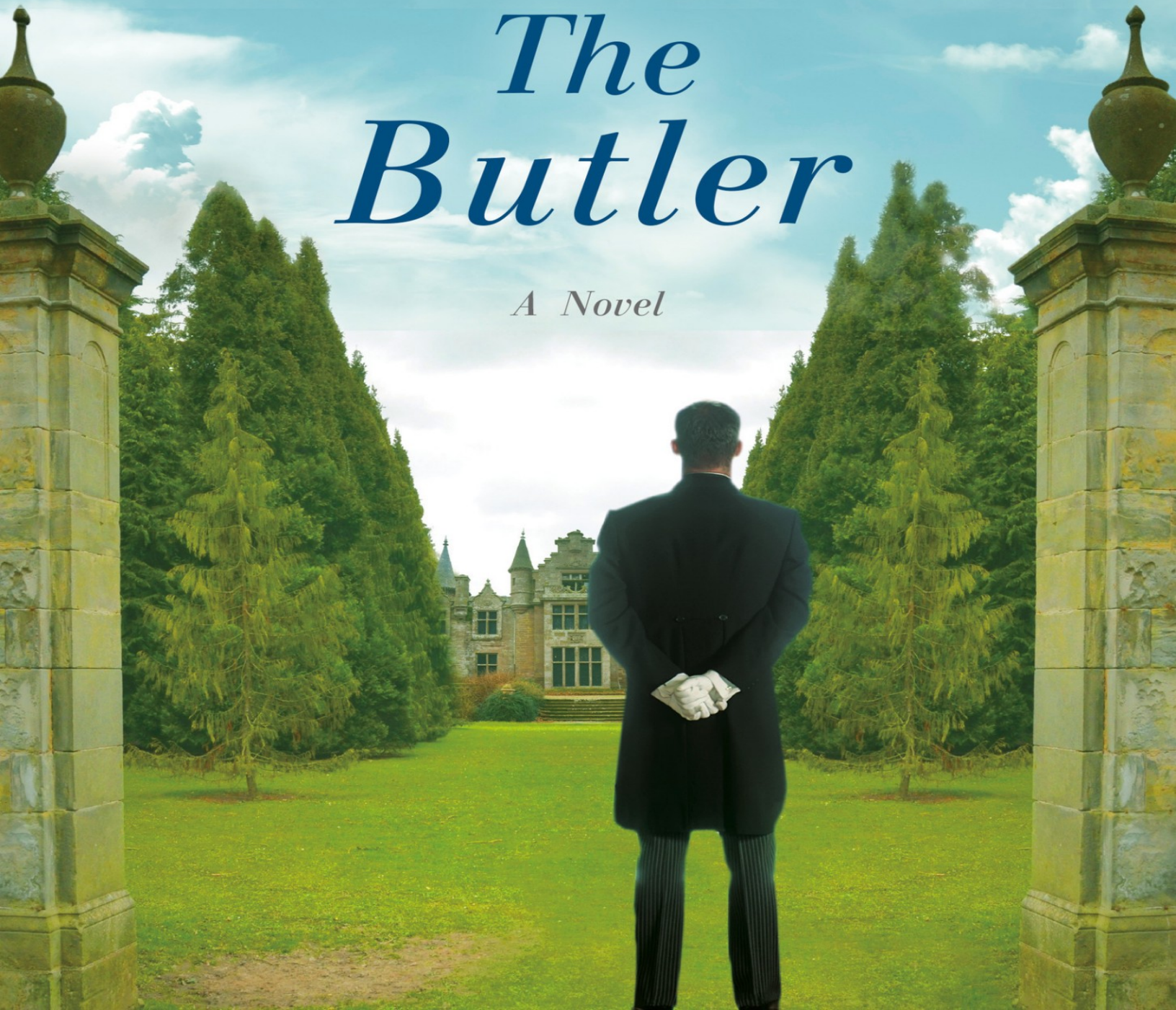


DANIELLE STEEL

The Butler

A Novel



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Delacorte Press

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The Butler is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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Dedication

By Danielle Steel

About the Author

Chapter 1

The moment the plane touched down at Ministro Pistarini de Ezeiza airport in Buenos Aires, Joachim von Hartmann knew in every fiber of his being that he was home. It was almost as if his heart and soul, and even his body, knew it. He had left as a boy of seventeen, twenty-five years before, when he'd moved to France with his mother and new French stepfather. Eight years later, he went to England on a lark, which turned into a worthy career for the past seventeen years. His roots were now firmly planted in Europe, but Joachim realized as he breathed the air of Buenos Aires that his heart had remained here. He had never fully cut the cord that bound him to Argentina. There was a magic to it that was still in his blood.

This was a long-awaited pilgrimage to the place where he had been born. All his boyhood memories were here, and what he had been too young to remember, his mother had told him again and again as he grew up. He felt as though he had never left as he came off the plane, like an old childhood friendship, or a great love.

Both his name and his tall, thin, aristocratic looks, with blond hair and blue eyes, were familiar in Argentina. With the influx of Irish, English, and German immigrants over the years, Argentines with German and Anglo-Saxon surnames and looks were not unusual. On his mother's side, all of Joachim's ancestors were German, originally from Bavaria and later from Berlin. His father, whom he never knew, had been from a distinguished banking family in Argentina. He had died when Joachim was less than a year old, and the rest of his father's family had died within a few years, so Joachim never knew them either. The mainstays of Joachim's life growing up had been his mother, Liese, and his identical twin brother, Javier.

Joachim had a special relationship with his brother because they were twins. He felt at times as though they were two halves of the same person.

Joachim's German maternal grandfather, Gunther von Hartmann, had been widowed when his wife was killed in the Allied bombings of Germany. Like others who could still afford to leave, he hadn't wanted to stay in Germany and live through the disarray and reconstruction of the country. He was accustomed to a genteel world that no longer existed after the war. As soon as possible after the war, he had taken his five-year-old daughter, Liese, and what was left of his once-vast family fortune, and moved to Buenos Aires, rather than be treated as a defeated enemy in Germany. He had enough left to live extremely well in Argentina, which wouldn't have been the case in Europe. Argentina was a country that welcomed the Germans who had chosen to settle there, as they had been doing for generations.

Joachim had never lived in Germany, and knew very little about it, or his mother's life there, except that she had experienced great wealth and luxury as a young girl, first in Germany and then in Argentina. But his mother had often told him about the beautiful house where she grew up with her father in Buenos Aires. It was filled with antiques, and the fine works of art her father had been able to bring with him. He had a passion for the beauty of art in all its forms and had passed it on to his daughter. She had told Joachim too of the pretty finca they had outside of the city, where they spent weekends, and the many servants her father employed. They had never gone back to Germany, even for a visit. They had no one left there. Gunther von Hartmann had only his daughter in the years after the war. He had nothing left in Germany, and he had forged a new life in Argentina. They spent their holidays in Uruguay, Colombia, Brazil, and other parts of Argentina. Gunther had no desire to see Germany or Europe again, and Liese no longer remembered it. He became an Argentine citizen, and Liese grew up feeling entirely Argentinian. Her father never remarried. She went to the best schools in Buenos Aires, and she eventually married Alejandro Canal, the son of one of the city's finest banking families. She lived in what seemed to her a perfect world, as she remembered it and described it to

Joachim. Her only sorrow, once married, was their inability to have children. She and her husband, Alejandro, had been married for ten very happy, fairly glamorous years, and had given up hope of having children, when by some miracle she conceived and gave birth to Joachim and his identical twin brother, Javier. She was thirty-nine when they were born. She told her sons that their birth was the happiest time of her life, but it all ended in tragedy a year later.

Her father, whom she adored, died suddenly at seventy-three, four months after the twins were born. Her husband, Alejandro, was killed in a riding accident three months later, as she told her sons when they were older. She rapidly discovered after her father's death that his money had been poorly invested and he died leaving her nothing. Her husband's family lost everything they had in the political upheavals that shook the country and left many of the previously wealthy penniless. By the time Joachim and Javier were a year old, Liese was living in a small apartment. Her in-laws' bank was bankrupt and they were unable to help her. She explained that her father-in-law had mishandled the bank's funds in desperation, and to spare her sons embarrassment later, she took back her maiden name, von Hartmann, and gave it to her sons as well.

Unlike his mother in her privileged youth, Joachim had grown up in modest circumstances. He had never known anything different, and neither he nor his twin, Javier, was unhappy. They lived in a poor neighborhood where there were always other children to play with, and their small apartment was a loving, warm home, thanks to their mother. They had food on the table, decent clothes, the basic necessities of life, and a mother who loved them. It had always seemed like more than enough to Joachim, who didn't hunger for more. Javier had a less contented nature as he got older, and in his early teens he argued with everyone and reproached their mother for what they didn't have. He had begun to notice the inequities between the rich and the poor in Argentina and was angry about the injustice of it. Joachim was content and satisfied with what they had. And it began to cause dissent between the two brothers, although Joachim loved his twin unconditionally.

Their mother had studied art history at the university before she got married, and had also been carefully schooled by her father, who knew a great deal about art, particularly the Impressionists. When the bottom fell out of her world, after her husband's and father's deaths, Liese was able to get a job she loved as a curator of French art at the National Museum of Fine Arts of Argentina. The job was poorly paid, but she was respected for her expertise and extensive knowledge of art. She tried to share her passion for art with her sons, but neither of them was particularly interested. They preferred playing soccer and other sports with their friends in the street.

They were fifteen when Liese met Francois Legrand, an art expert from the Louvre in Paris, who came to Buenos Aires to verify the authenticity of several paintings that the museum had recently acquired. Although she had always led a retiring life, and spent all her free time with her boys, she and Francois fell madly in love. After his visit, they maintained a constant correspondence, and he came back to Buenos Aires several times to see her. She was fifty-four when she met him. As with the birth of the twins, meeting Francois Legrand seemed like a miracle to her. There had been no man in her life for years, and it had never occurred to either of her sons that that could change. They were the center of her universe before, and even after, she met Francois. The correspondence with Francois Legrand and his occasional visits had gone on for two years. He was sixty-four, ten years older than Liese, and had been widowed for many years as well, with no children of his own. He wanted to marry Liese and bring her and her sons to Paris. He had even found a job for her at the Louvre. He was by no means a rich man, but had lived carefully, and could support her and the boys comfortably, and provide them a security they didn't have living on their mother's meager salary. Francois was genuinely fond of the boys and loved Liese deeply.

His relationship with Joachim was easy. He was a happy-go-lucky boy who didn't require more from life than what he had. He was planning to go to university in Buenos Aires but hadn't found his direction yet. He wanted nothing more than his happy, easy life, among his friends in Buenos Aires.

Javier, by contrast, was always the voice of discontent. He became angry as a teenager, at not having a father, at the money his family had lost before he was born, at what they didn't have, at being the youngest twin by eleven minutes. He resented his brother for that. He was hard on Joachim, who forgave him all, because they were twins. Joachim was unfailingly loyal to him. Javier resented their mother as well. He hated her stories of her golden youth, thanks to a grandfather he never knew, and who had managed to lose his entire fortune at his death. Javier was angry at his paternal grandparents too, for the fortune they had lost, which made him feel doubly deprived. Javier had a hunger in his belly that nothing could satisfy or cure, and he blamed his mother for not providing them with a better life than the one they had growing up. Joachim was grateful for all she'd done for them. Javier wanted more than a life of poverty, and his mother's and brother's love wasn't enough for him.

Unlike his mother, Javier didn't think Francois Legrand was the answer to their prayers, or his at least. He wanted much more than the comfortable, secure middle-class life Francois could provide. He didn't want to move to Paris if she married him. He had no interest even in his own ancestral roots in Europe. Javier was an Argentine to the core. Whereas the blue blood that ran in his German mother's veins, and even in his twin brother Joachim's, was always evident in subtle ways, good manners, and a natural compassion and generosity toward others, Javier related better to the common man in the streets of Buenos Aires. He acted like them and had a rough edge. He was always out of step, picking fights in school, and on the streets when he grew older. There was a violent side of him, despite his mother's efforts to quell it. Joachim tried to reason with him to no avail in their late teens. They were turning into very different men.

Joachim had a thirst for life, for new discoveries and the knowledge he acquired. He loved his studies. To him everything new he encountered was an adventure, and he was intrigued by the idea of attending the Sorbonne in Paris. He had learned French and English in school as a boy, and his mother had taught him German. He managed all four languages well. Javier had had the same education and had benefited from none of it. He was a poor

student and felt most at ease among the lowest element on the streets. Joachim didn't like the new friends his brother sought out as they got older, although they'd had the same friends as young boys. He thought his twin's pals were "cowards and little jerks." By their late teens, and even before that, the two brothers couldn't have been more different. Despite that, Joachim loved Javier deeply and had an older brother's protective instincts toward him, and felt sure he'd outgrow his rebellious nature. He frequently reassured his mother about it, and she hoped Joachim was right.

It had taken considerable convincing and reassurance, but Francois had finally overcome Liese's reservations about remarrying. After two years of correspondence and courtship, they were married in a small ceremony in Buenos Aires with only her two sons present. After a brief honeymoon in Punta del Este, Francois went back to Paris to ready his home to receive them. Joachim had been accepted at a lycée near Francois's home in Paris, where he would spend a year, pass his baccalauréat exam, then hopefully get into the Sorbonne, to pursue his education. He was planning to major in literature and art.

Much to Joachim's chagrin, Javier flatly refused to join them. At seventeen, he wanted to live with a friend's family for a year in Buenos Aires after his mother and brother left, and then go to work after that, without bothering with university. He grudgingly agreed to come to Paris in a year when he finished school, if his mother would allow him to spend the year in Buenos Aires. He didn't want to graduate in another country, without his friends. His new, wild friends meant more to him than his education or his family. Liese didn't like the family that Javier wanted to stay with, nor their son, and Joachim was upset at the thought of being separated from his brother for a year. He had never lived away from his twin, and even though they were very different and didn't always agree, he still felt that Javier was a part of him, like a limb, or his heart, a vital organ he couldn't imagine losing. He didn't want to be away from him for a year, but Javier fought like a cat to be left behind.

Joachim was always more protective of their mother, and it didn't seem fair to him to let her go to her new life alone, without her sons, even though

Francois was a kind man and would take good care of her. Joachim got along with him particularly well, and Francois enjoyed having a son for the first time. Javier treated him as an unwelcome stranger, an interloper, but Francois warmly invited him to live with them in Paris nonetheless. He knew how important her sons were to his new wife. She had made countless sacrifices for them while they grew up.

Eventually, after struggling with the decision, Liese gave in to Javier's constant pleas and arguments that went on day and night until she conceded. She agreed to let him stay with the family she didn't like. She thought they were coarse, and their children badly behaved, but they weren't evil people. And Javier solemnly promised to come to Paris in a year when he graduated. It was a major victory for him, which he celebrated with his friends for weeks, which made his mother even more uneasy. She wasn't fully confident that his best friend's family would supervise Javier as closely as she had, and he was hard to control. He was far more eager to fly free than Joachim was, and do what he wanted. Joachim still enjoyed family life, and never chafed over his mother's parental control. He liked the idea of Francois as the father figure he'd never had. He'd been hungry for a father all his life. And Francois was kind to both boys.

Liese felt their departure from Buenos Aires like a force tearing her in half, leaving one of her sons behind. They had packed up everything she wanted to keep, and sent it by ship to France. Her father's books, his letters to her, and all the souvenirs of the boys' childhood and youth. She kept only what was of sentimental value to her, and owned nothing of great worth. But she felt as though she was abandoning her whole life since she was five. She had strong ties to Argentina, despite all the material things she had lost long before.

Joachim felt as if he had left half of himself behind, the beating heart or the lungs with which he breathed. He believed that the bond between twins was a sacred one, more than that of ordinary brothers. He had a deep psychological bond to Javier, despite their differences. At seventeen, the tears had poured down his cheeks when he said goodbye to his twin brother. He could not imagine a single day of his life without his brother in it, no

matter how different they were becoming. The next year was going to be hard for him, in a new country and new school without his twin. Just knowing Javier was in his daily life was a comfort to him. In contrast, Javier could barely conceal how excited he was to be left on his own, living with his friend, without his mother and brother, and their supervision. And right up until the last minute, Liese was tempted to tell Javier she had changed her mind, but Francois convinced her that it might be better to let Javier do as he wished for a year, rather than bring an angry, sulking, rebellious teenage boy to Paris, which could only lead to trouble. He had already threatened not to go to school in France at all, if they forced him to leave with them, and he had promised to continue his schooling in Buenos Aires.

Liese had a thousand admonitions and instructions for him when she left. She and Joachim sat together on the plane, crying and holding hands. It was hard to feel happy about their move to France, while leaving someone so important to them in Buenos Aires. But Francois had done so many things to prepare for their arrival, and welcome them—a freshly painted, newly furnished room for Joachim, new curtains he'd had made for Liese, a new couch, and new china and utensils in the kitchen. He also bought a new television for the living room, so they could all watch sports together, and a stereo system for Joachim's room, so he could listen to his music. Francois was so overjoyed to see them when they arrived that he looked like he was going to explode. He had tried to think of everything to please them. And within days, Joachim could see his mother start to relax. It was the first time in seventeen years that his mother had a man to lean on and take care of her, since her husband's and father's deaths when he and Javier were only a few months old.

Francois wanted to do everything he could to make up for the hard years she'd had before she'd met him, the struggles and the poverty. She was happy with him, and the only sadness in her life was her constant worry about Javier. Joachim missed him too and knew that his mother would not fully feel at ease until his "younger" brother joined them, and she could

keep an eye on him herself. Javier was a child who needed supervision and guidance, and no one watched him as carefully as she did.

Joachim adjusted rapidly to his school in Paris, made friends with his classmates, and played sports after school. His French became even more fluent. Francois had arranged for dual citizenship for him and Liese and planned to do the same for Javier when he arrived. Joachim didn't feel French, but he felt at home there. And Liese loved her husband and her new job. She was deeply grateful for his kindness to her and Joachim.

Francois had secured a job for her at the Louvre. He was one of the experts who certified the authenticity of all paintings acquired by the Louvre. Liese soon discovered an organization that traced paintings stolen by the Nazis and returned them to their rightful owners whenever possible. She was offered a position by them and accepted immediately. They worked closely with the Louvre and other museums around Europe, and occasionally South America, tracking down works of art that had disappeared during the war, identifying where they had wound up, and then attempting to find their original owners and return the paintings if the owners were still alive. Many weren't, and had died in German concentration camps, if they were Jewish, but sometimes a family member had survived and was grateful for the return of their family's lost artwork and possessions. It was slow, meticulous, painstaking work tracking down both the work of art and the original owner, but she loved it. Francois called her an art detective and admired her dedication to her job. She was tireless in her efforts.

They were a happy couple, and Liese felt surprisingly at home in France. She spoke French, German, English, and Spanish, which made it easier for her to do the research, in many countries, to trace works of art that had been missing for fifty years.

Many of the world's masterpieces had disappeared during and after the war. A great number, particularly from France, had fallen into Nazi hands, and the works had then gone underground, hidden by those who had taken them, or sold privately by disreputable, dishonest dealers. Some had been honorably or anonymously returned to museums, but very few. It became

Liese's passion to ferret out the provenance of each work. It was heartbreaking to try to locate the original owners. Most of the heirs were astounded to suddenly find themselves with extremely valuable art. Liese did the work with passion and unrelenting perseverance. She loved telling Francois and Joachim at dinner about the particular painting she was currently pursuing.

Fresh battles erupted with Javier when he begged for another year in Buenos Aires after he graduated. He wanted to do a year of university there, instead of at the Sorbonne in Paris, like Joachim. Liese didn't want to agree to it and let Javier stay, but in the end she had no choice. He was eighteen and refused to come to Paris for another year, whether she agreed to it or not. Francois thought it best not to cause a long-term break with him and let him have his way again. They discovered months later, through friends and some of his old teachers, that he had not enrolled in the university, and was working instead. He had taken a job with a man who owned a freight company that shipped goods throughout South America. Javier was driving a truck for him, doing deliveries. Francois didn't like the sound of it but didn't want to worry Liese more than she already was. Once again, Javier promised to come to Paris in a year, after he'd saved some money, so he wouldn't be dependent on his stepfather when he arrived.

Liese's job was poorly paid, and a labor of love. Francois paid all her expenses and Joachim's, so she could afford to do it. He was as generous as his own salary and savings allowed, and they had everything they needed. She wasn't an extravagant woman, despite the comforts with which she'd grown up, and Joachim made few demands on them. He spent very little money as a student. He was a serious boy and never any trouble, unlike his brother.

Joachim felt it as a physical blow when Javier refused to come to Paris after their year's separation. Joachim felt his absence acutely. Javier's refusal to leave Buenos Aires threw Joachim off balance for his first year at the Sorbonne. He couldn't concentrate on his studies, worrying about his twin. He wrote to him, and called him from time to time, begging him to come, but Javier sounded different now. He was no longer a boy, but a man

living on his own in a small studio apartment near the freight company's warehouse.

He had moved out of his friend's home when he had graduated. He alluded to some kind of falling-out with him, and disagreements with his friend's parents, without explaining in detail. He was driving a truck now most of the time. To Joachim, it didn't sound worth staying in Buenos Aires for that, but Javier had no interest in coming to France for the time being. He always promised that he would eventually when he had saved enough money. Paris held no lure for him, even to see his twin or their mother. He said he felt Argentinian to the core and didn't want to live in France. He liked earning his own money, and his job, which didn't sound good to Joachim.

The second year of their separation was harder for Joachim than the first, because his brother's promises to come to Paris no longer sounded convincing, and Joachim was beginning to fear Javier would never come. Joachim wanted to visit Javier during the summer, to convince him in person, but Francois got Joachim a summer job, working for one of his friends at an auction house, carrying artwork on and off the stage during the auctions. It was hard work, and only manual labor, but it paid well, and Joachim didn't want to let his stepfather down and back out of the job. Javier said he was gone all the time anyway, driving the truck, so he would have seen little of him. He did all he could to discourage Joachim from coming, and the chasm between them seemed wider than ever. Joachim felt it like a loss, and feared they would be separated forever. He mourned their boyhood closeness, which had been the happiest days of his life, having his identical twin always near him, and now it was all over.

Joachim started his second year at the Sorbonne, studying literature and art history, at his mother's suggestion. They hadn't heard from Javier for two months by then. The home number they had for him had been disconnected, and the main office of the freight company said simply that he was "probably on the road" and they would give him a message. Two months later, his family still hadn't heard from him. To put Liese's mind at rest, Francois hired a detective firm with an office in Argentina to track him

down. They heard back from the agency a few weeks later. He confirmed that Javier was still working for the same freight company, driving between Argentina, Colombia, Uruguay, and Brazil, as he had said, but he was based now in Colombia and living in Bogotá. Discreet inquiries with the friend he had lived with revealed that they had had a falling-out and lost touch. The friend said that Javier had been too hard to live with and had caused problems with his parents. The parents had told their contact in Buenos Aires that Javier was disrespectful, followed no rules, and had fallen in with what seemed to them like bad company. He accepted no supervision or control whatsoever. Further inquiries supported the theory that he was hanging out with a bad group, and it was possible that drugs were involved, but there was no proof of it. At no time had the detective in Buenos Aires been able to lay eyes on Javier or connect with him. He had successfully slipped through his family's fingers. Liese wanted to go to Bogotá to try and find him herself, and Joachim volunteered to go with her, but the detective thought they would not be any more successful. Javier was on the road or in Colombia most of the time now. None of his old school friends had heard from him. He was leading a very different adult life from his peers or past connections. The detective's suspicion was that he might be transporting drugs, had fallen in with disreputable people, and would hardly welcome a visit from his mother and brother if that was the case.

The mood in the house was heavy after that. By Christmas, they hadn't heard from him for six months. He called Joachim late one night. He sounded high or drunk, and tried to pick an argument with him. There was no longer any question of him promising to come to Paris. He accused Joachim of still being a child, tied to their mother's apron strings, and bragged that he was a man now. He said he was earning a decent wage, better than what he could earn in Paris, but he was vague when Joachim asked him what he was transporting. All he was willing to say was that he was well paid for it and sounded like he was bragging.

Joachim was haunted by their conversation and reported it to his mother. Francois engaged the detective service again. They were able to find out very little, except that Javier was alive, spending more time in Colombia,

and only occasionally in Buenos Aires. The detective still suspected that he might be working for a drug dealer. Their contact with Javier was sporadic from then on. He would disappear for months, surface, and then vanish again. He called home very rarely.

Once on Christmas, he called his mother and started a heated argument with her when she complained about how elusive he was. It ruined the holiday for all of them. He called her on her birthday, and she cried for weeks afterward. Everything in her life was going well, except for the son she could no longer see or touch. He was lost to them, which was how Javier wanted it. He had ranted about politics to Joachim during one of their phone calls. He sounded revolutionary in his ideas and hostile about the middle and upper classes and the Establishment and referred to Francois and his mother as “bourgeois.” He was a changed person, and no longer the boy Joachim had come into the world with and grown up with and had loved so fiercely. And eventually, Javier stopped calling entirely and they had no way to reach him. It was agony for Joachim and his mother, a wound that never healed, always hoping to hear from him.

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When Joachim’s flight landed in Buenos Aires during the Argentine summer, it had been twenty-five years since he had seen his twin brother, and more than twenty years since he had spoken to him. Their mother no longer had any contact with him either. Francois had hired the detective a few more times, but they finally all agreed that it was a waste of money. Javier had disappeared into another world, another life, and until he wanted contact with them, it was unlikely that they would find him. He had slipped into a dark underworld where it was easy to hide and disappear. Liese wasn’t even sure that she would know if he died, since no one he knew would know how to find her. They checked prison records, but he hadn’t been in prison so far, and with the kind of people he worked for, if they wanted to get rid of him, or he betrayed them, or let them down, they would have him killed, and his family in Paris wouldn’t know that either. Joachim

had lived with Javier's silence for almost twenty-three years, and his mother for just as long. It was a bond between Joachim and his mother, the agonizing loss they both lived with, of brother and son.

For a long time, it felt like a death to Joachim, to have lost his identical twin, like losing a part of himself. He could no longer contact his brother, hear his voice, or see him. He had no idea where he was, or if he was alive on any particular day. And given the rough people he was involved with, it was never a certainty that he was still alive, or for how long that would last. It disrupted Joachim's life in countless ways. He couldn't concentrate on his studies at the Sorbonne, which seemed meaningless to him. He didn't care about art history or literature and had only taken those classes to please his mother. He didn't know what he wanted to do for a career. He often wondered if his brother was right, and he was being a "baby," still close to their mother. And finally, with failing grades, he dropped out of the Sorbonne, feeling lost and aimless, and unsure which way to turn.

Francois got him minor temporary jobs, as an art handler at the Louvre, then working in one of the restaurants there. Joachim went back to the auction house for a while but was nothing more than a furniture mover. He took a job running the Ferris wheel at a carnival one summer. Liese told Francois that was the bottom of the barrel. Joachim was intelligent, and capable of much more than that, but he seemed lost without Javier. But they all had to live with it. It was Javier who had distanced himself from them, severed all connection, and wanted it that way.

Joachim was nineteen the last time he heard from his twin, and spent five years after that doing odd jobs, going nowhere. He rented a tiny studio apartment in a dilapidated area of Paris. The building smelled bad, and the apartment was barely bigger than his bed, with a small battered fridge and a hot plate and sink, a toilet, and tiny shower. Liese hated to see him live that way, but he didn't want to take advantage of his stepfather. He felt that he should be independent by then, and living on his own, although Francois would have been happy to house him. He enjoyed having him around, and it made his mother happy.

Liese worried about both her sons constantly, for different reasons. Javier was destroying any chance he had for a good life, and he was affecting Joachim's life from a distance, with the grief of having lost his twin. Joachim doubted he would ever see Javier again and, at the same time, always hoped he would, and Javier would magically reappear, which never happened.

Liese had to make her own peace with having a son she might never see again. She prayed every day that he was still alive. Some sixth sense gave her the feeling that he was, and Joachim had the same intuition that somewhere out in the world, his brother was still living, but they had no way to verify it. The detective had found no trace of him during his last mission for them. Javier had vanished.

Liese had had her share of grief in her lifetime, the loss of her father and then her husband only months later, and then Javier's determined disappearance. Then eight years after she came to Paris, Francois died quietly in his sleep, lying beside her. A massive stroke was the cause of death. He was only seventy-four years old, but mercifully, he had died peacefully, hadn't fallen ill, and hadn't suffered. And Liese was a widow again at sixty-four. She was still passionately engaged in her work for the organization that located lost and stolen artwork in order to return it and had no desire to retire. She was healthy and strong, and loved going to work every day. Francois had still been working as an expert at the Louvre, but he had been tired lately, and thinking of retiring, and now he was gone.

He left almost everything he had to Liese, since he had no children or relatives. He had a very decent insurance policy he had taken out when he'd married her. And he had left a nice amount of money to Joachim, not enough to go crazy with, but he wouldn't have anyway. Francois knew that about him. It was enough for Joachim to buy himself a small apartment, nicer than the ugly one he rented, or study somewhere abroad, if he wished to. Francois gave him a little start in life. He had hoped that Joachim would go back to school, to learn a trade or pursue a career of some kind, but he hadn't. The loss of his twin had been a huge blow and took him years to adjust to. There were girls in his life, but they never lasted long. And he

never got deeply attached to any of them. Having lost Javier, he seemed to have a hard time getting close to anyone, for fear of losing them too. At twenty-five, he had no particular direction and hadn't found a career that inspired him, only the temporary jobs he took as filler. He was just passing time. Liese and Francois had talked about it a great deal, and Francois had been as concerned as any father would have been. Joachim had been lucky that his mother had married a man with a big heart who had wanted to take him under his wing, although Javier had thrown them all off balance. Liese always wondered if Joachim was just waiting for Javier to return.

Liese continued working after Francois died, with no intention of retiring. More than ever, she needed her job now. It gave her some purpose in life, a place to go every day, and contact with people. She was doing some good, or trying to, tracking down art and returning it to people who had been so severely wronged. She felt as though she was part of some form of justice, compensating in some small degree for all that had been lost or taken from them, most of it so enormous that no one could ever really make it up to them. But what she was able to return to them gave them something, and in some cases, with important works of art, it gave them an object of great monetary value. She was only a child when most of the art had been taken from them, or their relatives, during the war, but at least as an adult, she could be part of the restitution. It was very meaningful work for her, and she was proud of what she was doing. And Francois had been proud of her.

Joachim was shocked that Francois had left him anything at all and was deeply touched by it. Two months after he died, with his new inheritance, Joachim was having Sunday lunch with his mother at her apartment and saw an ad in the newspaper that intrigued him. He folded the paper and handed it to his mother, who looked at the page blankly. She couldn't see why he had shown it to her. She didn't see anything of interest.

"What am I supposed to look at?" she asked. They were both still shocked to have lost Francois, and Joachim had been checking on her a lot, to make sure she was all right. They were both doing the best they could to

get used to it. He had been a benevolent force in both their lives, a truly kind and loving man. And Joachim knew how lonely she was without him.

Joachim pointed to the newspaper. It was a fairly large ad for a butler school in England.

“That?” She looked surprised and he nodded. “Butler school? Why would you want to do that?” It sounded like another dead end to her, like all the jobs he had had since he’d dropped out of the Sorbonne.

“I don’t know. I’m not sure I do. But it sounds like fun, at least for a while anyway. Like a part in a movie.” He was twenty-five years old, and wanted a job that was fun, and so far none had been. He had no passions, like his mother’s love of art, or Francois’s. All he had was a bright mind, the strength of youth, and the fact that he spoke four languages, which wasn’t unusual in Europe. Many people did.

“You don’t need a part in a movie,” she said, frowning. “You need a real job, a career, something you’ll want to do at forty or fifty. Why would you want to be a butler? What gave you that idea?”

“The ad makes it sound interesting. You learn to run a fine home, have a supervisory position over other staff, how to take care of silver, fine porcelain, and antiques, and impeccable service, how to serve at table. It sounds like a very varied and responsible job.”

“Those days are gone,” she reminded him. “Everyone had formal staff, in full uniform, in Argentina when I was a girl. I’m sure no one there does now. And I don’t think anyone has a butler here either.”

“They have them in England. That’s where the school is. The course lasts six months, it might be fun.”

“Would you want to work in England?” She was surprised. He was so Latin by nature. He’d been in France for eight years by then and was at home there.

“I don’t know where I want to work, or what I want to do. But I’ve got time to spare. I’m only twenty-five, Mom. I can afford to waste six months of my life, especially now, thanks to Francois.” He was frustrated by his own lack of direction, but nothing interested him and there was nothing he wanted to do.

“I don’t think he intended the money for you to study for a job you’ll never want.”

“Maybe I will want it. Maybe being the head man in a grand house would be interesting.”

“You need to do more in life than learn how to set a table,” she said sternly.

“I don’t think I’d mind a life of service. I kind of like the idea of keeping people’s lives in good order. I wouldn’t mind that at all, especially if the house is impressive. I have nothing else to do at the moment, and shoving furniture around at the auction house has no future either. It’s a laborer’s job. I don’t like leaving you, though. I could come home on weekends, while I’m taking the course.”

“Don’t worry about me, I’m fine,” she said bravely. She wasn’t fine, but she thought that eventually she would be. And she didn’t want to stand in his way or be a burden to him. She just thought that being a butler sounded like a crazy idea with no future.

“I’ll call them and see what they have to say,” he said, and didn’t mention it again for the rest of lunch. They went for a walk together that afternoon, as she used to do with Francois on a Sunday afternoon, strolling in the park. She didn’t say it to Joachim, but now she had to adjust to one more person she loved missing from her life. It had happened to her much too often. Joachim thought the same thing, as he tucked her hand into his arm, and they walked along in silence, each of them lost in their own thoughts. She was thinking of Francois, and Joachim was silently mourning his stepfather and his brother and musing about butler school again. It sounded like a crazy idea to him too, but he had nothing else to do, and a lifetime ahead of him, with no set career plan. It might be amusing for six months. And nothing else appealed to him at the moment. Growing older was just no fun without his twin brother and hadn’t been for eight years. He had always thought that Javier would settle down once he got out of his teens, and they would be close again. And instead, he had disappeared.