

Mel shivered. A cold breeze drifted over her bare backside. *Dieu*, the window must be open. Stupid in late November in London. But windows had been the last things on Mel's mind last night.

Still drugged with sleep, she stretched out her hand towards Gérard's face. His eyes were closed, the lashes resting on his pale cheeks. Too much time indoors, Mel thought and smiled. In his early morning relaxed state, Gérard looked more like a boy of seventeen than a man of thirty-seven.

Her eyelids were so heavy. She closed them. After a few seconds, she realised she wasn't tired, just thick-headed. Opening her eyes again, she blinked hard then tugged on the duvet to cover them both against the too fresh air, but it was trapped under Gérard's body. Never mind, she could think of a much more pleasurable way to warm up than hiding under the bedclothes. She stroked his skin with the tips of her fingers sliding over the fine brown hairs on his shoulder, then down his chest and over his stomach towards...

He didn't stir.

He was cold. Stone cold.

No.

Then the smell hit her.

She sat up. The world spun around her. She shot her hand out onto the mattress to steady herself, then knelt beside him. Not wanting to, but knowing she had to, she stretched out her hand, two fingers close together, for the side of his throat. Nothing. She pressed harder, desperate for a sign. But he was too still and too pale. And the blue lips...

*Dieu*, no. Not her Gérard. Not clever, witty, vibrant Gérard. He couldn't be gone. But she'd confirmed enough dead bodies during her military life, the last only three weeks ago in a blazing desert wadi in Africa. She sat back, shivered and pressed the palms of her hands into her eye sockets. The sourness ran up her gullet. Clamping her hand over her mouth, she stumbled to the bathroom and threw up in the pan.

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Ambulance. She must call an ambulance.

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She sat on the toilet seat and gulped down water from the plastic tooth mug. In the bedroom, the green-uniformed man and woman were examining Gérard. Through the gap of the almost closed door, Mel could hear them mumbling to each other. After a few minutes, they stopped talking. They were making a call, giving the hotel name.

The woman came into the bathroom. Her calm face didn't seem as sympathetic as it had been earlier.

'What is it?' Mel asked.

'We've had to call the police. We've found something and there are marks on the deceased's body.'

'What? Let me see!' Mel said and leapt up.

The woman held out her plastic-gloved hand.

'No, stay here, and don't wash. The police will want to talk to you.'

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'What sort of a name is Mellysand?'

She clutched the bathrobe tighter and braced her legs to steady her balance. This was surreal. Gérard was dead and they suspected her. Why? How was she supposed to have done it? She shook her head which seemed full of mush thumping to escape.

'It's pronounced "Mél-i-send-uh",' she said. 'And it's the name I was given by my parents.'

'Not very English, is it?'

*Le bon Dieu* save me from these parochial Brits, she thought. And this cop was even worse than most. He didn't look like one either in his jeans, tan leather jacket, unshaven and with a single earring. But his warrant card looked genuine, and the two uniformed police outside had let him in.

'You got any ID?' he barked.

Mel pulled a pale turquoise and blue card with her photo and signature out of her purse and offered it to him.

'French?' He frowned, flicked it over to the other side, then back. 'You don't sound very French.'

'That's where I was born. My mother is English.'

'What are you doing here?'

'Visiting friends and doing some shopping.'

'I'll need a list of those friends and dates.'

'Why? Am I under suspicion?'

The cop looked down at the bed, duvet pulled back, bottom sheet stained by body fluids.

'When there's a dead man in your bed and you were presumably the last person to see him alive, let's say you're at least a person of interest.'