

From the *New York Times* bestselling author of
LILAC GIRLS

THE
GOLDEN
DOVES



A NOVEL



MARTHA
HALL KELLY





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By Martha Hall Kelly

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JOSIE

FORT BLISS, TEXAS
1952

I WAKE AT DAWN, FACEDOWN ON the sofa, thinking I'm back in Block Ten. The living room window's open a crack, and another Texas dust storm blows like hell outside, pummeling the room with more sand than dust. I swing my feet to the floor, head pounding. Sixty-five dossier photos taped above the sofa flutter in the wind, and the men look down on me.

Mengele. Von Braun. Speer.

I stand, head for the window, and kick over a half-full beer can. "Shit."

A gust hits my little shrine on the coffee table, the votive still flickering under my mother's picture and the photo of Arlette and me, arms linked at liberation. The wind catches my mother's photo and sails it into the air. I lunge to catch it before it falls, and then set it back in its spot.

I shuffle to the window, sand swirling in the air outside, so thick that the Franklin Mountains in the distance are just blurry mounds. A pigeon sits outside on the sill waiting out the storm. I wave her away and thump the window closed.

The kitchen wall clock reads 6:30 A.M. I'm already late.

Can't wait to get this over with. Hopefully a routine job. By my rules this time.

I pull on my regulation pinkish skirt, green blouse, and drab field jacket, then slide my silver PPK into my shoulder holster. That simple act calms me, the brown grip the perfect size for my hand. It's the Nazi police gun I confiscated from the suitcase of an incoming scientist, who swore he didn't know how it got there.

I stuff a pair of hospital gloves into one pocket, grab the welcome basket, and drive a government-issued jeep past the massive rocket at the entrance that reads WELCOME TO FORT BLISS: YOUR ARMY ANTI-AIRCRAFT AND GUIDED MISSILE CENTER.

I read the latest dossier as I drive. They all had quirks from their intake forms. One bathes obsessively. One masturbates too much. Krupp's quirk is that he's fastidious about his clothes and insisted he and his wife, Irma, buy all new luggage for the trip, specifying the exact models of the suitcases. Each new scientist was bound by their contract to declare the contents of each bag, but he'd written a missive on the packed items, down to his ten pairs of undershorts and his wife's cosmetic collection.

I find 210 Canyon Road, on the outskirts of a Fort Bliss residential neighborhood, a basic El Paso two-bedroom ranch house trying its best to be nondescript. It's the kind of place where military families come to forget the war and forge blindly into the 1950s with the help of bourbon and barbecue.

Only this is no average family.

I press the doorbell and stand in the stinging wind listening to the Westminster chimes, my palms wet on the cellophane of the basket. I survey the olive branch of a gift the Intake Group has assembled; a cheap woven bowl filled with someone's idea of foods representing American and German cultures. A can of Spam. Some stollen one of the secretaries baked. Oreo cookies, a bottle of Riesling wine, and a six-pack of Pearl beer.

I go to press the bell again and he opens the door a crack. "*Jah?*"

Just hearing that accent, my skin tries to crawl off my body. "Open up, Mr. Krupp. It's Lieutenant Anderson."

He swings the door wider to reveal Mrs. Krupp and two male children bathed in the yellow light of the foyer.

I consider getting back in the jeep and telling Tony P. to do his own intake from now on. Not that he can ever tell if these criminals are hiding anything. He usually ends up knocking back beers with them after a cursory look in their bags.

“I’m here to do your intake briefing, Mr. Krupp.”

The mother holds her children closer.

He beckons me in. “*Guten morgen.*”

What would Krupp do if I took my gun and waved it in his face like the Ravensbrück guards used to do to us for fun?

“English only, Mr. Krupp.”

“Please enter,” he says and reaches to guide me in.

I step back. “Don’t touch me, sir.”

It’s the same interior all these houses have, low popcorn ceiling, black iron handrails leading to a sunken living room, the carpet still wearing its vacuum marks. It smells like Pine-Sol and pancakes, and the only object in the room is a low oak cabinet, inset with a television, the green screen like one unblinking eye.

Herr Krupp steps back, wringing his hands. “We haven’t much furniture yet, though we were promised it.”

He looks nothing like his photo from the dossier. He’s at least ten years older, a bit stooped, and has lost the cocky grin of the old Reich days. A flat worm of a saber scar shines along his left cheek. The aristocratic badge of honor, proof he can take the pain. It’s the fashionable accessory that every German fencer longed to collect in great numbers, but Herr Krupp was happy with only one.

Without the SS uniform he’s smaller somehow, but my hands sweat just the same.

Mrs. Krupp is more attractive in person, brunette, and gets points for wearing faux pearls and a petticoated dress at this hour of the morning, after traveling all night. For my benefit? She wears no makeup and looks worried, but she’ll shortly bond with the wives of the other Nazis brought here for the rocket program and will soon be bringing tuna casserole to the potlucks at the pool as they reminisce about how handsome Hitler was.

“What is the purpose of this meeting?” she asks.

“To officially welcome you.” *And make sure you haven't smuggled in half the Reich's treasury.* “You two meet me in the kitchen.”

She clutches the boys closer. “But the children.”

“Do I have to ask you again?”

The two shuffle off, casting back looks, and I pull the Oreos from the welcome basket, take the children to the television, turn it on, and motion for them to sit in front of it.

Crisscross applesauce. They're becoming American already. I wait for the tube to warm up, and soon the game show *Winner Take All* appears with Bill Cullen wearing a striped tie.

“Do you want to be a *winner*?” the announcer shouts, and the audience claps.

A chiropractor from Grand Rapids has just won a generous supply of Prom home permanent and a \$250 U.S. defense bond.

The younger boy looks up at me, tears in his blue eyes.

They're so young and scared. It's not their fault their father is a murderer.

I hand him the package. “Go ahead,” I say in German. “Open the cookies.”

Welcome basket in hand, I head for the kitchen, where the Krupps wait under bright fluorescent lights, giving them both a hollowed-out look as they sit at their new cherry-red table and pleather upholstered chairs. Their luggage is stacked against the wall, and on the refrigerator someone has trapped a postcard under a grinning sun face magnet that reads *Welcome to El Paso!* A plate of pancakes the cafeteria must have sent over sits on the counter, untouched. Mr. Krupp crosses his legs, arms folded across his chest.

I lob the beer into the fridge, lean against the counter, and read his folder. “Ah, I see. One of the good Nazis. So, they've made you a glowing résumé. This is what you call a *Persilscheine*, isn't it, Mr. Krupp?”

He looks out the window. They're always astonished they've been accused of doing anything wrong.

“What’s that word mean, Mr. Krupp?”

“Detergent.”

“That’s right. It’s cleaned you up well. Says here you worked on a farm. Were pressed against your will to support Hitler. I think your past needed a good bit of cleaning, didn’t it? Luckily, we have some additional reports on you.”

“I am the victim here.”

I take up my clipboard. “Name?”

“Please, can we do this another time?” Krupp asks. “We’ve only just arrived, and my wife is tired from the long journey. She is not happy with the degrading medical examination she was forced to have upon arrival last night. And she thinks the milk is not fresh.”

“Name.”

“Herbert Krupp.”

“Born?”

“Munich.”

“List any medals you have received in the service to your country.”

“None.”

“Not even the War Merit Cross? No Art and Science award?”

He runs his fingers through his hair. “Absolutely not.”

“Last place of employment?”

He hesitates and glances about the kitchen.

I hover my pen above the space. “Let’s just say the Reich.” I fill in the blank with a swastika. “And where were you employed by the Reich, Mr. Krupp?”

“Outside of Bonn. At IG Farben.”

“In what capacity?”

“In the household products division. Soaps for the housewife.”

“Did you visit any concentration camps?”

“Very infrequently. And only when ordered.”

“Says here you often visited the IG Farben facility named IG Auschwitz. Buchenwald, too.”

“I called upon certain places as a salesman.”

“I see. And your visits to the camps had nothing to do with distributing Zyklon-B? Demonstrating its use?”

He frowns. “Oh, no.”

I turn to Mrs. Krupp. “Do you know what that is, Mrs. Krupp? Zyklon-B?”

She shakes her head.

“It is a cyanide-based pesticide used at Nazi concentration camps to murder prisoners. It says here, your husband was second-in-command to the guy who ran that part of the company.”

She looks away.

“But here you are, Mr. Krupp. On Canyon Road in your new kitchen. Last question. Have you in your possession any cash, securities, or valuables not declared on form twenty-one ten?”

“There are so many forms.” Sweat appears on his upper lip.

“Have you in your possession—”

“*Nein.*”

“English, Mr. Krupp.”

He reaches toward me. “Can’t you—”

I step back. “Do not touch me. I won’t say it again.”

I toss the clipboard onto the table. It lands with a clatter that startles them both, and then I step to the pile of suitcases. Each piece of brand-new Samsonite navy blue luggage wears a red paper tag, BAGGAGE INSPECTED printed in black.

I snap on the gloves. “Nice new suitcases. No traveling light for you.”

Krupp sits a little straighter. “They’ve already searched our luggage.”

I reach behind the pile, pull out an untagged cosmetic case, and heave it onto the table. “What about this one?”

The fluorescent lights overhead shine on the sweat beaded on Krupp’s forehead. “It contains my wife’s personal items.”

I turn to her. “Well, you don’t mind if a fellow female takes a look, do you?”

She meets my gaze, remarkably composed.

I try to lift it from the table. “This seems much too heavy, Mrs. Krupp. A naturally pretty lady like you doesn’t need so many cosmetics. What would the Führer say?”

I open the case, flip open my penknife, and Mrs. Krupp gasps.

Mr. Krupp stands. “Is this necessary? I’ve been brought here by the U.S. Army. I demand to see your superior.”

“Sit down, Mr. Krupp.”

He sits as I shove aside the jars and bottles and slit the satin bottom of the case. I reach in, a thrum of pleasure running through me, as my fingers breach a layer of cotton and find the unmistakable feeling of pebbled cowhide. I pull out a red leather box, a Nazi swastika and eagle embossed on the cover in gold. Inside, nestled in the purple velvet, rests a silver starburst with an inner band of good-sized diamonds at the center, and a red-enameled plaque superimposed with the golden head of Athena.

The Art and Science award.

I’m at once overwhelmed with the beauty and repulsed to see it in the flesh. No wonder Albert Speer wanted this one.

I hold it, heavy in my palm. “They say the recipient had to wear a special mount to support the weight.”

Mrs. Krupp speaks up. “We wouldn’t know.”

“Platinum, am I right? This could have gotten you all the way to South America.”

It gleams in the light, reflecting my face in the gold of Athena’s helmet.

I turn to Krupp. “Why did Hitler institute this award?”

He looks away.

“It was meant to replace the Nobel Prize, was it not? And what did Hitler call the Nobel?”

“I don’t—”

“Say it.”

Krupp lifts his chin but keeps his eyes averted. “He called it a Jew prize.”

“There you go. And he was so thin-skinned, when a German pacifist won it, he threw him in a concentration camp and declared no German

could accept the Nobel again. Only this prize. Am I right?"

Krupp stares at me, unblinking.

"Were you awarded this, or just pick it off some dead friend?"

"I don't know where it came from. My wife borrowed that case."

I set the award back in the box. "You can quit the act. I know you supervised the delivery of Zyklon-B to every one of Hitler's concentration camps personally. Demonstrated its use with human subjects. I have the paper trail."

The wife makes a choking sound and clutches her pearls.

"If I were in charge you'd be hanging at the end of a rope. But you're here now, and starting today, when you report to Area C, you'd better start coughing up whatever sciencey state secrets you allegedly have, and more info on your scientist pals, or it's back to the fatherland you go to stand trial."

I stash the box in my bag and start off toward the door but turn back.

"Before I go, I'm curious, Mr. Krupp. When you were at Buchenwald, did you see what was written on the gates there, at the entrance? The German phrase facing inside the camp so the prisoners could read it?"

He shakes his head.

"*Jedem das Seine*. Can you tell me what that means?"

"We are very tired—"

"Tell me, Mr. Krupp."

In the living room Bill Cullen laughs, and the audience applauds.

"One might say it means, 'Everyone gets what they deserve.'"

"That's right, Mr. Krupp. Do you think that's what you got? What you deserve? Mrs. Krupp?"

They both stare back at me, unblinking.

I head out. "No need to see me to the door. And by the way, the milk is fresh. Army personnel just stocked it last night."

"*Jüdischer Hund*," the wife says, under her breath.

I turn to her. "What did you say?"

She looks away.

I go back and snatch the six-pack from the fridge.

“I was going to recommend they go easy on you for smuggling that award in here, on account of your children. But those kids are better off without you murderers, and I’ll make sure my boss knows what you tried here.”

I need air and hurry out the way I came, past the boys still watching television, Oreos unopened, and head out the door. Would Karl punish these two? Probably not. He’d looked past much worse to get scientists for this program. But at least someone has held them accountable.

En route to my office in the jeep, sand collecting on the windshield wipers, I crack open a Pearl, down it, and then a second. Just another Texas breakfast.

ARLETTE

PARIS, FRANCE
1952

DAWN BREAKS AS I PICK my way along the icy Île de la Cité streets, toward the café. I cut through the Flower and Bird Market, the stalls shielding me from the wind whipping off the Seine. My thoughts veer toward finding Willie, and I stuff them down. Too much pain to think about this early.

It's been seven years since the war ended, and the market has come a long way, with new concrete floors and flower stalls. No more Germans in SS uniforms. And every vendor now has a transistor radio in their stall emitting a scratchy aria or weather report.

I'm envious, for I've not come that far or improved in any way. I hug the purse at my side, the one I made from my old green camp dress after Josie and I were liberated, as I pass a perfect little nosegay of white tuberoses. They symbolize innocence, something long gone for me. I continue walking. I have little money for food, never mind flowers, and besides, all-white flowers are too weddingish anyway.

I stop and then turn back. I'll probably never have a wedding of my own, so why not splurge? I hand the flower seller my last few francs and tuck the flowers inside the V of my dress, the blossoms cool against my skin. Just the scent says hope.

And I have something to celebrate, after all.

It still hurts to walk, even so many years later, but I focus on the letter in my pocket, for I'm about to burst with curiosity.

I pull it out and check the return address one more time.

Wagner. 10 Ox Herd Road, Berlin.

I make it to the café, its windows lit amber in the darkness, and take in the place, *Le Joyeux Oiseau Café* written in black script above the door. A former cobbler's shop, it's stuck along a row of shops down a side street near Notre-Dame, like a bad molar in a perfectly good row of teeth. It's not much to look at, but it's a life raft for me and the two other waitresses, Ravensbrück survivors all, cocooned away from the world.

I turn the brass knob and enter, the scent of bacon tartine and arabica beans in the air. There are only six tables inside, their veined marble tops pocked with decades of coffee drips, and a worn, claret red velvet-cushioned banquette along one wall.

The owner, Marianne, keeps us open mostly to fuel the flower merchants, a colorful mix of men from all over France. They live on caffeine and cigarettes, running back and forth in their cobalt smocks to the steamy greenhouses of Les Halles, keeping chilly Paris in tulips and ranunculus.

We're throwing a little benefit this morning, proceeds going to an organization that supports Ravensbrück survivors. Being a survivor is Marianne's one requirement for employment, and Bep, Riekie, and I are still like a camp family, having lost only Josie to America. Though Bep and Riekie are both from Holland, they've been here since Ravensbrück was liberated seven years ago and now seem just as French as the rest of us.

Marianne, a former sardine woman at Les Halles, stands at the counter rolling out short-crust pastry as Bep hurries by with a tray of glasses. "Who washed those?" Marianne calls out.

Curvy and frizzle-haired, Marianne, rather than wear a yellow star, spent the war in hiding, in a coffin-sized attic space, while her mother died at Ravensbrück. This place is her life, but she's growing weary of the job, as

the bruise-purple rings under her eyes attest. She is up at four each morning to grind beans and scrub the tile floor.

She steps to the tray and holds up a water glass. “This one still has lipstick on the rim.”

Her nephew Raphael rushes by with a tray of coffee cups. “Not my shade.”

Blond Raphael, with his strong arms and dark-lashed green eyes, looks to me and waits for the laugh he knows will come since he’s the funniest person I know.

I arrange my nosegay in a water glass and remind myself it’s important to look happy.

Marianne pulls me to her, one arm around my waist, releasing a wave of lavender soap.

“Why are you here, Arlette? It’s your day off.”

I shrug out of my coat. “Is it?” *One day is the same as the next.*

“You need to keep a calendar. And look at you, sketch pencil still tucked in your hair. You should be home designing dresses, not here trying to make this place chic. You could be a very good businesswoman.”

“Men distrust ambitious women.”

“Who needs men? You take care of you.”

I smile. “I only do this for the coffee.” *And because this is the only real family I’ve ever had.*

“Look at you, so thin. Have you forgotten to eat again?”

Had I? Some old chardonnay for dinner last night.

“Did you get your cat?”

Why had I mentioned my most fervent wish to her, of having an orange cat named Saffron someday? I wave that thought away. “No. I’m waiting for the right one to come along. But I can barely afford my own food.”

Bep rushes by. “Everyone will arrive at once as we open.” She pours boiling water into a French press, lets the grounds steep, and pushes down the stopper. “Not one of them understands fashionably late.”

We don’t talk about the camp, about her baby Thea and the *Kinderzimmer*, but Bep has healed well, at least on the outside. Still

waiflike, with skin the color of unripe cantaloupe, she has grown her hair long enough to wear in a thick braid down her back and married a cheesemonger from Lyon who keeps us all in free, perfectly ripe Saint-Marcellin. They have one son named Remi, and Bep is finally putting on some weight. Marianne has been trying to feed us like foie gras geese for years.

Dear Riekie hurries by carrying a stack of chairs, her hair white and as fine as milkweed silk. She's still so quick to smile, and has married a Frenchman as well, a flower merchant named Paul, with beautiful pansy-brown eyes, the perfect man for her, since he keeps their apartment filled with roses. A living testament to the axiom that women become more beautiful under men's desire, Riekie has never looked more radiant. We all know that Paul wants a family, but she can't bring herself to attempt another child.

Even Marianne has a beau, which leaves me the only unattached one.

I tie on my apron and wave the letter. "The return address says Wagner."

The room grows quiet.

Marianne comes closer. "Well? Open it."

Riekie sets down her chairs. "Your Gunther?"

I nod, fingers trembling.

Raphael is the only one who doesn't wear a look of breathless anticipation.

I slice the envelope top with a bread knife, open the page, and read aloud.

Dear Miss LaRue,

Regarding your third letter here, we must ask you to stop writing to us. If you choose to continue, you are hereby notified our next action will be a legal one.

Sincerely,

Mr. and Mrs. Werner Wagner

I grip the sink edge. “Oh, dear.”

Bep pulls the note from my hand. “Let me see that. Gunther’s parents? How dare they treat you so?”

Riekie rubs my back. “Did you ever meet them?”

I retrieve the note and slide it into my apron pocket. “No.”

At least this letter is something new for my grief box, something they’d had us make in the Mothers with Loss class I attended once at Marianne’s church. I decorated a child’s shoebox a parishioner had donated, glued paper lace to the sides and wrote *Willie* on the top in script. It’s the perfect place to keep the few things I still have that connect me to my son. A feather that belonged to our camp daughter Fleur. A cloth version of *Puss and Boots*. A rubber teething ring. And a lock of blond hair, close to my shade, tied with an apricot-colored ribbon. I carry my little cardboard coffin of love with me everywhere I go.

Marianne leans in. “Well, they didn’t say their son is dead. Gunther could be wounded. With amnesia.”

“For seven years?” I ask.

“Did you ever tell them about Willie? Their grandchild, after all.”

“No. Couldn’t bring myself to. What if they’d taken him from me?” I straighten up. “But never mind this. We have work to do.”

The wall clock strikes six and the chaos begins as the flower merchants stream in from the cold, huffing breath on their hands, coat pockets bulging with twine and stem nippers, their berets and stocking caps little defense against the cold.

They jockey for the best seats at the café tables. We bring them their French presses of coffee, and they discuss the problems of the flower business, which are many, and smoke and express their ongoing dissatisfaction with the world. More patrons enter, until there’s no more space, and some wait outside.

“How can you operate a café without serving café crème, Marianne?” one patron calls out. “When are you going to get an espresso machine?”

“When you pay for it,” Marianne shouts back. “Costs more than this whole shack is worth.”

Each one shuffles to the donation jar Marianne has placed atop the bar, to deposit a bill or jingle in some coins.

“Happy to help the best I can,” says Guillaume, a gentle ape of a man with an opium habit, who pines for Marianne.

The jar fills quickly as Raphael joins me at the deep porcelain sink, which faces out at the room. We wash coffee cups, sleeves rolled, arms up to the elbows in scalding water and suds. I pull cup number ten thousand and seven from the water, the water stinging my hands. But it almost feels good. Penance.

Raphael leans closer to me, our shoulders touching. “So, tell me. Will I ever have a chance with you, Arlette? I know many men admire you, but please tell me I’m the frontrunner.”

I smile and shove him with my shoulder.

One flower seller enters, carrying what must be his granddaughter on his hip. She’s about a year old and dressed in a sweet lilac wool coat with white velvet trim.

“Look at that child,” I say. Would I ever stop comparing children to my Willie?

“Beautiful,” Raphael says with a certain sadness. “Remind you of your boy?”

I nod.

He clasps my hand for a moment under the water, warm and strong.

What would Willie look like today? A grown up nine-year-old. No longer a baby, of course. Still blond? Gunther was blond and I am too, so yes. Not as light and baby fine as his hair was back then, probably darker by now. Would Willie still have that same sweet, expectant look he always did, as if just waiting to laugh at something? I conjure the feeling of holding him in my arms—

Raphael shakes my arm. “*Arlette*. Did you hear a word I said?”

“I’m sorry.” I return to my washing.

“I said, ‘Would you ever start another search?’ ”

I shake my head. “I lost everything looking for him.”

“Maybe this time use someone more reputable. A real private detective. I have a little money saved up.”

“That’s kind of you, but I have to move on. I don’t have an extra centime to pay a detective. As it is, I can only go to the Louvre on free days. The crowds...”

“I’m happy to take you. Even on full-price day.”

“I have to become self-sufficient. Besides, I already owe all of you a king’s ransom.”

“Would you consider adopting?”

I keep my gaze on the cup in my hands, scrub a coffee stain off the rim, and rinse the smooth white china, purifying it.

Adopt? How many times had well-intentioned people suggested that? It would only be a dreadful reminder my son was gone. I’d visited the orphanage in Montparnasse, but could barely look at their expectant faces, so tragic.

If Gunther were here, he’d help me find Willie. I try to recall an image of Gunther, back before he marched off with Hitler’s army, but I can barely summon him. He would have been a good father.

Riekie hurries over and bumps her hip into mine. “*Arlette.*” She leans in, her head practically on my shoulder. “Don’t look, but the gentleman in the corner in the camel hair overcoat keeps looking at you.”

“Don’t engage in craziness.”

“It’s true.”

I bite my lips to make them pink and regret that my toilette, once my masterpiece, has been reduced to brushing my teeth. “Who wouldn’t stare at a tall girl with messy hair and dressed like a rag picker?”

Bep approaches and leans in between us, her hair perfumed with cocoa from stirring the morning chocolate. “We both know you could model those clothes you design. You’re the closest thing to stunning this place has ever seen.”

Maybe once.

I slide the pencil from my hair and toss it on the counter.

Riekie cranes her neck for a better view. “He looks like the type who buys expensive presents.”

I shrug one shoulder. “Dangling jewels don’t suit me.”

Riekie smiles. “I guess you’re used to the male gaze. But it’s usually only Raphael who stares at you.”

Raphael wipes something off my cheek with his damp thumb. “Me, attentive? She often has marmalade stuck on her face. Trying to keep the help clean for the customers.”

“Don’t look,” Bep says, “but he’s coming this way.”

The man in the camel hair overcoat works his way through the crowd. I glance at him as he approaches. Some might find him attractive, in a rich way, with his dark hair and pink scarf folded at his throat. Hard to place him age-wise. Early forties, maybe? He carries a wood-handled umbrella, too prepared for my taste. How does one do the most romantic thing in Paris, stand in the middle of the street in the rain and kiss, wet to the core, if one brings an umbrella?

He leans across the counter to me. “The coffee was very good.”

I keep my gaze on my work.

He takes a folded stack of bills from his coat pocket and slides it into the jar.

Bep slumps into me, and I hold her up by the arm.

Marianne comes by and considers our new friend.

“Thank you for donating, sir,” I say, rinsing a cup.

He nods. “I’m Luc Minau.”

I glance in his direction.

“Are you Arlette Dagmar LaRue?” he asks.

I set the cup in the drainer. “And if I am?”

“I have some important information for you.” He holds out an ecru card. Bep takes it and holds it up for me to read. It’s nicely engraved.

MAÎTRE LUC MINAU
PRATICIEN DU DROIT
10 RUE DES ROSIERS, FRANCE

I try to look casual, pull the dishcloth from my shoulder, and dry the cup. “What is this about?”

“Happy to explain. Kindly meet me at my office tomorrow at noon.”

I continue drying as he walks toward the door and steps out.

Bep rushes to the jar, extracts the bills, and thumbs through them. “There must be one thousand francs here, Arlette. You weren’t very friendly.”

Riekie watches over her shoulder. “I do admire a man confident enough to wear pink. And I know you like your men on the scruffier side, but he’s not bad looking.”

“Tall, too,” Bep says, pointedly at me, as if he’s the only man my height in Paris.

I sling the dishcloth over my shoulder. “If he’s indeed a lawyer as the card says, I doubt he’s interested in me. Plus, he’s at least fifteen years older.”

Bep takes the cup from my hand. “Mature men can be very sexy.”

“He looks shifty,” Raphael says and walks off.

Marianne comes to my side. “It’s good to be careful, my dear. You were smart not to be too nice.”

“What’s this information he has?” Bep asks. “With an office on rue des Rosiers he must be legit.”

I examine the card. “Could be a fake. I attract lowlifes.”

Marianne slides her arm around my waist. “Don’t be ashamed you were taken in by a charlatan. I’ve gotten calls myself, about my mother mysteriously being alive. Don’t you think I wanted to believe it?”

I watch Mr. Minau as he stands just outside the door buttoning his coat. “I suppose it’s possible he knows something about Willie.”

“Why not do your own investigation? You were a Dove, after all, one of our—”

I hold up one hand. “No. I’m done with all that. It leads to nothing but trouble. I just want a normal life. No espionage.”

Marianne rubs my back. “Well then, meet with this man. Shall I come with you?”

Her concerned look makes me smile. “I’ll be fine. It’s a good address.”

“Just don’t hand over any money.”

I link arms with her. “That’s easy. I have none to give.”

Bep slides the bills back into the jar. “Or maybe he’s here to tell you your aunt has left you a fortune.”

Just the mention of Auntie sends my stomach churning. I’d kept that so secret.

“The question is how did he find me?”

I watch Luc Minau walk across the street.

“I’m afraid my past is about to catch up with me.”