

The Grenoble Wedding

The Chateau de la Paix hadn't seen a wedding reception quite like this one in its 300-year history, and Jean-Luc Grenoble was determined that it would be the most extravagant and impressive event St Malo had seen in years. Guests entered the palatial arrival hall, through the picture gallery, now full of enormous pictures of Jean-Luc and Martine, and onto the terrace at the rear of the chateau.

Waiters and waitresses dressed in gold and white served champagne and caviar, cognac, and sherry, and delicious hors d'oeuvres that had been specially commissioned from the premier local patisserie. Jugglers, fire-breathers, and magicians wandered through the crowd of over five hundred guests, performing tricks for them to much applause and appreciation. A small orchestra played from a temporary stage erected on the lawn in front of a vast expanse of oak flooring for dancing later in the day, both shipped in from Paris at great expense.

The civil ceremony had taken place at the Marie with just close family, and the married couple had been covertly taken into the chateau and led upstairs to the main ballroom. From there, they could enter down the impressive exterior stone staircase onto the garden terrace, and then down across the dark oak dancefloor to the vast white marquee that had been erected in the lower garden. The marquee was so large that more than a dozen of the flower borders had been dug up and the ground flattened to ensure there was sufficient room for the 50 tables, and the bride and groom sat on golden thrones, placed a raised dais five feet above the rest of the guests, like a King and Queen looking out across their minions.

Jean-Luc Grenoble stood on his own in the ballroom looking out at the milling guests and congratulated himself. Life was going well, he was moving up in the world, and Martine was the most beautiful and striking woman he had ever met. He knew that he wasn't a sophisticated man. He still had rough hands from years of hard work and beatings, and he was built like a brickhouse, not tall and willowy like some elegant actor or dancer. He believed that people were made for each other, and Martine had fallen for his hard-man image and rough demeanour, because that was what she liked. Whereas, for him, everyone would look at him differently with Martine on his arm, and that was what he liked. She loved him, and he thought she was stunning. What more could a man ask for?

Grenoble could see dignitaries, gang members, family, many local business men and merchants from the docks, and some complete strangers that he didn't recognise, but they were all there for him and were all going to applaud when he walked down the staircase with the most attractive woman in the whole place at his side. He took another large shot from his glass of cognac and wondered where his new wife was, and what was keeping her. He was eager to get out in front of the crowd and start milking the applause and the admiring looks. He had earned it.

Martine Grenoble had changed into her evening dress and was looking out of the master bedroom one floor higher up, onto the same scene as her new husband. She saw how people naturally were grouping together with others that they knew. There were the two sets of gang leaders from Paris and Marseille, both in separate groups guarded by their own security, the Parisians all beautifully tailored, and the Marseillais all wearing poorly fitting suits. The local business men and dignitaries grouped together and mingled amongst themselves, full of handshakes and cheek-kisses as they all congratulated themselves for being at such a fine event. Her husband had no family to speak of, but his key men were all present with their wives, the men squeezed into tight fitting suits and their wives all extravagantly dressed in poorly chosen frocks, plus Jean-Luc's two enforcers, Didier and Pascal, both already swaying with the amount of booze they had drunk. They were wearing very tightly fitting suits over their muscle-bound physiques and looking extremely uncomfortable in such plush surroundings.

Her own family were there, and looked like the poor relations that they were, all having travelled up from their little village in the Pyrenees. Her father was a tall figure, but grey hair and strong sunshine had aged him to look much older than his fifty years, and her mother was as statuesque and striking as ever but wore a cheap dress and looked totally out of place. She hadn't offered to buy her parents any smarter clothes, although she had considered it, but had quickly decided that this was her day, and she wanted all eyes to be on her. The dress she wore had been designed in Milan and was sheer black with fine lines of silver stitching, the sides and the back cut away to accentuate her long, curvy figure. Her shoes were hand made in Paris, stilettos that had been shortened to ensure that she wasn't taller than her husband, something he had insisted on, but the heels were high enough to accentuate her fabulous legs.

Today was an important day for Martine. She knew she was beautiful, and accepted the admiring looks and compliments with great ease. She also knew that she was much smarter than her husband and all of his gangland thugs, but the important point was that none of them realised that at all. To her husband she was just a pretty woman to have at his side, whereas, to Martine, Jean-Luc represented the opportunity to have power and influence. She did not love him. He was a simple brute and as such was blind to her real motivations. For a girl who worked the streets as a teenager, then as an escort in Paris for five years, she had found Jean-Luc very easy to manipulate. She would help him be successful and see where that took her. If his influence and powerbase grew sufficiently, that might be enough for Martine, but she doubted it, and was already considering who else might be up and coming, that might represent a better bet than Jean-Luc Grenoble.

Martine Grenoble was in no rush, she would get there in good time, and she was certain that her husband would never see her coming. He was just the most successful thug in the area right now.

Happy with her makeup, she dismissed her stylist, took a deep breath then skipped down the interior staircase and into the ballroom where her husband was waiting patiently for her.

'Jean-Luc! You look like a million-dollars, my Darling,' she said floating over to him and kissing him once on the mouth. 'I'm the proudest woman in the world. Let's go and join our guests, so that I can show you off to the whole world.'

'I'm ready when you are,' slurred Grenoble. 'Let's show those fuckers a thing or two.'

As they walked arm in arm outside to rapturous applause from the waiting crowd, all eyes were drawn to the long, sleek shape of Martine Grenoble who moved effortlessly at her husband's side. Their eyes then turned to Jean-Luc Grenoble himself, and many wondered how such a thick-set bull of a man had ever managed to capture such a glamorous woman. The more astute amongst them appreciated that it was Martine who had caught the man that 'she' wanted.