

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Andre hurried into the Church of Saint-Anne and sat as though seeking sanctuary. Slightly breathless from recent activity he welcomed the calm. He pulled his hand from his pocket and removed a blood-stained handkerchief. The small cut on his hand had stopped bleeding. He rewound the cloth and covered the wound. He knew there would be activity at the Maison; the shriek of a Security Alarm penetrating the late afternoon had certainly alerted the village. As if on cue, he heard the excited babble of female voices. Rising, he moved to the door making sure he could not be seen. A group of four women stood at the gates to Nohant gesticulating excitedly. No doubt this intrusion would take its place in the historical fabric of village life over the next few decades.

Another noise joined the hubbub. A police siren. Andre sank back into the gloom of the interior, produced his camera and began to photograph the ancient wall paintings. After all, he was just a tourist. Outside, a police car made a leisurely addition to the tableau at the gates. Andre's curiosity got the better of him. He sought the shadows at the door again. Two young policemen advanced towards the women and, confronted with wild gesticulations and chatter, were more or less informed of the tragedy unfolding in the Maison. Acknowledging the women and presenting themselves as superior males, they opened the gates and disappeared behind the building.

Andre felt it safe to appear. Strolling across the square, wounded hand hidden in a pocket, camera in the other, he approached the women. All four turned curious eyes towards him.

"Bon après midi. Mówisz po polsku?"

Three women drew back from him, but the fourth, a generation younger and certainly more attractive replied,

"Non. Français ou anglaise."

"Ah," said Andre. "That is good. I wonder

what has happened. What are the police doing?"

Three of the women looked at him with deepening suspicion. The younger woman smiled. It was good to see new blood in the village. "There has been a break in at the Maison."

"Oh, that is terrible. Has anything been stolen?"

"Maybe. Maybe not," said the woman indifferently.

"I hope not," said Andre with a smile. "I'm a tourist and we are due to see the interior sometime soon."

"I hope that we will see more of you in No hant," was the woman's reply, with more ambiguity than was required, "but we are cautious as there has been a murder, and strangers are under suspicion."

Andre smiled to himself, nodded to the women and turned away. As he walked he could feel judgmental eyes on him, six critical, two shameless. His path took him towards the nearby graveyard and a sudden movement amid the gravestones caught his attention. He paused; his curiosity aroused. The figure flitted between light and shade. It was only as the shape was disappearing into the dark that a memory was triggered. A memory which raised more questions than answers. It was Obadiah James.