

BEYOND A
THOUSAND
WORDS



A Novel

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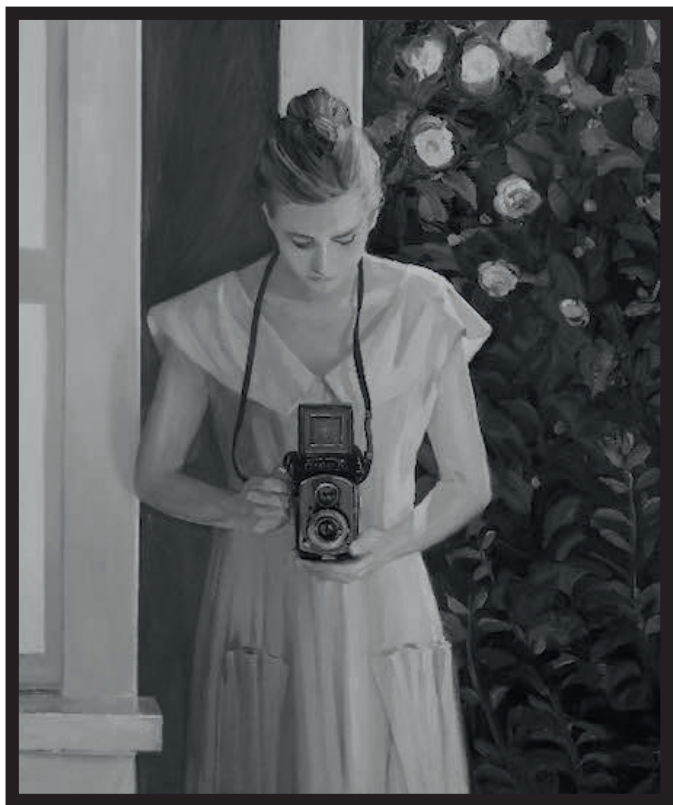


FOR PATTIE

IN MEMORY OF GUSSIE

PART ONE





CHAPTER ONE

Hanoi 1954

Drawn by rumors of expatriates abandoning the city, a mid-morning crowd gathered in front of the convent. Two elderly French nuns sat in the cab of the truck. Rosary beads dangled from weathered fingers as the women, beseeching safe passage, droned prayers at the windshield.

A fair-haired priest handed them a canteen through the passenger window. As Coty neared the truck, she guessed he was taller than she and about her age—maybe already beyond thirty. He was the first peer she had encountered in the North. The priest gestured a single-handed blessing. With a slight bow, he stepped back, taking his leave of the nuns.

The flatbed was stacked with burlap bags of rice that reached to the roof of the cab. Cigarette smoke clouded the throng and wafted up the cargo. The smell of gasoline led Coty to a kaleidoscopic puddle underneath the vehicle. She thought of her grandfather's warning as she proceeded to the only passage available "under the circumstances," as he often said.

Coty tossed her satchel onto the floor's emptied space, an opening cleared to accommodate her and the priest. Gripping the lanyard in one hand, she shifted the camera draped around her neck and then felt for a hold along the edge of the nearest sack. With the sole of her sandal set on top of the rear tire and a

knee bent tight to her body, she pulled with her arm and took one step up.

She now held the advantage of altitude, and, as he rounded the truck, she tracked the priest's bald spot—a patch no larger than the starched white square centered in his black collar. Without glancing at her, he stalled at the lowered tailgate to consider the challenge. In two failed attempts, he displayed far less athleticism than his predecessor. On his third try, he slid a knee atop the flattened tailgate and drew his pant leg through the grime as he wriggled.

The priest stood, brushing himself as he straightened. He might have fared better had the tailgate been raised, she thought. Backing in, he joined the white-haired American in the two-person slot carved out for their escape—standing room only.

“*Je suis* Coty Fine,” she said, acknowledging the priest and their shared predicament.

Ignoring her, he searched among those milling in the street. Lush from life in the damp hotbox of Vietnam, tree branches drooped leaves near the cargo. Coty studied his profile as the limbs swayed and their shadows swept across the priest's unblemished skin, which would be exposed to the sun as they rode to the harbor in Haiphong. She shrugged, grabbed her coarse braid, rolled the bundle of premature white curls under her conical leaf hat, and secured the *nón lá*'s chinstrap for the ride.

A harried man shoved the tailgate into position with a *clang*. In slapping sandals, he hustled to the cab, yanked the driver's door open, and scrambled up behind the steering wheel. The vibrating exhaust pipe spewed gray smoke that matched the faded paint of the truck's body. The engine settled into its idle. The driver bullied the gearshift and released the clutch under his sandal, and the truck lurched.

“*Je suis* Père Sabatier,” the priest said, without averting his focus.

The driver shifted gears. When the truck accelerated, Coty

grasped at burlap corners. Sabatier gazed out at those who had assembled to gawk or bid farewell. Ever the photographer, she tracked his vision to a young nun, dressed in the white-linen habit of her order.

“*Enchantée*, Père Sabatier. I wanted to stay in Hanoi. It appears that you had more reason than I,” she said in fluent French, as she brought the camera to her eye.

The nun’s hand stopped waving and dropped, leaden, to her side. The shutter clicked. Sabatier craned his neck until the truck turned at the street corner and the convent disappeared.

The sun, having tunneled through the city’s haze, grilled the flatbed. Merciful trees thinned out as they entered the thoroughfare, which bifurcated the business district adjacent to the convent’s neighborhood. Ahead, Coty saw a man on a bicycle, ferrying a load of broad grass blades, the raw stock used for caning. He stood on the pedals to power the bike up the rising grade. The rider’s hair flopped in cadence with the cane, which hung sideways as wide as the bike was long. Head down, he seemed to be drifting too close to the truck’s spinning wheels. Coty held her breath when she lost sight of the bike.

Bang!

She snatched the lanyard to reel in her camera. The truck rolled on, and as she turned back to search its wake, the bicycle reappeared alongside the tailgate. When the man lifted his head, the camera’s eye blinked.

The rider tugged on the handlebars and twisted his torso for leverage as he pressed down on the pedals. Cresting the hill, he found the seat of the bike and his facial muscles relaxed. With its pedals at rest, the bicycle coasted down the incline and faded to the rear.

Coty freed the camera to bounce off her flat chest as the truck rattled. She spread her feet farther apart, before reaching to adjust her *nón lá* with both hands. The driver found third gear with a grind. The truck pitched. Off-balance, Coty slammed

against the priest's side. Her camera swung on its lanyard, clipping him in the ribs. She grabbed the box with one hand and with the other felt for a handle among the cargo. Her clumsy skid belied her usual grace, an elegance earned over years of studying ballet and modern dance.

"We must brace ourselves, *madame*. The road will be even less smooth in the countryside," he said, as if scolding his mother.

"*Madame*?" *Seriously?* she thought, suspecting her white tresses had, once again, led a stranger to the wrong conclusion. Miffed, not embarrassed, Coty shook her shoulders to reset her posture. The adjustment stretched her closer to the height of the priest, who, like she, towered over locals. When he came face-to-face with his traveling companion, his mouth gaped and he recoiled. Coty reveled in Sabatier's befuddlement as he combed her face for clues that refuted the snowy hair of a *grande dame*.

She followed his gaze to her hand, where freckles on smooth skin gleamed beneath her sweat. The truck slowed, and Sabatier relaxed his grip. She heard grinding at the clutch's release as the driver downshifted into second gear. Exiting the curve, he found third gear again and accelerated. The priest stumbled, crashing against the wall of burlap bags. His knees buckled, and he lunged to embrace the closest bundle.

"*Oui, Père*. I'll try to be careful. *Merci*," she said. *Off to a good start*, Coty mused, regretful of slicing at a stranger with her New Yorker's edge. She smiled, attempting to soften her rebuff of Sabatier's lecture. Voicing a *humph*, he turned away.

Several blocks beyond the business district, industrial buildings grew sparse as city gave way to countryside. A lone paddy, encroached on by urban sprawl, hinted that the holdouts had lost their farming neighbors. Sparkles surrounded the ankles of a beast plodding in the muck—the first water buffalo Coty had seen on the journey.

For weeks, the dirt road had come under siege by traffic and

afternoon rain showers. The truck's right front tire splashed into a shallow pothole with an opening as wide as the mouth of a wheelbarrow. When the vehicle tilted to the right, Coty heard the underbody scraping against the puddle's edge. The rig surged up and out, tossing the two standing passengers between the bundles. After slamming into each other, they spun away to clutch separate sacks.

Coty laughed when the cleric turned, and they stood as close as dance partners. He seemed to puzzle over her unwrinkled face. Recalling the nun outside the convent, Coty guessed that Sabatier was a man gnawing at the bindings of his vows.

Few of her intimates would she have described as religious people. Since she had reached adulthood, she had entered synagogues only under duress from her family. A gentile friend's wedding or child's baptism had, on such occasions, drawn her into a Christian church. Coty reserved the cathedrals of Europe for appreciation of art and architecture, as well as for contemplating the crypts of robed perpetrators of unspeakable sins, laid to rest alongside the sainted beneath gilded halls. She had sought out the churches in Hanoi for their stony coolness, elsewhere elusive in the city's oppressive heat.

Sabatier appeared drawn, in need of water. Chivalry had wrought his dehydration soon after he handed the nuns his canteen. Beads of sweat slid onto his forearms from underneath short shirtsleeves of black linen. Without sanctuary from the relentless sun, he tugged on his Roman collar as if he might entice a breeze.

"We'll share, Père," Coty said, as she offered her water.

The lanky priest bowed with gratitude. As he gulped, his Adam's apple bobbed beneath pale skin. Even the backs of his fists were not tanned, much less leathered by constant baking. Coty's deduction was simple: when executing his pastoral duties, the shepherd had enjoyed the luxury of shade.

The burlap bags rocked side to side and bled the rice thresh-

er's dust, which mixed with the swirling air into funnels that danced atop the worn wooden floor. Coty tucked her canteen between two sacks, and the pair rode in silence as the sun raged down.

Sabatier muttered frustration with his handkerchief as he fought to achieve coverage of his exposed fair skin. Under a sun that shifted at each turn of the steering wheel, the jostling ride confounded the priest's attempts. An impossible task, Coty thought, cloaking his sun-scorched ears and neck with that cotton swatch while trying to shield the disk of bare skin at the crest of his skull.

The truck swayed. When they grabbed for handles, his kerchief sailed out above their wake. When she turned to commiserate, the priest's forehead was pinned to the burlap above his grip. Bordered by wafting strands of sandy-blond hair, the exposed skin of his bald spot had been seared crimson.

At the edge of the city, she shouted choppy instructions to the driver in her novice Vietnamese. He pulled the truck over, slowing in front of roadside stands that were set farther apart than had been the stalls packed along the streets of Hanoi. Coty spotted caned baskets hanging in the shade—their still-fresh leaves a moist, dark green. She yelled for him to stop.

An old woman looked up with the expression of a vendor who had not expected the customers she craved. Pausing between her roles of weaver and seller, she fanned herself with the leaves of her craft.

Coty stood. Elbows locked, she leaned over the back of the truck with the heels of her hands pressing down on the top of the tailgate. She called out a price she knew to be high for a sale far from the center of the city. The woman ceased her fanning mid-stroke and dropped the leaf stock. Beaming, the weaver-turned-saleswoman stepped out from the shade with a fresh hat.

The driver pulled the truck onto the road and stomped on the accelerator. Sabatier accepted the *nón lá* from Coty. He

rocked in a clumsy stance while tying the chin strap under his jaw.

“*Merci beaucoup*. Very kind, *mademoiselle*. I offer my simple blessing in exchange.”

Coty mimed her proposal to flip a sack down lengthwise, which would provide a bench with less than one-meter clearance between the raised tailgate and the end of the overturned bundle. “If you help me tip this one over, we can sit.”

After they had dropped the sack into place, Sabatier hesitated. “*Mademoiselle*, we’ll have to sit single file, *non?*”

True to her pattern, she chose not to restrain her tongue. “*Oui*. That’s obvious.”

The duo agreed to alternate positions whenever muscle cramps overwhelmed the person in the rear. The priest removed his sandals, straddled their improvised seat, and put his back to the cab. He slithered his bare feet down into the seams between the burlap bags.

Compounded by the effects of his sedentary profession, a tightness typical of male musculature must have caused Sabatier immediate discomfort. He was squirming when Coty sat down. She wriggled backward in between his legs and planted her feet flat on the floor.

Slender, tanned arms rose, seeking the centered sun. She wiggled her fingers, her shoulder blades slid, and the muscles of her back relaxed. She had not had time to cycle through her morning stretching routine before she rushed to the convent. As she brought her hands down to rest on her thighs, Sabatier shifted his body. Coty suspected she would spend far more time staring into the back of his paddy hat than he would looking over hers.

Paddies glistened. The sweet rot of vegetation diluted the exhaust fumes from dissipating city traffic. The truck picked up speed, turning their ride on the country road into a hammering jitter. Less than two kilometers later, she felt a hand on her shoulder and heard, “*Je suis désolé, mademoiselle.*”

After swapping places, they rode for more than an hour. Coty shifted her hips, which might have triggered his guilt. Sabatier's hand found her knee, and, with a sheepish twist, he invited her to take his spot. When she slid past him, she wondered if it would be worth the effort.

Minutes into her latest respite, Sabatier pulled his bare feet from the tight slots and stood in a wobble atop their crude bench. He attempted to brace himself by pressing his arms out, hands flat against the cargo.

The truck reeled and bounced. Again, he lost his balance. While clutching for a burlap edge at his side, he fought for solid footing. Coty thought he might pitch over her and crash in the dirt. The teetering priest's safety aside, she did not want to catch a knee in the back of her head.

"Let's change seats, Père. You don't have to stand."

Concrete buildings with stairwells vining up exterior walls gave way to clusters of single-story shacks. Slowing at the first village to avoid hitting livestock in the road, the truck backfired. Chickens stopped pecking and, with eyes stuck open, raised heads that jerked beaks at the truck. The birds ran about, kicking up dust and flapping wings that could not lift them from their terror.

Each successive village seemed smaller than and more distant from the last one. The monotony of traveling through cloned paddies was broken as they slowed to allow agitated chickens their protest. The occasional farmer, hunched over with pants rolled above calves, uncurled a bent spine to take stock of the rare interruption.

Hanoi was gone.

After relieving the priest, Coty rode in the back for another hour. Without intending to change seats, she squirmed to adjust her body. Sabatier, tapping her knee, signaled that he should move to the rear. Coty waved him off.

“I’ll stay in back.”

“*Non, mademoiselle*, I must take my turns, as brief as these might be,” he said, rising. He staggered, squeezed to her side, and wedged one of his feet behind her back, as if to pry her into compliance.

She capitulated, inching toward the tailgate as the truck shook. Coty twisted and glanced up at the man, who was swaying. “I’m limber. Let me sit there.”

Without replying, he sent his chin up and his vision out over her head. Irritated by his obstinance, she turned back to the road. The truck bounced. Coty felt her braid slip from beneath her hat and unfurl. She resisted her habit of tucking it back under her *nón lá* so that her inherited trademark would stay hidden from the curious and off the linen blouse that protected her skin.

Mere minutes passed before Sabatier sat. The thick, snowy braid draped down her back, and near him, she grew hot. With a practiced twirl, she poked it under her hat, stinging his chin with the braid’s tip.

During previous stints behind her, the priest had immediately started to fidget. This time, he was still. Coty sensed him gawking and craned her neck to one side to catch a glimpse. Though Sabatier’s head was bowed as if in prayer, his eyes betrayed him. He was taking in her shape, she was convinced.

The driver found another pothole. The priest jerked when her hips swung, alternating with force, against the insides of his thighs.

“Do you need a break?” she asked.

“*Pardonnez-moi?*”

“I thought you were getting *uncomfortable*.”

“*Désolé, mademoiselle.*”

“It’s not a contest, Père. We’ll unwind our legs in Haiphong as we search for the ship to Saigon.”

“I wish that I might do more for you.”

“Well, there’s one thing: I don’t want to call you ‘Père.’ I’m

Jewish and find it awkward. And, to be literal, you're not anyone's *father*. Are you?"

"*Mademoiselle*, you Americans are most blunt. *Non*, I have no children."

The next question slipped from her lips like a sin. "That you know of?"

Sabatier cleared his throat and said, "Call me Laurent, if you wish."

With a sigh, she sealed their truce and left him to stare over the tailgate with his legs unfurled in the direction of a woman he had not wished to leave behind. Banter at rest, they rode wordless for several kilometers, before the driver pulled the truck to the side of the road. The engine stopped, and steam snuck out from under the hood. Dust swept over the open flatbed as the disturbed road resettled. Coty coughed and waved her hand in front of her face.

Not knowing how long she had slept with her forehead pinned in the valley between Sabatier's shoulders, she had awakened in pain, her paddy hat tilted up and back by the descent into sleep. Her hip joints were strained, and the squeeze of opposing sacks had narrowed the circulation in her feet to a dribble.

Doors swung open; driver and nuns exited the cab. He and the women stepped in opposite directions in search of privacy.

"*Pardonnez-moi*, Laurent," she said, tapping his shoulder. Neither hips nor feet were the source of her most urgent discomfort. "I must follow the nuns."

The truck's open hood angled above the engine. The driver was pouring water into the radiator when Coty returned to the tailgate. Sabatier stood in the shade of a banyan tree that was too far from the road to shelter the vehicle.

The driver slammed the hood down and, with worn canvas straps, secured the metal water canister back onto the sidewall. From behind the steering wheel, he sent out a blast of the horn that flushed birds from their hiding and signaled the priest to return to his contortions.

Coty frowned at Sabatier as he approached. When he neared, she said, "I think I fell asleep on your back."

She raised one foot above her waist, hooked her ankle atop the truck's rear bumper, and stretched with slow pleasure. Exhaling a deliberate breath, she lowered her foot back to the dirt road. As she rotated her body to facilitate unwinding the opposite side, the horn sounded.

"After you, *mademoiselle*."

With a start, she faced him and asked, "Laurent, do you remember my name?"

"*Pardonnez-moi?*"

"Coty," she said, setting her fingers to work on the cargo. A burlap bag offered its rounded corner as purchase. When her feet found the floor of the flatbed, she turned and looked down. Sabatier's eyes were locked on where she had secured her foothold. He seemed to be replaying her ascent, placing his hands where she had gripped. The muscles of his neck grew taut as he pulled himself up.

Sabatier stood upright. He found the white patch at his throat and tugged. "Is Coty your given name?"

"*Non*, Laurent. My name is Rachel."

He motioned that he would assume the cramped position.

"My middle name is Côte. Named for Jules Côte, my grandfather's boyhood friend, born in France, but he lived in New York since he was a baby. Uncle Jules called me his little Coty, and the name stuck."

"Did Monsieur Côte teach you to speak such flawless French?"

She leaned to one side so he could slide behind her. As he passed, she said, "He knew that his surname meant 'coast.' Beyond that, he didn't speak many words that you couldn't find on a menu. Uncle Jules was more of a New Yorker than the mayor."

In less than three kilometers, Sabatier grabbed the bundles to pull himself up. He stood, rocking. Unable to scooch out of reach of the man's knees, she wished he would sit.

Raising his voice, he shouted down at the tip of her paddy hat. "Your lovely French, Mademoiselle Coty. Where did you study?"

"Paris. I lived there before Hanoi."

The truck's right front tire dropped into another pothole. The jostled nuns shrieked in the cab, and a knee found Coty's skull. Before the driver ground the transmission into a lower gear, she heard ringing in her head.

"Laurent, get down!"

Sabatier knelt. He flinched when Coty placed her hand on his shoulder to climb past.

"*Pardonnez-moi*, Coty. One more debt to add to my ledger with you."

The sun was low in the sky when the truck next pulled off the road. They had ridden single file, Coty wedged behind, for almost two hours. Steam rose above the roof of the cabin. The driver was wresting the water canister from the sidewall as Sabatier climbed over the tailgate.

After relieving themselves, Coty and the nuns returned to find Sabatier at the truck. Standing in the dirt road, he pointed to ready shade a few yards away. They walked to a stand of banyan trees, where the two women of the cloth huddled together, clutching their rosary beads. When the priest stepped under a branch of the tree Coty had selected, she took the gesture as an invitation.

"Laurent, tell me something," she said, as she leaned against the tree trunk. "Why did you leave Hanoi?"

"My bishop insisted, *mademoiselle*. Too dangerous, he told me. I had no choice."

"*Non?*"

"Coty, I'm a priest and must subordinate to my superiors."

"You could've relinquished your position, *non?*"

He fidgeted with his collar at the intimation that he might

have considered recanting his vows. Coty wanted to ask about the photogenic nun, a standout beauty among the gathered. Despite the priest's accumulating debts of gratitude, pressing him about the woman seemed aggressive, even by her standards. "Why did your bishop insist?"

Laurent spoke with a full throat. "The North's struggle for independence. It was best for the church."

No need for him to clarify. A scandal had not driven him away; it had been simple politics. Uncertainty about the future of the apostolic nunciature in Hanoi had abounded in prior weeks. Coty understood that with independence, dangers unfolded for Frenchmen left in the North—priests included. "Sorry, Laurent. I, too, wished to remain in Hanoi."

"Coty, you're a freelancer—no bosses. Why didn't you stay?"

Their roles reversed, Coty was glad she had not pressed him about the pretty nun. Not her business, she concluded, now that he was probing hers. "My grandfather asked me to get out of the North."

"Did he not support your coming to Vietnam?"

She blocked her forming scowl and said, "He's my biggest supporter."

"More than your parents?"

"*Oui*, Laurent. Without him, I would've been doomed to a life of drudgery."

The sunstruck priest seemed revived and alert—a trained confessor, curious and ready to listen. "Your grandfather didn't want you to marry and start a family?"

"He never asked me for anything, till the trouble in the North." Coty expounded on her grandfather Sheldon Fine, an indulgent benefactor who had encouraged her pursuit of art. Before she entered kindergarten, Zaydeh, not her preoccupied mother, had escorted Coty to the ballet studio, where, as the tallest child, she towered above tiny dancers. When she was an adolescent, he had given Coty her first camera, a gift that kindled a passion for photography.

“Do you have siblings?”

“I’ve two older brothers, who work with my father in the family business my grandfather started. As a young man, he was a jeweler. Today, the business is primarily real estate.”

“The family business—that’s the serious side of the man, *non?*”

Coty wanted to repay his knee to her head. “Zaydeh would tell you that the business is serious, of course, but it’s grown simple, straightforward, a steady enterprise. My father and uncles have run it for years.”

“He must be very proud of the men in your family.”

With a sigh, she continued, “By the end of the war, he had grown irritated with the men in our family. Their bickering over the business disgusted him.” The priest looked at her as if she spoke not French. How could she explain that Zaydeh was a frustrated artist who longed to look through a viewfinder? “Zaydeh’s an unusual man, Laurent. The business didn’t define him. It served him well, but he knew that his sons could keep it going without his daily oversight. After he handed them control, he turned wholeheartedly to amateur photography. I showed interest in his avocation and became his constant weekend companion. Together, we walked about Central Park with box cameras dangling above our navels.”

“And now you’re a professional photographer.” Kindness cloaked his face. She wondered if she had earlier mistaken him for arrogant. “How did you get here, to Vietnam?” he asked.

“I became intrigued by the work of Robert Doisneau.”

“Ah, Doisneau. After the Nazis thwarted the French army, he used his skills to forge passports and identification papers for the French Resistance.”

By the time Coty had arrived in Paris—years after the war—the German occupation, the Vichy compromise, and the French Resistance hung in the air as remnant scents, dissipated by the breeze of the Allied victory. The upheaval in Vietnam drew her eastward.

She smiled and said, “After the liberation, *Vogue* magazine sought to secure the eye of the genius, but the shots he had taken during the war compelled him to return to street photography. Those same harrowing photos drove me to capture the upheaval here in Vietnam.”

The nuns had left their tree and were heading back to the truck. Coty touched her camera. For how long had she told her story?

“Laurent, I’ve been a bore,” she said, as they strolled behind the waddling old women. When they reached the tailgate, he offered a hand, which the limber dancer did not need to step up onto the flatbed. She took it with gratitude.

Dusk faded into darkness. Soon they would stop at a village for the night. She would go with the nuns and he with the driver to separate huts, where they would sleep on floor mats as honored guests.

Their braking tires disturbed the dirt road. Billows of encircling dust ousted the rural smells of beast and vegetation. When the driver turned off the engine, its pings and pops accompanied a chorus of hidden insects.

Stars were out on the moonless night. Amid scant illumination from the twinkling above, Coty strained to see the faint outlines of the huts. The nearest shack seemed to be in motion—a water buffalo, she guessed, from the scent. It snorted, turned, and then lumbered away from the interlopers.

Laurent winced as he unfolded his legs and stood. He reached to retrieve her satchel.

“*Merci beaucoup*,” she said.

The bag clipped him when she tugged. He rubbed his arm as he rummaged for his worn leather rucksack, which had slipped between the cargo bags during the jostling ride.

“*Pardonnez-moi*, Laurent,” she muttered, wanting to get to her mat, where she could stretch out and dismiss her earlier lapses in judgment when she had droned on about Zaydeh.

“Coty, you wanted to photograph the conflict here,” he said. “Why did you let your grandfather dictate your retreat?”

Coty jumped down and waited for him to follow. When they stood face-to-face, she said, “Zaydeh didn’t *dictate*, Laurent. He grew afraid. It wasn’t a demand, but a request.” Grasping the shoulder straps of her camera and satchel, Coty pivoted, drawn by the voices of the French nuns.

“Because he was afraid, you sacrificed your passion?”

“As I told you, he asked; he didn’t dictate. Can you say the same of your bishop?”

“I trust that God guides the men who guide me.”

Obscured by darkness, the ground felt uneven as they walked. A lantern’s glow slipped from the nuns’ hut. She responded as they walked into the light. “I sense, Laurent, that you’re not as certain as your words.”

“Ah, Mademoiselle Coty—the mystery of faith. Not wise to question such a generous gift,” he said.

Behind them, she heard the knocking engine quiet as it cooled. Coty realized the priest had no answers beyond divine enigma. “Laurent, I don’t have your ‘gift.’”

She waited for a reaction. He accommodated with a telltale smirk that seemed to curl from superiority, his smugness portending one of Christianity’s seven deadly sins. Any well-trained cleric would cite pride as the first vice to enter a man’s heart and the last to leave.

Zaydeh would have told her not to waste any more time debating with a closed mind. She let it drop. When they arrived at the hut where the French women chattered, the priest seemed to relish her newfound reticence, as if he were gloating that she had slipped through the door of doubt, which channeled lost souls into the clutches of proselytizers.

“I’ll pray that you, too, will be granted his gift, *mademoiselle*.”