

*Secrets in*  
PARIS



ANN EL-NEMR



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*To all the women that have learned to survive  
and start a new life.*



# Letter to the Reader

This book is centered in one of my favorite cities of the world: Paris. This story will make you feel as if you are visiting the many beautiful sights as my characters explore the city and the countryside. Many conclusions came to mind while writing this book, so I pondered before I decided a sequel had to be written to finish it. Marcia will take you into a world most people cannot even imagine. What she had to do to survive will shock you. Now, that she has a shameful past she wants to keep hidden, she travels to Paris so she can start a new life. She cannot resist Stephane's charm nor his love, but unforeseen danger lurks around the corner. You must understand, everyone has skeletons in their closet, so what would you do if someone was going to expose them? Marcia's choices may surprise you. Enjoy!

Yours truly,

*Ann El-Nemr*



# Chapter 1

It was a rainy day in mid-August. A young woman walked quickly, taking long strides down a crowded walkway as her heartbeat pounded in her chest from nervousness, or maybe adrenaline. Her head held high, she stared straight ahead, avoiding everyone's eyes. She wore a Burberry black trench coat, palazzo pants, and black Louboutin high heels. She carried a large bag over her arm. Her eyes were hidden by a pair of black sunglasses, and her shoulder length blond hair bounced with every step she took. Her hips swung from side to side as she made her way through the alley. Men turned their heads to take a second peek at her while wishing she belonged to them or wondering who she was.

*Keep walking. Don't stop until you get to the gate, or you might not go. No, this is your destiny, your dream. Keep walking and don't look at anyone. You can do this,* she kept telling herself over and over again.

She arrived at the Air France boarding gate and stopped near the counter, leaning against one of the walls. She was at Terminal E at Boston Logan Airport. She waited with anticipation for her one-way flight to Paris, never looking at anyone. She dropped her carry-on

bag next to her leg, then took her boarding pass and her American Passport from her pocket to verify her seat again. She noticed her hands were trembling, so she placed them, along with her papers, back in her pockets as she counted the minutes to board the plane. Her eyes closed momentarily, and she bit her lower lip, taking a deep, impatient breath as she tried to calm herself. She was about to make a life-changing decision. *I hope I'm doing the right thing and that I won't regret this choice later*, she thought. *What if I don't like Paris? What if... Stop it! You will be just fine. You can always come back.*

Marcia Philips was a beautiful woman in her late twenties. She was an only child, orphaned. She had lost her parents in a car accident caused by a drunk driver while she was in her sophomore year of college. She had been pursuing a business degree at Bentley University in Boston, Massachusetts, and had always dreamed of opening her own high-end clothing store and being her own boss, but her aspirations had been shattered by the pain that enveloped her at that time. She was now alone. Since her parents had both been school-teachers, they had not been able to save much money while trying to put her through college. They had left her a small bungalow, which she sold for nearly nothing in order to pay for the funeral cost and the pile of hospital bills that was left behind after their death. Tears pooled in her eyes every time she thought about them. It had been a difficult few years trying to cope with their passing and reorganize her life to survive. She had worked two jobs to try to continue her studies, but it had been very stressful balancing both work and college. Many nights she had lain awake in bed, wondering how she was going to pay the rent or her tuition. She had been waitressing at a diner in the evenings and tutoring other students on campus,



but she had still been having difficulties meeting both ends...until that one late afternoon when she had met Tiffany. That seemed like such a long time ago, an eternity, but it had only been four and a half years earlier.

*A year had passed since the death of her parents. Marcia sat at a table, her hand under her chin, in the library of the university. Her table was by one of the windows, and she gazed at the blue flowers outside. She was wondering how she was going to finish her schoolwork on time and still manage to get to her waitressing night job at seven, and then she was interrupted. Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed someone standing by her table. Marcia turned her head and looked up at the girl, giving her an annoyed look. A tall, lean girl in her mid-twenties stood motionless, her long black hair tied up in a messy bun. Marcia noticed her stunning blue eyes. She was dressed in blue jeans and a gray Bentley sweatshirt, and she was glancing down at Marcia.*

“Hi, do you mind if I sit with you? There aren’t any other empty tables by the window, and I like the sunlight,” she said as she set her backpack on the table and then processed to pull the chair back. She sat down on the chair before taking her accounting book and her computer out.

Marcia stared at her, frustrated at the disruption, but answered, “Sure, go ahead,” in a flat tone. Then she directed her attention back to reading her business assignment.

“My name is Tiffany Reynolds. You’re in my accounting class with Mr. Brown, aren’t you? I’ve seen you around campus,” the girl quietly said as she took a pen out of her pencil case, seemingly preparing for her studies.

Marcia casually looked away from her book, curled her lips at the girl, and nodded, irritated at being bothered again. “Yes. I don’t mean to be rude, but I need to finish my project. I don’t have time to chat,” she told her firmly, then returned to staring at her computer screen.

*“I’m sorry to intrude, but I was told that you’re really good with numbers. I heard you tutor other students on the side for extra cash and that you are the best around, so I thought maybe you could... Listen, I really need help, and I can pay you whatever you want,” she replied.*

*Marcia watched as Tiffany tilted her head down, cast her eyes away, and shrugged her shoulders in desperation. She pressed her lips together, trying not to burst out laughing at her expression, but she couldn’t keep herself from smiling. Although it would take time away from her own studies, she needed the money. She looked at the clock on the far wall, then grinned at Tiffany and nodded her head.*

*“My name is Marcia Philips. My fee is fifty dollars per hour. I only have an hour before I have to go to work. What do you need help with, and what don’t you understand?” Marcia asked her.*

*“Everything!” Tiffany answered, and then they both laughed. From that day on, they became best friends, and Marcia’s life changed forever.*

Marcia was brought back to reality when she heard the flight attendant at the counter announce her flight number. She lifted her head and noticed people getting in line at the first-class row. She bent down, gripping the handle of her bag tightly. She exhaled heavily as she took a couple of steps forward to get in line behind the other passengers who were boarding the first-class section on the plane. She took her passport from her pocket and opened it so she could look at her boarding pass, glancing at her seat number again: 3A. The line started to move forward, and she slowly made her way to the airbus that was going to take her to her new life. She quickly arrived at her assigned seat and set her bag down, opening it and taking a magazine out, and then she stored her carry-on in the overhead storage compartment. Slipping off her coat, she gave it to the

flight attendant so she would hang it up in the closet, then thanked her. She placed her pillow and blanket to the side and sat down while she waited for the other passengers to board.

“Would you care for anything to drink?” another attendant came by and asked her.

Marcia looked up at her and shook her head. “No, thank you. I’m all set,” she answered.

She reached down for her seatbelt buckle and fastened it around her waist, then made herself comfortable by putting her pillow behind her head and wrapping the blanket around herself. She prepared for the long flight overseas. She didn’t want to eat, watch television, or talk to anyone; all she wanted to do was sleep until she landed in Paris. Her head was hurting, and her whole body ached from lack of sleep. She was rubbing her temples with her fingers when a feeling came over her that someone was observing her, so she slowly turned her head to her left to look. A well-dressed man in a tailored suit and tie sat in the seat next to her, just across the aisle. She watched him as he loosened his tie and then placed his hands on his knees, all the while focusing on her. *Hmm! Handsome*, she thought. He was in his early thirties. A strand of his dark brown hair had fallen on his forehead, but it was his deep aqua eyes that made him intriguing. From how intensely he stared at her, it was almost as if he could read her mind. He never uttered a word. Their eyes locked for a few seconds, but it seemed like longer, and then he smiled, showing her a perfect set of teeth. Marcia didn’t move or return his smile. She was instantly brought back to why she was leaving Boston and how easily it would be to engage him into conversation for her benefit, but she was done with that lifestyle. She didn’t need a man in her life at this moment. She angled her face away from him and sat back in her seat, hiding behind the panel of her pod so he couldn’t see her.

She closed her eyes, hoping sleep would invade her soon so she could forget the events that had burdened her over the last four years, but it was not to be. Her thoughts went back in time, reminding her why she was flying across the world and trying to forget those days. She was determined to put her life back together, without any drama or men.

Tears formed behind her eyelids as she thought about what she had done to survive, what she had done to be able to move forward and finish the last years of college. She balled her fists under the blanket as she tried to wash away the horrible memories. *Don't do this to yourself, she thought. It's over. You are a strong, independent woman, and you need to put the past behind you and move on with your life. Focus your energy on achieving what you have yearned to do since you were a little girl. Learn about fashion and be a successful entrepreneur. Time will heal all wounds. Leave the past behind and concentrate on the future.*

She shook her head, trying to dismiss the bad memories that still haunted her. She felt the movement of the airbus under her as it took off down the runway, headed toward France. Fifteen minutes later the plane was in the air, and she couldn't turn back now. Less than a half hour later she had reclined her seat into a bed, and she was sound asleep.

\* \* \*

The mysterious man sitting next to Marcia on the plane was Stephane LaRoche. He was the heir to a large vineyard in the region of Epernay, located northeast of Paris. For many years his family had produced some of the best award-winning wines and champagnes in the world. He was being groomed to inherit one of the most prestigious plantations in France, called LaRoche Vineyards,

which yielded the best grapes used in winemaking. Stephane and his younger sister, Etienne, had been taught every aspect of the industry since they had been children. They were meant to take the over the business and bring it to the next level in the world of wine awards. Stephane's father, Michel, was to pass over the reins of the company to Stephane after his retirement later that year.

While in line to board his flight, Stephane stood a couple of passengers behind the woman with the black trench coat. He had followed the blonde with his eyes as she walked past him and headed to the first-class section of the Air France flight. He was enthralled by her for some unknown reason, and he hoped he might get to meet her on the seven hour trans-Atlantic flight. He loved the way she held her head high with confidence, as if she was in control, walking with a bounce in her stride. He even loved her manicured fingernails. Everything about her aroused his interest. He hadn't seen such a beautiful woman in a long time. He desperately wanted to see her eyes, which were hidden behind those black shades.

*How in the hell can I like this woman so much? She hasn't even spoken a word to me! This is totally absurd. She is probably married, or she at least has a boyfriend,* Stephane thought as he followed behind her. He felt joy when he found out his seat was next to hers. He glanced down at her left hand as she passed her coat to the flight attendant—no wedding ring. He walked to his seat, never taking his eyes off of her, and quickly sat down. He placed his briefcase down next to his feet, then buckled in. A sexual rush passed through him as he realized how close he was to her. If he reached over the aisle, he could touch her. *I bet her skin is as soft as silk,* he thought. He had to know more about this woman. He couldn't move, and he hoped she would look his way. Unable to stop himself, he stared at her. Never in his life had something like this happened to him. It was as if he was drawn

to her. He watched as she placed the pillow behind her head before unwrapping the blanket and spreading it over her body. He rubbed his hands together nervously, undoing his tie and then placing his hands on his lap, all the while keeping his eyes on her.

*For God's sake, stop it!* Stephane's mind screamed. *She's only a woman. You have had hundreds of them over the years. What's so different about her?* he asked himself. But he was attracted to her like no other.

Stephane was pleased when she leaned forward in her seat and glanced his way. *How beautiful she is!* His heart skipped a beat as his eyes met hers, so he smiled her way. She held his gaze for what seemed like a long time, and lust invaded his being. He was about to introduce himself to her, but she turned away before a single word was said. She moved backwards and disappeared behind the partition of her seat. Stephane's shoulders slumped forward, and his heart sunk as he realized that he had failed to capture this woman's attention. Never in his life had that happened. He leaned back in his seat, disappointed. *Maybe I'll have another chance later,* he thought.

He stayed awake during the whole flight by watching a movie, reading contracts, and having supper, but while he did all of that, she slept. He got up to use the washroom twice, just so he could spy on her. He strolled the aisle slowly, admiring her from afar as she slept. As he stopped by his seat and looked over at her, he saw that she was on her side, her blanket covering her up to the shoulders. He could see the curve of her hip and her untidy hair, which was caused by her tossing and turning in the confined space. She looked so peaceful. *I need to calm myself. This is ridiculous! Never have I wanted to meet a woman in the way I do now,* he thought to himself, taking his seat quickly so she wouldn't catch him observing her sleep.

He peeked over toward her seat every time she moved, hoping she would sit up and he would be able to talk to her, but she slept

through the whole flight, and the flight attendant had to wake her up right before the plane landed. He watched her fold her blanket, pull a bottle of water from her bag, and take a sip of the water. He kept tapping his fingers on his knee nervously. His heart began to beat faster at the anticipation of talking to her. He still couldn't see her face. She finally stood up, turned her back to him, and bent down to grab her pocketbook. His eyes were locked on her. He pulled himself to the edge of his seat in the hopes that he might be able to help her with the carry-on that was surely in the overhead compartment, but she just walked down the aisle toward the washroom without even looking his way. He leaned over his armrest and observed as her hips swayed from side to side with every step she took. He sat back in his seat, disappointed, but he wasn't going to give up so easily. He kept watching for the red light from the bathroom to turn green, as it would give him an indication that she was coming toward him again.

Stephane waited patiently until he saw her come down the row. She had fixed her hair and put on red lipstick. *Wow! How I would love to kiss those lips*, he thought. He shifted his body closer to the side so he could see her better. Her head was facing to her right, away from him, as she walked back to her seat. She was only ten feet away. She was going to sit down again, and he would lose his chance to talk to her. *Do something to get her attention. Say something before she sits down again*, he kept repeating to himself.