Lovereading.co.uk
Helping you choose your next book

You loved your last book...but what are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

The Paris Architect

Written by Charles Belfoure

Published by Allison & Busby Limited

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.



The Paris Architect

CHARLES BELFOURE

Allison & Busby Limited
12 Fitzroy Mews
London W1T 6DW
allisonandbusby.com

First published in 2013.
This paperback edition published by Allison & Busby in 2015.
Published by arrangement with Sourcebooks Inc.

Copyright © 2013 by Charles Belfoure

The moral right of the author is hereby asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All characters and events in this publication, other than those clearly in the public domain, are fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition being imposed on the subsequent buyer.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

First Edition

ISBN 978-0-7490-1947-1

Typeset in 10.75/15.75 pt Adobe Garamond Pro by Allison & Busby Ltd.

The paper used for this Allison & Busby publication has been produced from trees that have been legally sourced from well-managed and credibly certified forests.

Printed and bound by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

CHAPTER ONE

Just as Lucien Bernard rounded the corner at the rue la Boétie, a man running from the opposite direction almost collided with him. He came so close that Lucien could smell his cologne as he raced by.

In the very second that Lucien realised he and the man wore the same scent, L'Eau d'Aunay, he heard a loud crack. He turned around. Just two metres away, the man lay face down on the pavement, blood streaming from the back of his bald head as though someone had turned on a faucet inside his skull. The dark crimson fluid flowed quickly in a narrow rivulet down his neck, over his crisp white collar, and then onto his well-tailored navy blue suit, changing its colour to a rich deep purple.

There had been plenty of killings in Paris in the two years since the beginning of the German occupation in 1940, but Lucien had never actually seen a dead body until this moment. He was oddly mesmerised, not by the dead body, but by the new colour the blood had produced on his suit. In an art class at school, he

had to paint boring colour wheel exercises. Here before him was bizarre proof that blue and red indeed made purple.

'Stay where you are!'

A German officer holding a steel-blue Luger ran up alongside him, followed by two tall soldiers with sub-machine guns, which they immediately trained on Lucien.

'Don't move, you bastard, or you'll be sleeping next to your friend,' said the officer.

Lucien couldn't have moved if he'd wanted to; he was frozen with fear.

The officer walked over to the body, then turned and strolled up to Lucien as if he were going to ask him for a light. About thirty years old, the man had a fine aquiline nose and very dark, un-Aryan brown eyes, which now stared deeply into Lucien's grey-blue ones. Lucien was unnerved. Shortly after the Germans took over, several pamphlets had been written by Frenchmen on how to deal with the occupiers. Maintain dignity and distance, do not talk to them, and above all, avoid eye contact. In the animal world, direct eye contact was a challenge and a form of aggression. But Lucien couldn't avoid breaking this rule with the German's eyes just ten centimetres from his.

'He's not my friend,' Lucien said in a quiet voice.

The German's face broke out into a wide grin.

'This kike is nobody's friend any more,' said the officer, whose uniform indicated he was a major in the Waffen-SS. The two soldiers laughed.

Though Lucien was so scared that he thought he had pissed himself, he knew he had to act quickly or he could be lying dead on the ground next. Lucien managed a shallow breath to brace

himself and to think. One of the oddest aspects of the Occupation was how incredibly pleasant and polite the Germans were when dealing with their defeated French subjects. They even gave up their seats on the Metro to the elderly.

Lucien tried the same tack.

'Is that your bullet lodged in the gentleman's skull?' he asked.

'Yes, it is. Just one shot,' the major said. 'But it's really not all that impressive. Jews aren't very athletic. They run so damn slow it's never much of a challenge.'

The major began to go through the man's pockets, pulling out papers and a handsome alligator wallet, which he placed in the side pocket of his green and black tunic. He grinned up at Lucien.

'But thank you so much for admiring my marksmanship.'

A wave of relief swept over Lucien – this wasn't his day to die. 'You're most welcome, Major.'

The officer stood. 'You may be on your way, but I suggest you visit a men's room first,' he said in a solicitous voice. He gestured with his grey gloved hand at the right shoulder of Lucien's grey suit.

'I'm afraid I splattered you. This filth is all over the back of your suit, which I greatly admire, by the way. Who is your tailor?'

Craning his neck to the right, Lucien could see specks of red on his shoulder. The officer produced a pen and a small brown notebook.

'Monsieur. Your tailor?'

'Millet. On the rue de Mogador.' Lucien had always heard that Germans were meticulous record keepers.

The German carefully wrote this down and pocketed his notebook in his trouser pocket.

'Thank you so much. No one in the world can surpass the artistry of French tailors, not even the British. You know, the French have us beat in all the arts, I'm afraid. Even we Germans concede that Gallic culture is vastly superior to Teutonic – in everything except fighting wars, that is.' The German laughed at his observation, as did the two soldiers.

Lucien followed suit and also laughed heartily.

After the laughter subsided, the major gave Lucien a curt salute. 'I won't keep you any longer, monsieur.'

Lucien nodded and walked away. When safely out of earshot, he muttered 'German shit' under his breath and continued on at an almost leisurely pace. Running through the streets of Paris had become a death wish – as the poor devil lying face down in the street had found out. Seeing a man murdered had frightened him, he realised, but he really wasn't upset that the man was dead. All that mattered was that *he* wasn't dead. It bothered him that he had so little compassion for his fellow man.

But no wonder – he'd been brought up in a family where compassion didn't exist.

His father, a university-trained geologist of some distinction, had had the same dog-eat-dog view of life as the most ignorant peasant. When it came to the misfortune of others, his philosophy had been 'tough shit, better him than me'. The late Professor Jean-Baptiste Bernard hadn't seemed to realise that human beings, including his wife and children, had feelings. His love and affection had been heaped upon inanimate objects – the rocks and minerals of France and her colonies – and he demanded that his two sons love them as well. Before most children could read, Lucien and his older brother, Mathieu, had been taught the names of every sedimentary, igneous,

and metamorphic rock in every one of France's nine geological provinces.

His father tested them at suppertime, setting rocks on the table for them to name. He was merciless if they made even one mistake, like the time Lucien couldn't identify bertrandite, a member of the silicate family, and his father had ordered him to put the rock in his mouth so he would never forget it. To this day, he remembered bertrandite's bitter taste.

He had hated his father, but now he wondered if he was more like his father than he wanted to admit.

As Lucien walked on in the glaring heat of the July afternoon, he looked up at the buildings clad in limestone (a sedimentary rock of the calcium carbonate family), with their beautiful rusticated bases, tall windows outlined in stone trim, and balconies with finely detailed wrought-iron designs supported on carved stone consoles. Some of the massive double doors of the apartment blocks were open, and he could see children playing in the interior courtyards, just as he had done when he was a boy. He passed a street-level window from which a black and white cat gazed sleepily at him.

Lucien loved every building in Paris – the city of his birth, the most beautiful city in the world. In his youth, he had roamed all over Paris, exploring its monuments, grand avenues, and boulevards down to the grimiest streets and alleys in the poorest districts. He could read the history of the city in the walls of these buildings. If that Kraut bastard's aim had been off, never again would he have seen these wonderful buildings, walk these cobblestone streets, or inhale the delicious aroma of baking bread in the boulangeries.

Farther down the rue la Boétie, he could see shopkeepers standing back from their plate glass windows – far enough to avoid being spotted from the street but close enough to have seen the shooting. A very fat man motioned to him from the entrance of the Cafe d'Été. When he reached the door, the man, who seemed to be the owner, handed him a wet bar towel.

'The bathroom's in the back,' he said.

Lucien thanked him and walked to the rear of the cafe. It was a typical dark Parisian cafe, narrow, a black-and-white-tiled floor with small tables along a wall, and a very poorly stocked bar on the opposite side. The Occupation had done the unthinkable in Paris: it had cut off a Frenchman's most basic necessities of life – cigarettes and wine. But the cafe was such an ingrained part of his existence that he still went there daily to smoke fake cigarettes made from grass and herbs and drink the watered-down swill that passed for wine. The Cafe d'Été patrons, who had probably seen what had happened, stopped talking and looked down at their glasses when Lucien passed, acting as if he'd been contaminated by his contact with the Germans. It reminded him of the time he'd been in a cafe when five German enlisted men blundered in. The place had gone totally silent, as if someone had turned off a switch on a radio. The soldiers had left immediately.

In the filthy bathroom, Lucien took off his suit jacket to begin the clean-up. A few blobs of blood the size of peas dotted the back of the jacket, and one was on the sleeve. He tried to blot out the Jew's blood, but faint stains remained. This annoyed him – he only had one good business suit. A tall, handsome man with a full head of wavy brown hair, Lucien was quite particular about his clothes. His wife, Celeste, was clever about practical matters,

though. She could probably get the bloodstains out of his jacket. He stood back and looked at himself in the mirror above the sink to make sure there wasn't any blood on his face or in his hair, then suddenly looked at his watch and realised his appointment was in ten minutes. He put his jacket back on and threw the soiled towel in the sink.

Once in the street, he couldn't help looking back at the corner where the shooting had taken place. The Germans and the body were gone; only a large pool of blood marked the spot of the shooting. The Germans were unbelievably efficient people. The French would have stood around the corpse, chatting and smoking cigarettes. Full rigor mortis would have set in by the time they had carted it away. Lucien almost started trotting but slowed his pace to a brisk walk. He hated being late, but he wasn't about to be shot in the back of the skull because of his obsession with punctuality. Monsieur Manet would understand. Still, this meeting held the possibility of a job, and Lucien didn't want to make a bad first impression.

Lucien had learnt early in his career that architecture was a business as well as an art, and one ought not look at a first job from a new client as a one-shot deal but rather as the first in a series of commissions. And this one had a lot of promise. The man he was to meet, Auguste Manet, owned a factory that until the war used to make engines for Citroën and other car makers. Before an initial meeting with a client, Lucien would always research his background to see if he had money, and Monsieur Manet definitely had money. Old money, from a distinguished family that went back generations. Manet had tried his hand at industry, something his class frowned upon. Wealth from business was

considered dirty, not dignified. But he had multiplied the family fortune a hundredfold, cashing in on the car craze, specialising in engines.

Manet was in an excellent position to obtain German contracts during the Occupation. Even before the German invasion in May 1940, a mass exodus had begun, with millions fleeing the north of the country to the south, where they thought they'd be safe. Many industrialists had tried unsuccessfully to move their entire factories, including the workers, to the south. But Manet had remained calm during the panic and stayed put, with all his factories intact.

Normally, a defeated country's economy ground to a halt, but Germany was in the business of war. It needed weapons for its fight with the Russians on the Eastern Front, and suitable French businesses were awarded contracts to produce war materiel. At first, French businessmen had viewed cooperation with the Germans as treason, but faced with a choice of having their businesses appropriated by the Germans without compensation or accepting the contracts, the pragmatic French had chosen the latter. Lucien was betting that Manet was a pragmatic man and that he was producing weapons for the Luftwaffe or the Wehrmacht. And that meant new factory space, which Lucien could design for him.

Before the war, whenever Lucien was on his way to meet a client for the first time, his imagination ran wild with visions of success – especially when he knew the client was rich. He tried to rein in his imagination now, telling himself to be pessimistic. Every time he got his hopes up high these days, they were smashed to bits. Like in 1938, when he was just about to start a store on

the rue de la Tour d'Auvergne and then the client went bankrupt because of a divorce. Or the big estate in Orleans whose owner was arrested for embezzlement. He told himself to be grateful for any crumb of work that he could find in wartime.

Having nearly forgotten the incident with the Jew, Lucien's mind began to formulate a generic design of a factory that would be quite suitable for any type of war production. As he turned up the avenue Marceau, he smiled as he always did whenever he thought of a new design.