

The Fabric of Desire

To steal a minaret you must first dig a well.

- Arab proverb

Chapter 1

“We met at Versailles,” Tia stated later, afterwards, when I knew enough not to believe one in one hundred of the stories she shared about Sebastian. He worked as a reverse touchstone for her; speaking of him or holding one of even his smallest of possessions only spun her further and further through the atmosphere. That afternoon I could fairly see her eyeballs bulging as she lost pressure, fell away from gravity.

Or maybe it was just the drugs.

One of the grad students at the service had supplied a bit of morphine, a touch of tranquilizer. This I accepted on Tia’s behalf, knowing it was I who would need something, and soon.

“Ashes to ashes,” the deacon had intoned, hastily summoned to recite words of comfort and soothing grace to a roomful of strangers. “Dust to dust.”

On my right Tia had sniffed, carefully blotting a dewy bit of moisture that had collected under one eye.

I will admit that there had been a time when I would have pushed Tia Carvallo down the stairs before I welcomed her into my apartment. At one point in my life I would have listened with a jealous passion to her stories about Sebastian, her sparely

spun tales that invariably denigrated into travelogues of the Riviera before spiraling into bedroom scenes, written expressly to wound the heart of an ex lover.

That time was dead and buried.

Besides, this was one story I needn't listen to. Sebastian had told me that they met after a small objects d'art auction in Chicago. It had been raining and several dealers and their wives had shared a taxi on their way to dinner.

Tia had been one of the wives.

Tia paused, mid story. She was sitting in my living room on my couch, balancing a glass of whiskey on her rather thin knees.

“You were saying?” I asked, poised to wash one of the grad student's pills down my throat with vodka from the freezer.

“I'm just remembering how warm it was. Everything about that day was perfect. Versailles is something you can't possibly appreciate until you've been there with someone you love.”

That was one of the things I had grown to like about Tia over those days prior to Sebastian's death – those sweeping, grandiose statements that made up such a large portion of her spoken thoughts. Saying such stupid things made it that much easier for me to pay almost no attention to her at all.

That afternoon, after we had said goodbye to Sebastian, she sat on my couch and her tears made deep salt tracks down newly emerged gullies worn in her face.

The pill, going down, wasn't as bitter as I had thought it would be.