

JACK DAWGS

KEN FOLLETT



DUTTON

CHAPTER 3

FLICK WAS IN the doorway of the Café des Sports, behind Michel, standing on tiptoe to look over his shoulder. She was alert, her heart pounding, her muscles tensed for action, but in her brain the blood flowed like ice water, and she watched and calculated with cool detachment.

There were eight guards in sight: two at the gate checking passes, two just inside the gate, two patrolling the grounds behind the iron railings, and two at the top of the short flight of steps leading to the château's grand doorway. But Michel's main force would bypass the gate.

The long north side of the church building formed part of the wall surrounding the château's grounds. The north transept jutted a few feet into the parking lot that had once been part of the ornamental garden. In the days of the *ancien régime*, the comte had had his own personal entrance to the church, a little door in the transept wall. The doorway had been boarded up and plastered over more than a hundred years ago, and had remained that way until today.

An hour ago, a retired quarryman called Gaston had entered the empty church and carefully placed four half-pound sticks of yellow plastic explosive at the foot of the blocked doorway. He had inserted detonators, connected them together so that they would all go off at the same instant, and added a five-second fuse ignited by a thumb plunger. Then he had smeared everything with ash from his kitchen fire to make it inconspicuous and moved an old wooden bench in front of the doorway for additional concealment. Satisfied with his handiwork, he had knelt down to pray.

When the church bell had stopped ringing a few seconds ago, Gaston had got up from his pew, walked a few paces from the nave into the transept, depressed the plunger, and ducked quickly back around the corner. The blast must have shaken centuries of dust from the Gothic arches. But the transept was not occupied during services, so no one would have been injured.

After the boom of the explosion, there was a long moment of silence in the square. Everyone froze: the guards at the château gate, the sentries patrolling the fence, the Gestapo major, and the well-dressed German with the glamorous mistress. Flick, taut with apprehension, looked across the square and through the iron railings into the grounds. In the parking lot was a relic of the seventeenth-century garden, a stone fountain with three mossy cherubs sporting where jets of water had once flowed. Around the dry marble bowl were parked a truck, an armored car, a Mercedes sedan painted the gray-green of the German army, and two black Citroëns of the Traction Avant type favored by the Gestapo in France. A soldier was filling the tank of one of the Citroëns, using a gas pump that stood incongruously in front of a tall château window. For a few seconds, nothing moved. Flick waited, holding her breath.

Among the congregation in the church were ten armed men. The priest, who was not a sympathizer and therefore had no warning, must have been pleased that so many people had shown up for the evening service, which was not normally very popular. He might have wondered why some of them wore topcoats, despite the warm weather, but after four years of austerity lots of people wore odd clothes, and a man might wear a raincoat to church because he had no jacket. By now, Flick hoped, the priest understood it all. At this moment, the ten would be leaping from their seats, pulling out their guns, and rushing through the brand-new hole in the wall.

At last they came into view around the end of the church. Flick's heart leaped with pride and fear when she saw them, a motley army in old caps and worn-out shoes, running across the parking lot toward the grand entrance of the château, feet pounding the dusty soil, clutching