

The Christmas Quest

Chapter 1

"Is there someone there who speaks English?" Will asked in frustration.

"My name is Jean Louis DeLac, and I am a speaker of English. How may I be of service?"

"Monsieur DuLac, this is Will MArtin, and I'm attempting to contact one of your employees... Gary Carr... I need to speak to him about an urgent, personal matter."

"Ah, yes... Gary Carr. One moment, please."

Will heard strains of elevator music through the phone as he was put on hold. As the music continued, Will drummed his fingers on the desktop. Because of the difference in time, he had come into the office early to make the call to Paris, and the early rays of the sun were just beginning to shine through the windows of Martin Real Estate.

Come On! This is costing a fortune, Will thought impatiently.

Finally, DuLac came back on the line. "Monsieur Martin, I'm afraid we have no one by that name working for us. I am truly sorry."

"Are you quite sure? I mean, I know for a fact he came to Paris to work for your firm nearly four years ago."

"Monsieur Martin, I am quite sure he does not work for us now, but he may have worked for us in the past. However, that will take me a few minutes to research. Would you prefer to hold or would you like me to call you back?"

Will thought for a moment. "Perhaps I could call you. It's a personal matter, and I don't want to cause you any problems or the cost of a transatlantic phone call."

"Of course, Monsieur Martin. Perhaps half an hour?"

"That would be fine. Thank you so much for your help."

"It is my pleasure. Au revoir."

Carefully Will Martin placed the phone back in its cradle and leaned back in his chair. *Why can't it ever be simple?* he thought as he turned in his office chair and looked out the window onto the town square. The signs of spring and rebirth were everywhere. A green blush of new leaves was getting a good start on the maple trees that surrounded the square. A feeling of satisfaction washed over him. *It's hard to believe I've been home only a little less than two years and already I feel such a part of this town. An awful lot has happened in that time.*

The phone chirped on his desk, awakening him from his reverie. "Martin Real Estate, Will Speaking," he said into the phone.

"Will dear, this is your grandmother. I called you at home and Renee said you had left for the office."

"Grams," he smiled, "just trying to get a few things done. What's up?"

"Two things, dear. One of them is both good news and bad news. The other one I hope will be a welcome invitation."

"Okay," he said puzzled, "how about the good news first?"

"The good news and bad news involve the same... event," she said struggling for the proper word. "Lillian died early this morning." The phone fell silent for a moment, then she continued softly, "I was with her when she died."

"That must have been tough, Grams."

"As I said, it was both bad news and good. It's always a loss when someone passes on, but she'd been in the nursing home for over a quarter of a century, bedridden and speechless."

Will thought back to a year ago at Christmas when he had found Lillian at his grandmother's request; the woman who twenty-four years before had been involved in an event that forever changed their lives. "Still, it had to be hard."

"Hmm. Yes, it was." She cleared her throat, "The other thing is, I was wondering if you and your family would like to come to dinner this Sunday?"

"Sure. Any special reason?"

"It just seems as if you are so busy, I never see you anymore."

Will laughed, "We were there last week, Grams, but I'm sure Renee would appreciate a vacation from the kitchen. Thanks for the invitation."

"See you Sunday dear. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Grams." Will replaced the phone in the cradle. "Always worrying about me," he said under his breath. He heard the front door open and the measured tread of Enid Cook's feet as she climbed the stairs.

"Good morning, Mr. Martin," his office manager said with clipped notes. "You're here early this morning."

"Good morning, Miss Cook. Just trying to get some personal work out of the way."

Her eyebrows raised.

Will rubbed his chin with his thumb. "Maybe you can help."

"Oh?"