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*Defiance*

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# PROLOGUE

*Gobi Desert*  
*Southeast of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia*

The light.

Her eyes followed the light.

If the sun still rose, if it traced its way across the sky, if it forced a small ray through the pinhole in the wall of a tent, across a cold, barren floor in the middle of nowhere, then surely God was still in control.

Wasn't he?

The light, even such a small ray, proved it was so.

She remembered places of bright sunlight—the ports where she once served her country.

Pearl Harbor.

Key West.

San Diego.

Were these great ports of call still in existence?

Did the gray warships of the American fleet still sail from these navy towns? Did cool, salty breezes still roll off the oceans, breathing life into Old Glory?

Did naval officers and enlisted men and women, dressed smartly in white, still stop in their tracks every morning under sun-spangled palm trees to salute as the national anthem echoed all over the bases of the U.S. Navy? Did they stop again at sunset, coming to attention as the flag came down?

Lying in a fetal position on the floor in the corner of the tent, she felt tears slide from her eyes. She was surprised she had any tears left to cry, but here they were, turning into a silent, sob-wracked torrent.

Still curled on her side, she swiped at her wet face with her fingers; her tears dripped from her cheek and chin to the floor, just shy of a small patch of sunlight.

She opened her eyes.

The sunbeam inched closer to the far corner of the tent. When the beam reached the corner of the tent, he would come.

He always came.

Moisture gathered in her palms. Sweat beaded on her forehead.

For months she prayed that he would forget her, that he would leave her alone. Why had God ignored her prayers?

She knew what came next. Her heart jackhammered inside her chest.

She shut her eyes again, squeezed them tight.

Sweet memories of home danced in her mind, memories of the Bible on the coffee table when she was a girl.

Thanks to her mother, she memorized a few verses. Those verses lived somewhere in the shadows of her memory.

She spoke silently.

Perhaps God still listened. Perhaps not. But just in case ...

*"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil ..."*

The sound of his footsteps cut through the walls of the tent.

*"For thou art with me ..."*

"Prepare yourself, my infidel," he called in broken English.

*"Thy rod and thy staff ..."*

"I come for you."

*"They comfort me."*

Hyperventilation gripped her body. Her breathing constricted. Her chest thumped violently. Brief, disconnected thoughts whirled through her brain.

The door of the tent flew open. It was him.

"Jesus, help me!"

# CHAPTER 1

*L'office de droit de Jean-Claude la Trec*  
*56, rue Charles de Gaulle*  
*Paris*

*10:00 p.m.*

The door exploded in a shower of glass.

Three black-masked bandits rushed in from the night.

Slinging their Uzis across his desk, they jammed steel gun barrels into his cheek, grinding his lips into his teeth. Jets of pain shot through his jaw. Violent shaking took possession of his body. Liquid soaked his pants—perhaps spilled pinot noir dripping from the desktop—or a bladder rendered useless by fear. He could not tell.

Jean-Claude la Trec, the great avocat of France, the man whose golden voice enraptured the media and earned him the title “the most magnificent lawyer in all of Europe,” cried out in a pitiful, helpless whine.

*“M’aider Dieu.”* God, help me.

“What is this?” A jarring punch bloodied his lip. “The great Jean-Claude la Trec, a self-avowed atheist, cries to God for help? Allah has nothing to do with this.” A sharp backhand bashed into his cheek. “We had a deal!”

“Who are you?”

“Does thirty million dollars say who we are?”

“But—”

“You demanded *thirty million* U.S. dollars to defend these pilots. You promised *victoire*, and one of them cuts a deal with the U.S. Navy!”

“That was not my idea—”

“Shut up!” A gun stock smashed his jaw. Sharp pain pounded the back of his skull.

“What information was compromised?”

“None. I assure you.”

“Liar!” The accents blended. French and Arabic.

“*S’il vous plaît.*” A slight burst of energy. “Nothing was compromised. *S’il vous plaît.*” Fighting for his life, his great advocacy skills flickered, then flamed. “They murdered one pilot before the trial ended. The other did not receive the death penalty.” His voice gained strength. “*S’il vous plaît.*”

“You promised victory!” a third voice cried.

“We did everything!”

“*Victoire!*”

“But the great Wells Levinson lost to Brewer. You never busted into his office with machine guns.”

“Silence!” A fist from the dark crushed his lower front teeth. Blood gushed. The overhead chandelier whirled, and he crashed to the floor. “We paid Levinson half what we paid you . . .”

A high-pitched band saw hummed in his ears. Voices faded in and out. He reached in his pants pocket, feeling for the number *trois* on his cell phone. The phone slipped out of his pocket and dropped onto the floor.

“... and *at least* Levinson’s clients were executed.” He referred to a U.S. Navy court-martial that had taken place in San Diego, involving the trial of three navy chaplains for treason. The three had been prosecuted by LCDR Zack Brewer, the famous Navy JAG officer, and defended by Wells Levinson, regarded as America’s preeminent defense attorney. All three were convicted and executed by the U.S. military.



Jeanette stood just outside the front of the old stone office building on rue Charles de Gaulle, hailing a taxi, when an electronically synthesized rendition of “La Marseilles” chirped from inside her purse.

*Jean-Claude’s final overture for the evening.*

She smiled at the thought, then waved off a slowing cab and reached for her cellular. The caller ID flashed a picture of her handsome, silver-haired employer.

"*Bonsoir*," she said in a soft voice.

"Of course they were executed!" An angry voice boomed through her cell phone. "Levinson's clients can no longer talk. But *your* client is in the hands of the Americans. Ready to betray our organization."

Jeanette looked over her shoulder at the light coming from the second-floor office window. From this angle on the street, she could see no one.

"This was not my idea." Jean-Claude's voice trembled. "I urged him not to talk. He was *your* recruit. Perhaps you should have been more selective when you recruited him."

"Shut up!" The sound of shattering glass pierced her eardrums. "Produce the file, and tell us where we can find the witch lawyer."

*Mon Dieu.*

"Please!" The thud of a punch and more shattering glass. "Lower left drawer ... The file ..."

"Pierre!"

*Bien sûr!*

The sound of rustling papers.

"Where's the witch, L'Enfant?"

"Who?"

A sharp thud was followed by a tortuous grunt. "Where is the traitor to Islam and to France who orchestrated this so-called plea bargain?"

*Run*, her mind commanded. But her legs froze.

*S'il vous plaît.* She is not here. She is not in France."

"Liar!" She heard a thud, fist against flesh. This was followed by a moan, then heavy, desperate breathing. "We saw her enter the building."

"She's gone." Jean-Claude wheezed heavily as if short of air. "Please."

"The file, Ramon! I have it!"

"You have the file. Please," Jean-Claude pleaded.

"Pierre." An Arab-accented voice spoke in French. "Please express the official gratitude of the French government and the Council of Ishmael for Monsieur la Trec's performance in the *Quasay* court-martial."

*Avec plaisir, monsieur.*"

The burst of machine-gun fire rattled her eardrums. She yanked the phone away.

*Dear Jesus.* This was her first prayer in years. Her heart hammered. She craned her neck, gazing up at the window. She brought the phone back to her ear. Cars whizzed by just a few meters away.

"Check him!"

“He’s dead.”

*Non. S’il vous plaît.*

“Take the file. Find L’Enfant!”

“Abdur.”

“What is it?”

“His cell phone!”

The connection dropped.

“Look! Down on the street. It is her!”

Jeannette quickly slipped off her high heels and sprinted down the sidewalk alongside rue Charles De Gaulle, toward the Arc de Triomphe. She ducked into the first dark alleyway and kept running.