

Prologue

Paris, France, August 1997

Diana, Princess of Wales, was thirty-six years old, desperately happy, and desperately unhappy. Desperate to avoid the media, who at once admired and hounded her. Desperate to keep her life private. It was the end of August, and she could trust no one. There was only one way out. As she reached for the phone, it rang.

"What is it?" she snapped. "Didn't I tell you not to call me at this number again?" She knew that the phone would be monitored.

There was silence on the other end.

"Yes, well, I understand. It's going to be dangerous. I am counting on you to carry this off."

The caller's question took her by surprise.

"No. I have no idea whether we'll see each other again. I suppose it is unlikely. So, good-bye then. *Adieu*."

"It's not like we were ever friends, anyway," she said coldly as she hung up the phone. "I've got to do this, so I can have what I've always wanted. In two days' time, I will be gone from the world. I told them to just wait and see what I would do next. I told them. If only it didn't have to end this way. But I can still change my mind—or can I?"

What good would it do? No, it has to be carried out...as I planned it. Even if we all end up dead."

She picked up the phone and dialed. "Make sure this looks good. Give them the pictures. It's our only chance for happiness, darling."

The male voice on the other end was softly reassuring.

"Yes, well, I hope so. If all goes well, then we'll be together again shortly. I love you, too."

She tugged at her barren earlobes as she hung up, her face drained but radiant from the sun she had enjoyed on the Côte d'Azur.

"My work will live on," Diana said to herself, "and so shall I."

Then she laughed out loud, her laugh filling the empty room as she recalled the time she had leapt from the balcony into the snow for a night of freedom, but this time the freedom would be guaranteed...forever.

Chapter 1

August 31, 1997

The phone rang in the residence above a restaurant on the rue du Gros-Horloge in Rouen. Still half asleep, Jacques Gérard looked at the clock on his nightstand. It was four o'clock in the morning. "Who could be calling at this hour?" he grumbled.

"Listen," the hoarse voice said in the familiar Corsican dialect. Jacques recognized it immediately. It was Diamanté. He felt a sudden apprehension. They had known each other for a very long time.

"We have to get someone out of France...*vite*." Diamanté's voice was gruff. "No one can know about it."

"What are you saying, *mon ami*?" Jacques felt like he was back in the war.

"The situation is very grave," Diamanté explained in hushed tones. He sounded tense and on edge. Jacques heard him take a deep breath. "We will require *Les Amis* and your son."

Jacques froze.

"But what is going on? Why Charlie?"

"I am on my way to Paris," Diamanté continued. "Alert your son that I will be stopping shortly at La P-S to pick him up."

The support of *Les Amis* will be needed for the last part of the journey. I will call with details later. *À bientôt.*"

"*Salut.*" Jacques hung up the phone. He had many questions, but it was not the Corsican's way to question intentions. He scratched his head. What was Diamanté involved in this time? Why was a group of former Résistance fighters needed and for what role? Why was his son needed? And how did Diamanté know that his son was at the hospital, anyway? What would be required of him in all of this?

"Diamanté will have his way," Jacques said aloud, shaking his head. Diamanté always had his way. He was stealth itself, quick, tireless, and clever. That's why they called him *le loup*, the wolf. During the second war of the twentieth century in Europe, he and Jacques had been part of the French underground network known as the Résistance. The local group in Rouen called themselves *Les Amis Clandestins*. There were still some of them around. Jacques knew that Diamanté was counting on it.

Jacques Gérard faced a personal dilemma. He had not spoken to his son, Charles-Christian, since his wife, Nathalie, had passed away two years ago. Before that, he had not seen him for several years. They had had a falling out over that girl Charlie was in love with—that American. What was her name? Anna? Jacques spat at the thought. "*Merde.*" His brows furled. He turned on the

television in his bedroom and picked up the phone to call Diamanté back. His son must be left out of this.

A live news report was being broadcast from Paris. Jacques watched intently. A serious car accident had happened around midnight in the tunnel near the place de l'Alma. An ambulance of the state-run emergency medical service SAMU (*Service d'Aide Médicale Urgente*) was on the scene.

"Charlie must be left out of whatever this is. Find someone else," Jacques protested.

"You are my friend, the only one who I can trust," Diamanté explained in a calm, low voice. "It will be a difficult trip. We will be in desperate need of someone with your son's skills and experience." Diamanté knew of the gag rule that all French doctors lived under. It would be against French law, rigorously prohibited by the *Ordre des Médecins*, for Jacques' son to discuss any details afterward. That would be of utmost importance.

Jacques put down the receiver and let out a heavy sigh. He was getting old. Charles-Christian was all the family he had in the world. He wanted desperately to resolve their differences. He turned up the volume on the television. Channel TF1 was broadcasting live from the Alma Tunnel. The SAMU ambulance had left the tunnel and arrived, according to the broadcast, at La Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital sometime around two o'clock in the

morning. Jacques' eyes grew wide. Charles-Christian would be in the middle of the event. He was one of the emergency room doctors. They had identified the victims as the Princess of Wales, her bodyguard, the chauffeur, and another man thought to be her current love interest.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" he said over and over as he dialed the hospital's main number.