

*Christine Tipper*



## *The Butterfly Collector*

Sarah felt the sweat trickle down her back. She was hot and bored. She was sitting in a large stuffy room with 11 other delegates from the south-west of England. They were into their second day of a four-day business exchange visit to Brittany. She glanced around at the motley collection of environmentalists, regional government officers and local businessmen. Most of them had shiny black spiders clinging to the sides of their heads – these were headphones to help them understand what was being said by the two female interpreters sitting at the back of the room giving simultaneous interpretations of the presentations from French into English. The short burst of applause made Sarah zone back into the present to hear the introduction of the next topic – renewable energy – again! Sarah sighed and let her mind wander. She saw Jean-Charles stand up and move towards the door. She'd found him arrogant and unapproachable yesterday, making disparaging remarks about the capabilities of the English to learn any language apart from their own. As if!! But today she'd had a friendly chat with him over coffee about her tattoo. Sarah was just thinking about how he'd been eyeing up her legs when she heard the word "papillon" in her right ear. She jerked her head up and looked round the table but nobody else seemed to be disturbed by the fact that a man's voice talking in French about butterflies was coming through the headphones. Sarah checked the others' faces again – no, nothing, just a glazed look of disconnection or perhaps deep concentration. The words crawling into her ears via the dark spongy underbelly of the spider made her blanche. She understood enough French to realise that the voice was telling the Butterfly Collector that his collection of beautiful dead creatures was about to be discovered. The more and more agitated messenger was talking about police, murders, missing girls, butterfly tattoos. Sarah started to panic. She glanced down at her leg. Was she the only one who could hear this? Who was she listening to? She pushed back from the table and earned herself a scathing look from Jean-Charles standing by the door. Picking up the small receiver box – so that she could still hear her headphones – she tried to quietly leave the room. She'd made it through the door when a hand caught her arm. Sarah screamed as she saw that the attached wrist was sporting a beautiful butterfly tattoo.

Sarah looked up and saw Jean-Charles's eyes burning into her. He tried to steer her away from the conference room and towards the exit. She panicked. What was happening? The grip around her arm became stronger. He was hurting her.

"Jean-Charles, you're hurting me. Let me go."

"I don't think so. I would really like to look more closely at the butterfly tattoo that decorates your leg so beautifully."

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“Well, here it is!”

At this point Sarah turned and kned him hard in the groin. The delicate small cornflower blue on her calf rose magnificently to the occasion.

As Jean-Charles doubled over Sarah caught sight of a small earpiece in his left ear. Somehow her interpreting headset must have intercepted the walkie-talkie messages from his accomplice. By now others were streaming out of the room because of the commotion. Sarah was going to have to explain why she had floored their host. She'd just opened her mouth when police officers burst into the foyer.

“Jean-Charles Badinter we are arresting you on suspicion of murder. You do not have to say anything ... Do you understand?”

Jean-Charles nodded. The police officer put handcuffs around Jean-Charles wrists. They dug into the purple and white of his Purple Emperor tattoo. Not such an Emperor now – thoughts of the fall of Napoleon and the Brits flitted through Sarah's mind.

As the police led Jean-Charles away Sarah smiled at him and lifted the hem of her skirt above the knee. There was a finely formed bee tattooed on her thigh.

“Hey, JC, a famous person once said, “float like a butterfly, sting like a bee”.”