

MAISON LEGACY: ♦♦

Cari Chesterfield

& 3X the Charm

BOOK III

SHARON
ELIZABETH
SARKISIAN

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Maison Legacy:
Cari Chesterfield and 3X the Charm BOOK III
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X*X*X*DEDICATION*X*X*X

TO Hagop and Nuver Kasakian, my grandparents:
WHO took us in and gave us a home when we needed one,
WHO supported us,
WHO loved us,
AND,
WHO did not deprive us of our LEGACY.

--ALSO--

TO Hagop Kasakian and Dr. Stephen G. Svajian, my great-uncle, who were instrumental in various matters pertaining to the early funding and administration of the St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral at 630 Second Avenue in New York City. Dr. Stephen G. Svajian was associated with locating the site for the St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral and for the St. Gregory the Illuminator Church, the sale of which he tried to prevent.

--ALSO--

TO Jack Skylark Castle, my own Charmer, who my mother wished to name Scaramuche, but I just called  My Sweetheart From Him-a-lay-a .

Cari Chesterfield's invitation to a mundane housewarming yields more than she bargained for in terms of excitement. Kidnapping, a hunt for gold - soon turning into a hunt for diamonds, arson.... They are all interwoven throughout this maze of a pair of secretive, old historical mansions. Past discoveries coalesce with present ones to culminate in the resolution of a past mystery regarding an attempted murder. A healthy dose of zesty competition for Cari's affections factors into this web of intrigue to salt and pepper the ongoing tale.

NIGHTMARE

How dare he displace the murky curtain of my somnolence -
somber robes and frilly collar, lace cascading down his
vest,

His zealous flights and bloodshot, crimson lights affording
me no rest,

Sowing seeds of doubt which make me shout and cringe in
fits of fright,

To bolt upright, and stare outright - out, into the night?

P R E F A C E

Twirling downward. Swirling down a tunnel of whirling oblivion. A bottomless pit. WHAT HO! Impact with a thump! Crowded into a dark enclosure. Jostling for position with many, many - a multitude of - others.

It was a long journey. A lot of twists and turns and involuntary pushes in various directions until finally reaching a destination pre-ordained the harbinger missive delivers its screaming message of finality.

Longing for blissful release. Shouts of elucidating announcements and pronouncements are unnecessary where a quiet release is all that is needed.

Separation from the clump of a clamoring group, singled out from the multitude yet seldom appreciated wisdom emanates. Ripping liberation is all that is needed to relieve the illuminating and enlightening message pressure. A quest. The QUEST!!!

It begs the question: Who am I? Ultimately, secrets are revealed.

CHAPTER 1

“I won’t go. I won’t go. I will not go! Je refuse. There is absolute no way, ne façon, you can make me!” Pierre Dûçot insisted adamantly.

“Oh, darling, be reasonable. They are our friends, for goodness sake!” his wife exclaimed with exasperated fervor.

“Vos amis, peut-être, Edi. NOT mine!” he declared with an air of finality folding his arms stubbornly, thrusting forth his chin and assuming a more erect stance.

Carina and Randmore McKinley exchanged looks of frustration mingled with semi-distaste as what had begun merely as a friendly visit to her Aunt Edith Chesterfield Norden Dûçot’s (‘Try saying that name three times fast!’ Cari had often joked to Randy) home, Chesterhollow, turned into a tug -of-war. Lying abandoned and forlornly unfolded upon the coffee table occupying the center of the room was the letter proving to be the bone of contention causing the current state of unrest among the occupants present and most assuredly was at the core of Pierre’s distress. The envelope’s return address was that of Mr. and Mrs. Calvin Mason.

“Elvie’s invitation is very gracious and including us in her good fortune is very considerate of her.”

“I have no problèmes avec her or Dudley - he made the extremely wise choice of saving the life of Pierre Dûçot! But...the wilderness?” he expostulated with obvious reluctance.

“Laurelton is NOT a wilderness. It is an established community. It is just a little bit...out in the country!” justified his wife,

Edith, with lukewarm enthusiasm as she wrestled with her words to convey a positive sentiment which she did not exactly feel or was entirely sure about.

“Un peu out in the country?! And their residence.... There is not even running water. Et la salle de bains - c’est dedans la forêt!” he objected.

“Well, the newlyweds are making improvements to their new property as we speak. Give them time. LaurelsHeath will soon be in possession of all the comforts and amenities that we enjoy here as soon as all of the additions to the house have been completed.” she parried in defense of her position. “How thrilling it must be to have a piece of history handed down to them from their Father. And to think that Jan LaFitte was holding on to it all this time just waiting on the chance to hand it down to a Maison. It is so heartwarming that now Elvie and Calvin can start their new married life in their very own home! Just think. Calvin and Dudley might have lived their whole lives through deprived of heritage and inheritance had Jan not discovered that Cal’s Uncle and Father had shortened their last name from Maison to Mason on coming to America.”

“Pah!” spat Pierre pessimistically before continuing. “And that Cal!” he exclaimed and began to kiss the air smacking his lips together noisily. Puckering his lips in an exaggerated fashion and bestowing a liberal round of smooches to no one in particular Pierre paused momentarily to speak: “Buttering up the sides of Jan comme ça. How disgusting! Just intolérable. It would make one ill to see him fawning all over him SI it were not so très amusant. Je ris: HA, HA! Oui. Such a display. Très tragique. Mais la plus drôle.” he concluded judiciously with self-righteous dignity intact.

“Pierre! Cal is NOT kissing up to him.” his nephew-in-law, Randmore McKinley, interrupted him long enough to laughingly point out. “He just found out that he and Jan are related!”

“That is what he says. But who is he really? Vraiment? How

do we know this for certain? Where are his papers, eh? What is his proof? J'ai besoin de voir des détails. I need the documents. I need the WITNESSES."

Pierre hammered each of these points home as if they were nails being pounded into Calvin Mason's coffin not only with his expressive tones but by pounding his fist on the coffee table before him where the poor delicate, fragile china teacups clattered their unwilling affirmations of his statements as well with each solid thump almost spilling their liquid contents.

"I do not know you mais I need cette vérification. Où did he attend l'école? WHO were his teachers? WHAT," Pierre asserted with damning finality, "are his political leanings?" he stopped speaking suddenly and stared at Randmore piercingly. "LAUGH, if you must, Randy, but THESE are legitimate questions." he sniffed disdainfully with the kind of knowing hauteur which indulged the ignorant as another small, stifled chuckle escaped Rand's lips. "You are being very naïve, Randy. C'est certain. Bien sûr. Quelqu'un as influential as Jan is will always attract, comment dit-on, the Glory Seekers!"

He turned his face to one side in profile to them while picking up an old antique pipe Edith kept on display as a knickknack in an ashtray on the coffee table and putting it in his mouth with authority bit down hard on the bit of the pipe stem striking an austere pose.

Cari began to chuckle outright at these theatrics and covered her mouth with her hand to smother the sound of mirth while a slight smile began to tug at the corners of her Aunt Edith's lips.

"Don't forget to ask him what he knows about American baseball!" interrupted Alex Caine breezing into the room as well as into the conversation of which he had only heard the latter portion of.

"Tu vois! Il a raison!" Pierre asserted eagerly relaxing his stance to agree heartily with the newcomer.

"I always make good sense. Now, who are we talking about?"

Alex inquired with lighthearted ignorance.

Randmore pulled his cousin aside to explain while Cari spoke logically to the Frenchman.

“But Pierre,” ventured Cari in a placating manner “Jan LaFitte SAVED Cal from being arrested and going to prison. Of course he was grateful!”

“Détails. Détails. Toujours the détails with you two.” he addressed her demurrer and then nodded in Randmore’s direction to include him in the rebuff. “These petit détails do not conceal his true intentions from moi.”

“Dearest Heart. Speaking of concealing things - Jan LaFitte may not even be the man’s real name.” Edith noted sedately in stride. “LeLoup told me-”

Rushing to her side Pierre clapped a hand over his wife’s mouth before she could continue speaking, betray LeLoup’s confidences and perhaps reveal further information regarding his elusive friend with the admittedly sketchy background by the name of Jan LaFitte. Pierre idolized Jan and jealously guarded the gentleman’s privacy. At the same time, he feared the swashbuckler’s wrath. In addition, LeLoup might be held culpable for revealing such privileged and confidential matter to an “outsider”.

“Be careful what you say - he may be listening...” Pierre whispered. “Do not risque offending Jan’s generous nature. A KINDER MORE GENEROUS FRIEND WE DO NOT KNOW!” he finished speaking in a booming voice which was obviously much too loud for their private conversation.

“Oh, rubbish! No one is listening-” she scoffed, removing his hand.

“Kind nature! GOOD nature!” Pierre shouted cutting off his wife in mid-sentence. “His spies are everywhere.” he counseled her hoarsely in a low whisper as he regarded Rand sharply with guarded suspicion. “Are you truly Randy McKinley - vraiment?” he quizzed

Randmore suddenly, whipping out the question with damning accusation.

Pierre's swift, pointed speech was calculated to catch the suspect Randmore unawares, unprepared and by surprise attack, confuse him and trip him up, thereby, eliciting an honest response from a possible agent of Jan's who might well be in disguise or possibly be wearing a realistically lifelike mask.

"Oh, stop the utter nonsense!!!" cried Edith throwing up her hands in patent exasperation as Pierre, on receiving no reply from the astounded younger man, stepped up to pinch Randy's cheek in order to verify his identity and she astutely gauged that both Randmore's and her niece's successful struggles at suppressing their overt expressions of mirth were becoming rapidly ineffectual. "And as for Calvin," she asserted, attempting to divert Pierre's attention to the more pertinent topic at hand, "he was merely being POLITE to Jan. Nothing more. Nothing less!"

"Mais, chérie!" protested the Frenchman.

"NOTHING MORE!" she reasserted vehemently and stubbornly lest her tenuous newly found control over the situation be impugned and thus evaporate. "Calvin was merely catching up with a long, lost relative." finished Edith soundly with a quelling glance.

"Pah!" scoffed Pierre. "He was bragging of his très unselfish behavior in relinquishing the treasure to him. Treasure, I might add, which he STOLE." he pointed out with continued persistence.

"It was very unselfish because when he understood that it did belong to Jan, Cal summarily returned it all back to him. After all, at that time he was unaware of Jan's true identity and took it on PURE faith that he was the rightful owner. This sort of act speaks to his moral behavior and character and sense of fairness and justice!"

"Je vois. I see. I see." he stiffly acknowledged abruptly, pacing back and forth and slightly miffed. He then sniffed with superiority: "Cette situation est très grave. Quelle tromperie! I can see that this

Calvin has fooled you, my own wife, aussi.”

Edith was taken aback and appeared flustered by this statement. After recovering her equilibrium and poise, however, she began laughing breaking the tension among the room’s other occupants.

“Oh, Pumpkin Eater...you are so cute when you are jealous!” she exclaimed indulgently. “You are jealous of Cal and Jan’s friendship.”

“Pumpkin Eater...?” Randmore and Alex both articulated quiz-zically in unison with gleeful surprise and zest coloring their voices.

“As in Pierre, Pierre, Pumpkin Eater...?” Cari sputtered in disbelief while she speedily rose from her seated position on an armchair and ran hurriedly from the cozy sitting room gasping and giggling with the utterance. “Wait until I tell the others!” she teased Pierre her laughing words now emanating from the hallway and echoing down the corridor.

“I am with Cari!” Rand teased Edith and Pierre mischievously. “I am sure we won’t hear you kidding Alex about his snacks anymore!”

“Yeah.” enjoined Alex scoffingly. “Would you like some ‘milk and cookies’ with that, Pumpkin Eater?”