

# CHAPTER ONE

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A few passengers glanced at Jak's tortured expression before he slinked low into seat 21, anxious for the train doors to close.

They gathered speed out of Antibes and he wiped away perspiration, taking care to avoid the purple-red wound over his right eye.

What happened to my wife?

He shaded the afternoon glare to search a vignette of fleeting images—a crowded car park blurring into splotches of grass and graffiti, and the rustic bastions of Fort Carré towering proudly above the headland.

Where is she?

The train swayed parallel to the coast, its rhythmical 'cli-clack', 'cli-clack' beating in time with his pounding heart and shaking hands.

The sun's rays gathered into a fiery orb that sank abruptly into the tranquil Mediterranean, followed by tangerine streaks across the bay. He watched spellbound until the numbing fear that had stalked him all day subsided. Taking a deep breath, he closed his swollen eyes and dozed.

"Excuse me Monsieur, is this seat taken?"

Jak bolted upright.

"No," he replied, feeling embarrassed and avoiding any further conversation by gazing back out the window—to be confronted by his own reflection.

Damn, I haven't shaved.

But the elegant stranger sitting opposite in seat 22 cared little about his appearance.

"Grazie," she replied, placing a purple Longchamp bag beside her and turning the pages of a fashion magazine.

This is a sophisticated lady, but I'm in too much of a mess to talk to her. She will think I'm a tramp.

To his surprise, she placed the magazine on the table between them, taking time to review the cover before extending her hand.

"Forgive me. I forgot to introduce myself. My name is Sasha."

Jak responded, impressed by the softness of her red lambskin gloves and engaging smile.

"I'm Jak."

"Pleased to meet you. Were you staying in Antibes?" she enquired.

"I was just there for the day."

"Did you enjoy it?"

"Oh, it's charming I guess." But his thoughts fled elsewhere, searching for answers. His head slumped to read the unfolded note in his hand.

I would recognize my wife's handwriting anywhere. Who wrote this lie?

He crushed the paper as the truth exploded on him.