

CHAPTER ONE

Éygalières, Provence

“You’re looking particularly elegant this evening, Kick,” Thomas said as we turned onto the road from Éygalières to St. Rémy on our way to a dinner party at the Balfours’ farm in Les Baux. “Very calm. Serene, in fact.”

“What a lovely compliment,” I smiled over at my husband. “You know, in the last few months, since we got home from that extraordinary trip to Switzerland and I retired for good, I have been feeling secure. It’s silly, I know, because the statute on my crimes doesn’t expire for who knows how many years and, to my knowledge, Interpol hasn’t suspended the international dragnet for me.”

“No. But at least I can keep you out of their sights.”

“And, there isn’t a bounty.”

Thomas laughed. “No. No bounty. And listen, if worse came to worst, and you were somehow identified and apprehended, you’ve done such outstanding service to the crown over the past couple of years, I’m sure Her Majesty’s courts would look upon you with compassion.”

“Oh, wonderful – you mean only ten years’ hard labor instead of life?”

“Something like that,” Thomas teased. “But I’ll come visit you every day.” He turned serious. “Kick, believe me, you’re in no danger. I’d tell you if

you were. I love seeing a contented smile on your face – you’ve earned a little peace in your life, a little serenity. Enjoy it.”

Maybe Thomas was right. Maybe it was time for me to let up a bit, move down from my normal high state of alert. But I’ve never been relaxed or complacent – after all, you don’t get to be the most elusive and successful jewel thief in history by being, to use the vernacular, laid-back. My journey from an impoverished girl born to a destitute mother on the fringes of the Oklahoma oil fields to the sunlit existence of a millionairess well-settled in the legendary lavender fields of Provence had been arduous, dangerous and meticulously planned.

And when I decided it was time to leave the game, I simply disappeared and immersed myself in the luxury gleaned from decades of solitary, anonymous work. I vanished into the gauzy fairy tale world of the super rich who spend their days bathed in golden light and Premier Cru Burgundy. And, as if that weren’t enough, a short time after returning to my Provencale farmhouse hideout, La Petite Pomme, I crowned my notorious career by becoming the wife of Sir Thomas Curtis, Scotland Yard’s revered Inspector Emeritus. So now, when I was called to duty – occasional assignments that I accepted reluctantly – I worked for the good guys, on the side of the law.

Some may say I’m lucky – they’d be wrong. I don’t believe in luck and I didn’t get where I am by wishing it so. I’ve always believed in cautious,

considered, controlled advancement, leaving as little as possible to life's inevitable vagaries. But it was true, I had earned time off for good behavior. Maybe I would lighten up a bit.

I leaned back and watched the beautiful countryside fly by, a slight smile played about my lips. "If you want to know, Thomas, sometimes I do feel as though I've quite swallowed the proverbial canary," I laughed.

What a silly, stupid thing to say.

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