

## DEATH AT THE GRANDE CHAPITRE / THE CHAINED ROSE

*By Claudette V. Ferron*

### **The Kidnapping**

"Do you speak English?" were the last words Demetria Mecklen remembered hearing and the distressed expression on the attractive face of the woman who spoke them, before succumbing to an unknown force and absolute darkness. Now, momentarily conscious she couldn't see or feel anything, and she couldn't move, but somehow she felt strangely peaceful.

*Am I dead?* she wondered as she struggled to stay alert.

Her thoughts were confused, random and fragmented. She strained to be coherent.

*My name is Demetria Mecklen. I am 21 years old. I was born in Geneva, Switzerland. Today is – a blank? Try to remember -- try to remember – Demi.*

Demetria willed herself to think and not to slip into the unconscious abyss that beckoned her. But she was overcome as a heavy blackness cloaked her mind and she faded from herself into its seductive embrace.

"Make the call Nicholas, make the call!" Amina Mecklen was insistent in her motherly distress. "It's been two days! No one's heard from her. This is not like Demi! Even if she and Peter had an argument, she

would've called me by now. If she were hurt, or worse, we would have heard from the police or a hospital. You know it Nicholas! She's been taken! Make the call!"

Demetria Mecklen's mother struggled against the fear that was overtaking her. The fear she had lived with since she married Dr. Nicholas Mecklen, the emerging international authority on antiterrorism defensive immunology, and then given birth to their beloved daughter and only child.

"What if we're overreacting? You know how kids are these days? We'll look foolish! Maybe we should give it another day Amie."

Nicholas Mecklen true to his scientific mind was trying to be analytical and pragmatic. But his wife was having none of it. Her child was in jeopardy and she knew it.

"If you won't make the call, I will!" she said stubbornly, knowing in her heart she could trust her maternal instincts. She didn't know what had happened, but she knew her child was in trouble.

Standing in the beautifully furnished living room of their elegant contemporary home near the University of Geneva, surrounded by Amina's vibrant, modern paintings, interspersed with the works of famed 20th century artists, Nicholas Mecklen felt an unfamiliar fear. The fear of incompetence. As a world-renowned immunologist leading ground-breaking vaccine research into biochemical warfare at the University's Center for Frontiers in Genetics and Biochemistry, his expertise was

unparalleled. But in this moment, as a husband and a father, he was helpless. And he could never resist a plea from his wife, especially when secretly he dreaded that she was right. So, though a fit and athletic man, he sat down heavily on the stylish cream leather sofa in the middle of the spacious room. Then pulling his cell phone from his pocket, he powered it on by pushing a hidden button on the side of the device, and put it to his ear. Almost immediately the line engaged and a man's firm voice answered,

“GP2,” was all he said, and all that was necessary.

“Dr. Nicholas K. Mecklen” Mecklen replied deliberately.

But “K” was not his middle initial, it was a code identifying his distress call -- a suspected kidnapping or abduction.

Immediately the man's voice took on an urgent tone as he replied, “One moment, I'm transferring you now Dr. Mecklen.”

As Mecklen listened to the click of the call being transferred he heard the man say, “Nicholas Mecklen, kidnapping.”

Then another voice came on the line. This time it was a woman.

Speaking with clear authority she said, “Thanks!” And without waiting for a reply she continued, “Dr. Mecklen, this is Judith Mazlon, I will be the Operations Manager assigned to your case. We regret the circumstances for your call. Wife or daughter?” Mazlon asked abruptly.

“Daughter – Demetria,” Mecklen replied, trying to comfort himself with the thought that Mazlon’s brusqueness was simply professionalism and not insensitivity.

“Any evidence of forced entry? Is your location secure?” Mazlon asked hurriedly.

“No forced entry. My wife and I are safe at home.” Mecklen replied, trying to sound confident for Amina sitting across from him on the edge of a matching cream leather chaise.

“Please move to your safe room now!” Mazlon ordered. “A team has been dispatched to your location.” She continued. “They will arrive in 10 minutes, and bring you and your wife in. The access authorization code is ‘Osprey’. Do not open the door, answer the phone, or touch anything until the team gets there!” Then interrupting herself, Mazlon said firmly, “Dr. Mecklen we activated your unit’s GPS and it shows that you and your wife are still sitting in your living room. Please move to your safe room now!”

“Is that really necessary?” Mecklen asked, despite knowing that arguing was useless.

“Dr. Mecklen, you know the protocol. Move now!” Mazlon ordered.

Mecklen may have been an invaluable asset, a scientific genius, part of a critical international antiterrorism initiative, but once he made “the call,” Mazlon was in charge of his life and the safety of his family – the Mecklen unit.