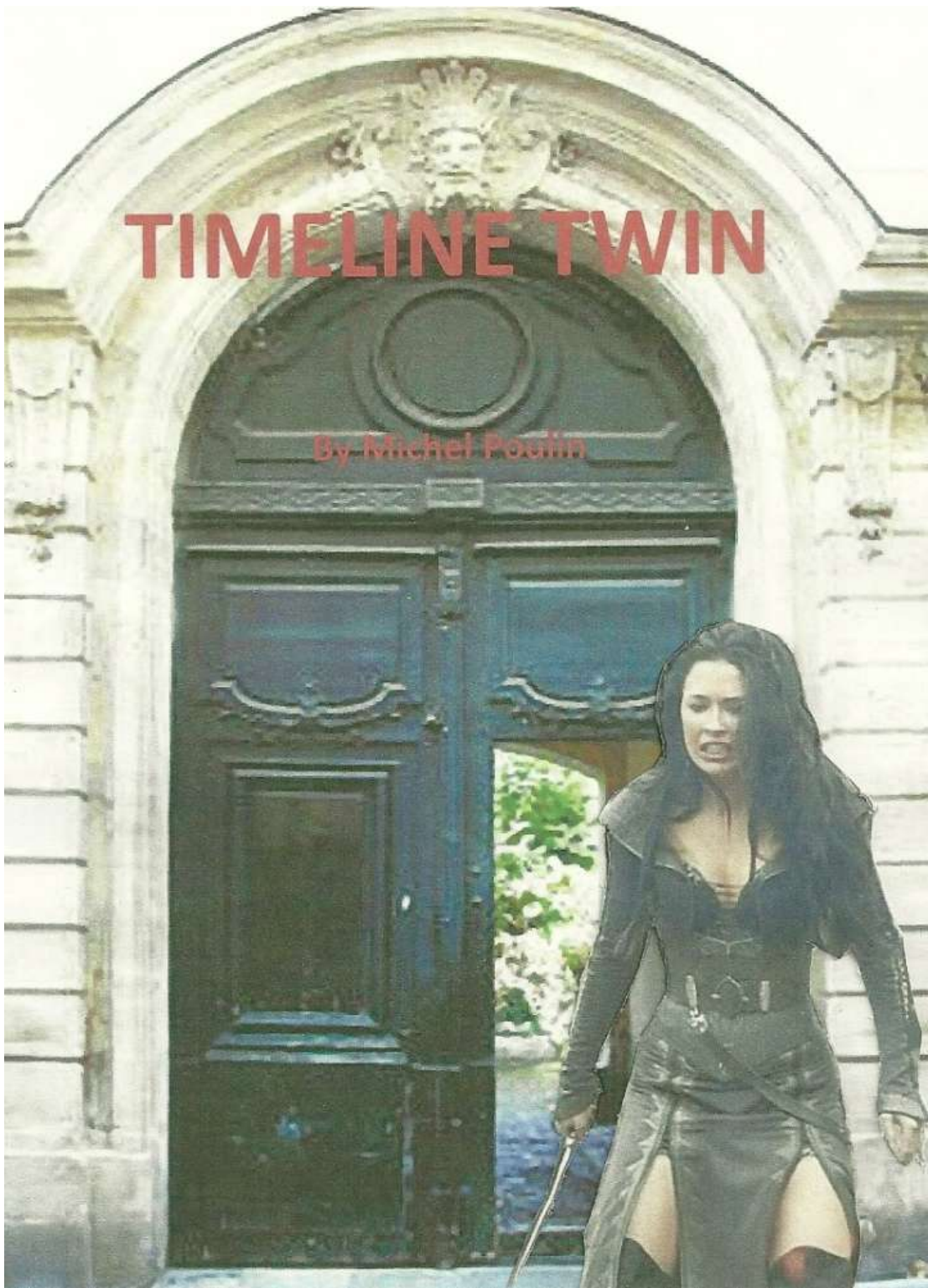


TIMELINE TWIN

By Michel Poulin



TIMELINE TWIN

A FANTASY AND HISTORICAL/SCIENCE-FICTION NOVEL

BY MICHEL POULIN

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WARNING TO POTENTIAL READERS

THIS NOVEL CONTAINS GRAPHIC DESCRIPTIONS OF WAR, VIOLENCE AND SEX AS WELL AS COARSE LANGUAGE AND CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECTS UNSUITABLE FOR CHILDREN. WHILE THIS NOVEL DEPICTS MANY HISTORICAL PERSONS AND EVENTS FROM THE PAST, THIS IS A WORK OF FICTION AND WORDS OR DEEDS ATTRIBUTED IN IT TO PERSONS WHO EXISTED DO NOT REFLECT HISTORICAL EVENTS AND ONLY DESCRIBE ALTERNATE HISTORICAL SCENARIOS. RELIGION-RELATED EVENTS DEPICTED IN THIS NOVEL IN NO WAY REFLECT THE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF THE AUTHOR.

ABOUT THIS NOVEL

This novel is the sixth installment in a collection of novels depicting the adventures through time of members of the Time Patrol, an organization originating from the 34th Century. It was originally meant to be the last novel of the series but, with the draft's length growing to near unmanageable level, I decided to split the draft in two. TIMELINE TWIN will thus be followed by TO THE SANDS OF MARS, which will become in effect the last novel of the collection. Those novels should be treated strictly as novels about alternate realities and historical fiction. The year in the dates shown in the headings are followed by the letters 'A', 'B' or 'C', denoting in which timeline the action is happening. Timeline 'A' is the original historical line, while Timeline 'B' is a

parallel alternate history created accidentally by Nancy Laplante when she was transported against her will from 2012 to the year 1940 and changed history by her actions. Timeline 'C' is a second parallel history created from 1941 'B' when enemies of Nancy tried to kill her and thus change history in their favor. While Nancy Laplante 'A' died in 2019 'A' while reporting on a war in Northern Iraq, her young timeline twin, Nancy 'B', is ready to take over from her, while Ingrid Dows 'C', timeline twin of the adopted daughter of Nancy, continues to serve with distinction in the United States Air Force in 1953 'C'.

Cover picture: Nancy Laplante 'B', dressed in a travel outfit of the mid 17th Century, standing in front of the carriage entrance of the Hôtel de Brinvilliers, at number 12, Charles-V Street, Paris.

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CHAPTER 1 – A LAST GOODBYE

10 :18 (Montreal Time)

Saturday, February 23, 2019 ‘A’

Sainte-Famille Cemetery, De Montbrun Street

Boucherville, South Shore of Montreal

Province of Québec, Canada

Thankfully, the weather was fair on this freezing February morning, with the rays of the Sun mitigating a bit the sub-zero temperature and with no wind to make the air even colder. Still, the dozens of men and women, with a few children among them, that were coming out of the convoy of cars and limousines inside the cemetery were all well bundled in winter coats, hats, boots and gloves. Many also wore sunglasses to protect their eyes from the glare of the Sun reflecting on the thick layer of snow. All were silent and had sad or downcast expressions on their faces as they converged on a large polished headstone, in front of which a rectangular hole had been dug in the frozen ground, with a mound of earth nearby. Numerous flower crowns and bouquets were already laid in front of the headstone. The scene would have been typical of most funerals except for the presence in force of the municipal police, which was busy keeping at a respectful distance a small army of reporters and paparazzi, many of which were holding cameras equipped with telephoto lens.

Angelina Jolie, with the help of her husband Brad Pitt, gathered together their six children, now ranging in age between ten and seventeen, after coming out of their limousine and walked with them towards the hole in the ground. She could already distinguish at least three different groups of people that had come to attend the funeral of Nancy Laplante. One, of which Angelina was part of, consisted of over twenty actors, actresses, film directors and studio executives from Hollywood, all of which had worked with Nancy Laplante on film sets or had befriended her. Another, smaller group, was made up of CNN executives and reporters, including Anderson Cooper and Christiane Amanpour, plus a few war reporters from around the globe. The third, and by far the largest group, was a most heteroclitic one and was probably making the reporters and

paparazzi present wondering who those people were. There were men and women, most looking fit, young and tough, plus more than a few teenage children. Angelina however guessed who they were when she recognized the so-called 'boyfriend' of Nancy Laplante, Mike Crawford, in reality her husband. Fourteen year-old Zahara, walking besides Angelina, also recognized him and pointed at a huge, towering teenager standing besides Mike Crawford.

"Mom, I see Herakles, besides Nancy's husband. I also see Eli and David, plus Saint Mary Magdalene, David's mother."

Angelina couldn't help hesitate then and cut her step as she stared at the small Semitic woman holding the hand of a teenage boy with curly brown hair and brown skin. She had been told by her children on their return from the Jerusalem of 1948 'B', where Nancy Laplante had brought them temporarily for their own safety, about Nancy's family there and about a few other people, including a Miriam of Magdala that was actually the one known in the Bible as Saint Mary Magdalene, and about her son from Jesus, David. Still, to see such an historical figure here and now was quite a shock to Angelina. Her eyes then returned to the said Herakles, who was at least as tall and powerful physically as Mike Crawford, but who still had a juvenile face.

"How old was this Herakles when you met him in Jerusalem, Zahara?"

"He was thirteen then and he was really kind and nice. Maybe a few years have passed for him since then, Mom."

Angelina nodded her head at that, understanding what her adopted daughter, an ex-Ethiopian refugee, meant. Very few people in this time period knew that Nancy Laplante had been a time traveler and that two parallel timelines existed apart from this world. Angelina and Brad would not have known about that either, save for a completely unpredictable fluke. A ship hijacking eleven months ago off California had caught them and a small crowd of other Hollywood celebrities at the mercy of a gang of merciless pirates bent on emptying their bank accounts. That hijacking of billionaire Roman Abramovich's yacht had also put in jeopardy the 31 children of those celebrities, including Angelina's six children, who were aboard the MV ECLIPSE at the time. The pirates had hoped to use the children to pressure their parents into revealing their bank account numbers and access codes but Nancy, who had been one of the guests of Roman Abramovich, had brought the children to the safety of 1948 'B' Jerusalem, at the cost of revealing herself as a time traveler. She had then slaughtered the pirates and saved Abramovich and his guests. Angelina, like Brad and the other adult guests, had

been stunned and shocked by the stories told to them afterwards by their children, returned by Nancy to the yacht once the pirates were all dead or captured. She had however accepted to keep Nancy's secret, after hearing her pleas to that effect.

Now that Zahara had warned her about the presence of at least a few members of Nancy's family at the funeral, Angelina started scrutinizing more closely the faces of those who were part of the third group of mourners. She was no historian, but she was well educated and read and knew that Nancy had been reigning as the Queen of Jerusalem in 1948 'B', so looked for known people from the mid 20th Century. Her eyes soon caught on a young woman of medium height in her twenties who wore a conservative black dress and coat and a black hat with black mesh face veil. Angelina's blood shot to her brain when she tentatively recognized the woman as a young version of Queen Elizabeth of England. Two persons to the left of Elizabeth, an overweight man in his fifties with thick curly gray hair and wearing sunglasses also attracted Angelina's attention. It didn't take her much time to recognize him, as she had seen photographs and portraits of him in numerous Israeli and Jewish homes, offices and museums. Still, her knees nearly went weak when she made up the man as being David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel, as he appeared at about the time of Israel's declaration of independence. Even more shocking was the man standing near Ben-Gurion, a huge and intimidating-looking man with a long scar on his left cheek.

"A SS officer, standing besides Israel's first prime minister..." Whispered Angelina to herself, making her husband Brad look at her with confusion.

"What did you say, Angie?"

"Please keep a straight face and your voice low, Brad, but we have a few visitors from the past in that group to the left of the headstone. Zahara recognized two of Nancy's sons, plus Saint Mary Magdalene, while I just recognized a young Queen Elizabeth of England, Prime Minister David Ben Gurion of Israel and Otto Skorzeni, SS commando officer extraordinaire in World War 2."

While he didn't speak out loud or exclaimed himself, Brad eyed with growing shock the group designated by his wife before whispering to her.

"My god! You are right, Angie. I think that I also recognize Hanna Reitsch, the celebrated Nazi female test pilot from World War 2, besides Skorzeni. Those people are taking a hell of a lot of risks in showing up publicly like this, especially with all those paparazzi present nearby."

Angelina couldn't help throw a dubious look at Brad at his last words.

"And how do you expect ignorant morons like those paparazzi to know enough about history to recognize those people, especially when they don't have any reasons to think that they come from the past?"

Their argument was cut short by the arrival in the cemetery of three big black SUVs of the kind Hollywood action movies were so fond of using. The reporters and paparazzi crowd immediately pointed as one their cameras at the three vehicles as they rolled inside the cemetery, finally stopping behind the other vehicles of the mourners already present. The municipal police agents also became noticeably more nervous and vigilant as six tall, fit men in dark suits and overcoats and wearing sunglasses came out of the SUVs, forming a box besides the middle SUV before another man came out of that vehicle. He also wore sunglasses and a black overcoat, but was clearly a lot older than the six men waiting for him. Channing Tatum, who was standing with his wife Jena and their little daughter near Angelina and Brad, sucked his breath in.

"Holy shit! It's President Bill Clinton! The reporters will go bonkers on this." As the reporters and paparazzi clicked picture after picture of him as he walked with his Secret Service escort towards the headstone and waiting mourners, Bill Clinton gave a sad look at the hearse parked nearby and in which Nancy Laplante's coffin was still in. His arrival was the signal for six big men from the crowd of mourners to walk to the hearse and start pulling out the coffin, then carrying it towards its intended resting place. As the coffin was gently put down on the straps laid over the hole in the ground, Bill Clinton started doing the tour of the mourners, with the CNN group first to be visited, followed by the Hollywood group. He kept his words few and his emotions guarded with them, but was still visibly sad. In truth, while not an American citizen, Nancy Laplante had rendered some stellar services to the United States in the past few years, not the least one being her killing the head of the Taliban movement, Mullah Omar, in Pakistan, and the rescue of CNN's star anchor Anderson Cooper on the same occasion. As a daring war reporter, Nancy had also helped the American public understand better what was really at play in a number of festering wars and smoldering conflicts through her CNN reports and analysis, something that had often helped the current President of the United States, Hillary Rodham-Clinton, in passing her foreign policy message to the American public. Then came the time to Clinton to go speak with the members of the last group.

First presenting his condolences to Mike Crawford, Bill Clinton was presented by the latter to five teenagers and one stunningly beautiful young woman, named as being the children, either adopted or natural, of Nancy Laplante. Clinton couldn't help stare up in wonderment at sixteen year old Herakles, who towered over him and had much wider shoulders.

"Just sixteen, you said?"

The teenager, who had kind manners and a soft voice, gave him a sad smile while nearly crushing Clinton's hand, even though he didn't seem to make it on purpose.

"Yes, Mister President. My name means 'Hercules' in Greek."

"Uh, I see!" Said Clinton, not daring to ask for more details before continuing down the line of mourners. Two teenagers, a boy and a girl, who were holding hands with a young woman in her thirties, next caught his attention. He first exchanged a kiss on the cheek with the woman, who presented herself as a friend of Nancy and who was named Sylvie Comeau. Sylvie then presented the two children, whose prominent brow ridgelines, elongated craniums and nearly non-existent chin had attracted Bill Clinton's curiosity.

"May I present you my adopted children, Kin and Ani, Mister President?" Said Comeau before lowering her voice to a whisper and bending over to speak in Clinton's ear. "They are Neanderthal children. I saved them 52,000 years ago, after their parents and the rest of their group were killed by cave hyenas."

With cold sweat breaking on his forehead, Bill Clinton stared in silence at the children for a couple of seconds before speaking.

"Pleased to meet you, Kin and Ani."

"Thank you, Mister President. You were very kind to come to Nancy's funeral." Replied in an articulate voice the boy, surprising Clinton. Seeing his expression then, Sylvie Comeau cut in, still keeping her voice low.

"They have an I.Q. in the mid 90s, Mister President. Neanderthals were actually about as intelligent as the average modern man. You could probably say that you met some politicians in Washington that were more obtuse."

Despite the circumstances, that remark made Bill Clinton smile with amusement.

"You are probably right about that, madam. Saving those children was a most kind act indeed. You are to be commended for your compassion and open mindedness."

"Thank you, Mister President."

The next person in line to attract Bill Clinton's attention was Elizabeth Windsor, whom he recognized quickly enough, making him bow to her and kiss her hand.

"Your Majesty!"

"Actually, my proper title now would be 'Your Highness', Mister President. My sister Margaret is sitting on the throne where I come from. Nancy told me about how caring to your people you proved as a president."

"And I must say in turn that your, uh, twin, is doing a remarkable job as Queen of Great Britain, Your Highness."

"Thank you, Mister President. Could you pass my respects to your wife, the President?"

"I certainly will, Your Majesty."

After bowing again to her, Clinton went on, now expecting about anything. He also easily recognized David Ben-Gurion, with which he exchanged a few words and nearly freaked out when faced with the big, powerful Otto Skorzeni, who managed to make Clinton's Secret Service bodyguards nervous just by his presence. After shaking a dozen more hands from persons he didn't recognize, he finally went to stand near the headstone with his bodyguards as a rabbi with a thick black beard was about to start delivering Nancy Laplante's eulogy. The rabbi, wearing a skull cap and shawl, shook his hand in turn and presented himself.

"Mister President! I am Rabbi Shimon Huberband. I understand that you asked to deliver part of Nancy's eulogy."

"You are correct, Rabbi Huberband." Said Clinton, already promising himself to google the rabbi's name at the first chance he had to do it. "I didn't know that Nancy was Jewish."

"In another place and time, she was. I believe that you already know from her historical documentary on the life of Yeshua of Nazareth that you and your wife saw that Yeshua made her one of her disciples, correct?"

Again, cold sweat broke on Clinton's forehead on hearing that.

"Uh, the copy of the video documentary she loaned to us didn't mention that little fact, Rabbi Huberband. Jesus Christ really made her one of his disciples?"

"And one that he was very respectful of, if I understand well. Nancy also saved the lives of countless thousands of Jews in the past. I was one of those Jews she saved

and, now that I am the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem in her time, I simply could not refuse the honor to deliver the eulogy for my queen.”

“I see! As her spiritual leader, you are entitled to deliver first your part of her eulogy, Rabbi Huberband.”

Huberband then shook his head slowly, his face most somber.

“Pardon me for correcting you, Mister President, but I was not her spiritual leader. Only The One deserves that title, as she was her Chosen.”

Huberband then looked at the rest of the assembled mourners and started speaking in a calm, strong and solemn voice.

“My friends, we are assembled here to pay our ultimate respects to a truly exceptional woman, a woman who saved or helped countless others through her acts of bravery and compassion. She was the kind of person of which we see only a few through the centuries, a person whose name deserves to be remembered and cherished for eternity. Nancy Laplante transcended the boundaries of nationalities, races and religions, as she was simply a human being of the most wonderful kind. She didn’t care if those she helped were white or black, poor or rich, Christians or Muslims, as long as they were good, decent people. Many, through their intolerance, bigotry or evil thoughts, hated her and wanted her ill, but she overcame their hatred and often brought justice to those evil men, for the greater good of all. Her ultimate act in life, so typical of her, was to protect from harm two little children, using her body as a shield so that those children could live. That last act resumed perfectly what made Nancy Laplante such an exceptional person, with bravery allied to selfless sacrifice and care for others.”

More than a few mourners, including Angelina Jolie and many other women present, cried silently as Huberband delivered his eulogy, which he kept short but eloquent. Then came the turn of Bill Clinton, who gravely looked at the others present.

“My friends, I couldn’t possibly praise Nancy Laplante better than Rabbi Huberband just did. As a friend and as ex-President of the United States, I could not possibly refuse to come honor such a woman as Nancy Laplante. On top of all that she did, she was also a Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient, a fact that by itself justified my presence here. However, beyond coming to present the official respects of the government of the United States to a true heroine and wonderful human being, I came to say a last goodbye to someone I came to admire and respect greatly. Apart from saving many lives in the past years, she fought the forces of evil, hatred and intolerance with unparalleled bravery, daring and skill. She also helped inform all in this world about the

true costs and horrors of war, thus promoted in her own way the cause of peace. She was both the ultimate soldier and the ultimate peacemaker. May her memory live forever, Amen!"

Once Bill Clinton was finished, the employee from the funeral home that was present took it as the signal to push a small lever, releasing the tension on the straps supporting Nancy's coffin and making it lower slowly in its grave, at the same time as a recorded bagpipe version of 'Amazing Grace' started playing on a portable radio/CD player. Many of the mourners prayed silently or cried as the coffin disappeared inside the hole. Once the coffin was at the bottom, two cemetery employee removed the straps and pulley systems, allowing mourners who wished to do so to use shovels provided by the cemetery to each pour some earth on top of the coffin. Mike Crawford, a tall, handsome and physically powerful man with short black hair and green eyes, who was apparently in his mid thirties, then made an announcement in a strong voice.

"Thank you all for coming to pay your last respects to Nancy, my friends. Now that this burial ceremony is over, you are all invited to attend a last reception in her honor at the nearby WelcomInns Hotel, where a reception lounge has been rented by me. Maps with indications to the hotel have already been given to your drivers, while my own car will take the lead and guide you to it. I hope that you will all be able to come. We may now drive off to the hotel."

Holding her two younger children by the hand, nine year old twins Vivienne and Knox, Angelina Jolie returned with the rest of her family to their rented limousine, which had been provided courtesy of Mike Crawford at their arrival in Montreal. The convoy of mourners, with ex-President Clinton's motorcade jumping near the head, then slowly rolled out of the cemetery under the cameras of the reporters and paparazzi crowding around the gate. As Angelina had expected, some of those paparazzi ran back to their cars in order to follow the convoy and continue to take pictures. Angelina sighed with exasperation, then had a last look at Nancy's grave, where the two cemetery employees were busy filling back the hole containing her coffin. More tears came to her eyes as she remembered the good times they had together in the too few years they had known each other. Nancy had proved to be a friend on which Angelina and her family could count on, while Angelina had done her best to help Nancy when she had been distraught

at being forced to leave Montreal and come live in California. In fact, most of the mourners that came today had a debt of gratitude towards Nancy.

Angelina and Brad already knew where the WelcomInns Hotel in Boucherville was, as Mike Crawford's invitation to the funerals included arrangements for both the local transportation and hotel rooms, with the Jolie-Pitt getting rooms and suites at the WelcomInns, like apparently most of the other American mourners, save for ex-President Clinton. While being of rather modest size by Los Angeles standards and not being what an Hollywood celebrity would call a true luxury hotel, it was a modern, comfortable and most decent establishment that had proved more than acceptable to Angelina. Bad tongues would have said that Angelina could not live in anything but the best but, in truth, she could do with about anything, having experienced many atrocious living conditions in the past while acting as a United Nations goodwill ambassador to refugees. Now, calling the Boucherville's WelcomInns Hotel a Third World facility would have been grossly unfair, as it would actually satisfy about the most demanding American or European tourist. It also had the benefit of being well situated, being located near an exit to the main highway linking the cities of Montreal and Quebec and also being only a few kilometers from Montreal itself and its international airport. Lastly, it had the advantage of being right in Boucherville, less than three kilometers from the cemetery where Nancy was now buried. Mike Crawford, who had apparently been told a few things by Nancy about her relationship with Angelina, had also included in his invitation letter a few suggestions in terms of places to eat, places that Nancy had in fact spoken about in the past. Angelina smiled on seeing her children throw interested looks at a modest pizzeria restaurant as their limousine turned on De Mortagne Boulevard and passed in front of the 'ORLANDO' restaurant. After having Nancy tell her many times about how much she liked a calories-soaked and definitely not pretentious-looking Quebec specialty called 'poutine', along with smoked meat sandwiches, and having herself tried poutine by herself during a past trip to Montreal, Angelina had brought her six children and Brad to the ORLANDO for an early supper yesterday after arriving from Los Angeles. To her amusement, her children had loved the recipe, essentially French fries topped by grated cheese and hot brown gravy that could also include a variety of toppings that went from chopped chicken, sausage bits and chopped pork meat to smoked meat. Her older sons, seventeen year-old Maddox and fifteen year-old Pax, had also been pleased when a large group of female teenage students from the nearby

high school had walked in for a snack, dressed in their school uniforms, which included short pleated skirts. Both Maddox and Pax had later pronounced the standard of the local girls to be 'very nice', while a near riot had broken in the restaurant when the teenage girls had recognized Angelina and Brad after a moment of uncertainty. Angelina smiled even wider as she thought about that rather wild but fun family supper time, as no professional reporter or photographer had been around to spoil the fun.

The convoy of mourners arrived at the WelcomInns Hotel after less than fifteen minutes, with two local police cars coming along to escort ex-President Clinton's motorcade. As the mourners came out of their vehicles and entered the hotel, to be immediately guided to a ground floor reception lounge, police agents took position at the lounge's entrances and in the hotel lobby, to deter paparazzi from coming in and causing trouble. A large, good quality photograph of Nancy, taken of her while she was wearing her typical war reporter's outfit in some Middle East war zone, sat on an easel at the entrance, framed by flowers. Immense sadness returned to Angelina as she stared at the framed photo for a long moment. She was suddenly conscious that someone else was standing beside her and she turned her head, only to recognize Christiane Amanpour, the veteran CNN international correspondent and anchor, who had tears rolling on her cheeks.

"I still can't believe that she is gone." Said weakly Amanpour when she saw that Angelina was looking at her. "She seemed nearly indestructible."

"We all die one day, Miss Amanpour. Nancy did it the heroic way, while protecting children."

"I know! Still, such a loss is hard to accept."

Angelina nodded, then gently touched Amanpour's forearm.

"It indeed is. Let's go in: I am sure that Nancy would want us to have some good time discussing together despite of this."

"You are right, Miss Jolie."

"Please, call me simply Angelina. Can I call you Christiane?"

"Yes, of course."

Both entered the lounge, where Mike Crawford greeted them near the entrance with handshakes and kisses on the cheek.

"Thank you for coming to this reception. The bar is a free service, so feel free to have what you want, especially since you won't need to drive."

Christiane Amanpour, who was no empty head, looked at him for a moment after shaking hands and then spoke in a near whisper.

“Tell me the truth, Mister Crawford. You were more than just Nancy’s boyfriend, right?”

Mike hesitated only for a second before nodding his head.

“I was in fact secretly her husband, Miss Amanpour. She didn’t want to subject me and our children to the mad publicity that had started to follow her.”

“Could I meet your children later on, Mister Crawford?”

“I would be pleased to do so, and please call me simply Mike.”

Angelina and Christiane then had to move, as more mourners were entering the lounge. As she looked around her, Angelina was suddenly aware that the more historically known persons she had recognized at the cemetery were nowhere in sight. She quickly understood that they must have skipped the reception, in order not to risk being recognized by the members and staff of CNN, who didn’t know that Nancy had been a time traveler, contrary to most of the actors and actress that had been saved by Nancy on the MV ECLIPSE and were present in the lounge. Christiane Amanpour, for one, would have surely recognized David Ben-Gurion and Elizabeth Windsor, once they had taken off their hats and sunglasses. Joining up with Brad and their children, Angelina went to get a drink and some hors d’oeuvres at the bar and buffet tables, then started to mix in with the others to exchange souvenirs and stories about Nancy.

On her part, Christiane Amanpour, still feeling sad and depressed, got herself a drink before going to join a group formed by Anderson Cooper, Bill Clinton and Parisa Kosravi, CNN’s Vice-President for International News and Christiane’s direct superior at CNN. The group quickly swell afterwards, with Jennifer Garner and Ben Affleck joining them first, followed by Hugh Jackman and his wife Deborra-Lee. After a few minutes of quiet discussion, Christiane noticed that most of the actors’ children had congregated in one corner of the lounge, talking with a group of children seemingly led by a huge teenager. Intrigued, Christiane excused herself with her group and went towards the children, stopping a few paces away from them and sitting down at a table to discreetly look at them. The big teenager, actually the size of a very large and tall professional wrestler but still definitely not an adult, looked at her after only a few seconds, scrutinizing her in turn. Christiane then felt a funny sensation inside her head, as if someone was tickling her brain. The teenager, who could be about seventeen or

eighteen, then came to her and nodded politely his head to her while pointing an empty chair at her table.

“Could I speak with you, miss?”

“Of course! By the way, I am Christiane Amanpour, and I worked with Nancy at CNN.”

“Nancy told me about you, miss.” Said the teenager before sitting and then presenting his hand for a shake. “Herakles Sirtis-Laplante. I was adopted by Nancy when I was eight.”

“You are quite a big boy, Herakles. How old are you?”

“I am sixteen years old, miss.”

Christiane was left stunned for a moment as she stared at the 190 centimeters plus teenager, who was all muscles and had to weigh at least 130 kilos, without any visible fat.

“My god! How could you be so big at your age, Herakles?”

The teenager then shrugged in response.

“It is quite a long story, miss. But enough about me. Mike told me that you wanted to meet Nancy’s children. Would you like me to present my siblings to you?”

“Very much so, Herakles, but shouldn’t your father do this?”

“He already approves of my initiative, miss.” Replied Herakles while pointing at Mike Crawford, who was some distance away and talking with five other persons. Christiane saw Mike look at her and Herakles and then nod at the teenager, who smiled in turn at the news anchor.

“You see?”

He then looked at some of the other teenagers nearby and signaled them to join him at the table. Christiane felt her heart accelerate as three prepubescent teenagers, two boys and a girl, came to sit at their table, followed soon by two young women. Christiane’s eyes were attracted in particular to two of the prepubescent teenagers, a boy and a girl who were obviously twins and bore more than a passing resemblance to Nancy, both having green eyes and black hair as well. Herakles kept his voice low as he presented in turn the newcomers, starting with the twins, who were tall for their age.

“May I present to you first Patrick and Suzanne Laplante-Crawford? They are nine year-old and are twins from Nancy and Mike. Then you have eleven year-old Eli, who was adopted at birth by Nancy.”

Herakles then pointed at the two young women.

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