

BETRAYAL
IN THE
LOUVRE

H J Gaudreau

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Prologue

The notice that would forever change their lives was not found in a local, big city newspaper; rather it was in a weekly crier called the “Michigan Voice”. That Eve saw it at all was a bit of a surprise. They rarely, if ever picked up the Voice. But for some reason fate intervened, and Jim had grabbed the paper as he left the town’s only hardware store. Now, sitting on the back porch, drinking her coffee, waiting for Jim to finish in the barn, Eve thumbed through the only reading material available. And there it was, third page, lower left: “Antique Show and Charity Auction Returns to Detroit.” Jim, more than Eve, enjoyed the show. Rarely could they afford the items for sale; this was not a “clean out the garage” kind of antique show. This show was hosted by some of the country’s finest auction houses. They didn’t attend as buyers. Jim was a collector of arcane bits of trivia and simply found the auction to be a treasure trove of “interesting stuff”.

Suddenly, the baying of a beagle could be heard behind the equipment shed, a gray ghost raced around the building and headed for the pasture. Molly had picked up the scent and was close behind the rabbit.

Jim stepped from the barn, slid the door shut and walked to the house. “Your antique auction is next week,” she said as he climbed the porch steps. Jim washed his hands at the outdoor sink then sat in a deep wicker chair next to his wife.

“Great! That thing is always so interesting. And this year I’ve got something I want to take.”

Eve started to laugh, “You really are a nerd. You know that don’t you?”

Jim just grinned.

“What do you want to sell?”

“Well, I’m not really sure. Remember that stuff my great grandfather brought back from World War One? I’m hoping someone at the show will recognize it and be able to tell me a little bit more.”

“Like if we’ve been hauling junk around the world for the past thirty years or not?” Eve asked in a gentle dig.

“Well, yeah,” he grinned. “In any case, I thought this was a

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good chance to have it appraised. At least someone might be able to tell me what it is. And if not, maybe the Tigers are playing.”

“I knew there was more to this than an antique auction! C’mon, call your dog and let’s go in. I’m hungry.”

Chapter 1

Paris

3 June 1789

General Nicolas Luckner was out of bed before the man, for a man it surely was, on the other side of the door pounded a second time. In a moment he had a brace of .60 caliber holster pistols in his hands and was standing, naked, back to the wall, next to the door. The woman in the bed felt a wave of fear wash over her. The wave crested, then, human nature what it is, she admired the view.

From outside the door a young man's voice called, "Mon General, it is urgent."

Luckner recognized the voice of his new adjutant and relaxed. The man, boy really, had been with him for only the past two weeks. This was the first time he'd been to the General's room after their morning drill. Luckner opened the door and let the man-boy in. The adjutant instinctively began a salute, saw the General was naked and attempted to look away. He turned his right shoulder to the General and found himself facing a young, naked, red-haired woman sitting cross-legged on the bed. His surprise evident he involuntarily took a step backward, whereupon he collided with the General. Shaken he spun around to meet the now angry glare of the man he feared more than anything in this life and, he was convinced, the next as well.

He stammered once, cleared his throat and before the General had finished inhaling in preparation for what surely would be one of history's great tongue-lashings he managed to stammer out the news he had been sent to deliver. "Sir, ah...Col DeAubry asked that...you have...you are supposed to..." The Adjutant's young eyes couldn't overcome the powerful draw of the woman's naked body. Like a bee to honey his eyes, without command, turned to her. The woman caught the glance, and vixen that she was, instantly decided to toy with the man-boy. She went into an exaggerated yawn, stretching her arms over her head, thrusting her bare breasts at the Adjutant. Then, like a cherry on top of a banana

split, she smiled. The Adjutant's slim hold on his composure cracked.

The breach only lasted a moment as a thick hand slapped him on his left ear. The General stared down a long pointed nose, suppressed a smile and waited. The young officer regained his composure, stiffened, looked directly at the General and said, "Sir, Col DeAubry has asked that I relay a message."

"Well?" General Luckner's expression was stern, as befitted a General. He was enjoying this little game. The man-boy tried again, "The King has summoned you." Luckner's brain instantly went to full attention.

"For what purpose? When and where? These things should have been said already." Luckner did not suffer fools gladly, the game was over, the humor gone. The young man was now angering the General. Had he never seen a naked woman before?

"Le château de Versailles. Immediately."

"Tell the Colonel 'thank you' and I shall be with him in five minutes," Luckner said. The Adjutant, from sheer habit, saluted; stole another glance at the naked woman and fled the room. The General closed the door behind him. "No, he probably hasn't," he thought. Then his mind snapped back to the summons.

It was time, he was sure of it. This was necessary. There had been enough of patience, negotiations, maneuvering, politics and talk, talk, talk. Now, he was going to be told to round up the rabble and stuff them into the Bastille like so much sausage. Or, better yet, he'd put them to the sword tonight. He began to assemble his uniform. In a few short minutes he was dressed; except for the boots. He could not find his boot hooks. His frustration grew as he looked under the bed, under the rug, behind the door...then he remembered. Reaching into the pile of woman's clothing on the floor he found them. The woman smiled at him. In a moment his boots had been pulled on and he was out the door.

Outside the tavern Col DeAubry sat comfortably astride his horse, his attention focused on the hard piece of bread and moldy cheese which constituted his breakfast. A tall, rather lanky man, DeAubry had been born to a shoe cobbler. He had run from his apprenticeship at the first chance. At the age of twelve he'd taken a job as an assistant to a farrier and developed considerable expertise with horses. Five years later the man who had become

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more a father than employer was killed when a horse with an abscessed foot kicked him in the head. DeAubry found himself without means, a great deal of expertise in horses and a perfect fit for the cavalry.

The Colonel was known as a calm, sensible officer who could make things happen. He'd been with the General his entire career. Except, of course, for the three years he'd spent, at Luckner's insistence, with Rochambeau. He had survived a fever in the West Indies and distinguished himself on more than one occasion while fighting the British in their war with the American colonialists. His study and knowledge of siege warfare had been particularly useful in the later part of that campaign.

Under Luckner's sponsorship he'd risen to an almost unheard of rank for a man so low born. He was a trusted second to the General and the men feared and respected DeAubry as much as they feared and respected the General.

A few moments after DeAubry received the message a smartly dressed, fully alert General Nicolas Luckner exploded from the tavern's front door and mounted the horse held by the Adjutant. DeAubry relayed what little information he had, took up his position on the General's left and they began the short ride to the château de Versailles. It was mid-afternoon, a light rain fell from a gray sky. The rain was welcome in Luckner's mind. It kept the rabble in their houses and it washed the sewage and animal droppings from the streets.

As they approached Le Potager du Roi the General noticed several handbills tacked to the trees outside of the royal garden's tall fence. Before he could pull one from its posting he spotted several men running across the road into the buildings and fields to his right. Instinctively his hand went to his pistol and he surveyed the doors, windows, alleys and bushes along his route. He wished he'd taken an escort; two men and a man-child would not do. He was not afraid of these traitorous fools, but he did not wish to be delayed. He would speak to DeAubry later about this.

Not knowing what the handbills were all about but feeling they may play a part in the upcoming meeting with the King he stopped, dismounted and ripped one from the trunk of a large oak tree. The Colonel did the same. DeAubry was shocked by what he read, the author accused the Queen of being a lesbian and whore. "More attacks on the Queen's reputation." DeAubry muttered as he shook his head. Luckner read the paper in his hand. It railed

against the King's treasurer Monsieur de Barentin, incompetent government and the King's intelligence. He snarled, crumpled the paper and tossed it to the ground. Other bills peppered the trees and buildings for the next several hundred yards. They walked their horses for a few moments, silently reading the posters.

DeAubry examined the fields and buildings. A boy appeared from behind a cottage. He yelled something and threw a rotten apple in their direction. The apple landed well short. What were these people about? There had been a time, not so long ago when the French military had faced down the British across the globe. People had looked at him with pride. Now? Well, now things were different weren't they? DeAubry couldn't put his finger on it, something was happening. He was looked at with contempt, sometimes hate. He didn't understand it, he didn't know what it was, but he knew change was coming. And, from all he had seen, it wasn't change for the better.

Luckner was mounting his horse. The rain was thicker now; the sky seemed a darker shade of gray. Settling into the saddle the General pulled his collar up against the wind and the rain. He pulled his sword, indicated to the Adjutant to do the same, then leaning toward the still dismounted DeAubry he said, "Have as many men as possible, with good horses, at the palace in an hour. I suspect we're going to be busy tonight." Luckner then turned his horse in the direction of the château, kicked the animal with his heels and cantered away. DeAubry would do his best, but horses were becoming scarce.

Chapter 2

“The Detroit Antiques Show is the biggest in the mid-west and I’m not going to miss it. Who knows, we could have something worth bizzillions of dollars.” Herman James Crenshaw, retired Air Force Colonel, now proud co-owner with his wife of a sixty acre farm called from the attic of his cottage styled log home. “Hey, do you know where that box of my great grandfather’s stuff is?” The sound of boxes being moved and old furniture banging could clearly be heard above Eve Crenshaw’s head. “Damn!....” More thumping of boxes. “Eve could you bring up a flashlight please? I forgot to turn on the light.”

She stood at the bottom of the attic ladder, face turned up to the dark void overhead and smiled. “Yes Jim, I’ll get you a flashlight.” Eve walked into the kitchen and retrieved one from the pantry. “Hon, here’s the flashlight.” She climbed the ladder, flicking on the light switch next to the attic door and pulling a cobweb from her shoulder length honey auburn hair. Light filled the room, making the flashlight superfluous. “Did you find it?” she asked, doing her best to suppress a grin and failing.

“No, but I did find that lamp you bought in North Dakota.” They both laughed. It was the worst lamp they’d ever seen. They bought the lamp to use as a gift in their squadron’s dirty Santa Christmas gift exchange; the object of which was to find the ugliest, funniest gift possible. Unfortunately, Jim had received orders before the party and they’d spent that Christmas moving into another house at another Air Force base. Now, here they were nearly thirty years later, retired from the Air Force and they still had it. She laughed at the absurdity of the thing. Jim smiled at his wife, he loved how her golden eyes sparkled when she laughed.

“Hey, here it is!” Jim triumphantly held up a wooden Boraxo soapbox. He sat the box on the floor, knelt beside it and opened the top. Inside was a mess kit, with his Great grandfathers name crudely etched onto the back of the pan. Jim held up the mess kit, showed it to Eve, still standing on the ladder, and then placed it on the attic floor. Next he held up a cigarette lighter with “Ardennes 1918 – Crenshaw” carved into the side. “Can you believe these things were used in the mud and trenches of World War One? It’s amazing.” Jim was an unabashed history nut. In

rapid succession the lighter was followed by a knife, a badly aged book with a faded cover, a handful of uniform decorations, none of which Jim recognized, a patch with a red arrow pierced by a small line and a dirty light coffee brown coloured tube with dirty brass ends.

“What’s that?” Eve asked.

“I don’t know,” said Jim “but this is what I’ve been looking for. I’ve been wondering about this thing since we found it when we went through Mom’s stuff. I’m betting it’s a map case, maybe German. I’m hoping someone can tell me at the show. But maybe it was used to carry something like a unit flag or maybe it was a spacer of some sort.”

“Let’s open it and see what’s inside.”

“I’ve tried. I can’t unscrew the damn thing and these lids don’t pop off. I’m afraid of breaking it if I put too much pressure on it,” Jim replied. Studying the tube for a moment Jim looked at Eve and said, “It just seems like it’s pretty well made, it’s a quality piece; but what it is I’m totally blank on. I’ve tried looking in museums and on-line and I’ve never seen anything remotely like it. So, this is my last hope at solving the great Crenshaw mystery.”

“Well, let’s hope the mystery is solved then,” she said.

They examined the tube. It seemed fairly stained and dirty. It had some markings on the side but they couldn’t make out what they were. The ends were metal and appeared as if they would polish nicely.

“This thing’s filthy. I’ll get a couple of rags and some soap and water.” Eve started for the workbench.

“No, no, we can’t do that. They say you shouldn’t clean an antique; it makes it less valuable. We better wait. I want an expert to see this thing.”

“Jim, that’s nuts.”

“No it’s not, any expert will tell you that.”

“Name one.”

“That fat guy on TV, he says that all the time,” Jim began to grin.

“You’re making that up...but okay.” She looked at Jim and smiled back. “Just wrap that thing up before you put it on my car’s carpet.”

“Okay, okay, you’ve got a deal,” Jim said as he began putting the various items on the attic floor back in the box.

“That’s all you’re taking? It’s a forty dollar ticket! We’ve

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got to take more than just that,” she exclaimed.

“Well, I’ve got a couple of tools that I could get rid of. And, we could take this lamp,” Jim smiled.

“The lamp? No, that’s special.” Eve laughed and backed down the ladder.

Chapter 3

Louis XVI studied the scene outside the rain-streaked window. The lead lined windowpanes distorted the view of the ornate gardens of the Château de Versailles. He didn't see the distortion, he didn't see the gardens. He simply stared in the direction of the Hotel des Menus Plaisiers. The afternoon was cold, gray, wet. It seemed as if a dark cloud simply grew from the horizon, centered on that damned hotel. The cloud expanded up and over him. It closed in around him, through him and squeezed his heart so that it was hard to breath; even harder to think. And now, more than ever he needed to think.

Things were going badly and he knew it. It was a slow, rumbling avalanche and it was coming right at him. Insults had been shouted. Shouted at him! Things were said in the newspapers and on handbills. Most of France had suffered poor harvests, the Treasury was empty, and his wife was making a mess of things. A raucous group of Parliaments, the councils in each region, had demanded action. That fool, François de Paule de Barentin, had encouraged a general meeting with the nobility, the clergy and the people, an Estates-General. It was a rarely used thing, it would be the first since 1619. And now, there they were, assembled in that damned hotel. Things were not calmer; they were worse. The Estates-General was a disaster. The whole thing was a mockery to his reign.

He had lost control from the beginning. His advisers had no advice of course, worthless fools. They simply made matters worse. The commoners had not understood their role. They even tried to sit in the front of the theater! These uncultured fools didn't even recognize the protocol of such a meeting. The rules for the conduct and proceedings were clearly established in L'Etiquette of 1614. The clergy and nobility were to sit in the front, dressed in the formal regalia defined by their station in the nobility. The representatives of the Third Estate; landmen, tradesmen and minor members of the nobility were to sit at the back; far away from the throne as befit their standing. It was simply the way things were done.

That had been the first issue, harangued and argued with but finally overcome. It had been, well...uncomfortable.

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Then Barentin began with a procedural process formalizing the rules for the conduct of the assembly. The fool completely misread the crowd. He talked for hours, forgot what he was about and tried to get right to the financial situation of the country and address taxes. It resulted in a near riot. They wanted to talk about procedures. Louie had already agreed to double representation for the commoners. He had made a major concession. Was that not enough? Surely that had no impact on the procedures for votes on issues before the Estates-General. Each estate would vote by orders – thus each estate had an equal voice. That was certainly fair; he did not see an issue. Individual votes would apply only insofar as how the total order voted. To do otherwise, was contrary to the rules. Besides that, well, damn-it, he was the King.

Last week these fools had formed the Communes. What the hell was that? Worse, they had invited him to participate! Participate! Of course he had refused, what choice did he have? This was an action against God! He was King and a representative of God. It could not stand!

Finally, his Councilors understood; military force would be necessary. He didn't want to do that to his own people. Yes, it might work. No, he couldn't do that. He vacillated. He couldn't decide. Now even that seemed to be slipping away. What was happening?

He could sense a growing danger. It was out there, perhaps in this black cloud of mist sweeping up from the river Somme. It pushed down on him and his Palace. It crept in, hidden on the back of that mist. He could not stop it; he didn't know how to fight it. But he knew, he knew that change, danger and, perhaps death itself was stalking him. He could feel it, sense it and it chilled him. His stomach had tightened; a taste of bile had risen in his throat and was with him day and night. He had waited long enough; he would not be irresolute about this, now was the time. Now he needed to protect the throne and his son.

And that was the purpose of this afternoon's meeting. Was he being prudent? A coward? Or, realist? He hadn't decided, and he no longer had time to think of it. The heavy clap of boots on stone echoed behind him. He glanced one more time in the direction of that hateful hotel, noticed the rain had increased. An omen? He turned to face Lieutenant General Nikolaus Luckner.

Luckner was a German. And, as such he couldn't rid

himself of his German accent. He was one of the few men Louis had ever heard who could make the beautiful French language sound hard and rough. He was tall and weathered having spent his life under saddle. Louis supposed he could be called a good-looking man. Those looks and the size of his purse assured him of a warm bed each night. His military expertise was without question though in a few short years he would, not for the first time, change his loyalties. He was well educated, having studied with the Jesuits of Passau. His military experience was extensive, and to say varied understated it. He had served with the Bavarian, Dutch and Hanoverian armies. He had fought as a commander of Hussars during the Seven Years War against Louis' father. Now however, he seemed to have found a home in the French army. He was a strange pick for the task at hand the King thought. But, the two had an odd closeness that seemed more a function of nature than of their personalities. Was he a friend? Louis thought not, but he was no enemy. In any case, here he stood, looking directly at the King.

Luckner hadn't yet made his obedience; no sign of acknowledgment, he simply stared at the King. It irritated Louis, but he didn't have time to make a point of it. After a moment's pause, Louis spoke, "Nikolaus, I have a most delicate task for you."

"At your command sire," Luckner said.

The king smiled in spite of himself. Luckner never used the honorarium "Sire", it sounded ironic, fake and contrived coming from him. Yet, perhaps the seriousness of the day had made itself known to him. Who could know? He looked hard at his General. What was in the man's soul? Could he be trusted? The choice had been made, he continued.

"I believe there is some danger on the horizon. The communes seem to reject the authority of the King and it will take some time to reassert that understanding."

"Have you considered simply putting them to the sword?" Luckner asked fully expecting to be sent out to do just that.

"I have. Yet the countryside would not bear it. The people would rise up against me. No, it is better to work this out. But, there are some..." He paused, his face grew dark. No, not dark. Something else, Luckner couldn't put his finger on it. "I think we will have some difficult days," the king said more to himself than to his General.

Louis turned to the window. The dusk was deepening into

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night. The rain had steadied and except for the pattern inlaid in the marble courtyard, the Cour de Marbre, he couldn't see anything. He thought about that, yes, the scene was blurred outside as well as in. He was quiet for a long moment. Luckner became uncomfortable. What was happening to this King? The man needed to stiffen his spine, put the leaders of this crisis to the block and be done with it. He was about to interrupt the silence when the King turned. He seemed to have found a bit of strength.

"My son, Louis-Joseph, will die tonight. An announcement will be made at dawn. His death will be attributed to tuberculosis. It will fit well with his illness of last year. You are to take the Dauphin, along with a woman of the Queen's choosing away from Paris. My suggestion is to Montmedy or Sedan Castle, but you may have better knowledge. He must not be recognized or his very existence known until the Estates-General is successfully closed."

General Luckner knew what this meant, but remained silent. Instead he nodded his head in agreement, but inwardly he wondered if it ever would be "successfully closed." Nevertheless, this was a prudent decision and a minor ruse that could be explained in due course. "Of course, it shall be done my friend," he said.

The King again turned to the window. Over his shoulder he said, "Things will never be the same..." He grew thoughtful. Luckner stood in silence.

"Sire?" The irony was gone.

Louis turned, looked directly into Luckner's eyes and said, "Take my son's Letters of Royal Patent and funds for a long stay."

The King looked past his General. Silence filled the room. Luckner knew this was not the time to interrupt the King, he focused on the man's eyes. They were heavy; he looked tired. No, not tired...they were, what? Dead?

"And, Nicklous, I need you to take some other things. Remove "La Joyeuse", the Coronation Crown, and the Holy Ampulla with my son. Ensure only your most trusted men accompany you...tell no one, save, in good time, the Dauphin."

Luckner's face hardened; his grey eyes narrowed. He knew now what was in the King's mind. "Sire, I'm sure it will not come to that. The crown is safe with the House of Bourbon."

"I'm not so sure. In any case, do this for me."

Lieutenant General Nikolaus Luckner, for the first time,

took his adopted King's hand and kissed the royal ring. He bowed, walked backward for five paces, turned and with crisp military bearing, walked out of the room.

Louis the sixteenth slumped. A wave of sadness; the sadness of a parent losing a child, not a King losing a kingdom, swept over him. He turned to the window once more. He knew. He knew deep in his soul that he would never see his son again.

Chapter 4

Waco, Texas

10 August 1917

The 32nd Infantry Division under Major General James Parker had been assembled from the National Guard units of Wisconsin and Michigan. Some of its elements had deployed with General John “Black Jack” Pershing in his pursuit of the Mexican border raider, Poncho Villa. Thus, the Division was experienced in large troop movements and the issues associated with supplying a large, mobile group of men and machines.

Commanding General Parker was an experienced and intelligent soldier. Unlike many military men of his generation he paid close attention to world politics and technological innovations in addition to the more traditional study of military history. As early as 1915 he felt certain the United States would be drawn into the conflict just starting in France and spreading across the Western Hemisphere. His estimations proved prophetic. When a German diplomatic message, the ‘Zimmermann note,’ fell into United States hands exposing Germany’s attempted alliance with Mexico against the United States the country quickly abandoned its neutral policies. The United States declared war in April 1917.

Parker had been certain his division would be one of the first sent into action. He had already set his mind to the issues of moving this huge organization from here to there and keeping it in action once assembled on foreign soil.

In his youth, Parker had been taught that an Army was dependent on hay and the feed bag. That was nearly true today, only hay and the feed bag had been replaced with gasoline and spare parts. And, now one more item had been added to the list, mechanics.

Mechanics were few and far between, so General Parker decided to teach his own. And, he knew that moving a Division was difficult and slow. He wanted it fast and easy; so beginning in the summer of 1916 he had his men pack and unpack trucks, tear down and rebuild engines, change tires, overhaul weapons, move,

shoot and do it all again. They marched, they exercised, and they attended classes. They could strip and reassemble their new 1903 Springfield rifles blindfolded. They could disassemble their trucks and reassemble them.

The training in the heat of west Texas was brutal. The men from Wisconsin and Michigan suffered. Most had been struck down with heat exhaustion at least once, several more than once. One man had died of heat stress. But the training never let up.

Corporal John Turner rolled over in his bunk and looked over the side. "Oushel, I'm telling you, this is the hottest summer I ever been through. I ain't never been this hot; I swear Hades itself ain't this hot, nooo, it ain't."

Turner had joined the Army after a fight with his father. "Pup" as his father had called him had accompanied his Uncle on a trip to Chicago when he was thirteen. He had seen the big city and wanted no part of being a dairy farmer after that. By the time he was sixteen he'd quit school and was planning his escape. The next year he announced he was leaving and his father had erupted. Six months later he was in Chicago, penniless and, when he could sneak past the owner, sleeping in a barn. It only took a week of Chicago winter to convince him that he could crawl back to his father and admit he was beaten or join the Army. The Army looked like the better option.

"I swear if I take apart another truck engine I'll go crazy. I'm telling you John, I've seen the insides of every motor in the division!" Oushel Crenshaw replied.

Oushel and John had become good friends over the past several months. Oushel admired John; he was older, had been in the Army six months longer and knew how everything worked. John was where someone went to find out the latest news. John was someone who knew about things, he was smart. Oushel was an only child. His mother had died of measles when he was four. His father worked as a lumberjack and they followed the tree line around northern Michigan. It couldn't last, eventually the trees were all gone and his father went to Detroit hoping to land a job with Mr. Ford. The day Oushel turned seventeen, he told his father that he didn't want to work in the factory and he was joining the Army. Six weeks later he was on a train for the first time in his life, headed to Waco, Texas.

In early November John announced that they were "on the list." Oushel wasn't sure exactly what that meant, but didn't want

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his friend to think him stupid so he didn't ask. A day and two trips through the chow line later he had it figured out, they were going to France. Everyone wanted one last leave.

"Think the General will let us take leave before we go? I'd like to see my Dad," Oushel asked John that evening. He was a little embarrassed about asking, but he did want to see his father. They'd been close for his entire life. Now he was afraid he'd never see him again.

"Ain't no way. He can't have us trying to git home and back. Suppose orders come down for us to move right now. No, I seen this before, we ain't gettin' no leave." Turner rolled a cigarette, licked the paper and twisted the ends.

"Well, I'm asking the Captain anyway."

"Ask all you want, he ain't gonna let you go."

Oushel thought about that. John was probably right; at least what he said made sense.

"I could take the train. It would only be a week, maybe ten days."

"Oush, it ain't possible. The Captain got his orders and they say no leave for nobody. You ain't goin'."

A day later Oushel tried anyway. John was right, no leave was granted. The 32nd Infantry Division began to move to Europe in December. In January they suffered their first casualties when a German U-boat sank a troop ship carrying elements of the transportation section. By February the Division was scattered across the ports and bases of England and southern France. It took three weeks for the Division to reform. Several of the more junior officers complained the war would be over before they saw action.

The Germans launched a major offensive, with a hundred thousand men in March. In April the Division went into action. The majority of the officers didn't live to see the summer.

Chapter 5

I

Most would believe the items that marked and inferred royalty would be kept in a throne room or a vault somewhere in the Palace. They would be wrong. The Regalia of the French crown were kept in the newest and largest of the chapels of the Château de Versailles. Begun in 1689 and consecrated in 1710 the fifth chapel was an engineering and artistic masterpiece. It was here where Louis had married Marie Antoinette. Its architecture, inlaid floors and bas-relief sculpture of Louis XIV Crossing the Rhine, made it a favorite of the Chateau's residents.

Luckner left the protection of the palace and stepped into the night. His adjutant quickly took up position on his left. Luckner gave him his instructions as they walked. The man-child answered "Oui, mon Général," gave Luckner his knapsack and was off. It was still chilly; summer hadn't yet taken hold of the continent. The General crossed the Cour de Marbre and descended the steps to the Royal Courtyard. As he walked, he pulled his collar up. His felt hat, not dried from this afternoon's ride was becoming even heavier from the rain.

Crossing the yard he turned to his left, rounded the building and continued to the Chapel. Its exterior was truly a remarkable, beautiful structure. Sadly, some complained its roofline, thrusting high above the rest of the Palace, clashed with the architectural beauty of the building. Had it occurred to Luckner to think of these things his classical training would have prohibited him from agreeing.

He ascended the steps, pushed open the doors and entered the narthex. Here, he paused to gain his bearings. Examining the walls in the flickering candlelight, he quickly found what he was looking for. A pair of ancient and ornate swords were crossed over a large cross, the insignia of the L'Ordre des Chevaliers du Saint-Esprit. He removed one, tested its heft and continued. Entering the nave he crossed himself as he marched its length. At the far end stood the altar, its golden carvings of angels standing out against the white marble behind. Having reached the altar steps,

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not glancing at the masterwork of Coypel, he crossed himself once more and ascended the high altar. Here, he opened the ambry and removed the Bishops crown and a small bottle of Holy Water. These were quickly wrapped in a cloth and placed gently in the knapsack.

He paused to regain his bearings as he retreated to the narthex. Unlike most cathedrals of Europe, this one had a Tribune Royale, a sort of second story, from which the royal family could view the holy altar, be seen by those in attendance in the apse and still maintain the proper distance from their subjects. The Tribune Royale also contained a small altar; it was there that he needed to be.

Finding the proper staircase, he ascended. As he approached the top steps he was forced to look at the ceiling. It was painted with Jean Jouvenet's "The Descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Virgin and the Apostles", truly a masterpiece and, another time he would have spent considerable time examining its many nuances. Now, though he was forced to look at it, he didn't see it.

His intended destination was behind the traditional seating area for the royal family and guests. It served as a private altar and was not visible from the nave. Two guards stood in front of the communion table.

"Leave", he said.

"Mon General, we cannot leave, we are representatives of the King. It is our duty, I must ask you your business." The Sergeant stood at attention; fear streaked across the man's face.

Luckner sympathized with the man. The Sergeant was in an awkward position. But he didn't have the time. Raising the sword he had taken from the shrine to the Knights of the Holy Spirit he placed the point at the man's throat. The Sergeant's eyes met his. "In the name of the King remove yourselves from this place," Luckner said. His eyes locked on those of the Sergeant; this was a good man Luckner thought, there were too few like him. Few would have questioned a General, orders or no. He could see a fire in the man's eyes. Luckner sensed the man's confusion. The Sergeant decided there was no doubt a sword would be driven through his neck if he objected further. He lowered his eyes, glanced at his man and acquiesced.

"Oui, Mon General, I intended no offense," said the Sergeant. He and the Private hurried off.

The small altar was made of marble, with a simple gold cross standing in the middle of the communion table. Behind it, recessed into the wall was an ambry. To this storage area General Luckner proceeded. In front of, and level with the lower edge of the ambry was another communion table, this one also made of white marble. The ambry itself was made up of five wooden doors forming the shape of a U; one central door nearly four feet long and hinged at the bottom and, on each side two square doors of similar construction, one over the other. In the center of the U was a painting of King Solomon holding a sword and a baby, one woman crying, another simply watching. He did not know the artist. The structure was of a beautiful dark Lebanon cedar, with a carved scene of the Archangel Gabriel slaying a demon. The sword of Christ poised above the demon's heart as its central motif. The four smaller doors had similar scenes of holy triumph over evil.

He opened the small door on the bottom right. This compartment held the Patents of the extended family of the House of Bourbon. Inside was a stack of wooden cylinders, butt ends facing outward. A Patent was actually a vellum document, in this case made of calf's leather, attesting to the family tree of a royal. Each of the individual's ancestors and blood relatives were identified. Their portraits painted onto the leather in painstaking detail. It documented the how and why of the bearer's claim to royalty. He closed that door and opened the one above it. Inside this door were only six cylinders; these were the Patents of the King, his Queen, and their three surviving children and one dead child. The cylinders, twenty inches long, were actually hollow elephant tusks. Each end was covered with a gold cap. Engraved into each cylinder was a name. He quickly examined one, then the next, until he finally found the one labeled "Louis-Joseph". Withdrawing the cylinder he secured it in the small knapsack he carried.

Luckner went to the other end of the ambry and opened the top door. Inside was a square box, of Lebanon cedar, a fleur-de-lis inlaid in ivory and the words "The House of Bourbon" inlaid in gold and mother of pearl decorating the top. He removed the box and put it on the altar. Carefully he felt for the small clasp hidden in a relief carved on the front. Finding it, he opened the box. There, cushioned in a purple pillow was a Crown. Certain he had the correct crown Luckner stood to his full height, and listened intently. All the while carefully studying the walls, nooks and

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shadows of his surroundings. Convinced he was alone, he removed the crown and placed it on the altar. Next, he removed the Holy Ampule from its bed below and carefully sat it next to the crown.

Retrieving the knapsack he removed the crown and bottle of holy water he had taken from the altar below and placed them in the box. The deception complete he replaced the box in the ambry.

Opening the lower door he removed a similar box. Inside he found a purple pillow with a crown sparkling of diamonds, rubies and jewels. He quickly estimated its worth. It was more than enough for his purposes. This was a personal crown, worn at state functions after the coronation. He removed this crown and stuffed it into his knapsack. This he could use to pay for the Dauphin's expenses...and maybe a small reward for his services.

Next, he examined the central door. Quickly finding the latch he released it and lowered the door. Inside, a shelf, covered with purple velvet, held a box, also of Lebanon cedar and more or less fitting the dimensions of the shelf holding it. He removed the box. Its cover also had the fleur-de-lis inlaid in ivory. The words "The House of Bourbon" were inlaid in gold and mother of pearl above the seal. Below the seal were the words "The Final Argument Of The King".

He lifted the box out of the compartment and also placed it on the table-altar. He then placed the sword he'd removed from the wall in its place and closed the door. Preparing to open the box he paused, knowing exactly what was inside. He sucked a breath between clenched teeth and opened the box. Held in place by simple leather straps over a purple pillow lay the sword "La Joyeuse". Luckner was a man not easily impressed; this weapon impressed him. The blade was clearly made for its work. It shown brightly; the edge sparkled in the candlelight. The pommel was large, gold and intricately carved. The handle was wrapped in sweat and blood stained leather. The hilt had more than a few nicks, this sword had been used in battle and had done its work well. The sword had instilled fear across the entirety of Europe. It was said to possess powers that made its holder unbeatable in battle. That had certainly been the case as it had slashed its way across all of Europe and Italy. This sword had been sung about since the eleventh century. The song of Roland exclaimed that it changed colour thirty times a day. It had been forged to contain

the Spear of Destiny within its pommel; and forged from the same unearthly metal as Roland's Durendal and Ogier's Curtana. Before him lay the sword of the King of the Franks, the King of the Lombards, and the Emperor of the Romans. This was the Sword of Charlemagne.

Spending only a moment to honor the sword, he slung the small knapsack over his shoulder, stuffed the box containing La Joyeuse under his arm and left the chapel.

II

The Chateau de Versailles contains over 700 rooms and 67 staircases. Only a small portion of the palace is devoted to the living quarters of royalty. The remainder of the rooms are devoted to official functions, offices, museums, apartments for members of the court, servants' quarters, kitchens, canning rooms, slaughter rooms, wine cellars, guards' quarters, armories, store rooms and similar rooms devoted to the support of the king and his palace.

Wishing to avoid this maze of hallways and rooms, Luckner again elected to walk outside. He left the chapel by the way he had entered, descending the stairs, turning to his right and rounding the corner of the building. The rain was no more than a drizzle. Unfortunately, the box was awkward and difficult to carry. He needed assistance from his men. Fortunately, they were now here. He entered the Cour Royale. There, fifty of his best men sat patiently upon their horses, the rain not bothering them in the least.

"Colonel DeAubry" Luckner called.

"Oui, Mon General" a voice from the dark edge of the group sang out.

"Colonel, take this box and knapsack, secure them in a coach." He paused then added, "A traveler's coach, not a royal coach. Do you understand?"

"Oui."

"Good, have the turn-out ready in fifteen minutes. I'll meet you at the stables. Keep the coach out of sight as much as possible." With that he turned and walked toward the Cour de Marbre. Stopping briefly, he pointed at a Sergeant and a Private then said, "You and you, come with me, hurry."

The men dismounted, handed the reins of their respective

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mounts to their comrades and hurried after the General.

Luckner marched across the Cour de Marbre and entered the Dauphin's guardroom. From there he moved to the anteroom. As he entered the anteroom a woman wearing a green dress with purple trim was surprised as she relaxed on a chaise, she immediately stood. Luckner examined her. Not a woman, in fact, she was a mere child. She must be one of the Dauphin's governesses. She hadn't said a word; fear streaked her face.

"Where is he?" he asked. The girl began to stammer.

"Do not delay me young lady," Luckner said in his commanding, harsh French.

The girl simply pointed at the bedchamber door.

Luckner and the two men crossed the room and entered the Dauphin's bedchamber. Marie Antoinette, Queen of France, looked up from a couch in the center of the room. A young boy sat next to her. A picture book lay across their legs. Her eye's met Luckner's.

"Madame, I am sent by the King to take the boy. We must leave at once." Luckner tried to sound warm and understanding. In his German accented French he did not succeed.

Marie Antoinette looked at the General. She thought how unfair life had been for her. Selected to marry the future King of France at the age of 13, it had taken painful dental surgery to correct her crooked teeth before the Dauphin had agreed to the wedding. They had married the next year and she had left her home in Austria, never to see it again. Her husband, sexually inept, did not come to her bed for seven years. When he did it was rare, and his sole purpose was to ensure an heir. There was little love in the act. Now that four children had come of the union, his visits were even more rare. In fact, it had been nearly two years since he had last bedded her. Marie, feeling very lonely, had taken to a small set of cottages on the grounds, the hameau de la reine, filling her days with gardening, gambling and shopping.

The latter two vices drew unwanted attention from the treasury and eventually her King. It fed the already not insignificant distrust of her at court. She was called "the Austrian" and, it seemed these little vices had cost her early popularity with the people of France. Eventually, she found love in the arms of another woman. Her first consort being the Princesse de Lambelle. That affair did not last long, ended amiably and the

Queen moved on. Soon, a new lover entered her life, the duchesse de Polignac; Yolande de Polastron. This woman became her constant companion, at her side as she shopped, played the horses, gambled and gardened. Yolande filled the void an even half-attentive husband should have filled. She also grew to love the children as much as Marie.

The Queen of course knew the purpose of Luckner's visit. She knew, she understood, but she did not believe it necessary. Events would eventually prove her wrong. "Where do you intend to take my child?" she asked. Already tears were forming in her eyes.

"I do not believe it wise to tell you Madame, just know that he will be safe." The General saw her distress. He tried to soften his voice even more, "I am to bring a governess of your choosing."

The Queen held the boy tightly. She sobbed silently. This was too fast, too abrupt. Finally, she whispered, "No, no, mon General." Marie, knowing her pleading would do no good, finally gathered herself. "Take Yolande".

Luckner turned to the Sergeant, "Gather up the Duchesse, no luggage."

"You," he said pointing at the Private, "Assist the young girl outside, pack one small trunk for the Dauphin. You must be able to carry it yourself."

He took the boy from the Queen's arms. The child began to cry, just small convulsions. Luckner could feel the shudders as he held the child. She simply stared at him, locking his eyes with an emotion he could not identify, hate, gratitude, confusion, he didn't know. He felt a bit of pity for the woman, but only a small amount. He was a soldier; he had his orders.

He lifted the boy to his shoulder, turned and walked out of the room. Marie Antoinette sat and sobbed. She was a mother who would never see her son again.

Chapter 6

Colonel DeAubry had had some difficulty finding a simple four poster carriage for the General's use. Eventually, one of the men discovered a sadly used, shabby example in a small shed near the quarters of one of the many bureaucrats which staffed the palace. It was perfect, exactly like the many that clogged the streets of Paris day and night. They harnessed four horses from the King's stables and were ready for the General shortly thereafter.

They did not have long to wait. The General came hurrying into the stables holding a young boy, closely followed by the Private carrying a trunk. The child looked about the stables, did not find his mother, or for that matter anyone he knew, and began to cry again. At this the General looked exceedingly uncomfortable. His discomfort did not last long as soon thereafter the Sergeant appeared with the handsome duchesse de Polignac. She immediately went to the child and calmed him.

The General then examined the turn out. He did not like the horses. They were much too fine for the carriage and would draw unwanted attention. A sharp word to the Colonel and soon they found a less well muscled set of horses, unmatched in any way and quickly had them reharnessed to the carriage. This detail attended to the General then directed the Sergeant and the Private to remove their uniform coats and replace them with plain cloaks from the stable tack room. He did the same. Satisfied, he returned to the courtyard. Watching the men as they completed last minute details he frowned. Their uniforms would stand out, but there was nothing for that now.

Taking Colonel DeAubry by the arm he spoke in a low tone. "We must pass unnoticed. We shall proceed in three groups. Our advance guard must be at least a mile in front of the carriage. The distance will disassociate the carriage from the troops. They will appear as a company simply moving through the countryside on some urgent business. Our rear guard must be at least a half-mile behind. Is that understood?"

DeAubry did not like this arrangement and shook his head. "Oui, Mon General, but our defense will be slow to react should anything threaten the carriage."

Luckner thought about this then said, "I know, but we

cannot risk being noticed. We shall make for the castle at Sedan. It is heavily fortified and the troops are loyal to the King there. We will travel through this night and tomorrow. I believe we can make Reims before we need rest. We'll find someplace outside of the town and spend tomorrow night there." The Colonel nodded his agreement and soon they had settled on the route of march. In moments the advance guard was sent on their way.

Luckner now turned his attention back to the coach. The duchesse and Dauphin were inside. The boy was peeking out of the window at the General and Colonel. Luckner went to the coach, opened the door and closed all the window curtains.

Stepping to the previously selected Sergeant and Private he asked if either had experience driving a four-in-hand. The Private brightened and said he had driven the hearse in his village from the time he was twelve. Luckner examined the man.....no, boy. How could there be so many children in the Army? The boy couldn't be older than fifteen. "Alright, you drive." "You," he said, indicating the Sergeant, "ride as the rear coachman". He then examined two coachmen's blunderbusses his Adjutant had removed from another four-poster and placed on the seats of the driver and coachman. They were already loaded, but Luckner reprimed them himself and handed one to the Sergeant. The other he tucked under his arm.

Luckner then surveyed his small band, it would have to do. With a wave he sent the advance guard ahead. Then, he inspected the coach and tack one last time, a small shove sent the Private to the driver's box. He waited a few moments to ensure the advance guard had achieved their separation and, with a quick glance at the Colonel, a shouted "*Bonne chance*" he took his position atop the carriage. One more glance around his small party, a nudge of the Private's shoulder, and they were rolling out of the stables. Ten minutes later the rear guard also left the palace grounds.

They did not stop that night. They did switch teams in the morning, and by the next evening they were nearing Riems. Colonel DeAubry sent word to his advance guard and soon they had discovered a small roadhouse hidden from view by trees and shrubs and considerably off the main road. The men set up camp behind the roadhouse barn. The General and duchesse took rooms above the small tavern. Colonel DeAubry had the few patrons removed and kept in a small shed behind the tavern for the night. He then posted several men inside the tavern itself. He ensured his men stayed alert by paying the keeper to place all

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alcohol under lock and key. He stressed the importance of this arrangement by thrusting the barrel of his pistol into the right nostril of the man as he set out his terms. Should any traveler find his way to this roadhouse during the upcoming evening he would be told there was no room.

Colonel DeAubry had begun this march with forty-eight men on horseback and two riding the carriage. But they had moved quickly, only stopping to change the carriage horses that morning. Even the best cavalry unit could not sustain that kind of pace for that distance without men being lost or horses throwing shoes, especially when a substantial portion of that march is at night. This was not the best of times. They had lost twelve men to poor horses, a desertion or two, and other issues. He now had thirty-six men on horseback. He hoped several would regain the column by morning but, knowing the terrible lack of food throughout the countryside, he knew their chances of finding fit horses were very slim.

At first light the advance group, now down to twenty men, decamped and rode away from the roadhouse to the woods nearly a hundred yards behind. Once hidden in the woods they turned north-northeast and paralleled the road. After thirty minutes they found a small stream, really no more than a ditch, with brush on both sides leading back to the road. Thus they were able to reenter the road and proceed on their way. At the same time two men from the rear guard departed the roadhouse via the long drive. They were sent ahead for a half-mile, then turned and rode back to the roadhouse, giving the all clear. The General's coach left the roadhouse immediately thereafter with the rear guard taking up their normal half-mile position en train.

The day passed routinely until they reached the center of the small village of Rethal. There, in a gentle sweeping curve of the road to the right, for no apparent reason, Colonel DeAubry's horse slipped on the wet cobblestone. DeAubry, having spent a lifetime on horseback, had his left leg over the neck of the horse and had begun to jump to the ground even before the horse landed on its side. DeAubry landed on his feet, but squarely in the middle of a small pool of liquid, impolitely put there by chamber pot of the occupant of the overhanging second floor. Not able to retain his footing he went to the ground and ended up sitting squarely in the foul liquid. To say he was not amused was an understatement.

Finding his horse now lame, he looked for a replacement.

His adjutant offered his, but the two had been together for over a year and DeAubry respected that bond. His problem was resolved shortly thereafter as the men found the local Priest maintained a fine saddle horse. DeAubry, having had a poor experience with a Priest in his youth didn't mind taking the horse at all. He promised to pay a fair price for the horse the next time he passed through the town; all the while knowing the odds of seeing this place again were slim and none.

The delay infuriated the Colonel but did provide some sound intelligence. In the center of the village stood a small kiosk. On it, a poster, crudely printed, described a rally to take place this day in the town of Poix-Terron. The rally was to protest against the ancient regime. It appeared to be led by one Claude Moen the local representative to the commune in Paris. Monsieur Moen had become fired with his democratic zeal during his adventures in the Americas with Rochambeau during the late war with England. Those democratic feelings, combined with a self-serving and violent personality, made Moen an unusually dangerous man. DeAubry didn't know any of this, but he did recognize a threat to their anonymity. Word must be sent to the advance guard and to the General to avoid Poix-Terron at all costs. To this end, he directed one of his men to commandeer a woodsman's cloak and hat, then ride ahead to track down his comrades.

Colonel DeAubry's luck held. His messenger was successful and at Neuvizy both the advance guard and the General altered course for Sauville. This portion of the journey was difficult, the roads oft times degenerating into nothing more than two wagon tracks through the fields. Nevertheless, they pressed on. In a field east of Vendresse they stopped. The Dauphin now thought this to be a great adventure; he had proven to be a good traveler. The duchesse on the other hand, was none to happy with the trip, especially her sleeping arrangements and toilet opportunities for the coming evening. The General made both the Dauphin and the Duchesse sleep inside the coach. He, being perfectly comfortable outside, elected to sleep under the carriage. The rest of the men pitched small tents or slept under their blankets on the ground.

Morning found DeAubry again adjusting his troops, owing to muddy ground, more poorly shod horses and bad roads. He again sent twenty men in the advance guard but was forced to cut the rear guard to ten, including himself. He did not like this

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situation and suggested to the General that they were close enough to Sedan to simply rejoin the entire troop and march into the castle as a unit. This certainly seemed a more defensible way to move. The General considered this, but owing to Monsieur Moen's activities decided that stealth was a more effective means of protecting their charges and he dismissed the Colonel's suggestion.

The road to Sedan exits Cheehery and turns sharply left, crosses several fields and not much further along enters Cheveuges. From Cheveuges, Sedan is only approximately four miles distant. The road into Cheveuges runs parallel to a long, wooded low ridge. At the end of the ridge and bisecting it flows a small brook, its sides choked with long grasses. The road ran along the ridge to what was once a small woodlot, the wood having found its way to fireplaces throughout Cheveuges many years ago. The road turned sharply right around the now vacant woodlot, and ran hard up along the brook. On the near side of the brook stood a *ferme maconnaise*. The two-story barn had an overhanging roof, with tall pillars, its roof tiles were round and it looked freshly built. Just in front of the barn the road turned back to the left and crossed the brook on a small wooden bridge. From there it ran straight into the southeastern end of the village.

Midday found the advance guard having crossed over this small bridge and passing through Cheveuges. The Lieutenant in charge was tired, and not knowing the town was the home of one Monsieur Claude Moen, was not especially alert as his band rode through the very middle of the hamlet. But then, there was nothing peculiar to alert him. In fact, there was nothing to catch his attention at all. The streets were completely empty, devoid of people, dogs, pigs, or chickens. The Lieutenant exited the village, saw the walls of Sedan in the distance and, just slightly, quickened his pace.

Some fifteen minutes behind the lead group came the coach. General Luckner rode in the coachman's position as did the other guard. The young driver, armed, sat in the box. The Duchesse de Polignac and Dauphin rode inside. The coach slowed considerably to make the hard right hand turn at the phantom woodlot, did not accelerate and then began to turn back to the left to cross the small bridge. At that point, gunfire erupted from the far side of the brook. The horse in the near wheeler position was shot through the head and instantly collapsed in harness. Its lifeless body immediately stopped the coach. General Luckner,

who had caught sight of a musket barrel stretching above the long grass as its owner took aim, had begun to stand when a ball struck him in the thigh, its force knocking him off the coach.

Screams erupted from inside the four-poster. In the momentary lull that always occurs after a volley of musket fire, occasioned by the time necessary to reload, rod, prime and aim the weapon, General Luckner picked himself up from the ground, opened the door of the coach and pulled the Dauphin to the ground. He then began a quick, limping trot to the new barn standing beside the road. Immediately behind him came his two men and the Duchesse de Polignac. A second volley erupted before they had taken more than a few steps but the coach and remaining horses blocked their assailant's aim and the rounds passed near them without effect.

Colonel DeAubry, hearing the gunshots urged his horse to a gallop. He and his men were at the scene within minutes. The slight breeze, and the time necessary for the horses to cover the half-mile to the scene had completely dissipated the musket smoke and Colonel DeAubry's troops were thus at the considerable disadvantage of not knowing from where the gunfire had come. Additionally, they had not seen the General and his party take refuge in the barn. Therefore, the normal and natural thing to do was proceed immediately to the now riddled coach. As they surrounded the turn-out another volley of gunfire blasted from the far bank of the brook. Three of DeAubry's men fell to the ground, one dead before impact. The Colonel dropped from his horse, examined the inside of the coach and, finding no one inside turned his attention to his antagonists. "Kill those pigs" he shouted sending his remaining five men across the bridge.

Fortunately for DeAubry's men, only fifteen peasants had set the ambush. Of those, only half had firearms and none of those were, as of yet, reloaded. Their owners did not possess the skill and speed of a trained military man in that particular art. The soldiers were on them in seconds. The work was quickly and efficiently done. Muskets were fired, then pistols, then swords finished the gruesome task.

General Luckner watched with a small bit of satisfaction as his men dispatched the rabble. Unfortunately, he was now presented with a problem. A coach shot full of holes and only a partial team would not pass unobserved through the village in front of them. And, there was the time issue associated with unhitching

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a dead horse. If ever there was a need to hurry it was now. He would have to carry all the royal trappings and his two guests with the limited number of horses and men available.

Luckner directed the men to remove La Joyeuse and his knapsack from the coach and bring the items to the barn. Turning to Colonel DeAubry he placed him in charge of the artifacts. He then directed the Duchesse aboard the Adjutant's horse, selected another and readied himself for a painful ride the remaining few miles to Sedan. Before mounting the horse the General glanced at Colonel DeAubry who had begun assigning baggage to each of the men, seeing to the wounded, gathering horses and readying for the short ride remaining. This Colonel knew his business.

It was at that critical moment that fate turned against the General. One of the Privates had chased a peculiarly large and burly fellow down on foot. The man had struggled mightily and taken several slashes of the sword, the final blow being to the neck, severing the external carotid artery and causing blood to spurt forth. In the process the Privates' uniform had become soaked with the man's blood. Owing to the distance the man had run the Private had been slow to return. He now entered the barn and rejoined the troop.

There are two rules to remember when working with horses. The first is that they are a herd animal. A horse is not comfortable alone. It wishes to be near other horses. When one horse runs or panics the surrounding horses do as well, assuming the first had good reason. It's purely a survival instinct, present in the animal as a result of evolution. The horse that stood to see why the first was running usually ended up as a meal to some predator.

The second rule goes hand in hand with the first. The horse is a prey animal. Evolution has taught them to be wary. They are extremely alert to any new object or smell in their customary environment. Men have understood these equine idiosyncrasies for thousands of years. Hence, horses are trained to accept different stimuli. Draft horses pulling a carriage are typically trained to be very stoical; children, loud noises, traffic, the hustle and bustle of a street do not disturb them. However, put a snake at their feet and panic ensues. Plow horses on the other hand simply step on the snake and go about their business but do not like the chaos of a village street. Similarly, cavalry horses accept the smell of blood as another part of the environment; most horses however,

do not. Colonel DeAubry's commandeered horse, coming as it did from a Priest, was one who did not. The horse smelled the blood soaked jacket of the victorious Private, reared on his hind legs in a panic and backed into the horse behind him. That horse, not knowing what the problem was, but sensing the panic in the first, followed suit. Both horses threw their riders and escaped from the barn, running some fifty yards before stopping.

General Lockner felt time slipping away. He grabbed DeAubry's arm. "DeAubry, we do not have time for this," he hissed.

"I'm sorry Mon General," DeAubry said. What could he do? The horses, as it were, were out of the barn.

"I will take six men, the Duchesse and the Dauphin and make for the fort as fast as possible. We will try to catch up with the advance guard. Once there we will be safe. You gather your damn horses, and catch up as quickly as possible."

The Colonel did not like being separated and having so few men but he could not argue. "Oui, Mon General," was all he could say. With that, the General painfully mounted his horse and the little group trotted across the bridge.

DeAubry and his four men slowly approached the skittish horses. The horse's nostrils flared; they snorted but they did not run. The Adjutant, a bright man-child it turned out, had found a barrel of apples in the barn. The horses couldn't resist the fresh smell of apples and were soon under control, back to the barn and ready to leave. It was at that moment the second wave of peasants found them. They swept out of the woods, jumped the stream and filled the road. Escape was impossible. The five men made it back to the barn where they put up a heroic fight. It did not matter; the peasants were not good shots but what they lacked in skill they made up for in volume. Slowly the Colonel's men died. When it was over there was no sign of la Jeyeuse or the knapsack.

Chapter 7

Cheveuges, like its neighbors, and unknown to the King, and by extension to Lieutenant General Luckner, had become engulfed in politics. The residents had formed their own Commune. Their national Commune representative was more radical than most and he had advocated, and convinced most of the people of the village that ridding themselves of the King was the natural and appropriate thing to do. His adventures in the American war for independence playing a large roll in those feelings.

It did not take long for word to filter through the small village that something had happened just at its outskirts. Gunfire that close could not go unnoticed. No one knew the details but they did know that the King's troops had killed several of their fellow citizens. Wives and mothers were already mourning their unconfirmed losses. Fathers and brothers were swearing revenge.

Cheveuges was, in fact, a very small village. Two roads paralleled each other to form the village. They were connected in the center by a cross street to form the letter "H". General Luckner and his group had approached the town at the southeast corner, intending to leave the road, "cap" the H, rejoin the road and exit to the north. They traveled at a steady trot, not being able to break into a cantor because of the Dutchesse and Dauphin were each doubled on a horse. The Dauphin rode with the General and the Dutchesse with the Lieutenant. As they completed crossing the top of the H they were forced to round a large brick building to regain the road. There, they met a large crowd of angry women...and armed men.

In Cheveuges, public notices were posted on the large notice board outside the tavern which faced the side road constituting the cross bar of the H. On the board hung a Royal notice. It was bordered in black and read:

Louis-Joseph
26th Dauphin of France
is Dead
4 June 1789

The King's notice was only incorrect by three days.

Chapter 8

Jim didn't normally like visiting downtown Detroit. Not because of the bad reputation of the city; that was fading fast as the city rebounded from terrible economic times. No, Jim's problem was that he tended to get lost in Detroit. He had lived in many different cities, and even different countries during his long Air Force career, but there was something about navigating in downtown Detroit that did him in. Several trips to Lions games at Ford Field or Tigers games at Comerica Park had been highlighted with him somehow taking the Ambassador Bridge Street exit off Fisher Highway and, there not being any exits, finding himself trapped in line to cross the bridge into Canada. A side trip that cost at least an hour and caused considerable swearing when its inevitability was discovered.

But, this Friday he was happily accepting the challenge. After dropping their beagle, Molly, at the vets they packed the Jeep Grand Cherokee and headed for the show. Immediately upon entering I-94 east bound Eve stuck the GPS to the windshield between them. Then, she pulled the written directions to the hotel, the restaurant and the convention center from her purse. Eve was an experienced traveler and she knew her husband's tendency to simply rely on his memory rather than a map to find places. Tonight, she had two priorities; she was going to eat a nice dinner and she wasn't going to Canada. By six-thirty, both goals had been met. They had eaten a very nice meal and, not visited Canada; though Eve had their passports in her purse just in case. As an added bonus, they had checked in at the proper hotel.

At seven o'clock they were departing the ticket window and walking up the ramp into Cobo Hall. The term "Hall" being an understatement on the order of describing the Empire State Building as just another office building. Cobo Hall, located on the precise spot where it is said Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac, a French colonist, first set foot in 1701 and claimed the area for France in the name of King Louis XIV, is a two million four hundred thousand square foot mega center.

The Detroit Antique Show, more formally known as "The Detroit Antique Show and Charity Auction", is held each fall. The show had developed and grown over the years. Now, rather than a

garage sale on steroids, it had become one of the premiere springtime outlets for top auction houses from around the country. Detroit's mixture of world-class accommodations and a devoted effort to populate the buying crowd with celebrities guaranteed excitement and valuable and unique auction items.

The antiques show runs four days from nine in the morning to nine at night. It begins on a Wednesday morning and ends on Sunday evening. Saturday and Sunday evenings are what make the show unique. On Saturday, an auction is held of items with an appraised value less than a thousand dollars. That doesn't mean that all items sell for less than a thousand dollars, many times the sales price is higher, sometimes significantly higher. It always seems to be the case that someone simply must have an item, regardless of price and good judgment. Or, a simple case of auction fever strikes some unfortunate novice. Saturday caters to the people that get carried away. Naturally, the show organizers do everything in their power to promote that particular malady.

Sunday is when things really get interesting. All the items have an appraised value greater than one thousand dollars; many items are appraised at several thousand. The Detroit Mayor, sports stars, media stars and other celebrities are recruited with the lure of their name being associated with big dollars going to many of the cities charities. These people are then encouraged to put their star power behind personal invitations to hundreds of high rollers from around the country. A professional marketing firm selects these high-income individuals based upon an in-depth analysis of their buying patterns. Detroit's rich and famous, as well as personalities from around the country, are commonly seen bidding against each other for works of traditional Native American art, Americana, folk art and some of the strangest things ever seen at an auction. It's a spectacular event and raises hundreds of thousands of dollars for charities all over the metro area.

It wasn't the auction that drew Jim. The show had one other high value draw: expertise. And that expertise was free for those who had something interesting enough to make it past the screeners. The entire process had a sort of game show flavor. The concept was fairly simple and logical. Members of the public were encouraged to bring their antiques, have them appraised and, if the owner wished, place them in the Saturday or Sunday auction. What the public was not told was that the initial screening of the antiques was done by antique shop hired help, interns, temporary hires and

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assistants of the name brand auction house appraisers. These people were not novices. They usually had considerable time in the world of antiquing, but they were not the experts. It wasn't meant to be condescending; it simply had to be that way. There were vast numbers of antiques coming through the door. And, the truth of the matter was, most people were simply bringing a slightly different version of Grandma's broach. There were hundreds of items to be appraised and only a few, true experts.

Jim and Eve showed their tickets at the door and then purchased a show program. Handing Eve the program Jim said, "You can't tell the..." "Players without a program," she finished the phrase. She could predict his sayings and when he'd use them. He grinned at her, kissed her lightly and they made their way to the Detroit Hall of the Cobo Convention center. The room was huge: 200,000 square feet. And, the false wall had been removed to join with the MaComb Hall, another 150,000 square feet. They were stunned. They had expected large, but not this large. It would take an entire weekend just to get an idea of what was here. It was hopeless trying to really see it all.

As they were getting their bearings Jim spotted a sign hanging from the ceiling. The sign read "ANTIQUÉ REGISTRATION AND APPRAISAL". Pointing it out to Eve he said, "I guess it doesn't get any simpler than that!" They immediately set course through the crowd toward the sign. Red velvet ropes hung from golden stands forming an isle to the registration desk. The line wasn't very long, after all, it was well past 7 P.M. Most show attendees were going home not coming in. A tired, older woman, with blue gray hair asked if they had anything for appraisal. Eve answered that they did and the woman handed her a form and a short golf course pencil. The form asked for a description of the item, country of origin, estimated value and other details. Jim, being a history buff, was annoyed that he had no idea what the odd tube was, but he assumed it came from Europe and had been used in the Great War by his Great grandfather. He simply described the item as a tube with brass caps, age unknown, probably from Europe and used in World War I. Beyond that he left the rest of the form blank.

In short order a young man, wearing a blue blazer with nametag, a gaudy tie and old, scuffed brown shoes approached them. He was holding their form.

"Good evening, Mr. and Mrs. Crenshaw. I'm John Taylor

and I'm your appraiser for tonight."

Jim was slightly taken aback. John Taylor didn't appear to shave. "May I see the tube you've described please?" Jim handed him the tube and watched Taylor's face. Taylor was not a poker player. His surprise and confusion was immediate.

"Well sir, I'm not sure what this is. I think this may be made of ivory and I think, well, I'm not sure but this doesn't look like brass on the ends. It's these markings on the side that I cannot make out. It may be Cambodian." Jim glanced at Eve; she could tell Jim didn't agree but was keeping quiet. "I think we'd better ask Mr. Ito." With that last sentence Jim had achieved his goal of having a professional appraisal done of his great grandfather's tube.

Taylor led them to the far side of the Detroit Hall. There, under a sign which read "Chinese Pottery and Carvings" sat a long table and a large man. Mr. Ito was holding a green vase close to his nose and had a jeweler's monocle in his right eye. Jim and Eve took a few steps back as he addressed the owner of the vase. When he had finished, Jim, Eve and John Taylor stepped forward. Introductions were done all around and Jim gave a brief history of the tube to Mr. Ito.

Ito began to carefully examine the tube. He held it to an ultraviolet light. He turned it and rolled it in his hands, his monocled eye taking in every square inch. Finally, he put the tube down on the table. He then reached into a toolbox behind him and removed a dish, water bottle and a soft cloth. In short order he began to gently clean a portion of the tube.

After several minutes he sat back in his chair, removed the monocle and said, "This is not from the orient. It is a beautiful piece, the caps at the end are done with amazing workmanship and the carving in the middle is an extraordinary piece of scrimshaw. But, no, not from the orient. I think you need to speak to someone more versed in French antiques. This name looks French." He held up the tube and pointed. Under the grime could be seen a carving of a flower, centered in one of the pedals of the flower was the name "Louis".

Jim's surprise was evident. He'd never seen that carving before. He was actually a little embarrassed for not noticing it and he said so. "Not to worry," said Ito. "The grime has filled in the engraving. I nearly missed it myself. To be honest, I was trying to get a better view of the material this tube is made from. I thought for a moment it was plastic, but I am certain it is elephant ivory.

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This is an extraordinary piece. It's a container of some type I think. Good luck with this. I am curious to know the outcome."

With the last remark he looked at their escort who immediately took the hint. They thanked Mr. Ito for his efforts and then turned to follow John Taylor.

Taylor led them through the floor displays to a central booth. Over the booth hung a sign which read "French Pottery, Jewelry and Statues". There sat a middle-aged woman very thin with too much makeup; next to her sat a distinguished man wearing a double breasted, European suit. A short, stout woman hovered over the man as he examined a porcelain statue.

"Madame I do believe this statute she was made in Orleans," the man with the double breasted suit said. "See here she has the maker's mark? That is the mark of Monsieur Henri Beau, a man who worked in Orleans, he from annee 1725 a 1760. He had une petite small shop, was known for these small statues they in porcelain and their deep colours. He became petite famous him, how do you say...fabrique un peu, making a few of these statues for the Duke of Orleans. I would estimate this would sell at auction for..."

The man paused, tilted his head back and appeared to be doing some computations. Eve and Jim glanced at each other, to their well traveled eyes this looked more for show than anything else.

"ahhh...for three to four thousand dollars"

The woman squealed with delight. She thanked the expert profusely and hurried away to tell her friends. At that point John Taylor approached, turned to Jim and Eve and said, "Mr. Crenshaw, Mrs. Crenshaw this is Mr. Raymond LeDuc, deputy curator of the Riems Museum in France."

LeDuc quickly studied Eve, paid no attention to Jim and said, "How may I be of service?"

Jim explained what he knew of the tube, which was essentially a repeat of what Mr. Ito had told him moments ago. Monsieur LeDuc asked to see the tube. He then placed it under his magnifying glass and carefully examined every part of it. He glanced up at Eve. Jim thought he looked more serious than when he had been while playing with the plump lady. Without taking his eye from the tube, LeDuc reached under the table and came out with a spray bottle and a cloth. He sprayed the tube and began to wipe it.

Eve poked Jim in the ribs and whispered, “There goes your theory about keeping the value if you don’t clean an antique.” Jim winced and nodded.

Finally, LeDuc straightened up. “This is definitely French. If it is what I believe it to be you have a most unique and valuable object here.” He continued to clean the tube. Finally, engraving could be seen on the end-caps. LeDuc sat back in his chair. “This is remarkable,” he said and looked up at them.

Jim and Eve cast nervous glances at each other, then they turned back to LeDuc. The man had disappeared under his table. Jim fought down a smile, Eve wasn’t so successful. The sound of tools being moved about in a toolbox could be heard.

He reappeared, “Monsieur e Madame Crenshaw please observe here.” He had a tool that looked like a sharpened wire embedded in a small screwdriver handle. With the sharpened wire he pointed at the side of the tube. “Here we have a decoupage, a...a carving of a bouquet of flowers, yes?”

Jim, Eve and John Taylor all leaned forward and eyed the tube. Yes, it was clear now. LeDuc’s cleaning had revealed a bouquet of flowers stretching the length of one side of the tube.

“*Ici...*” he pointed with the tool in his hand, “is a name, no? You see? The name she is Louis, yes?” They studied the tube, yes, there was a name in very ornate script.

“Ah, *voila, ici* she is another name. You see? It is Joseph.” He looked at the couple. “You know who is Louis Joseph?” They shook their heads no. Both John Taylor and the woman with too much make-up did the same.

He didn’t tell them. He simply returned to the tube. “Now, Monsieur e Madame, we shall see if you are a very wealthy couple no?” He sat down his probe and began to polish the top of the caps. At last he began to examine the surface of each cap very carefully under his magnifying glass. After several moments he picked up his probe and inserted it into a small hole in one end. He pushed, and they heard a small “click”. He then began to remove dirt and grime from a crack that had appeared approximately an eighth of an inch below the edge of the cap and circled the tube. At last, he inserted the probe in the crack and gently began to pry upward. With a small amount of force the cap sprang open on a recessed hinge. He stopped and looked at them without saying a word. They looked back and then at each other.

“What does that mean?” Jim asked.

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“We shall know it soon,” LeDuc said. He then tipped the tube and a rolled scroll, with a purple ribbon around it slid out. He caught it in his left hand and gently sat it on the table. LeDuc then immediately disappeared below his table. Jim and Eve nervously eyed the scroll, then each other, then their gaze returned to the scroll. LeDuc reappeared wearing white cotton gloves and holding a folded piece of black velvet. He sat the tube aside, unfolded the velvet and placed it on the table. Then, he gently placed the scroll on top of the cloth. After a short examination with a magnifying glass he began to gently untie the ribbon. At last it fell free and the scroll began to unroll. It was made of leather, not paper. Around the edge was a gentle painting of flowers, all white lilies. At the top, in the center was the fleur-de-lis. In the center of the scroll was a painting of a tree, its branches intertwined and extending from a thick trunk. On each branch was a miniature portrait with a name below it. At the foot of the tree was a beheaded serpent and a sword. Under the tree were several lines of text in the same ornate script as the names on the tube.

LeDuc sat stunned. His hands began to shake. Jim and Eve could only stare at the beautiful and unusual document. Monsieur LeDuc took his magnifying glass and silently began to read. Finally, he stood, walked around the table and gripped Eve by the shoulders. “Madame” he said, kissing her on each cheek then releasing her and gripping Jim the same way, “Monsieur...you have the Royal Patent of the Dauphin of France.”

Jim and Eve looked at each other. Neither understood what LeDuc was saying. The man’s excitement couldn’t be contained, his voice raising in pitch he said, “Madame, here...” he pointed at the fleur-de-lis in the top center of the scroll, “this is key...this document she is of the royal French family. See here the fleur-de-lis? This is the sign of French royalty since King Clovis the First. And, see here...” he pointed at a portrait of a young boy. “the Dauphin. You have the Royal Patent of the Dauphin himself?”

Eve turned to Jim then back to LeDuc, “I’m fairly certain we’re not talking about a fish, so please tell me what a Dauphin is?”

“Madame, yes in a strange way we are referring to the fish. You see, every member of the royal family he has his own coat of arms. The oldest male child of the King, he is next in line for the thrown, no? On his coat of arms swim a pair of the dauphins. So, it has always been tradition to refer to him as The Dauphin. You

understand now, no?”

Jim looked at Eve. “Hon, I think this is a very big deal. He’s saying this is a very historical document. I’ll bet this is an important thing.” Turning back to LeDuc he said, “Monsieur LeDuc, can you tell us which Dauphin this applies to?”

“Wait, are there more than one?” Eve asked, still confused.

“Ah, oui, of course,” LeDuc said immediately. “You see, madame, it is always so. It is always the oldest living son of the living King. When the King dies, his son, the Dauphin, he becomes the King, no? And his son, he becomes the next Dauphin. If the boy dies, and he has a younger brother then the younger brother becomes the Dauphin, you see?”

Eve nodded. She could see the excitement on LeDuc and her husband’s face. As she looked around she also could see that LeDuc’s initial reaction had not gone unnoticed by the many passers by. A crowd had begun to develop. Already people were leaning over Jim’s shoulder trying to get a better look.

John Taylor, being a bright young man, immediately radioed for additional security. In short order two off duty Detroit police officers were at their sides. LeDuc gently put the document in a lay-flat case. The tube went into a separate case. John Taylor, the guards, Monsieur LeDuc, Jim and Eve then made their way to the show offices and a vault.

After securing their treasures they convened in the office of the Cobo Convention Center manager. Mr. David Shilling, the show director, was using this office as his own during the show week. He had never been associated with the find of an antique of this value and he wanted to know more.

Soft drinks and snacks were brought in and the key players convened around the office couch and sitting chairs. Shilling wanted to hear the whole story. Monsieur LeDuc began with an explanation of the significance of a Royal Patent, and how they were used to document royal blood.

“It is not the word ‘patent’ like your inventor Thomas Edison made. No, the word is...ahhh, ahhhh....” LeDuc searched his excited mind for the correct English translation. “The word she means the ‘open book’ in Latin. It is a proof. It is the document, the royal, or noble provides to their betters to prove they are a royal or noble. You see?”

Shilling leaned forward, “You mean to keep someone from impersonating a knight or a prince?”

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“Exact!” cried LeDuc. “There was no television, no glamour magazine, so when a noble went from city to city no one knew him. Proof must be provided, you understand?”

“Got it,” said Jim. “But why would the king, or even the king’s son need one? Everyone knew who the king was I’m sure.”

LeDuc frowned, “I must confess, I do not know.”

Unfazed by this minor setback LeDuc continued with his story. “The Royal Patents were rarely seen and then only by the church. They were never seen by the public,” he said.

Then, as if it were not obvious enough, he stressed that French Royal Patents are extremely rare and extremely valuable. There are two reasons for this. The first is the simple fact that not many have survived.

“There are none, all of the known Royal Patents, they were destroyed by the barbarians during the revolution,” he cried.

LeDuc explained this was an attempt to destroy the entire concept of royalty in France. Only a few of the Patents belonging to the lesser nobles were still in existence. Remarkably, one Royal Patent from the family of King Louis XVI existed, that of a cousin. It had been stored in a wooden tube, the acids in the wood slightly damaging the leather over time. The owner had been particularly astute in national politics and fled to Germany in time to salvage his fortune before the revolution. He never returned to France.

The second reason a French Royal Patent is so valuable is its sheer beauty. The Patent on display in Berlin is breathtaking for its detail and technical artistry. Portraits of each of the major members of the royal family and the pertinent family branch are rendered with remarkable realism. Art historians and other scholars from throughout Europe have used this particular document as the source document for identifying specific individuals in various artworks across the continent.

The Patent in the Cobo Center’s vault was extraordinary in that the entire Royal line was illustrated. Each member of the royal line had their portrait painted in miniature. The historical value, should it prove authentic, was astonishing. The scroll was bordered with a bright, highly detailed painting of lilies and the central family tree was a beautifully done apple tree, a beheaded serpent lay at its roots and a sword dripping of the serpent’s blood hovered over the body.

Monsieur LeDuc tended to focus his dissertation on Eve, to the exclusion of the men around the room. He was in his

element. The excitement of the original discovery had not dissipated and he was obviously flirting with her.

“The sword, she is important. She represents the beginning of the French monarchy. She is not the Holy Sword of the Redeemer. No, she is the Sword of Charlemagne. This represents the destruction of evil, represented by the serpent. And the tree, it represents the royal line. See how it takes its glow from the sword,” LeDuc continued.

Jim and Eve were then pressed to tell how the Patent came into their possession. “There’s really not much we know.” Jim said. He then explained that his Great grandfather had fought in the First World War and had returned from Europe with the item. It had been kept in a box in his Mother’s house for years and after his sister had taken over the home he had moved the box to his own home.

As the evening wound to a close David Shilling leaned forward in his chair and locked eyes with each of them, “You know Eve, Jim, you have an amazing find there. It could make you very wealthy. But, and this is a ‘big but’; you’re going to have to get this thing verified before you can sell it. It could be a fake. Even though you’ve had it for eighty years someone could have fooled your Great grandfather.”

Jim was stunned. “I hadn’t thought of that.”

“Who would do something like that and why?” asked Eve. Shilling turned to Eve, “Oh Eve, it happens all the time. Just think of P.T. Barnum and his famous Mermaid. Many, many of the items in his, so called “museum” were out and out lies and forgeries. Even his famous saying “there’s one born every minute” wasn’t really said by him!

They both started to laugh. Then Jim grew serious, glancing at LeDuc to ensure he wasn’t listening he said; “I guess you’ve got a good point David. But isn’t LeDuc’s verification good enough?”

David turned serious. “No, LeDuc is an expert in French historical items, but this is beyond his level. I’m not so sure LeDuc is the man for this job.”

Jim thought that over for a moment. “I agree, just in the short time we’ve dealt with him I get the impression he’s a...well, let’s just say a bit over the top and leave it like that.”

Eve leaned forward and lowered her voice as well, “I agree, LeDuc isn’t my first choice. Do you have anyone you could

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recommend to validate this thing?”

“Well, all I can think of is a professor of French history I know over at the U,” Shilling said, referring to the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. “I’ll call him tomorrow morning and set up an appointment for you.”

They spent a few minutes discussing Dr. Bill Rousseau at the University; then they made the obligatory comments on the school’s football and hockey teams, the upcoming Ohio game and other traditions of the area. Soon, fatigue began to creep into the room and it was clear everyone wanted to go home or at least to their hotel room. Eve mentioned it was late, and they all quickly agreed. Shortly thereafter the conclave began to break up. Shilling showed everyone out of his office and ante-room and said good-night.

Eve and Jim headed to the garage.

John Taylor went home to tell his girlfriend of his day’s adventure.

Raymond LeDuc went to make a phone call.

Chapter 9

That Sunday afternoon, Jim and Eve drove home. Like most farmers Jim kept his hunting rifle and his shotguns locked in a tall metal cabinet known as a 'gun safe' in his basement. It was here that he placed the tube and its precious contents. They spent a nervous night knowing they had a possible fortune in the basement. They would feel much better once the items were stored in their safety deposit box at the bank. But first, they had to have these things authenticated. On Monday morning Eve took a vacation day and they drove to Ann Arbor to meet with Dr. Rousseau.

Fall is the best time of the year on the University of Michigan campus. The trees on central campus are bursting with colour. The "Diag," so named for two diagonal walkways crisscrossing a large square in the central campus park area is filled with students and various groups passing out fliers; everything from "Save the Planet" to "Stop the War." Banners screamed "Beat Ohio State" and still more solicited attendance at lectures by various experts on subjects as diverse as "Gay Health" to "America in a Changing Economic and Cultural Millennium." What Jim and Eve always found so interesting was how the local Young Democrats could pass out literature on one corner, the Young Republicans on the opposite, then the two meet for pizza at Pizza Bobs on State Street afterward. It truly was an eclectic place.

Dr. William Rousseau, the man Shilling had recommended, had agreed to see them late in the afternoon that Monday. Dr. Rousseau was an expert on French history and specialized in what he called the "transitional period" from King Louis XIV, through the end of the Bourbon Restoration and the fall of Louis-Philippe I. He had written several well-respected books and, as is increasingly the norm, had published many articles in various blogs and other web sites devoted to his particular area of expertise. They found his small office in the basement of Rackham Hall. The office, contrary to the image most have of a university professor, was neat and tidy with a pair of plain chairs facing a moderate sized desk. Behind him was a credenza with his computer monitor ensconced in a fairly good-sized bookcase. The three other walls were lined with bookcases as well.

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Bill, as he preferred to be called, appeared to be near fifty years old and of average build with a salt and pepper beard and hair. They shook hands all-round and were directed to the two chairs. Bill listened closely to their story, stopping them only twice to ask a question and never interrupting the flow of the narrative. Finally, the story at its current end, he sat back in his chair and asked to see the tube and the Royal Patent.

Eve reached to the floor, picked up her large, oversized purse and pulled out, what appeared to be a cardboard tube. Removing the top she turned to Jim and waited. Jim, feeling a bit embarrassed by the procedure, removed a pair of white cotton gloves from his pocket and put them on. Simultaneously, Eve took a rolled up piece of cloth from her purse. Bill removed a few items from his otherwise neat desktop and Eve laid out the cloth. Jim slid the tube from within the cardboard onto the cloth. Then he removed a paper clip from his pocket, straightened it and opened one end of the tube as he'd been shown the night before. He then removed the leather scroll, placed the tube to the side and unrolled the Patent on the cloth.

Bill removed a large magnifying glass from his desk and said, "I'm impressed, you handled the document exactly as a museum curator would. Who showed you?"

"David Shilling, over at the antique auction. He said it would keep our skin oils off the leather," Jim replied.

Rousseau bent over the document and began to glass various portraits. "He's correct, very important to preserve this if its authentic," he muttered, obviously deep in thought.

Several silent minutes passed. Rousseau occasionally muttered an approving comment, but largely stayed silent. After several minutes he walked to the bookcase across from his desk, searched for a moment, then removed two books.

Returning to his desk he put the books to one side, sat down and said, "First, let me say thank you for allowing me to examine such a wonderful find." Then, glancing at both Jim and Eve and sweeping his hand over the vellum document and tube he said, "Unfortunately, I am not the man that can authenticate these items." Jim could feel his shoulders sag. Before he could ask the obvious question Bill continued. "I would guess there is only one person that could properly do that in North America, maybe three or four in France. These pieces are truly extraordinary."

Jim and Eve glanced at each other. "Well, why is it so

hard?” she asked. “I thought you’d just do, I don’t know, maybe carbon 14 dating or something like that to establish the age, then maybe a comparison with similar works of the time and that would be that.”

Bill looked at her and smiled. “That’s actually very good. How did you come up with it?”

She smiled back. “I teach science, 7th grade. You’ve now got me at my limit of scientific expertise.”

“I’d bet not,” Bill said. “You’re wrong, but not by much. We can’t use carbon-14 dating. That process is helpful, but it will only put us in the general time period; probably within fifty to a hundred years. Its not nearly precise enough for this project. We do have a process somewhat similar to carbon-14 dating which will be helpful. And, we’ll have to ensure this is not a contemporary forgery.”

Bill paused and began to examine the Patent again. Almost as an afterthought he added, “No, for this project a chemical and dye analysis will have to be done on the ink and paint. That will give us the composition. The actual text and the paintings are also very important. The text will be examined for correct phrasing. The paintings will be examined to ensure they’re identifying the correct people. The material itself will be examined using radioisotope analysis and other methods. Additionally, the tube will be examined; its age can be determined fairly closely by the ivory. The real trick will be doing this without harming the object.”

“You said you can’t do all that analysis correct?” asked Jim.

“Correct, I don’t have the expertise for some of the testing. And, the royal family tree is not my forte. No, I would have to refer you to a colleague at the University of Montreal, Dr. Jean-Michelle Somme.”

He then reached for the two books he’d previously retrieved. “Would you like a little context for these things? I may be able to add to your mystery, or take some of the mystery away, I’m not quite sure.” He smiled and studied their faces.

“Yes!” “Certainly!” they both exclaimed.

“Well, first let me show you this picture. It’s a rarely seen view of the royal seating area of the tribune royale.”

Jim clearly looked confused. Bill said, “The tribune royale is the area reserved for the King or royal sovereign in a cathedral. Very few cathedrals actually have one; the fifth chapel at Versailles

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is one of those few.”

Bill walked to a small table in the corner and laid the open book on it. He tapped a picture and said, “Look at this.”

It was a black and white picture of a series of cushioned chairs behind a wooden fence. They bent over the picture for a moment, then straightened, their confusion evident.

Bill explained, “This area is never visited by the public, no photographs are allowed and only scholars are permitted here. To the best of my knowledge, none has been given permission in thirty years. What is important in this photograph is the background. You see here?”

He used the handle of a small magnifying glass as a pointer and touched the image of a small altar to the side of the seats.

“This is the family altar. It’s where the royals would go for private services, communion, contemplation, that sort of thing. To the side, you can’t see it in this picture, is a confessional. I’m showing you this picture because of the ambry behind the communion table. The ambry is a storage area. Normally they only store the communion wafers, wine, chalice, and other items necessary for Holy Communion in an ambry. But, this one is different. See how large it is?”

Jim, being near sighted took off his glasses for a better look. Eve shouldered Jim aside, pulled her shoulder length honey-brown hair aside, took the proffered glass and adjusted the book for a better view. Jim, now standing to the side looked at Eve and grinned. “You goof,” he said. “Ya snooze, ya lose,” she shot back and laughed.

“Yeah, that is big,” Eve said. “How come?”

“They need that much room to store the chalice and communion plate?” Jim asked.

“Actually, it’s called a chalice and paten. And let’s not forget the wine. But, even with the wine your eye is correct. That’s a lot of space for those items.”

“Well, why so much?” asked Eve.

“That, my friends...,” Bill began with a satisfied sigh, “is an interesting story.” With that lead-in all three resumed their seats.

“It seems the French monarchy is descended from the great warrior-king Charlemagne. Charlemagne conquered all of Europe from the English Channel and Atlantic coast almost to the Urals. At one time he held the title of King of the Franks, the

King of the Lombards, and Emperor of the Romans. In short, he was a powerful guy, both politically and physically. He was unusually big and muscular for that period and, unfortunately, the swords of the day didn't fit him."

"How can a sword fit someone? I thought they were just a big, you know, a big knife," asked Eve.

"Oh, make no mistake, the fit of a sword is very important. A man's life depended on his sword. It must have the proper weight, balance point and length. If it doesn't then it's an inefficient tool. And, a sword is nothing if not a tool," replied Bill. "I'm not an expert in medieval weapons, but I've spoken with several that are and that's what they tell me. In any case, Charlemagne could not find a sword that fit him properly so he had one made. As it happened, when the sword was finished he entered into a period of great conquest. People credited the sword with remarkable powers and it began to take on a life of its own.

Eventually, the sword became so associated with Charlemagne and his successes that people began to see it as the source of his power. After his death subsequent Kings were measured against him. Naturally, his successors wanted to claim his legitimacy and his legacy. What better way to do that than become associated with his powerful sword? Therefore, at each coronation Charlemagne's sword was carried in front of the new King as a sign of that power and ancestry."

Bill paused, collected his thoughts and continued, "Charlemagne's sword is one of the most celebrated weapons in history. The sword is sung of in the oldest known piece of French literature, the Song of Roland. In that story the sword itself granted great power to Charlemagne and allowed him to avenge the defeat of some of his troops. The sword developed its own mystic, much like Excalibur in England. The sword was even believed to hold supernatural powers.

He paused again, "Does the sword hold supernatural power? I have no idea, but I do know that it became hugely important to the man. In one battle in southern France, Charlemagne had it ripped from his hand and he lost it. One of his knights, seeing the King without his sword searched the battlefield; during the battle no less, found the sword, killed the man that had it and returned it to his King.

"That sounds a bit nuts," said Jim.

"It does indeed, and probably was, but it did earn the man

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a great piece of land and ensured a town was named after the sword.”

“They named a town after the sword? Not the guy that found it? Oh he got the short end of that deal,” Jim laughed.

“Yes, they did name a town after the sword. It’s why we now have the town of Joyeuse, France,” Bill patiently explained.

“What, wait, I don’t get it,” Jim said. “He named a town ‘Happy’ because a guy returned his sword?”

“Well, it does sound a little odd when you put it that way,” Bill acknowledged with a grin. “But, the name of the sword is ‘la Joyeuse,’ they named the town after the sword.”

“So how does the sword relate to this ambry?” Eve asked bringing Bill back to the original subject.

“Ah, well...this long area in the ambry is where the sword was kept between coronations.” He again pointed with his pencil. “It is the symbol of the House of Bourbon even more than the fleur-de-lis. And, behind these smaller doors on either side were kept the instruments of the coronation called Regalia; the coronation crown and the individual crowns.”

“What? Wait...what kind of crowns?” Eve asked.

Bill appreciated the question, “Another interesting thing...all Kings after Charlemagne were crowned with the crown Charlemagne himself wore. But, after the coronation, sometimes the same day, they switched to a crown made specifically for the new King. There are several good examples in the Louvre of these individual crowns. The crown of Charlemagne is also in the museum, it is known as the ‘Coronation Crown’. Although, there is some dispute as to its authenticity among various scholars of that sort of thing.”

Bill returned to the picture. Pausing to gather himself he said, “Here they kept the Royal Patents. You have a Royal Patent, but not just any Royal Patent. You have the Patent of the Dauphin of France. Royal Patents were rare even then. The royal family was considered to be *noblesse de epee* or *noblesse ancienne*. Both terms were used and they mean noble by the sword or simply traditional or old nobility. In any case, this type of nobility is handed down.”

Jim and Eve were leaning forward. Bill had become the history professor he was and his excitement with their discovery was evident.

“A second type of nobility is for the newly noble. It’s where the King confers nobility on someone. This is called

“Noblesse de letters” and the letters literally mean a letter from the King saying this person is now a noble and confers the selected rank. That letter is called a Patent. Are you with me?” Bill stopped his lecture to ensure his students were following along.

“Got it” said Jim

“Wait, I don’t.” said Eve “If one type is by birth and the other is by a letter, then why would someone who is royal by birth need a letter?”

“Excellent question,” Bill enthused.

“Teachers pet,” Jim said in a mock stage whisper. They all had a laugh and Bill continued.

“You must remember, treaties and alliances were often made through marriage. In those cases, the old noble families of Europe wanted to know whom they were becoming allied to, and to whom they were becoming related to. There had to be some documentation. Thus, the invention of the Royal Patent. It didn’t prove royalty, it documented relatives of the royal in question.”

“Oh, that makes sense. You certainly wouldn’t want your new sister-in-law to be the Queen you’ve been at war with for the past few years,” Jim quipped.

“You joke,” Bill said, “But you’ve got the point exactly. Remember, war is not always a military event, more often it is conducted via trade policies or religious activities. In those days France, Germany, Austria, the various nation-states like Venice and Naples, all of the European powers, were constantly struggling with one or another. Knowing who your friends were was important; knowing who your relatives were was even more important.”

“This Patent is for Louis-Joseph, the oldest son of Louis XVI. Because he was the oldest, he was called The Dauphin. Dauphin was the traditional title for the son destined to be King.” Rousseau paused to let that sink in.

Feeling that his point had been made he returned to his narrative. “There is an odd historical mystery that many scholars have pondered and no one has resolved. A few years ago a letter written by Charles Henri Sanson and sent to one of the revolutionary newspapers of the time was found in Paris. The letter was eventually sold at auction by Christie’s auction house in London so I’m certain it was authenticated. Sanson, of course, was the High Executioner of France for the King, later for the revolutionary government.”

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In unison, both Jim and Eve, in a casual voice and wave of the hand said “Oh, of course...”, then grinned.

Bill smiled and continued, enjoying this couple and their obvious happy union. “Sanson dropped the blade on the King himself in 1793. In this letter he claimed to be telling, quote, ‘the exact truth of what happened.’”

Bill looked closely at Jim and Eve. “Now, here’s what makes this interesting. Sanson said that the King approached death with great calm and bravery and, just before he lay on the guillotine table he said ‘Henri, Please do not touch Louis-Joseph.’”

Bill smiled, “Now, here’s the thing. France followed Salic law, which means that only the eldest male heir could assume the throne. History tells us that Louis XVI had four children. Marie-Therese, Louis-Joseph, Louis-Charles, and Sophie. Marie-Therese was obviously female and not a threat to the revolution. She survived the period known as “The Terror” when all those heads were rolling in Paris. Her younger sister Sophie died at eleven months of tuberculosis. The boys are why the story gets interesting.”

Jim and Eve were thoroughly engaged. Both were staring hard at Rousseau’s face as if to draw the words out. Much to their distress he paused. The break in the monolog seemed to hurt. He opened the other book on his desk and searched for a page, finally finding it he laid it on the desktop.

“This is a painting of Louis-Joseph. According to the news of the time, and royal proclamations, which were posted from one end of France to the other, he died of tuberculosis on the fourth of June, 1791. His younger brother, Louis-Charles assumed the role of Dauphin. Unfortunately for poor Louis-Charles, he did not escape the Terror and died in prison after suffering terrible abuse at the age of ten.”

They looked up at him. He didn’t say a word. Finally Eve said, “If Louis-Joeseph died on the fourth of June 1791...”

Jim interrupted, “...then why did his father ask the executioner not to touch him in 1793?”

“Exactly,” said Rousseau.

Chapter 10

I

The Musée du Louvre in Paris is a world renowned treasure. The building itself was once the home of the French royal family. That was before Louis XIV decided he wanted to be away from the commoners in Paris and moved 18 miles away to the Château de Versailles.

The Louvre Museum contains nearly 35,000 objects from prehistory to the 19th century and covers an area of 652,000 square feet making it truly one of the largest museums in the world. Its historians and restoration specialists are among the elite in the world. Eight and a half million people visit this world treasure each year.

Running such a complex and well-respected institution requires the many specialized departments one would find associated with any large office building. There is house keeping, food services, security, building maintenance and the rest of the routine functions. And, as with any leading museum, there are the expected research and technical departments such as art preservation, authentication, research and display staffs.

For many, the Art Acquisition Department is the premier department in the hierarchy of the institution. Headed by Professor Andre Rioux, it is this department that identifies and purchases art works for the museum's vast collections. Art Acquisition, in turn, is comprised of three branches: Frankish Art, Modern Art and the *crème de la crème*, the French Historical Art branch.

For reasons no one specifically remembers, within the French Historical Art branch a smaller sub branch, known as the Art Recovery section, is located. Little known outside the tight knit community of the stratospheric art world, the Art Recovery section's personnel are some of the best detectives in the world. This specialized group is charged with hunting artwork lost during the Nazi occupation, recovering works lost due to museum thievery and identifying art fraud.

The deputy director of the Art Acquisition Department

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was a Monsieur Paul Marcil. As a child Marcil had loved the stories told by his father of the once great empire that was France. He reveled in the medieval grandeur of the many kingdoms of the Franks and celebrated the unification of France by Charlemagne. His boyhood was built upon medieval knights. He dreamed of adventure, treasure and heroic battles while on crusade.

Life didn't turn out exactly as the boy envisioned. His father's history lessons and a failed attempt at law school, a failure not wholly without cause due to his father's royalist political teachings, led to five years in the French Foreign Legion. His membership in that organization stemming from his birth in Algeria just before the end of French colonial rule.

Marcil believed the country's leaders had failed to stop or even control Arab immigration and the creeping takeover of his country. Burqas in a French bistro or bakery were one thing, seeing minarets desecrate the famous Paris skyline was simply too much. He left the Legion after the minimum five years and wandered from job to job, city to city and thus across France. He was lost.

It was his interest in the past that led Marcil to a seemingly odd choice of university studies. He selected the study of art and art history at the Université de Paris. Here, the hardened, bitter ex-soldier found comfort in the majestic art of the *Ancien Régime*. He reveled in the glory that was then, took comfort in the power of early France and came to hate the Revolution and the emperor it spawned. He saw Napoleon as a disaster, a man who had failed to maintain the glory of what had been and what had been won. His worst offense being his defeat at Waterloo, making a return to the monarchy impossible. Napoleon had suffered a righteous death on a forgotten rock in the middle of the South Atlantic.

It was also here that the old associates and comrades of his grandfather and his father found him. He was perfectly educated for the job they had in mind. It didn't take long before Marcil had been radicalized; soon thereafter he was a member of the Action Française.

II

The organization Action Française, sometimes simply known by the letters "AF", has been existence, in one form or

another, since the French Revolution. In the beginning, 'organization' was too strong a word to describe the loose collection of deposed nobility trying to reverse the republican establishments created by the Assembly and institutionalized by the First Republic. There simply existed a loose confederation of nobles and supporters of the beheaded King who wished to see the restoration of the royal family.

This group became more serious in their efforts as Napoleon gradually increased his power. They quickly joined together becoming a powerful, though secret society in the heart of Paris. And, they fought Napoleon, hoping to usurp his empire. They were the source of inside intelligence to numerous European governments even as Napoleon's empire grew.

Eventually, their efforts were rewarded. When Napoleon was finally defeated the European powers restored the House of Bourbon to the throne. The monarchists were more than happy to assume the more lucrative positions in the new government. But, they overreached. Their greed was too much, crippling the economy of the newly restored kingdom. That and the fact that a monarchy no longer suited the French people proved decisive. Soon, Charles the Tenth showed his incompetence and was overthrown. This dealt a terrible blow to the organization whose members were increasing in wealth and power every day.

Seeing a true monarchy as no longer an option for France, the organization adopted a new strategy. Rather than the establishment of a formal monarchy, a curtain was to be drawn between those operating the levers of power, and those directing their operations. The AF would direct those operations. By the 1930's the AF had become quite adept at this behind the scenes manipulation of power. Maybe too adept, and once again they overreached. The AF considered becoming a legitimate political party. The chosen leader of this new party was Paul Marci's grandfather, Monsieur Charles Maurras.

Charles Maurras is one of history's mystery men. Maurras was selected to lead the newly created legitimate political party established by the Council. Maurras was a "petit leader" of the AF, and certainly not a member of the inner circle, known as the Council de Governors. Instead, he became the public face of the organization in the 1930s. In this role he displayed that family trait he passed to his grandson, to wit: a hunger to be among the elite, when in fact he had neither the grooming nor the bloodlines.

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Early in the war Maurras, caught up in the anti-government feelings of the time, proudly and publicly proclaimed the Nazi defeat of France to be a “divine surprise”. This greatly angered the nationalist leaning Council. More ominously it angered the head of the Council, the Grand Duke of Orleans. In fact, it so angered the Grand Duke that Maurras was quietly cut off and isolated. The Council went one step further and dropped any support of its fledgling political party. The party’s members, always kept in the dark about the Council and its activities, were allowed to fade away or be arrested. Eventually, Maurras was one of those to be arrested and jailed. Alone, abandoned and without friends he died in prison in 1952.

The AF, having relearned its lesson began to retreat deeper into the shadows. By the mid 1960s it was a forgotten organization, and that’s the way it preferred things. As the AF returned to its core strategy of power manipulation it became increasingly apparent that its business plan was complicated and had a great number of moving parts. The AF needed to control the men who controlled power. That task requires an ability to quickly and permanently remove certain public servants and enforce discipline over others on a fairly routine and long-term basis. This reality drove a recruitment of first class men with skills not taught in the local university, but skills that Charles Maurras’ grandson had gained in the Legion.

At first, Paul Marcil didn’t know of the ‘persuasive’ side of the organization; he simply assumed the AF to be a political organization. Unaware of the family connection he was pleased that the AF fit nicely with the teachings of his grandfather and his father. He believed the government of Charles De Gaul had imprisoned his grandfather without cause. He didn’t believe the “Republic” was functioning at all. As proof he pointed out that De Gaul, a military man, had been in charge of the government from 1944 until nearly his death. He didn’t believe for one moment that De Gaul had retired and “come back at the request of the people” in 1958. No, it was clear, De Gaul had been a tyrant and a dictator who had killed his grandfather. The current French President was no better. Any fool knew a King was better than a tyrant. Kings passed their knowledge, wisdom and love for their people through their bloodlines. And so, the young, ex-Legionnaire secretly joined the same organization his grandfather and his father had served; the Action Française.

His service began by mirroring the work his father had done. This was mostly small tasks, such as delivering bundles of francs to journalists who had an interest or were sympathetic to a return of the monarchy. But, he had a gift and certain flair. His knowledge of French antiquity helped a great deal, and his military training hadn't been forgotten by the institution's leadership. Gently he was pulled into the more aggressive operations, all the while his public career was backed and aided by the AF.

This situation suited him. He moved from museum to museum, eventually landing a coveted position in the Louvre. Gradually he began to understand how the AF implemented decisions and influenced members of the government and clergy. Once this side of the equation became known he quickly decided this was the way he could move up the chain of command. He dreamed of sitting on the Council, his Uncle's fantasies of Kings and nobles blinded him to the reality. The operations side of the AF he assumed, was the short path to membership on the Council. It wasn't long before he began to employ his unique Legion-honed talents for the AF.

Marcil's ability to resolve "issues" quickly, quietly and thoroughly was unexcelled. He was particularly proud of his skillful employment of the "skiing accident." After all, it had actually increased safety on the ski slopes. Most skiers now wore helmets and he considered that to be a very good thing. The fact that it was a direct result of several high visibility members of government and high society crashing into trees and suffering fatal head wounds didn't bother him. It was an issue of the greater good. And, he had carried out the wishes of the Council efficiently and quietly. That too was a good thing.

As time went on, he grew to an age and stature where his work in the field became less important than his skillful management of certain intelligence activities of the organization. By the time he was fifty his cover life, as an art history expert, had landed him in the top echelon of the Louvre museum. This expertise in the Ancient Régime, his prior work for the Council, his skills and contacts combined, in his opinion, to warrant membership on the Council. Unfortunately, the reality of the royal system interfered. Marcil's non-royal blood eliminated his chances of ever becoming a Duke and a member of the Council.

And, here was the great dilemma of Marcil's life. He desperately wanted to be part of something bigger than himself,

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something that represented France's glory. But, that very thing kept him from obtaining his goal. He could not become part of the inner circle of the organization he so loved because he was not of royal blood. Merit had no impact on this. But, to Marcil, everything has its exception. And, if he could present something of incredible value to the Council de Governors of the Action Française then surely he would be welcomed, given a title and achieve his dream. The total absurdity of this line of thought never occurred to Paul Marcil.

III

The Art Acquisition Department's second mission, to authenticate ownership and pedigree of artwork and initiate recovery of stolen French artwork from around the world brings it into daily contact with Interpol and police forces across the globe. It therefore is possible to track and influence many of the investigations into art theft being conducted throughout Europe. And that was why the Action Française had worked so hard to place its own man in a high position in this particular branch. Paul Marcil was that man.

It was to Marcil that LeDuc was now speaking in rapid Marseilles' accented French. "No Monsieur Marcil, I do not know from where he got the Royal Patent. He said his Great grandfather found it during First World War and brought it back to the United States. No, he didn't say where he found it." Marcil felt his initial elation slipping away. He found himself becoming angrier as the conversation continued, "Find out where the damn thing was found. We need some details." With that he hung up the phone.

Marcil went to his office cabinet and removed a bottle of cognac. He poured a small drink and studied the scene outside his window. Slowly his happiness returned. This could be it. Marcil had been searching for something like this for twenty years. If he could provide the Grand Duke with something truly extraordinary, matched with his past work for the Council, surely they would make him a royal. In the past twenty years he had chased several false leads; he'd searched for the Holy Grail, he'd searched for the Spear of Longinus, the real Sword of Charlemagne, relics of Joan of Arc and lesser historical treasures. But now, this was something real, something that had, for the first time, real physical evidence.

Marcil knew something that others did not. Because many of the museums in France reported to the Louvre, and those that didn't kept close contacts, he had information from around the country. His contacts with scholars all over France allowed him to assemble a bigger picture than the Council could see sitting in their tiny offices. He knew of sound academic research pointing to the possibility that the sword, La Joyese, and other royal treasures had been smuggled out of Paris during the French Revolution. This fit nicely with his own research. He suspected the royal sword on display in this very museum was a fake; and he had determined the Coronation Crown on display in the museum was not the original. Most importantly, he knew enough to keep this research off the radar of the museum's other department heads. If these Americans had really found a Royal Patent it was probable that it was somehow associated with the missing Regalia. If he could find out where the Patent came from maybe it would lead to the rest. This was his greatest chance to join the Council. It could not be mishandled.

Marcil stood at his desk, then walked to the window and looked out over the grounds. Action Française would owe him a tremendous debt of gratitude. They would solve the nobility problem by making him a noble. He began to fantasize about how he would be paid – Comté? Or only a baronie? He certainly expected an attractive sum would accompany the appointment, as it should, and did in the days of glory when the King not only granted nobility but also land. He expected and would deserve the same. Marcil shook himself; he had work to do. He had been hunting something like this for years, now he nearly had it.

Chapter 11

Eve and Jim had enjoyed their time with Bill Rousseau. He had even treated them to dinner at the Brown Jug, a campus restaurant named after a trophy passed between the University of Michigan and University of Minnesota football teams. Bill went over the French Revolution in some detail, making it sound like a novel rather than dry history. Jim and Eve began to know the main characters and found themselves rooting for one over the other. It was a sad, incredibly interesting and an ultimately tragic tale. While it had begun as an attempt to increase the welfare of the people, it degenerated rapidly.

Bill's description of the final, ugly convulsions of the revolution had them transfixed. The King pushed for war with Austria in an attempt to solidify support for the thrown. It hadn't worked. War had indeed been declared, but the people did not rally around him as he had expected. Instead, prices for food and other goods were driven up and the plight of the people didn't improve. The situation continued to degenerate until a paramilitary coup occurred.

The waitress brought their food. Jim and Eve sat transfixed while Bill, between bites, brought the story to its climax. Eventually, the Jacobins, a radical revolutionary group, assumed control. Their leader, Maximilien Robespierre, from his seat on the Committee for Public Safety drove a radical, deadly period called The Great Terror. He dealt with opposition by beheading anyone associated with it. It was a real life horror movie. Soon, neighbors were turning on neighbors and family against each other. It was a miserable time to be French. The King was deposed, beheaded and counter revolutionary wars were fought, external wars were fought and a terrible death toll endured by the people of France. Bill ended the tale with a quick explanation of how the revolution had led directly to the dictatorship of Napoleon. It was a sad, but fascinating story.

Next, they discussed the necessary steps to validate their find, including the issue of going to Montreal. Jim and Eve were a bit nervous about the trip. Neither knew a great deal of the French language and the University of Montreal was primarily a French speaking institution. Bill did his best to calm those fears, having

been to the University several times. He assured them that Dr. Somme was equally at home in English as she was in French.

After what seemed only a short time Jim ordered another pitcher of beer. The waitress delivered the beer and asked if there would be anything else. Jim checked his watch and was amazed to see that it was after midnight. They'd been talking for over three hours. "I'm sure glad this place is open all night." Jim said as he poured out the new pitcher. To his amazement, Eve didn't appear at all sleepy. "You're certainly a good story teller." She said to Bill as she sipped her glass.

"Well, there's one final thing..." Bill grew serious and locked eyes with Jim, then Eve. "...people will pay a lot of money for this." He pointed at Eve's oversized purse. "You'd better be careful with it. And, I wouldn't advertise that I had this thing laying around the house. You never know how far people will go to grab something of value, and this is worth a ton."

They spent the next week arranging a meeting with Professor Jean-Michelle Somme. Eve prepared extra lesson plans and then arranged for a substitute teacher. She made sure to do this early because she was very picky about who could substitute in her class. The next Wednesday evening they were back at the vets dropping Molly off. Shortly thereafter they were on the road, hoping to make London, Ontario for the night, then Montréal early on Thursday morning.

Chapter 12

I

Montreal is truly a beautiful city. Its downtown has a European flavor mixed with a high tech, modern urban landscape. Jim and Eve were intrigued with the city and anxious to do a little exploring, but first things first, they headed directly to the University. Bill had warned them of the rather odd positioning of the University. It ran along the length of the north side of two extremely large cemeteries, the Cimetire Notre-Dame-des-Neiges and the Mt. Royal cemetery. As they passed the first Jim said, “Ya gotta love a cemetery called Our Lady of the Snow”. Eve smiled and said, “We don’t live in Oklahoma anymore.” Referring to Jim’s last assignment at Tinker Air Force Base outside Oklahoma City and the oppressive heat of an Oklahoma summer. Using the cemeteries as a landmark, Jim circled the campus until they found their destination.

Dr. Somme was a member of the graduate school. Her office located in the Édouard-Montpetit Pavillon, took a bit of finding. Eventually Jim and Eve found their target and parked the Jeep. Soon they were at her closed door. Jim eyed Eve and asked, “Why do I feel like I’m going to see my professor with a late paper?” She smiled, “I don’t know but I sure wish you’d knock, this hallway is cold.” At that the door opened and a young man squeezed past looking none too happy. Jim pushed through the open door to stand face to face with a woman in her early forties, with an attractive figure and long dark hair matching her dark brown eyes. “Dr. Somme?” he asked.

She looked at him for a moment. His thin hair and gray temples ensuring he wasn’t mistaken as a student. “Yes? Oh! You must be Mr. Crenshaw?” she said in flawless English. “Your wife did not come?” At that, Eve pushed the door completely open and said hello. Dr. Somme smiled and welcomed them both. Closing the door she escorted them though an outer office which was apparently shared with three other professors and into her comfortable personal office. She asked them to sit and then completed the more formal introductions. Jean, as she preferred to

be called, quickly came to the point.

“So you believe you have a French Royal Patent and you want me to examine it? Royal Patents are very rare, none exist of the immediate royal family; only one is available to us of the second tier, that one being in Germany.”

Jim nodded at this. “We’ve heard of it.”

“There are several examples of lessor nobles from that period so we do have a good idea of the format and techniques for the fabrication of a Patent. But, now tell me the story of how you obtained this item,” Jean said as she made herself comfortable in her office chair.

For the next thirty minutes she sat transfixed absorbing their story. Finally she asked for the tube, completed the white gloves ceremony and withdrew the Patent. Taking a large glass from her desk she moved it slowly in and out, focusing it and began to carefully examine the leather document. After several minutes she murmured, “This is amazing, if true this is the Patent of Louis-Joseph.” Finally looking up at Jim and Eve she announced that it appeared to be correct, but she would need to run some fairly specific tests.

She then picked up the tube. She examined it carefully, paying particular attention to the engraving. After several moments she announced the tube would need further examination also. All told, she would need the objects for the next ten days.

Jim’s surprise was evident. “You can’t authenticate these today?”

“No, certainly not. The tests take several days to run. And, we’ll need to schedule time on the machines. They’re not here solely for my use you know,” she patiently explained.

Jim and Eve were uncomfortable with letting the Patent out of their hands, but didn’t see any choice and agreed to the loan of the objects. To this point Jean had been rather detached and, actually a bit aloof. Now, she dropped her guard, smiled and said, “You mentioned that Dr. Rousseau showed you a picture of the ambry where the Royal Patents were stored. Did he tell you that the ambry was ransacked sometime before the revolution?”

Jim and Eve did not see the significance. “No” said Jim, “but how is that relevant to authenticating this Patent?”

Jean eyed him closely, then continued, “It is extremely relevant, especially in light of what you may have here. You see, finding this specific Patent is more incredible than you may

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realize.”

“How so?” asked Eve.

“It’s a bit of a story. If I jump around please stop me and ask questions. You see, one cause of the French Revolution was the American Revolution!

“Oh, I’ve never heard that before,” Eve exclaimed.

“Well, it seems that Mister Benjamin Franklin skillfully manipulated the French into siding with the Colonialists. It eventually cost France millions and millions of Francs. Add a few poor harvests in a row and the French people ended up broke, hungry and ripe for their own revolution,” Jean said.

She leaned forward in her chair, her elbows on her desk and eyes intense. “Just a year after the Revolution France was struggling for its very life. The country was fighting a war on two sides and getting itself deeper and deeper in debt. One method of addressing the debt problem was to liquidate the treasures of the nobles and the church. To do that the new revolutionary government set up several ‘committees’. These committees were to recover what they termed ‘the people’s treasures.’ In truth, these committees simply ransacked the royal palaces and the holdings of the holy Catholic church.”

Jean stood, returned to the file cabinet and, after a moment returned with several file folders. She began to spread several photos and photocopies across the top of the desk.

“These documents discuss this plundering of art works and other valuables from the nobles and churches,” she said.

She continued to spread the papers in front of Jim and Eve. “The committee responsible was called ‘the Committee for Restoration of Public Treasures’. The thefts or collections, depending upon your view, were confirmed by statements from two members of this Committee, given in trials for various crimes or affronts. Their testimony is found in trial records of the day.” She began to point to various documents spread across the desk.

Jean checked her watch. “I’m going to have to run along to a meeting in a moment. But, these committee members also published their testimony in revolutionary newspapers, and they recorded very similar statements in their private diaries; so we place great credence in their truth. The records speak directly of the ransacking of the ambry that held this very Patent. They mention removal of King Louis XVI’s crown and the Queen’s jewels.”

Again checking her watch she said, “Now, I must go, but

let me give you this book and let's say we meet again tomorrow at..." She checked her desk calendar and said "...tomorrow will be difficult. Could we get together for dinner tonight instead?" Jim and Eve were delighted to accept the invitation and arrangements were soon made to meet that evening at a new restaurant on Côte de la Place d'Armes which had opened just the past month. Jean then escorted them to the office door, "Tonight then, 8 O'clock?"

II

Jim and Eve spent the rest of the afternoon exploring Montreal and shopping in the downtown area. Then they returned to their hotel, showered, changed and headed to the restaurant.

"Eve, I've got to admit I'm learning more about the French Revolution than I ever wanted to know," Jim complained as they walked to the restaurant.

"I thought you were the history buff?" she taunted.

"Mile wide and an inch deep," Jim said as they entered the candle lit building. They were escorted to their table and a few moments later Jean appeared wearing a fashionable dress and fur wrap. Conversation centered on where Jim and Eve had been stationed, which countries they had visited and when. Jean had lived in Europe for several years as well, and they shared stories of their trips throughout the continent.

At last Jean said, "Well, let's see. We were discussing French history when we parted this afternoon. I think I'd left off with the fact that the new French government was broke and ransacking the country for anything they could convert to cold hard cash."

"You had just told us about the ransacking of the Royal Ambry." Eve prodded.

"Yes, well...here things begin to get interesting." She paused, apparently for dramatic effect. "There has always been a bit of a mystery surrounding the French Royal Regalia. You see..."

"Excuse me" Eve interrupted, "What exactly is a Royal Regalia?"

"The Regalia are the signs of authority or right to the position. Traditionally things like a crown, a scepter, a thrown, are collectively called the regalia." Jean patiently explained. "Royal

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regalia applies to kings and queens. The most famous are the British Crown Jewels, but regalia applies to the symbols of an office or station. Look at the President of the United States; the office has the Presidential Seal. Even a town mayor has a seal or the head chair at the town council meeting. These things are all regalia.”

“Okay, got it.” Eve nodded.

“So, the French Royal Regalia, since the Revolution, has always been a bit of a mystery. We know that before the revolution there were four items that played a key role in the coronation of any new French King. We know this from surviving official papers of the Church, as well as various diaries, and even from the examination of several paintings of different coronations.” By this time they had completed their meal and Jim was wondering about the bill.

Jean continued her narrative. “The French were very Catholic and considered themselves to be, if not representatives, at least faithful servants of the Church. It was very important for them to have a direct tie to the Church. Therefore, the French kings were blessed by the French Cardinal as part of but prior to the actual coronation. For this the Holy Ampoule was used.”

“And what is a Holy Ampoule?” Jim asked while trying to convert Canadian dollars to US in his head, finally giving up and simply handing his credit card to the waiter.

“Let me get that!” Jean nearly shouted.

“Too late Jean, I already did,” Jim said with a smile.

Jean gave him a stern look then continued. “An ampoule is simply a container. Clovis the First was the first Frankish king to be baptized as a Christian. That occurred in about nine hundred, no one is certain of the exact year. It was said that the unction, or the physical act of the blessing, was performed using Holy Water contained in a Roman glass container alleged to have been found in the sarcophagus of Saint Remi. The container, or ampoule, was about 5 centimeters tall. Since the ampoule was associated with a saint it was almost by definition a Holy Relic imbued with certain blessings.”

“Wow, that’s a great tradition. So, you’re saying that the Holy Ampoule is a piece of Royal Regalia?” Eve asked.

“Yes, it is,” Jean replied. “And, now we move to the next piece. The French had a peculiar tradition of crowning the new king with a specific crown called the Charlemagne Coronation

Crown. It was originally a simple gold crown, but over the years four large jeweled fleur-de-lis were affixed to the original piece. Immediately after the coronation this crown was removed and replaced with a personal crown. The personal crown was made specifically for the new king. But, the important one, the one that conferred the throne, was the Coronation Crown. So, while both crowns could be called Royal Regalia I want you to think only of the Charlemagne Coronation Crown.”

“And that’s because of what?” asked Jim.

“Ah...you like these historical mysteries don’t you Jim?”

Jean said with a smile. “Be patient, let’s now talk about the coronation sword.”

Jim interjected. “Actually, Jean, Bill told us a lot about the sword. He said it had been stored in the Ambry and that it was the actual sword of the real Charlemagne. He said all the subsequent kings used it to legitimize their reigns.”

“Okay, perfect. Well then, in answer to your question, it’s the same with the Crown. It conferred Charlemagne’s image to the new king. So, we have discussed the three key items. The Holy Ampoule, the Charlemagne Coronation Crown, and the Sword of Charlemagne. But, we’ve not discussed the fourth...”

Her smile broadened and she looked from Jim to Eve. “How can you crown someone unless you know their of royal blood?”

Jim smiled, “The Patent?”

“Absolutely. The fourth item is the Royale Patent. They were always kept together in the Ambry.” Jean smiled, “So we have a mystery.”

They spent the next half hour discussing the unique properties that made up the Royal Regalia. Finally, Eve observed it was very late. The three new friends agreed to meet again the next morning in Jean’s office.

Chapter 13

I

“I need to know more about these two Americans!”
Marcil was becoming angry. He knew that a Royal Patent had been found, but he didn’t know how or where. He didn’t know if the Americans knew that the Patent was part of the Royal Regalia. All he knew was that he didn’t know much.

“Get in their house LeDuc, put a microphone in each of the rooms. Search the place, maybe the fools left it laying out. Just get me something or I’ll have your manhood in Paris and the rest of you at the bottom of the ocean. Do you understand me?”
Marcil growled into his phone.

LeDuc was not an exceptional man. He didn’t consider himself anything other than a deputy director of a museum. In that he was wrong, Raymond LeDuc may not have had a classic case of dissociative identity disorder, but he did possess two personalities: one the mild mannered deputy academic, and on occasion he was a cold-blooded killer. His friends in the Action Française had recognized that trait long ago. And now he was forever tied to that organization. How he’d gotten mixed up with this Action Française idiot was only a distant memory. Now, here he was years later with blood on his hands and unable to find a way back to that simpler time. He hated Marcil. He hated being afraid. He hated his other personality.

“Yes, Monsieur Marcil. We shall be hearing everything the couple does and says.” LeDuc thought about that for a brief moment, then smiled in spite of his predicament. This might be entertaining if nothing else. He hung up the phone and thought over the instructions he’d been given. Bug their house? It was madness. He didn’t know how to bug a house. He only knew one person in the United States he could ask to do this little favor and the man was past his prime. This was not good, not good at all. And, he’d have to stay here in this factory city even longer. Detroit was no Paris. Finally, LeDuc left his hotel room and found the elevator. Arriving at the ground floor he passed a small coffee bar and approached the desk clerk. As he walked he glanced around

the lobby. Nothing unusual, no one knew him here and no one cared who he was.

“Good afternoon,” he exclaimed. “I need to extend my stay a few more days.”

II

Marcil hung up his desk phone with a crash. At least some phones could still be slammed. He thought for a moment, composed himself and decided it best to send a report to the Council. Surely they would be excited by the possible recover of such an important piece of Royal lineage.

He removed the tedious papers and reports lying on his desk pad. He then pulled a soft cloth from a desk drawer and dusted the desktop. Satisfied it was clean he removed a piece of thick, cream coloured stationary from his right desk drawer. Pulling open the drawer on the lower left, he removed a quill and ink well. The Council accepted only formal, old world penmanship, and only quill and ink was used. He dipped the quill in the ink well and began to write. His letter was addressed to the Action Française’s Council de Governors. He struggled with the wording. It took two drafts and well over an hour, but he was finally pleased with the result. Occasionally, he paused and thought of how close he’d been to membership the last time, but there was always the issue of royal blood. This time surely....

III

Returning to his room LeDuc opened his smart phone, paged through the list of contacts and finally found the one man he knew in the United States. Touching the telephone number he listened as the phone rang. Claude Poteau had been a reliable and useful tool in the States for the past forty years. Now in his late sixties Claude was beginning to slow down, nevertheless, he was all that Ray had. The phone connected and LeDuc heard the cigarette-choked grunt of Claude Poteau.

“Eh? Oui, qui is-il?”

“It’s Ray, I need some work.” The conversation went about as Ray figured it would: difficult, full of expletives and

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generally unsatisfying.

He disconnected the line and sat on his bed. How could he end his relationship with Marcil and the AF? He couldn't could he? Damn.

Chapter 14

Jim and Eve brought brioche and croissants and were seated once again in Jean's office.

"Last night after we left the restaurant I returned here to do a little additional research." Jean began. She had their attention. Jim and Eve immediately sat their brioche and café-au-lait on the table and stared at her.

"I have long held my suspicions. Last night I assembled my evidence; it is weak, and I have not published about this...yet. But, I believe I have discovered something very important."

They were sitting around Jean's small office table. Jean stood and crossed to a bookshelf behind her desk and, after a short search removed a large, slim volume. While walking back to the table she opened the index, dragged her finger down the page, simultaneously positioning herself between Jim and Eve's chairs. Then, with evident satisfaction she opened the text to a full page picture and laid it on the table between them.

"This is a painting of the coronation of Louie the sixteenth's father, Louis the fifteenth. Here you can see the blessing."

She placed her finger on the page. "Here you see the Cardinal making the sign of the Cross on Louis' forehead. That's the "unction".

Jim and Eve bent over the book.

"But look here in the Cardinal's hand." She moved her finger to the Cardinal's left hand. "Notice that the vial is held in a square receptacle made of gold?"

Jim glanced at Eve. She was as engrossed in this as he was. "Yes, and are those jewels on the square thing?" Eve asked.

"I think they are," said Jean. "Now, I want you to look here." She pointed to the altar behind the Cardinal. "See the crown? That's the Charlemagne Coronation Crown. See the four fleur-de-lis?" Both Jim and Eve were nodding their heads.

Jean then returned to her desk and picked up a large, atlas sized book. A ruler protruded from the top, evidently previously put there as a bookmark. She opened the book to the ruler and sat it on top of the first volume between Jim and Eve.

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“Here is a painting of the coronation of Louis XIII.” She pointed to a large painting of the King leaving the altar. He was preceded by several young girls spreading flower pedals, four page boys carrying various objects, an armored knight holding a sword vertically with both hands, with the Cardinal and several priests leading the procession.

“I believe that is the Sword of Charlemagne.” She said, her index finger stabbing the center of the page.

Jim was becoming increasingly confused. “Okay, I get all this Jean, but I just don’t see what it has to do with our Patent?”

“A fair question.” Jean replied. “Let me continue and it will be clear.” At that she went to a file, pulled out a folder and extracted a CD. She inserted the CD into her computer, grabbed her ‘cheaters’, glanced at Eve and Jim and put on the glasses. After a moment she found what she was looking for.

“Here, here is a statement by the head of the royal guard at his trial for thievery.”

“What did he steal?” Jim asked.

“Probably nothing. But many items that the Committee expected to find in the palace at Versailles were not there,” Jean said. “Since they couldn’t find these things they had to blame someone. This poor soul was blamed, given a fair trial and beheaded. Many scholars now believe that members of the Committee simply made off with these treasures.”

Jim and Eve were now becoming absorbed with this story, much like when they had heard the first half of the tale from Bill Rousseau. Jean continued, “In any case, the guard related at his trial that the regalia as it was called always stayed with the Patents. These items were considered inseparable. That’s because taken together they bestowed the throne to the next in line.”

She eyed them closely. Jim and Eve stared back expectantly. Finally, she realized they had missed her point.

“The Patents were kept with the sword, coronation crown and the Holy Ampoule. Where one was there was the other. I have always been mystified at how the Louvre could have the Sword, the Ampoule and the Crown but not the Patent. The fact that you have what certainly appears to be the legitimate Royal Patent lends credence to research which questions the authenticity of the Regalia currently on display in the Louvre.”

“There’s more,” said Dr. Somme. “There was a certain French General that was a favorite of King Louis XVI. Initially, he

sided with his King and fought the revolution. At one point being wounded in the leg. We know this from his testimony at trial in 1794.”

“Trial?” asked Eve.

“Yes,” Jean said. “You see, General Nicholas Luckner switched sides. When the General Assembly was first called he supported the King. As things got out of control and the King was deposed, he publicly supported the revolution. About that time the remaining European monarchies realized this idea of the people running the government could spread.”

“But what could they do?” Eve asked

“They declared war,” said Jim. “She’s talking about the Napoleonic wars.”

“Not actually true,” said Jean. “But very close. The period is called the French Revolutionary Wars. And, the war was perfect for General Luckner. He avoided the Committee for Public Safety, kept his head and helped the Army against the invasion. In 1791 he became a Marshal of France. The next year he became the Commander of the Army of the North. France did well and he was part of the reason. He had several victories. But, his luck turned. He suffered a terrible defeat, lost a lot of ground and eventually was removed from active command.”

“All good things come to an end,” grinned Jim.

Jean didn’t even pause. “Things got worse for him. After his defeat Luckner was made generalissimo with orders to build a Reserve Army. That didn’t work out well since the countryside had been picked clean of men and boys. There was no one left with which to build an Army. But, that didn’t work as an excuse and he was eventually removed. He was getting on in years by this time; he was 71 or 72, something like that. In any case, he retired and went to Paris. Fate was still against him. The revolutionary group in power, called the Jacobins, didn’t trust him and in less than a year he was arrested by the Revolutionary Tribunal. His trial went the same as all other trials of the day, and he was sentenced to death. He died on the guillotine in Paris in 1794.”

“Wow,” said Eve. “I should have taken more world history, I thought the French Revolution was just about ‘Let them eat cake’ and Napoleon, I didn’t know about this other stuff.”

“Now, here’s the interesting thing. At his trial, a Colonel spoke against him. The Colonel said that in the early days of the Revolution he had been a Lieutenant under General Luckner. He

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had helped move several items of extreme value, a woman and a child out of the Château du Versailles during the opening days of the convention. It was in an ambush by members of one of the communes that the General was wounded in the leg.”

Jim thought for a moment. “You think that is how the Patent got out of the Palace?”

“Yes, I do,” said Professor Somme.

Jim and Eve glanced at each other. “This is all very interesting Jean, and probably very important to the historical record, but I thought we were trying to validate the Patent. What am I missing?” Jim was becoming increasingly curious about where Jean’s long narrative was taking them.

“This all has to do with the Patent. But it’s bigger than just the Patent.” Jean’s excitement could not be tamed. She returned to her bookshelf and removed a large catalog nearly three inches thick.

“This is the catalog of items held by the Louvre,” she said as she flipped open to a specific page and laid the book between Jim and Eve. “This is the Coronation Crown in the Louvre museum.” Then she uncovered the first book she had shown Jim and Eve. Placing her right index finger on the painting and her left index finger on the catalog she asked, “Do these look at all similar to you?”

Jim and Eve were dumbstruck. “They’ve got the wrong crown,” Eve whispered.

Jean wasn’t through. “Now look at this.” She pulled the second text back to the edge of the table and next to Eve. “This is what the Louvre calls the Sword of Charlemagne. It doesn’t look like this one does it?” she said as she pointed at the catalog. “They’ve got the wrong sword too.”

What about the Ampoule?” Jim asked.

Jean’s excitement was evident. “During the final crazy days of the Jacobins they trotted out the Holy Ampoule and destroyed it in public. They beat it with hammers. One piece was recovered and is now in the Louvre.” Here she paused to add weight to what she was about to say. “Remember it was supposed to be made of Roman glass? Well, guess what...the one in the Louvre isn’t.”

Eve and Jim stared hard at Jean. “You’re telling us they destroyed a fake?” Jim asked.

“Yes I am,” Jean said with certainty.

The three of them looked at each other in silence. “So you think General Luckner removed the Royal Regalia and replaced it with fakes before the Revolution?” Jim asked.

“I do” Jean said emphatically. “And, because of who’s Patent you have, I’ll bet the child mentioned by the Colonel was the Dauphin.”

Finally Jim said “So you think that because it takes all four of these items to crown a King that they were never separated. And, you think that someone, maybe this Luckner fellow, replaced the originals with fakes during the French Revolution?”

“Exactly,” Jean said with relief. “It’s the only explanation.”

Eve studied Jean’s face. Finally, she said, “That means one other thing. You believe that wherever Jim’s Great grandfather found the Patent that’s where the other items are too?”

“Exactly,” Jean said with satisfaction.

Chapter 15

I

After a quick lunch, Jim and Eve thanked Jean for the education, reluctantly handed over the tube and said their goodbyes. Jean promised them a full report within two weeks. They all suspected it would be sooner since they were all excited about this find. The return drive from Montreal seemed to take forever. Seven hours later they had all the traveling they could take for the day. Eve spotted an acceptable hotel outside of Toronto and they quickly were checked in, unpacked, and in search of a nice restaurant. Eventually they settled on a small steak house.

Taking their seats in a booth Jim looked over the menu; put it down and began to examine the parking lot outside their window. Soon their food arrived and Eve attempted to make small talk. Jim only half heartily participated in the conversation and concentrated on his food. After the waiter took their plates he took off his ring, absently began to twirl in on his finger and returned his gaze to the parking lot.

“You’ve got something on your mind, and I’m guessing I’m not going to like it,” she said.

Jim smiled. “Yeah, can’t hide it from you. I’m pretty subtle that way.”

“I’ve got a few years practice reading that face,” she reminded him.

“Well, I’ve been thinking a lot about what we’ve seen and learned this past several days. Jean made some pretty startling claims. And, the conclusion is pretty awesome. If the Patent is part of the regalia, and the regalia is always together...”

“And Jean says they were,” interjected Eve.

“I’m saying if they’re always together, why wasn’t the regalia found when my Great grandfather found the Patent?” Jim was now pointing his desert fork at Eve.

“Well, maybe he didn’t look very hard. It was during a war. He might have been a little busy. And I hope that fork isn’t loaded,” Eve said with a smile and a bite of her cherry pie.

“I wonder if we can find exactly where he found the

Patent,” Jim mused.

“How would we do that?”

“I don’t know. That’s what I’ve been thinking about this past hour or more. We would have to know where his unit was fighting and exactly where he was when he found the Patent. It’s really impossible. I mean, he could have just been doing his laundry and there it was or he could have been digging a trench and discovered it. There’s just no way that kind of thing would show up in some record.”

After a moment of silence Eve said, “We know your great grandfather’s unit right?”

“Yes,” said Jim.

“Well, can’t we find out where they fought? Wouldn’t that tell us at least where he was?”

“No, history books only tell where the units were during major events. Sometimes they’ll describe specific movements, but it rarely gets down to the unit level. It might help a little, but we wouldn’t find a passage that said ‘Oushel Crenshaw found an ivory tube beneath the big tree at the corner of this and that road’ or anything like that,” Jim explained. “The best a history book might say is this company attacked that town, but I’m not even sure it would get to that level of detail.”

“Oh,....that’s not a big help is it?” She looked a bit crestfallen.

“No, not a big help, but not a bad idea,” Jim said, “We should definitely read the battle history of the Red Arrow Division. It will at least give us an appreciation, and maybe a starting place.”

“The Red Arrow Division? What’s that?” Eve asked.

“That was the name of his division; well, the real name was the 32ed Infantry Division but they were known as the Red Arrow Division. The French called them ‘Less Terribles’.”

Eve laughed. “Your french accent is terrible! It’s ‘Les Terribles’.” Then, “Why the terribles?”

Jim grinned. “French isn’t my strong point, ya got me. Anyway, apparently they were terrible, in a good way. They were never defeated, and they broke every German line they were sent against. Even the shoulder patch was changed, from a red arrow to a line shot through with a red arrow. I guess it’s supposed to symbolize the fact that the 32nd Division penetrated every German line of defense that it faced during World War I. They were a pretty tough bunch of guys. I’ve read a little bit about them, and

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I'm pretty impressed."

"Well," Eve said, "I guess we're going to learn a whole bunch more about the Red Legged Division."

"Oh my God, RED AAROW Division," Jim cried.

"That's what I said." She quickly shot back and grinned.

II

Jim and Eve's driveway was fairly long and extended some one-hundred yards from the road to the house. On both sides sat corn fields so that, to an airplane overhead, the house, barn and equipment shed looked as if they sat on a small green island in the middle of a large yellow splash of corn. This year the weather had been just right. The corn stood eight feet tall and was a pleasant dry yellow colour. Their farm wasn't their primary source of income, more of a secondary source and an homage to the land they owned. Jim parked in the garage, went to the back of the Jeep and lifted the door. Eve opened the dog cage and put a leash on Molly. Meanwhile Jim opened the door to the house and walked in.

He immediately turned to punch his code into the house alarm then stopped. There was no beeping.

"Eve, we forgot to put the alarm on," he called. Then he thought about what he'd just said. Even if they had forgotten to put the alarm on it should have beeped. He examined the alarm pad. The face was dark, no lit number telling him the door to the garage was open. He closed the door and reset the alarm. Nothing.

"Eve, the alarm doesn't work," Jim called. "We'll have to get that fixed. I'll call the alarm company first thing tomorrow."

By this time Eve was in their bedroom and had placed the few things she'd bought in Montreal on the bed. She then unpacked her suitcase, putting the dirty clothes in the hamper and the clean cloths she'd not used back in their proper places. She stopped. Her bottom bureau drawer was slightly open. She couldn't remember leaving that drawer open, and it was not like her to leave things open. That, and an alarm not working, made her uneasy.

She went to the closet. Eve kept a neat closet, skirts, pants and blouses lined up. They were crowded to one end of the

clothes rod. She turned to Jim's side of the closet, always a bit messier than her side. He'd left a pair of boots in the middle of the floor when they left, she remembered because she had stumbled over them on the way out and they'd had a word or two about his messy habits. He had made a show of standing them up beneath the hanging dress pants before they left. The boots were now lying on their sides next to his other shoes.

"Jim, come take a look at this." Jim could sense a bit of urgency in her voice. He hurried into the bedroom. Eve went to her bureau and pointed. The bottom drawer was open about a half inch. "I don't remember doing that," she said.

She then went to the closet. "My clothes aren't where I left them, and..." She pointed at his boots. "...didn't you stand those up over there?" she asked as she pointed.

Jim looked concerned, "Yeah, I'm pretty sure I did."

They began a search of the house. The first thing Eve checked was her jewelry. It all seemed to be there. Jim checked the garage, all his tools and power equipment was there.

Jim checked behind the back door. His .22 rifle was standing there. Like many farmers Jim kept the little rifle handy. Rats, woodchucks, coyotes and other critters are common on a farm and were not welcome.

They checked all the cabinets, several items were out of place, but nothing seemed to have been taken. They went upstairs. Their son now lived in the city. His room had been turned into a guest room and re-carpeted with a short pile carpet just two weeks ago. Eve had vacuumed the day before they left for Montreal. The nap of the carpet stood tall where the vacuum had lifted it. In the carpet they could see footsteps.

Eve looked at Jim. "I vacuumed in here before we left. Someone walked around this room."

They examined the rest of the upstairs. Nothing was missing.

They went downstairs. At this point Jim thought they may have surprised a thief. He was worried the intruder was in the basement. He stopped on the top step, went to the back door and grabbed the rifle. They descended the basement steps. The television was there. The bar in the corner looked undisturbed. The laundry room looked normal. There was no one in the furnace room.

They opened the door to the utility room and turned on

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the light. Jim and Eve used the utility room as a sort of hobby room. She kept her spare quilting material in plastic bins in the corner. She also had several boxes of items she used at school in bins marked “Reading”, “Math” or “Science”. Jim kept his hunting and fishing equipment here. In the corner stood a gun safe. The safe was six feet tall, made of high-density steel and supposedly impervious to intrusion. That wasn’t true. Someone had retrieved the torch from the barn and cut the hinges off of the safe door. It now lay on the floor in front of the safe. Inside, Jim’s two hunting rifles and three shotguns stood proudly in their places. The drawers were all open, nothing was missing.

Chapter 16

I

The Michigan State Police force is a well-respected state organization. Its officers are considered professional, competent and generally held in high regard by the public. But, as is typical of public service organizations, it is chronically undermanned. In rural areas taking a report on a breaking and entering is low on the priority list.

Officer Ryan Harris arrived about two hours after Eve phoned the State Police post. He walked through the house with Jim and Eve. He examined the footprints in the carpet. Then began to try to find fingerprints. He dusted several glass surfaces with no success. He went to the basement and dusted the gun safe. Again, without success. Both he and Jim went to the barn where Jim kept his cutting torch. There were no surfaces likely to hold a fingerprint, but they did search the barn and the equipment shed. Nothing other than the torch had been moved. The intruder had left footprints in the dirt floor of both buildings. Officer Harris photographed them and made a plaster of Paris mold. He did not hold out much hope of finding the intruder however.

“Mr. Crenshaw, I would say someone definitely searched your house and barns looking for something,” Harris said as they walked back to the house. “But, I can’t imagine what it was they were looking for. And, I cannot explain why they would take the trouble to cut off the door of your gun safe and not remove the guns.” He paused, stopped and looked at Jim. “You didn’t keep anything in there that you shouldn’t did you? Is there anything you haven’t told me?”

Jim looked at the young trooper. “Officer Harris, you’re exactly right to be asking that kind of question.” Jim pulled his wallet out of his pocket and handed his retired military ID card to the man. “But, I spent most of my life serving this country honorably. I wouldn’t disgrace myself now after all those years.”

Ryan glanced at the I.D. card. His eyes widened a bit when he saw Jim was a retired, bird Colonel. “No sir, I bet you wouldn’t,” was all Harris said.

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They opened the back door, and Eve insisted they sit at the table. She poured three cups of coffee and Ryan began filling out his paperwork. He started by asking the routine questions: when did you leave home, who knew you were going, full name and address, etcetera, etcetera. Finally, he said, "Do you have a home burglar alarm?"

"Yes, but the battery is dead, its not working," Eve replied.

Jim leaned forward, "But...damn, I didn't think about this earlier. It should have beeped last week to tell us the battery was low. It didn't, I wonder..."

"The battery shouldn't have made a difference. Usually they're just back up for power outages. Let's take a look at that control panel," Officer Harris said.

The three of them went to the garage and Jim opened the control panel. He pressed in a code and attempted to arm the system. It didn't work. They checked the backup battery. Jim's voltage meter showed it fully charged.

Then they went to the exterior phone box on the wall outside the garage. There a series of new wires were attached to the phone cable. Officer Harris was the first to speak. "That looks like a very professional job." The telephone wire and alarm company cable were spliced. A nine-volt battery supplied power to a small black box with two wires attached to clips. The clips went to the alarm cable and the telephone cable. "Mr. and Mrs. Crenshaw, someone knew an awful lot about burglar systems; this thing has been by-passed."

Jim and Eve could only stare.

II

That evening was a tense one. Jim ensured all the doors and windows were locked. They tried to watch television, but couldn't get interested in any of their favorite shows. They tried a game of cards but that didn't last long. Finally Jim put voice to what they were both thinking. "Someone searched our house looking for something very specific."

"I know, and we both think we know what it is they were looking for don't we?" Eve said.

"Do you remember what Bill Rousseau said to us?" Jim asked.

“No. Well, wait...didn't he say something about being careful?” Eve stared at Jim.

“Yup. He said people will pay a lot of money for the Patent and the tube. He said we'd better be careful with it.” Jim put down his cards, scooped up the pile on the table and started to put them back in the box.

“Hey, I would have won you know.” She objected, but it was just for show. “We didn't even have the tube here. Why would anyone be searching for it in our house?”

“Well, they didn't know we didn't have it in the house. They probably thought they could snag it and sell it for a lot of money,” Jim said.

They both grew quiet. Finally, Eve said, “How are we going to find where your Great grandfather found the tube?”

“I'm not really certain, but I think I know where to start,” he said. “I'm going to learn everything I can about my great grandfather and his unit.”

“How do we do that? Can we get his records from the Veteran's Administration?” she asked.

“That's a great idea, but I don't think it will work. As I recall, all the World War I vets, or at least most of them, had their records destroyed in a fire sometime in the early seventies. No, I think this is going to be a library and internet search.”

With that, Jim headed to his small office and the family computer.

Chapter 17

LeDuc was on the phone with what he had been told was a ‘a technical expert.’ In this case the man might have been an expert with surveillance equipment and burglar systems, but he was not an expert at searching a house. Claude Poteau had failed him. He was simply too old, too sick and too lame. Poteau hadn’t even done the job himself. He’d subcontracted the work to a young fool from someplace called “Hamtramck”. My God, the kid wasn’t even French. He was a Pollock!

“You fool,” LeDuc hissed. The “Mr. Hyde” side of his personality was in full bloom. “Did you not see footprints in a freshly vacuumed carpet? How could you not think to look behind you? Are you blind?” LeDuc was just getting warmed up.

“Were you not told to make sure your visit was not discovered? Are you an idiot? Did you think they might overlook the door to a gun safe, with burned off hinges and LAYING ON THE FLOOR?” That last part in a thundering yell. “You ass! They know that someone wants the tube. They know its value and you warned them of its vulnerability! You fool!” LeDuc’s blood was boiling now, and it spilled over with a string of oaths that would have made Satan himself proud.

Finally, his energy spent, LeDuc asked, “Did you get the microphones in place, did you at least do that? Did you do one thing right?” LeDuc was satisfied with the answer. Conversations in the Crenshaw house were being recorded and saved to a computer hard drive. The computer was routed through an internet connection and could be monitored by simply logging into the server. He could monitor the house anytime, anyplace, from his smart phone or from his lap-top. This at least, had impressed him.

He pushed the ‘end’ button on his phone, hit speed dial and in a moment was talking to another ‘technical expert’, this one in Toronto. The world would soon be in need of a new recording “expert.” Finishing that conversation, he put the phone on the table and thought about Poteau. The man had let him down. He’d done good work in the past, but now? Now, he was old, lazy, and a risk. He decided. LeDuc picked up his phone and hit redial.

Ridding the world of one extra idiot and an old man gave

LeDuc no pleasure. It was merely a free service. Now he thought hard about the next phone call. LeDuc dreaded it, but it had to be done. He phoned Marcil. As expected Marcil erupted with a string of oaths of his own, matching LeDuc's in vehemence, violence and clearly winning in the creativity category. He would have to be careful of Marcil in the future LeDuc thought.

Marcil wanted the internet password so he too could listen to the American couple. LeDuc provided the necessary information and hung up. He began to think about his value to Marcil and wondered if he should return to France or find a nice beach in South America. Who could know?

Chapter 18

I

Over the next five days Jim immersed himself in World War I history. He spent hours at the library and even more time on the internet. He gradually became very familiar with the wartime unit of his Great grandfather. Oschel Crenshaw had joined the Michigan National Guard in 1915. The unit had been deployed on Mexican border duty during the pursuit of Pancho Villa. Later it was one of the first to sail to France to fight the Germans. After several large and bloody battles where it earned a distinguished war record the 32nd was charged with occupation of portions of Germany.

Jim found the reading interesting, even fascinating, but not helpful. He couldn't find details of any battles, only the role of the Division in larger campaigns. He still didn't have a clue as to where Oschel Crenshaw had found the tube.

The next Saturday Eve and Jim were scheduled to leave for his sister's house in Traverse City for the holiday weekend. They intended to stay for two days and return on Monday afternoon. But, before going Jim wanted to return the cushions for their yard furniture to the attic. "Seems like our little adventure started by me going up this ladder into that attic." He commented.

Eve smiled. "Yup, and it was what, a month ago? Feels like an awful long time ago now doesn't it."

She went back to rinsing off tools and patio furniture then stopped. "What did you say was in the soap box?" She asked, suddenly serious.

"Oh, some medals, a mess kit, a cigarette lighter, that's about it." Jim said as he ascended the ladder.

"No, you said there was more. And, I think you said there was a book. It was in your great grandfather's war stuff. Maybe there's something important in that book," Eve exclaimed, growing excited. "Let's take a look in there. Maybe something can help us out."

Jim went back to the attic and after several minutes of shifting boxes and moving the Christmas decorations out of the

way he found the Boraxo box. Clutching the box to his chest with one hand he carefully climbed down the ladder and carried it into the house. Finally he sat it on the kitchen island, took a beer from the refrigerator, then opened the box. There inside, under the knife, patches and other paraphernalia was a large, black leather bound book. Examining it closely he read, "The 32nd Division in the World War".

Quickly clearing away some paperwork from the kitchen table he laid the book flat and opened it. Together they scanned the index. The book was an homage, published by the state governments of Michigan and Wisconsin after the war and apparently presented to the surviving members of the Division on the anniversary of the Armistice Day, 1922. It contained a detailed history of the unit, its officers and men, a list of killed and wounded in action and a reproduction of after-action reports for each battle and skirmish fought by the Division. Commentary about the overall war and the unit's contribution at the moment of the report or series of reports was also provided. It was indeed an impressive record.

Soon Jim was engrossed in the history of the unit. It didn't matter to Eve, after ten minutes she was back on task. "Okay, we've got work to do," Eve prodded. "If we're going to be there by dark we'd better get this show on the road."

Reluctantly Jim agreed, put the book aside and began packing the Jeep. Soon, Molly was in her traveling cage, the suitcases and snacks were loaded and Eve was loading her pillow. In another twenty minutes they'd passed through town, stopped at the gas station and were entering the highway. Turning north on M23 they settled into a cruise. After little more than an hour they had reached I-75, passed Birch Run, Frankenmuth and Saginaw and had begun looking forward to their traditional stop for ice cream in Gaylord.

Jim's sister Sherrie lived in a traditional, northern Michigan fieldstone farmhouse situated on seventy-five acres just northwest of Traverse City. Jim's mother and father had purchased the property and moved there after Jim left home to attend the University. When Jim's parents had passed away Sherrie and her husband Gerry had moved into the house. Over several years they expanded and updated the house. It was now a beautiful, modern home and had been featured in several local "Parade of Homes" tours. Along with the home renovations Gerry had cleared more

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of the land and together he and Sherrie had turned the acreage into a cherry orchard. Now, they had a successful cherry farming business, supplying cherries to packinghouses and on-line customers.

Sherrie met them at the gate to the property with her big yellow Labrador at her side. After the usual hugs and kisses Jim gave Eve the keys and he and Sherrie watched the Jeep bounce up the driveway to the house. “We’re going to fill those ruts in someday,” Sherrie laughed. Jim put his arm around her and they walked to the house.

II

The next morning the four of them sat on the porch drinking their morning coffee and discussing the Patent, the French Revolution and their new friends Jean-Michelle Somme and Bill Rousseau. Eventually, the conversation turned to Jim and Sherrie’s great grandfather. The family had a military background and Oushel Crenshaw was one of many who had served in the military. They both had heard a great deal about him as children. When Jim thought of those stories now, in the context of his own military training, he was certain the man had suffered from post-traumatic stress syndrome; he’d had a bit of a drinking problem and family stories often mentioned his frequent stops at various bars and pubs. He’d never been a violent or mean drunk, just occasionally “in his cups” as the saying went. Now, having read a detailed account of the man’s wartime unit Jim was more convinced of it than ever.

“I wish I had known him,” Jim said as they watched several wild turkey walk across the pasture. “I’ve no way of getting more information about him, there’s no one left who really knew him. There’s a lot I’d like to ask him about, not just about the Patent, but other things. What were people like? How did they do it? It’s a terribly interesting and important time in history and so many know so little about it. I just wish I knew more.”

“I’ve always been absolutely stunned by what they did and went through in that war,” Sherrie said. “But you look at what they did in the years after the war and it’s equally impressive. Remember Mom talking about the Great Depression and how people went without for so long? Our great grandparents and

grandparents sure put up with a lot.”

They all nodded and fell silent. After a few moments Sherrie said, “You know, I’ve got some of Grandma’s things. Let’s look through there. Maybe there’s something in there of her father’s.”

Jim readily accepted and for the second time in as many days he was climbing a ladder into an attic. Unfortunately, two hours later all Jim had for his trouble were some of his great grandmother’s dresses, some children’s toys, photo albums and a bible spread out on the dining room table. And, a knot on his forehead where he’d hit it on a ceiling joist.

That evening Jim and Eve were in their room rehashing the day’s events. It has been fun finding and looking over all the old things. And, they had found evidence of a family mystery. It seemed that a great aunt had run off with a lover at the age of twenty-three, never to be heard from again. Jim had found a picture of the wayward aunt in the bottom of a trunk containing the rest of their great grandmother’s items. Gerry had promptly declared that he’d married into a disgraced family. Therefore both he and Eve should be excused from cooking and washing dishes for the next two days. Eve had promptly agreed, and the two of them then decided a trip into town was warranted. Sherrie and Jim were left to cooking and preparing the evening’s barbeque.

But none of the newly discovered items had helped in finding the solution to the riddle of where the Patent had been discovered. Jim was becoming increasingly discouraged.

“Eve, I think we’re stuck. There’s nothing to tell us where to look. He fought from near Paris to the German border. There’s no way we’ll ever get this narrowed down.”

“I know hon. I don’t know how to help. But, really is it such a big deal? We do have the Patent. We know its worth a lot. We’re a heck of a lot better off than we were before this all started.”

“Eve, it’s not a money thing. It’s family history, it’s world history. This is important. We could be on to something that could change the historical record of an entire country. This is a big deal.”

“I know babe, and don’t give me that stuff about history. This is about your family...I wasn’t born at night.”

Jim started to laugh. “Oh my God, you never, ever, get sayings right. It’s ‘I was born at night, but it wasn’t last night!’”

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“Oh...,” Eve said. Jim couldn’t keep a straight face, and they both had a good laugh. Finally, knowing there was nothing more to say about the matter Jim went looking for something to read before going to bed. Leaving the bedroom he turned to his right and walked to the end of the hall. There on the opposite side of the staircase was a bookshelf. This part of the house was pretty much as Jim had remembered it from when his parents had lived here. He didn’t think the books in that shelf had ever been changed.

Flipping on the hall light he began searching the bookshelf. A book entitled “Modern Bee Keeping” caught his eye. Pulling it down he laughed when he saw it had been published in 1958. Next he found several mysteries. His mother had belonged to a mystery reader book club many years ago. A new mystery had been sent each month. Next to the mysteries he found a book for the next several days, “Tarzan of the Apes” by Edgar Rice Burrough. Removing the book, Jim noticed several smaller, thin books on the shelf above. Pulling out the first he was surprised to see it was a book of French phrases. It told how to ask directions, ask a few basic questions and contained a small amount of French geography and history. Jim was amazed to see it was published by the War Department, 1916. He was absolutely stunned to see the name “Oushel Crenshaw” written in pencil on the inside cover. Next to it was a small, weathered and ragged copy of the Bible, again the name of its owner was written inside. Immediately next to that was a small black leather bound book with no title.

Pulling down the small black book Jim found that it wasn’t a book at all. Instead, it was a bound notebook. Its pages nothing but lined writing paper. He opened the inside front cover. Inside was a picture drawn in pencil. Someone with a lot of time, but not much talent had obviously drawn it. Opening to the first page he found a dozen or more French phrases, all in a messy stretched handwriting. Jim turned the book over and opened the back cover. At the top was the name “Lulu May Walters” then an address and a list of important information such as “first date”, “birthday” and “favorite flower”.

Jim’s imagination fired. Not daring to guess what he had in his hands he sat down on the window seat. The book looked to be about a hundred pages or so. There were two cardboard dividers, the first at the one-third point, the second at the two-thirds point. Pausing a moment to gather his thoughts he opened

to the second page of the book. It was a list of numbers and times. At the bottom of the page it listed track numbers. It was a list of train departures. The next several pages were crude pictures of people, boats and buildings. Then a block of blank pages had been folded over at the corner. The next page was a drawing of a machine gun. Each part was labeled. Following that was a page containing instructions for cleaning and servicing the weapon. The next few pages were blank, then a drawing or a map with arrows. A few small notes made Jim think it was notes for an attack on a fortified position. Following that were several blank pages, more drawings of houses, chickens and people. Then the first cardboard divider with a calendar for the year 1918 printed on the cardboard. Behind the divider the first page was labeled 17 April 1918 and it was full of handwriting, all in pencil. The second divider didn't divide anything. The handwriting simply continued on each page thereafter. The last ten or fifteen pages were blank.

Jim began to read. As he did his excitement began to grow. He'd found a diary. And, the more he read, the more excited he became. He'd found the diary of his great grandfather.

Chapter 19

I

Two days later Jim and Eve were back home, sitting on the porch and letting the sun sink behind the corn. Jim was reading the diary to Eve. Transfixed by the tale, they were transported back to a horrible time. It all seemed so real, made more so by the comments on day-to-day life. Jim's Great grandfather complained of bad food, no yarn to darn his socks, losing at cards. He spoke of the famous World War One trenches. In one section three pages were devoted to mud. His ancestor explained all the different types and uses of mud; how it deadened the noise of a shell. How it sucked in shells and made great showers when the shell exploded. How it stopped shrapnel and how it seeped into guns and trousers and food and cots and water barrels and wounds and on and on and on.

Two pages were devoted to the description of an observation balloon. They had set up anti-aircraft guns around the balloon and "aeroplanes" as he called them were constantly patrolling near the balloon. Several pages later there was one sentence: "The balloon was blown up today."

Sometimes the narrative was interrupted for several days; then a short list of friends killed, or maybe a story of how someone was lucky to have escaped death. Rarely was a battle described in detail, though sometimes a particular incident seemed to take on more than casual importance. The story changed subtly when a large battle was described as being heard off in the distance. The horizon flashed and artillery barked and boomed. The men all grew silent, many said prayers. They all expected orders to move forward to the attack on their own front but none came. The description went on for some time. It seemed Oschel had a difficult time sleeping that night.

The day after the battle in the distance the entry was very small. "*Army on the move.*" was all it said. Several more entries were made which simply said the army had taken to the roads and began moving. Sore feet were now the problem and the topic of each night's entry. Whole pages were devoted to sore feet, drying socks

and the best way to wrap feet before starting off in the morning. Food and supplies were a constant item of comment. Two pages were devoted to catching a chicken that had been spotted in a damaged chicken coop. Once there were three pages devoted to a French woman they had seen in a farmhouse as they marched past. The diary droned on, the sole topic being the daily observations of a man walking through a broken, war torn countryside.

Camp life seemed to be enjoyed. At least in comparison to life in the trenches described early in the diary. Hot meals were always commented on. It seemed they were served about every three days. A friend, who was only identified as Robert, was a noted barber in the unit.

After an hour, Eve said she needed to put some laundry in the washer and start supper. She disappeared into the house. Jim sat on the now dark porch, a cold cup of coffee on the floor next to him and read by the porch light. He read for another twenty minutes.

Suddenly Jim stopped. He called down the basement stairs, "Eve, I've got something. C'mer and listen to this."

She climbed the stairs. "This better be good. I've got things to do," she complained.

Jim looked at her and smiled. "Hon, you know I hate seeing you work so hard..." He began.

She cut him off "Yeah, yeah, I know, that's why you're staying up here where you can't see me, very funny. Now, what did you call me here for?" It was an old joke they'd been quoting at each other for years.

Jim got serious. "Okay, after you went in I kept reading. The diary went along just talking about routine things like food, cooking, one guy's birthday and stuff like that. Then, in mid-August it seems they caught up with the Germans. Apparently, the Germans were trying to reform a front and stabilize their lines. The commanders were trying to stop that and keep things from degenerating back to trench warfare. At least that's what the campfire generals were saying. Anyway, on August twenty-fifth he got into a battle near a little town called Chickery or something like that. Listen to this..." he said and began to read from the diary.

*25 August 1918
Captain says we're to attack the town of Chehery*

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tomorrow. It's a pretty small town and we're hitting it with four companies. I don't like where we're going. Captain Walters put us on the right flank. That ain't the best thing. It's closest to the main line of the Germans. If they come for us we're sure to get in the thick of it.

27 August 1918

Chehery is took. But at a terrible cost. Captain Walters is gone and so are many of those good boys. We come through a woods in the middle of the night. It was dark or nearly so but every once in a while the moon come out so I could see the branches in front of me. Finally, we come to a field. It was the prettiest field of grain you ever saw with a big two-story barn by a creek and the town laying just a ways beyond, at least that's what the word was. They said that the Germans were in that town. After waiting for a while at the edge of that field we finally screwed up our nerve and started across. It was probably an hour or less before sun up. We was crossing that field all quiet and in fine fashion when all of a sudden every artillery piece in the German army started to fire at us. The gates of hell just plain opened up above us. I seen the Captain just disappear in a red cloud. The boys was brave, they run forward like good soldiers, but we was stopped by that creek. Bombs and shells was bursting and the noise was more than a man could stand. Me and John Turner ducked into that barn pretty quick when them Huns started firing their machine guns at us. John got killed a few minutes later. A bullet come right through the wall. I dug in the back of one of them stalls. Couldn't dig too deep because I run into a pile of canvas. I got into that hole and scooped hay and manure over me. I hid for the entire day, didn't smell too good after that. Nearly got myself caught by them Krauts. That night the rest of the 126th come and rescued us. D Company was in terrible shape. We had a lot of the boys git killed or wounded. Only about half of us was walking that night. It was probably the scariest I been since getting here in France. It was a terrible day.

Jim and Eve stared at each other. They had their clue.

II

LeDuc listened to the reading of the diary from his hotel room in Detroit's Renaissance Center. He smiled. This could be the ticket to a big payday. Marcil would be very happy. He pulled the ear buds out and turned off his laptop. He walked to his 72nd floor suite window. The view of Windsor Canada directly in front of him, and Belle Isle to his left was spectacular. He didn't see any of it. He knew what he had to do. He knew the potential payday, but he hated talking to that man. He wished he'd turned down that first little favor so many years ago. But, he was now a wealthy man; a wealthy man who lived in fear, but wealthy nevertheless. He sighed, "I guess all jobs have their unpleasantness," he said to the glass.

He then pulled his cell phone out of the holster on his belt. In minutes he had given Marcil the details.

A short time later Marcil disconnected the phone. This was an interesting development. It seemed the Americans were on to where the Patent had been found. At least they had a clue. That could lead the couple to the location of the Regalia. He thought this over a bit. A barn near Chehery. That didn't seem to be enough for anyone to find anything. He dismissed it. His issue now was to get the Patent from these two. Maybe then he'd look for a one-hundred year old barn near Chehery.

LeDuc looked at the dead cell phone. The boss had instructed him to keep a close eye on the Crenshaws and that he would do the rest. Whatever "the rest" meant. LeDuc did not know and didn't really want to know.

Chapter 20

Saturday morning Jim and Eve decided to eat breakfast at the diner in town. Several people greeted them when they walked in the front door. The local gossip was exchanged, discussions about the spring crops, markets, yields, sports, the availability and price of gas, seed and fertilizer for next year filled the next twenty minutes. It didn't take long and their order arrived. Eve began to tell Jim about an incident in her class at school. Jim tried to pay attention but she could tell his mind was elsewhere. Finally Eve said, "You're not listening. I know that look. It means you've got something up your sleeve. What are you thinking?"

"Do you think that barn is still there?"

"No way. I can't imagine it would have lasted nearly a hundred years and two world wars. And, I'll bet that little town is now a huge city and that whole area is all covered with concrete." She sipped her coffee and eyed Jim over the rim.

"You're probably right," he mused.

A moment later Jim waved down the waitress for more coffee. When she left he said, "Do you think we could find it?"

Eve seemed to think about that for a second or two and then said, "The city? Sure, we could find it. But so what? It's not like that barn will still be there. Jim, we're talking about events that happened in 1918. The odds of anything still being there are slim and none. You know that."

As they talked they became increasingly curious about the current population and size of the town. Returning to the house they hurried to the small office they had set up off the kitchen. Jim sat at the desk and logged onto their computer. They quickly found the right website and in short order were looking at an aerial view of the town of Chehery. Small was an understatement. The town was made up of approximately twenty buildings. Farmland ran right up to the back of many of the buildings. Several fields had barns in them. Two streams wound through the fields and what appeared to be several ditches. Any one of which could have been the creek in Oschel Crenshaw's diary.

"Doesn't look so bad," said Jim. "I just can't tell if these are one or two story barns, old or new or what. And, if one of those barns is it, well..."

HJ GAUDREAU

Eve was silent. After a moment's hesitation she said, "Summer break is coming up. I've always wanted to see France. You really want to go check this out?"

He stared at her. "Are you nuts?" And then he smiled. "You read my mind again. Well, let me see how our savings account looks."