

Long Lost

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PART ONE

Chapter 1

*“You don’t know her secret,” Win said to me.
“Should I?”
Win shrugged.
“It’s bad?” I asked.
“Very,” Win said.
“Then maybe I don’t want to know.”*

Two days before I learned the secret she’d kept buried for a decade—the seemingly personal secret that would not only devastate the two of us but change the world forever—Terese Collins called me at five AM, pushing me from one quasi-erotic dream into another. She simply said, “Come to Paris.”

I had not heard her voice in, what, seven years maybe, and the line had static and she didn’t bother with hello or any preamble. I stirred and said, “Terese? Where are you?”

“In a cozy hotel on the Left Bank called d’Aubusson.

You'll love it here. There's an Air France flight leaving tonight at seven."

I sat up. Terese Collins. Imagery flooded in—her Class-B-felony bikini, that private island, the sun-kissed beach, her gaze that could melt teeth, her Class-B-felony bikini.

It's worth mentioning the bikini twice.

"I can't," I said.

"Paris," she said.

"I know."

Nearly a decade ago we ran away to an island as two lost souls. I thought that we would never see each other again, but we did. A few years later, she helped save my son's life. And then, poof, she was gone without a trace—until now.

"Think about it," she went on. "The City of Lights. We could make love all night long."

I managed a swallow. "Sure, yeah, but what would we do during the day?"

"If I remember correctly, you'd probably need to rest."

"And vitamin E," I said, smiling in spite of myself. "I can't, Terese. I'm involved."

"With the 9/11 widow?"

I wondered how she knew. "Yeah."

"This wouldn't be about her."

"Sorry, but I think it would."

"Are you in love?" she asked.

"Would it matter if I said yes?"

"Not really."

I switched hands. "What's wrong, Terese?"

"Nothing's wrong. I want to spend a romantic, sensual, fantasy-filled weekend with you in Paris."

Another swallow. “I haven’t heard from you in, what, seven years?”

“Almost eight.”

“I called,” I said. “Repeatedly.”

“I know.”

“I left messages. I wrote letters. I tried to find you.”

“I know,” she said again.

There was silence. I don’t like silence.

“Terese?”

“When you needed me,” she said, “really needed me, I was there, wasn’t I?”

“Yes.”

“Come to Paris, Myron.”

“Just like that?”

“Yes.”

“Where have you been all this time?”

“I will tell you everything when you get here.”

“I can’t. I’m involved with someone.”

That damn silence again.

“Terese?”

“Do you remember when we met?”

It had been on the heels of the greatest disaster of my life. I guess the same was true for her. We had both been pushed into attending a charity event by well-meaning friends, and as soon as we saw each other, it was as if our mutual misery were magnetic. I’m not a big believer in the eyes being the windows of the soul. I’ve known too many psychos who could fool you to rely on such pseudoscience. But the sadness was so obvious in Terese’s eyes. It emanated from her entire being really, and that night, with my own life in ruins, I craved that.

Terese had a friend who owned a small Caribbean island not far from Aruba. We ran off that very night and told no one where we were going. We ended up spending three weeks there, making love, barely talking, vanishing and tearing into each other because there was nothing else.

“Of course I remember,” I said.

“We both had been crushed. We never talked about it. But we both knew.”

“Yes.”

“Whatever crushed you,” Terese said, “you were able to move past it. That’s natural. We recover. We get damaged and then we rebuild.”

“And you?”

“I couldn’t rebuild. I don’t even think I wanted to rebuild. I was shattered and maybe it was best to keep me that way.”

“I’m not sure I follow.”

Her voice was soft now. “I didn’t think—check that, I still don’t think—that I would like to see what my world would look like rebuilt. I don’t think I would like the result.”

“Terese?”

She didn’t reply.

“I want to help,” I said.

“Maybe you can’t,” she said. “Maybe there’s no point.”

More silence.

“Forget I called, Myron. Take care of yourself.”

And then she was gone.