

19TH ARRONDISSEMENT PARIS, FRANCE

The sound of breaking glass disrupted the quiet of the neighborhood. A dog barked at the sudden disruption, but a mumbled curse from its slumbering owner quickly silenced it and the only noise was from the cars swirling along the Boulevard Périphérique just beyond the Arrondissement.

“Vous m'a promis de bonbons,” the girl whined. In her late teens with tangled and matted hair, she wore a leather jacket over a faded The Circus Starring Britney Spears concert t-shirt. The knees of her jeans had worn through and her black Sketchers were covered in mud. She rubbed her arms, not to warm them against the cold, but to suppress the itches from the lines of needle marks that ran up the veins.

“Bientôt, ma chère,” the man in his twenties beside replied in a soothing voice, rubbing her shoulders. Dressed in a black leather motorcycle jacket and boots with camouflage uniform pants, he looked like your average street thug. Like his girlfriend, he was a heroin addict.

He turned to the person working the lock on the door. “Dépêche-toi, Ancel!” he hissed, urging him to work faster.

“Presque il,” Ancel replied, calmly. The oldest, he dressed for a life on the street. He'd chosen this pharmacy to rob because it was in a mostly commercial area and the floors above housed offices, not the residence of the owner. This would hopefully prevent a quick police response and allow them time to find the opiates.

“Succès, Gauvain!” Ancel exclaimed, wrenching open the door in a squeal of corroded metal hinges.

“Bien jouer,” Gauvain congratulated, slapping Ancel on the back. He turned to the girl.

“Promesse tenue, Rosine.”

Rosine hugged Gauvain, smashing her lips into his.

The three rushed inside and started rummaging for the treasure.

Because the owners of the pharmacy did not live over their store, they had equipped it with an alarm that should have activated the moment Ancel broke the glass and stuck his hand through the opening.

That it did not owed to the France Télécom van parked in the alley out back, though said vehicle did not originate from the motorpool at the head office in the 15th arrondissement across the city.

Inside, a team from the Directorate-General for External Security monitored the inside of the store, piggybacking off the alarm camera feeds that they had cut.

Ancel had been in and out of the French Criminal Justice System and informants with the National Police had tipped off the DGSE of the break-in this evening. They needed to test a new creation in the field, and a few drug addicts would not be missed.

In the back of the van, away from the surveillance equipment, an older man and a young girl sat. The girl wore the tan and purple uniform of a private collèè and looked to be around 12.

“Prêt?” the older man asked the young girl, who merely nodded her head. He turned to one of the men manning the surveillance equipment.

“Est-ce clair de procéder?” he asked and received a thumbs-up.

Returning his attention to the girl, he patted her on the head before opening the rear door of the van and releasing her into the night.

The girl’s brown loafers hit the pavement with a sharp slap, the right one catching the edge of a puddle, splashing brackish water against her white knee socks.

She adjusted the cuffs of her uniform blazer and confidently marched down the alley, around the corner and towards the entrance to the pharmacy. She reached the door and yanked it open, almost ripping it off the hinges.

"Qu'est-ce que c'est?" Gauvain asked, his head popping up from where he'd been trying to beat his way into the secured medicine cabinet where the morphine and other Controlled Substances were stored. He saw a small figure outlined in the door.

"Qui êtes-vous?" he challenged. Beside him, Ancel rose. On the other side of the pharmacy, Rosine turned from where she'd been looking at sunglasses.

"Je l'ai dit, qui vous êtes?" Gauvain repeated.

In response, the girl stuck her arms straight out at forty-five degrees to her torso. She flexed her forearms and two dull gray blades slid out, dropping into her hands.

"Qu'est-la?" Gauvain asked, surprised.

Like a mongoose on a cobra, the girl charged into the pharmacy, leaping over the counter that Gauvain and Ancel were behind. As she came down between them, she slashed Gauvain across the belly. The addict stared down dumbly as the lower part of his shirt flipped open, followed by his intestines spilling out like pink pasta. His legs gave out from under him and he slowly sank to the floor like an imploding high-rise.

Ancel didn't have time to scream before the girl stabbed upward with her other hand, the ceramic blade sliding cleanly into his neck and through his vertebrae. A quick twist of her arm and Ancel's head tumbled off his body.

Rosine slowly backed away from the carnage, chanting "non...non...non..." like a ward against evil. The girl walked to the end of the counter and approached, her uniform covered in gore, the splotches of arterial blood on her legs contrasting with the brilliant white of her socks.

Rosine's back impacted with a set of shelves. With nowhere to turn, she watched the girl calmly approach. Rosine noticed the girl's hazel eyes reflected the ambient light like a cat's.

The girl drew back her right hand and Rosine mouthed a silent prayer to her mother as she closed her eyes tight.

“Mon dieu,” the DGSE agents remarked as they watched over the pharmacy’s video system as the girl dispatched all three addicts in under sixty seconds.

There was a loud knock on the back door, causing everyone to involuntarily jump. The man who’d released the girl opened it and let her in.

“Laissez-nous sortir d’ici,” he ordered, and the driver turned over the engine and the van motored down the alley and out onto the main street.

“Bien fait, Noël,” the man told the girl. He draped a blanket over her shoulders.

“Merci, Christophe,” the girl replied, smiling up at him with bright, hazel eyes.

The van did not head for the adjoining 20th arrondissement and the Centre Administratif des Tourelles, headquarters for the DGSE. Instead, it drove in towards the center of the city and pulled into the central courtyard of a white stone building near the right bank of the River Seine.

Christophe and Noël exited the back of the van and entered the structure. They walked down a hallway and stopped at a door, Christophe touching his security card to the pad next to the door. There was the metallic click of a lock disengaging and Christophe pushed the door open, indicating for Noël to precede him. They entered a large open area consisting of metal desks with computer workstations on them, file cabinets, and other office equipment. A collection of large whiteboards, chalkboards and corkboards informally divided the area into smaller sections.

The two walked through the room and approached another door. Christophe ran his card over the reader and pushed it open. They entered another hallway, this one with four evenly spaced doors on each side. Christophe approached the second one on the right and unlocked it. Pushing open the door revealed a room with a bed, desk and chair, and wardrobe.

"Grab your pajamas and a change of underclothes," Christophe ordered and Noël slipped off her loafers, removed the holders for her blades and placed them and the weapons on the table, and secured the clothing items from the wardrobe. She then followed Christophe to the end of the hall and into a small bathroom with a tub and shower.

"Clean yourself up and change for bed. Place your uniform in the laundry bag and bring it with you. I'll be waiting in your room."

"Yes, Christophe," Noël acknowledged. He closed the door to give her privacy and Noël undressed, showered, and put on her pajamas. She padded back to her room and slipped under the covers.

"You did well today, Noël," he said, brushing back her bangs. Noël gave him a large smile and snuggled under the blankets. Christophe turned off the overhead light, leaving a small nightlight to provide

illumination.

Closing the door behind him, Christophe returned to the open office area and crossed to a row of offices. He knocked on one of the doors and opened the door when bid.

"How'd she do?" a well-dressed, but hard-looking man asked.

"Amazing, Bob. She eliminated three targets in under sixty seconds, though they weren't pretty kills," Christophe replied.

"Knife kills never are, but they are quiet," Bob replied.