. A little voice in the back of her mind was whispering a warning, and she'd learned to trust that voice over the years.

"Is something bothering you?" Lucien asked.

Grimacing, Juliette nodded.

"We've got all the street performers on board, we are going to patrol these areas, we're going to keep a lookout for him. But, when we were talking to the performers about areas, about the different parts of Paris, it was like a light flickered on in my brain, but it wasn't there for long enough to let me see it. I don't know what it is that I'm missing, but I need to figure it out."

Lucien looked at her, his gaze assessing.

"You have good instincts," he said, the compliment causing her to blink in surprise.

"Thank you," she said.

"If you think something is missing, it probably is, and we need to find out what. And fast." He checked his watch. "Already it is afternoon. We only have a few more hours before he might be gearing up to kill again."

## CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

Juliette nodded. She agreed with Lucien, and felt deeply worried by how fast the time was passing. They were still too far behind him. How could they catch up?

She needed some head space, a chance to get her thoughts in order. And she couldn't do it here, in this crowded square, at a moment's notice. Abruptly, she realized what she needed.

She needed to do what she always did when a tough case or problem was weighing on her mind. That was to walk, and let it simmer in her subconscious.

If she did this here, her mind might offer a solution. She didn't have a lot of time, but she could try.

"Give me twenty minutes, and I'll see if I can work out what it is," she said. Turning, she strode away.

The pressure of needing to find a solution weighed on her mind as Juliette headed out of the square and onto a side street, which at this hour was busy with pedestrians and cars, moving slowly and weaving around each other in the narrow space.

The killer might have walked this way, down this very road. This was his hunting ground and she knew he'd scoped it out well.

What had he been thinking as he walked? How was he committing these crimes? Was he considering this alleyway as the place to take his next victim? Or that one ahead?

She frowned, realizing what was at stake, and what impact a third murder might have on the case. It would be a huge blow. It might even be a death blow. This task force was new, and they needed to get results.

Juliette usually loved walking. She settled into a rhythm and went into her own head, and her subconscious mind always seemed to get as much exercise as her legs did.

Now, as she walked, she tried to put her worries aside and let her subconscious do the job it needed to do.

He was hiding in plain sight, perhaps as a street performer. They'd asked the other performers, the musicians, and entertainers, to keep an eye out for him, but nobody had seen him so far - or if they had, they weren't saying.

Why was that? What were they not seeing here?

Her boots trod the ground as she veered away from the main street, heading down the second of the alleyways that had caught her eye. Down here looked exactly like a place where he might hide out and lie in wait for a new victim. It was close to a tourist hub, yet deserted.

What had made her turn down here, though? It was an uninviting place. Wet, with a puddle of water running down the gutter in the middle, with high walls that even now in the daytime seemed to swallow the light.

"I walked down here because I was trying to put myself in his shoes. Trying to think how he could have done this. But why would Claudette have walked into a place like this?" she said aloud. "Why would Katarina have walked in here? Why is nobody seeing him?"

She remembered that mime artist in the square - he'd had an excellent and surprising performance. He'd wrapped himself in a curtain of white, and had then appeared to grow magically taller, swaying like a ghost coming to life. When the curtain had opened, he'd been standing normally, and smiling. She thought that he must have had some kind of collapsible platform that he'd used to achieve this very captivating illusion.

So what if this killer had a disguise, too? A black cloak or a black drape that he could wrap around himself or hide behind so that he looked like nothing more than a discarded trash bag, just a featureless dark object in the shadows?

That would work and it would tie in with the street performer ethos.

That meant he would reveal himself to his victim when the time was right. He'd step up, out of that concealment, and he'd do something to attract their attention and lure them in.

He must look like a performer, or like something he wasn't. But now at last, she thought she'd gotten deeper into his mind, and figured out his MO. Conceal, then reveal, then lure. All done from the cover of a deserted alleyway to make certain nobody else saw.

That was what they'd been missing. They'd thought he'd started out in plain view and had somehow lured or dragged his victims into the alleyways. But now, she was realizing, he must have hidden in the alleys all along, and only shown himself when the time was right and a susceptible person had walked past.

She nodded, her pace quickening as she turned to start the walk back to the square. If this was how he was doing things, they needed to change their strategy, because they wouldn't catch him if they patrolled the public places.

None of the street performers would see him because he was out of sight, hiding, revealing himself only to a potential victim, catching her eye and enticing her into his dark territory.

Now, she needed to figure out how they could work with this.

Arriving back in the square, she saw Lucien's head turn immediately to look at her.

She had the explanation. Now, she needed a solution. She hurried over to him.

"I've been thinking about this killer, and how he's been doing what he has. And I think I've worked it out."

"You have?" Lucien raised an eyebrow as Wyatt hurried over.

Turning to them, she explained.

"He has some way of hiding himself. Perhaps he uses dark fabric, black sacking, something to put over himself so that he's undetectable in the alleyway. He hides there, and he waits, and then he lures them in. We've been thinking that they must have been grabbed from busy public roads and dragged down the alleyway, but I think he's been luring them in. By looking like a statue, something eye-catching, something so mysterious and out of the way that it intrigues them. Perhaps he moves, attracts their attention, and then stays still again so they think he isn't even real. Then, he could use his cover again while he paints their faces."

Lucien and Wyatt exchanged a glance.

"It's a logical idea," Lucien said, nodding slowly. "Hiding away, and then attracting their attention, and then looking like a real statue is a clever way to get around their fears of him being a stranger."

"Yes, that would make sense. And if he hides under some sort of cover then presumably he can use it to cover them, too."

"Exactly. If someone else walked through the alleyway, they might never see the victim. Perhaps he uses black plastic, or a tarp, or some kind of cloth. It's dark, people are alone, they're hurrying to get where they need to be. Most likely, he can just hide away and keep out of sight, and then carry on when the coast is clear, which presumably, in an alleyway, would be most of the time."

She grimaced as she said it because she knew what this meant. She could see Wyatt and Lucien knew too.

"We are looking for someone who is an expert at disappearing," Lucien said. "Patrolling all of Paris's alleyways, even in the closest

arrondissements, will be impossible. Looking for someone who can disguise himself with a tarp or a sheet, who is not going to be there when you shine a flashlight - how are we going to find him?"

He said the question in a thoughtful tone, as if he was already going over ideas in his mind.

"Camera footage?" Wyatt asked.

"I don't even think camera footage will help." Juliette shook her head. But something about Wyatt's suggestion had lit a flame in her own mind.

"I'll tell you how we could do it," she said.

"How?" Both men turned to her.

Juliette took a deep breath. "We need to set up a sting operation and trap him. We need to get enough plainclothes police officers to be the bait, and to walk around after dark in the parts of the city where he might be. And we then have to hope he shows himself to one of us."

Lucien's eyes narrowed. "It might work, I guess," he said dubiously.

"It's the only thing that can. Remember, we know now that he's not targeting his victims. He's just waiting for the right one to come along and then he's luring them in. All we need to do is get enough of the right looking people, in the area where he's likely to be, and we maximize our chances of him choosing one of us."

Now, both the men were looking more excited. Lucien glanced at Wyatt and then at her.

"This is going to be short notice to organize. I am not sure we can do it. Manpower will be an issue, especially since he targets women. But let's try."

"We need to move fast," Juliette said.

She checked her watch, seeing with a jolt it was now four p.m. Their window to trap the killer was narrow.

Every second counted in putting the sting operation in place.



## CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

The main police station was a hive of activity. Juliette could feel the tension in the air, an atmosphere of excitement, as frantic preparations for the sting operation began.

Some of the police patrols had stood down, although there were still additional officers out on the streets. But all female policewomen and some police reservists and security personnel had been recalled, redeployed, and were now being briefed by Lucien.

"We each need to walk through a designated area, following the main routes, but remaining aware of what is happening in the alleys and side streets. So as not to alert the killer, once you have walked through your area, you will move on to the next, so that he does not see you twice if he is being cautious, and looking out for us. So, take a good look at the map, and the routes we have planned."

He flashed the map up on the screen. The assembled cops and security - ten in total, stared at it, nodding.

Seated at the desk, with two laptops open, Sierra was highlighting the routes in real time, calculating the approximate timing it would take for each person to walk through. With her AI to assist, she'd created a series of ten maps that covered the wider vicinity of the Eiffel Tower, where they thought he would strike.

Would ten people be enough? It was all that the Paris police had been able to pull together on short notice. Ideally, an operation like this would take a few days to organize but with the killer operating within such a short interval, they didn't have that luxury of time.

Juliette couldn't suppress a flicker of nerves that ten wouldn't be enough, or that the killer would lay low for a while, and it would be a waste of manpower.

But then she shook her head. This man was increasing his interval of killing with a bloodthirsty ferocity. Knowing the police were on his trail wouldn't stop him from killing again and it might even encourage him to move faster.

"You will need to be dressed similarly to these two victims." Lucien flashed the images of the clothing onto the screen. "As you can see, we are looking for casual jeans, a brightly colored top, perhaps a dark jacket."

Moving forward, Juliette added, "It's possible that the right victim will attract his eye, so we need to try and be who he wants us to be."

Having gone past a high street clothing store to get the look she wanted, she was already dressed in clothing she thought would work - faded jeans, sneakers, a red top, and a soft, dark jacket. She was worried that the killer might recognize her, so she'd chosen a wig from the bunch of props that Lucien had obtained. For tonight, she was going to be a striking redhead, and she hoped the flaming hair might catch his eye.

"This killer is extremely dangerous," she said. "He acts fast and he uses lethal force. For this operation, if you see him, we need to use a code word so that the rest of the team is alerted."

She'd thought carefully about that. If the killer was watching his victim approach, the victim couldn't just start mumbling to herself that she thought she'd seen something.

"We are going to use the phrase, *Comme c'est étrange*," she said.

The English translation, "How strange," she thought was apt. If the killer was luring his victims in, they must have been intrigued enough to walk down that alleyway.

"If you see anything strange, any movement or attention-grabbing activity from inside one of the quieter, narrow streets, you look twice, you make sure to appear fascinated, and you say those words," Lucien emphasized, as the assembled group nodded. "We will then send backup to your location as fast as possible. Do not get too close to this man. Try to delay, try to buy some time. And do not let him escape. If he runs, be ready to run after him, and make sure you see which way he turns."

The air of determination in the room was palpable. They all knew what they had to do, and they all knew the risks. But they were ready to do whatever it took to catch this killer.

Juliette looked at the time which was ticking inexorably by. Now, it was after six p.m. and they needed to get into position, ready for the sting operation, which would kick off at six-thirty and would run until eleven p.m. Only when the streets were deserted, and they'd given the killer every chance to pounce, would the team stand down.

"Good luck everyone," Juliette said, as they all got up to leave. "Let's get out there and find him."

"Good luck to you, too," one of the women said.

Lucien and Wyatt, unable to provide themselves as bait, would be centrally situated with a team of three other armed police officers. They would be ready at a moment's notice, to rush to whichever site needed help, or whichever of the police officers had triggered the killer.

Juliette couldn't help thinking, as she walked out to the waiting car, that their police sting operation was like a miniature version of Paris itself. The arrondissements in Paris began from the center, with the first arrondissement, and then fanned out in a growing circle, in a clockwise direction. Like a curlicue, like a snail's shell. And their sting operation was basically that, in miniature. They had identified the central area of the arrondissement, and then they had fanned out around that, with five of them taking the inner circle and the rest on the outside. Given the vast web of streets, and the fact that the killer didn't stick to one arrondissement but overlapped in his kills, Juliette knew it wasn't an exact plan, and might not be precise enough. But it was the best they could do.

Was there something else significant about the mapping?

Something else was niggling at her mind, demanding attention, but at that moment, she didn't have time to explore her idea further. Even so, it wouldn't hurt to do some research. Perhaps, using her AI, Sierra could identify a pattern to the kills so far, that they hadn't yet been able to see.

Turning off her earpiece, so the others wouldn't be distracted by the conversation, she picked up her phone and called Sierra.

"Hey, Juliette," Sierra answered.

"Sierra, I have an idea."

"What's that?"

"I was wondering if you could run a few AI algorithms on the location of the two kills, and if your software could pinpoint any spot where he's most likely to be? I've been trying to think of it but there are so many variables. It might just help us."

"You're right, it might," Sierra said. "Let me take a look. I've got a few different programs that I can run, and they'll look at different things. Geography, street location, latitude points, and also we could assume a fictitious headquarters for him and plot around that."

"That all sounds great," Juliette said, wishing she'd thought of this earlier because it sounded exciting. But hopefully, as Sierra worked, they could use her findings to get closer to him, if she did come up with an answer. And in the meantime, at least they had the wider area covered.

As she got into the car taking her and two others to their starting point, she felt a thrill of anticipation, a rush of adrenaline. This was it. This was the moment they had all been waiting for.

She checked her earpiece.

"All good? Can everyone hear me?" she asked.

There were replies from all ten of the other policewomen. Everyone was ready, everyone's equipment was working. This hastily cobbled together sting operation was working as well as it could, given the timeframe.

"Good luck. Remember your briefing, remember your routes," she said.

"The same to you," came a chorus of muted replies.

Thinking about the routes, Juliette hoped yet again they were in the right area, that the killer wouldn't choose to strike somewhere different, and leave them scrambling to catch up. They could not afford to lose another victim. One more kill, and Juliette had no doubt it would mean the third strike for their brand new investigation team.

"Here you are," the driver said.

She knew her route. In the distance, she could see the Eiffel Tower, bright and gleaming with its lights.

Juliette climbed out of the car and set off, making sure to walk with a tired slouch, and not to look in the least like a police officer.

Take the bait. Come after me, she urged him silently, hoping that tonight, he would pick her as his next victim.

## CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

Juliette slouched forward, getting into her role. She had to be careful. Tonight, as she walked this route, she was not going to be thinking like a cop, nor even an undercover cop.

This was who she was. Just a tired office worker in a low tier corporate position at one of the company headquarters in Paris. Something unglamorous. Not make-up or cosmetics. Something less exciting. Maybe adhesives and coatings.

That was it.

She was a low level worker at an adhesives and coatings company, and she'd come to central Paris for a compulsory training day, and was now heading home. Tired of her job, annoyed by a training day that had brought her all the way into the city center when her home was an hour's Metro ride away. She was trudging along, and might be briefly sidetracked by some interest, a distraction.

She'd be open to it. Though not seeking it.

In character, she made her way through the crowd, all the while keeping her eyes on the lookout spots that she'd identified. She needed to make sure there was nothing there that might lead anyone else astray.

Though she had no idea how the killer had shown himself to his past victims, she could imagine how it might have happened. How their eye might have been caught. She was hoping that her eye would be caught, as she walked along her route.

From here, the vista opened up, and she could see those beautiful twinkling lights of the tower, the anchor of Paris, the wonder of the world that drew so many from all corners of the globe just to look, to see.

She turned sideways to stare, because anyone would do that, even a disillusioned office worker.

And then, she turned back. She followed the route away from the tower's view, and into the winding side streets. He hadn't appeared for her and that meant she now needed to move on to the next phase of her patrol. This would take her down the winding alleyways of a neighboring suburb. Personally, she thought it was a more promising area, but she couldn't be sure. Who knew where he was now?

The streets were much quieter now and Juliette found herself straining her eyes to pick out anything suspicious. She kept her head down and her gait casual, but her eyes were constantly darting around in search of any clues.

"Nothing so far," she muttered, adding to the host of similar comments that she'd heard from the others.

She was beginning to feel scared that he would not appear, that they'd overthought this and set the entire operation up for no reason.

But then, she heard a noise. It was a soft, melodic sound, like the tinkling of a distant music box.

She scrunched her eyes in concentration, trying to pinpoint where it was coming from. Would she be lured by this?

Yes, she would. It was beautiful and intriguing enough.

Veering down the cross street, she followed the sound, and it led her to a corner. As she neared it, the sound got louder and her own hopes got even higher. Perhaps this was the lure that he'd used.

Rounding the corner, she stared ahead in expectation.

Standing there was a tall, dark, and handsome man wearing a red cape and playing a harp. He was the source of the music. And he'd attracted quite the crowd. People were gathered around him, listening, filming, exclaiming. Money was pouring into the hat he'd placed in front of him.

She had no idea if he was a legitimate performer or not. Perhaps he had a license, perhaps not. But with so many people around him, the chances of him committing any murder was way too slim. This wasn't their man and she had to look further.

Juliette sighed, and then made her way back onto the main street.

"I had a possible, but it didn't work out," she said. She felt like she'd been walking for ages. Was this killer even going to surface tonight?

She squared her shoulders and kept walking. She would not give up. She'd keep looking until she found him.

What was that ahead?

Her heart pounded fast and hard as she saw the man standing near the corner, with his stony looking flesh, the blank stare, the immobile stance.

Was this him, luring her in?

She felt almost hypnotized as she drew closer, watching carefully, but there was no movement here at all. Nothing to make her think this was anything other than an edifice of gray stone.

She stood in front of it. Reached out a hand.

Gasping, she almost laughed, as her hand touched real, cold stone. She'd just been tricked by one of Paris's genuine statues.

She turned away, feeling suddenly discouraged, hope draining as fast as it had come.

Juliette tried to draw some motivation from the fact that she was just one of the cogs in the wheel. There were ten others. There was realistically a one in eleven chance that the killer would show himself to her.

What she needed to do was her job as well as she could. Not to miss anything, not to skip over any detail that might make a difference. And perhaps the team needed to hear the same. A bit of encouragement might go a long way.

She spoke into her mic. In French. Speaking to what she hoped would be the hearts and minds of the other actors in this sting operation, to encourage them.

"It's late and we are tired. Some of you are probably thinking this is it, that he won't appear. There's a time in every operation where you feel like this, and it's normal. Just don't let yourself shut off your surroundings. Keep alert and keep looking. We need to keep trying, every step of the way. This is our one chance to catch the killer. Let's keep going. Together, we can do this."

She hoped that her feedback would have the desired effect. She knew that she was the stranger in the group, and hoped that it was not going to be taken out of turn.

For herself, for Wyatt, for Lucien, and above all for the victims, she needed to keep everyone on the same side and pulling together.

The team responded with a wave of positive comments. It was an encouragement that bolstered everyone.

"Thank you for that," someone said.

"I'm glad you mentioned it. I was feeling discouraged," another woman said.

"I guess this is a time when we feel tired. I'll keep very alert now," someone else added.

And then, she heard Lucien's voice.

"Keep focus, keep striving. Thanks, Juliette. We all needed that."

She felt reassured that even though they had been searching for hours, they would not give up. And Juliette felt her own courage swell. She was

determined to catch this killer, and she wouldn't let anyone stand in her way.

Just as she'd done on previous jobs, knowing that she was still giving her all and that her team was alongside her, gave her a wave of determination. It was time to keep going. Keep looking in all the nooks and crannies. Keep hoping. Keep believing.

She walked on, listening to the others' comments in her ear. There was more enthusiasm in the voices now.

"I am remembering to keep in character," one said. "I am feeling bored with work, wanting to get home."

"I am looking for something interesting, to brighten up my dull life."

"I am tired, and slowing down, looking to see what is there, on the side road," another one said. And then, her voice sharpened. "And I have seen something," she hissed. "Moving forward. It's a human statue, a man painted in silver and gold."

Striving her best to keep in her own character, not to drop her cover yet, Juliette felt her heart pound, because it sounded like this was a serious lead. This was something!

"What is this?" the woman said, pretending to be in character. And then, with loud assurance in her tone, she blurted out the code word they'd all been waiting for. "Comme c'est étrange!"

Juliette didn't hesitate, but broke into a full run.



## CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

As Juliette hurtled down the street toward the crossroad, she heard Sierra's voice intervening urgently.

"The coordinates are corner Rue Perignon and Avenue Deschamps. Deschamps is a very small side street. Sending coordinates!"

She glanced at the coordinates as she ran, and veered left to get on track, knowing that every possible police officer would be joining in this race. This was the final stretch, the chance for them to catch Goldenface, who'd finally shown himself.

All she cared about was getting there before he managed to escape, and hopefully without any loss of life or injury.

Please, please, let this go down successfully, she thought. As she ran, opening her phone to check the coordinates, abandoning her cover, she wondered how he'd looked. Wondered what had happened and who he was.

And then the words she dreaded.

"He's on the run! He's going!"

Breath hissed into her lungs. No, she thought. Please, no. Not now, not when they were so close to catching him.

"Which way?" anxious voices were asking. It was Sierra, at her operations desk and mapping out the action who was able to clarify, her voice calm.

"Operator nine is running north. So that's where the suspect is fleeing. He's heading in the direction of Rue Percival. Description?" she asked.

There were a few moments of breathless silence, and then the policewoman replied.

"Metallic. He was dressed - like a robot. Like steampunk. I thought he was a machine. Very good disguise."

"Okay, Steampunk. Metallic. Robot outfit. Did you see which way he turned on Rue Percival?"

"No. Too far behind." But the policewoman sounded as if she was doing her best to catch up.

Juliette knew that from her current direction, she'd come in on the south end of Rue Percival. She didn't know if that would be helpful or not. If the killer was running north, then no.

"We're north. Heading to the north side," Lucien confirmed.

So he, Wyatt, and the police backup would be that way. She'd be on the opposite side, and from their layout, Juliette wondered uneasily whether she might be the only one who was able to get there in the time.

If so, then she'd better run faster, she told herself, forcing doubt aside.

She wasn't going to catch this guy by being hesitant or worried. She had a chance if she could get there as fast as she could and then, hopefully, be the one to stop him if he was fleeing that way.

Here it was. Rue Percival. Juliette sped down it, her breath misting lightly in the cooling night air, her eyes peeled for anything resembling the description.

But all she spotted as she ran was an old woman walking her dog, a couple of teenagers talking on the street corner, and a few cars passing.

No metallic figure. No robotic figure. No one at all.

Had he already escaped? Or was he still around here? There were no cross streets. So if he was coming down, then she would meet him.

She continued, and then, in the gloom, ahead of her, she saw a strange, gleaming sight. A figure, running hard. Undoubtedly this was the man described.

"Seen him," she said breathlessly. "Heading south."

Then there was time to do nothing more than close in.

He was tall and gangling. He was wearing a mass of striped black and silver, and there was silver face paint obscuring his features. He stopped to look back, and she could see his chest heaving with the effort.

She could get him. Even as she raced ahead, Juliette was triangulating the distance to make sure she'd end up in the right place.

He was very distracted about what was going on behind his back, clearly fleeing the pursuers from the north side, and that put her in a much better situation. She was able to get close, as he turned and ran headlong again, coming straight toward her.

Now, she thought. Now, do it.

She leaped into his path. She knew what she had to do. Obstruct him, trip him, stop his forward movement.

Coming at him with arms outstretched, she was ready for any evasion. And he tried. As he got close, and realized what she was doing, he let out a cry of alarm and tried to dodge aside.

"No, you don't," Juliette yelled.

She caught hold of his arm, and with a mighty heave, she knocked him off balance. He stumbled, and she felt the jolt go through her as his weight went down. She jerked his arm again, twisting as she pulled, and he sprawled onto the floor.

His limbs were flailing. There was desperate fight in him, but she was desperate too.

She bent down and with a final lunge, she managed to grab his arms and hold them, using all the strength she had. He was struggling, trying to jerk away, and as she got the handcuffs off her belt, he almost succeeded.

"No!" With all her strength, she grabbed him again and this time, she managed to clip the cuff around one of his wrists.

He was panting, chest heaving. He was struggling, but with a lunge, she had him in her grasp. Not tightly enough, though. His arm came free and this time, he jerked it away so hard he nearly pulled her off her feet. His hand whacked her on the forehead, more of a lucky blow than intentional, but even so, for a moment, she was blinded by the stinging impact.

"No!" Juliette shouted, shaking off the pain and lunging for him again. She was determined to finish the job.

But then, he kicked out, and while she twisted aside to avoid the impact, she almost let go of the cuff.

"No, you don't!"

This time, she hung on with all her strength, and finally, she got the other wrist into the metal bracelet and clicked it closed, gripping onto his arms for dear life.

At the same moment, she heard the thud of feet and looked up to see Wyatt, approaching at a full run.

None too soon. She was done after this struggle, and would appreciate the help.

Wyatt grabbed one of Steampunk's arms, and she took hold of the other.

Now, there was nowhere for him to go and he knew it. They had their handcuffed suspect captured.

Finally, gasping for breath, Juliette could take a step back and look at him.

He had a lean, narrow face which was daubed with artistically applied gold and silver paint. A sleek black hat covered his hair. More paint camouflaged his arms, and he was wearing black gloves, she noticed,

feeling even more certain. Black gloves. This was their man; she was sure of it. All the boxes were checked.

"Who are you?" Juliette said. He stared back, silent. And then he shook his head and gave an angry scowl.

He wasn't saying who he was.

This man was not going to confess easily, and perhaps not at all. And of all the defenses that Juliette was used to seeing, she considered total silence to be the most powerful weapon of all.

It was so hard to break through. She had no idea yet of his nationality, his name, or anything about him.

This questioning was going to be her biggest challenge yet, and as she turned toward the police van that was pulling up at the end of the road, she felt another pang of self-doubt. What if he was smart enough to get out of it?

What if he had a few tricks left up his sleeve?

## CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

Goldenface stood still, becoming one with his environment. This was a critical time, and he knew that the environment was not safe. He was at risk here. He'd moved twice, but each time he'd made sure to get closer to the place where he planned to put his third, and final, statue, so that he could ensure it was clear.

Now, he was back home, changing his disguise.

He'd seen earlier that the police were looking closely at statues and street performers, and that they'd even encouraged the performers to look for strangers hiding in their numbers. He'd noticed the commotion in the square, and heard the talk afterward, and he had known immediately that he risked discovery.

Getting caught was usually easy for someone of his skills to evade. Gold paint wasn't the only material he'd stocked up on. He'd bought in a supply of others, too. And now was the time to use one of the weapons in his artillery.

He smiled as he applied the last of the coppery white cream to his face, and his newly shaven head, and his arms.

This cream, which he'd mixed up himself with color pigments from the cosmetics store, was the perfect match for the even, smooth, pale skin of a store mannequin. He'd taken time to make the color match because there should be no room for doubt. If the disguise was perfect then people's eyes would accept it. If it was imperfect, people would notice and look, and then he risked discovery.

But he thought it was a well-chosen disguise, and he'd tried to make it perfect.

That was who he was going to be. A mannequin. With a shaved head and stiff limbs at odd angles, and a featureless face, with clothing sitting on him not quite right, a little askew, looking as if it wasn't really meant to be there.

He was nothing more, now, than a clothes rack in human form, something to be overlooked, until the time was right to move. People were looking for a human statue, or a performer, someone bright and shiny and eye-catching. They were not looking for a simple store model that was in hundreds of the high street windows, in different guises.

He smiled at the thought. He'd been so clever to think of this.

But he had been clever in other ways, too. He had been careful to plan his escape route. He had prepared for any eventuality.

He stood still and waited, with a sense of calm. He knew that he had done everything he could. All he could do now was watch and wait. What he thought was likely to happen was that the police would stand down as the night wore on. Either that, or they would arrest the wrong person.

The street performers in Paris were a temperamental bunch. Artistic, passionate. He'd seen fights and arguments since he was here. They were unpredictable and volatile and he thought that would work for him.

One of them, if questioned or scrutinized, could easily explode in a temper, run away, strike an officer, and that would be enough. They'd think they had their man.

There. He checked himself in the mirror, making sure his disguise was perfect.

He straightened up and stepped back, admiring the effect. He was almost certain that this would work. He looked like a mannequin, just a dummy in a shop window, frozen in place.

The police would pass him by, as if he were just part of the scenery. He would be safe.

He took a deep breath, then stepped out into the street. He walked slowly and stiffly, the way a mannequin would, not looking left or right, not stopping, just heading straight for the street corner that he needed, the one where the lines of power for this third and final statue were strongest. Only he could sense that.

Now, he needed to find the right store, any fashion boutique would do – Paris was crammed with them, and there was bound to be one near enough to suit his needs. Then he'd position himself in the doorway, tilting back against the doorframe, just as if the store owner was intending to change his display and had left this mannequin outside, no longer needed for now.

And he waited, with the iron discipline in his mind taking hold, so that even if he'd wanted to move, he couldn't, because it would not be possible.

He became one with the walls, one with the door. He didn't allow himself to move or even breathe. Time slowed for him until it was no longer relevant. He let it drain away, let the night pass, aware of the people moving by - fewer, as the night drew on.

"We'd better get home," he heard a woman say. "What if this killer's out somewhere? He could get us."

"Yes, it's creepy out here. I don't feel safe anymore. Let's get inside, soon," her friend said, and he felt a wonderful elation, a rush of joy that his powers were causing this. They admired him, they knew him. Soon he would be as famous as the tower itself.

And then, as he waited, a policeman passed him by, a typical French cop, stuffed full of his own importance in his dark clothing and official hat. Staring around, the radio crackling. He saw Goldenface but he didn't see him. He didn't really see him, with the right eyes, the eyes that would notice him.

But even so, it was a tense moment.

"Discipline yourself," he whispered inwardly. "Discipline. Stillness. You are a mannequin and not present in this real life. You are just a plastic form, without sentience."

When the policeman passed by, Goldenface knew he was safe. Even so, his heart was pounding. That had been a near miss. But he saw no more cops around, and he thought, now, that they were giving up.

After all, it was a costly drain on resources to have so many people patrolling the streets for such long hours. And in contrast, he was just one person, a needle in a haystack. He felt a surge of pride that he had managed to evade capture, despite the strong police presence. He was faster and nimbler than they were. He was smarter than them, too.

Already he was looking ahead.

This would be his third statue created here, and then, in accordance with his master plan, he was done with France.

Then he would lay low for a month or two and move to Greece. There were new goals there. The mighty Parthenon awaited. What a structure! What a noble monument. He was looking forward, already, to his next three statues, and how he would position them there. Each creation drew his power to him more strongly along the meridian lines, the directions that only he could sense.

And there were so many places left to go. After Greece, his next stop, of course, would be the Great Pyramid of Giza, and he couldn't wait for the power to flow into his veins as he completed his trio of creations there.

After that, he would go to Rio de Janeiro, to leave statues at the most significant localities surrounding the powerful statue of Christ the Redeemer. He smiled, a grim smile of satisfaction. Yes, he could feel his power growing. Every great statue, every timeless building and construction

carried that ability to make him stronger, and each one was adding to his skills.

He drew in a breath, allowing himself to move for the first time in what must have been an hour, but had felt much shorter to him.

He waited a few more minutes, counting them in his head. Then, feeling that it was safe, he stepped away from the doorway, his body still stiff and rigid.

He nodded in satisfaction, and then, with a sudden burst of energy, he began to walk.

The streets were ever more silent and the air was growing very cool. He kept his pace steady and his eyes straight ahead, not looking left or right.

He stretched his stiffened limbs, enjoying the feeling of the cold night air on his skin. He felt alive. He felt powerful.

He was Goldenface, and he was unstoppable.

His third statue awaited, and by midnight, he promised himself the deed would be done.

He narrowed his eyes.

He was still thinking about that meeting he'd wanted, that agent he'd noticed. Maybe it wouldn't happen, but if it was possible, he was going to try to arrange it. Its success would depend on how smart the police were. If he saw the opportunity, he hoped it would add to his power and in a way, it would complete the circle.

"I might see you again, lady agent," he whispered, suddenly feeling excited by what the next few hours would bring.



## CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

There was a sense of purpose and excitement inside the police station in central Paris where the suspect had been taken. Juliette sensed it immediately.

Lucien had taken charge and was organizing for their suspect to be processed and searched. The man, with his silver and gold painted features, his black and chrome outfit, stood statue still as he was searched, in a way that made Juliette look at him again, carefully.

He was used to doing this, she thought. He was used to standing, waiting, becoming one with the landscape around him.

The skill it took to be a performer, the patience to stand and pose, made her even surer now that this was how he'd been able to melt into the background and avoid detection.

"Right. We have searched him. No paint found, but he had a pack of stage make-up in his satchel," Lucien said. "Let's go and question him." He looked expectantly at Wyatt and Juliette.

Juliette was already putting on her more unobtrusive dark blue jacket, and shaking out her hair, placing the wig she'd worn on a table. The time for cover was past. Now it was time for her to ask questions in her FBI agent capacity.

Wyatt nodded to her. "You go in this time. I'll observe."

Juliette felt grateful that he was offering for her to take a turn, because she didn't think this man was going to be easy to question.

So far, worryingly, he hadn't said a word. He'd stood in utter silence, staring at them with a strangely calm expression.

The ID on him showed that he was Francois Dupont, a French citizen. He didn't have a passport on him. Juliette couldn't wait for the team of French police to search his place, which according to his address details, was on the outskirts of Paris. She hoped she'd find stamps in his passport that matched up with the U.S. killings. And a stash of the gold paint that she expected to find there. But that was still ahead of them. The team was being dispatched now, and should arrive at his home within half an hour.

His keys had been on his person and although he hadn't spoken, they had informed him what they were going to do, and that his home and his possessions would be searched for evidence.

He'd simply watched in silence.

"Come through," Lucien told him in a sharp voice. "This is where you talk to us." He led the way to the interview room.

Sitting opposite him, in the harsh light, Juliette took a look at their suspect, taking in every detail of his appearance and demeanor.

The paint on his face was smudged. She noticed a spot near his ear that he'd missed completely and the pallor of his skin showed through. His eyes were a deep gray color, like the sea on a stormy day. They stared at her, unblinking, as if challenging her to crack his silence.

She took a look at him, letting the silence build, but resolving it shouldn't go on too long because he'd shown already that he was comfortable with it.

So once she had gathered her thoughts, Juliette decided that pressure was the way to go.

Bombard him with questions. Crack open that protective shield of silence that he'd wrapped himself in. And get to the truth of it all.

But even as she thought that, looking at him again, she felt a highly unwanted pang of doubt.

The paint jobs on the women had been perfect. Each victim had looked like a work of art. This man's paint was more amateurish, as if it had been hastily done.

And was that gold the same color as she remembered from the victims? Or was it more of a coppery shade? Now that she was looking at it in the bright light of the interview room, she thought she was seeing more copper.

That worried her, but she pushed it aside. This wasn't the time for self-doubt. Now, she needed to forge ahead and get some answers and then, hopefully, everything would become clearer.

"So," she said in French, her voice low and steady. "We have your name. We know where you live. What we don't know is why you are here in Paris, at night, with paint on your face, and a very strange disguise."

She waited. He didn't answer, simply stared from one of them to the other. Juliette sighed. This wasn't going to be easy.

"You ran when the police approached you. You were asked to stop, and you fled," Lucien said, his voice harsh. "Why did you flee? Were you feeling guilty? What was your intention when you were out there on the streets? What goal did you have? Were you looking to kill another woman?"

Now, the man's eyes widened slightly and he gave the tiniest shake of his head.

So, he was able to understand them and to respond, but he was simply choosing not to.

"Look," she said, her voice firm. "You can either cooperate, or we can take you down to the cells, and keep you there overnight. We can do this the hard way. Or else, you can talk to us, and tell us. Perhaps there's a reason and if so, I suggest you explain it to us. It's up to you."

She waited, her gaze locked with his. She thought she'd tried to sound forceful yet reasonable, and she sensed she had made a connection with him. Would it prove to be so?

Then, slowly, he opened his mouth.

"I'm not running from anything. I'm searching for something," he said, his voice a low murmur.

"What are you searching for?"

"I'm a pilgrim," he said. "A pilgrim on the journey for truth."

Lucien let out a mocking laugh. "You're a common killer. Prove me wrong," he jeered.

But Francois simply turned and looked at him patiently.

"I am a pilgrim, and my journey is to find the truth of life. I want to perform in every city of the world. So far, I have performed in four cities."

"With papers?" Juliette asked.

He shook his head. "No. I don't need papers to find the truth. I don't need them. I may not have papers, but I am an artist. I am a creator, a dreamer, and an explorer. I am on the path, the path of truth and enlightenment. I just need to be who I am, to give my art to one city, and then I can reach out to the next."

He was icy and calm. Juliette was surprised by his poise and control. Now that he was speaking, it seemed as if he didn't have any emotion to show, or maybe it was bottled up inside him.

Lucien turned to her and mouthed, "He's our man. I know it."

But as she stared at him, Juliette felt less sure. He was most definitely strange, someone who defied society's norms, who was on his own mission and who defied normality. But the differences were making her worried, and the small details were perturbing her.

That paint. It was wrong. Even the brush strokes were different. More amateurish than the perfection she'd seen on the bodies.

And she thought about where he'd been found. It was slightly outside of the area where she'd instinctively expected to find him.

Why is that?

Now the instinctive voice in her mind that had been worried about the locations was asking her that exact question, and loudly.

Why did you think he'd be somewhere else? Is there a reason for that?

Maybe this suspect is not the man you need, the voice told her. But maybe you're focusing on him for a reason now, and that reason is that he's helping you think of something you do need to know.

Perhaps, he's going to allow you to join the dots in your mind.

Perturbed by her instinctive voice's loudness, Juliette looked down, thinking frantically about the similarity, the link she'd just made.

What if the killer was the same kind of person, someone who wanted to travel from place to place, creating a record of his journey through kills?

The statues that he created with his make-up were flawless. Just like another statue - a statue that until now, she hadn't thought about or realized.

The Statue of Liberty.

"Oh, no," she murmured to herself, causing Lucien to stare at her in surprise. "That's the central point. The hub he was using. And here, it's the tower. That's why the kills are certain distances apart. Now I see."

A cold wash of goose bumps prickled her spine, as intense as a shower of ice, as she remembered those kills, and their placement.

Finally, she realized what the killer was doing and why.

"Wait!" she told Lucien. "I need to step outside. Urgently."

The strands were coming together in her mind. For the very first time, she knew she'd truly gotten inside this killer's mind.

And the problem was it might already be too late.

## CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

Juliette rushed out of the interview room, and as she slammed the door, she saw Wyatt rounding the corner at a run.

"What is it?" he asked, sounding alarmed. "You okay? What's the issue in there? Did something happen I didn't pick up on?"

Already, Juliette was scrolling through her phone to find Sierra's number. This was going to be so close, so close - if they even still had time at all.

"I'm fine. But we've missed something."

"What?"

"The killer. That's what we've missed."

Wyatt's eyes widened. "What? But I thought we were sure that was him. In that room. I mean, he was painted up with stage paint and everything. You don't think it's him now?"

"I'm not sure anymore."

"Why's that?"

"It was partly the make-up that started making me question it," she explained. "He paints his victims so perfectly. This paint job, on himself, it was patchy. Careless."

Wyatt nodded. "That's not like Goldenface."

"I was also wondering if the paint is a different brand, a lower quality one. The gold color is different and it seems to be smudging more." She drew a deep breath. "Over and above those details, I've been looking at his personality. His response to the questions."

Wyatt stared grimly at her. "Look, it's early, but his answers have been surprising me, I must say."

"Exactly. They're not what I expected. I don't think this man is fully mentally capable, I think he's delusional and lives in his own world, but the problem is that I've finally seen the pattern. I think I understand how Goldenface is killing and why. That's why I'm calling Sierra." She dialed her number, feeling stressed.

Her instinct had been right. Now, too late, she knew why she'd asked Sierra to map out those points. Her subconscious had been a step ahead.

"Sierra?" she asked, as the young tech answered.

"Juliette. Is this about those coordinates for all the murder cases?"

"Yes, it is. Have you had time to plot them?"

"I have. I've done them in two batches. The Paris murders all on one map, and the New York and New Jersey murders on another. You want the maps?"

"Yes, please."

"Sending through now."

Juliette stared impatiently at her phone, and a moment later, the image she'd been waiting for pinged through.

She grabbed it, enlarged it, and took a look.

"Yes, this is right," she muttered. "This is exactly right. It's what we wanted. Right here. I just missed the point he was using for his pivot. The central point, where all the kills are clustered around. And it's here. The Statue of Liberty."

The kills in New York, when plotted in relation to the Statue of Liberty, showed a perfectly straight arc. The first kill due east, the second one northeast, and the third one due north. All the same distance away from the statue – about two and a half miles. Why hadn't she seen that before? She'd picked up the arc, but the fact that the killings had been in different states had confused the issue.

She had not realized until this moment that they hinged around the presence of the statue, each a similar distance away from Lady Liberty herself.

"Now, what's he doing here?"

With hands trembling slightly from tension, she looked at the second map.

The first kill was due south from the Eiffel Tower, about a mile away. The second one was exactly southeast and the same distance away.

And that meant, if he was following his pattern, the third would be east, due east, and approximately a mile from the tower. Just like the others.

"We need to get there. Fast," she said.

She got on the phone. "Sierra, the place where he's killing. I've mapped it. Due east, about a mile from the Eiffel Tower. That is going to match up with his pattern, which seems to be to move counterclockwise. I'm going to go there, right now."

Urgency flared within her.

"It's very smart to pick that up. But he's a psycho. Unpredictable. Are you sure he's following it so closely? There's nowhere else he could be?" Peering over her shoulder, Wyatt sounded as anxious as she felt. "What if

we've got this wrong and he's moved the other way for the third kill, gone southwest instead of east?"

He pointed to the map.

Juliette considered it. The pressure was on. They were trying to read his mind and predict his actions, with the limited information they had. And Wyatt was right. They hadn't gotten all the way into his mind.

"I think he'll go east," she said. "But you're right, it's possible he decided to choose the other direction this time, so southwest could be a possibility."

She didn't want to make the wrong judgment call and miss the chance of saving his next target.

"There's also still the possibility it is our guy in there?" Wyatt said. "He could have been planning this, on his way to one of these points on the map, when he got caught by the cops? We can't rule him out."

"No. We can't. Especially not now that he's started talking. But Sierra can give the information to Lucien. That might help him talk, if he's the killer and he knows he's been found out."

Juliette considered their strategy.

"We're going to have to go out and look. He's planned this so methodically. He's not going to stop; he's going to continue on the same killing interval. So we have to get there. In case he's already there, waiting to trap someone."

With a strong suspect in custody, and the feeling that the case had been closed, the hard working police had all departed. The only cop left in the station was the officer at the front desk, one other, and themselves.

"Let's you and I go," she told Wyatt. "I'll take east, you take southwest. Whoever sees him, we message the other for help, and we wear our earpieces."

There was no time to do anything more but rush out of the police station, and into Paris's late night streets.

From where they were, Wyatt would reach his coordinates first. She had further to drive. Juliette headed off, and as she drove, she got on the phone and updated Sierra.

"I need you to message Lucien and tell him what we're doing," she said. "The killer is using the Eiffel Tower as his new point of reference, just like he used the Statue of Liberty back in the States. We're heading to the approximate coordinates where we think he'll be. East is the most likely, and I'm going there. Wyatt also suggested maybe he'll go the other way,

southwest, so we need to cover that base as well. We don't have backup, so we're going alone. So if you can put the word out to other police stations, we can get bigger numbers there."

"Gotcha." Sierra sounded impressed. "I'll message him straight away, and get the other police out to those two sites."

Juliette felt cold with dread inside to think he might already have killed and vanished, that the numbers they were going to summon would get there too late.

What if she herself was already too late?

No, Juliette thought. No, I can't be. If she was right and he was out there, about to grab his next victim, she didn't want to be the one to let him get away.

She put her foot down and sped through the streets, now empty and quiet, racing against the clock. He must be here, following his deluded pattern, dancing to the beat of a drum only he could hear as he carried out these obscene murders.

"I'm almost there," she told Sierra, speaking into her earpiece, as the Eiffel Tower came into view about half a mile away. She scanned the map on her GPS carefully. Yes, he would be due east, and he would be a mile away, but he also had to consider how he would lure his victims in. Finding the right alleyway might mean he was a few yards closer, or further out. This was exact, yet inexact. There had been small differences in the plotting of the other kills.

But now she was speeding into the right area. She was due east, and a mile from the tower. She was on a main street, with side streets branching off it, and in this area, she was sure he would be.

Climbing out of the car, she continued on foot, striding forward, listening carefully, all her senses attuned for what she might find.

She had a feeling she was close.

Twenty yards further on, she saw an alleyway. It was dark; the streetlight didn't reach in that far, and it was lined with large dumpsters. Juliette's heart skipped a beat.

Was this was where he was, where he had chosen to kill?

She might not see him because he was adept at disguising himself. She would need to walk in, get close to him, and hope she could then see past whatever camouflage he was using.



He wasn't showing himself to her, that was obvious. He was hiding away, or else, he was already busy painting the face of a woman he'd killed, and her stomach churned at the thought.

And then, as she hurried down the alleyway, smelling dirty water and the faint odor of rot, she heard a whisper that chilled her spine.

"Hello, lady agent. You got here in time? Come over here, my American friend. I have something to show you!"

## CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

The words felt like ice down Juliette's spine. They were deeply personal, and the tone was chilling. This killer knew her. He'd seen her, he'd tracked her in the States, and he knew who she was without her speaking a word. She spun sideways, looking more carefully, and this time, against the darkened wall and behind a dumpster, she saw an almost invisible curtain of black netting. It was concealed by the building's overhang a couple of yards above, and it was very dark.

Her hand was on her gun, but she couldn't shoot. No way could she shoot now. She had no idea what was behind there.

Did he have a victim? Was she alive or dead? He could be busy painting her face even now.

She couldn't see. He could be holding a woman in front of him with his hand clamped over her mouth. He could be crouched over a dead woman, busy painting her face in gold. She couldn't see anything but the shadowy netting that didn't even allow her to judge its depth.

"How do you know me?" she asked, buying time to see if she could figure anything else out about this scene.

"I saw you in America," he said. "You were looking at my statues. I saw you trying to hunt for clues."

"Why are you telling me this?" Juliette said. His accent was American, he was from the States, and he'd traveled to Europe to embark on the next stage of these creepy murders. She felt filled with horror. Her mouth was dry.

"If you come closer, I'll show you something. I did it for you. I didn't want you to miss out. Come closer, and I'll show you what I did for you."

"If you've killed someone, I don't want to see it," she said, feeling sick at the thought of what lay beyond that curtain, which she now saw was propped at each end by two dumpsters, and attached to the wall above. It looked like a section of brick, like a darker patch in the wall. Visually it was totally confusing, just like the stage paint of a statue.

And it was working to mislead her eyes. She had no idea where he was beyond it.

If only she could see! She wouldn't hesitate to shoot him. She had identified, beyond doubt, that he was the killer. She'd followed him and he'd

recognized her and there was no way on earth such a killing would be anything but righteous.

But she couldn't. Because she had no idea what lay beyond that thick netting. Was he alone? It didn't sound like he was. He wasn't making her think he was alone.

Did he have a victim there? Was someone already dead, lying inside that netting?

She couldn't see it move. It was unlikely anyone was alive and conscious unless they were too terrified to move a muscle.

"But have I killed anyone?" he asked.

"Maybe you don't have anyone there at all, and you're just bluffing," she said.

"I don't think so," he whispered again, and this time, Juliette heard it.

The tiniest whimper of a woman's voice. Anxiety surged. He did have someone there. He had a hostage. And now, the priority was to save her life.

Juliette had to act fast. She had to make a decision. No way could she shoot. Right now, that wasn't something she could risk.

She didn't even know if he had a gun. He might be training it on her right now, luring her in.

Or he might be holding an unconscious woman up in front of him, hoping that his taunts made her pull the trigger so that the woman died, and this time it would be her fault.

Horror filled her at that thought. She would never be able to live with herself in that case.

Juliette moved forward, her heart beating wildly.

She was walking into his trap, but she had no choice. Her instincts screamed at her to run, but she couldn't do that. She had to try and save this woman. As a police officer, it was her job to make sure that no one was hurt, and she had to risk her own safety.

She had to go closer.

Of course, she could wait for backup. In another few minutes there might be other police on the scene if they could get here fast enough. Sierra would be listening through her earpiece. But the problem was that in another few minutes, he might decide to kill her, and once he got his hands around her neck, Juliette knew that she'd have only a few more seconds to live.

"Why are you telling me this?" she said, edging forward. She guessed that he could see her more clearly than she could see him from behind that

dark netting. And that, in itself, gave her an idea of what she could do.

A lightbulb moment, literally. Now, with her plan in mind, she needed to keep him talking until she could get even closer.

"How do you know me?" she said.

"You're not difficult to recognize, lady cop."

She had to move closer. Her mind was telling her she shouldn't, but she had to. There was no other way.

She took another step. Casually she let her arm drop to her side. She wasn't lowering her gun hand. She was lowering her left hand.

"Why are you doing this?" she asked. "Tell me."

His voice sounded contemptuous.

"Power, of course," he said scornfully, his voice low. "My power is growing, and it will only become more potent with every kill. The meridians I choose, the power lines from the statues, are feeding me. They're giving me what I need. And I want to leave my mark on the world. I want to create statues that will be eternally beautiful, and I want my name to be remembered."

His voice resonated with arrogance, and Juliette realized that this was a man who truly believed in his own power.

She shuddered, feeling a chill run down her spine. But then she shook it off and focused on the job in hand.

"Why did you choose these particular victims?"

"They were in the right place at the right time. That's all I needed. I gave them the lure and they chose me. Some walked past. But these women, the ones who came to me, knew what I could offer them."

Juliette nodded slowly, feeling a little sick at the thought of what this man had done.

But she pushed on. She edged forward, feeling sick with the knowledge of what he was, and what he was capable of.

"And the statues? The locations? What do they mean to you?"

He smiled then, a cold, cruel, calculating smile.

"They are monuments that hold immense power," he said. "Each one stands for eternity, each one feeds my strength and will. They are giving me what I need, until I stand alone as the one true power. This is just the start."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

He replied in a hissing whisper, as if he sensed she was wearing an earpiece and didn't want it to pick up his words, which were for her alone.

“Oh, I have so many other places to go. My next stop is the Parthenon. I’m going to create three more statues there. I have the directions already mapped out, where the power meridians go. Of course, you won’t be there for that one, sadly. Then, I might go to Italy if the call of Michelangelo’s David is strong enough. If not, I’ll head to the Great Pyramid and save David for later. And the famous statue of Christ the Redeemer is also on my list. I’m going to do all those. All of them!”

He paused, as if savoring the thought.

That diatribe had given her the chance to edge forward another step. Her heart was hammering in fear and horror. She was speaking to an unseen opponent, who was protected behind his cover, and who was taunting her because he knew he could.

She took another step. She was now close enough to do what she hoped might give her a momentary advantage.

It was the one thing that he wouldn't expect, while laughing at her from his darkened hiding place. The one thing that might allow her to get past that netting without being caught in his trap.

She slipped her hand into her pocket.

This was it. This was what she had to do. It was crazy, and it might not work, but she had to try.

Juliette grabbed her flashlight off her belt. She snapped it on and shone it directly at that netting, leaping forward, hoping that in this pitch dark alley, with his dark-adapted eyes, it might be blinding.

She leaped forward, hand raised, ready to rip the netting aside and grab him, hoping that somehow she would avoid the trap she was worrying he’d set. But the trap was waiting, and she plunged straight in. She never had a chance, Juliette realized, as its jaws closed around her.

## CHAPTER THIRTY

Of course she'd never had a chance. In the dark, in her haste. Juliette hadn't seen the thin wire that had been waiting, a large loop at head height, hung above the netting. A trap just for her, meant for her to put her head in unsuspectingly, so that he could pull it tight and garrote her.

She didn't see the wire until it was almost too late, but as she leaped forward, her flashlight picked up the glint of it.

She didn't manage to get her head out, but she got her hand in. In a lightning fast, defensive move, Juliette managed to raise her right arm and get it between the wire and her neck.

She gasped, as the wire pulled tight. Laughing, he grabbed hold of something and twisted. In the jerking beam of the flashlight she could see his arm move, and she was almost lifted off her feet, struggling, trapped in the wire's cruel bite. The wire dug painfully into her forearm, pinning it against her neck in a tight chokehold. It was her right hand, her gun hand, and now it was trapped. The noose must be attached to the building's overhang, she realized. He'd placed it, fastened it, and waited, and now she knew exactly how an animal felt when it was caught in a snare.

But it wasn't a deadly stranglehold, not yet. The noose hadn't done its intended job, and she could still draw in a thread of air. Shock resounded through her as she struggled against it. With her other hand, the free hand, she dropped the flashlight and it clattered to the ground. Then, she lashed out and grabbed the dark netting and pulled it down with all her strength.

And there he was, so grotesque and unexpected that it was another shock. His face and arms were painted a blank, matte white, like a mannequin, and he wore clothes with price tags still attached. His face was white, his head shaved, his eyes blazing.

And on the ground lay the woman, the one whose moan she'd heard. Although Juliette's head was pulled painfully high, she could just see the collapsed figure. It looked like the woman was gagged and tied, but she was still alive. Juliette saw her hand move slightly.

Now, as quick as a predator might move, Goldenface was lunging forward, and she knew that this was now a fight for her life. Juliette lashed out with her heel, aiming for his groin, but she missed, and her foot caught him in the hip.

He was too fast for her, her gun hand was trapped, and every move she made was pulling the wire tighter. The only thing that was stopping it from tightening more was the fact her feet were still on the ground, balanced on her toes, taking some strain off the wire.

He was trying to change that. He lunged forward and tried to tackle her with his full weight, tried to fling it against her and bring her down.

But she was too fast for him. Juliette twisted, and he missed her, and she brought her elbow forward, scything it into his chest.

Her movement made the wire tighten another notch, and she knew that she had only a few seconds of freedom left before it was too tight for her to move at all.

She lashed out again, kicking and thumping and punching, trying to fight him off. She wanted to shout, but the wire was now too tight, it was crushing her own arm into her neck and cutting off her power of speech.

He was too fast, and she was losing. Juliette felt a dull, despairing fear take hold of her.

She clawed with her free hand, her fingers scrabbling at the wire, trying to get it free, trying to get enough space between her neck and the wire to breathe.

The wire was strangling her, and she was gasping, but she wasn't giving in. As he moved in, trying again to knock her off her feet, she pulled up her knee and shot it forward, and this time he was the one who staggered back, sprawling against the wall.

She jerked and writhed, trying to get out of the wire's deadly grip. Right now, there was nothing she could do to save this woman, and it was only the fight with Juliette that was distracting him from the slumped captive.

With renewed determination, she tried again, lashing out with her leg, and finally, she got in the blow she'd wanted to, and caught him full in the solar plexus.

Juliette heard him gasp and he staggered back.

Juliette aimed again, kicking out for his head this time, needing to put him down for long enough that she could try to get herself free, anything to stop him from coming back into the fight.

But she missed. She wasn't fast enough, and he lunged forward, his arms reaching out to grab her, to pull her down, to finish her off.

Desperate now, she kicked out again with her leg, this time her boot thudded into his chest so that he reeled off balance. She was gasping for air,

her body fighting for life, her hands clawing and scraping at the noose that was trapping her.

Then he reached back, and he pulled the lever again, and this time the noose lifted her all the way into the air. Now she was dangling, suspended by the wire, a few inches off the ground.

Panicked now, Juliette fought against him, but she was trapped, and he was pulling the wire so tight. She couldn't breathe, and she felt her mind start to blacken, fearing that soon she'd pass out. Then he'd have two victims instead of only one.

She thrashed and struggled, but it was useless. Her strength was fading fast.

Then she felt it. Her free hand found something, and she grabbed it from the top of the dumpster.

It wasn't much of a weapon, but it was all she had. It was her last chance. Her hopes now rode on an empty can of spray paint, clutched in her left hand.

And as she slammed it down onto his head, she felt it hit him. She felt the sharp, mechanical clang as it connected with his skull. He staggered back, falling to one knee.

Now, if she could only get herself free. She lunged for the dumpster, desperate to get purchase on top of it so she could take the killing weight off her throat. But the plastic was damp and slippery and too far away, and she was choking, the wire pulling even tighter. Fighting against it, she knew she had to stay alive for the woman that he was about to kill. She kicked out at him again, needing to keep him down for long enough at least so she could try and get herself out of this wire, but it was cutting into her arm, feeling as sharp as a knife.

She was going to fight, whatever it took, Juliette decided. She was going to try and at least disable this killer, so that the woman's life would be saved. Surely that she could do?

But then, hissing in anger, he dove forward, grabbed her leg, and yanked down.

“We’re finishing this! Now! I need to get going, cop lady! No time for any of your tricks.”

Searing pain scored across her arm and she felt her own forearm mashed into her neck, cutting off the air completely. The wire around her arm and the back of her neck was sheer, raw agony.



She was going to fight, but it was going to kill her. That, she knew.

And then, she heard the stamping of feet and a shout from behind her; arms wrapped around her, lifting her, taking the weight off the wire so that the agony eased.

"I've got you, Juliette! I've got you!" It was Lucien's voice, taut with concern. He was grabbing her around her hips with one hand, holding her firmly, while with the other, he fought to loosen the chokehold of the noose. She gasped, dragging a fresh, cool breath of air into her tortured throat.

And then, with another tackle, Wyatt leaped into the fray, cannoning into the killer, and sending him sprawling backward. His head knocked into the alley's wall with a thud that Juliette knew meant lights out.

Wyatt wasn't pulling his punches, or taking any risks. While she and Lucien were wrestling with the flimsy, biting wire, Wyatt was handcuffing Goldenface's hands firmly behind him.

By the time he woke up from the bang on his head, this man would be in a police van.

Wyatt turned to the woman who was gagged, and gently undid the tight ropes that held it in place. He freed her from the gag at the same time that Juliette and Lucien finally got the noose off her neck.

Lucien lowered her. Juliette stood on legs that were trembling from shock and adrenaline. But she'd survived this, and the last victim had been saved.

Not just the last victim, but future ones, all the innocent women who would have been murdered by him in Greece, Egypt, Brazil, and who knew where else his crazed search for the invisible power meridians would have taken him?

But finally, this deluded man was in custody, and they had done what it took to save these lives. Her arm was raw, her throat was burning, she was battered and bruised.

But inside, she felt a deep relief that Goldenface's days of terrorizing the communities around the world's most famous tourist attractions were over. And their new team had succeeded - not only in capturing him, but also in forming an alliance and a partnership that had allowed their unlikely trio to work together, and to cooperate with Lucien, a man who she'd now come to respect, and even like.

After all, how could you not like a man who'd rescued a starving kitten and named her Mona Lisa?

It had been a good day.

Now, she wondered what tomorrow would bring.

## EPILOGUE

Two days later, Juliette walked into the FBI New York headquarters once again. It had been only a few days since she'd last entered this building, but it felt like eons had passed.

The Goldenface capture had been a huge success, and she'd been receiving calls from journalists ever since her airplane had landed. Juliette knew the ropes when it came to those interviews. She'd given credit to her teammates and the FBI, and had referred the journalists to the FBI's media center for more information. She wasn't authorized to give out more than that.

But privately, she was fascinated by the details that had been uncovered on Goldenface. His real name was Gordon Ehlers; he was twenty five years old, and he'd grown up in a wealthy family and had a trust fund. But after he'd shown signs of psychopathic behavior in his late teens, his family had broken all ties with him. Clearly, his killing instincts had worsened over the years, and Juliette was sure that there were other unsolved murders of women in New York and surrounding areas that might still be linked to him.

Local police were piecing the evidence together, and other charges might be laid for older, colder cases. In the meantime though, he was facing multiple life sentences for what he'd done, and was being assessed to see whether he was a candidate for a psychiatric hospital or a maximum security prison. Either way, he would never see the world as a free man again, and Juliette felt relieved about that.

Reaching her floor, she headed along the corridor and pushed open the door to the boardroom.

There was her boss, Ebury, looking at her in approval, and Juliette also recognized the FBI representative from the director's office who'd attended the meeting a few days ago.

The other team members - Wyatt and Sierra - weren't there and she guessed that they must be interviewing each one separately for a reason, wondering what it was.

"Morning, Juliette,"

"Morning," she greeted the men, shaking hands with each in turn, noticing that they glanced at her forearm. It hadn't required stitches but the wire had sliced open the skin, and it was still bandaged.

"Congratulations on solving the case," Ebury said.

"Thank you," Juliette said, feeling proud.

"How's your injury?" the director asked. "It sounds like you had a deadly struggle on your hands."

"It was touch and go for a few minutes, until my team arrived. My arm's feeling better every day, and the cut's only skin deep," she was relieved to report, although her arm was also severely bruised.

"We wanted to talk to you about something important," the FBI representative said. "We've been impressed with the work you, Wyatt, and Sierra have done. You have a unique set of skills and this has filled a very important gap in our crime fighting portfolio. We'd like to make this international task force permanent. We're offering you a job, to be part of it."

Permanent? Her eyes widened. This was an opportunity she'd never expected. She'd be traveling around the world, heading to crime flash points all over the globe, helping to solve serial cases and other major crimes?

It sounded like an amazing opportunity, and although her instinct was to say yes, she knew there would be a lot to think about and she must consider it carefully. Was she ready for a nomadic existence? Did she want to give up her current role and take on something new?

"I'm very pleased to have that offer, and it sounds exciting," she said.

"How long do I have to think about it before I give you my decision?"

"We'd like your answer by tomorrow," he said. "We're making the same offer to your teammates, and each of you can sleep on it and let us know in the morning."

"That sounds fair. Thank you," Juliette said.

"That's all we have to discuss, apart from saying thank you for the work you did. We had good reports from the Paris police, saying that you were great to work with and that they were impressed by your ability to be part of an international team, and the skills you brought to the investigation," Ebury said.

Juliette felt both pleased and relieved as she stood up, exchanging another handshake with her boss and the high level FBI execs.

What a surprising turn this had taken. A permanent task force, traveling the world? This was a day of curveballs for sure, and as she walked out of the meeting room, yet another one landed as her phone buzzed.

She glanced down at the message.

It was from Lucien.

*"Juliette, thank you for what you did here, and for helping solve the case. We were commended and the credit is yours. I liked working with you. More than that, I would like to speak to you again, to get to know you better. So – if you will be working overseas more often, then next time you are in Paris, would you like to go for a coffee? Or perhaps, a glass of wine?"*

She felt an incredulous smile warm her face.

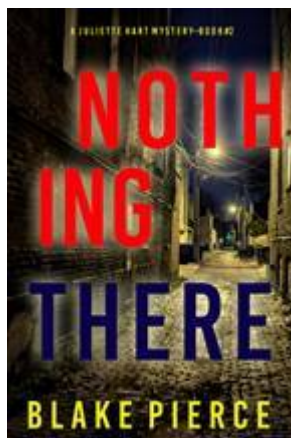
She was being asked on a date? That was what it sounded like, at any rate. A date. With the man who'd irritated her so badly at the start of the case that she could have shaken him senseless, but who'd shown her his bravery and integrity by the end.

What a turnaround this case had proven to be.

Juliette stared down at her phone, considering this offer, and everything it meant.

Then, having made up her mind, she keyed in a reply.

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**NOTHING THERE**

**(A Juliette Hart FBI Suspense Thriller—Book Two)**

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“A masterpiece of thriller and mystery.”

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NOTHING THERE is Book #2 in a long-anticipated new series by #1 bestseller and USA Today bestselling author Blake Pierce, whose bestseller Once Gone (a free download) has received over 7,000 five star ratings and reviews.

FBI Special Agent Juliette Hart had hoped to leave the darkness of her past behind her, and to never return to Europe. But the one killer who has eluded her in the U.S. has also forced her return.

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But can Juliette overcome her demons?

Or will her darkness swallow her whole?

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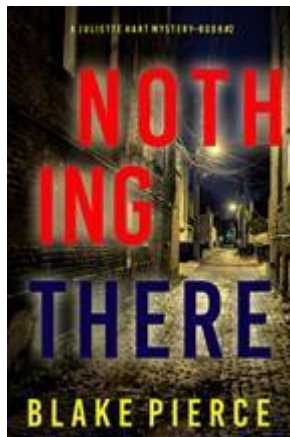
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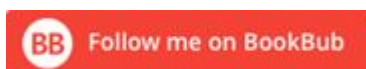
## Blake Pierce

Blake Pierce is the USA Today bestselling author of the RILEY PAGE mystery series, which includes seventeen books. Blake Pierce is also the author of the MACKENZIE WHITE mystery series, comprising fourteen books; of the AVERY BLACK mystery series, comprising six books; of the KERI LOCKE mystery series, comprising five books; of the MAKING OF RILEY PAIGE mystery series, comprising six books; of the KATE WISE mystery series, comprising seven books; of the CHLOE FINE psychological suspense mystery, comprising six books; of the JESSIE HUNT psychological suspense thriller series, comprising twenty eight books; of the AU PAIR psychological suspense thriller series, comprising three books; of the ZOE PRIME mystery series, comprising six books; of the ADELE SHARP mystery series, comprising sixteen books, of the EUROPEAN VOYAGE cozy mystery series, comprising six books; of the LAURA FROST FBI suspense thriller, comprising eleven books; of the ELLA DARK FBI suspense thriller, comprising fourteen books (and counting); of the A YEAR IN EUROPE cozy mystery series, comprising

nine books, of the AVA GOLD mystery series, comprising six books; of the RACHEL GIFT mystery series, comprising ten books (and counting); of the VALERIE LAW mystery series, comprising nine books (and counting); of the PAIGE KING mystery series, comprising eight books (and counting); of the MAY MOORE mystery series, comprising eleven books (and counting); of the CORA SHIELDS mystery series, comprising five books (and counting); of the NICKY LYONS mystery series, comprising eight books (and counting); of the CAMI LARK mystery series, comprising eight books (and counting); of the AMBER YOUNG mystery series, comprising five books (and counting); of the DAISY FORTUNE mystery series, comprising five books (and counting); of the FIONA RED mystery series, comprising five books (and counting); of the new FAITH BOLD mystery series, comprising five books (and counting); and of the JULIETTE HART mystery series, comprising five books (and counting).

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An avid reader and lifelong fan of the mystery and thriller genres, Blake loves to hear from you, so please feel free to visit [www.blakepierceauthor.com](http://www.blakepierceauthor.com) to learn more and stay in touch.



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