

THE LOST SYMPHONY

Jack Rogan Mysteries Series Book 6

Gabriel Farago

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Amber Safe, Paris Ritz: 6 February 2017

Anielka looked impatiently at Zuzanna. It was almost time to go. An excited Aubert had asked her to meet him at the Ritz at eleven pm. He had hinted he had some good news. Anielka had changed her outfit twice already until, finally satisfied, she had chosen a creation by Tuomas Merikoski. His Paris-based Finnish label, Aalto, appealed to her because it combined Scandinavian minimalism with Parisian nonchalance. Raw, direct, sophisticated. But most important of all, the outfit reflected her mood and expressed exactly how she felt that night: mysterious and dangerous, like midsummer nights in the forests of Finland with echoes of a violent, pagan past ...

Zuzanna adjusted Anielka's hair. 'Here, let me look at you,' she said and stepped back. 'Perfect, especially the dark lipstick; like blood. Now, remember what I told you. We have to move quickly here. You will have to improvise. The best outcome would be if you could somehow arrange access to the safe for Emile while you are with Aubert in the Amber Safe tonight. Emile would only need a few minutes to open the security box. Celine was a master at doing things like this,' she added and watched Anielka carefully. She noticed the mention of Celine's name had its desired effect. Pleased with the reaction, Zuzanna was sure that Anielka would try to live up to expectations at all cost.

'And what am I supposed to do with Aubert?' asked Anielka.

'Drug him. One of the pills I gave you stirred into his drink should do it quickly.'

'And then what?'

'You call me and Emile will make his way to the safe in the basement. We've already had a trial run. He knows exactly where to find the Amber Safe and how to get to it unnoticed. Don't forget, he's a pro. He knows how to blend in and improvise.'

'I'll do what I can,' said Anielka and reached for her tiny designer handbag.

'I know you will,' said Zuzanna and kissed Anielka gently on the cheek, careful not to disturb her makeup. 'I will be waiting for your call.'

Looking like a fashion queen, Anielka stepped out of the taxi, her long legs showing off her wide-legged black pants, glossy black, embroidered jacket, red scarf and shiny red

stilettos. With her long blonde hair carefully dishevelled to give her a sultry, straight-out-of-the-bedroom look, she once again turned heads as soon as she entered the lobby, like a visual magnet for the curious, always on the lookout for glamour.

Aubert's heart missed a beat when he saw Anielka come towards him, smiling alluringly. *She looks completely different*, he thought, as he remembered their passionate encounter in the Amber Safe two days earlier. *Magnifique!*

'You look ravishing,' said Aubert. 'Drink?'

'Absolutely.'

'I have a table waiting for us in the Bar Vendôme; come.'

As soon as they were seated, Aubert ordered champagne.

'I haven't been able to get the Amber Safe out of my mind,' said Anielka. 'It seems to have cast a spell over me.'

'Oh? In what way,' said Aubert, raising an eyebrow.

'Difficult to tell. Perhaps it wasn't the room as such, but something else ...' said Anielka. She reached under the table and walked the tips of her fingers gently up Aubert's thigh.

'You think so?'

'Not sure, but there's a way to find out, don't you think?'

'Could be exhausting,' said Aubert, trying to contain his excitement. 'I spoke to the Board, and ...'

Before Aubert could complete the sentence, Anielka stopped him by putting a finger on his lips. 'Not here,' she whispered. 'Tell me later. In the safe ... But first, let's have some champagne.'

Half an hour later, Aubert and Anielka made their way discreetly down to the basement.

'Are there security cameras down here?' asked Anielka as they stepped out of the lift.

'No. Why do you ask?' said Aubert, surprised.

'Because of this,' said Anielka. She stopped, put her arms around Aubert's neck and kissed him passionately on the mouth.

'No-one really comes down here,' whispered Aubert.

'Only us; perfect,' said Anielka, ticking off the first part of her assignment. Then she kissed Aubert again, took him by the hand and pulled him towards the Amber Safe.

'No champagne?' said Anielka, pointing to the safe door at the end of the deserted

corridor. ‘You promised!’

‘Heads will roll,’ said Aubert, annoyed. ‘We’ll have some later ...’

Could be a problem, thought Anielka, her mind racing.

As soon as they were inside the safe, Aubert pushed Anielka towards the mirror and began to undress her, his hot breath fogging up the glass behind her head.

After that, there was no stopping him, but Anielka had lost all interest in sex and seduction. All she could think of was how to drug Aubert. Everything depended on that, but there was no champagne and no glass. As Aubert became more and more aroused, Anielka became more and more annoyed and began to resist. It was evident that Aubert had had a lot to drink that evening and he was becoming increasingly demanding and aggressive.

‘What’s wrong?’ he said, sensing Anielka’s change of mood. Instead of the passionate surprise encounter of the other day, he could sense reluctance. ‘Not what you expected?’

‘Nothing like that.’

‘Then what?’ said Aubert. ‘You want to know about the photoshoot, is that it? Is that what this is all about?’ he asked, becoming angry. ‘Are you trying to use me?’

‘Of course not. Louis, you are *bursting* me!’

Without saying another word, Aubert spun Anielka roughly around, pinned her against the mirror and attempted to enter her from behind.

‘*No!* Not that way!’ shouted Anielka.

Ignoring her protests, Aubert didn’t stop. Suddenly, something inside Anielka snapped as she remembered a similar situation on her fourteenth birthday, the first time she had been raped by her uncle.

Instead of resisting, she let Aubert have his way. ‘See, I knew it,’ hissed Aubert, his hot breath reeking of alcohol, tickling her ear. ‘You love it, don’t you, you slut?’

Taking a deep breath, Anielka searched for her handbag on the table next to her with her left hand. She found the bag and pressed the clip at the top. The bag opened and Anielka reached inside, the touch of cold steel calming her. Then she gripped the small but lethal switchblade knife – a Schrade Viper – and activated the assisted opening mechanism by pressing a button. Almost instantly, the razor-sharp spear-point blade leaped from its cover.

As Aubert loosened his grip, groaning and breathing heavily, Anielka raised her hand

holding the knife and stabbed him in the side, penetrating his liver. Feeling excruciating pain, Aubert let go of Anielka and looked down, blood gushing from the deep wound.

‘You cut me, you bitch?’ he stammered and pressed his hands against the wound to stem the blood flow. As he turned away, Anielka cut his throat from behind with one clean stroke from right to left and stepped back as Aubert fell to his knees. She walked around to face him, careful to avoid stepping in his blood. He stared up at Anielka with glassy eyes, surprise and disbelief contorting his face. Then, making a gurgling sound as blood trickled down his chest, Aubert fell forward and his whole body began to convulse as he lay dying on the floor, his blood staining the Persian carpet.

Anielka bent down and calmly wiped the blade of her knife on Aubert’s trousers lying next to him on the floor, and slipped the knife back into her handbag. Then she quickly dressed, reached for her phone and called Zuzanna.

******* End of Chapter Excerpt *******

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