

An Evening in Paris

November 2015

IT WAS WARM for mid-November. They sat on the terrace of a little restaurant. Anyplace in France, she said, how wonderful the food, the delicious wine, the gentle harmony of others there for love, food, friendship, ideas, freedom, the joys of life.

They had been through the wars together, fallen in love amid the hail of bullets and thud of explosions in cities drenched with blood. Knowing, as the cliché put it, any moment could be their last.

It gave an intensity to love, that this person dearer to you than life itself could be extinguished at any instant. Someone you cherished so completely, composed of neurons, cells, muscles, bone, tissue and memories, could be blown apart, riddled with bullets, any second.

“I love you so much,” she said. “But I think I love you even more in Paris.”

“France does that to us all. What was it Hemingway said –”

“Paris is a moveable feast.”

“Yes, and we will happily feast, in whatever life brings us.”

“As you’ve said, to follow the path with heart?”

“Yes.” He caressed the back of her hand. “For us, the wars are over.”

“For us the wars will never be over. You know that.”

He looked out on the quiet street. “Let’s take time out. Then we decide.”

“Decide what?”

“Whether we keep fighting or run for cover.” He smiled at the thought. Not once in all these years had he ever run for cover. Nor had she.

“Your buddy Owen said that people like us, once we’re in, we can never get out.”

“Look where it got him. You want that?” Again he checked the street. It was automatic, this watchfulness. On the edge of consciousness.

He scanned the passing pedestrians – happy couples hand in hand, an old man with a wispy beard, a little girl walking a black poodle, an ancient limping Chinese woman, a kid on a skateboard.

But it worried him, this something; he wished he'd brought a sidearm, but Home Office didn't want you carrying one here. And everything seemed so peaceful. He sipped his wine, the raw ancient roots of Provence...

A black Seat slowed as it came down the street. A grinning face full of hatred, an AK barrel aiming at them out its window, a blasting muzzle as he leaped across the table knocking her to the sidewalk and covered her with his body amid the hideous twanging hammer of bullets and smashing glass and screams and clatter of chairs and tables crashing and the howl of the Kalashnikov and awful whap of bullets into flesh as people tumbled crying.

It couldn't be, this horror, he'd left it all behind.