

# DANIELLE STEEL

## Complications

A Novel



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*A Novel*



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# Contents

*Cover*

*Title Page*

*Copyright*

*Chapter 1*

*Chapter 2*

*Chapter 3*

*Chapter 4*

*Chapter 5*

*Chapter 6*

*Chapter 7*

*Chapter 8*

*Chapter 9*

*Chapter 10*

*Chapter 11*

*Chapter 12*

*Chapter 13*

*Chapter 14*

*Chapter 15*

*Chapter 16*

*Chapter 17*

*Dedication*

*By Danielle Steel*

*About the Author*

## Chapter 1

The Louis XVI Hotel on the rue Boissy d'Anglas just off the rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré in Paris had been closed for renovations for four years. The street it was on was particularly appropriate, open only to foot traffic. It was guarded by a policeman, who would open the barrier for a car to pass carrying an important person, or guests of the exclusive hotel. Smaller than the grand "palaces," the five-star hotels of Paris, it was a favorite among those in the know, the jet set, royalty, and the internationally chic. It had a loyal following of the world's elite, and offered its clients exquisite rooms, enormous suites, all filled with stunning antiques, draperies in the finest silks and satins, beautiful floors reminiscent of Versailles, and a magnificent art collection. Not tiny, and not enormous, it had an intimate feel to it and compared favorably with the many homes of the people who stayed there. It had been flawlessly run with an iron hand by the charming manager Monsieur Louis Lavalley for thirty-eight years. He had been trained at the Ritz, and was famous among hotel guests around the world, and was the envy of his competitors. He was incomparably discreet, and knew all the delicate secrets of the patrons, many movie stars, and people who had much to lose if his mask of secrecy ever slipped. It never had. He didn't allow things to go badly for anyone staying there, no matter how dicey the circumstances. He had been past retirement age, at seventy-four, with no intention of stepping down, when the hotel closed for

renovation four years before. A vicious cancer had taken him in its grip halfway through the renovation, and devoured him quickly. Louis Lavalley had succumbed eleven months before the opening. He had run the renovation of the hotel so masterfully that even his death did not delay it. A portrait of him in his formal morning coat had been unveiled the day of the opening, and their old, familiar patrons looked fondly at it as they checked in. There were tears in the eyes of several guests, though not the staff, who respected him, but had often suffered from his rigid diligence. He was every hotel guest's dream, if he deemed them worthy of the Louis XVI. If they didn't live up to the hotel's high standards, they found themselves unable to obtain so much as a lunch reservation there in future, let alone one of the fabulous suites. Indiscretions in the lives of their valued guests were unfailingly overlooked, and M. Lavalley had protected them from the press and paparazzi for years. Bad behavior while at the hotel was not, however, tolerated.

Famous rock stars didn't stand a chance of doing more than passing through the lobby, and even then, they were keenly watched, and met with a chilly greeting. It was not a favorite spot of the famously boorish, and the regulars were forgiven all, which created an unshakable, lasting bond between them and the hotel. The newly rich who didn't know how to behave or respect the premises had never been welcome there. The hotel had been almost fully booked for two years before the reopening. Monsieur Lavalley had noted the first reservations himself. And the fact that he had not lived to see that long-awaited event was a source of grief to all. His standards were almost impossibly high, but he was unfailingly loyal, and he would have given his life to protect the hotel's most faithful guests.

They'd had a few cancellations of the original reservations for the opening, due to death, ill health, or unforeseen circumstances, like divorce or the arrival of a baby right at that time. The last-minute cancellations left room for a few unknowns and new faces among the returning guests. The new manager, Olivier Bateau, would be new to all. The assistant manager had retired after Lavalley's death, unable to conceive of being the adjutant to a less extraordinary general, and had moved to a home in Spain. Louis

Lavalle had owned a house in the South of France, and spent his summer vacations there. The perks of the job were numerous and lucrative. He had a son, Albert, whom few people knew about, since he never discussed his personal life. His son was a doctor in Tahiti, married to a local woman there, and had three children. But only the head housekeeper, who had been Louis's discreet companion for twenty years, knew about his son, and it had taken him ten years to tell her. His son never came to Paris, and Lavalle visited him in Tahiti every five or six years. He wasn't close to the boy, who had been brought up by his maternal grandfather in Brittany, after Lavalle and the boy's mother had divorced when his son was barely more than a baby. They were essentially strangers to each other, and Albert was stunned when his father left him his entire estate. He was shocked at the small fortune his father had amassed, and he and his children were set for life, handsomely, from the fruits of his father's labors at the Louis XVI. He meant more to his son in death than he had in life, but Louis would be remembered fondly by him, and with some amazement. He had left his longtime companion, Ghislaine, the head housekeeper, a generous sum too, and she retired to a small, pretty apartment in Cannes shortly after his death. Thanks to Louis, she no longer had to work, and was enjoying her retirement on the Riviera, with fond memories of him.

The third generation of owners of the hotel were consummately discreet and never appeared at the hotel. They remained distant unknown legends and preferred it that way. This latest generation lived in London, and the hotel was a gold mine for them. It had taken Lavalle ten years after they had inherited it to convince them to do the renovation, which was more necessary than the guests realized. Lavalle had convinced the owners at last to add the high-tech features which were essential to their younger clients now. The old guard didn't care about the lack of technology, but Lavalle had recognized that adding it would assure their future. But the new high-tech features still had some bugs in them when the hotel reopened. Technicians were frantically working on it, and it was the last remaining piece of the renovation which was not working smoothly.



They now had a phone system worthy of a space station, and it was well over the head of the new manager, Olivier Bateau, and he was desperately trying to learn how to use it. He went to bed every night with the highly confidential files they kept on all their guests. He knew he had much to learn about many of them. Lavalley had kept many of their profiles safely lodged in his head, and others in the hotel safe.

Bateau's assistant manager, Yvonne Philippe, was new as well. Bateau was forty-one years old, divorced after a brief marriage, like Lavalley himself. He had no children, and had worked at the Hotel du Cap-Eden-Roc for two years at the front desk, and then at the Ritz, where he had done well but had not been considered exceptional. People in hotel circles considered him a dark horse choice, but the owners of the Louis XVI had liked him when they'd met in London. They'd been in a hurry to hire someone after his predecessor's untimely death a year before the opening. Bateau had never had as much responsibility as he would have now, but they believed that he was capable of handling it, and would be equal to the task in a short time. He was intelligent, eager to please them, and had convinced them that he was the right man for the job.

Bateau had chosen his assistant manager himself. Yvonne Philippe was thirty-two years old, and their paths had crossed at the Ritz, where she had worked for over a year. She was one of the young under-managers at the front desk and seemed like a capable woman. She was a graduate of the *École Hôtelière* in Lausanne and had worked at the Baur au Lac in Zurich for three years after she graduated. Afterward she had worked at Claridge's in London, and the Four Seasons in Milan. She spoke fluent English, German, Spanish, and Italian, as well as French. Bateau spoke English, German, Russian, and French. Yvonne had a confidence about her, which he liked and reassured him. He suffered from anxiety, and was a worrier by nature, which Yvonne had already figured out about him. He was in a panic over the reopening, and she did everything she could to reassure him. She had an unflappable quality about her. It was valuable in the hotel business, where a crisis could arise at any moment, among highly demanding, spoiled people who wanted their every whim catered to and occasionally got

themselves into awkward situations, which they expected the hotel management to solve. Yvonne handled crises of that sort well. Olivier had experienced his share of them at the Ritz, when two major American movie stars had died while staying at the hotel, one of an overdose of heroin, the other of a massive stroke at fifty-seven. There had been several jewel robberies, and serious bomb threats during his tenure there, and various minor diplomatic incidents, all of which had to be handled with the utmost discretion. He had done a good job, but in most cases, had needed the assistance of a senior manager to calm things down. Now he would be that person, and would have to prove himself capable with his assistant manager's backup. She was remarkably resourceful and had dealt with all manner of crises at her previous posts, and already knew some of their regulars from their stays at the hotels where she'd worked in other cities. The regular guests of the Louis XVI were a distinguished crowd, but had many foibles, and were used to having their every whim indulged, which Olivier Bateau was determined to do for them, with Yvonne's help. His secret dream was to become even more of a legend than Louis Lavalley, a very ambitious goal. Unlike Olivier, Lavalley had nerves of steel, and if he was ever frightened or surprised, it never showed.

Still in the first week of the reopening, everything had gone well, with the exception of the Internet, which still had bugs in it, and the phone system, which was continuing to go down in various parts of the hotel with no reasonable explanation. It would come back on a few hours after it went off, as though a ghost were running it and playing tricks on them. Maybe it's Lavalley, Yvonne had suggested. Her superior did not consider it amusing. Why would Lavalley want to torture him, just to remind him that he was still running the show, even from "the other side"? He didn't even like Yvonne saying it in jest, since anything was possible. As Olivier Bateau pointed out to her, hotels had a life and soul of their own, and there were already more than enough superstitions about them. From all he knew of him, he thought Louis Lavalley perfectly capable of haunting the phone system, just to prove a point and make his lingering presence known. Lavalley had acted as though he was the owner of the hotel, and was

possessive about it, although people knew he wasn't the owner. But in his discreet way, he had been very grand, and all the new technology had been his idea. Olivier thought it was much more complicated and advanced than necessary for a relatively small hotel.

There were three shops and several vitrines in the lobby. There was the shop of a famous jeweler with a sampling of their very high-end, high-priced wares, a small Loro Piana shop, and a handbag shop carrying various brands, with its own vitrine of vintage Hermès alligator handbags, which sold in the six figures. All of the vitrines were rented by important luxury stores to show a small sample of what was available in their boutiques along the Faubourg. Occasionally they sold a high-priced matching set of jewelry right out of one of the vitrines. People who came to the popular, well-known bar for a drink, or to their famous three-star restaurant, enjoyed looking at the jewelry and other wares in the vitrines. The hotel also had an elaborate alarm system, and a flock of security people to safeguard the merchandise on display.

The prices of the accommodations at the Louis XVI were appropriately high, given the magnificence of the decor and who their guests were, and they had raised their prices again before the reopening. No one of modest means could have afforded to stay there, and people with some of the largest fortunes in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and a few from America were among their regulars, although the Americans seemed to prefer larger hotels, like the Ritz and the Four Seasons. The more discerning guests had been coming to the Louis XVI for years, and were begging to return now. Sold out by the time they opened, they already had a waiting list for the next four months, and a full house until then. They always kept a small number of rooms and suites in reserve in case someone exceptionally important made a request at the last minute, but even those were in short supply. Halfway through their first week back, Olivier went down the list of people checking in that day, and told Yvonne at an early morning meeting who he wanted her to accompany to their rooms, and who he would be seeing to. All the others could be handled by the junior assistant managers on duty at the front desk.

Yvonne was impressed when Olivier put Gabrielle Gates on her list of people to greet that day. She was on their list of regulars. Yvonne had seen her at Claridge's, but hadn't been allowed to go near her. She was too junior then to greet such an important guest, but as the number two at Louis XVI, despite her age, it was an honor to be allowed to escort such an elite client. Yvonne knew who she was. Gabrielle Gates was American, an important art consultant. Her late father, Theodore Weston, had owned a prominent art gallery in New York, and she had learned from him. She had been married to Arthur Gates, one of the most successful venture capitalists in the States, who was twenty-five years older than she was. Yvonne vaguely remembered that Gabrielle was around forty-five, had two daughters who were college age or slightly older by then. Gabrielle was a very attractive, very chic woman, with an aura of power around her, her own, and that of her late father and ex-husband. She had been born into a privileged family. Her late mother had been a famously beautiful debutante, and Gabrielle had the self-assurance of a much-loved only child. She was headstrong and had been the apple of her father's eye. Yvonne remembered that there had been a scandal in the last two years when her husband left her for a much younger woman, only three years older than his oldest daughter. There had been a lot of press about it, and talk about how much Arthur Gates was worth, and how young his new bride was. But Gabrielle came from money too, and was a successful art consultant who dealt with extremely high-priced art, and had famous clients. Like all gossip and scandal, the story burned white hot for a while, with photographs of both parties in the press, and after six months the story disappeared.

Gabrielle Gates was famously private and discreet. She had made no comment to the press that hounded her, and eventually they lost interest in her and her story. Arthur had remained visible though, at sixty-eight with his twenty-four-year-old bride, a Russian girl he had met skiing in Saint Moritz.

Yvonne knew her type. The hotels where she worked were full of them, always with much older, very, very rich men. For whatever reason, the men they latched on to were flattered by their attention, and spoiled them beyond

belief. Their rejected wives were usually handsomely rewarded with houses and ski chalets, yachts, jewels, planes, and art. The young girls won the big prizes, for however long the relationship lasted, and when it ended, they often found another older man just as wealthy and powerful, or even richer. Yvonne always thought that they certainly knew what they were doing, and she envied them at first, but not for long. She wouldn't have wanted to marry a man like that, or to marry for money. A real Prince Charming would have been welcome, but not a seventy-year-old man and his big bank account. It was all too venal for her. Some of the men with those young girls were pretty awful. She'd never seen Arthur Gates except in photographs, and he was quite a lot older even than his ex-wife. Gabrielle had been his third wife, and he'd been widowed before her. He looked distinguished in photographs, but he was certainly very old, and she didn't think he was a nice man if he had dumped his wife and run off with a gold digger in her early twenties.

She noticed on their reservation lists that Gabrielle had taken their usual suite, and was traveling alone. She had made the reservation fairly recently, and they had done some serious juggling to accommodate her. There were several stars after her name in the old records kept by Louis Laval, indicating they should be willing to move heaven and earth to give her the suite she wanted whenever she asked. She came to Paris frequently for business, and to see friends, and the notes said that her husband was always with her. This time obviously, he wasn't. The notes said they had their own plane. It didn't mention who had kept the plane in the divorce. But the car and driver they had hired for her was picking her up at Charles de Gaulle Airport, not Le Bourget. So, this time she was flying commercial.

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When the plane landed at Charles de Gaulle Airport in Roissy, an hour outside Paris, it was the first time Gabrielle had come to Paris in two years. She had stayed at the Ritz and the Four Seasons while the Louis XVI was being renovated, before she and Arthur separated. Neither hotel compared

to the smaller, more exclusive hotel she and Arthur loved. She had stayed at the Ritz with her parents as a child when they vacationed in Europe and loved it then, but once she discovered the Louis XVI with Arthur, she had come to prefer the smaller, more personal atmosphere it offered, with its incomparable suites, and their favorite one, and she loved the location so close to the shops on the Faubourg Saint-Honoré.

A year after the hotel had closed, she had discovered Arthur's affair with Sasha. It hadn't remained a secret for long. With the desperation of age, he had become besotted with Sasha, and their affair became a public scandal almost immediately.

There had been no holding their marriage together after the affair hit the media, and he didn't seem to care. Their daughters were furious with him, although now two and a half years later, they hadn't forgiven him, but accepted the situation and saw him anyway. They didn't want to lose their father, even though they thought Sasha was ridiculous and an embarrassment.

For Gabrielle, it had been a crushing blow. She was almost forty-three when she discovered it, and it had hurt immeasurably. They had been married for twenty-two years then. There was no question, Arthur had a marked preference for young girls, which she no longer was. But this one was a true operator, and he was lavishing a fortune on her, with her expert guidance, haute couture, jewels, a king's ransom in art, which she would sell one day. They had all seen girls like her in operation, but Gabrielle got a view of it this time at close range. She had filed for divorce six months after she discovered the affair. Their divorce had become final a year before her trip to Paris, and had been handled as discreetly as possible. She had dealt with it with dignity, and had refrained from maligning him to their daughters, although she was privately bitter about it. More than bitter, she was crushed. She had thought their love was real and would last forever, and that the twenty-five-year age difference between them would have satisfied his lust for younger women. It hadn't. Sasha had successfully ensnared him. And like many young women of her ilk, she got pregnant as soon as they were married, or possibly just before. The baby boy was three

months old now, and Sasha's future was assured. Meanwhile, for the first time in twenty-four years, Gabrielle's future seemed uncertain. Her career was solid and she had continued to work by phone during the whole mess of the divorce, while she attempted to stay out of sight. Her oldest daughter had just moved to L.A. after graduation and her youngest was in college, having fun in Washington at Georgetown University, as a senior. Both girls were upset by Arthur's infant son. Gabrielle hadn't quite recovered from it either, although she wasn't surprised, given who and what Sasha was, a gold digger of the most efficient kind, and damn good at it, a real pro. The whole thing was humiliating in the extreme.

It didn't matter to her that Arthur looked foolish to everyone, but it did matter that there were men among his peers who envied him, men whom she realized now had never really been her friends. She had been disposed of and forgotten, and she was glad that her parents were no longer alive to see it. They had lavished love on her as an only child, born to them as a surprise late in life. She knew that watching her get cast away by Arthur would have broken their hearts, nearly as much as it had hers, and her daughters'. It was small comfort to know that her father would have been livid at Arthur. She felt undesirable, old, and vulnerable now nonetheless. She covered it well, and remained calm, cool, and professional with her clients, but she felt broken inside, and didn't even let her daughters see to what extent. For months, she had cried all the time whenever she was alone. She felt dazed, and hopeless about the future. She saw herself suddenly middle-aged at forty-three when she filed for divorce, and had no desire to start her life again. It had taken her more than two years to get back on her feet. No one had seen her socially since the divorce. She had stopped traveling, except to go to the most important art fairs, and only did that when she had to, to meet a client. She never made any reference whatsoever to Arthur and his new wife and child. And no one would have dared bring the subject up with her.

Therapy with a good psychiatrist, medication for a few months, time, her love for her daughters, and her work ethic had finally pulled her out of it. Gabrielle had inherited her elegance from her mother, and her passion for

art from her father. Both traits had helped her survive. The trip to Paris was a somewhat last-minute decision. She opted to come to Paris for the Biennale antique furniture and art show in September, and an important Sotheby's auction, which coincided perfectly with the reopening of what had been her and Arthur's favorite hotel. She was curious to see it, although a little worried about what ghosts would linger there for her. She hadn't been able to resist the urge to ask for their usual suite, and was afraid doing so might have been a mistake. She just prayed that Arthur and Sasha weren't going to the Biennale too, but she didn't think they would. Sasha's tastes were less sophisticated, and Gabrielle knew she preferred contemporary art. Arthur had spent a fortune buying the most expensive, avant-garde artwork for her.

Gabrielle flew commercial for the first time in years, since Arthur had kept the plane. She hadn't wanted it. She was simply dressed when she emerged from the flight, in black jeans and loafers, a plain black sweater and fur jacket, and a large black leather Hermès Birkin bag she used for travel. Her face was beautiful, and she was slim and tall, with creamy white skin, very dark hair pulled tightly back, and big green eyes. But you had to look carefully to spot her. She liked disappearing quietly into a crowd, and not being noticed, despite her striking looks. It was only once you did that you saw her aristocratic bearing, her quiet grace, and all the trappings of natural elegance. She was a woman who didn't like to be in the limelight and even less so now. There had been a time, when she was first married to Arthur, that she let him show her off like a beautiful doll, but she was never comfortable with it, and over the years grew into her own simple chic style. And now he had the dolly he had always wanted, a girl he could dress up and show off, oblivious to her vulgarity and content to highlight her youth, while she bled him for everything she could get out of him. Gabrielle had never done anything like that to him. She loved him, had inherited her own money, and had never been after Arthur's. He was in a very different situation now. Gabrielle had dignity and grace, unlike Sasha, who was common and cunning, and very sexy.



A ground crew agent from Air France met Gabrielle at the plane, helped her at baggage claim, and turned her over to the driver with a discreet black Mercedes the hotel had sent for her. Arthur had bought Sasha a silver Bentley. He drove a Lamborghini himself. Arthur liked the luxuries his success provided, and so did Sasha. Gabrielle didn't care about that, although she had flown first class, with the curtain of her compartment drawn so she could have privacy. It was comfortable that way, and she skipped dinner and slept on the flight. Always fashionably thin, she was too much so now. It had been a hard two and a half years in her life, and she was looking forward to staying at her favorite hotel again, as though everything would be fine when she got there, thinking mistakenly that she could turn back the clock. Gabrielle knew she couldn't, and kept telling herself she was better off, if this was who Arthur really was. More than anything, she was disappointed, but she didn't want anyone's pity, which was why she had stayed away from everyone she knew, and had known during her marriage. She neither wanted to malign the man she had loved, nor lament him, or feel sorry for herself.

She knew she would have a good life without him, and reminded herself of it constantly. Intelligently, and reasonably, she knew she would be okay, but it still hurt at times. This trip was the first evidence of her new life, and of her courage to go back to familiar places without him. She wasn't sure if she had bitten off more than she should have, but if it turned out to be too much for her, she could always leave, and go home, or move to the Ritz.

As they drove toward Paris, she didn't feel shaky, she felt brave, and was glad she had taken the trip. She loved Paris, and didn't want to give it up for him. He didn't own it, nor did Sasha. They had each other now. That was enough.

The Louis XVI had kept most of their employees on partial salary during the renovation. Only the more recent hires had been let go entirely and some of the long-term employees were paid in full and waited to return when the hotel reopened. The doorman recognized Gabrielle immediately, and greeted her warmly, lifting his cap as she smiled. He took charge of her

luggage, and she went through the revolving door, and headed to the front desk.

She noticed immediately that at first glance, the hotel had changed very little. The signature pieces of art and furniture were seemingly unchanged and placed in the same locations. A new carpet had been woven with the exact same design as the old one, but here and there she saw shiny new marble, and more modern-looking vitrines for the jewelry.

The red uniforms of the bellboys were the same as they had been for decades but were all new, as were the fresh-faced boys wearing them, many of them too young to shave and barely more than teenagers. And the lineup of faces at the reception desk was all brand new too. She recognized no one, which surprised her a little. She thought she'd see one or two of the old guard, although she knew that M. Lavalley had died, and his assistant and the head housekeeper had retired. What she saw instead was a nervous-looking balding man in his forties who looked flustered. She introduced herself, and he did the same, and said he was Olivier Bateau, the new manager. He welcomed her, but wasn't impressed by how she was dressed. He was used to the outer trappings of more ostentatious, less discreet guests, and pawned her off on his assistant, Yvonne Philippe, immediately, and said Miss Philippe would take her to her room. It was the first major change, since Louis Lavalley had always personally escorted them to their suite. But she wondered if it was because she was no longer married to Arthur, and attributed it to that more than anything else.

Gabrielle was tired after the overnight flight, and Yvonne was quiet and respectful as they walked through the lobby so familiar to Gabrielle. She noticed small changes all along the way, but no major ones. They had done the remodeling well and as much as possible they'd kept things close to the original version that everyone loved. The elevator was all marble and mirror now, and looked less Old World but reassuringly modern and efficient, although they still had a liveried man to run it, which wasn't needed. Yvonne explained the new high-tech features available in every room now, and admitted quietly that they were still "working out a few details" with the Internet and phones, but expected everything to be

working smoothly within a day or two. Gabrielle was planning to stay for a week.

Gabrielle held her breath as Yvonne unlocked the room with a new electronic key system, and when the door to the suite opened as though by magic. At first glance, everything looked the same. She could see that all the fabrics were new, but the furniture and the color scheme remained unchanged in a soft pale sky blue. There were satins and brocades everywhere, and the new curtains were magnificent, better than the old ones. They had replaced the Aubusson carpet with another one, but the effect was as handsome as it had been before. On closer inspection, there were some new pieces of furniture in the room, all antiques, and a new mirrored mini bar. The carved white marble mantelpiece that she and Arthur had loved was still there. The bathrooms in the suite, two full ones and a powder room, were stunningly modern now and very grand, but with an antique feel to them. Yvonne explained all the technology in the room then, and showed her how to work everything on an iPad, including the curtains.

It was the best remodel Gabrielle had ever seen, rather like her own. She had considered a facelift when Arthur left her, and fortunately the plastic surgeon she consulted talked her out of it and said she didn't need it. Instead he suggested some injections, filler, some subtle changes, and an electrical treatment to "surprise" her face back to youth. The results had been very successful. She didn't look different or as though she had had work done. The changes were very subtle and made her look rested and healthy and highlighted her features. It made her look more beautiful, and took a full decade off her age in her appearance. She smiled, thinking that she and the hotel had been subtly rejuvenated, without doing anything too invasive or destructive. Her daughters hadn't even noticed the changes to her face until months after she'd had them. But with Arthur's new wife being nineteen years younger than she was, she felt so old that she wanted to do something, and was glad she had. It had been the beginning of her starting to lead a new life on her own. And this was the second big step, coming to Paris by herself.

She gave Yvonne a handsome tip, and her bags arrived in the suite before the assistant manager left. Yvonne had noticed how surprised Gabrielle looked when Olivier didn't take her to her room, which Yvonne thought was a mistake, but Gabrielle had been very pleasant to her, and was too polite to object to what was actually a step down in how she was treated at the hotel. The new manager didn't know any better, which Yvonne thought was a concern, but Gabrielle didn't make an issue of it.

A few minutes later Gabrielle was alone in the suite with a pyramid of macarons prepared by the chef, a plate of strawberries, a bowl of fruit, a massive box of the best chocolates, a huge bouquet of pink roses, and a bottle of their favorite champagne chilling, Dom Pérignon, which they preferred to Cristal, their standard offering to important Americans.

Gabrielle sat down in a chair and looked around the suite. It hadn't changed significantly, but everything else in her life had, and she had. Arthur was gone now, in the arms of his new wife. Gabrielle had lived the life of a recluse for the past few years, although she had promised her therapist that she would try to get out more, and this trip was a major step. It was amazing to think how her life had changed in four years, during the hotel renovation. Her daughters had grown up, one had left home and the other was in college. They had started their own lives, so she was truly alone now, as never before. And being in Paris, in the room where she and Arthur had been so happy so many times over the years, seemed to underline it as nothing else could have. It brought tears to her eyes as she stood up and looked out the window at the rooftops of the Faubourg Saint-Honoré. Well-constructed double windows kept the noise out and a new air-conditioning system, also operated from the iPad, had been added. She knew that she just had to go forward now. She was sad for a minute, but was well aware that that wouldn't change anything, and she didn't want to give depression a chance to take hold.

She glanced at her watch, and decided to walk through the Biennale, see which galleries were represented, and to check out their booths anonymously, strolling through the elaborate exhibition at the Grand Palais. Some vendors spent as much as a million dollars on their booths, and she

wanted to see them. She opened the champagne and poured herself a glass, helped herself to a macaron from the pyramid of them on the silver tray, and tried not to think about Arthur. He was no longer part of her life, and didn't deserve to be. She was in Paris, at her favorite hotel, and both she and the hotel had changed for the better. It was all she allowed herself to think about, as she washed her face and brushed her long dark hair. She had her life ahead of her, and she was going to make it a good life, whatever it took. She headed toward the lobby ten minutes later, on the way to the Biennale, and she was smiling. She was happy to be there.