UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_158309

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OSMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Call No. 813.5/S66G Accession No. [redacted]

Author Smythe, D. M

Title Golden Venus 1960

This book should be returned on or before the date last marked below.

GOLDEN VENUS

BY DAVID MYNDERS SMYTHE

Golden Venus

Madame de Pompadour,

Mistress of France

GOLDEN VENUS

by

David Mynders Smythe

0010

P. O. KRISHNAYYA'S NEWS SERVICE
PRESS SECTION
UNITED NATIONS, N. Y., U. S. A.

GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK

Doubleday & Company, Inc.

1960

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 60–8685
Copyright © 1960 by David Mynders Smythe
All Rights Reserved
Printed in the United States of America

TO

Madeline Ehrlich,

ONE OF THE FEW WHO BELIEVED.

PROLOGUE

The sergeant of the *Garde Nationale* opened the door of the gatekeeper's cottage and frowned into the darkness. "Who is it?" he shouted. "What do you want?"

"Open the gates, at once! We come from the Committee of Public Safety—and we're almost drowned." The speaker's voice was taut with anger. The sergeant's eyes widened; he snatched a lantern from the table, and ran out into the rain, "Pardon, citizens, I beg your pardon," he stammered. "I wasn't told you were coming, or you would never have had to wait." He fumbled nervously with the lock and the gilded iron gates swung open. The two men in long dripping cloaks pushed past him and stamped into the cottage. The frightened sergeant shut the gates and hurried inside to find his callers shaking themselves before the fire like wet farm dogs.

"Citizens, where is your carriage? Surely the Committee of Public Safety doesn't ask good republicans to walk on a night like this?"

"Hardly!" exclaimed the man with the angry voice. He was short, and his red apple-face seemed amiable at first glance, but his little porcine eyes and thin intolerant mouth signaled a vicious temper. "Our carriage broke an axle at the bottom of the hill of Bougival. Send some of your men to help the driver." He turned around and held his hands out to the fire.

The sergeant nodded. "But citizens, first I must trouble you for your papers—I admit no one to Louveciennes without a written order from the Public Prosecutor."

"I know that, you ox," began the choleric man, but his companion, a youth with a lean earnest face, interrupted. "Wait, Jules, the sergeant is right." He reached beneath his cloak and drew out two oblong cards. "Here they are." He smiled reassuringly and handed the papers to the soldier, who examined them intently before laboriously writing in his record book:

8 décembre, 1793
Let pass at 19 hours 30 minutes by Order of the
Public Prosecutor Fouquier-Tinville:
Citizen Jules Metray: age, 38 years.
Citizen Armand Feuille: age, 23 years.

Metray, the older of the two, crossed the small room to the table and looked down at the scrawled entry. "Don't you know the republican calendar yet, sergeant? I see you still use the dates of the debased monarchy—perhaps you need more educating, a man in your important post!" His tone was ironical and his small eyes shone with sardonic amusement. "Give us back the papers and we'll be on our way. Armand," he turned to his colleague, "I suppose we will have to walk, but we're so wet now a little more of it won't matter." He glanced at the abashed sergeant and said, "How far to the Château?"

"Not far, monsieur—citizen—straight up the roadway, about five minutes' walk. I regret we have no carriage. . . ." but his visitors had already disappeared with a loud bang of the door, leaving him to his own uneasy thoughts. He looked again at the incriminating notation: 8 *décembre,* 1793 and damned his blunder. The new calendar had such odd names for the months—*Brumaire, Fructidor, Prairial*—he could never remember which was which. He scratched his head in ponderous reflection, inked out the reactionary date, and wrote above it: 18 *Frimaire,* Year II.

The two men were silent as they plodded up the sloping drive, leaning forward against the cold wind and driving rain. Bordering

the roadside, leafless lindens thrust their trunks upward, stark branches dimly outlined against the winter sky. From the Seine at the foot of the hill sounded the clanking of chains and the rumbling of gears as the Marly Pump pursued its once royal function of supplying water to distant Versailles. Versailles—a mausoleum housing royal ghosts, asking only to slumber with its memories.

The Château of Louveciennes was also a house of the dead. Of a lighter elegance than vast Versailles, it too gave off an aura of memories—memories of a king, boundless extravagance, love, and a mistress who would not look upon it again.

Panting from their uphill walk, the weary men reached the portico and Armand Feuille beat with his fists on the heavy paneled door. Candlelight flickered through the cracks in the closed shutters. After a pause, during which Feuille continued to hammer violently and Metray kicked the door, it slowly opened. A man stood in the narrow opening, holding a lighted candle in a silver holder and peering suspiciously into the night.

"Yes, citizen?" The accent was good, yet the high thin voice held a curiously remote quality, an indefinable strangeness which made Feuille's flesh crawl.

"Let us in, damn you!" snapped Metray. "We are deputies of the Convention, and the Committee of Public Safety has sent us to Louveciennes to inventory its contents." He blew his nose. "For God's sake, take us to a fire and give us some dry clothes, or we will be dead too—and not by the guillotine!"

The man swung wide the door and they stepped into the foyer. Metray shed his sodden cloak, dropping it heedlessly on the marble floor, while Feuille looked curiously at the man with the brown skin who stood watching them. So warily—the liquid dark eyes in the long cadaverous face missed nothing. The enormous nostrils flared, and Feuille thought momentarily of some sinister horse from a nether world. He led them into a small white and gold salon, pointed to armchairs before the fire, and brought quilted-satin dressing gowns and a decanter of burgundy. Only

then did the thin repellent voice speak, addressing itself to Metray. "You mentioned the guillotine?" As he uttered the last word his thin head arched forward on his long neck and his pink tongue caressed his pendulous lower lip.

Metray was not a squeamish man, but he twisted in his chair and sipped his wine before he could bring himself to answer, and when he did it was with an abrupt question of his own. "What is your name?"

"I am Zamor."

"Of *course!* I should have known. Armand," he waved his hand, "this is Citizen Zamor, the Bengalese"—he paused, uneasily aware that the brown man's eyes had glazed, motionless at the foreign word—"the Bengalese who knew the *ci-devant* Comtesse so well, who was with her so long. Weren't you, Zamor?"

"Yes, citizen, I was with her long—since I was seven. That would be twenty-four years."

"Well, you know a lot about her; you must have seen many men. . . ." Metray winked.

Zamor's lips twisted in a sly smile. "I told the Committee what I knew."

"I know! You did your duty like a patriot, and it was enough! You can rest now—your fine lady is finished—she was shaved by the National Razor this very afternoon. How she howled—like a bitch in heat! Not a pretty sight—but entertaining."

"You *saw* it?" Zamor stood by the chimney, his eyes glittering in the firelight. He was trembling, and his breath coursed with such violence through his dilated nostrils that Feuille, watching in dismay, expected him to whinny exultantly.

"Oh yes." Metray was elaborately casual. "How the slut hated to forfeit her rotten life! Too bad there weren't more to see it, but the day was dark, and the rain starting. . . ."

"There were enough!" Feuille spoke sharply. "It made me sick, and I think most of the mob felt like I did."

"Citizen Feuille!" Metray's glance was mocking, but his tone

was edged. "You sound more like an aristocrat than a simple bourgeois from Flanders. This Messalina deserved——"

"Messalina?"

"Messalina—that's what the Public Prosecutor called her; and the Prosecutor is never wrong, is he?"

"No—never wrong." Feuille gazed into the fire.

"You are a good Jacobin, Armand, I know that." Metray's tone was milder. "But you grew up in the provinces, too far away to know what a monster this woman was—she sucked the blood of the people. . . ." he paused. "I'll tell you about her before we are through. You'll find out."

Feuille raised his eyes to a portrait on the opposite wall. "Is that she?" he whispered.

Metray turned to look. From a golden oval frame a woman returned his gaze. She wore a décolleté gown of rose-colored silk; her blond hair was simply dressed, its tints matching the warm flesh tones of her face and bosom. But more arresting than her almost-breathing physical beauty was the merry tolerance in her deep blue eyes, the expression of guileless trust on her enchanting features. Metray seemed reluctant to shift his eyes from the portrait; at last he glanced at Feuille, his full face more flushed than usual. He breathed deeply and set his tight mouth. "Yes, that is the *ci-devant* Comtesse du Barry, the way she looked when she went to Versailles. No wonder you do not recognize her; the likeness bears little resemblance to the screaming harlot we saw today." He gulped the rest of his wine.

"Beautiful—she was beautiful." Feuille sighed.

"Naturally, you young lecher! Do you think she used brains to climb where she did?"

Zamor snickered, and Feuille wanted to hit him. "I'll retire now, citizens," Zamor said. "Everything in the Château is ready for the inventory, just as she left it. Take any of the upstairs rooms you want," he added, "but I warn you they are all cold; we don't keep Louveciennes as we did before——" he checked himself, backed through the doorway, and was gone.

"Ugh!" Feuille made a face. "He turns my stomach. Half horse, half snake!"

Metray laughed. "He's no maiden's dream, that's true enough. I don't like him either, patriot or not. Let's go to bed! We have work to do; it will take days to catalogue everything here, to compare with the list Citizeness du Barry wrote in prison. It all belongs to the nation now."

"Where shall I sleep?" Feuille mumbled. "I'm worn out."

"I'm staying here where it is warm," said Metray, stretching out on a sofa. "Why don't you take the suite of the late owner?" His sardonic smile reappeared. "But her pretty body won't be lying in those pink satin sheets to keep you warm—she is resting elsewhere tonight."

Feuille, sleepy, rubbing his eyes, did not hear. Metray raised his voice. "She is sleeping without her golden head in a common grave near the Madeleine, and she's in good royalist company, the kind she liked; Capet and Antoinette are not ten feet away." He laughed at Feuille's expression. "Go to bed, Armand."

Feuille walked into the foyer and paused, his foot already on the first step of the stairway. "Jules," he called. "Here is another portrait, one of a winsome little girl—is it her child?"

"She had no child!" Metray's voice sounded from the salon. "Although it's God's wonder she didn't spawn a litter! That must be the portrait of the *ci-devant* Comtesse when she was little Jeanne Bécu. Didn't you study the inventory, Armand?" His voice rose with irritation. "It is the very first item on the list."

Part One

LOVE IS NOTHING, LIFE IS PLEASURE

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove—
MARLOWE: The Passionate Shepherd to his Love

CHAPTER ONE

ITEM: Portrait of the ci-devant Comtesse du Barry as a child.

The swaying two-wheeled cart creaked to a halt at the crest of the slope and the driver jumped to the ground. He loosened the shaft which chafed the horse's rounded flanks and wiped his brow with his sleeve. It was not ten o'clock, but the May sun already shone brightly, its hot rays bathing the rich countryside of Lorraine. The river Meuse in the valley below wound its ribboned course, sunlight glinting on the waters as they threaded past Vaucouleurs.

The man drank from a flask of red wine and handed it up to the woman who sat in the back of the straw-filled cart. "Mademoiselle Anne, this will do you good; already you look weary, and we have only started." The woman smiled but shook her head. "Come, now," he urged, concern in his voice. "You and Jeanne have a long road ahead—it will take us four or five days. Paris is not just beyond the next hill." He leaned over and patted the golden hair of the child nestled beside her mother. The little girl's blue eyes twinkled merrily, and she laughed with the rippling joy of all her four years.

Anne Bécu spoke. "How good you are, Monsieur Davoste, to Jeanne and me. I could not have managed without you." She poured the cool wine into a clay cup, gave a sip to the child, and drank the rest. "You are right—I am weary. It isn't easy to leave

Vaucouleurs. I have lived here all my life. Thirty-four years!" She laughed bitterly. "I look older than that, don't I?"

His rugged features twisted with embarrassment. "Not at all," he lied, for Anne Bécu, although still handsome, plainly showed her age. Strands of gray betrayed her dark brown hair, a network of lines wrinkled the corners of her fine eyes, and those hands, which sewed with more artistry than any other seamstress in Lorraine, revealed beyond hope of camouflage that her youth was gone. Davoste, nearly fifty, remembered with a dull sense of pain her maddening loveliness as a girl, the striking good looks and, he thought ruefully, the free ways she had inherited from her father.

As a peasant in the fair kingdom of France in this year of Our Lord 1747, Davoste was doubly unusual; he owned his land, sixty fertile arpents watered by the Meuse, and—he had never married. Once he had hoped that Anne Bécu would accept him, but before she was in her twenties all Vaucouleurs knew of her insatiable desire for young strong men.

How many lovers had there been, he wondered with a prick of nostalgic jealousy, how many lusting virile bodies, peasant lads, eager tradesmen, strong soldiers of the Swiss on their way to Versailles? Davoste tried to ignore the whispers that swirled like autumn leaves around Anne Bécu. God protest, he was no prude; he liked the pleasures of the vine and the flesh as well as any man, and the townspeoples' smug hypocrisy toward the pretty seamstress disgusted him. She wasn't spawning bastards, was she?

And then suddenly she was. When her daughter was born, wives speculated resentfully and men drinking in the tavern joked about the unknown father. "After ten years of whoring it's a miracle she hasn't whelped before now!" snorted the irate Curé. "Show her charity, good men." Frère Jean Gomard, a stalwart Picpus monk, reproved them. "Perhaps with a child to care for, Mademoiselle Anne will mend her ways." His listeners smirked, and Davoste had known that they were thinking of the many

evenings Frère Jean himself had been glimpsed sidling through the seamstress' door.

Three years passed and indeed it seemed as if Anne had changed her ways. She supported the infant by her sewing, so flawless—and so nominal in price—that the virtuous, scornful wives of Vaucouleurs continued to come to her. She returned their hostile stares with courteous indifference. No longer did she saunter the twisted streets of the town, no more did her neat doorway frame the clandestine coming and going of nocturnal footsteps. Men on the prowl were disappointed but women moderated their criticism, and even the rasping Curé began to relent until, just last February, she confounded them all by bearing another nameless child, this time a boy.

He was as dark and sickly as Jeanne was blonde and radiant, and after three puling months he mercifully died. Davoste remembered the fury he felt when a committee of townsmen, led by the Curé, had not even waited until the funeral to notify Anne Bécu that she was no longer welcome to live in Vaucouleurs.

He had gone to her yesterday after the boy's burial. "Mademoiselle Anne," he had begun hesitantly, pitying her pallor, her tight composed expression, "I have heard what they have done; where will you go?" Anne put her hand to her cheek. "I don't know, Monsieur Davoste." She paused. "My brother Charles is valet to the Queen's father, in Nancy—perhaps he can help us." Her eyes brightened. "And my sister Helène lives in Paris—but Paris is far away, farther even than Nancy. Jeanne and I can never reach there."

"I think you can," Davoste countered. "I've always wanted to see the King's city, and you can come with me. We will start tomorrow."

Anne's face relaxed at his comforting words and she hugged Jeanne in a flood of relieved tears. "She *is* a pretty girl, isn't she? All I have now."

"I never saw a child so beautiful in all Lorraine," Davoste agreed. "Such golden hair—such blue eyes! Somehow she doesn't

look—tell me," he went on in a rapid burst that surprised him, "who—I mean—was it Frère Jean?" He reddened at his own boldness.

Anne looked at him calmly. "You are a good man, Monsieur Davoste, there is no harm in telling you; Jeanne's father was one of the Hundred Swiss—and so proud he was to guard the King!" She sighed. "His hair was the color of honey and his eyes, too, were just like hers."

So that's it, thought Davoste. I knew the man couldn't be from this district, the child's too fair. Anne continued, her features softening, freshening in the glow of burning remembrance. "He was a man to love, and he loved me too. I know—a woman can tell those things." She saw the question on Davoste's face. "His name doesn't matter now, for he never came back. He promised, but he never did. Last year a soldier on his way home to Bern told me he was dead, stabbed in a Paris wineshop. After that, what was the use?" She shrugged. "I took someone else, and you know what happened."

As Davoste climbed back into the cart he remembered something his grandmother had once said, that lust alone never produces a beautiful child, and he decided, looking at Jeanne, that Anne had really loved her Swiss; only when she knew he would never return did she revert to profligacy and bring forth another bastard, ugly, ailing, certainly this time no child of love. Davoste struggled with his thoughts. Anne was a beautiful girl no longer, but still she could move a man. He wanted her and knew that he could have her now for the taking, but the throbbing changes in his body were checked by a wave of distaste for her futile disordered life. He flicked the horse with the reins and the cart began to move once more.

Behind him Anne sensed the tension of his warring impulses and put an arm around her child. "Jeanne, my little one, do you see that oak tree, the tallest one on the far hill?"

"Yes, mama." The childish lisp was pronounced, and Anne

often wondered if the defect would be lasting. "Yes, I see the big tree, *way* over there." She pointed a chubby finger toward the north.

"Well, let me tell you a story. On the other side of the hill lies a tiny village, very old. It is called Domrémy."

"Domrémy?" Jeanne repeated, her voice trilling the first three notes of the scale.

"Once a little girl lived there, a little girl very much like you. She was named Jeanne too."

"Was she pretty, mama?"

"Not as pretty as you, but she was an angel. She grew up to be brave and pure and when the wicked English came, bringing war and ruin, God called her to save France. The English burned her, but she saved France for the King."

Jeanne listened with wonder. "Poor little Jeanne," she said softly. "I feel sorry for her." They fell silent and only the creaking of the cart was audible. Even the birds were hushed. The child pulled at her mother's dress.

"Mama, will I save France?"

"No, darling." Anne smiled. "It was long ago, that story; you are *my* angel, but you are not the Maid of Orléans."

The cart rolled on; by late afternoon Lorraine was far behind and they were in the rich vineyards of Champagne. When dusk came they stopped at a small inn, scarcely more than a roofed dungheap, smelling of pigs and cattle. Supper was cabbage soup with bread and cheese, and after they ate, Davoste slept on the floor while Jeanne and Anne climbed the shaky ladder to a small space under the roof. Jeanne had never slept away from the spotless house back in Vaucouleurs and she screamed when two enormous gray rats scurried across the boards. "Mama, it's terrible here! It's dark and dirty! I never want to be in a place like this again!"

Next morning they were early on the road which followed the nearby Marne as it meandered through the fields and woods toward Paris. Champagne yielded to Ile-de-France; on the fifth

day they were approaching the capital. In the far distance they could see its cathedral towers outlined against the western sky.

Anne asked Davoste to stop by a small stream where she washed Jeanne and tidied herself. In the nearness of the great city her features were livelier; her air of depression had vanished. She and Jeanne strolled into the woods and picked handfuls of lilies of the valley. "I love flowers, mama, and these smell best. Lilies?" Her lisp was comically sweet.

"*Muguets,* darling, not *fleurs-de-lis.* Gentle, soft, and white as you; stand still and I'll fix them in your hair."

They returned to Davoste who stood waiting. As Jeanne ran to him clouds of white butterflies swarmed around her and she laughed with glee, trying in vain to snare a pair of gossamer wings. "Catch a white butterfly while you can, little girl," advised Davoste smilingly, "for next month will find them gone; in the Ile-de-France May brings the white butterflies but in June they are red."

They resumed the last stage of their journey and were already in the eastern end of Paris when pale twilight fell. Jeanne looked excitedly at the people, ever more numerous, hurrying through the narrow streets. Many were shouting, their words unintelligible. Davoste explained that they were vendors—of fruit and fish, milk and honeycombs, lottery tickets, secondhand hats. The ardent beat of Paris' heart was contagious; Davoste laughed loudly and Jeanne's eyes sparkled as brightly as her mother's. Ahead of them, to the left, the noble twin towers of Notre Dame reared skyward in the fading light.

Helène Bécu received her sister with the reluctant warmth reserved for a poor relation. Helène was chambermaid in the house of an important man—Monsieur Bignon, Librarian to His Majesty—and she carried herself with fitting dignity. Older than Anne, jealous of her sister's looks and something of a prude, she heard in silence weighty with disapproval Anne's reason for her journey. She let them sleep in her room and promised to speak to her mistress in the morning. "Madame Bignon is capable, most

efficient," she informed Anne in a tone intended to be impressive. "She will find a position for you, sister; do not doubt it."

Madame Bignon justified her chambermaid's prediction. Before the week was out she sent word that a M. Billard would employ Anne as a cook, and he had agreed that Jeanne might share her room in the servants' quarters. "A cook!" Anne sighed. "Naturally I can cook, but you know I am best at sewing." She clasped her well-formed hands. "I advise you to take it, nevertheless," Helène said primly. "Positions are hard to come by. You cannot stay longer here; Madame Bignon has already been good enough to——"

"But of course," Anne assented quickly. "I am grateful. We shall go today to Monsieur Billard's."

The financier Billard owned a fine house near the Place des Victoires. He was a widower in his sixties who followed a lonely routine since the death of his beloved wife. When he instructed Anne on her duties she mentioned hopefully that she could sew better than she could cook. "Good, that is very good," he remarked absently, his thoughts already fixed on ways to finance the next lottery. "I leave it to you, these things; just see that I am comfortable."

The summer went by. Jeanne was too young to run in the crowded streets, but from the dormer window of their attic room she would gaze for hours at Paris beneath her. The noisy hawkers crying their diverse wares, the incessant human flow that seemed to be the essence of life, even the repellent stink that rose from the cobbled streets, all these enraptured her. Across the gabled roofs the Seine divided the city, winding its slow course past the sprawling mass of the Louvre—and the Tuileries—and on into the green countryside that led to the heights of Chaillot.

More than a year passed before Monsieur Billard took any notice of Jeanne. One morning in mid-August, shortly before her birthday, he walked into the kitchen, his florid face smiling; behind him trailed a pale sandy-haired man. "This is Nicolas Ran-

con," he said to Anne, "the new cook." Noting her alarmed expression he added reassuringly, "Don't be afraid, you are not losing your job—rather, I am giving you one more congenial. You told me yourself you are a better seamstress. That's no surprise, men cook best. From now on you run my house, mend my clothes, and leave the cuisine to Rancon." Anne curtsied and looked up to see Rancon grinning shyly at her. Angry to feel her cheeks burning she rose clumsily, nearly losing her balance.

Jeanne gave a tinkling laugh, and Billard turned. His glance ignored the simple mended dress, the makeshift shoes, and rested on the happy face. The thought crossed his mind that her fresh bloom was enhanced rather than marred by two small moles, one over her right eyebrow and the other under her lower lip. He walked across the kitchen and made a courtly bow. "I did not realize my roof sheltered such a pretty young lady." He had no children and had always considered himself too busy for them, but now impulsively he put an arm around Jeanne. She hesitated, she remembered Davoste had been kind enough, but this was the first time a man—a gentleman too—had shown her real affection. Her eyes filled and she threw her soft arms around his legs, hugging him fiercely, longing unconsciously for the protection of a father.

"I like you, monsieur." She smiled up at him through her tears, happy tears, and he was touched by her trustful expression.

"How old are you, my child?"

"Jeanne will be five on the nineteenth of this month," Anne interposed.

Billard glanced down at her golden hair. "Jeanne, you are getting to be a big girl. If you like, come sit sometime in the evening after dinner. I get lonely, perhaps you can cheer me."

A few nights afterward Jeanne, in her white dress, sat in the *salon* at his feet watching him finish his brandy. She stared admiringly at the ornate gilded furniture of the last reign, which had formed part of Madame Billard's dowry. She had never seen such luxury as this room held and she wished she could sit here

forever, feeling the shelter of Monsieur Billard's ample presence.

He placed an object in her hand. "For your birthday," he said. The rotund aging man seemed almost shy. Jeanne opened the small leather box and gazed silently at the gold locket inside. She had never seen jewelry, only the gleaming precious vessels when she went to Mass, and she had never owned the simplest trinket. She sat on the floor staring at the locket. "Jeanne! Don't sit there all night—put it on and let me see how it looks."

"Oh, Monsieur Billard," Jeanne breathed, "how pretty it is! I shall always keep it." She held up the locket to the light of the candelabra and a blue stone sparkled in the center. "That is a sapphire," Billard told her. "The gold is for your hair and the jewel is for your eyes." He fastened the clasp on her neck and turned her around in order to view the effect. Jeanne, ecstatic with her treasure, radiated an enchantment rare in a child, a grace almost womanly. The old financier appraised her intently. "*Sacré Dieu!* I vow you look like a queen—well, a little princess anyway."

"I know what a princess is. Rancon was telling me yesterday about them; he said they are our good King's daughters and that they live . . . they live . . . I can't remember." She frowned.

"Versailles is where they live, but don't worry about that. Go show the locket to your mother—besides, it's time for you to be in bed. Come sit with me again."

Jeanne did come again, many times, to sit with Billard in the months that followed. They talked with the naturalness of two grownups in the long winter evenings before the roaring fire and for the first time, and far too late, Billard regretted that his good wife had never been able to give him a child of his own. Jeanne filled a void in his existence and he brought presents to her—dainty dresses, pink ribbons for her hair, cunning toy windmills whose arms turned in the breeze. To her he represented security and affection and she repaid him with the only gift in her power, warm instinctive love.

She received little attention that year from her mother. Anne had become irritable, embroiled in unending bickering with the

other female servants. Her interest in men, dormant during her misfortunes, blazed again, and her insistent physical need found a vulnerable target in Rancon, her successor in the kitchen. The evenings Jeanne spent in the front of the house with Monsieur Billard furnished ample opportunity for Anne to savor Rancon's physical points; ten years her junior, lusty and easy-going, he seemed to the fading seamstress a last opportunity to find a man on whom she could lean—yet dominate. At thirty-six she was even willing to marry him.

When she informed her employer, who was aware of but totally indifferent to the liaison in the servants' attic, he gave his consent, mainly because he hoped a satisfied Anne would be a more attentive mother. To Jeanne, a husband for her mother was an interesting novelty; Rancon was kind to her and she liked him, but her heart lay in the domain of M. Billard.

Billard had an old hobby, painting, at which he was moderately able. He showed Jeanne landscapes of the Pont-Neuf, the Tuileries, the Jardin des Plantes, and many portraits of his wife, attired in the fashion of the Regency. With her death he had lost enthusiasm but now, perhaps inspired by Jeanne's beauty, he took up his brushes once more. When June came the two of them rode in his carriage to the village of Monceau. While Billard set up his easel Jeanne gathered violets; sometimes she scampered along the paths chasing butterflies. "See, Monsieur Billard," she said, gently holding one she had succeeded in catching, "red! Monsieur Davoste told me the butterflies are red in June." She laughed with delight at her knowledge and sat on the grass to watch him paint, in imitation of Watteau, insipid sheep and idyllic shepherds and shepherdesses. One day he turned to her and said, "Jeanne, I shall paint you. Would you like that?"

"Oh yes, I would, a lot! What will I wear?" He smiled at the feminine question. "We'll buy you a beautiful dress—I promise."

The portrait of Jeanne was the best Billard had ever done. In a dress of blue silk she sat demurely under a linden tree; three of its heart-shaped leaves lay in her lap. His treatment was less

fanciful than usual—this subject needed no embellishment. He ordered a simple gold frame for the canvas and hung it in his *salon*.

"Isn't she a young goddess, Sainte-Foy?" he proudly asked. Radix de Sainte-Foy, only twenty-one, was already rising fast in the financial bureau of the Navy and frequently sought the older man's advice. Billard often invited him to dinner, and over their brandy they watched Jeanne playing with the spaniel Sainte-Foy had given her. She adored Sainte-Foy and at times he spied her regarding him worshipfully. He would wink and turn back to his conversation, but her azure eyes always followed him. Jeanne had never seen anyone so handsome—blue eyes, lighter than hers, surmounted by dark brows; a regular nose, slightly tilted, and teeth that sparkled when he laughed.

Even if Sainte-Foy had not given her the spaniel she would have loved him. The first time she had seen him was the winter before. Leaning over the fireside to retrieve a button fallen from her sleeve, she moved too close to the crackling flames and a flying spark turned her flimsy dress into a terrifying torch. Sainte-Foy flung her to the floor and smothered the flames with cushions from the sofa. Strands of her hair were singed, but she was not burned—only badly frightened. Sainte-Foy's words made a deep impression. "Jeanne," he warned, his eyes serious, "never *never* get too close to the fire; fire is cruel to little girls."

"I know," Jeanne nodded. "Mama told me about Jeanne of Domrémy; I'll try to remember."

"See that you do, or I'll have to wait around until you grow up"—he grinned—"and protect you myself." Jeanne raised her eyebrows and looked at him gravely. "I hope you do. Please promise!"

Besides Sainte-Foy, one of Billard's few visitors was the Abbé Arnaud. He was more corpulent than his host, and paid homage to Rancon's culinary skill by eating for three hours or more, and as his consumption of wine was equally generous he was in a

state of amiable somnolence when the meal was over. One Sunday after lunch he sat Jeanne upon his lap and ponderously bounced her on his knee.

"How old are you now?" he asked.

"I am six, Monsieur l'Abbé. Ouch!" She jumped to the floor, rubbing her backside.

"What is it?" Billard stared suspiciously at the abbé.

"Oh—it is nothing." Abbé Arnaud, coloring, tried to explain. "I meant to scratch my knee and must have pinched Jeanne by mistake."

"It didn't hurt, Monsieur l'Abbé, it just surprised me. I don't mind—I think I liked it." She giggled, and Billard frowned. "Sit over there, Jeanne, on the sofa," he ordered.

"Billard." The abbé changed the subject. "The child should be sent to a convent. It is time she learned to read and write, and, I might add, to speak properly; that's a bad lisp she has, it needs correction."

"Do you think so?" Billard's tone was curt; the same thought had crossed his mind but he had rejected it, disliking the prospect of losing Jeanne. The abbé resumed in an understanding tone. "I know it is not easy to send her away—she is company for you, but think of her. From what you tell me of her background, how can she expect much from life? Her mother can teach her sewing, but if she learns to read, and keep figures, she can hope to marry some good bourgeois, perhaps even a shopkeeper. Also," he added piously, lifting his sleepy eyes heavenward, "she needs instruction in religion; I doubt if her mother can give her that."

"Let Anne be!" Billard replied sharply. "She tries to be a good mother in her own way."

The abbé droned on. "Without proper training it will go hard for her—the streets perhaps——"

"Enough of your mewing!" Billard was angry but his eyes held a reflective expression. He temporized. "I know Jeanne is old enough to receive orderly instruction. I'm not so selfish as all that; it is only that I have not yet found the proper place for her."

"I know one," said the abbé softly. "The sisters at Saint Aure give instruction in Christian piety and in arts suitable to women —good women." He smiled slightly. "I will speak to Mother Geneviève, if you permit me."

Billard sighed. "Very well, Abbé, I permit it. Speak to her; say that I will pay all the charges for Jeanne until she is a young lady and——"

"Monsieur Billard, don't send me away!" Jeanne began to cry. "I love it here, I love you, and Mama, and Monsieur Sainte-Foy, and——" she looked at the abbé angrily. Between sobs she lisped more than usual. She ran to Billard's chair, burying her head in his lap. He patted the golden hair. "I shall miss you, little Jeanne, perhaps more than you will miss me; but you need playmates your own age, and the good sisters will teach you——"

"No, no! I won't go!" She had worked herself into a tantrum of grief; her face was streaked and mottled and she pulled at the mole under her lip. "Don't make me go. I don't have to go, do I?"

"Now there, calm yourself. The abbé will arrange it for us— but be certain, Abbé," he spoke firmly to the obese figure seated on the opposite side of the hearth, "that it is understood Jeanne will not enter Saint Aure until after the New Year. At least we will have one more Christmas together."

CHAPTER TWO

ITEM: Gold chain and locket; small sapphire set in center.

On a wintry morning in January a coach stood at the entrance of Billard's house. The breath of the restless horses steamed in the cold air and the hoofs of their forelegs pawed the icy street. The financier and the little girl walked out of the house. Jeanne wore a green coat of fine English wool and her hands were hidden in a tiny sable muff which Billard had given her as a New Year's present. In the open doorway were Rancon and Anne, who held out her arms for a farewell embrace. "Good-by, Jeanne," she said gently. "Study hard, and we shall come to visit you when it is permitted."

Jeanne tried to smile. "I'll be good, mama; I'll learn my lessons well, then maybe I won't have to stay so long." She pulled her hands from the muff and hugged her mother hard, then jumped into the coach. Billard climbed in beside her, the driver slammed the door, and the unwieldy vehicle rumbled over the cobblestones. Jeanne sat silently, shivering, seeing nothing through the frosted glass, but after a time, impelled by natural curiosity, she wiped a clear space on the window. "Look!" Her voice held a note of dismay. "We are on a bridge!"

"Yes," explained Billard, "this is the Pont-Neuf. Remember the painting I showed you? And see the empty stalls—too cold today for the poultry sellers."

"But why are we crossing the river?"

"Saint Aure is in the Faubourg Saint-Marcel, Jeanne—on the left bank."

Jeanne burst into fresh tears. "It's so far from home, Monsieur Billard! I'll never see any of you again."

"But certainly you will." He spoke soothingly. "It's not all that far; the ride takes only a few minutes, and your mother can walk it in an hour. Abbé Arnaud tells me you may have visitors one Saturday every three months if your behavior is pleasing to the sisters."

Jeanne relapsed into saddened silence. Within a few minutes they arrived at the convent, a low building surrounded by a high stone wall. The coachman handed a package to Billard, who walked with Jeanne into a bare reception room where Mother Geneviève, attended by another nun, awaited them. The Mother Superior, who was very old, stepped forward with an air of infinite weariness and greeted Billard. She gave a faint smile and clutched Jeanne's shoulder with a thin veined hand. "Welcome, my child. We trust you will be happy here—more important, we shall pray that you justify the faith of your benefactor, Monsieur Billard."

"I'll try," said Jeanne timidly, and curtsied. Mother Geneviève motioned to the nun who stood behind her. "Sister Angélique will have special charge of you. She will give you your uniform and explain our rules." Sister Angélique, unsmiling, moved forward. She was fat, with pendulous cheeks and pale gray eyes. "Your sheets, child, do you have them, as required?" The words came through clenched teeth, as though it pained her to waste time on something so trivial as speech.

Jeanne looked at Billard in bewilderment. "They are here, Sister," he answered, handing over the package he carried. "Two pairs of sheets and six towels; is that correct?"

"Correct!" snapped Sister Angélique. She seized Jeanne's arm and dragged her toward an inner door. Jeanne looked back at Billard. His eyes were full of regret but he attempted an encouraging smile, and waved. "God bless you, Jeanne. I shall come when I can."

Jeanne could not reply. Choked with tears she turned and let the fat nun lead her into the dark corridor beyond the doorway. They mounted a short flight of steps, turned into a wider passageway, and stopped at an open door. Sister Angélique released her hold on Jeanne's arm and spoke in her arid manner. "Your cell." She pointed. "Undress." Before Jeanne could move she was gone, swishing down the corridor in her long robes with surprising rapidity. Jeanne forlornly inspected the small room; dimly lighted by one barred window, it held a narrow bed, a chair, and a rough wooden table over which hung a crudely fashioned crucifix.

When the nun returned Jeanne had taken off her clothes and was sitting on the hard bed, hugging herself for warmth in the unheated cell. Sister Angélique gazed resentfully at the gracefully formed body, now pale blue with cold, and tossed a shapeless bundle on the floor. "The clothes you will wear henceforth." She reached down and gathered the fine woolen coat and the neat starched dress which Jeanne had folded on the chair.

Jeanne stared with aversion at the homespun stuff. She made a face but began to put it on: first the gown of coarse white serge, which scratched her delicate skin but at least felt warm, then over it a long black veil which covered her head and, unstarched, fell to her ankles, and finally a rough band which bound her forehead.

"Your shoes." The nun pointed accusingly. "Take them off." Jeanne stood mutely, and Sister Angélique stooped and wrenched the pert black shoes from her feet. "These are your shoes now." She produced a pair of bilious leather footgear and laced them with thongs of the same nauseous color. Jeanne stared at her feet. There was no mirror in the cell, none indeed within the walls of the convent of Saint Aure, but she needed none—she knew how she must look, and she began to sob. "Sister . . . must I . . . do I have to wear these ugly clothes?" She realized at once she had said the wrong thing.

"Vanity!" The nun pursed her sagging cheeks. "Think not how you look, give care to what you are!" She crossed herself.

"What is that?" She put her hand on the golden chain around Jeanne's neck and drew forth the locket which had been Billard's present.

"Ha! Girl, you *are* vain, in truth; I'll take that. I'll keep it for you."

"No, please—no!" Jeanne's voice rose in unmitigated despair. "Monsieur Billard gave it to me and I promised him I would always keep it." As the nun continued to tug at the clasp Jeanne began to scream uncontrollably. The locket was her sole link with the warm comfortable world now so remote, her sole reminder of care and loving attention from Monsieur Billard, her mother and Rancon, and Monsieur Sainte-Foy. "Sister, *please* let me keep it. It won't show," she added placatingly. She gazed with desperate appeal into Sister Angélique's cold eyes.

"I told you it's not what shows that gives us merit—it's what we are." The nun shrugged. "Very well, keep it—but you must wear a Holy Medal as well; Sanctity will vanquish Mammon." She moved to the door. "You will stay here today in prayer and meditation. Tomorrow you commence your duties." She left the cell, taking Jeanne's clothes and pulling the heavy door shut. Jeanne lay on the bed and sobbed herself to sleep, her fingers clenched around the locket of gold.

Jeanne did not recover her spirits for many weeks. She went through the conventual routine with no outward protest, but her heart was sick with loneliness. Accustomed to the constant companionship of adults who treated her as one of themselves, she was now without any company at all. Saint Aure did not countenance the sharing of cells. Each of the forty girls passed the long nights alone with her thoughts, and presumably her prayers, walled off from the other pupils. Mother Geneviève was not unkind, but she automatically followed the venerable tradition of her order, which warned that when young girls become friendly they indulge in levity and idle chatter—far better that their hours be spent in solitary prayer and study.

Jeanne's mentor had impressed upon her the iniquity of what clearly was the greatest of sins, unbridled merriment. An obedient smile, a timid chuckle, if timely, would be tolerated, but no well-trained young lady burst into open laughter. The sound was offensive to Heaven, and to the ears of Sister Angélique as well. Jeanne's bright, alert expression faded. Billard, paying his first visit in April, was struck by her low tones, her failure to laugh, and spoke to the Mother Superior. "Is Jeanne well, Mother Geneviève? It is not like her to be so quiet."

"She is quite well, Monsieur Billard. The change you observe is a meritous one—Jeanne is learning to live by discipline." She added sweetly, "I gather from Sister Angélique's reports that she knew none before she came here." Billard's face flushed angrily but he controlled his voice. "I concede this is a different environment, but when I come in July I want to see more color in her cheeks."

The next morning Jeanne awoke from a dream in which she and Sainte-Foy were frolicking with her little dog, to the discordant clang of Sister Angélique's bell, pitiless signal that it was five o'clock. Jeanne sighed and lay still for several minutes, thinking of the monotonous day that stretched before her: Mass—which she enjoyed because it was the only spot of color and beauty in her existence—breakfast, lessons from *Lives of the Saints,* prayers, improvement in speech, dinner, instruction in reading and writing, sewing, more prayers, supper, vespers—and so it went with unflagging supervision until she fell exhausted into her austere bed at nine.

Hearing footsteps she threw back the coarse blanket and sat on the side of the bed lacing the ugly shoes which she hated. She was brushing her hair when Sister Angélique opened the door. "Always primping!" She fixed Jeanne with a look of active dislike. "Hurry! Always late! Think of me; I rise at four, happy in His service. What time, mademoiselle, did you rise at home?" Jeanne, unaware of the sarcasm, answered guilelessly. "About eight, Sister—sometimes mama let me sleep until nine."

"Without doubt!" The pale eyes flashed. "You will do better here; late once more, you get no breakfast—and you will wash the linen for a week." Jeanne fumbled hastily with her clumsy dress and veil while the nun continued. "Monsieur Billard," she said, biting off the words, "thinks you too pale. Mother Geneviève is kind enough to permit you to walk in the garden this afternoon, and every afternoon—if you get out of bed the instant I ring my bell."

"I promise, Sister." Jeanne's eyes shone; not since her arrival had she seen the outside of the convent. The morning crept all too slowly; all Jeanne could think of was the bright April sunshine which filtered through the narrow windows. "Jeanne." Sister Thérèse, whose task was to correct her lisp, spoke gently. "You are daydreaming—pay attention. Repeat after me, very slowly: *le roi est charmant.*"

"Le roi est sarmant."

"No." Sister Thérèse, a slender woman with warm brown eyes, was patient. *"Charmant."*

"Sar . . . charmant!" Jeanne grinned triumphantly.

"Very good—see how you have improved, in just three months? The important thing is not to speak too fast; whenever you do, you always lisp. Now go—you may walk in the garden for half an hour." Jeanne turned away and began to skip down the corridor in her awkward shoes. Sister Thérèse's voice stopped her. "I said walk, not skip." But the reproof was mild, almost a caress after the strictures of Sister Angélique.

Jeanne walked sedately along the garden's graveled path. She breathed deeply, for the clean spring air smelled deliciously fresh after the musty odor of the convent. She paused in the warm sun to stare at a chestnut tree about to bud and saw a girl, wearing a uniform like hers, sitting on a stone bench. The solitary figure stared solemnly and Jeanne smiled as she walked down the path. She halted. "My name is Jeanne Bécu. What's yours?"

"Suzanne Picot." The other girl was shy and sat on the bench

twisting her hands in her lap. "We're not supposed to talk," she said, but her eyes were hungry for friendship.

Jeanne laughed. "Why not? We're not hearing Mass or having lessons." She sat down. "How did you get permission to come to the garden?"

"I am first in arithmetic," Suzanne answered. "But that is nothing, arithmetic is easy," she added modestly.

"I'll bet it isn't; I haven't even had it yet, and I'm nearly seven."

"I'm eight."

Jeanne looked with open curiosity at her new acquaintance. Suzanne was brunette—her eyes dark brown and her hair, peeping from beneath her veil, pure black. She was not pretty and the tip of her nose was flattened, but when her wide mouth smiled she inspired a warm trust. "Tell me about yourself," Jeanne begged.

No one at Saint Aure had ever asked Suzanne a personal question and her shyness vanished before Jeanne's eager interest as the morning mist before the sun. Her father, she said, was a candlemaker in the town of Versailles; her mother was dead and her father's elder sister kept house for him. Her father furnished candles to the Château and was prosperous enough to send her to Saint Aure; she realized how privileged she was but, she wistfully confessed, she did get so lonely—even after two years she was still homesick. Sometimes she cried at night, but she knew that was wrong for a big girl.

"Oh, I cry too, all the time when I think of Monsieur Billard and mama," Jeanne assured her. They smiled at each other with new understanding and their sorrow, shared, somehow seemed less crushing. "What is the Château of Versailles like?" asked Jeanne. "Does it have round towers?"

"No, but it is beautiful." Suzanne launched into a glowing description. "It must be the most beautiful Château in the world, and so big you can't see the end of it. There are a thousand windows and the roof is gilded like the sun. Once I waited at

the gates for papa and"—she paused breathlessly—"I saw the King."

"The King!"

"He was on horseback followed by his gentlemen, and he was on his way to the hunt. Jeanne, our King is so handsome and looks so kind; I believe he saw me as he went by." She smiled sheepishly.

"What about the Princesses? Monsieur Billard said I look like a princess."

"Mesdames." Suzanne politely corrected her. "Mesdames do not like the outdoors, so I have never seen them. A page told papa they hardly ever leave the Château, although two of them are away now studying at the abbey of Fontevrault."

A harsh familiar sound interrupted their talk. Sister Angélique stood at the head of the garden ringing her bell and motioning sternly to them. As they hurried up the path Jeanne whispered, "Let's meet here tomorrow—we can be friends, Suzanne, and talk some more."

After that first meeting Jeanne was more contented. Her eyes recovered their sparkle, she smiled more, and when with Suzanne she even dared to laugh. Her sunny disposition returned, winning all the nuns' indulgent affection; even Sister Angélique thawed —slightly. When Billard next visited the convent he was heartened by Jeanne's happier expression.

"Mother Geneviève tells me you study harder and as for your lisp, why *Sacré Dieu!* It's almost gone!"

"Sister Thérèse says I'll always have it, a little."

"No importance—a little lisp only makes you more winsome. I'm satisfied." He glanced with distaste at the shapeless serge that concealed her body. "Where is your locket? Don't you wear it?"

"I do wear it, always. Here. . . ." She snuggled up to him and pulled the locket from her high-necked gown. "I wear a Holy Medal with it but I like the locket better." The old man looked at her tenderly. "Here is a box of sweetmeats your mother made—she sent them with her love and asked me to kiss you for her."

Jeanne laughed and threw her arms around his neck, and he kissed her on the forehead.

They talked for an hour as they had done in the old days at home. Billard told her Abbé Arnaud was no more. At dinner one night last month he had surpassed himself in the amount of food he ate and with it had drunk two full bottles of champagne. After coffee he and Billard began a game of chess, but before two moves had been made the abbé's eyes rolled upward and he pitched heavily to the floor. Anne and Rancon had heard the noise—in fact, Billard added wryly, the crash had shaken the house, but by the time they ran into the salon the good abbé was dead. "I'm sorry for the abbé, I shall pray for him. He was good—even if he did pinch me." They looked at each other and in spite of their grave faces burst out laughing.

Seven years flowed slowly by. Jeanne was not unhappy. The serene months she had lived at Billard's were wrapped, as they would always be, in an agreeable dream of sheltered childhood, but her memory was dimmed by the years of instruction and regulation at Saint Aure. This was a time for girlhood intimacies and the affection between her and Suzanne was the dominant emotion in her life. Suzanne worshiped her, gazing with unenvious admiration at her rosy skin, her sapphire eyes. "Jeanne, you are so beautiful. Do you look like your mother?"

Jeanne frowned thoughtfully. "No, mama is dark—like you. She says I look like papa." She added simply, "He is dead."

"I wish I were like you," Suzanne said dreamily. "I'm not pretty, and no one will marry me, but I think a rich man will marry you."

For several days Jeanne pondered Suzanne's remark. She had never known any boys; they simply had occupied no place in her circumscribed life. From her attic window at home she had watched them play and fight in the muddy streets, and she remembered clinging to Billard at Monceau when the rough village lads ran shouting past. Once they had brushed against his

easel and knocked it over, and he had driven them away with his cane. All the men she had known were protective and kind—Monsieur Davoste, barely a memory—Rancon, Sainte-Foy, and of course Monsieur Billard.

He had grown increasingly stout and unwieldy, and the last time Jeanne had seen him he looked ill. Yesterday, a visitor's day, he had sent Anne in his stead. Her mother said he was suffering from a severe attack of gout and could not leave his bed.

Anne commented on Jeanne's growth. "You are thin and your legs are like poplar branches." Jeanne looked crestfallen. "Don't worry, it's only your time of life; I was the same at your age. In two years you will be as beautiful as any girl in Paris."

Jeanne shook her head in disbelief. "Sister Angélique tells me my eyes slant."

"What if they do?" asked Anne indignantly. "It is barely perceptible and will only render you more seductive. Your grandmother, for whom I named you, had eyes the same shape and every man in her village considered them entrancing."

She hugged Jeanne good-by and promised that if Monsieur Billard were still ill on next visitor's day he would send Monsieur de Sainte-Foy in his place. Jeanne walked back to her cell turning Monsieur de Sainte-Foy over in her mind. Of course she had not forgotten him; yet she had to admit she could not be sure what he looked like.

When her next visitor came in October he did turn out to be Radix de Sainte-Foy, and as Jeanne entered the reception room he glanced indifferently at her. "Monsieur de Sainte-Foy?" Jeanne knew it was he; one look at his saucy tilted nose and his eyes, blue like the dawn, and the years came back to her. "It is I —Jeanne Bécu."

He rose. "Jeanne! But what an idiot I am—of course you are changed! Seven years, nearly eight; you were just a little girl then, and now. . . . I suppose I have changed too?" He was a bit heavier, more mature and, she thought, much more handsome; she appraised him no longer with the eyes of a child. "Not much,

monsieur—I knew you at once." She smiled and he tried unsuccessfully to match this girl, almost a woman, with his vision of the child he had known. "But you are ravishing, even in——"

"This uniform?" *Ravishing,* he had called her; a word she did not know, a word suggesting delectable surprises. "I have not seen a pretty dress in so many years I wouldn't know how to put one on." He was silent, annoyed with himself because he was unaccountably embarrassed—by a mere girl garbed in dull convent attire!

"Monsieur Billard must still be sick—how is he?" Sainte-Foy looked at her gravely. She recalled the identical expression in his eyes when he had warned her not to get too near the fire. "Yes, he is really ill; your mother gives him good care but even Rancon is unable to coax his appetite."

"Tell him I missed him today but . . . just the same . . . I am happy it was you who came."

Sainte-Foy's eyes twinkled, suddenly aware. "I forgot," he said. "These are sugared almonds. I stopped on the Pont-Neuf to buy them—but they are a gift for a child and you are now a young lady." He bowed. A warm glow flooded Jeanne's cheeks; her eyes were starry. "I love almonds," she announced, taking the paper container. "Every time I eat one I shall think of you." She curtsied and hurried from the room, her face burning, her yellow shoes trodding empyrean heights.

That night she dreamed she was walking in front of an enormous pink and white building, its courtyard surrounded by a gilded railing. She wondered where she was until, looking up, she saw that the vast roof gleamed in the sun. I know where I am, she thought, this is the Château of Versailles. She heard the clatter of a horse galloping over the cobblestones aiming directly at her, but she stood where she was, unafraid. The horseman reined in his steed and she looked at him with mingled awe and curiosity. He was in knight's armor, his face visored. The King, she thought, it must be the King! The knight saluted her with

his lance, on which fluttered a crimson banner embroidered with white butterflies, and raised his visor. Jeanne gasped; it was her own Monsieur de Sainte-Foy! Smiling impishly he pointed his lance at her with mock ferocity, then let it fall. It struck the pavement with a discordant clang.

Clang, clang! Jeanne stirred uneasily, emerging slowly from her dream. Sister Angélique's bell was ringing inexorably, ushering in a crisp October Sunday. Jeanne bounded out of bed, remembering that this was the day every pupil had looked forward to for a month. Mother Geneviève had arranged a morning expedition to the Jardin des Plantes. She had come to this decision only after many prayers for guidance. All the girls were in a state of grace—therefore they were inviolable. Anyway, they would be under the protective supervision of Sister Clothilde and Sister Angélique. After Mass, Mother Geneviève expressed her hope that the journey would be pleasurable and, more important, instructive.

The Jardin des Plantes, a treasure of rare and exotic shrubs, was an hour's walk from the convent. The long line of girls proceeded in double file, led by placid Sister Clothilde. Sister Angélique strode in the rear, her watchful eyes alert for any frivolous transgression. "Faster, Sister Clothilde," she shouted. "Mother Geneviève insisted we reach there before noon."

"I wonder why?" Jeanne whispered to Suzanne walking beside her. Suzanne looked warningly at her and put a finger to her lips.

When they entered the botanical garden Sister Angélique seated them on the grass and barked a string of facts which she had spent a week committing to memory. "Monsieur Buffon is curator of this magnificent area . . . he has brought specimens from the far places of this earth . . . to your left, oleanders . . . beyond, flowering jasmine from the Holy Land . . . behind me, a costly plant from Peru, His Majesty has one like it at Versailles . . . everything here is resplendent with color in the springtime . . . you are permitted questions if you desire."

"Sister, why didn't you bring us when the flowers were here?"

Sister Angélique, her feet burning from the long walk, eyed Jeanne coldly. "Insolent girl, never satisfied! I want no trouble with you today." She clapped her hands in dismissal, Jeanne's question unanswered. The pupils were allowed an hour to inspect the trees and plants which grew all around them in rich profusion.

Jeanne and Suzanne, holding hands, wandered down a secluded path until they reached an open space. In the center of the clearing rose a hillock covered with a maze of delicate shrubs and ferns. They climbed the trail which wound upward to a round observation tower fitted with benches. They seated themselves and surveyed the red and gold panorama which lay beneath them in the autumn sun.

"It is lovely," Jeanne exclaimed, "even now, but think how it must look and smell in May! Someday I shall come in May." She gazed dreamily at the landscape of trees and varied plants and with surprise realized she was thinking of Sainte-Foy. She wondered if her companion could hear the pounding of her heart.

"Jeanne." Suzanne's voice was low. "I shall be leaving Saint Aure next month."

"How I shall miss you!" Jeanne spoke in distress. "Will you go home?"

"Yes, papa has sent for me. He says now I can keep his accounts and help in the shop."

"That sounds exciting. I wish I could leave. I'm so tired of Saint Aure"—she kicked her feet—"and without you it will be awful!"

"Promise to write," Suzanne begged. "Send your letter to N. Picot, Candlemaker." She clasped her hands in her lap and her wide mouth twisted in a pathetic smile. "We must never lose each other, Jeanne; you are the only friend I have." Jeanne smiled back. "We won't lose each other—we shall always be friends."

The sun was directly overhead when they were amazed to hear melodious chimes above them. One . . . two . . . three . . . they

counted, and looked up to see an iron sphere fitted with pendulums atop the observation tower. The machinery struck with measured regularity, sounding the hour of noon.

"Buffon's sundial," explained Suzanne. "I remember now; Sister Gervais spoke of it in arithmetic class." Jeanne nodded. "I guess that is why Mother Geneviève wanted us here at noon—it is enchanting, isn't it?" They craned their necks at the intricate mechanism, now fallen silent, and marveled at the ingenuity of Monsieur Buffon.

They heard the sound of Sister Angélique's bell in the distance. "We must not be late," Suzanne, rising, said in a frightened tone. "We'll hurry," Jeanne agreed. "I'll race you." They ran down the slope as fast as they could in their voluminous attire. Suzanne's veil caught on the branch of a yew tree and Jeanne, in the lead, shouted triumphantly. Rounding the curve at the foot of the hill they burst into the clearing and their shrieks and laughter died. Their fellow students stood before them, lined in solemn rows for the return walk to the convent. Sister Clothilde was in her accustomed place, her empty round eyes staring, while Sister Angélique paced furiously back and forth.

"This unseemly behavior, mesdemoiselles—intolerable!" She patted the unresisting grass with her foot. "Tardy—running—and *laughing:* who is responsible?" Ignoring Suzanne, she glared at Jeanne.

"It was my suggestion, Sister, that we race," Jeanne admitted. "So we would not be late."

"The laughter—also your suggestion?"

"But Sister, why is laughing wrong? *Le Bon Dieu* wants us to be happy, doesn't He? Our Lord Himself—"

Sister Angélique's pendulous cheeks darkened. "Blasphemy, blasphemy! How dare you?" She strode toward Jeanne and slapped her hard, then dug with her hand beneath the tight neckline of her gown. Her pudgy fingers found the chain of Jeanne's locket and she jerked with such force that the clasp broke. "This time I know best; you shall never wear this bauble

again at Saint Aure." Suzanne burst into loud sobs while Jeanne stood mute with rage and shame.

That night when sleep came to her at last, the Holy Medal around her neck was uncontaminated by the touch of the locket. Sanctity had vanquished Mammon. She could not know that Sister Angélique lay in her own cell shaken with dry sobs as she clutched the locket, recalling against her will a bitter day long past—that indelible day when she, Angélique de Bomarde, daughter of a noble but impoverished house, had been told by her father that she could not, for want of a dowry, marry the man she loved and that destiny beckoned her to a nun's life of loving service at Saint Aure.

As punishment Jeanne was forbidden to talk to the other pupils for six months, and she was allowed to receive no visitors for a year. Sister Clothilde, who taught her embroidery and the household arts, was replaced by Sister Gervais, as exact and colorless as the arithmetic she vainly tried to pound into Jeanne's confused brain. Twice daily, mornings and evenings, she made the stations of the cross; this was intended as penance but in her misery she welcomed the quiet of the chapel. She was full of reverence for the ceremonies of the Church even if she did not understand its teachings. She knew Suzanne had gone, and her religious duties were the only outlet for her turbulent emotions.

She longed for the visitors she could not have—M. Billard, her mother, and Sainte-Foy. The weeks and months of cheerless isolation turned from tomorrow into yesterday until one cold Saturday in January, very like the day Billard had brought her to Saint Aure nine long years ago, she was allowed to see her mother. Anne Rancon stood in the reception room and they surveyed each other almost like strangers. Anne realized that Jeanne had flowered into a beautiful young woman nearly sixteen and her sharp eyes did not fail to discern beneath the shapeless garb the rounded outline of firm young breasts, the alluring curves of a graceful body.

"Jeanne, I came six weeks ago but I was not permitted to see

you." Anne's face, now careworn, was melancholy. Jeanne's bewildered sense of injustice poured forth and she told her mother the long history of Sister Angélique's dislike which had culminated with the awful scene in the Jardin des Plantes. "I can't seem to behave the way I should, mama. What did I do wrong?"

"Don't think about it," Anne replied. "It is all over for you now—I have come to take you away." Over Jeanne's face came an expression of incredulous joy mingled with curiosity. "Monsieur Billard is dead," Anne explained. "Before he died, in November, he told me his fortune was gone; only his house was left and it went to a cousin. He gave me the portrait he painted of you and fifty louis, and regretted it could not be more."

Jeanne thought of the portly old gentleman with his florid face, the long evenings before the fire when she had sat at his feet and he gently stroked her hair, and the sunny expeditions to paint at Monceau. She wept quietly for Billard and although she did not know it, she wept too for a childhood irrevocably past.

She dried her tears and Anne handed her a bundle. "I used part of the money to buy you shoes and stockings, and I made you a dress—I copied it from the newest fashions in the shop windows of the rue Saint-Honoré." Her tone grew plaintive. "The rest of Monsieur Billard's money Rancon and I have had to spend for food and shelter, so you see you can no longer stay here—you must come to help us. You must go to work."

"Mama!" Jeanne forgot her grief in her excitement. "I'll be so glad to leave this place. I'll be happy to work, you know that." Anne smiled, and with the smile there was a flicker of her vanished beauty. "I know; hurry, put on your dress, and we will go."

Jeanne returned for the last time to her cell, so long a prison of lonely nights, kicked off the yellow shoes, tossed the white serge gown on the bed and gathered her few belongings—a brush, a comb, and three worn towels. As she passed through the corridor to rejoin her mother she paused to bid good-by to Sister Clothilde and Sister Thérèse, who pressed a prayer book into her hand.

"Good-by, Jeanne—don't speak too rapidly and your lisp will hardly be noticed." She smiled and kissed her on the forehead. "I shall miss you, my child. I have always found you good."

When Jeanne re-entered the reception room she was surprised to see Sister Angélique and Mother Geneviève. Sister Angélique, breathing heavily, walked toward her. "You must hate me," she began, her voice uncommonly low. "I don't mean to be severe; it must be my way. Here, take this—it is yours." She thrust the gold locket with its broken clasp into Jeanne's hands and started to turn away.

Jeanne caught her arm. "Sister Angélique, of course I don't hate you—I don't hate anyone." She kissed the nun on her sagging cheek and Sister Angélique's gray eyes filmed with tears. "Good-by, Mother Geneviève," Jeanne said. "Thank you, thank all the good sisters, and pray for me."

"We shall," Mother Geneviève quavered. "We shall pray, my daughter, that you will always lead a life of Christian virtue." Jeanne curtsied and walked with Anne into the courtyard. She glanced at her trimly shod feet, her warm blue dress, and gave a joyous leap. Looking back she saw Sister Angélique watching glumly and in spite of herself—she could not restrain the impulse —she skipped merrily through the outer gate. "Free, mama, I'm free!" she shouted, the sound of her liberated laughter wafting through the crisp air to the convent doorway.

CHAPTER THREE

ITEM: Silver stickpin, windmill-shaped.

Jeanne's new state of freedom was one of indigence, but in her joy at being out of the convent she did not care. Anne and Rancon were lodged in two small rooms of a decrepit house located in a sad and somber neighborhood near Les Halles. The house, which leaned alarmingly, fronted on a dark cul-de-sac of evil-smelling mud.

There was no money for wood and the rooms were cold, but Jeanne was accustomed to the chill of the convent and said that heated rooms made her lightheaded anyway. Her mother thought she was sparing her feelings, but seeing Jeanne apparently comfortable, realized she spoke the truth. Anne kept their poor quarters with her usual neatness; the shabby furniture was rubbed clean and if there were extra sous to buy water the washbasin was always filled.

The fetid odor of the common privy in the hallway was Jeanne's only complaint but Anne shrugged and observed that they were fortunate, as the neighboring houses had none at all. "Take care to walk in the middle of the alley," she warned. "Don't go beneath overhanging windows or something unpleasant may be emptied on your head." Jeanne giggled but her mother's look silenced her. "It is strictly forbidden," Anne said gloomily, "but people persist in the slovenly practice."

Jeanne found her stepfather visibly aged. His sandy hair was

thin and his mild eyes held an expression of quiet despair. Since Billard's death he had sought work, trying first the fine houses of their former neighborhood, then the common inns. No one needed a cook and he offered to perform any task, no matter how menial. Last week, impelled by desperation, he walked the twelve miles to Versailles where two of Anne's cousins were grooms at the Château. In vain; there was no work to be had and he returned exhausted, dumb with defeat.

Anne humbled her pride and went to her sister Helène, who received her with little pleasure and less sympathy. "I know of nothing for you or your husband and I cannot," she said primly, "trouble Madame Bignon again—she helped you once, twelve years ago." Helène gave her a livre and started to close the door. "That's all I can spare—good luck to you, sister." Anne, trembling with shame, used the coin to pay for their last bit of bread and cheese.

Over the simple meal they discussed the future. Tingling with the buoyancy of youth Jeanne did not share their despondency. She would write to Suzanne. M. Picot was a man of property; perhaps he would have a task for Rancon or even for herself—she would like to work beside Suzanne in the candle shop. "Something will turn up, I know," she predicted cheerfully.

The next day she wrote to her friend, keeping the promise she had made to Suzanne that day in the Jardin des Plantes. She described their ugly poverty and begged for a helpful suggestion but to her disappointment no answer came, and the weeks that followed were severe. Rancon managed, by filling water carts at the river, to earn barely enough sous to keep them alive.

One afternoon he bounded up the stairs and burst into the room. "I have a job!" he shouted. "Unloading fishcarts at Les Halles, and how fortunate I am—only fourteen hours a day instead of sixteen." He turned to Jeanne. "I have an excellent suggestion—you can sell coffee. It is cold these mornings and the laborers and fishwives will buy." Jeanne eagerly agreed, even

after Anne reminded her she would have to get up at five o'clock.

The first morning Rancon showed her the way to the great marketplace but after that she went alone, avoiding, as Anne had cautioned, windows from which householders flung their refuse. At the same time she was careful to sidestep the heaps of human and animal filth which clogged the gutters in the middle of the streets. The winter dawn came late and in the flickering light of the lanterns suspended overhead it was difficult to see where she stepped. The long spout of the heavy coffeepot caught in her cloak, and the tin cups strung around her neck rattled as she walked.

The workmen warmed to the friendly smile on Jeanne's pretty face and to the pleasing note in her light voice: "A cup of coffee, good and hot?" They shouted earthy jokes in their rough argot but they meant her no harm; sometimes young draymen bought more than one cup for an added chance to whisper good-humored suggestions. Jeanne only laughed merrily, pleased at their male recognition, until one became too importunate, overzealous with sharp pinches of her backside. Jeanne deftly resolved the problem by spilling scalding coffee on her suitor's blue trousers. The laborers standing nearby laughed uproariously, and her troublesome admirer ceased being a customer.

The fishwives accepted her presence without jealousy. They were too occupied cleaning and selling fish, exchanging all the while an incessant stream of abuse. Their shrill vituperation surpassed their men's language in color and pungency and Jeanne, listening, acquired an abundant store of words and phrases she had never dreamed of in the pure sheltered walls of Saint Aure. "Scrap of filth!" "And what of you, pregnant sow?" "Slut yourself, scrap of wornout cloth." The fishwives would laugh, slap one another on the rump, and turn to strident gossip.

Jeanne savored the sights and sounds and most of all the rich human flavor. This was life—raw, pulsating, vigorous—and after the arid convent years she responded eagerly to it. Anne was hardly a prude but the gutter vulgarities of Paris were still alien to her

ears, and she was shocked at the language Jeanne picked up in the purlieus of Les Halles. She was relieved when Jeanne stopped selling coffee.

"But mama, I want to do something," Jeanne protested. She was ill with a cold she had contracted from steady exposure to the damp chill mornings. "You need the sous I earn, and I like being in the streets. It's exciting."

"We must think of a calling that won't get you up so early. You hated that, didn't you?" Jeanne smiled. "It's true." For a moment she was lost in thought. "I should like to sell toy windmills. Children love them and I love children. And I could wear those becoming dresses the windmill girls wear."

"You are a scamp." Anne laughed aloud at Jeanne's guile. "I can make the dress and cap for you, but where is the money for the toys?"

Jeanne knew there was none but she continued to hope, and her habitual optimism was rewarded. One Saturday evening Rancon returned carrying two bottles of good wine. His earnest face was flushed and in his left hand shone two louis. "I won!" he boasted, holding the dazzling coins in front of Anne. "I won on the lottery; first time I ever dared to play, and I won!"

"Two louis!" Anne's eyes were bright; she took the gold coins and nodded to Jeanne. "This will buy your windmills and still leave enough for shoes, candles, and a fresh supply of water."

In her new outfit Jeanne paraded before her mother for approval. The long full skirt revealed her well-shod feet and graceful ankles; a neatly stitched bodice covered her bosom and one corner of her apron was gathered provocatively at the left side. Anne stood back and inspected her, noting the arched regular eyebrows, the classical nose, and finally the cupid's-bow mouth, slightly open in a smile which revealed her even white teeth. "You are beautiful, Jeanne," she declared proudly. "I said you would be as beautiful as any girl in Paris and you are—only more so."

She adjusted Jeanne's cap of white lace which barely covered the luxuriant golden hair. "So you must be sensible—men are bolder than ever in the springtime; if you choose one, choose him carefully." Jeanne smiled wisely. "Don't worry, mama; I'm nearly sixteen." She kissed Anne good-by and went out swinging on her arm a wicker basket filled with miniature replicas of the windmills which surrounded Paris.

Jeanne soon realized that the clamorous neighborhood of Les Halles was not the most remunerative place to sell her wares. Except for the occasional glance of an admiring workman few people paid her any attention, and her soft lisping invitation: "If you please, buy a windmill" was drowned out by the ear-splitting cries of vendors toughened by years of shrill urging: "Buy, come buy—hot baked apples, pastries, scissors, laces, ribbons, milk—buy, come buy!" Even if she had made herself heard, who could afford toys for children? What they needed was bread. She decided to try the Marais, where many aristocrats still lived. There she found buyers, and when she transferred to the solid bourgeois quarter bordering the Place des Victoires her sales doubled.

She often passed the house that had been Billard's. Once she stood before the shuttered windows that were impervious to her searching gaze, and her eyes grew misty. She glanced up to the window high in the attic and thought of the little girl who had sat there more than ten years ago drinking in the vista of life that swirled through the Place. She was in that swirl now but even her zest for it could not quell the pang of nostalgia in her heart. She walked on, turning homeward in the fading afternoon.

Spring, her favorite season, had dressed the city in soft beauty after the rigorous winter. The plane trees shyly displayed tender young leaves, and down the street three strolling musicians played a lilting air. Her spirits rose. She had sold all but one windmill, which she held in her outstretched hand so that its sails turned as she skipped in time to the distant music. Her skirts flared and passers-by paused to smile at the vibrant picture she made.

She had almost reached home when she noticed a forlorn little

girl seated on the cobblestones. The child was in rags, her face and hands were covered with grime, and her matted hair was full of vermin. Guessing that she had never owned a toy Jeanne impulsively pressed the windmill into the dirty hand. "A present, little one." Poor waif, she thought—I pray my children will be clean and beautiful. "*Merci,* mam'selle." The faint voice was barely audible and the child looked blankly at the toy.

"Hold it facing the breeze," Jeanne urged. "If there is no breeze you make one—like this." She blew and the arms of the windmill turned slowly. The child got to her feet and Jeanne saw that one leg was shorter than the other. As she hobbled in the street there sounded a clatter of hoofs, a rumble of wheels, and an elegant cabriolet dashed past. Jeanne snatched the girl from its path and the miniature windmill lay where it had fallen, crushed by the heavy wheels.

Jeanne soothed the crying child. Her own heart was beating fast; she was furious at the reckless driver whose senseless speed endangered everyone in the street. "These damned aristocrats think nothing of us, is it not so? The girl could have been killed."

She turned in surprise at the voice behind her and saw a thin red-haired man in his early twenties. His whining tone ruffled her nerves but she tried to answer calmly. "It is not only aristocrats, it's anyone with a carriage."

"But aristocrats are the worst—I hate them!" His voice rose, edged more with envy than hate. "But you, mademoiselle, are you hurt?"

"No, thanks to God; nor is the child." She sighed with relief. "But it frightened me so. I suppose I am a physical coward—I can't stand pain or seeing anyone hurt." She wiped the child's face and as she turned to go, the man plucked her sleeve. "My name is Paul Lametz. Do you permit me to walk with you?"

Jeanne shrugged. She was not sure she liked him. He exuded an overpowering odor of orange water and his nose ran, but his expression was so pleading Jeanne gave in. They turned into the alley and by the time they reached her door she was thinking that

a male escort was a pleasant novelty. She knew that the neighbors were peering through their windows, wondering who he was.

Lametz explained that he was a hairdresser. He and his mother had moved into the next street a short while before, and he had watched Jeanne for more than a week. Today, seeing her skipping to the music, he could not resist speaking to her. She was flattered, and he seemed so anxious to please that she agreed to see him again. He came the following night and Anne Rancon disliked him at once. After he had gone she spoke sarcastically of his pimply face, his unctuous airs, his excessive use of scent. Her sneers drove Jeanne to defend him with a warmth she did not feel. "He's not that offensive, mama, and he is not free with me—he only wants to be friends."

"With those shifty eyes! He wants more than friendship!" Anne was angry and Jeanne grew stubborn. "I shall see him again, mama; he promised to take me to Nicolet's to see the clowns, and I'm going!" Jeanne had learned of Nicolet's from the girls who sold milk and honeycombs on the rue de Cléry. Everyone went there, they told her, great ladies and financiers, fashionable young men and girls from the Opéra—as well as ordinary people like themselves. Nicolet's featured tightrope walkers, dancers, and even a performing monkey. Jeanne, braving her mother's disapproval, put on her best dress and waited impatiently for her caller.

When they were in the street Lametz faced her but his eyes looked at the ground. "We cannot go to Nicolet's; one of the acrobats has smallpox. But we will go to Ramponneau's. He serves the cheapest—I mean the best—wine in Paris." They walked in silence to the first intersection, Jeanne fighting her disappointment. I'll enjoy tonight anyway, she consoled herself; I can always go some other time to Nicolet's. "Paul, how far to Ramponneau's?"

"Not far, only a few more streets." But it was far, very far, all the way to the suburb of Belleville, and Jeanne was perspiring and tired when they reached the tavern. They pushed their way through the immense crowd—Jeanne had never seen so many in

one room, there must have been hundreds—and found a table in a dark corner. A starved-looking waiter brought ordinary wine and Lametz settled contentedly, wiping his nose with a dirty handkerchief. The sweetish scent of orange water assailed Jeanne's nostrils.

She looked with distaste at the brawling noisy throng. Stonemasons and waggoners milled about, fondling their women, pushing and shouting for more drink. At the foot of the stairs two dragoons wrestled over a plump girl selling rosettes. While the soldiers rolled on the floor one of their companions winked at the girl and she slipped away on his arm. Lametz filled Jeanne's cup and placed a moist hand on hers. "Ramponneau's is lively; all kinds come here."

"So I see."

He pressed her hand; a whine entered his voice. "I mean ladies and gentlemen, even aristocrats."

"I thought you don't like aristocrats." She resented this place and the wine was making her too warm. Lametz turned as red as his hair; he frowned and called for more wine. "When they behave like humans they are tolerable." He pointed to the drunken mob. "It's when they give themselves airs that I hate them."

"I don't see any aristocrats," Jeanne protested, "and I want to go. It's too hot in here—it makes me giddy."

Lametz insisted on ordering another bottle of wine, which he rapidly drank. His glance traveled from Jeanne's face to her bosom and whenever she looked at him his watery eyes shifted. At last he called for the bill, and when the waiter brought it, accused him of overcharging. "Monsieur, our wine is cheaper by half than any in Paris," the waiter objected. "You ought to know."

Lametz carefully counted his money and put the exact amount of the bill on the table—no more, not a sou. The scrawny waiter stared at the coins and gave an angry hoot. "Pig! Thief! Never a *pourboire,* and you come here every week; don't expect me to serve you again, ever!" He snatched the money and stalked away, and Lametz grinned sheepishly at Jeanne.

"That fellow is a lout. *Diable!* Next time we will have a waiter more polite. I still say," his whine this time was defensive, "that Ramponneau's has the best wine in Paris."

"Don't you mean the cheapest?" Jeanne gazed at him levelly, fixing his evasive eyes. They moved toward the door; Jeanne was faint from the stale air and the heat of bodies pressing against her, and disgusted with her escort's slimy pretense. If he was too niggardly to give a miserable tip how would he have paid the prices at Nicolet's? She realized now he had never intended to take her there. The smallpox story was a lie—everything he said was a lie. Her shrewd mother was right.

"I want to go home, Paul. Will you get a cab?"

"Why not?" he replied casually, as if he always rode in cabs. He hailed the first empty one that passed, and seated close to him in the confining vehicle Jeanne realized he was drunk. Added to the familiar orange water was the mixed smell of cheap wine and garlic. He tried to slip an arm around her waist and she pulled away. He slumped in his corner, breathing heavily, until the cab stopped.

He paid the driver and Jeanne bade him a chill farewell, but he caught her arm. "Come, you're warmer than that—your looks and your smile promise——" He followed her into the dark hallway and forced her against the wall, his tight body pressing against hers. "You excite me. . . . I wanted you when I saw you . . . and now——" His breath was overpowering. He circled her waist with one hand and with the other fumbled roughly at her bodice.

"Idiot!"—she gasped—"but I don't like you!"

"Yes you do—just wait!" He kissed her and his mouth was wet as he forced open her lips. Jeanne trembled. She closed her eyes, overcome with revulsion and a tingling wave that surged through her body. Lametz' thin frame hid unsuspected strength but she pushed him away and started for the stairs. "I don't like you," she repeated. "I hate you! You smell—more, you stink—worse than the fishmarket at Les Halles."

He seized her again and swung her around. She could not see his face but she knew his nose was running. He spat on the steps. "And who are you, Mademoiselle Bécu, to be so particular?" His voice whined no longer, it was hoarse with rage. "Aren't you the same type as your mother?"

"My mother!" cried Jeanne.

"Who else—Mistress Anne, the whore of Vaucouleurs! My mother knows all about her . . . why she left Lorraine . . . we have a cousin . . . a man," he snickered, "who came from there."

Jeanne stood aghast. The dim light filtering through the open doorway flickered, throwing shadows like wolves on the wall. She slapped Lametz with all her force, her palm making a smacking sound as it struck his moist cheek. She turned and fled up the stairs, hearing his curses below, and flung herself into Anne's room.

Anne and Rancon were sleeping so soundly that Jeanne's hasty entrance did not wake them. She crept into the next room and lay trembling in her own bed. She nearly laughed to imagine Lametz' damp pimply face as it must have looked writhing with passion and then, remembering the feel of his lips on hers, she shuddered. Angry as she was at him, she was angrier at herself to admit the physical thrill that had coursed through her inner being. And the things he had said about her mother—how could she keep those to herself?

She could not. The next morning after Rancon had left for Les Halles she sat drinking coffee with Anne, who noticed her distracted mood of artificial gaiety. "What happened?" Anne asked quietly. Jeanne's face burned. She smiled faintly and was about to gloss over her experience but something in Anne's expression stopped her. She described the entire wretched evening, climaxed by Lametz' sordid attempt in the hallway. "That's all, mama—really." She sipped her coffee and attempted a nonchalant air. "You were right, he wanted more than friendship."

Anne shook her head. "That is not all—there is something

more." Jeanne was on the brink of denial but Anne's gaze demanded the truth. Jeanne turned a deeper scarlet. "He . . . he talked about you."

Anne nodded. "I suspected that! Tell me—everything!"

"He said you had to leave Vaucouleurs, that you were"—she could not utter the raw word—"that your reputation——"

"So that's it!" Anne pushed back her chair and got up. "I should have told you myself; you were bound to find out someday, and hearing hard things about those we love is easier when it comes from them.

"Jeanne," she continued earnestly, "I have not talked much of your father. I knew him only a few days but I loved him." Jeanne started to speak but Anne silenced her with a gesture. "Let me finish what I have to say: there were other men before him and I loved them too. I never slept with a man I did not love," she said defiantly, "until I knew your father would never come back, and then I took the first one who asked. That was not love—I simply wanted the man; I had come to believe that love was nothing, that life was only for pleasure."

She paced back and forth in distress. "I was wrong; I found that it is pleasure without love which is really nothing. I even"—she hesitated—"took two men that last year in Vaucouleurs. Don't ever do that, Jeanne," she implored. "Give yourself to only one man at a time." She paused, and although her face worked with emotion she seemed curiously relieved. "I'm glad I have told you —don't hate me!"

"Hate you, mama? How foolish!"

Anne reflected aloud. "I love Rancon; not as I loved back in Lorraine, but I've been a good wife. . . ." She burst into sobs. Her head sank on her breast and she clenched her hands. Jeanne had never known her to lose her composure and she was touched by the flood of disclosures; she stroked the bowed head compassionately. "You couldn't help it, mama. Who has a right to blame you?"

The older and the younger woman looked at each other with fresh understanding and embraced. Still trying to recover from the storm of feeling that swept the room, they heard a hum of voices and ran to the window. In the street below stood a gray-haired woman. She pointed upward and shrieked: "Good people, there are the two of them!" She motioned a few curious onlookers to come closer, and glared up at Anne. "Rancon woman—debaucher of youth and panderer as well!" She wheeled to face her smirking audience. "That whore sent her whelp to seduce my upstanding son; like mother, like daughter." She spat in the mud and Jeanne remarked ironically, "Like mother, like son."

After the crone had shuffled away Anne insisted they go to the police *commissaire* and tell Jeanne's story. It was the wise course, she said, for they wanted no trouble with their neighbors or the authorities. Her suggestion proved sensible, for Lametz and his garrulous mother had already preceded them. The police official glanced with puzzlement at Jeanne's youthful freshness. "Mademoiselle, am I to understand that you are the brazen female who tried to debase Monsieur Lametz?" He turned to Anne. "And that you launched your daughter on this immoral mission?" His voice was gruff but his eyes twinkled. Jeanne broke in and related the history of her acquaintance with Lametz. "A short acquaintance, monsieur—but nevertheless far too long." She smiled confidingly and the *commissaire* burst out laughing. "I believe you; I have to believe you after seeing that sniveling ninny. A girl with your looks reduced to chasing a specimen like that? *Peste!*" He snorted in disgust. "I shall make a record of this sorry affair should you ever need it, but don't concern yourself. He won't trouble you again, *pardieu!*"

He was right. Jeanne glimpsed Lametz only once more, rounding a distant corner, and a few days later a woman who had witnessed the alleyway denunciation told her that he had left Paris. "Too wicked a city for that pure one, no doubt," the neighbor chuckled. Paul Lametz, she went on, intended to pursue his hairdressing trade at Arras, in the province of Artois.

During the summer that followed Jeanne had many admirers —from a safe distance. Portly farmers-general emerging from their houses in the Place Louis-le-Grand stared at the pretty girl carrying her basket of windmills, and young men strolling past the shops in the rue Saint-Honoré engaged her in conversation. Admirers, yes; she enjoyed appreciative masculine glances at her unfolding beauty, but she encouraged no suitors. The contact with Lametz had unnerved her more than she liked to admit. How could she have been simple enough to ignore her mother's seasoned judgment? From now on she would be more careful.

In the course of the long summer days she came to know all sections of the right bank. She drifted from the neighborhood of the Bastille, grim medieval structure now (one said) almost empty, through the splendid grille of the Place Royale and on to the rue Saint-Honoré stretching far to the west. She lingered before the shop windows filling her eyes with their luxurious contents. With each day she loved Paris more.

One late August afternoon—her sixteenth birthday—she wandered past the sprawling forsaken Tuileries. She remembered Suzanne Picot's glowing picture of Versailles and wondered if she would ever see it. I suppose I will, she said to herself; perhaps I shall visit Suzanne someday and she will point out the Château. What had become of Suzanne? Perhaps she had never received Jeanne's letter; otherwise she would have replied. Suzanne was never careless.

She reached the Seine and turned left, walking past the Louvre as far as the Pont-Neuf. Somewhere across the river to the southeast lay Saint Aure. She thought of the nuns accepting their quiet destiny, molding their pupils in Christian piety and instilling in them virtues suitable to women—all to the harsh clang of Sister Angélique's bell. Sister Angélique! Jeanne smiled, a trifle sadly. Perhaps she was not as oppressive as she seemed; she had tried at the last to make amends. But the convent was a remote bit of the past, and she felt mature and infinitely worldly as she set her feet on the Pont-Neuf.

She had crossed the bridge twice before, when Billard took her as a dejected child to Saint Aure and when Anne had come for her last winter. Anne had warned her not to frequent the Pont-Neuf, notorious for mountebanks, cutpurses, and cloak snatchers, but Jeanne was confident she could take care of herself. She walked halfway across the span to the Place Dauphine and shaded her eyes, gazing westward beyond the equestrian statue of Henri Quatre. The sun was sinking, a lambent pool of gold, and the clear sky was the color of mauve. How beautiful Paris was at sunset—how beautiful Paris was at any time!

She pulled herself away. Rancon had promised to prepare a birthday supper and she must not be late. She started back, weaving through the mass of people crowded around the stalls on the bridge. She paused in front of a shooting gallery whose proprietor summoned customers at the top of his lungs to try three shots for a sou. One was certain to win a prize, he screamed frenziedly. "Look good people at the wonderful prizes to be gained." He waved grandly at an assortment of old hats, torn masks, broken flutes, dirty rosettes, and other rubbish. Why not celebrate my birthday? Jeanne asked herself. She had done well the past week and the small purse attached to her dress was filled with sous.

While she hesitated a one-eyed ointment seller, his face and neck covered with boils, bumped against her. "Pardon, mam'selle, I don't see well—but well enough to admire your *grains de beauté*." He reached out to touch the mole under her lip and she drew back in revulsion. He jostled her once more and walked rapidly away.

She decided not to try the shooting gallery and moved on, passing the booths of conjurers, toothdrawers, and sellers of poultry. "Buy, buy! Butter, geese, eggs from the country—come buy!" She reached for her purse to buy some eggs for Anne, and gave a shriek. "That thieving pig!" she cried, looking around in vain for the ointment seller. He and her money had vanished.

She hurried home and with angry tears poured forth her bad

luck. "I'm such a fool, mama. You told me not to go to the Pont-Neuf, but I never listen to you."

Anne looked at her gravely. "You may be sixteen, but you don't know everything. When will you learn that everyone is not good, that there are many in the world who will do you harm?" She kissed her. "Don't cry anymore; it's past—but don't always be so trustful."

She handed Jeanne a small box tied with red ribbon. "For your birthday, from Rancon and me." Jeanne untied the packet and, her loss already forgotten, exclaimed with delight. In her hand lay a stickpin, its head a delicately wrought windmill of silver. "Mama! You shouldn't; you cannot afford——"

"Hush." Anne smiled. "We have saved for this day. Rancon thought of you when he saw it on the jeweler's cart. I think you love jewelry even more than clothes."

"I do!" Jeanne laughed and hugged her stepfather. "Thank you, thank you both. I'll wear it for good luck." She stuck the tiny ornament in her bodice, and they sat down to their sumptuous supper of cutlets, chicken wings, and wine.

The modest birthday gift did bring luck all the rest of the summer, indeed even through October. Jeanne sold windmills as fast as she could restock them. But when the weather turned cool her sales declined, and by December they had ceased entirely. Substantial citizens did not take their children for pleasure strolls in midwinter. Jeanne used the last money she had to buy a small supply of lace, ribbons, and pin boxes, and Anne added a few handkerchiefs to sell in the week between Christmas and New Year's.

Jeanne had little success. The afternoon of New Year's Eve she was walking dejectedly along the rue Saint-Honoré, her head down against the snow flurries blowing from the east. She passed the elegant shops, their frosted windows obscuring the luxuries within. She was not thinking of luxuries; she was conscious only of an awesome sensation—hunger. As she paused at the busy

corner of the rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs a short older man tapped her briskly on the shoulder.

"A bad day, mademoiselle, for selling." His birdlike eyes observed her sharply.

"Will you buy, monsieur?" Jeanne turned hopefully.

"I?" His beak of a nose quivered with suppressed amusement. "Why should I buy? I sell, all the things you have and far more—have you never heard of Labille?"

"But naturally; who hasn't?"

"I am Labille." He drew himself up. He could not have been much over five feet; he was no taller than Jeanne. She looked at him again, noting his expensive coat, his carefully powdered hair under the black felt hat. She was ashamed for Labille, who owned the finest haberdashery in Paris, to see her pitiful collection of ribbons and laces.

"You are cold." He fingered the thin stuff of her dress with the hand of an expert. "And you should wear a hat!" His hand described an impatient gesture. "Come to my shop for warmth." A quick suspicion flashed through Jeanne's mind but she promptly dismissed it. This peppery little man was no Lametz; he seemed really concerned for her. She followed him the short distance along the rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs to his shop. Above the bell which hung over the door shone the inscription in letters of gold: MAISON LABILLE. She had passed the place many times but never dreamed she would enter it.

The shop was closed. "Madame Labille's cousin died," he explained. "Sit down—by the stove," he commanded. Jeanne was cold and tired as well as hungry. Labille seemed to read her thoughts; he fussed around the room with rapid nervous movements and brought her a cup of chocolate and three small cakes. While she ate he watched her intently, deep in thought.

"You'll do," he said suddenly. "Yes, with the right clothes and your hair combed high, you'll do." Jeanne looked at him wonderingly. "Well, don't you want to work for me? You'll help my

trade, you're pretty enough—and isn't this better than peddling your rubbish in the streets?"

"Monsieur Labille!" exclaimed Jeanne. "Oh, yes—I shall be so happy working here." She took his hand gratefully. "When shall I start?"

"Monday—don't thank me, this is simply good business for us both." Jeanne smiled, for in his quick nervous voice there was an unmistakable note of kindness. She walked home with a light heart, warm and comfortable in spite of the swirling snow. Imagine! To be one of the salesgirls at Labille's! A new year—1760—a new decade and a whole exciting new world lay before her.

CHAPTER FOUR

ITEM: Mouche box, blue enamel, unadorned.

Jeanne liked working at Labille's. The warm shop, redolent of perfumed gloves and the dry fresh smell of new cloth, resounded with amiable banter and jesting laughter in the late afternoon. That was the hour men sauntered in—rouged rakes, portly *abbés*, solemn bourgeois bankers, and languid insolent noblemen. All were expensively dressed and frittered the hours away in flirtatious chatter. Those new to Labille's feigned interest in cravats or perhaps a bolt of velvet or brocade for a suit, but the regular habitués openly devoted their attentions to the salesgirls. They made purchases, of course; it was clearly understood that the salesgirls had no time for those who bought nothing, but in their buying their eyes lingered on Jeanne and Elizabeth and Aurore.

Jeanne liked Elizabeth Valdin. Her neck was too thick for her short body but her ready smile attracted everyone. She received many offers but confined her favors to a burly Navy commandant with whom she was madly in love. Elizabeth, already an experienced nineteen, taught Jeanne artful tricks which would induce men to buy and warned her not to provoke Labille's wife, a domineering scold who presided at the cashbox, by selling too little. Labille himself, despite his high-strung impatience, was satisfied if sales went moderately well, but Madame—ah, that was another matter!

The other salesgirl was Aurore Malet, a sultry-looking Provençale who had been in Paris only five months but whose ambitions already soared. Her raven hair and thick white skin were undeniably alluring, but her cold green eyes were never attuned to the smile on her lips. Aurore dreamed of an improbable incident that would catapult her into the path of the King. She was convinced that if he ever saw her she would displace the Pompadour. Everyone who heard her fantasies laughed and even Madame Labille smiled thinly. "You are crazy!" she scoffed. "Our good Louis will never send the Marquise packing."

"And tell me why not?" asked Aurore. "She's a worn-out hag and he has not slept with her in years."

"Precisely." Madame Labille spoke with wisdom. "The King keeps her because she understands him and she *never* bores him. Many of the girls in the *Parc aux Cerfs* are lovely and desirable, but they are no threat to the Marquise—she is relieved that they are available for the King's needs." She cackled. "She is a cold one, and it is not by her skill in bed that she has managed to endure so long."

Madame Labille saw Jeanne listening. "And you, Jeanne, are you too dreaming of Versailles?" She smiled cunningly. "At that, you have a better chance than Aurore; you look like an angel and they say King Louis prefers them that way. Aurore tries too hard—and whatever she is, she's no angel."

Aurore tossed her head. "Mademoiselle Angel—that's what we ought to call her!" A note of jealousy crept into her voice. "We'll have to find a fitting sweetheart for this angel, one who will be good for business." She laughed spitefully. "But take care, Angel, to avoid *my* suppliants!"

It had never occurred to Jeanne to flirt with Aurore's admirers. From the beginning she had sensed the dark-haired girl's dislike, and she dreaded discord. Aurore inspired many wooers but the lover she currently flaunted was the Comte de Genlis, the most notorious libertine in a city replete with libertines. "A title!"

Madame Labille gibed. "Perhaps she considers him her initial step to Versailles."

Jeanne had been over three months at Labille's when the Comte de Genlis made up his mind to add her to his long list of lustful triumphs. "*Dieu me garde!*" he swore to his valet, who accompanied him everywhere, and frequently doubled as his procurer. "What a bosom! Beside it others pale in comparison." His eyes riveted on Jeanne's décolletage, its low cut baring the cleavage between her firm breasts. He started toward her and she smiled innocently. "Cravats, monsieur—ribbons?" She fluttered her hand at the ribbons cascading below her bodice as Elizabeth Valdin had taught her. "Like these?"

"Perhaps." He moved nearer. "You are new; what are you called?"

"We call her Mademoiselle Angel, Monsieur le Comte." Aurore's jealous voice rang out behind them. "Yes, she is new—and as far as you are concerned she shall stay new."

The Comte de Genlis, a stocky young man, licked his fleshy lips and whispered a few placating words to his mistress. She laughed, shrugged in Jeanne's direction, and moved away on his arm. Jeanne watched them disappear, mortified that she had been placed at the mercy of Aurore's venom.

Labille came toward her followed by a man who walked with painful slowness; he had a wooden leg. "Colonel Marcien, this is Jeanne—she will serve you gladly." Jeanne curtsied and smiled demurely at the veteran. He was markedly older than the usual run of fops who clustered in the shop. His dark face was rugged, weathered by many campaigns. His black eyes swept Jeanne from her hair, drawn back from her forehead in set curls, to the wide panniered dress that touched the floor.

"Mademoiselle Angel—*would* you care to displace Madame de Pompadour?" He smiled at Jeanne's confusion. "I was only jesting—don't heed Mademoiselle Aurore's remark; her appearance is not equaled by her disposition. And now," he went on, "will

you show me the newest in wigs?" Jeanne liked the pleasing protective tone of his voice.

They crossed the room to the shelf where the wig-stands were ranged in precise rows, most of them supporting wigs curled in the latest fashion, although here and there was an empty stand as bald as the colonel's head when he arose in the morning. Jeanne selected a powdered bob wig and held it up for approval. "It is worn with a varnished leather hunting hat," she explained. "On you it should go well." Colonel Marcien looked at the wig thoughtfully and gave a short laugh. "You forget I don't hunt since the Prussians took my leg at Rosbach; still"—he turned the wig in his hand—"I like the shape. I'll take it."

Jeanne put the wig in a box and handed it to him. He pressed her hand. "*Your* shape, Mademoiselle Jeanne, is what most appeals. Will you sup with me?" Jeanne was unprepared for his sudden shift of mood and stared at him in amazement. A whirl of thoughts revolved in her brain. Perhaps she should acquire a protector—Elizabeth and Aurore each had one—and Colonel Marcien was polite as well as forceful. But he was at least forty, and Jeanne still retained girlhood dreams of a suitor who would prove young and handsome. Her smile was apologetic and her voice pleaded for understanding when she replied. "I am honored, Monsieur le Colonel, in truth I am . . . but tonight my mother is expecting me . . . that is, tonight I have an engagement."

Colonel Marcien kissed her hand and gave her a skeptical glance. "Very well, mademoiselle—perhaps some other time."

Jeanne blushed furiously as she walked home, still thinking of her stupid reply to the lame officer. She had acted like an untried child instead of a mature young woman. Certainly Labille had not engaged her to be a prostitute, but he did expect her to be winning and agreeable to the wealthy men who frequented his shop. If he knew of her clumsy refusal he would be angry, while Madame Labille—Jeanne trembled at the thought.

And the unconvincing excuse about her mother! Colonel

Marcien was surely not deceived by that. She decided not to confide in her mother or ask her advice. No—she would be self-reliant as Anne herself had always been, and work out her problem alone. The next time the brave colonel solicited her company she would accept.

But two days later she met Charles Duval, and Colonel Marcien was for a time forgotten. Elizabeth's lover the commandant, who called every Saturday afternoon, was this time accompanied by an olive-skinned young man. "Jeanne," said the navy officer, "this is Charles Duval; I have spoken so much of you that he is on fire to be presented."

Duval murmured something Jeanne did not hear. She extended her hand and when his lips brushed it she felt a thrill she had never known; her eyes met his and she knew something strange and wonderful was happening to her, she knew that her doubtful waiting was over.

"You are in the Navy too, Monsieur Duval?" Dimples appeared in his cheeks as he smiled at her slight lisp, and his brown eyes danced. "Not exactly, mademoiselle; I am only a poor clerk working under the commandant's orders." He nodded toward Elizabeth and her lover who were watching them. "We are going to the *Comédie Italienne,*" announced the commandant, "so amuse yourselves—if you can." He shook with laughter and Elizabeth smiled knowingly over her shoulder at Jeanne as they departed.

It was past the closing hour, and she and Charles Duval were alone in the shop. She looked at him with wonder. What a sensuous mouth he has, she thought, and how well it goes with that cleft in his chin! Duval appeared to delight in her appraisal as if he guessed her thoughts, and his eyes returned her gaze. "Will you go with me?" His voice aroused her. "Perhaps to Nicolet's?"

"Nicolet's! Oh, yes, Monsieur Duval—I have always wanted to go to Nicolet's." She recalled Lametz' false promise of the year

before, and dismissed the ugly memory. This exciting young man was no Lametz, that was clear. He smelled of fresh cologne rather than stale orange water. She put on a small cap of fine lace and over it tied a mantilla of black velvet. "I'm ready," she said, and took his arm.

They walked in the April twilight, unhurried, each stirred by the other's nearness, until they came to the boulevards. A short distance away Nicolet's sprawling array of stalls, booths, and arcades attracted an eager crowd. Flaring torches lighted the scene as Duval led the way to a table. Jeanne turned her head to watch a performing monkey dressed in a mandarin costume like its trainer, and collided violently with a plump abbé. "Pardon!" she gasped, almost breathless, "there are so many people it is hard to move." The *abbé* snorted with irritation and waddled away, and Jeanne sank onto a bench beside her companion. She stared fascinated at the mixture of strollers—dandified macaronis ogling fine ladies, officers of the Lightguards bearing grisettes on their arms, two blond Swedes at a nearby table barking their guttural tongue, and there, standing somewhat aside, a financier and a priest doubled in laughter at the exaggerated postures of a painted clown. "It is marvelous," she said. "Just as they claim, always the best at Nicolet's."

Duval ordered ices and while they ate they watched the nimble acrobats and tightrope walkers, who were followed by a brightly costumed chorus of singers. Jeanne rarely took her eyes from the shifting pattern of color and talent but she was warmly conscious of Duval's firm body beside her. Never had she seen so handsome a man, one who aroused in her such a wild surge of desire. When an interval came in the series of entertainments she lightly touched his sleeve. "Tell me of yourself; your accent is not Parisian."

Duval nodded in agreement and said that he came from Tours. His father was a prosperous merchant and he could live with infinitely greater comfort at home than in Paris, but he was a man of twenty-one and he had insisted on having a look at the great

world. His father, angry at his show of independence, refused to augment his meager salary and he was hard pressed for money. At times he even thought of returning to Tours where at least he could eat and dress well, and where everyone knew him. In Paris no one knew him, and he counted himself fortunate if he could afford an evening out once a fortnight. A share in the family business awaited him if he returned to Tours and married the girl his father had chosen.

His face grew bitter. All at once he perceived Jeanne's disappointed expression and altered his tone. "Now that I have met you I wouldn't think of leaving Paris. The commandant only half described you; he said your appearance was bewitching but he forgot to add how gay and kind you are." He put an arm around her and drew her closer to him.

After Nicolet had offered the evening's final entertainment—a pair of swarthy jugglers from Naples—Duval and Jeanne strolled through the cool spring night. Jeanne was conscious only of the ardent pressure of his hand on hers, and she had difficulty collecting her thoughts as she spoke of her years in the convent. She hesitated when she came to Lametz, and then in a burst of frankness told him everything.

Duval stopped in front of a shop under an overhanging sign and stared at her. "You mean"—he paused in astonishment—"you, a virgin?" He pronounced the word in the incredulous tone enlightened people reserved for the witchcraft of the Middle Ages. Jeanne nodded shyly and he rushed on, a wave of passion deepening his voice. "I said you are kind, how kind will you be tonight?" He leaned over to kiss her. A grating noise sounded above them and the shop sign, swaying in the breeze, tore loose and crashed to the street, narrowly missing his head. Startled they jumped apart, and a passing couple laughed. Duval gave his arm to Jeanne and they resumed their walk.

The crowded boulevards were far behind and they neared the somber neighborhood where Anne and Rancon lodged. Jeanne passed through the door and turned wordlessly in the dark hall-

way. Duval took her in his arms and pulled her to him. She could feel his lithe body rigid beneath his clothing. He kissed her gently, insistently; and absurdly, irrelevantly, she thought of Lametz' boorish attempt in the same hallway. What a world of difference this time, with this man! She flung her arms around his neck and drew his lips again to hers.

After a long moment they released each other, panting. "No," Jeanne breathed. "Not here. . . . I don't want it this way." Duval was silent, struggling with himself. "Will you see me next Saturday?" he begged.

"*Next* Saturday? But I thought——"

"Jeanne." His voice was husky. "I can't wait two weeks. . . . I love you. . . . I want you."

"I love you too, Charles—the minute I saw you I knew it; I'll see you whenever you want—we'll find somewhere."

Anne Rancon, always observant, was aware that some dynamic force had entered Jeanne's life and she shrewdly suspected its nature, but she refrained from comment. Jeanne had decided for the moment to say nothing to her mother but she eagerly confided her restless fancies to Elizabeth during quiet intervals in the shop. Her friend smiled with understanding as Jeanne prattled on. "He is so handsome, Elizabeth, so strong." Her blue eyes shone with longing. The lingering week had crept by and she had thought that today, the first Saturday in May, would never come. "Do you think he will really be here this afternoon?"

Elizabeth laughed at her. "But of course he will. You ask me that after all you have told me? If it makes you feel any better, the commandant says Monsieur Duval has spoken of only you the entire week."

Aurore flashed them a sharp look. "Why the foolish chatter, you giggling tarts? Has our little Angel taken a lover at last?" Jeanne and Elizabeth did not bother to reply and the spiteful girl drifted across the room to the Comte de Genlis' valet, who bore a message from his master. Jeanne's eyes followed her. She

pitied poor Elizabeth, who shared with Aurore the attic above the shop. What a vixen to suffer as a roommate!

"Why so pensive, Jeanne?" A delicious shiver went through her. She knew that voice, it had sounded in her memory all week —and she whirled to face Duval. He leaned against a counter, watching her with longing.

"You're here!"

"Naturally." There was a half-smile on his curved lips. "Where else would I be—or have you forgotten this is Saturday afternoon?"

"Oh, no! It's just that I did not expect you so soon. It's only three o'clock but Monsieur Labille says I can leave early. I've never had a day off."

Jeanne applied a small amount of rice powder to her face and waving good-by to Elizabeth, walked with him into the sunny street. They sauntered the short distance down the rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs and crossed the rue Saint-Honoré, their hands linked and their arms swinging in harmony with the quickening pulse of springtime in Paris. People glanced admiringly at the handsome couple. Jeanne's golden hair was uncovered and her exquisitely molded neck arched whenever she turned to look at Duval. They paused briefly in the thronged arcades of the Palais-Royal to listen to a ragged band of street musicians. The violins sang sweetly in the clear air while an urchin furnished flawless accompaniment on a flageolet.

Arm in arm they strolled past the Louvre. In front of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, Duval hailed a cab and directed the driver to the Jardin des Plantes. The cab crossed the Pont-Neuf to the left bank and as it rolled through the Faubourg Saint-Marcel, Jeanne pointed out the rooftops of Saint Aure rising above the grim stone wall that surrounded the convent.

They alighted at the entrance to the Jardin des Plantes. Duval bought a bottle of wine and a bag of small cakes spiced with currants, and they wandered among the cool greenery. They stopped to admire a cedar which Duval said one of the Jussieu

brothers had brought from Syria, and then moved slowly along the neat graveled path. All at once Jeanne gave an exclamation of surprise. "Look—there is the observation tower!"

They sat on the velvet lawn at the foot of the small hillock and Jeanne told him of the excursion she had made with the girls of the convent to the Jardin des Plantes over two years before. "Suzanne Picot and I were in the tower when Monsieur Buffon's mechanism struck noon—it startled us but it was very exciting." Duval had stretched out on the ground and with his eyes half-closed watched her as she talked. He moved his hand lazily up and down her back.

"That tickles." She laughed merrily, and continued her story. "The Jardin des Plantes wasn't as lovely then as it is today, because it was October. The tuberoses weren't out, or the violets and—look, Charles." She waved her arm. "Butterflies! The white butterflies that always come in May." She laughed with joy and lay back on the grass beside him.

They lay for a long time in silence, each wanting the other. Finally he turned on his side, propped himself on his elbow and looked down at her. His voice was low. "Do you know how beautiful you are? You are the most beautiful girl I have ever seen—and I can't decide what is most beautiful about you. Is it your fine golden hair . . . your violet eyes . . . your cupid mouth . . . your swan neck . . . your superb bosom?" As he spoke he lightly touched with his free hand each feature. "I think it is your eyes." He spoke decisively. "I've never seen eyes of such a color, such a shape . . . the way they slant just a trifle." He stopped, trembling.

Dusk had fallen, the singing of the birds was stilled and the hush of evening enveloped the sweet-scented garden like a warm blanket. The moon had risen and in its silver light Jeanne saw Duval's dark eyes shining. "Your eyes are beautiful too," she said. "So deep brown they seem almost black. I think——"

Duval rolled over; his lips were slightly parted when he kissed her. She clasped her arms around his neck and closed her eyes

beneath the warm comfortable weight of his firm body; as she gave herself to him the memory recurred to her, why she did not know, of the sundial sounding the strokes of the hour so long ago . . . one . . . two . . . three.

Jeanne floated through the clear warm summer buoyed by the flow of passion given and returned, the comforting ebb of fulfilled love. Duval came almost every evening to Labille's, and when he was without money the lovers strolled lazily through the gardens of the Tuileries and along the banks of the Seine. Jeanne wanted only to be with him; she asked for nothing beyond himself.

Occasionally Duval fell into a bitter mood toward his father. "It is not fair," he burst out, "bringing me up with every comfort, instilling in me a taste for fine things, and then letting me starve in Paris because I won't do his bidding; it's the worst kind of blackmail. He dangles financial security before me if I will only marry that plain virgin with her ample dowry. I won't do it!" They were walking on the Pont-Royal and he angrily threw a chestnut into the water.

Jeanne pressed closer to him, saying nothing, hoping his gloom would pass. One evening, in the culmination of passion, he had mentioned marriage to her. She wanted to believe him but Anne, to whom she now related every detail of their affair, cautioned her. "Enjoy your love while you have it, Jeanne, but don't expect too much. Love is the only emotion in which we humans must give as well as take—but so rarely can we give and take in equal measure. Charles Duval is a charming lad but he yearns for money, and to get it he must please his father. If it comes to a final choice——"

Jeanne's eyes filled with angry tears but she did not argue with her mother. Anne was nearly fifty; how could she be expected to remember how people felt when they were in love? But Jeanne reluctantly admitted to herself that Charles did seem to think that money should shower on him through no effort of his own.

She was old enough to understand that more than anything money demanded its price. For the first time she consciously wished she had money—much money—to give to Charles. Then he could marry her and forget the ugly maiden in Tours.

It was not Jeanne's nature to mope, and in a few minutes she shrugged away her melancholy thoughts. It was Sunday, a brilliant day in mid-September, and Charles had promised to take her to the last *fête* of the season at Saint-Cloud. He arrived in a cab even before Jeanne and Anne returned from Mass at Saint-Roch. They found him upstairs talking with Rancon over a bottle of wine. Duval jumped up when they entered and with a boyish flourish handed Anne a basket of grapes and oranges. Anne accepted the gift smilingly, a faint color rising in her cheeks. She could easily be his mother, yet his charm was undeniable, his physical appeal so overpowering that she could not blame Jeanne for her infatuation. She sighed inwardly, remembering her own youth.

As the cab, its beribboned horse stepping merrily, rolled between the spaced trees of the Champs Elysées, Duval took his arm from around Jeanne's shoulder and reached in his pocket. He placed something cool and hard in her palm. "For you," he said. "It is very small, far too small to hold all my love." He kissed her. She glanced down and saw a blue enamel box in her hand.

"I know you don't use beauty spots. With those enchanting moles you don't need them, but use the box to hold pins or thread." She knew he could not afford the present—enamel was expensive. The fruit he had brought to Anne, and the cost of a cab for the long ride to Saint-Cloud—she stared at him and a question formed in her eyes.

"Some naval officers, friends of the commandant, invited me to play *comète* last week and I won twenty livres. Of course I couldn't afford to play"—the hint of a familiar bitter note edged into his voice—"suppose I had lost? But I didn't lose—I won!" His gaiety returned. "I'm still a child in some ways, I suppose;

when I have money I am happy and I spend it. That is what money is for, isn't it?"

"What else?" She laughed, matching his mood.

"I had hoped to buy you a bibelot of Sèvres, such as the Pompadour surrounds herself with, but that was beyond my twenty livres."

"I like this so much better, Charles." She put a hand on his knee. "I love you for it."

The traffic on the roadway thickened and slowed as they neared Saint-Cloud. The cab fell into a long procession of lumbering carriages with crests emblazoned on their doors, dandies attired in the English style riding horseback, and ordinary wigmakers, stonemasons, and artisans proceeding on foot. On a shaded path at the side of the road four sedan chairs, borne by liveried bearers, moved in stately rhythm. Everyone was carefree, desiring to climax the glorious summer which was slowly ending, as yet untinged by the melancholy advent of autumn.

When they reached the center of the *fête* they abandoned the cab, Duval ordering the driver to wait for them until dusk. Arm in arm they wandered through the crowd, stopping at intervals to watch a dancing bear, a pack of trained dogs, and a group of Pierrots from Monceau. A great gilded coach rolled majestically down a cleared alley in the forest and people bowed as it passed. "That must be the Duc d'Orléans," Duval remarked. "He owns the Château of Saint-Cloud."

Jeanne nodded absently, her eyes resting on the swings hanging from the huge oaks. "Would you like to swing?" Duval smiled indulgently. "Or shall we play tops, or a game of quoits? I wager I can beat you."

"Please, Charles, let me swing; it will be thrilling to sail through the air with the breeze blowing in my hair." Jeanne seated herself in a swing, grasped the ropes tightly, and Duval began to push. The swing gathered momentum slowly—then faster, faster, until Jeanne imagined she was a butterfly winging through the forest. Her clear laughter tinkled in the air as the swing bore her forward

and upward until she touched the branches—then the rushing backward descent as the ground rose to meet her.

"Enough!" Duval gasped. "You have exhausted me." He stopped pushing and the swing slowed, each arc it described narrowing until it came to a gentle rest. Jeanne's skin was pink and her face glowed as she fell in step alongside Duval and they turned to look for the cab. "Thank you for a wonderful day, Charles. I think it's the best day we have ever had."

"*The* best?" he teased, half smiling.

"Well," she blushed, "*almost* the best."

Duval did not come again for over a week. Jeanne feared he was ill. When he did reappear he seemed distracted and as they began their usual stroll he remained moodily silent. Jeanne chattered aimlessly as they turned toward the Tuileries, seeking some topic that might rouse his interest. He grumbled that he was tired of the gardens and she suggested the Place Royale, where they could wander beneath the arcades and perhaps rest on a bench. The sky was a mass of gray clouds and there was an unmistakable hint of autumn in the air.

"No, not the Place Royale—I'm tired of it too. Perhaps I am getting tired of Paris," he snapped irritably. Jeanne pressed against his arm and he drew away. They walked on in silence for some minutes and he began to speak, his voice mounting in bitterness. One of the naval officers with whom he worked had offered to obtain him a membership in an exclusive tennis court. But the indoor tennis courts of Paris were for the wealthy, and the initial cost of two hundred livres was more than his salary for many weeks. "I am finished with this genteel poverty. Perhaps I should never have come to Paris."

Jeanne marked a new disquieting tone in his voice, and in a flash of intuition asked if he had had further word from his father. Duval ignored her question but she persisted, and he finally admitted that a letter from Tours had reached him yesterday. "Father offers to turn over to me the entire business if I return. It

will mean a handsome income and—he really does need me. He is getting old—perhaps I am selfish to remain here and consider only myself."

Jeanne looked at him with dismay. "But I do love you, Jeanne," he said hastily.

"You will have to marry that girl, won't you?"

He flushed angrily. "Damn it, I suppose so—if I go back. I haven't *said* I'm going!"

"Take me to Nicolet's, Charles, as you did the night we met."

"Nicolet's! Always somewhere to spend money—money I do not have!"

"But Charles—I have never asked you for anything. It's enough for me just to be with you. Anyway, I have money tonight—let me pay."

"Never!" His face turned a deeper red and his sensuous mouth tightened, turning downward at the corners in a way Jeanne had never seen. "You don't fool me—you may not ask directly, but you love luxury. I've watched your eyes when you pass jewelers' windows. How you must scorn my cheap enamel box! You don't even need it. I should have given you a rouge pot. Why don't you use rouge?" he asked illogically.

Jeanne was disconcerted. "Mama says my skin is fresh enough without it; a true Lorrainer, she says."

"You should use rouge, nevertheless—you're too pale."

Jeanne turned to hide her gathering tears. "Yes," he reverted to his earlier theme, "you hanker for luxury and I can never give it to you. Find yourself a man who can—that should not be difficult!"

Jeanne left him and ran, sobbing as she fled over the rough cobblestones. She dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief and bumped into an old woman selling brooms. Duval caught up with her. "Jeanne—forgive me. I am in an ugly mood." He stroked her shoulder tentatively. "Oh—Charles!" She clung to him, weeping. "Take me home; I don't feel well."

In silence they walked the remaining distance. Jeanne tried to

recover her composure, helped by the realization that her arm was linked with his and that this time he did not draw away. I really don't feel well, though, she reflected; I am dizzy and my head is on fire. When they came to her door Duval kissed her with more tenderness than passion. "Good-by, Jeanne—I'll come tomorrow at noon to Labille's. I promise."

Jeanne tossed through a sleepless night rehearing a hundred times Duval's harsh words. If only his father would give him enough money to live like a gentleman! He still loved her, she kept telling herself—but she could not rid her memory of his disturbing tone. Toward dawn she fell into a restless sleep, her burning brow pressed against the cool pillow.

When she awoke she had a fearful headache but she forced herself to dress and go to the haberdashery. Jeanne admitted to Elizabeth that she felt wretched but said she had dragged herself to the shop to meet Duval. But noon and then the long afternoon passed with no sign of him. Jeanne felt weaker and sicker as the hours crept by and was thankful there were no customers to demand her attention. Once or twice Madame Labille looked at her sharply, but made no comment.

After the shop was closed and shuttered Jeanne asked Elizabeth to question the commandant about Duval, but Elizabeth answered that her lover had been sent to Cherbourg to inspect the harbor defenses. Jeanne braced herself. "Then I myself shall go to the Ministry of Marine to find Charles."

Elizabeth, real concern on her face, protested that she should be in bed but Jeanne was heedless. Throwing a light scarf over her head she hurried outside. The Ministry was not far but she feared she would never reach it; several times she paused to lean against a wall for support. When she arrived at the large stone building she was trembling, her throat was raw and her head pounded. She walked down a corridor and turned at the first open doorway. A poorly dressed clerk glanced up from his chore of thinning a bottle of ink. "What is it, mademoiselle?" His voice was as weary as Jeanne's throbbing body.

"I—I am looking for Monsieur Duval—Monsieur Charles Duval." Her breath came in quick gasps and she was afraid she was going to faint.

"Oh—Duval. He isn't here anymore. He resigned yesterday and departed this morning for Tours. That was his desk over there—pardon, is mademoiselle ill?"

Jeanne shook her head dumbly and staggered through the doorway. As she groped her way toward the street she was dimly aware of a tall man hurrying past. In her befuddled brain some dim signal from the past impelled her to think of Radix de Sainte-Foy. She put out a hand to steady herself and almost cried out.

No . . . no . . . she told herself dully. It couldn't be, and even if it were her mind and her body—and her heart—were too sick to care. She somehow reached the street and did not remember getting home. In the dark hallway at the foot of the stairs Rancon found her unconscious.

CHAPTER FIVE

ITEM: Diamond brooch; pair of small diamond earrings.

Anne was sitting on a stool beside her bed when Jeanne awoke. She tried to speak but Anne shook her head and smoothed her brow with a cold cloth. Jeanne closed her heavy eyelids and was drifting back to sleep when she heard a door open and the tread of unfamiliar footsteps approaching the bed. Anne spoke a few indistinct words and a clear voice broke in. "I told you, Madame Rancon—it will leave no scars."

"But smallpox!" Anne intended to whisper but her tone of horror penetrated Jeanne's half-conscious mind. She opened her eyes abruptly and fixed them in panic on her mother. The black-clad doctor leaned over. "You heard, mademoiselle? Be at ease, you have fortune bestowed on very few. I do not conceal that you have smallpox—see the light red rash on your body—but it is the rarest and mildest form and I swear by Saint Luke that no scar will mar your delectable body." He was an elderly man but he smiled appreciatively. Jeanne saw trustworthiness in his intelligent face and lapsed again into deep sleep.

Her trust was not misplaced. The case was a light one and when it ebbed, left no disfiguring evidence that it had ever struck. Anne nursed her with gentle efficiency, smoothing her pillow, brushing her hair, and applying scented ointments wherever the faint scarlet rash appeared. On the fifth day Anne flayed a cock alive, pressed it in a mortar, and then boiled it in poppyseed. She

urged Jeanne to drink the broth. "This will restore your strength —in Lorraine it is said never to fail."

Jeanne made a grimace of distaste but drank the bowl of hot liquid. She felt stronger, though whenever her thoughts reverted to Duval her stomach turned to lead. She gazed at the wall, trying to hide her tears. "Do you feel like telling me now?" asked Anne softly. Jeanne sat up, widening her eyes in feigned surprise. "What, mama?"

"You were delirious for twenty-four hours after Rancon stumbled over you. You kept crying *Charles—Charles,* and then you burst into the most pitiful sobs I ever heard. And once, a strange thing, you clearly mentioned Monsieur Radix de Sainte-Foy."

"Yes," said Jeanne, remembering. "I thought I saw Monsieur de Sainte-Foy at the Ministry of Marine but I wasn't sure."

"You well might have—he was in the financial bureau of the Ministry when we lived at Monsieur Billard's. But what were you doing there, and what has that to do with Charles Duval?"

Jeanne did not have the strength to resist her mother's probing and she told her of the stinging final evening with Duval. Anne listened without interruption until Jeanne finished and sank back exhausted, tears running down her mottled face. "I'll never love again, mama," she sobbed. "Didn't you once say that life is not for love but for pleasure?"

Anne smiled wryly at the way her words had been twisted. "Yes, Jeanne, you will love again—I know it. Duval was a handsome boy but he was young and selfish. In truth, you loved him far more than he loved you. I told you that giving and receiving in love is rarely equal."

"But he *did* love me! I know he did!"

"You thought he did and no doubt he thought so too, within the small capacity he has for love. But remember this is your first affair, and women never forget their first. We get over it—yes, we get over it," she repeated as Jeanne made a gesture of dissent, "but we never forget it. There will always be a scar in your heart

but each year it will grow smaller and someday a real man will love you to distraction—he is the one you will have to match with equal love."

She hesitated, then continued briskly. "Until that time comes, be practical. Use your common sense. Love has hurt you—forget love for a while. It will return, believe me."

"You mean Charles? Do you think he will return?"

Anne looked at her daughter pityingly. She was tempted to give the answer Jeanne longed to hear but she could not be deceptive. "No, Jeanne, I think he will never come back—I think you will never hear from Charles Duval again." Jeanne blinked to hold back the tears but she accepted her mother's words. In her heart she knew they were true.

Three weeks went by before Jeanne was strong enough to return to Labille's. Except for a slight pallor she was as beautiful as before, but her gaiety seemed to have vanished with Duval. Elizabeth had circulated the story of his desertion, and Madame Labille forgot her sums at the cherished cashbox long enough to present Jeanne with fifty sous; from her it was a supreme gesture of sympathy.

Most surprising of all was the behavior of Aurore. Instead of gloating over Jeanne's dejection she spoke in a soft natural voice and even brought her a cup of chocolate. Jeanne was astonished and commented on the change to Elizabeth, who explained that Aurore had been unwontedly subdued for the past week. She had admitted to Elizabeth—a confidence previously unthinkable—that she had ended her affair with the Comte de Genlis. When Elizabeth had asked the reason she shuddered and fell silent but from her expression Elizabeth guessed that something frightful had occurred.

The next time the Comte de Genlis appeared at Labille's Jeanne told him that Aurore was on an errand and asked if she might serve him instead. "I do not wish to see Aurore, Made-

moiselle Jeanne." He removed his perfumed gloves and took her hand. "It is you I came to see."

Jeanne looked at him questioningly. There was a disarming expression on his face and she realized that he would have been almost handsome had his lips not been so thick. He pressed her hand and she did not withdraw it. "May I show you something, Monsieur le Comte? We have fine silks from Lyons——"

"No, nothing today. Do I not make myself clear? I came to see you."

In the past Jeanne would never have dared to risk Aurore's jealousy by talking with Genlis, but Aurore was clearly finished with him and in any event she was not there to witness. No harm could come of it; the Comte wanted to be friendly and he wore an interesting air of elegance Jeanne had never before encountered. His words and his gestures reflected Versailles rather than Paris. Why not be agreeable—why should she mope when Duval was far away in Tours enjoying his coveted money? Almost as if he read her mind the stocky nobleman gave a courtly bow. "Will you honor me by dining *chez moi* tomorrow evening?"

"With pleasure, Monsieur le Comte—but the honor is mine."

"Splendid! Tell me where you live and I shall send for you at seven."

Anne spent the following day fashioning a seductive gown from a bolt of pink silk Jeanne managed to secure at Labille's. By sunset she had finished, and Jeanne tried on the dress for the final time. Anne looked approvingly at the three small bows of red velvet which nestled below the tight bodice, and lowered her eyes to the tiny corseted waist and the enormous panniered skirt which swept the floor.

"You look almost like a lady of the Court," she said. "If only you had diamonds . . ."

"I shall have diamonds someday." Jeanne laughed. "I can't wear Monsieur Billard's little-girl locket all my life, can I?"

Almost as if in reply to her question a vigorous hand rapped on the door. Jeanne opened it and found herself staring at a muscular

servant in purple livery braided with gold. "At your service, mademoiselle." He bowed low. "I am from the household of the Comte de Genlis."

"But—I heard no coach."

The man smiled in a superior way. "No, mademoiselle; my fellow and I are to convey you in Monsieur le Comte's own sedan chair."

"Sedan chair!" Jeanne gasped; in her excitement she lisped as she turned to bid Anne good-by. "I *feel* like a lady of the Court now, mama. A sedan chair! I shall pretend for tonight that I am the Pompadour." She laughed gaily and followed the stalwart attendant down the stairs.

Jeanne sank back in the satin-upholstered sedan chair and surrendered herself to dreams of luxury. The Comte de Genlis was a great gentleman—perhaps she would please him, perhaps he would choose her as his mistress and take her away from Labille's. She started at the thought. She had been there nearly a year and had been happy, but since Duval went away the busy scented shop, noisy with coxcombs' simpering and chattering, gave her the feeling of a trapped butterfly. She had given herself joyously and without restraint to the man she loved and he had abandoned her for money. From now on she would think of herself. She would try to forget love and seek a protector. The Comte de Genlis? She could gratify his desires and he could give her security—perhaps luxury—perhaps even diamonds.

Her fantasies swayed back and forth as though in cadence with the rhythmic lulling motion of the sedan chair. Its purple-clad bearers threaded their way through the crowded streets to the Marais, where stood the Hôtel de Genlis. Auguste, the valet who accompanied his master whenever he came to Labille's, darted from the entrance and escorted her into the foyer where her host awaited her. He came forward, smiling.

"The most beautiful nymph to grace this hall in many months —no, years. You are ravishing and you need no other ornament than your beauty, but perhaps you will accept this as a memento

of our future connection." He bowed and handed her a blue morocco case. Jeanne opened it and caught her breath, almost blinded by the fiery brilliance of a diamond brooch, its stones flashing in the candlelight. Already her dreams were coming true—her first diamonds!

"Permit me." Genlis lifted the jeweled pin from its case and fastened it in the center of Jeanne's bodice, above the velvet bows. As he fumbled with the clasp Jeanne twitched and uttered a cry. "Did I prick you?" His eyes glittered as he watched her pained expression. "I did not intend to cause you pain—of course." He secured the brooch to her gown, offered her his arm, and they mounted the stairway to the first floor.

After a sumptuous dinner served by two silent pages Genlis escorted Jeanne into a small salon. Its fruitwood furniture was upholstered in yellow satin. He dismissed the servants and locked the tall doors. "I will myself serve the champagne." He filled the two crystal goblets and seated himself beside her on the sofa.

They drank for a while in silence. Genlis inched nearer and let his hand fall heavily on her thigh. His courtly aspect had undergone a subtle transformation; he was breathing heavily and his eyes had a curious glitter. "Take off your gown," he ordered. Jeanne was repelled by his surprising crudeness but she slowly complied, reminding herself that she had not been invited to the Hôtel de Genlis merely to dine.

When she turned around Genlis stood before her, his stocky frame nude in the subdued light which flickered from the double candlestick.

Without another word he pushed her on the sofa and his fleshy lips kissed her on the neck. "Monsieur le Comte!" she cried out. "You're biting me, you're hurting me." She tried to wrench free but his heavy body pressed her firmly on the cushions. He half raised up and blew out the candles.

Nearly one hour later, the candles relighted, they sat drinking the last of the champagne. Jeanne wrestled with her troubled thoughts. Genlis had been rough, even brutal in his love-making.

She wanted to cry and she felt an ineffable sadness when she recalled the moments of gentle ecstasy with Charles Duval. But she told herself she had been in love with Duval; perhaps that was the difference; yet he had ended by wounding her heart more than Genlis had hurt her body. She was immature no longer and she must comport herself as he obviously expected—like an experienced woman. He had recovered his aplomb and lolled on the sofa, toying with his glass. Jeanne looked at him and mustered a smile.

He said, "You are even more exciting than your beauty led me to hope." For a moment, although still nude, he was again the polished aristocrat and Jeanne felt a surge of relief. "But you need more . . . variety. Do you know the Marquis de Sade?"

"No," answered Jeanne. "Does he come to Labille's?" Her question seemed to amuse the Comte. "I suppose he doesn't, at that. His tastes are more likely to be satisfied at La Gourdan's. I suggest that you make his acquaintance and then——" he broke off, caught up in some private train of thought.

"But you are charming, Monsieur le Comte," Jeanne said, trying to be agreeable. "I do not believe Monsieur le Marquis can be more so."

Genlis put down his glass and looked searchingly at her. His passion visibly returning, he stood up and walked to a tapestried screen which stood in a corner. "I'll show you how charming Sade can be." He reached behind the screen and brought forth a cat-o'-nine-tails, its thongs cruelly knotted at the ends. He stalked across the salon brandishing the ugly object, and Jeanne froze. He ran his tongue over his lips, his throat made gurgling sounds, and the strange glitter in his eyes turned demonic. He flicked the whip in Jeanne's direction and one of the strips of leather brushed her leg. He came nearer, transported, and Jeanne jumped from the sofa, screaming. "No, Monsieur le Comte! In the name of God, let me go! I must go home!"

He stood in the middle of the room struggling to control himself. He tossed the cat-o'-nine-tails on a chair and began to dress.

"Very well, mademoiselle." His voice was filled with angry contempt. "You may go. Thank you for a pleasant evening—and I hope someday you may learn to be more talented."

Jeanne put on her gown in a frenzy of haste and Genlis unlocked the door. As it swung open she glimpsed Auguste's face lighted with malicious curiosity. The valet was pressed against the door and she realized he had heard everything. She was halfway down the stairs when Auguste caught up with her. "His Excellency says you forgot this, mademoiselle." He handed her the diamond brooch. "You must have laid it on the table when you disrobed." Jeanne hesitated, snatched the jewel, and hurried on across the foyer. As she fled through the entrance doors into the early dawn there trailed behind her the mocking laughter of the Comte de Genlis and his knowing valet.

Jeanne told Elizabeth her horrifying encounter and they both glanced involuntarily at Aurore, who stood out of earshot attending a customer. It was clear to them now why she had ruptured her prolonged liaison with Genlis. "I fail to understand how she stood him," said Elizabeth disgustedly. "Perhaps he concealed his cruelty," Jeanne suggested, "until he could no longer repress it." They agreed to spare Aurore painful memories and did not tell her of Jeanne's bizarre evening at the Hôtel de Genlis.

A few days later Jeanne was talking to the lame veteran, Colonel Marcien, and Aurore and Elizabeth were unpacking a new supply of hats when a large raddled woman lumbered into the shop. "I am La Gourdan," she boomed. "Where is the mademoiselle who visits the Comte de Genlis?" Jeanne turned pale and stared in alarm at the woman she knew to be the most notorious madam in Paris. She remained silent pondering what she might say, and Aurore came forward. "I presume you mean me," she remarked coolly.

"I think not," La Gourdan replied in her loud voice. "Auguste, from the Hôtel de Genlis, expressly described a blonde." She

turned her eyes in Jeanne's direction and nodded with satisfaction.

"You?" Aurore's voice was an incredulous whisper. "Aurore," Jeanne stammered, "I thought you were finished with Monsieur le Comte; otherwise I should never—"

"Finished—indeed!" Aurore's black eyes flashed. "I never want to see that piece of filth again. Don't worry, Jeanne," she said more calmly. "I'm not angry with you; I only wish I had known in time to warn you."

"I wish so too," agreed Jeanne fervently.

"What horrors that monster inflicted upon me. . . ." Aurore paused, trembling.

"Ladies, ladies!" La Gourdan interrupted. "I come on business, not to participate in recriminations. Auguste supplies me the names of likely recruits. He mentioned only one of you, but two are still better. Let me be frank; I am prepared to offer both of you a future far more promising than here." She glanced disdainfully around the shop. "My establishment is celebrated, a rendezvous favored by young noblemen."

"Gross pig!" Aurore hissed the words. "I've had enough of noblemen, enough of Paris! I'm going back to Arles, which I should never have left." Her mouth quivered and she turned her back.

"I've had enough of noblemen too," echoed Jeanne. "Young noblemen, anyway." She was suddenly conscious of the scene's distorted humor. "Thank you for your kind offer, madame, but I must decline." La Gourdan shrugged. "As you please, mademoiselle—Bécu, is it not? You would be an adornment in my establishment"—her voice was tinged with regret—"but perhaps the future will change your mind." She gave a half-smile and left Jeanne standing with Colonel Marcien.

He walked slowly to a chair and seated himself. "Pardon, Mademoiselle Jeanne, but I cannot stand long on this wooden leg." He laid his cane across his lap. "When I first met you, Mademoiselle Aurore showed jealousy over Monsieur le Comte and

now I see that you are in full agreement about him. An odd type, that man! I have heard of his strange pleasures. Even the rough soldiers of my regiment would not stoop to his gratifications."

"Yes," Jeanne agreed. "I was fortunate to escape from him. What Aurore must have undergone!"

"Jeanne." Addressing her familiarly, the colonel hesitated. "Do you recall when I first invited you to go with me and you invented an excuse? No doubt you considered me too old—perhaps I am. I am more than twice your age, but I want you now as I wanted you then—the only reason I did not pursue you was because I knew you loved Monsieur Duval."

"How could you know?"

"A love affair such as that cannot be hidden; your faces and your bodies betrayed you." An incongruous look of pleading crossed his hawk-nosed countenance. "But now that Duval has gone may I hope again?"

"But—Monsieur le Colonel—"

"Ah, I realize I am no handsome young lover but I am no Comte de Genlis either. I have a modest pension and I will care for you." Jeanne recognized in his voice the same protective note which had impressed her months before. "Yes!" she exclaimed impulsively. "Monsieur le Colonel, I accept."

Jeanne was Colonel Marcien's mistress for a year. He never deceived her about his situation. He explained he had an invalid wife in Brittany to whom he had sworn he would return by Christmas of 1761. "My wife is an unusual woman; she understands me. It was her suggestion that I spend four years in Paris. Three are gone, so there is one left for you and me to be together. My wife wants me to forget the war before I come home but how can I forget it? France is losing with every month that goes by."

"Is that true?" Jeanne asked innocently.

"But you are impossible!" Colonel Marcien was faintly vexed, yet amused. "What thoughts does your pretty head hold, only

men—and clothes—and diamonds? Yes, the war is a stalemate in Europe; it goes badly in India and with the loss of Quebec, still worse in Canada." He frowned.

"Oh, I am stupid," Jeanne said. "I admit it. I can never understand the meaning of wars and politics; perhaps you can teach me." He smiled at the artless look in her blue eyes. "I doubt it! I fear you are hopeless, but your beauty compensates."

In spite of the caged sensation she had felt at Labille's, Jeanne continued working there. Labille had been good to her; moreover she still needed her wage, small though it was. Colonel Marcien was not a rich man and he had been honest enough to explain that their relationship could not last. He begged her to share his comfortable rooms in the rue de Richelieu and Jeanne consented. She told Anne that she was old enough to fend for herself and that she would make more suitable acquaintances if she no longer resided in Rancon's humble lodgings. But Aurore Malet's departure altered the plan.

As she had announced, Aurore, her ambitions deflated and her spirits chastened, prepared to leave for Provence. Madame Labille refused to allow her husband to hire another salesgirl, cannily deciding they could manage with only Elizabeth and Jeanne. Labille was dubious, feeling that this time his wife's parsimony was excessive, but as usual he yielded to her nagging. He explained the new arrangement to Jeanne and insisted she move into the space above the shop where Aurore had lived with Elizabeth. When Jeanne told Colonel Marcien of the shift he grumbled, but softened when she promised to pass as many nights with him as he desired. "It's only a formality," she said. "Labille doesn't care where I am at night so long as I maintain the appearance of living in his shop."

The cart Jeanne hired to move her few belongings drew up in front of Labille's as Aurore was making her farewells. She was coldly formal to Labille and his wife but when she came to Elizabeth and Jeanne she broke down. "I have been an ill-tempered slut! Elizabeth, you will be happier with Jeanne sharing

your room instead of me—she is an angel." Realizing what she had said, she reddened. "I am not being sarcastic; I mean it. Jeanne"—she embraced her, sobbing—"I admit I was jealous of you at first; you are so much more beautiful than I, and I didn't believe your kindness was genuine. Forgive me—I was wrong."

Elizabeth and Jeanne were crying too, and Jeanne hugged Aurore and kissed her on the cheek. "Good-by, Aurore—be happy in your sunny land and find a good husband." Aurore brushed her eyes and as she stepped through the door she turned, half smiling through her tears. "And you also—unless you intend to succeed the Pompadour." Jeanne laughed, happy that Aurore could jest. "Not I—I am not clever. I am happy here—I belong in Paris."

Elizabeth helped Jeanne carry her belongings to their room and they sat up talking until long past midnight. Jeanne had always liked Elizabeth; except for Suzanne she had never known a close friend of her own sex until she came to Labille's. Jeanne had found Suzanne timid and dependent on her, but Elizabeth was different—wiser, endowed with the poised calm which only experience brings. Anne had the same sureness and spoke frankly to her at all times, but Anne was her mother, and regardless of their intimacy the timeless barrier that divides one generation from the next lurked below the surface.

Jeanne sat before the mirror brushing her hair, a warm wrapper around her shoulders. "Elizabeth, I am going to like staying with you—even more than if I had installed myself at Colonel Marcien's. Men are superb, it is men who make life for us, but don't you agree they grow heavy at times?" Elizabeth, surprised, sat up in bed. A spontaneous smile brightened her face.

"I don't mean all the time, of course," Jeanne added hurriedly. "But think of being with a man, even one you love, all day *and* all night—you could never relax and talk as we are doing, without a thought of how we look."

"You are right," Elizabeth agreed. "I experienced more than you have before I realized that. It is precisely why I will not go to

live with the commandant, and you well know I love him." Her plain face glowed. "He has never actually asked me to live with him but I know he would be pleased if I did. And now tell me about Monsieur le Colonel—does he suit you?"

Jeanne put down the hairbrush, blew out the candles, and climbed into her own bed. Lying under the covers, listening to the howl of the cold December wind, she talked of Colonel Marcien. She was not in love with him but she was content. Although he had only one leg he was surprisingly accomplished in bed. His love-making was thorough and sure and in his careful timing he considered her equally with himself. With a shade of reluctance Jeanne confessed she now delighted in raptures she had never dreamed of and that in retrospect Charles Duval seemed callow, hurried.

"The most remarkable thing," she concluded, "is how easily I adjust to the difference in our ages. The other men I have known were little older than I and each was a disappointment—Lametz was an oaf, Charles a handsome selfish boy, and Genlis a beast. Strange, is it not? Monsieur le Colonel is twice my age—more—but he is the first to treat me with dignity and respect. That is why I am content."

As the months of her liaison with Colonel Marcien slipped by, her satisfaction increased. Instead of frustration because he was twenty-odd years her senior Jeanne derived security from his firm protective attitude. She tried to understand herself and finally decided, after painful introspection, that her desire for affection and security was most likely to be fulfilled with an older man.

Because of his artificial limb Colonel Marcien walked as little as possible. Once, not wishing to appear infirm, he yielded to Jeanne's entreaties and took her to the fair of Saint-Germain. This was an immense wooden structure which displayed, like Nicolet's, numerous booths, acrobats, and sideshows—but walking the necessary distance to view the spectacle caused him obvious discomfort. Too late Jeanne realized her lack of consideration and

never again asked him to go anywhere if excessive physical effort was involved.

The colonel was a devoted admirer of the theater and instilled in Jeanne a kindred passion. They never missed performances of the Opéra in the Palais-Royal and were also inveterate followers of the *Comédie Française* as well. Seated in the loges they made a striking pair, the battle-scarred veteran in a suit of black satin with jabot and cuffs of fine lace and the exquisite young woman attentive at his side. Colonel Marcien's pension was supplemented by a moderate income from his Brittany estate, and he stretched his resources to the limit in gifts to Jeanne—handsome gowns of taffeta or satin, an eyeglass set in enamel for the Opéra and, on her eighteenth birthday, a pair of small diamond earrings. "The stones are but a fraction the size of my devotion," he told her, "but they are the most I can manage." Jeanne knew he had gone into debt for the jewels but she knew too that the gift came from the heart and she proudly wore the earrings the next time they attended the theater.

Beginning in late spring, all through the summer and into early autumn their chief pastime was to hire a carriage and be driven through the verdant countryside to Passy or sometimes through the Bois to Saint-Cloud. Near Passy they discovered a rural inn, Aux Deux Cerises; small and secluded, it was their favorite haunt. They passed long summer afternoons beneath its arbor drinking chilled white wine with cherries.

Colonel Marcien was happiest there. He talked of his military career which stretched from the glorious victory of Fontenoy through the present disastrous war with England and Prussia. Often he waxed bitter at the dreary record of ineptitude at Versailles, for which he blamed the Marquise de Pompadour. "That fishmonger!" he grumbled. "No one cares whom King Louis shares his bed with, but politics is no province for a woman—the popinjays she chooses for generals have been the ruin of the King's armies."

"That's what I think also," agreed Jeanne. "I shall never under-

stand the political world and I don't want to. A woman should be an agreeable companion to a man—and that is all." Seeing that he was still irritated she assumed a lighter tone and suggested a game of dominoes. Colonel Marcien liked all forms of gambling but dominoes was his favorite. Jeanne knew that a victorious bout would quickly restore his good temper; if he lost, which he seldom did, he paid her five livres, and if she lost she paid with love.

Whenever the superintendent of his estate forwarded money from his rents Colonel Marcien visited the gambling house operated by the Marquise du Quesnoy. "Her title is as false as her teeth," he remarked, "but the play at her tables is honest." One evening in late November, a day before Colonel Marcien planned to leave Paris behind him forever, they went for a final time to the establishment in the rue de Bourbon.

The rain, pounding all day, had turned the street into a torrent and as the carriage stopped at the entrance a lantern-carrier sprang forth. "Light, who wants light?" Marcien nodded affirmatively and the man laid a plank across the filth-strewn water that swirled through the street. Jeanne and the colonel, guided by the lantern-bearer, stepped gingerly on the narrow board and reached the haven of the doorway.

As they removed their wet cloaks Jeanne had the disturbing sensation of being watched. She glanced behind her and saw a man leaning indolently against the wall. With his knee breeches of orange silk he wore a gray dress coat and a sword, and his hand negligently held a gold-headed cane. He bowed a trifle, a smile of unashamed admiration on his handsome face.

"Who is he?" she asked Colonel Marcien. "Such an open glance—almost insolent!"

"That is Comte Jean du Barry, but everyone calls him the Roué, a title to which he has much better claim." They moved on into the gaming room but Jeanne was overcome with curiosity and turned around once more to meet again the admiring, slightly mocking eyes of the Roué.

The large salon usually dedicated to gambling was empty, its tables deserted, its chairs vacant. Jeanne immediately realized why—the cold was so bitter that not wine or brandy or even the excitement of competition could warm the players. The rain-lashed wind rattled the panes and penetrated the apertures in the window frames. A lackey had stuffed paper, rags, and even furs into the cracks—to no avail. Jeanne stood uncertainly, remembering from her previous visits the gilded crowded room which was now so barren.

A middle-aged woman with a puffy face and a glint of avarice in her black eyes hurried to them from an adjoining room. "Ah—Monsieur le Colonel, such an honor—and Mademoiselle Bécu." Jeanne smiled inwardly; long ago she had noticed that the self-styled Marquise du Quesnoy always addressed first the patron who controlled the funds. The Marquise fixed her lorgnette and surveyed the empty room. "A bit chill this evening"—she laughed deprecatingly—"and so I have arranged a more comfortable location in there." She gestured with the lorgnette toward the room from which she had emerged.

Jeanne and Colonel Marcien followed her and passed into a small, brightly lighted *salon* filled with crowded tables and a babel of chattering voices. A roaring wood fire, added to the heat of many bodies, afforded warmth which was sufficient—in fact, thought Jeanne, excessive. She liked comfort, but overheated rooms made her giddy and she moved nearer the window where the gusts of cold air caused the draperies to billow and sway. Colonel Marcien seated himself at a table where *comète* was in progress, and Jeanne decided that in a few moments she would join him. He always said she brought him luck.

An elderly man leaning on a stick shuffled past, his gouty limbs moving with painful slowness. He hailed the Marquise in a quavering voice. "Madame, what sort of house do you preside over? Nowhere can I find a game of *cavagnole.*"

"But monsieur," she replied with a patronizing air, "we do not play *cavagnole;* will monsieur not choose *comète,* or *lansquenet*

—or perhaps lotto?" The ancient invalid mumbled, shook his head petulantly, and hobbled away.

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed a man's hearty voice in Jeanne's ear. She turned her head in surprise; beside her, a cynical smile on his lips, stood Comte du Barry. "Doesn't that relic realize that no one plays *cavagnole* anymore except the Queen and her friends? Ho! Come to think of it he looks as though he belongs in that dowdy circle." He winked confidingly at Jeanne and she could not help laughing at his unabashed malice.

"I am told you are called the Roué." She scanned him closely and guessed he must be in his late thirties—only a few years younger than Colonel Marcien, but far handsomer. His mocking glance implied that his one love was himself. Jeanne had no illusions but she felt a strong current drawing her to him—even his strong Gascon accent attracted her.

"So—you know about me? Good!" He gave her a quizzical look and twirled his cane. "I admit I am a rogue." He shrugged. "Why not admit it? Everyone knows it anyway. But I am not a bad sort; I want everyone to enjoy life—as long as they do not object to my doing the same." He saw that he had captured her interest and swept on.

"You do not know it but I have seen you many times with your wounded colonel." Jeanne stiffened and he added, "Don't take offense: I am well aware that Colonel Marcien is an estimable gentleman—I am also aware he leaves Paris shortly. What will become of you?" Jeanne was annoyed at his blunt question. "It is no concern of yours," she flared. "I have learned to shift for myself."

"Naturally; we all do." He patted her arm as though he had known her for a long time. "I too have a gambling house, with a clientele far more elegant than this crone can boast. I shall be honored if you will preside over my tables and the discreet suppers I arrange. Your dazzling beauty will attract to my house the wealthy and powerful!"

"Is that all you want of me?"

The Roué grinned. "I confess you are eminently desirable and I trust we can give each other pleasant hours. I don't pretend I love you; I love only myself. I won't desire you after a few months —I do not confine my attentions to one, no matter how bewitching, and when that time comes you may amuse yourself as you like, but you will always be free to share my roof. Do we understand each other?"

Jeanne was taken aback but she liked his candor. She rubbed the mole under her lip thoughtfully. "I shall consider it—I promise you an answer before the evening is ended." She left him and went to stand behind Colonel Marcien's chair. "I am enjoying luck," he smiled up at her. "A few minutes more——"

Jeanne, oblivious of the game, stood weighing the Roué's unexpected proposal. His directness and refreshing lack of hypocrisy charmed her. She felt no affection for him—perhaps that would come later, perhaps it would never come. But with the departure of Colonel Marcien she would be left without a protector and she felt reasonably certain that at the Roué's she would enjoy luxury or something very near to it. She would have to leave Labille's—but what was there to lose?

Colonel Marcien finished his game and pushed back his chair. "It is late—my traveling coach departs early and I must be ready." He assumed an air of military preciseness. "I have had a successful evening." He pressed two hundred livres in Jeanne's hand. "This will take care of you for a while." Jeanne opened her green silk purse and stuffed the money into its quilted-satin interior. She was furious at him; all at once she perceived his selfish smugness, his taking her for granted—the most unforgivable of human faults, she thought angrily. In comparison the Roué's selfishness was bracing. While the colonel said good-by to the disappointed Marquise du Quesnoy (she loathed to lose), Jeanne walked to the Roué who stood waiting in the doorway.

"Monsieur le Comte——"

"Don't call me that," he broke in. "At least not when we are alone. The title is false. Even were it genuine it would belong

to my older brother." His expression was so whimsical that Jeanne burst out laughing, warmed by his unabashed roguery, confident she had made a wise decision. "I accept your proposal," she said. The Roué smiled with pleasure and as she turned to rejoin Colonel Marcien for their last night, he called after her: "We shall fare splendidly, you and I—I am convinced a dazzling future lies ahead."

CHAPTER SIX

ITEM: L'Encyclopédie, seventeen volumes; bound in rose-colored leather, stamped with gold.

The next morning Colonel Marcien and Jeanne bade each other farewell. She was glad he had not noticed her momentary anger the previous evening. She realized his offhandedness had not been deliberate and that in his unimaginative way he was thinking of her well-being. She consoled herself with the thought that she had given him lasting memories during the long hours of their final night.

The coach in which he would journey stood at the door and Jeanne clung to him in tears. She was remembering the solicitude he had shown during their year together and his patience in trying to teach her something of the world about her. She admitted to herself that she still understood nothing of political events, but in her acquired taste for drama and music—and her enhanced skill in the ways of love—she would always be in his debt.

The coachman stowed and tied the colonel's trunk and motioned that it was time to depart. Colonel Marcien took Jeanne in his arms and kissed her. "Adieu, dear one. You have given much joy to me and I shall always remember you."

"And I you." Jeanne burst into fresh tears and he wiped her eyes with his handkerchief. "Follow likely fortune when it beckons," he counseled. "You are far too lovely to be ignored by life; select wisely and you will go far." She had not mentioned her pact with the Roué, yet his words sounded as if he knew.

He climbed slowly into the coach and leaned out the window. In the cold morning light he looked suddenly weary and old. "God keep you, Jeanne; perhaps in time we shall meet again." The coachman sprang to the box, flicked the reins, and the lumbering vehicle rolled away. As it turned the corner Colonel Marcien leaned out once more and Jeanne waved forlornly. She was not inclined to profound thought but an inner voice told her she would never see him again. She gathered her cloak about her and walked dejectedly down the street, feeling in her heart the pain that gnaws when a familiar person departs.

Now that he had gone she wished she could will him back. How could she know what lay ahead? The unknown could be alarming but her spirits brightened when she recalled the Roué's dynamic presence. Perhaps the future would turn out well. Her confidence rose and by the time she reached Labille's she wore her normal sunny expression. She told Elizabeth she had agreed to an arrangement with the Roué and wondered how she should inform Labille and his wife.

Elizabeth advised her to be especially tactful with Madame Labille if she wished to avoid a scene, but there were many customers all that day and Jeanne waited vainly for a favorable opportunity. Suddenly she sighed with relief—across the crowded shop she spied the Roué. On his head was a tricorne adorned with an ostrich plume and as he swaggered toward her he twirled the inevitable cane, this one of ebony chased with silver.

"Ho! And how is my enchanting partner today?" He swept off his plumed hat with a flourish and kissed her hand. Jeanne felt everyone's glance upon them and wondered if the Roué always spoke so loudly—his Gascon accent alone attracted enough attention. "How much longer will you remain in this musty fleatrap?" Out of the corner of her eye Jeanne saw Madame Labille look up sharply from the cashbox and whisper to her husband, who started toward them with quick nervous steps.

Jeanne stole a glance at the Roué leaning indolently against a table. He winked encouragingly. His presence gave her confi-

dence and she told Labille she was leaving and that in the future she would reside with Monsieur le Comte du Barry in the rue Neuve-Saint-Eustache. Labille spread his hands in surprise and addressed the Roué. "But Monsieur le Comte, Mademoiselle Jeanne is my greatest attraction. . . ."

"And she is overdrawn seven livres!" Madame Labille had joined them, her voice shrill with greed, her brain swiftly calculating the decline in sales which Jeanne's departure would entail. "*Peste!*" exclaimed the Roué. "What is that to me?" He tossed a louis in her direction. "That should quiet you, woman."

He turned to Jeanne. "Get your cloak—we will send tomorrow for your belongings." Jeanne murmured a hurried good-by to Elizabeth and turned to Labille and his wife. "Good-by, monsieur and madame—I have spent two happy years here, and I thank you." Madame Labille had recovered her composure and her avaricious eyes appraised the Roué's expensive apparel and air of wealthy indifference. She kissed Jeanne. "Good-by, dear Jeanne; be certain that you don't forget your old friends. Come often to see us and . . . perhaps you and Monsieur le Comte will buy from time to time?"

When they reached the street the Roué gave a boisterous laugh. "Such a rapacious shrew! How can you abide her?"

"Madame Labille is not unkind; it is only that she likes money."

"Ho! So do I—to spend, but she wants to hoard it. All the world's difference!"

The Roué's carriage stood waiting and as a lackey opened the door Jeanne saw an emblazoned crest with a motto: *Boutez-en-avant.* She was about to comment when she heard a vendor's cracked voice: "Everyone knows what he has to do . . . mesdames, messieurs . . . everyone. . . ." With her foot already on the step she turned and saw a man trundling a portable privy over the uneven cobblestones. She jumped hastily into the carriage and the Roué slid in beside her convulsed with laughter.

"What is it?" Jeanne asked, pulling at his sleeve. "What is so amusing?" The Roué struggled to control his mirth; his face was

crimson as he fought to recover his breath. "Everyone knows what he has to do. . . ." he mocked. "I was only thinking of your good Madame Labille—I wager that privy vendor has an eager customer right now." His eyes streamed and his body shook with renewed laughter as the carriage started.

Perhaps to his own surprise the Roué enjoyed Jeanne's enchantments considerably longer than the few months he had predicted. He confessed with a mischievous smile that he found her more adroit than he had supposed. Although he encouraged her to mingle freely with his patrons, he indicated politely but firmly to the wealthy noblemen who played at his tables that Jeanne's favors were reserved for him alone.

"*Pardieu,* that is not the Roué's custom." Jeanne smelled a strong odor of musk and knew at once that it was the Duc de Richelieu who spoke. Richelieu, an aging lecher with the sharp eyes and face of a fox, was standing behind her chair talking to the Duc de Duras. Jeanne pretended to be absorbed in the game of lotto at her table but she did not miss a word of their conversation. She gathered from Richelieu's astringent comments that the Roué's usual practice was to seduce a girl with promises of marriage and then hand her over, for a generous fee, to a new protector.

Jeanne was neither shocked nor greatly surprised. In the months since she had come to the house in the rue Neuve-Saint-Eustache she had learned much about the Roué—and mostly from himself. By his own admission he liked money, and scruples played no part in how he obtained it.

He told Jeanne frankly he had abandoned a wife and son in rural Lévignac when he came to Paris. "So how could I marry when I already have a wife—no matter what I promise?" He gulped a glass of brandy as Jeanne finished her account of the conversation she had overheard. "Ho! Richelieu is a more accomplished rogue than I; he has plundered a fortune in Hanover, but the name he bears and his intimacy with the King protect

him, while I—I must pander and cheat for the luxury we enjoy."

He grinned and pulled her to his lap. It was four in the morning, the last unsteady gamblers had departed, and they were alone in the Roué's bedroom. He was already drunk but he poured more brandy. "Is it luxury enough, Jeanne?" He fondled the diamond pendant on her bosom and she kissed him in reply. The Roué was certainly no miser. He had presented her a carriage embossed with the coronet of a spurious Comtesse, gowns of satin and brocade and superb diamonds—bracelet, aigrette, and the enormous pendant.

Most of his funds were acquired by his wits but at least part of his income was legitimate. Jeanne knew he held a lucrative contract from the War Ministry to provision the troops in Corsica and if he profited also from the folly of gambling nobles and reaped a handsome return on the sums he invested in pretty faces, what harm was there in that? What did it matter where money came from as long as it flowed in for gowns, furniture, porcelains, diamonds? Jeanne yawned and began to undress.

The Roué put down his brandy and fumbled with the buttons of his linen waistcoat. Jeanne thought sometimes he drank too much but as it seemed to have no effect on his amiable disposition, she kept her opinion to herself. He was generous, and his mental and physical agility stimulated her senses. His wooing was spiced with outrageous Gascon flattery and his remarkable prowess was even more agreeable. The diversity of his love-making she laid to his wide travels, but whatever the cause she felt a firm attachment, entirely unsentimental, to the shameless Roué. She snuffed the candles and handed him another brandy before climbing into bed.

More than two years rolled by before the Roué began to cast his appraising mocking glances at other women. From the beginning Jeanne had been prepared for such a shift and she accepted it with a shrug. Her protector made it clear he wanted her to remain as the presiding deity of his gambling salon and he ar-

ranged for Anne and Rancon to move into the house and supervise its domestic routine.

A week was sufficient to mark the smoother flow of housekeeping details. Whenever Anne's sharp eye observed evidence of laziness or drunkenness among the servants she promptly discharged them. The Roué was surprisingly sentimental with his servants and admitted he would never have brought himself to dismiss any of them. "Your mother is a treasure, my dear," he remarked. "She is as efficient as you are desirable, and she saves me a fortune in housekeeping while you earn another at our suppers and games." He embraced Jeanne and presented her with a new gift, an eyeglass set in a jeweled fan.

One morning in March of 1764 Anne brought the breakfast tray to Jeanne's tufted bed. She drew back the brocade draperies at the window and pale winter sunlight flooded the room. Jeanne rubbed her eyes in surprise. "Why are you here at this hour, mama? Where is my maid?"

"She is ill," Anne answered. "I thought I would come myself and have a talk. You and Monsieur le Comte are so occupied with carriage rides and the *Comédie* and suppers that I see you far too little." She gave her a fond smile and put the tray on the bed. Jeanne ignored the pat of butter nested on a currant leaf and bit into a dry roll while Anne poured her coffee.

Jeanne chattered about the previous evening and said the Roué's pockets were filled with English gold. "Since the end of the war rich milords have flocked from London to Paris and they lose heavily, even when they play whist." Anne nodded absently. "Jeanne." She spoke in the unmistakable tone which meant that something was on her mind.

"Have you never considered why you have no child?"

Jeanne put down the roll, gazed for a moment at Anne in astonishment, and laughed merrily. "Yes, I have pondered it more than once—there has been ample opportunity, hasn't there?" She saw the crease of a frown on Anne's brow and spoke more seriously. "But I'm only twenty and you were thirty when I was born.

I do love children, and I hope to have them." Anne looked dubious and Jeanne seized her hand. "There is no reason why I can't, is there? I mean—there is nothing wrong with me?"

"You have always enjoyed good health—even your smallpox was mild—but *le Bon Dieu* is unpredictable. Some women, no matter how strong, never bear a child for reasons we cannot know." A distressed look crossed Jeanne's face and Anne reassured her. "There is no cause yet for worry; time and Providence will arrange it. I was only thinking that a child of the Comte du Barry would have a promising future."

Jeanne reminded her she was no longer the Roué's mistress, at the same time telling herself uneasily that *he* was a father. If any defect existed, clearly it did not lie with the Roué. Could it lie with her?

The most dashing English nobleman who had come to Paris after the signing of the peace treaty was the Earl of March. Milord March, the Roué called him. He liked to gamble—only women were more important to him—and he appeared nearly every evening to play at the tables over which Jeanne presided. Dressed in the smart English fashion which had become stylish since the war's end he presented a jaunty figure as he lounged at the whist table.

"Zounds!" he swore as the Roué won another game. "I don't think you cheat, du Barry, but I think you would if you could. Wouldn't you?" He spoke in a serious tone but the Roué, understanding the strange ways of the English, knew he was only jesting and answered in like vein. "Of course, but I don't need to cheat, milord. I win anyway."

They laid down their cards when supper was announced and Jeanne took the Englishman's arm while the Roué escorted March's mistress, Countess la Rena. "Another false title," the Roué had whispered earlier, "but that is of no importance. Paris is full of them—look at me!"

La Rena was an Italian, a true Mediterranean beauty. Her

voluptuous body tended to be overweight and her dark sultry looks made Jeanne think of the long-departed Aurore, but beneath her sensual appearance beat a kind heart and Jeanne liked her at once.

She adored the two children she had borne her English lover and had permitted Jeanne to take them driving on fine afternoons during the previous summer. Jeanne's golden beauty, flanked on either side by the two dark-haired little boys, made a captivating sight through the carriage windows. Jeanne delighted to buy them almond biscuits, a favorite delicacy sure to evoke exclamations of childish pleasure. They would kiss her and she would hug them in return, her eyes filling with sudden tears. If I don't have a child of my own, she vowed, I shall someday adopt one. Little did she dream what her vow would cost her.

The two couples were joined at their meal by that inveterate habitué of the Roué's establishment, the Duc de Richelieu. Milord March was on Jeanne's left while Richelieu, as a peer of France, took the chair on her right. The table was enveloped in the scent of musk he always wore.

Everyone was curious over the severe illness of Madame de Pompadour and begged Richelieu to share the latest news from Versailles. They knew he hated the King's mistress with mortal fury and they anticipated one of his wittily venomous remarks, but all he said was, "I think Madame la Marquise is finally leaving the Château forever."

"Some years ago," interrupted the Roué, "I offered to supply an appetizing girl named Dorothée to His Majesty, but when the Pompadour told him she was infected with the pox he lost interest. She wasn't infected," he added with mock indignation, "well—only slightly." There was a ripple of laughter around the table.

"I remember that," Richelieu said. "Dorothée would have made your fortune." He glanced at Jeanne and the idle fancy entered his head that the King might enjoy her for a night or so. His quick mind grasped that the Roué was no longer her lover,

and knowing the Roué he considered what fee he might offer. After a moment's reflection he tossed away the idea. His nearly seventy years did not influence his decision, but already he had so many women in Paris—why bother with another?

Jeanne sat unaware of her dinner partner's thoughts. She was restless, vaguely ill at ease. A disordered jumble of names coursed through her brain . . . Charles Duval . . . the dying mistress at Versailles . . . Colonel Marcien. . . . She watched the Roué across the table. He was toying with his wine and telling one of his ribald Gascon stories to La Rena. Jeanne surmised from her puzzled expression that she had not understood it. All at once with a flash of irritation she realized that she missed the Roué's bedroom—what she wanted was a lover!

The following Friday the Roué gave a brilliant ball for Milord March and his mistress. He could well afford it; the jaunty English lord had lost to him, in the course of some eight months, a sum in excess of fifty thousand livres. Jeanne, in a gown of flowered silk, stood beside the Roué waiting for their guests of honor. She blazed with diamonds—all the pieces given her by the Roué, the earrings from Colonel Marcien, even the diamond brooch of the horrible Comte de Genlis.

When Milord March and La Rena arrived they exclaimed over the brilliantly lighted *salon*. The gaming tables had been removed. Three hundred candles cast their glow on guests who moved and conversed beneath paintings framed above the doors. As Jeanne nodded to Richelieu across the room a hand touched her arm and she heard Milord March's voice. "By your leave, I have invited an intimate friend to join us tonight; may I present Monsieur Radix de Sainte-Foy?"

Jeanne's heart seemed to stop—then pounded furiously. She turned her head and looked into the eyes she remembered so well, pale blue eyes surmounted by thick dark brows and hair. There were new lines around his mouth and as he stared at Jeanne his expression was as startled as hers. She was uncertain

that he recognized her and extended her hand automatically. "We are honored to have Monsieur de Sainte-Foy. It has been a very long time." Although she tried to keep the excitement from her voice she spoke rapidly and for the first time in years she lisped.

Sainte-Foy bowed to kiss her hand and when he straightened there was a look of incredulous recognition on his face. "Mademoiselle . . . your beauty rolls back the years . . . it makes me think of one who . . . but pardon, you cannot be . . ."

"Jeanne Bécu?" Jeanne's voice was low, her eyes soft.

"*Pardieu!*" Sainte-Foy drew a lace handkerchief from his sleeve and wiped his brow. "Jeanne! But what are you——" He left the question unfinished, tightened his lips, and moved away with Milord March and La Rena. Out of the corner of her eye Jeanne saw them talking animatedly to him; undoubtedly they were discussing her. She suppressed a tremor. What, she wondered, would his reaction be when he learned that the child at Monsieur Billard's, the adolescent at Saint Aure, had become the hostess of the Roué?

After she had greeted all the guests Sainte-Foy came close to her. "I must talk to you—alone." In answer she took his arm, led him into a small library, and closed the door. He leaned against the chimney, a look of astonishment and admiration on his face, and then he smiled and became once more the Sainte-Foy of her childhood, the laughing young man with the tilted nose who had given her a spaniel and had saved her from the fire.

"I always thought you looked like an angel, Jeanne—all white and gold. You still do, but a grown-up angel, somehow different; perhaps it is the diamonds."

"Perhaps—perhaps more. Much has happened since you visited me at Saint Aure."

"Ah, yes—that was the last time I saw you. Six—no, nearly seven years ago. How could I be expected to recognize you tonight? Then you wore that hideous convent gown, while now——"

"Yes," said Jeanne teasingly, "that was the last time you saw

little Jeanne Bécu, but not the last time she saw you." He frowned, puzzled. "Once I saw you," she continued, "in the Ministry of Marine."

"Then why didn't you speak?"

"I was too unhappy—it was the unhappiest day of my life. I thought the world had ended for me."

"It must have been a lover," he declared. "Nothing but an unhappy love affair could cause distress to beauty such as yours, but I do not understand how any man could be so foolish."

Jeanne laughed shortly. "Do not flatter me, Monsieur de Sainte-Foy." A wave of nostalgia gripped her. She longed to perch on his lap as she had done long ago and tell him everything that had happened to her. He was the last link with the sweet years of her childhood, those protected years when she had played at the feet of himself and Monsieur Billard.

"Call me Radix," he said. "Too much lies behind us, and ahead, for you to be so formal. Perhaps——"

He was interrupted by the sudden opening of the door. An overdressed woman tripped laughingly into the room, ardently pursued by a much younger man in red satin breeches. He was too intent on his purpose to notice Jeanne and Sainte-Foy, but the older woman halted in her pretended flight. "Impetuous boy!" she scolded, but her true sentiment was betrayed by the coquettish way she spread her fan. "I fear we intrude here. . . ." She giggled in a high voice and led her junior swain from the room.

"That was Mademoiselle Legrand and her latest." Jeanne spoke gaily; the entrance of the outlandish pair had been a distraction from her nostalgic thoughts. "The Roué says she is another Ninon de L'Enclos; he vows she is seventy-seven and has as many young lovers as she has years."

"And you?" His eyes sparkled with interest. "How many young lovers do you have?"

"No lovers at all for the moment—and I shall *never* again take a young one." She remembered the conclusion she had reached

when she lived with Colonel Marcien, that an older man best provided security and affection; for that matter, an older man was more conversant in the ways of love. She raised her head to Sainte-Foy and their blue eyes—his pale as a summer dawn, hers deep as the afternoon sky—met and held in a pledge of mutual agreement.

The Roué was accommodating. He had no objections to Sainte-Foy becoming Jeanne's lover—far from it. He confessed in his debonair way that he welcomed the arrangement. Was Sainte-Foy not Treasurer of the Marine and a wealthy man? The Roué's only stipulation was that Jeanne encourage him to play at the tables, and this was not difficult as Sainte-Foy was a devotee of whist. The Roué rearranged Jeanne's rooms to afford greater privacy and Sainte-Foy usually passed the nights there. As his own house was filled with unmarried female relatives the new adjustment was a congenial one.

One rainy evening—Jeanne always remembered afterward that it was a Tuesday—she and her new lover set out to visit Milord March and La Rena. They lived in a handsome house on the rue du Bac, across the Seine. Just as the carriage turned toward the Pont-Royal Jeanne spied a somber torchlit procession on their right. "What is that?" she asked wonderingly. "The horses have black plumes. . . ."

"*Dieu me dêfend!*" he exclaimed. "That is surely the funeral of Madame de Pompadour." He sighed and an expression of regret darkened his eyes. "It is just as well that the night is rainy or the Marquise might encounter insults on her last journey. Paris hated her but the Philosophers were her true friends, and they are the only men of sense in France."

Jeanne was surprised at his serious tone. Already she had realized that Sainte-Foy was a different breed than the witty cynical nobles who crowded the Roué's house, and now she perceived that she did not understand him at all. She had heard the Roué declare that the Philosophers had intellectual and far-

sighted ideas, but unfortunately they knew it and babbled among themselves like the fishwives of Les Halles.

"Was the Pompadour then so intelligent?" Jeanne asked.

"Intelligent! She had the only real intelligence in that royal beehive. The wonder is that Louis the Well-Beloved"—his voice deepened sarcastically—"could endure her quick mentality since he so rarely uses his own."

"But Radix—"

"Take you!" he challenged. "You could lure His Majesty and he might even be glad that——"

"That I am stupid?" Her voice was full of hurt and Sainte-Foy put an arm around her. "Forgive me; I did not mean to be unkind." The carriage, its lanterns shining dimly through the heavy April rain, was crossing the Pont-Royal. "But don't ever go near the royal Château. It was ambition to reach Versailles, and worse —to remain there—that killed the Pompadour."

Jeanne remained silent. She felt strangely melancholy but made a determined effort to erase the memory of the mournful procession they had witnessed; by the time they pulled up in front of Milord March's house she had almost recovered her cheerfulness. The rain had ceased and she stepped into the foyer where the Englishman and his mistress stood waiting. They were obviously pleased at Sainte-Foy's liaison with Jeanne. "You both look happy," whispered La Rena. "May you be as happy as we are!" Jeanne embraced her and they climbed the stairs to the first floor where dinner was served.

Milord March kept them in constant laughter with his solemn-faced account of King George's vagaries. "Zounds! I wager he will end up stark mad. Even our good Stuarts were never so fanciful and they were far more kinglike." The evening sped by and it was long past midnight before they rose to go. Milord March summoned a footman who handed Jeanne a large square package.

"No diamonds!" Milord March warned her, "but an object far more difficult to obtain in France." Jeanne unwrapped layers

of cloth and uncovered a heavy burnished teapot. "Copper!" she exclaimed in delighted surprise. "Real copper! My mother will be so pleased she will probably drown me in tea!"

"I could have ordered it encrusted with your beloved diamonds," he said unsmilingly, "had the Roué not relieved me of so many livres." Jeanne laughed; she had learned that it was precisely when Milord March appeared most solemn that he was most amused. These English were truly bizarre!

Sainte-Foy and Jeanne departed and their carriage recrossed the Pont-Royal. When it reached the river's right bank they noticed several fishermen and boatmen grouped in a circle. One held aloft a torch and its glare revealed the careworn faces of the men who were staring transfixed at something on the ground. Sainte-Foy ordered the driver to stop and find out what it was.

In a few seconds he returned. "Monsieur," he babbled with excitement, "a shopgirl has drowned herself . . . they are trying to revive her but . . ." Sainte-Foy opened the carriage door. "I'll have a look myself," he announced to Jeanne. "You stay here." As she watched him join the murmuring group by the water's edge the feeling of depression she had experienced earlier in the evening returned.

She shrank from anything morbid but she was seized by an uncontrollable curiosity, and almost against her will she left the carriage and followed Sainte-Foy. She slipped quietly behind him and tried to see the still form on the ground. One of the men briskly rubbed the soles and another attempted to spoon vinegar into the mouth. The second man stood up and gestured hopelessly. "It's not worth the trouble, friends—she is dead." He moved away from the body and Jeanne was able to see the dead woman's face. She gasped with horror and clutched Sainte-Foy. The woman was Elizabeth Valdin.

All the way home Jeanne wept softly in Sainte-Foy's arms. It was the first time she had ever seen a person lifeless for whom

she felt affection and it was not only sorrow for Elizabeth but awe at the immensity of life and death that tore her heart. "Why would Elizabeth do such a thing?" she sobbed. "She was always so sensible—not a butterfly like me—and she so loved the commandant."

"The commandant?" Sainte-Foy's voice was curious. Jeanne described the navy officer who had called so faithfully for Elizabeth every Saturday afternoon at Labille's. She had never seen a couple more steadfastly devoted and she wondered what the commandant would say when he learned of this tragedy; it would break his heart.

"This commandant—you say he was a burly man, red-faced and jovial?"

"Yes—so amiable, so thoughtful too." She was remembering with a fresh pang the day the commandant had introduced Charles Duval to her.

"I know him—at the Ministry of Marine." Sainte-Foy's voice was tinged with compassion as he stroked her hand. "I dislike to destroy your delusion, Jeanne, but Elizabeth's commandant was anything but faithful. If he came to her every Saturday he had six others to fill the remainder of the week and perhaps an extra one or two as well. He was considered excessive even in the Navy."

Jeanne stared in mute disbelief. "Yes," Sainte-Foy speculated, "I think it is now clear what happened. You say Elizabeth loved him. She must have finally realized that to him she was merely a convenience—one of many. That is why she took her life," he said with finality. "It was the very depth of her love that destroyed her."

Jeanne pondered his words after they had gone to bed. Sainte-Foy was astonishingly abandoned for a man who appeared so calm, but that night he was tender, merely encircling her in his arms. When sleep finally soothed her troubled mind she was still thinking of the powerful Pompadour killed by ambition, and her own poor friend—killed by love.

Many months passed and Jeanne realized more and more that Sainte-Foy's true personality was unlike the vision of her childhood dreams. He was no armored knight doing battle for his lady; rather he was contemplative and addicted to philosophical reading. Yet she had to admit, when she thought hard, that there had always been an underlying seriousness to his nature. Into her memory there flashed the vivid picture of Sainte-Foy smothering flames on her dress and warning her earnestly not to get too close to the fire. That cautious gravity had been the true mark of his character—not the winning smile which she preferred to remember.

One evening when they were in her room she confessed with a half-embarrassed laugh that he had been the idol of her youth, and after he visited her at the convent she had invested his figure with the mantle of all her romantic longings. She hoped he would react with a light tender gesture or a witty remark, but he only said in a flat voice: "Your emotions were the irrational dreams of a child, while our present relationship is one of mutual pleasure and reason only."

"But what is wrong with dreams, Radix? Don't they color life—doesn't everyone have them?"

"Dreams are a waste of time—superstitions. We live in the most civilized age the world has ever known and soon Reason—the clear pure Reason of Man—will govern all."

"But will people be happier?"

His expression was forbearing. "Jeanne, the Philosophers tell us——"

"Those Philosophers!" She stamped her foot impatiently. "Can you talk of nothing else?" She looked coaxingly at him and his features quivered; he darted forward and held her close and in an instant she wondered how a man so frenzied with passion could talk of such dull subjects.

A few days later a set of *L'Encyclopédie,* bound in rose-colored leather, stamped with gold, was delivered to her. Sainte-Foy pointed out that since the King had suppressed the work it was

difficult to obtain, but through his patron, the Duc de Choiseul, he had managed to secure one. "So lovely!" Jeanne commented. "Such beauty to admire!" She made a moue. "But *so* much to read; however, I'll try."

She tried, with small success. It was agreeable to read about rouge and to learn how silk stockings were made, and Voltaire's sprightly articles on history held her interest, but d'Alembert's views on religion horrified her with their heretical leanings, and she closed the volume with relief. She would keep *L'Encyclopédie* —the set made such a handsome addition to her library—but reading it was another matter. At times the price of pleasing Sainte-Foy went too high and at such times the lusty company of the Roué was an exhilarating change.

One morning shortly before noon she entered the Roué's room. The previous evening at the tables had extended later than usual, and he had just emerged from bed. Jeanne stared in amazement. He was seated by the window wrapped in a green satin dressing gown and on his head two baked apples were held in place by a tight band which stretched beneath his chin.

"My eyes." He grinned, peering at her through slits. "They are swollen almost shut. Too much champagne, even for me—but Dr. Bugonne swears this will cure." Jeanne had heard Sainte-Foy declare that Dr. Bugonne was a notorious quack who had grown rich by his glib tongue. She repressed a strong temptation to laugh at the Roué's droll appearance. "I imagine you will not find such a remedy in *L'Encyclopédie,*" she teased.

"*L'Encyclopédie—merde!* Sometimes I grow disappointed in Monsieur de Sainte-Foy." He pronounced the name in an absurd lilting tone of mockery and Jeanne exploded with laughter. "He is a bore with his tiresome talk of the Philosophers and—more to the point—he hardly ever gambles anymore. Do you find him so stimulating after more than two years that you must divert him from the tables?"

Her thinking was uncomplicated and with the Roué she was always utterly frank. "He is not witty and amusing like you, but

he offers compensations." She detected a leer in the half-closed eyes. "Ho!" he chuckled. "You should know. He loves you, I presume?"

Jeanne braced herself; at times the Roué's jesting went too far. "He doesn't love me," she said defensively. "He says love is irrational, but he *likes* me. Who are you to cavil? You didn't love me either!" The Roué opened his mouth to speak, checked himself, then began again. His voice carried an exaggerated note of insouciance. "Of course I didn't love you, but I have a compensation to offer that Sainte-Foy would never dream of."

He opened a drawer and drew forth a paper. "I am making over to you all the income from my contract to supply the troops in Corsica. It amounts to a goodly sum and it shows my gratitude for the enormous profits you have earned me. Remember when I told you we should fare splendidly, you and I?"

Jeanne was thrilled at the Roué's gift. How many diamonds the money would buy! She kissed him heartily and one of the baked apples fell from his head and squashed on the floor in front of the window. *"Diable!"* He jumped up and as he bent over to retrieve the shapeless apple his face was visible from the street. "A delight to the ladies and pleasure to all." The cry of a biscuit vendor arose from below and the Roué hastily withdrew from the window. "I could well believe that dog was describing me were I properly attired." He grimaced at his reflection in the mirror and stuck out his tongue. "But not with one apple lopsided on my skull!" He replaced the fallen apple on his head and tightened the band under his chin.

Jeanne found life enchanting as she had never dreamed it could be in the days when she worked at Labille's. Occasionally she returned there to buy a bolt of satin or fine cloth from the Indies. Labille in his fussy manner was courteous and his wife was almost obsequious as she encouraged Jeanne to purchase without limit. She cannily appealed to Jeanne's extravagance, knowing that the Roué or Sainte-Foy would ultimately pay.

Jeanne enjoyed spending and loved the attention it invited, but inevitably on these visits she was haunted by the ghost of Elizabeth. Once in the middle of a fitting she recalled her former roommate's spontaneous smile and her eyes filled with tears. When she explained the reason Madame Labille shrugged. "It was a pity—Elizabeth was a good worker. But that commandant—what a *salaud!* When he came he bought almost nothing at all!"

Radiant in expensive gowns, sparkling with the diamonds she loved, Jeanne continued to be the leading attraction of the Roué's establishment. Few women came there except an occasional grisette or girl from the Opéra, but Jeanne could always depend on La Rena to accompany Milord March and Mademoiselle Legrand to hover over some handsome likely youth. It was from the men—great courtiers like the Prince de Ligne, the Duc de Duras, and above all Richelieu—that Jeanne acquired polish and manners and the wit which was the heart of their brilliant conversation.

She reveled in this life of excitement, living in surroundings which approached luxury. She had the friendship and support of the Roué and—a factor of growing importance—a satisfying liaison with a man. Sainte-Foy often bored her with his endless complaints of political abuses, and she always laughed when he predicted troubles for the monarchy. But in the long hours of the night he was a stirring companion.

Sainte-Foy, unlike Colonel Marcien, cared nothing for the theater, but he had an expert's eye for paintings and somewhat pedantically shared his knowledge with her. They paid repeated visits to the Louvre, where he pointed out with lucidity the qualities which should be sought in a work of art. Jeanne's natural taste and quick powers of assimilation pleased him. "Perhaps I shall know how to choose a fine painting someday," she said. "The only one I own now is that which Monsieur Billard did of me when I was seven. Do you remember it?"

"Of course I do." His impersonal academic manner vanished. He turned to her with a laughing tenderness which carried her

back through the years to the *salon* of Monsieur Billard and the small spaniel which frisked on the polished floor. "I think perhaps I loved you then, Jeanne, although of course I did not know it."

"I knew I loved you, even then." Jeanne was swept by a wave of longing; she could not be sure whether it was for the Monsieur de Sainte-Foy of her childhood or the Radix who stood beside her in the draughty Louvre. But the night which followed was the culmination of their idyll: Sainte-Foy, instead of plunging into a snorting passionate frenzy, wooed her with a gentleness almost paternal and she fell asleep in his arms like a tired happy child.

But from then on he changed. Three mystifying weeks passed before he slept again in the rue Neuve-Saint-Eustache. As winter turned into spring he came with less frequency and when he stayed, his manner was cold, sometimes almost brutal. Jeanne never again evoked the protective feeling he had shown that one night. Now it was April of 1768—she had been his mistress for four years—and she felt as though she did not really know him at all, or if she did that she no longer loved him.

Worry was an emotion entirely new to her, one which she abhorred, but now she worried over Sainte-Foy, who touched a fundamental segment of her nature, and over another disquieting development as well. The Roué informed her with gravity rare for him that the Duc de Choiseul had revoked his contract with the War Ministry. The loss of the income would strike them doubly hard as profits from gambling and the discreet suppers had dwindled alarmingly. "What can we do?" he asked. For the first time his bold Gascon strategy had deserted him. "I have no credit at Versailles; the Pompadour hated me and although she is dead, Choiseul was her creature and he controls everything."

Jeanne stood against the mantel in deep thought, tapping her teeth with the end of a quill. "I know!" she exclaimed vehemently. "Sainte-Foy is a protégé of Choiseul; I'll ask him for a letter and go myself." The Roué looked at her, his eyes lighting hopefully. Jeanne's voice vibrated with optimism. "I'll ask Monsieur de

Choiseul to renew the contract and I promise to return from Versailles with glorious news."

Jeanne ordered a new dress for her eventful trip and by the time it was fashioned April had yielded to the warm sun of May. Jeanne had chosen the fabric with careful thought—a simple morning dress of blue linen gathered at the bodice with pink ribbons. She should look innocent and appealing to the man who ruled the Ministries of War and Foreign Affairs; the man to whom, according to Sainte-Foy, the bored King had turned over the affairs of France. Sainte-Foy cautioned her to state her request simply and to let Choiseul do most of the talking; he was a capable charming man—but inordinately vain.

It was already past noon when her carriage pounded down the Avenue de Paris and rolled through the great gilded gates of the royal Château. Jeanne's first glimpse was one of disappointment. This was not the pink and white Château Suzanne Picot had pictured to her. It impressed her as a vast disordered jumble of stone wings and pavilions culminating in a small inner courtyard, and the sharp unmistakable odor of stale urine assailed her nose. She reproached herself for expecting reality from a child's description—after all, many years had passed since she and Suzanne had prattled in the garden of Saint Aure. She left her carriage in the outer courtyard and walked over to the pavilion which housed the Ministry of War.

When she was ushered into the Duc de Choiseul's council chamber she thought the lackey had misdirected her. A red-haired man with shrewd eyes and the face of an intelligent pig sat behind a desk while his valet offered various wigs for his approval. "No, you knave—I've told you before, never that *démodée* wig again." The voice was pleasing but it carried an imperious tone which made Jeanne wince. The chastened valet backed away and the man in the chair swung around to face Jeanne. His lips smiled coldly beneath the short nose.

"What is your petition, mademoiselle?"

Jeanne collected herself. Could this be—yes, it must be—the

Duc de Choiseul, next to the King the most powerful man in France? "Your Excellency"—to her annoyance she found herself lisping—"I come to beg you to restore the Ministry's contract with the Comte du Barry."

"Parbleu!" He looked at Jeanne sharply and she imagined she detected a glitter of admiration in his small eyes. "And you are—a friend—of Monsieur du Barry?"

Jeanne's intuition warned her that this shrewd man knew all about her. "Yes, Your Excellency; also I am a friend of Monsieur Radix de Sainte-Foy. He has done me the honor of sending a favorable letter to you." She handed the missive to the Minister of War who glanced at it briefly and resumed his questioning.

"Why does Monsieur du Barry send such a charming ambassador instead of coming to plead for himself? Or is it precisely because you *are* charming?" This time there was no misreading the leer on the porcine face. Jeanne felt his baffling charm, yet she was repelled.

Choiseul continued without waiting for her answer. "I shall tell you, mademoiselle, why this Monsieur du Barry, this *soi-disant* comte, imposed upon you instead of coming himself. The Marquise de Pompadour called him the greatest rogue in France. She was right. I know it—and Monsieur du Barry knows I know it!" As he spoke his voice rose and his face reddened.

Jeanne retreated a step and Choiseul recovered his composure. The look of amiable intelligence returned to his snub-nosed face and he rose from his chair. "I regret, mademoiselle, lovely as you are, that I must reject your request, but I consider first the welfare of His Majesty's army. Monsieur du Barry is not a reliable person to provision the troops." He bowed, nodded his head in dismissal, and Jeanne hurried from the room. She threw a backward glance over her shoulder and saw the Duc de Choiseul in deep conversation with the valet, who was holding up two new wigs for his consideration.

Jeanne was disheartened by the rebuff. What a loss of income it entailed for her, and how angered the Roué would be to learn

the extent of Choiseul's enmity! She roused herself from her dejected mood. Perhaps she would never come to Versailles again—while she was here she might as well see as much as she could. She knew the public was permitted to proceed unhampered through the State Apartments and even to observe the royal family at dinner, but her courage failed her. If the Roué or Sainte-Foy were with her—but she dared not enter the Château alone. It was so enormous she would never find her way.

She decided to walk in the storied gardens and to reach them, she skirted the long northern wing of the building. She paused to admire the fountains playing in the *Bassin de Neptune*. *"Prenez-garde!"* A shrill voice called from above and she looked up to see a chambermaid emptying a *pot de chambre*. Jeanne shrieked and leaped aside, reaching safety by mere inches. *"Dieu me garde!"* she swore aloud. "Dangerous as the streets of Paris!"

She walked several minutes facing the sun and then turned around to gaze at the Château. Now she saw the Versailles Suzanne had described—the warm rays of the sun accentuated the gilding of the roof and transformed the thousand windows into panes of gold. She stood silently, awed by the scene of majestic grandeur.

Her thoughts reverted to Suzanne. Should she attempt to locate her in the nearby town? Ten years was a long time. They had been affectionate schoolgirls then but now they were in their middle twenties. The years had wrought such vast changes in Jeanne's own life; perhaps Suzanne too had changed, altered into someone unrecognizable and unknown.

Lost in reverie she strolled slowly between regimented rows of yew trees clipped—the thought idly occurred to her—like brooms. She came to a turn in the path and before her fluttered a shimmering cloud of white butterflies. Scampering across the grass in a frivolous attempt to catch one she tripped on her long skirt and fell to her knees. She half rose, unhurt but shaken, and was startled at the touch of a firm hand on her elbow.

"It is difficult to catch butterflies, mademoiselle—even in May.

You are not hurt?" The man's voice was curiously husky, almost harsh, but invested with such amazing charm that Jeanne turned in wonder. She hastily brushed off her dress and looked at her rescuer. She saw a strikingly handsome man much older than herself, wearing a suit of black velvet. As he bowed she caught the sparkle of a diamond clasp in his cockaded hat.

"Do you come often to the Château?" The low husky voice was compelling. The speaker lightly swung his polished black cane and gazed searchingly at Jeanne. She had a strange sensation of having seen him before and racked her brain trying to remember where. "No, monsieur, this is the first time I have ever been here. It is magnificent, but so vast I could never see it all."

"If you come again I shall show it to you." A gleam of interest flickered in the intense dark eyes. Jeanne started to explain that she would never have reason to come again to Versailles and suddenly stopped in the middle of a sentence. She put her hand to her mouth and stared in overwhelming realization at the figure watching her. Of course she had seen the likeness of that elegant face—it was on every coin in the kingdom! Before her stood Louis XV, King of France.

Part Two

GOLDEN VENUS

CHAPTER SEVEN

ITEM: Portrait of Louis XV, by Van Loo, in an oval gold frame.

The King knew from Jeanne's expression that she recognized him. A charming smile came over his face. "I shall show *ce-pays-ci* to you if you come again," he repeated. Jeanne felt a tremor of excitement; she realized he was in earnest. The King *did* want her to return—he was asking her, Jeanne Bécu, to come to him! Perhaps she did not understand politics but she understood men and she had heard enough about Louis XV to divine his purpose.

"You honor me, Sire; I shall come whenever you wish." She started to curtsy but he shook his head. "Let there be no ceremony between us when we are alone. Do not think of me as the King; think of me merely as Louis de Bourbon—a man who pleases you." He gently took her hand. "Perhaps I assume too much too soon, but I trust I *shall* please you in time."

Jeanne looked at him without self-consciousness. She thought she detected a shadow of loneliness in the beautiful black eyes, a hunger to be loved as a human being and not as a sovereign. That would not be difficult for her. The King was fifty-eight but he retained much of the astonishing physical beauty which had made him the handsomest man of his time. Although he was beginning to put on weight his figure was still trim, and he had an exquisite courtesy which Jeanne found irresistible.

"You please me now, Sire—as you do everyone." Her manner and voice were so natural that the King, who hated flattery,

warmed to her sincerity. He asked her who she was, and as they walked in the direction of the Château Jeanne told him something of herself. She did not bore him with minute details but neither did she lie. She was candid when she discussed her role in the Roué's household.

The King had never met anyone so natural, so unaffected and disarming. They reached the Château and before he turned to go through a passageway to the Marble Court he again took her hand. "When will you come again?"

"Perhaps next week?" Her reply was a question.

"No." He traced a pattern in the gravel with his ebony cane. "Next week is too long a time. Come tomorrow evening. I shall send Lebel for you. He is my valet and entirely trustworthy." He raised his hat and smiled. *"A demain."* He turned and was gone.

Jeanne walked back to her carriage in a trance and during the hour's ride to Paris she could think of nothing but the King's appealing, slightly melancholy smile and his curiously husky voice. There could not be another like it in all France.

When she arrived home the Roué was waiting impatiently. He saw her triumphant smile and his hopes rose. "You look as if you bear good news from Choiseul." Jeanne kissed him airily. "Indeed I have good news but it has nothing to do with Choiseul." She began to relate the course of the eventful day and when she described the husky-voiced man in the garden the Roué stared incredulously. "You are not trying to tell me he was——?"

"The King? Yes!" Jeanne gave a radiant smile. "He asks a rendezvous for tomorrow evening. Shall I go?" Her expression was deliberately playful.

"Go? Are you mad? Certainly you will go! Jeanne, this chance meeting can make our fortune, but all depends upon your skill." He poured forth a flood of admonitions and suggestions until Jeanne motioned him to be silent. "I usually take your advice and I will take it now, but don't you credit me with any knowledge of men? His Majesty will not be the first, and perhaps I under-

stand him better than you imagine. He is charming and I like him."

The Roué moderated his voice. "I don't underestimate you, Jeanne," he apologized, "but there is one vital fact you do not know. The King's chronic ailment is ennui. That is the enemy you must ceaselessly combat. What profit if you pass several nights at Versailles and are then dismissed?" The Roué was still talking earnestly some minutes later when Sainte-Foy walked in and went up to Jeanne. "What answer did the Duc de Choiseul give you?"

Jeanne ignored the Roué's warning look and repeated all that had happened at Versailles. When she finished Sainte-Foy's face was taut and his pale blue eyes fixed her coldly. "You are not returning to the Château?"

"But I am! Why not? You have been of little comfort to me for some time." The Roué nodded in vigorous approval but Sainte-Foy brushed aside her remark.

"Frivolous little fool! That sated stallion will tire of you in a week and either pack you back to Paris or install you in the *Parc aux Cerfs* with the brood of mares he keeps there. Do you actually imagine that you have any future at Versailles?"

"At least I can try to make one; I cannot imagine I have any with you." There were angry hurt tears in Jeanne's eyes as the full measure of her disappointment in Sainte-Foy struck her.

"Jeanne!" He tried a pleading note. "Perhaps I have been indifferent but now I am thinking of *you*. The Duc de Choiseul will never permit you to become the King's mistress."

"The Duc de Choiseul!" Jeanne repeated the name in astonishment. "What has he got to do with it?"

"Just this—he is determined that his sister, the Duchesse de Grammont, be named *maîtresse-en-titre*."

"Won't the King have something to say on that subject?"

The Roué roared with laughter at Jeanne's reply and Sainte-Foy set his lips, trying to control his temper. "Nevertheless I am

serious and I warn you—the Duc de Choiseul permits no one to obstruct his plans. If you become an obstacle to his ambitions he will stop at nothing—nothing—to destroy you."

"Radix, you are always serious—too serious—and you are always warning me of something."

"Yes, I am!" he answered angrily. "I am warning you to stay away from Versailles. It will destroy you. Even if by some miracle you manage to hold the King's favor that will destroy you too. This moribund monarchy is doomed."

"Come, Sainte-Foy!" scoffed the Roué. "You have been buried too long in *l'Encyclopédie.*"

Sainte-Foy ignored him and turned to hear what Jeanne was saying. "I am doing nothing wrong. I did not scheme to meet the King or throw myself in his way as so many have done. It was the King who first spoke to me."

Sainte-Foy made one last plea. "Once I saved your life, Jeanne, and I told you then never to get too close to the fire. I remember exactly what I said: 'Fire is cruel to little girls.' Do you remember?"

"I remember. But it is too late, Radix, to bring up the past. The present and, still more, the future appeal to me."

Late the next day a closed carriage with no markings drew up and an elderly man descended. He introduced himself to the eager Roué as Lebel, valet to His Majesty. "I have come to accompany Mademoiselle."

"But of course." The Roué was all smiles. "She will be ready presently. Some wine, perhaps, while you wait?"

"*Merci, non.*" Lebel's refusal was firm and the Roué thought he looked drawn and ill. Usually so garrulous, he felt constrained before this gaunt impassive man, the repository of a hundred royal confidences. He was wishing Jeanne would hurry when she appeared at the top of the stairway, and as she swept gracefully down he heard Lebel murmur softly to himself: "*Quelle beauté*

incroyable!" The Roué smiled with satisfaction; Lebel was a connoisseur.

Lebel, seated beside Jeanne in the carriage rolling toward Versailles, stole a sidewise glance at her. The King had chosen well but Lebel wondered how long she would last. He had seen so many arrive in triumphant expectancy only to be indifferently dismissed a short time afterward. The King had not been in love for a long time; he was bored and restless, and more from habit than desire visited the *Parc aux Cerfs* or consulted with the Duc de Richelieu on available girls from Paris.

Was it conceivable he would fall in love now? Lebel shrugged —he doubted it. This Mademoiselle Bécu was endowed with dazzling beauty, but could she amuse the King? No one had succeeded in that impossible task since the Pompadour had died. Lebel twitched in a fierce spasm of pain. Perhaps he would live to conduct others to the King, but not if this lovely woman held favor long, for Lebel was fully aware he was dying of a cancer. He sighed wearily; trying to conceal his pain he explained to Jeanne that they would be driven to a side door of the Château and that she must conceal her face with her cloak until he conducted her to His Majesty. That was the way these affairs always began, he reflected sardonically.

Darkness had fallen when they reached the Château. Its vast bulk loomed ahead like a brilliantly illuminated galleon sailing majestically on the horizon. Lebel conducted her through an obscure door on the ground floor and they mounted several flights of dark narrow stairs. Jeanne wondered how much higher they would climb; she was growing short of breath while behind her the ashen-faced valet followed painfully.

They came at last to a door which he opened and Jeanne stepped into a small lilac-scented room. "That is the *Cour des Cerfs,*" said Lebel as Jeanne gazed through a window which overlooked an inner courtyard. She turned to reply and found to her surprise that he had already vanished. She looked around. The tiny room had an air of simple elegance, of muted luxury. Its

gray paneled walls were embellished with carving of exquisite grace, and in an alcove lighted by soft candlelight was a table with places set for two.

Suddenly she caught the sound of footsteps; she was not afraid but she was tingling with excitement. She turned in anticipation. A concealed door in the wall opened and through it stepped the King. He stood silently for a moment and she saw that his face in repose wore an expression of weary melancholy. She thought of the gleam of loneliness she had seen in his eyes yesterday. And then the King smiled his charming smile and stepped forward.

"Forgive me if I kept you waiting—and on our first rendezvous! The hunt today went longer than I expected."

"It is nothing, Sire." Instinctively she dropped a curtsy and he lightly reproved her. "I have said I require no formalities when you and I are together; if we are ever before the eyes of the Court naturally it will be otherwise."

She rose to her feet. *If,* he had said. Was Sainte-Foy correct, was the King seeking only a new face, a transient diversion? The secrecy of her journey, the seclusion of this small room hidden in the attics—but what could she expect? Her common sense came to her rescue. She had no *entrée* and when she regarded her situation objectively it was preposterous to suppose that she, Anne Bécu's daughter, would ever be presented at the Court of Versailles!

Her warm laughter bubbled forth. "I will take you at your word, Sire. Tell me what is this enchanting room?" The King looked at her with puzzled interest. The chambers of Versailles rarely echoed to a laugh of such natural merriment. This woman is not afraid of me, he thought. She is simply herself. "This is one of the Little Apartments, the only area in the Château where I am a man rather than a symbol. That is why I had you brought here."

He took her in his arms and kissed her tentatively, then relaxed his hold and stroked her moles, the one under her lip and

the one over her eyebrow as well. "Those fascinating *grains de beauté*!" His eyes were sparkling now. They held no loneliness, only desire, and in an access of passion he covered the moles with kisses until Jeanne laughingly protested. "Sire! You are tickling me!" The King, surprised, released her and burst into a hearty laugh with undertones of deep huskiness. It was the first time Jeanne had heard him laugh and she wished he would do so more often.

"You are truly refreshing," he said. Still laughing he led her to the table and rang a silver bell which rested beside his plate. A servant in the royal livery entered by the same door which Jeanne had come through and served them in trained silence. He was well acquainted with the King's wishes, for no word of command was needed, and when supper was finished the man withdrew with the dinner service.

The King walked to a small cabinet and brought out a copper coffee grinder and coffeepot. "I often make my own coffee," he declared proudly. He began to grind the coffee beans and Jeanne told him about the rare copper teapot Milord March had given her, all the while stifling her astonishment at the sight of the King brewing his own coffee like any simple bourgeois. She paused, afraid she was boring him, but the King urged her to talk some more. "It is stimulating to hear details of life in Paris. Except from letters I select from the post and what *Son Excellence* tells me I know little of my subjects' lives."

"*Son Excellence?*"

"That is my title for the Duc de Richelieu." He shrugged slightly; he was about to lose interest in the subject.

"I have the honor of knowing the Duc de Richelieu," said Jeanne. "He comes frequently to the Roué's salon."

"The *honor* of knowing?" The King gave an amused smile. "*Son Excellence* is a scoundrel but he entertains me and that is sufficient."

The coffee was ready and the King served her in a cup of Sèvres, *rose de Pompadour* in color. Jeanne was wondering what

this indecipherable man had really thought of his former mistress and what he now thought of *her,* when the King spoke. "My friends tell me I make superlative coffee but I fear they flatter me. Tell me *your* opinion." Jeanne lifted the dainty cup and tasted the steaming black liquid. "It is excellent, Sire—I mean it."

"I think you do." He walked behind her chair where he stood with one hand resting softly on her mass of fine golden hair. For an instant she had the incongruous feeling that she was once more a little girl sitting at Monsieur Billard's feet. The King's voice broke her reverie; he bent over and kissed her hair. "Shall we go?"

She rose and followed him through the concealed door. He led her through a dark passage until they reached a chamber even smaller than the one they had left. These walls were hung with gold-threaded white satin and the four-columned bed was draped with the same rich material. A gold-framed mirror of Venetian glass covered one wall and reflected the luxurious bed.

The King stepped into an adjoining closet for a few minutes and when he reappeared he was wearing a dressing gown of maroon velvet. He stared fixedly at Jeanne's reflection in the mirror. She had let her hair fall partly down her back and the filmy peignoir she had put on clung revealingly to her body. Its loose folds half bared her firm bosom. "Jeanne," he said softly, "you are like a golden Venus in the mirror." He stroked her nipples and when he saw a large brown mole in the hollow between her breasts he drew a deep breath. Jeanne snuffed three of the four candles still burning and they moved together toward the bed.

When she awoke the other half of the bed was empty. Enough light came through the one window to show that she was alone in the room. She nestled between the satin sheets and relived the night. The King had given her an extraordinary sensation of being at once father and lover. His caresses were almost paternal during the quiet intervals, to be succeeded by a violent surge of desire.

Upon reflection Jeanne realized that the peaks of ecstasy were

due to her, and she was thankful for the men—Duval, the colonel, the Roué, Radix—who, each in his own way, had developed her instinctive skills as a woman. She knew she had pleased the King, yet she felt a tinge of uncertainty. What was it the Roué had stressed? Ennui, he had warned, was the King's dominant emotion.

The door opened and the King entered still wearing his dressing gown. One look at his smiling face and she knew he was not bored now. He looked in fact younger and his walk, so replete with dignity, had taken on an almost youthful quality. He leaned over and kissed her.

Jeanne stayed almost three weeks in the Château, hidden in the maze of rooms that comprised the Little Apartments. Every night the King came to her and she practiced with growing confidence the art of transforming a surfeited monarch into a relaxed and charming man. He was absent during the day either hunting or attending to affairs of State, and Jeanne found the solitary hours almost unbearably lonely. Except for two silent retainers who cleaned the rooms and served her meals she saw only Lebel, who explained what was already obvious to her—that His Majesty did not wish anyone to know she was in the Château.

Jeanne wondered how it would end. The King seemed fascinated by her, even more than Charles Duval had been in the first rush of youthful passion. The mask of boredom lifted whenever he came to her room and he was reluctant to leave in the mornings, but as yet he had spoken no word to indicate what her future was to be. One afternoon near the end of May she heard Lebel's familiar slow step and when the valet entered she laid aside the book she was reading.

"How are you feeling, Lebel?" Jeanne thought to herself that he looked more drawn with every passing day and she wondered from what illness he suffered. Once she mentioned it to the King and learned with surprise that her royal lover was fascinated by all forms of illness and death. It took a full hour for her to divert

him from his repetitive discussion of the morbid subject. Now Lebel warmed to the note of sympathy in her sweet voice.

"I am better, mademoiselle," he lied. "But there is another illness here far transcending mine in importance. I refer to Her Majesty."

"The *Queen?*" Jeanne was startled; like everyone else she had almost forgotten the existence of Marie Leczinska. She realized of course that somewhere in a lonely magnificent suite on the opposite side of the Château lived the King's consort, pious and neglected. She was utterly without influence and no one paid her any attention—the King least of all.

"Is Her Majesty really ill?"

Lebel nodded gravely. He shrewdly suspected that the Queen suffered from the same dread malady that was devouring him. "There is no hope for her," he said, "and therefore His Majesty commands me to tell you it is best that you return to Paris."

Jeanne began her preparations to depart. She understood that with the Queen dying it was impossible for her to remain in the Château. But simultaneously a fear seized her that she might never again see the King and she realized with a twinge that she was growing to love him. This could be the result Sainte-Foy had prophesied with such smug certainty. Everyone knew the King disliked unpleasant interviews, and this might be his method of dismissing her.

When Lebel brought her a wide diamond bracelet her suspicions were strengthened. Yes—this was a farewell gift. The King had grown weary and was using the Queen's illness as a pretext to send her away. Jeanne sighed and reminded herself again that she, a nobody, could hardly expect to be installed as *maîtresse-en-titre*. She, to succeed the clever brilliant Pompadour? It was unthinkable!

At least she would have warm memories of her hours with the King. She smiled wistfully as she thought of his tenderness, his exquisite courtesy and attentive interest in her empty prattle, and

the sound of his husky voice breaking into delighted laughter at some risqué Parisian phrase she had thoughtlessly uttered.

It had all been an enchanting dream and when she was back at the Roué's she would be awake. She followed Lebel down the tiny staircase and allowed him to help her into the waiting coach. During the hour's ride back to Paris she dreaded Sainte-Foy's gloating smile and the Roué's violent disappointment.

But when she re-entered the familiar house where she had lived for six years the Roué embraced her triumphantly. He betrayed no sign of chagrin or frustration. "Ho!" he shouted. "Our Jeanne has returned to us—for a visit?"

"Not a visit," Jeanne answered. "Forever. Radix was right."

"You think so?" The Roué's smile was cunning. "A friend of ours thinks differently." He led her into the small library where she was surprised to see the Duc de Richelieu standing by the window.

"*Son Excellence!*" Jeanne's exclamation was involuntary. Richelieu's thin lips smiled. "Aha! A sure indication you have been with the Master! And how did you enjoy your sojourn at Versailles?" His sharp old eyes peered at her intently.

Jeanne gave an account of her stay at the Château and showed her dazzling bracelet to the Roué. "But it is all over," she ended sadly. "I fear I am dismissed."

"Nonsense!" said Richelieu vehemently. "I know better! I am the King's confidant in these matters. Do you want to hear what he told me?" He paused tantalizingly and Jeanne caught her breath. "His Majesty said to me the morning after you went to him . . . he said . . . '*Son Excellence,* she has given me delights I never knew existed!' "

"There!" The Roué's voice boomed reassuringly. "You see? Go on," he prodded, "tell Jeanne what else His Majesty said." Richelieu tapped his long forefinger against the snuffbox he was holding. "The King forgets that I am seventy-two, which is flattering, because he also said: 'She makes *me* forget that I will soon be sixty!' "

The Roué's smile was crafty when he turned to Jeanne. "Before you kept your rendezvous with the King you suggested that I underestimated you; now you underestimate yourself. Do the King's words sound like those of a man who is weary of you?" He shook his head emphatically in answer to his own query. "Never! But let His Excellency explain."

Richelieu took a pinch of snuff, waited until he had sneezed, and began to speak. He dropped his dandified manner, his usual air of insolent indifference, and his words poured forth in a tone of rare earnestness. He told Jeanne he was convinced that if they struck boldly the King would install her at Versailles. Of course they must wait until the Queen died; the King had fallen into one of his morbid preoccupations with death and funerals and was assiduous in daily visits to his formerly neglected wife. But after her death he would quickly forget, and Richelieu would have no difficulty reminding him of Jeanne. During the interval the Roué must shower her with jewels and clothes and carriages even if he loaded himself with debt, for this was not the time to ask anything of the King. As for Jeanne, it was essential that she marry.

"Marry!" Her exclamation was one of utter bewilderment.

"Only a lady who is married and titled can become the *maîtresse-en-titre,*" Richelieu explained patiently. "But once you are suitably married I have little doubt you will be formally presented at Court."

"If the Duc de Choiseul does not prevent it." The Roué's comment brought a momentary frown to Richelieu's brow. "Choiseul! He will do everything possible to prevent it; that I know full well. He wishes to put forward his rawboned sister. But I have every confidence in you, my dear"—he flashed a foxlike smile at Jeanne—"in your skill and beauty to defeat Monsieur de Choiseul. I hope someday you will wield the power to rid us of him. I hate him—he was the creature of the Pompadour."

"And I—I am to be the creature of *Son Excellence!*" Jeanne smiled but her eyes gazed coolly into Richelieu's. He bowed

ironically. "One as beautiful as you is hardly a 'creature,'" he answered. "Let us say rather that you will be my friend."

"And of course *my* friend too," the Roué chimed in eagerly. "We are devoted to your interests, Jeanne—and to our own." His crafty impish smile reappeared and Jeanne laughed in spite of herself. "And where am I to find this titled husband?" Her question was a reminder and Richelieu turned to the Roué, who reflectively twirled his gold-headed cane.

"I would be a most willing candidate but, alas, I am not free. . . . I own a sweet wife in Toulouse." His face wore an expression of such comic despair that Richelieu and Jeanne burst into peals of laughter. He went on, his face brightening. "Ho! I have it! My older brother Guillaume—I shall urge him to come to Paris at once. He is unmarried and although he has no title we shall give him one in the marriage contract. You must become familiar with your new title, Jeanne—you will soon be the Comtesse du Barry!"

The summer passed in a fever of excitement in the rue Neuve-Saint-Eustache. The Queen died in June with the same resignation she had lived, and less than ten days after her remains had been transported to Saint-Denis, Richelieu brought a summons from the King. Jeanne hurried to Versailles in a gray berline lined with white silk which the Roué had bought her.

"This is no time for thrift," he had observed. "Now it is all or nothing!" He pressed a tiara and necklace of diamonds and emeralds upon her. "His Majesty must not suspect money is our object; we must appear to have it." He started to add that Richelieu had advanced him one hundred thousand livres, then thought better of it, reflecting how fortunate it was that Jeanne had so little sense for figures.

Lebel, gray-faced and thin, led her to the Little Apartments where the King awaited her. He was standing at the window with his back to the room and only half turned his head as she entered. He was in a morose mood and Jeanne summoned all her resources

to arouse his interest. She chattered in the random way he had found so appealing, but it was not until she ingenuously revealed that Richelieu had quoted his remarks about her that a flicker of interest shone in the King's somber eyes. A gradual smile softened his face.

"*Son Excellence* should keep his mouth shut, but I admit I said those things about you. And they were true." He was laughing now, the enchanting laugh Jeanne remembered, and she breathed a relieved sigh. Perhaps she had committed a *faux pas*, but what matter if it made the King laugh? She guessed he was depressed by the royal obsequies and lonely too—and not for the Queen. She glided softly to him and placed her hand over his heart and his arms went around her.

The next morning Jeanne returned to Paris. The King mentioned that Richelieu had outlined the plan for her marriage but he seemed averse to discussing the details. He said he was going to Compiègne for maneuvers and would send for her when he returned. By then she would be a married woman—and a comtesse.

Richelieu came several times in the next few weeks to confer with the Roué. Although he tried to mask his anxiety with his habitual air of indifference he finally admitted he was uneasy. Choiseul and his grasping sister were with the King and Richelieu knew from long years of intimacy how fickle the monarch could be. To worsen matters, Lebel, who was always influential in the King's liaisons and whose presence would have served to remind him of Jeanne's existence, had died an agonizing death the middle of August. "*Diable!*" Richelieu snapped in exasperation. "Where is your lout of a brother? Will he never arrive?"

A few days after this outburst Guillaume du Barry, travel-stained and sweating in the late August heat, arrived from Lévignac. Jeanne looked at him with frank curiosity. She could hardly believe he was the Roué's brother. No polished elegance, no insouciant bravado—this scrawny red-haired man looked and talked like a country bumpkin. She studied his face from which two front teeth were missing and wondered what there was so madden-

ingly familiar about him. It was impossible that she had ever seen him—one glance was enough to proclaim that he had never before left Languedoc.

The Roué's brother raised a dirty handkerchief to his face and Jeanne gasped. Now she knew! His nose ran, just like . . . what was the name of that oaf so long ago? Lametz. That was it—he made her think of Paul Lametz! She stared at her future husband and had difficulty retaining her composure. When she was alone with the Roué she told him of the grotesque resemblance.

"Don't think of it again," he consoled. "You will be married tomorrow and you will never have to see him again. My brother is no beauty, but comfort yourself with the thought of the charming *beau-frère* you will acquire." A bright mocking smile curved his lips. "Guillaume—pardon, the *Comte* du Barry—is a simpleton or he would never have spent his life in that handful of huts called Lévignac. All he asks is a modest annuity and then he will return to his cows and pigs."

"I hope you are speaking the truth. I could not stand marriage to Guillaume in more than name."

The wedding fell on the first day of September. Jeanne and her awkward groom were attended by the Roué, Milord March and La Rena, and Anne and Rancon. They gathered before dawn at the small church of Saint-Laurent in Auteuil. Jeanne had agreed with the Roué that the ceremony should attract a minimum of attention. Police spies in the pay of Choiseul were alert, and the marriage contract which the Roué had drawn up was a shameless masterpiece replete with Gascon falsehoods.

Even Jeanne, knowing the Roué so well, was stunned by his audacity. Anne Bécu Rancon had been transformed into the Marquise de Montrabé and Jeanne's nameless father had become Jean-Jacques Gomard de Vaubernier, Almoner to His Majesty. The Roué had made his brother a comte, while calling himself Governor of Lévignac. Jeanne bore a pretentious name which the Roué considered respectable: Jeanne Gomard de Vaubernier, gentlewoman of Paris.

As she and the fictitious Comte du Barry knelt before the priest for the sacrament of matrimony Jeanne brooded over the promise she had made in the marriage contract to support any child that might be the issue of this marriage. She told herself firmly that such a prospect was infinitely remote.

As the wedding party hurried from the church into the fresh early morning Guillaume du Barry halted in the shadow of the portal and bowed clumsily to his new comtesse. "Adieu, madame." Except for a curt greeting the previous day he had not otherwise addressed her. "I wish you a tranquil marriage." He turned and was gone and Jeanne wondered if she would ever see him again. She hoped not.

The month wore on. Jeanne and the Roué fidgeted with impatience until the King should return from Compiègne, for there were ominous signs that the Duc de Choiseul was aware of their plans. This they deduced from Sainte-Foy, who called a few days after the wedding. To Jeanne's surprise he showed flashes of the gay kindness which had endeared him to her long ago; he had obviously decided to bury the friction which had lately divided them. He embraced her and his pale blue eyes were tender, but when he spoke his voice carried the familiar note of solemn warning.

"I wish for you the greatest fortune, Jeanne. I have always loved you, in spite of my saying that our relations were merely those of pleasure and reason." He smiled wistfully. "Perhaps we say things as foolish in the name of reason as in emotion. I hope you will be happy with the King, but take care—Versailles is a viper's nest."

"Thank you, Radix." Her eyes were misty. "It would sadden me if we did not part as friends after so many shared memories."

"You already have a powerful enemy who has approached me," he continued.

"Monsieur de Choiseul?"

He nodded. "The Duc inquired if I knew any unsavory details of your past and I said I did not."

Jeanne gave him a look of gratitude. "I would never hurt you, Jeanne, but I fear your course will lead you to disaster. And if Choiseul is your enemy I can no longer see you, for I owe my place to him."

Jeanne later pondered his disquieting words and wondered at the perversity of those who made life more cruel and complicated than it need be. She had no desire to harm the Duc de Choiseul or curtail his power. He was the darling of the Philosophers, and many Parisians considered him France's only gifted statesman. She knew from her audience with him that he abhorred the Roué, but in his strange fashion he had been polite to her. No—she would not become a pawn of Richelieu's in his duel of hatred with the Minister.

All she asked was to make the King happy and enjoy the world's luxuries. Monsieur de Choiseul should see no harm in that, no threat to his position, and with his undoubted intelligence he should realize that the King would never take his ugly strident sister as his mistress. Why, the Duchesse de Grammont was nearly forty and everyone knew she had the odor of a goat!

But Jeanne's rationalizations were not much comfort to her. Shortly after Sainte-Foy had departed Morin, a personable young valet Jeanne had recently engaged, announced another visitor. When he ushered in an old raddled woman Jeanne and the Roué exchanged glances of alarm. Both recognized La Gourdan, the notorious madam whose house always interested the police.

"Ho! What brings you here? It is usually I who visits your establishment." The Roué's loud tones of joviality sought to hide his uneasiness.

"True!" she replied, outshouting him. "But I bring profitable information for you and Mademoiselle Bécu—pardon, it is the Comtesse du Barry now, is it not?" She inclined her head almost respectfully and Jeanne remembered her visit to Labille's when

she had tried to recruit the services of herself and Aurore Malet. What pattern was unraveling here?

In her forthright manner La Gourdan went to the point. "An emissary from a great nobleman has visited me and asked to examine my register. He offered five hundred livres if your name were somehow to appear on the list of girls who have worked for me." She noticed Jeanne's sudden pallor and a sly smile spread over her large face. "I am not a rich woman but I am an honest one. I admitted, Comtesse, that I would have been fortunate to have had the benefit of your services, but I could only speak the truth and say you had spurned my offer."

Jeanne breathed more easily. "You are a friend, madame. *Merci mille fois!*"

"Yes," the Roué chimed in vigorously. "And as you say, you only spoke the truth!"

"I did what I thought just, but the truth is expensive, monsieur; sometimes more costly than lies." The old woman assumed an expression of cunning innocence.

"Of course!" The Roué reached for his purse and put a thousand livres in La Gourdan's outstretched hand. "The Comtesse is grateful and she will see to it that you encounter no future troubles with the police."

After La Gourdan had lumbered away Jeanne turned in exasperation. "Stop making promises in my name! I have done all you said—I have married your ox of a brother and what has happened? I remain in suspense until there is word from the King. Suppose these vile intrigues—suppose there is no word?"

"But there will be," the Roué answered calmly, and his confidence was vindicated before September ended. The King sent a message by Richelieu asking Jeanne to meet him at Fontainebleau. Accompanied only by two chambermaids and the valet Denis Morin, she went to rejoin the royal lover she had not seen in over two months. In a furor of anticipation she wondered how he would receive her.

She need not have wondered. The King had given orders that

she be installed in the Hermitage which had been built for Madame de Pompadour. Jeanne barely had time to change her traveling clothes before he climbed the stairs to the paneled salon on the landing. He walked as always with ineffable dignity and greeted her with a grave charming smile, but when Morin had withdrawn he clasped her hungrily to him.

"Jeanne! How I have missed you! Since we parted I have become an aging man; you must give me back my youth."

Her heart was pounding with joy. The realization flashed upon her with sharp clarity that she had never known such pure happiness. Not because he was the King, not because he could give her all that infinite wealth could buy, but because she loved him as she had loved no man before. She drew back and gazed tenderly at the handsome countenance which wore a look of inexpressible sweetness. The majesty with which he carried himself . . . the grace with which he turned his head . . .

"Sire, you are not as old as you think. I *know!*"

He kissed her again and then lowered his mouth to the small mole under her lip. "Sire," she giggled, "you are always tickling me."

The King released her and seated himself on a tapestried armchair. He motioned her to sit on his lap and she put her head on his shoulder. "You are Jeanne—truly my golden Venus." He stroked her blonde hair softly. "When we are alone you will call me Louis." She started to raise her head but the pressure of his hand gently restrained her. "Yes—why not? I asked you to think of me as a man rather than a king; when we are among others you may address me as 'Sire' and I shall refer to you as 'Madame.' By the way, *Son Excellence* tells me you now bear your new title."

Jeanne looked up. "Yes, Sire—Louis." His name slipped out as naturally as if she had always known him and from his contented smile she realized that was precisely the relationship he wished. "*Comtesse du Barry:* do you think it pretty?"

"As pretty as its owner and far prettier than some I have known."

"Prettier than *Marquise de Pompadour?*" The question was daring but the King only smiled wistfully.

"Yes, prettier than that, as you are prettier than she was."

"But Louis, she was so beautiful. Such charm, such taste; this exquisite Hermitage must be a perfect reflection of her. I feel her influence all around me."

"If you think this is charming you must see the new Trianon. Madame de Pompadour conceived it, but you shall be the one to enjoy it. And you are right—her taste was flawless."

"You must have loved her a great deal."

"No," he answered surprisingly. "I never did."

"But you must have," Jeanne insisted. "If you did not love her why did you keep her near you for twenty years?"

"Because she loved *me,*" the King answered gently. "If I had sent her away it would have broken her heart."

Jeanne felt tears in her eyes at this intimate revelation. The King was kindhearted, unable to inflict suffering on anyone or—a disturbing thought struck her—he was incapable of loving anyone. He said he had not loved the Pompadour and perhaps he believed it, but Jeanne as a woman knew he must have loved her *once.*

"Do you really love me, Louis, or will you someday send me away?"

"How can you ask such a foolish question?" he said impatiently. "Don't you *know* I love you? To prove it, you shall be presented at Court and formally installed at the Château."

"There are many who dislike me now—they will hate me then," she warned. "I am not interested in power but others judge me by their own ambitions, so they fear me. They will slander me to you."

"Perhaps you refer to Choiseul." He smiled indulgently as if she were a child. "He will not harm you. I promise."

But in spite of the King's reassurance Jeanne felt an intermittent throb of fear during the six weeks she stayed at Fontainebleau. The King invariably hunted on fine days and as she had

not been presented she had to remain behind, pondering the vexatious situation which confronted her. Whenever she walked from the delicately proportioned Hermitage of white marble to the great Château of Fontainebleau she suffered from the glances of envy and hatred which the ladies of the Court darted in her direction. They pointedly altered their steps in order to avoid her, and tears of humiliation sprang to her eyes.

The Roué, who had discreetly ensconced himself in a modest inn nearby, tried to console her, and Richelieu swore there was nothing to worry about and that the King was clearly more in love every day. Jeanne would dry her tears and show a sunny radiant face when the King returned at dusk. She never mentioned to him that the Duc de Choiseul had looked straight through her or that the Duchesse de Grammont, on his arm, had spat and executed an unbelievably obscene gesture as they passed her in the garden. Jeanne knew the King loved her, but even his love could not transform the court presentation of the former Jeanne Bécu into a simple undertaking.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ITEM: Gilt clock on a carved gilt base; the Three Graces support the dial, beneath which Cupid with his arrow indicates the hour: from Poirier, jeweler, rue Saint-Honoré.

When Jeanne returned with the Court to Versailles she lived in an atmosphere of strain and uncertainty. The nights she spent with the King, but etiquette forbade that she be seen with him in public until she had been formally presented. She occupied Lebel's former rooms on the ground floor and at times in the loneliness of the dark winter days she thought of that discreet haggard man with a twinge of regret.

For she *was* lonely. Even her mother could not be with her. She had arranged for Anne to be sheltered at the convent of St. Elizabeth while Rancon undertook a mission to the provinces for the Roué. The Roué himself had closed his establishment and awaited with growing impatience the time when the King would confer a fixed income on Jeanne. From this windfall he intended to reap the crowning profit of his fantastic career.

Jeanne sensed that she was on the very threshold of triumph but she yearned for the company of a friend. The King filled her nights but the days dragged. The Château swarmed with noble ladies who would have cheerfully foresworn their hope of Heaven to be in her place, but she knew they would seize every opportunity to snub her cruelly. One evening she began to weep, and poured forth to the King her hunger for companionship. "Except for you, Louis, I see only my chambermaids and Morin, and devoted though he is I can hardly converse with him all day!"

The King, always dismayed by tears, reproached himself for his thoughtlessness. "I have been selfish to leave you alone in these cheerless surroundings. After you are presented you shall have the most luxurious apartments the Château has ever contained." He looked at her tear-stained face and the main burden of her grievance returned to him. "I know the perfect companion to lighten your loneliness—the Maréchale de Mirepoix."

Jeanne's eyes widened. "Tell me about her; who is she?"

"She is the ugliest and the most amusing woman in *ce-pays-ci*, and she will do anything I ask, for I am always paying her debts." He hesitated. "She was devoted to your predecessor."

"Then she will surely dislike me!"

The King shook his head. "She is too intelligent for that. She knows I love you, and besides, she has a kind heart of her own. I am sure you will like her."

The following morning the Maréchale de Mirepoix knocked on Jeanne's door and was admitted by Morin. Jeanne stared at her with interest. She must have been somewhat younger than the King, but she appeared older. She was small and slender and her hands moved with quick animated gestures. Before Jeanne could utter a welcome the Maréchale glided across the room and embraced her. "*Ma chère!* His Majesty asked me to call upon you and I am honored to do so."

"The honor is mine, madame."

"*Zut!* Don't be formal with me! We are going to be friends—I feel it." The King's description of the Maréchale had been all too accurate. Jeanne was staring in fascination at the older woman's nose. Spade-shaped, it twitched vigorously when she spoke. At first glance this remarkable organ dominated the mud-colored face until Jeanne noticed her eyes. They were brown and of unusual beauty in so homely a setting, but their striking characteristic was an expression of alert curiosity. Jeanne felt sure those eyes missed nothing that went on at Versailles.

Without waiting to be invited she seated herself on a straight

chair. "His Majesty tells me you are lonely. No wonder—in this hole!" Her eyes darted about Lebel's room. "But knowing His Majesty I am sure you will soon be installed in surroundings which will make these look like a privy."

Jeanne averted her gaze from the awesome nose and to her amused dismay noticed another highly individual trait. As the Maréchale spoke her left hand remained motionless but her right traveled in a rapid hopping motion from one knee to the other and back. Jeanne wondered wildly if the hand were connected by some invisible wire to the vocal chords, for as soon as she fell silent it subsided quiescent in her lap.

Jeanne tried to focus her attention on the other's conversation. "Yes, I shall have apartments above the King after I am presented."

"So you *are* going to be presented! From what the Duc de Richelieu told me I suspected as much." She paused a moment, her active eyes reflecting her busy brain. "In that event you must learn all the devious ways of *ce-pays-ci,* and I—I shall teach you."

This was not the first time Jeanne had heard that odd expression. The King always used it in speaking of Versailles when he was there, and she now realized that no one at the Château referred to it in any other way. "You have strange customs here, madame; it is nothing like Paris. I shall have to learn all over."

"Paris! *Zut!*" The tiny woman rose from her chair. "Did you hear me knock on your door?"

"But of course! Is that not usual?"

"You see?" Her visitor spoke triumphantly. "Yes, one knocks on some doors in *ce-pays-ci,* but *never* on royal doors. On them one scratches."

"*Scratches?* But how? Why?"

"Like this." She glided across the room to the door and with the long nail of her left little finger made a sibilant scratching sound on the wooden panel. "It must always be done so, and in no other fashion. The reason—who knows? Who knows the rea-

son for any customs here? Like all the others it originated with *le Roi Soleil* and therefore it will endure forever."

Jeanne nodded as if she understood, and promised herself she would never hesitate to ask the Maréchale to explain any mystifying customs she might encounter. She summoned her courage. "Madame . . . pardon, but I know you want me to be frank. I have noticed the extraordinary gliding motion with which you walk; it seems to me your feet never leave the floor. Is it a trait peculiar to yourself, or is it another custom of *ce-pays-ci?*"

The Maréchale's ugly face creased with lines of mirth and the nose twitched alarmingly. "*Ma chère,* your frankness is enchanting; no wonder the King loves you. I have many peculiar traits, I know, but my carriage is not among them. No, all court ladies walk so. This distinctive motion is a sure indication that one has been presented. Here, let me show you."

She took Jeanne's hand and led her endlessly back and forth until she had mastered the absurd peacock walk. At last the Maréchale released her and Jeanne sank exhausted on a *bergére.* "Very good!" exclaimed her mentor. "The Marquise took longer to learn; she too was Parisienne, as much as you."

Jeanne longed to question her about the Marquise de Pompadour, but decided she should know her more intimately before referring to the deceased mistress. The Maréchale took her leave, promising she would come again to instruct Jeanne in the intricacies of court etiquette. Jeanne resolved to master them all; she must not embarrass the King. She owed it to him and to the position she expected to attain to conduct herself in public as if she had been born in the Château, but she registered an inner vow that when she and her royal lover were alone she would emphasize her fresh and natural charm. That was what had captivated him, not the frozen artificial customs which had surrounded him from birth.

She was amazed to discover how numerous and complicated those customs were. The Maréchale de Mirepoix glided through

her door every day exactly at noon and over a cutlet or pheasant explained the involved precedence that governed the courtiers. Precedence, she insisted, was the heart of the system; who might speak first to whom, who should be the first to call on another, who could sit on three-legged stools, or armchairs, or not sit at all in the presence of those of superior rank.

Her description of the King's daughters was devastating and Jeanne laughed until she gasped for breath. "Mesdames," said the Maréchale, "prefer to be unmarried and remain Daughters of France, and that is indeed fortunate for four princes somewhere in Europe!" She explained that Madame Adelaide, the eldest, held the highest rank of any woman at Court since the Queen's death. She was an embittered spinster with a spiteful tongue and a masculine voice almost as husky as the King's. "She adores him and tries to rule him; he adores all his daughters but never listens to any of them."

Jeanne dimly remembered Monsieur Billard once comparing her to a little princess, and there was a vague recollection of something Suzanne had once said about Mesdames rarely leaving the Château. "What about the other three?" she asked. "They dislike the outdoors, don't they?"

The Maréchale put her napkin on the table and as she began to speak her right hand commenced its hopping motion across her knees. "Not Madame Louise; she is an ardent horsewoman, but Mesdames Sophie and Victoire hardly ever leave their rooms. Madame Sophie is terrified of storms and is not very intelligent. Neither is Madame Victoire, but she is the most amiable—all she really cares about is her couch and her meals. As I said, Madame Louise is energetic, but almost to the point of hysteria."

"What a dull existence Mesdames have!"

"They are themselves dull, *ma chère,* but never say I said it. There is nothing in their lives but an excess of piety. I am sure that is why they hated the Marquise."

"Did they hate her?"

"Hate her! The word is too weak—they loathed her. Madame Adelaide always referred to her as *Mama Whore.*"

"How cruel!" cried Jeanne, her cheeks flushing. "I wonder what she will call me?"

The Maréchale's voice and right hand resumed their strangely related life and she advised Jeanne not to worry about Mesdames. No, they would never like her; that was inevitable. But they could never harm her as long as she kept the King's favor. The Maréchale's words channeled Jeanne's thoughts once more to the Pompadour who had stayed in his favor for twenty years.

"Madame," she said, "I have something to show you—and to ask you." She opened a drawer and took from it a black velvet wallet delicately embroidered with silver thread and fine strands of light chestnut hair. "The King gave me this. Does it mean anything to you?"

"No—I never saw it before," the other answered, but uncertainty had crept into her usually confident voice. Jeanne placed the wallet in her hand. "I do not consider that I have any right to this, and so I give it to you in memory of a friend you loved. It contains a letter; I want you to read it, aloud."

The Maréchale opened the wallet and extracted a yellowed paper. When she held it closer to the window the handwriting became clearer and she paled as if a specter had drifted before her sharp eyes.

"Read it," said Jeanne softly.

The Maréchale squinted in the poor light. "Sire," she began, "I am ill, dangerously perhaps. In the melancholy that overcomes me, I wish to leave you a souvenir which will always keep me in your memory. I have embroidered this wallet with my hair—accept it and do not ever let it leave you. Sign this, I beg you it is the whim of illness."

The Maréchale paused, her voice quavering with emotion, and Jeanne saw that her eyes were filled with tears, as indeed were Jeanne's own. The Maréchale cleared her throat and read the

final line on the paper. "This token of affection will never leave me. Louis."

"The Marquise! You have a kind heart to give this to me, for I was devoted to her." The Maréchale fell silent and her hands lay immobile in her lap. She seemed in wordless communication with some remote gentle spirit and her homely face was unwontedly serious.

"Was the *King* devoted to her?" Jeanne's question aroused her and an animated sparkle returned to her eyes, dispelling the brief mood of nostalgia. "*Zut, mais oui!* How can you ask?"

"Because he told me that he never loved her but had not the heart to send her away. I found that difficult to understand, but now . . . turning her wallet over to me . . . and her letter . . ."

"Let me tell you something, Comtesse." The Maréchale leaned forward. "He loved her as a man loves his wife; she was his friend and companion, but he is *in* love with you as he never was with her. Trust me—I know. I was her friend and I shall be yours. The King meant no slight to her memory—but she is dead and you have made him very much alive."

"Thank you," said Jeanne. "Now I do understand."

"He is in love with you," the older woman repeated, "as he has never been in love before, and he has asked me to sponsor your presentation at Court. He has already fixed Candlemas as the date."

"*Grace à Dieu!* I had rather you, madame, than anyone."

A hint of a smile hovered at the corners of the Maréchale's mouth. She decided she really liked Jeanne. She studied her beautiful face and decided not to spoil her happiness. Why tell her that the King could find no other lady at Court who would introduce the new Comtesse du Barry or that she, the Maréchale de Mirepoix, had demanded full payment of her enormous debts in return for sponsoring his mistress? She knew the King, deeply secretive by nature, would not give her away. She would be a friend to this merry tender comtesse and there might be no more debts, ever.

That evening Jeanne waited impatiently to thank the King. Presentation to him before the entire Court on Candlemas Day, and that not two months away! There would hardly be sufficient time after Christmas to order her gown and arrange for the jewels she would wear. With a light heart she heard the King's familiar tread on the stair, but when he entered she saw immediately that he was irritated. His skin had the faint yellowish tinge she had learned to recognize as a sign of anger, and his dark eyes were brooding. He kissed her perfunctorily and when he spoke his voice was unusually harsh.

"Those swine! Who dares to write such filth about you?" He thrust a cheaply printed leaflet in her hand and turned to stare moodily out the window. Jeanne's frightened glance lowered to the paper she held:

Jeanne Bécu, virgin fair
Until Lametz did her hair;
So enchanting to be near,
But it was her own idea—
Now Jeanne is no virgin fair.

Jeanne burst into tears and threw herself at the King's feet. "Sire, this is untrue!" Unconsciously she reverted to the respectful form of address. "I have told you about myself, and the truth does not include this lie!"

The King's face softened and his voice became tender. He raised Jeanne to her feet. "I know it is not true; that is what makes it worse. I ordered Sartine to investigate and he has given me a report of the entire affair. If the author of this scurrility is found he shall go to the Bastille!"

Jeanne's mind was whirling. She thanked Heaven that Anne had insisted on reporting Jeanne's version of Lametz' attempted assault to the police and she remembered with gratitude the kind *commissaire* who had heard her story. She remembered too, uneasily, something the Maréchale had told her. During the reign of the Marquise, when the walls of Paris were plastered with those

filthy verses, the *Poissonades,* the mistress had reproached the Chief of Police for his inability to discover their author. According to the Maréchale, Sartine had replied: "I know Paris, madame, but I do not know Versailles."

That was it! Jeanne had the answer. Someone here at Versailles powerful enough to obtain access to the records of the police, someone who sought her ruin, had perverted the truth and inspired this attack. It could only be the Duc de Choiseul.

She said as much to the King and his face clouded again. "If I thought that were true . . ." he clenched his fist. "But no; Choiseul is my Minister and my Ministers are only my servants. After you are presented he will come to know you and he too will be enchanted."

"But he knows me already," Jeanne reminded him, unconvinced. In her mind she saw Choiseul's intelligent porcine face and the thought came to her that she should seek another interview. She would placate him and offer assurances that she wanted to be friends. After a moment's reflection she dismissed the notion as futile. Nothing she said before her presentation would deflect his hostility or discourage the preposterous ambition of his ugly sister to climb into the King's bed. She would have to wait until she had the *entrée* before she tried to reason with Choiseul. Surely by then his undoubted intelligence would impel him to come to terms with her.

The King's New Year's present to Jeanne was a veritable Golconda of rubies set in every conceivable ornament—an enormous ring, twin brooches, a tiara, and a necklace with stones the size of birds' eggs. A few nights later she wore the blood-red stones to a small dinner the King gave in the same room of the Little Apartments where they had kept their first rendezvous. When she entered through the concealed door Richelieu and the Maréchale, the only guests, broke off their animated chatter and turned in wonder. "A Circe!" exclaimed Richelieu. "A Circe of alabaster decked with the fire of the rising sun!" For once he

spoke without irony; his voice was full of undisguised admiration.

The King, who had preceded Jeanne into the room, laughed. "*Son Excellence,*" he chided, "the Comtesse is no Circe; she does not turn men into swine but like Venus she makes them feel they are gods." He smiled at Jeanne and his handsome features radiated an extraordinary aura of youthfulness. His vigorous maturity made Richelieu appear more than ever like an aging wizened fox.

The King accepted a glass of champagne from Jeanne and went on speaking. "When the decoration of the Comtesse's apartments is completed, cupids and doves will be everywhere—fitting emblems of *my* Venus." He gave Jeanne a lighthearted kiss and motioned them to be seated. In intimate gatherings such as this, the King was a delightful host, often dismissing the footmen and serving the dishes himself. He did so tonight.

"Sire," ventured the Maréchale, "such magnificent rubies the Comtesse is wearing! *Ce-pays-ci* knows no jewels more splendid."

"Ah, but wait! Wait until she is presented and you will be blinded." He smiled with an air of secrecy and refilled his glass.

Jeanne feigned interest in Richelieu's account of his latest affair, but she was thinking longingly of the day when her presentation would actually occur. She had practiced countless hours before her mirror under the watchful eyes of the Maréchale until she managed with perfection the gliding walk of a court lady. The experienced Maréchale taught her to curtsy in the approved manner, to turn gracefully on her heel and most important of all, how to execute the difficult backward steps when she withdrew from the King without becoming entangled in her hoopskirt. Jeanne had made all her preparations and the days of waiting had seemed endless, but now she tried to curb her impatience—Candlemas was scarcely three weeks off.

And then disaster struck. Five days before Candlemas the King had a fall from his horse while hunting. From her window Jeanne saw him being carried into the Château on a ladder covered with

a mattress and she shook with fear. Her first thought was that he had been killed.

She sent her valet Morin, whose frank handsome face reflected her own agitation, to find out what had happened. He soon returned to report that he had been unable to learn anything. However, the heavy scent of musk half an hour later heralded Richelieu's approach. He told her that the King was badly shaken and his right arm severely sprained. "He has dismissed Mesdames from his bedroom and asks that I bring you to him."

Jeanne followed Richelieu up a strange stairway and found herself, for the first time, in the King's own magnificent bedroom. Here was the splendor of the great Château she had yet to see, but she was too distraught to notice the white paneled walls embellished with marvelous woodcarvings of shells and flowers. She rushed to the bed where the King was lying propped up with pillows. "Louis!" she cried, completely oblivious of Richelieu's presence.

The King winced with pain and tried to manage a faint smile. *"Doucement—doucement."* He slowly shifted his position and now she saw that his right arm was in a sling. "Louis, are you hurt?"

He smiled again at her superfluous question, and caressed her with his free hand. "The injury is not serious but it is devilishly painful, which is sometimes worse. La Martinière says it will be several weeks before I can move. Do you realize what that means?"

"My presentation! But Louis, that is nothing compared with your comfort. Postpone it!"

"I shall have to," he agreed. "I have no choice."

Candlemas passed, and then came the beginning of Lent. Now her presentation was impossible until after Easter. Jeanne tried to forget her disappointment. Her first concern was for the King, but she also feared that Choiseul would employ the extra time in new attempts to undermine her.

The King recovered slowly and although he was soon out of bed he still carried his injured arm in a sling. La Martinière, the First Physician, confided to Richelieu, who relayed the information to Jeanne, that the shock was more severe than he had at first believed. His chief fear was that the King might develop a blood clot, which he said was especially dangerous for a man nearly sixty.

The somber Lenten season dragged on. Jeanne heard Mass every morning in the soaring marble chapel. She invariably stole a quick glance toward the Royal tribune which rose behind her. The King was often there; for many years he had been ineligible to receive the Host but he remained faithful in his attendance at Mass. He had once explained to a bewildered Jeanne that as a descendant of Saint-Louis he could not be damned if he died in a state of grace. He said he would attend to that when the time came.

On Holy Thursday she glanced upward as usual and quickly lowered her head to hide a smile. The King had just crossed himself with his left hand and looked guiltily around to see if anyone had noticed his transgression. He wore the same embarrassed expression Jeanne had seen on the Roué's face when the baked apple had fallen from his head. She realized that her royal lover, for all his seasoned maturity, was like all men—an errant small boy at times. She forced her attention back to her religious devotions, happy that the King had almost recovered and that Lent would soon be over.

A few days after Easter her formal presentation to Louis XV was transformed from a prolonged dream into brilliant reality. It was late in the April afternoon, so late that the thousands of candles in the Château had been lighted. The elegant coach bearing Jeanne and the Maréchale de Mirepoix rolled through the gates of the inner courtyard, the Royal Court, to which only the royal family and those with the *entrée* had access.

Jeanne, preceded a few paces by her sponsor, hurried up the

Queen's Staircase. The Maréchale glanced back and hissed over her shoulder. "More slowly; take care—your feet must not seem to leave the floor." Jeanne slowed, and before they passed into the *Oeil-de-Boeuf* she was gliding across the polished floors with stately grace as if she had been nurtured in the Château.

The magnificent rooms glowed with light and were thronged with richly dressed courtiers. For months rumors had buzzed through the royal beehive and bets had been placed by followers of Choiseul that the presentation would never take place. She knew this as she moved through the State Bedchamber, the very altar of this royal temple.

Jeanne was poised, and suffused with a feeling of serene confidence. She wished her mother were present to witness her triumph and then the likeness of old Monsieur Billard flashed through her mind. Would he censure his beloved little Jeanne for the role she was playing today? He had said she looked like a princess . . . if he could see her now he would have said she looked like a queen.

When she came to the threshold of the Council Chamber she curtsied, and as she arose a brilliant scene lay before her. On both sides of a cleared aisle was ranged the Court, observing every detail of her comportment, eager for a gauche movement or a hint of nervousness. The eyes of aristocratic ladies sparkled with rage and envy as she advanced to the center of the room, for she transcended in beauty any woman who had ever been presented before.

Her blue satin dress was embroidered with pearl-edged leaves of silver. Its hoopskirt was immense, containing more than five yards of material at the bottom. Jeanne progressed to the spot directly beneath the huge chandelier, curtsied a second time and then, preceded by the Maréchale, moved slowly toward the King. He stood at the far end of the Council Chamber, his right arm still in a sling. He waited in easy dignity and flashed her a smile of pride and encouragement. When he had said that all who saw her

on this day would be blinded he had not been speaking lightly.

She blazed with diamonds which had cost the Treasury half a million livres. The stones glittered in her ears and in her hair, around her neck and on her hands and arms, but with her instinctive taste the effect was not excessive.

She was now directly before the King. "Sire—Madame la Comtesse du Barry." The Maréchale murmured the introduction and stepped to one side. Jeanne lowered her head and sank to the floor, then rose with the grace of a swan to gaze into her lover's face. The King did not speak, he only inclined his head slightly in acknowledgment, but his eyes were eloquent.

Jeanne began to withdraw, moving backward with flawless precision, managing the enormous hoopskirt with expert skill. When she reached the doorway of the State Bedchamber she curtsied one final time and turned to depart. An excited hum of conversation trailed her as she walked between the rows of spectators. She held her head high, looking straight ahead, but out of the corner of her eye she spied a vaguely familiar figure, stocky and thick-lipped. It was the depraved Comte de Genlis, his face wearing a ludicrous mask of incredulity. Beside him the Duchesse de Grammont, her Amazonian frame trembling with fury, voiced a vicious epithet. Her brother Choiseul was not visible but Jeanne knew he was somewhere in the throng, eyeing her with cold hatred.

Jeanne smiled to herself. Today she could afford serenity; no Comte de Genlis or Duchesse de Grammont could threaten her now, and for the moment she did not fear even the Duc de Choiseul.

The next morning the King announced they were going to spend a few days at Trianon. Jeanne had never visited the new building and she exclaimed with delight when she saw it. Instantly it recalled to her the Pompadour's exquisite Hermitage where she had stayed at Fontainebleau. "Louis, it is a diminutive jewel. Like a private house. We can be so happy here."

The King smiled indulgently and led her inside. The superbly simple furniture in the new classical style had only recently been installed. He showed her their adjoining bedrooms and took an almost boyish pleasure in pointing out the dining table which lowered through the floor to the kitchens below. "When we want to be undisturbed," he explained, "the servants arrange the table on the first floor and it ascends to the dining room. We need never be seen by them unless we wish it."

Jeanne was so extravagant in admiration for the Little Trianon that the King took her driving a few weeks later toward Marly. "I have a surprise. I hope it will please you." The carriage reached the Seine, followed the river a short distance and climbed the hill of Bougival. It swept through iron gates, imposing but badly in need of regilding, and followed an ascending drive bordered by rows of linden trees. At the crest of the slope stood a Château. Although its lines blended in an appealing combination of grace and dignity the building had an air of neglect. Some of its windows were broken, but in spite of its forlorn appearance Jeanne caught her breath. A strange presentiment filled her heart, a feeling that she had come home.

"What is this Château called?" she asked.

"It is called Louveciennes, my dearest, and it shall be your very own, for as long as you live."

"What a gentle melodious name, soft and beautiful!"

"Like its new *châtelaine*. You will live here and enjoy it long after I am gone." The flicker of melancholy Jeanne so dreaded shadowed his eyes. She feared the King's morbid preoccupation with death but usually it was the death of others he dwelt upon; never before had he referred to his own. Desperately she was seeking a diversionary topic when a harsh clanking of gears and chains shattered the stillness. Jeanne shrank back in the seat against the King's shoulder.

"*Mon Dieu!* What is *that?*"

He laughed aloud and his gloomy thoughts fled. "That is the

one imperfection here; I should have warned you. That is the frightful noise of the Marly Pump. Do you still think you want Louveciennes?"

"Yes—certainly I do! That is nothing to the raucous noises of Paris. I shall soon grow accustomed to it and sleep like a child."

"Sometimes you *are* a child." He put his arm around her. "And now, Madame du Barry, let's inspect your new domain and decide what needs to be done; virtually everything, I fancy."

They left the carriage and walked in the unkempt, overgrown gardens. The King plucked a heart-shaped linden leaf and handed it to Jeanne. "The appropriate shape for you," he said. Jeanne adored him when he was in his present mood, a mood, she reflected, of obvious happiness. She had long since noticed that in public his face had a withdrawn majestic look; only with her and a few intimates like Richelieu and the Maréchale did his features relax in warm winning charm. She took his arm and they inspected the interior of the Château. The King was an ardent builder and spoke enthusiastically of the alterations he would order. "And also," he added, "I shall command Ledoux to draw up plans for a *Pavillon*. It will be a gem—the smallest, and the finest, in the kingdom."

Jeanne knew she would never be able to spend much time at Louveciennes during the King's lifetime, for his existence was centered in the vast Château of Versailles. Work was slowly progressing there on the new apartments she would occupy. She was impatient to escape the confining quarters where Lebel had lived, and all through the hot summer months she was never really comfortable except at Trianon.

One evening in late September she was returning alone to Versailles. The King had remained with Richelieu and some of his friends in readiness for an early hunt the next day. The windows of Jeanne's coach were tightly shut against the pelting rain. It was cool and she, who disliked too much heat, shivered in the swaying coach. What a filthy night, she thought; autumn is upon us indeed!

The vehicle rumbled over the cobblestones of the Place d'Armes and as it started through the gates of the Royal Court, Jeanne heard a shrill scream. The wheels thudded against some object and the heavy coach lurched to an abrupt stop. Jeanne lowered the window and the sound of the driver's muffled oaths reached her. "What is it?" she asked, her voice sharp with alarm. "What has happened?"

In an instant the coachman was standing by the window, his face gray with fright. "Pardon, Madame la Comtesse . . . a woman . . . I did not see her . . . she stumbled against the wheels." Jeanne leaned out the window and saw a sodden body lying on the pavement. "Quick, you fool!" she ordered angrily. "Help the poor woman; don't just let her lie there!" The man ran to the prone figure and lifted her head and Jeanne caught a glimpse of her face in the glare of the coach lantern.

"Wait!" She flung open the door, jumped from the coach, and oblivious of the driving rain ran to the limp figure. Her quick action was impelled by instinct rather than reason. Something in the twist of the woman's head, the line of her wide mouth . . . she knelt on the cobblestones and gazed intently at the pale face glistening with raindrops. The woman's black hair was matted and dirty, her clothes were shapeless rags, and her feet were bare. A thin stream of blood trickled from a cut on her forehead.

Jeanne rose to her feet and leaned weakly against the coach for support. Her face was as pale as the injured woman's and her eyes were wide with shock. "Put her in my coach at once!" she ordered. "Instantly!"

The coachman gaped with astonishment and lifted the unconscious woman into the seat beside Jeanne. Her muddy garments stained the white silk upholstery but Jeanne neither knew nor cared. She took the woman's head in her lap and dabbed gently at the bleeding wound with her handkerchief. All she knew and all she cared was that she had found Suzanne Picot again.

Jeanne sat by the sofa on which Suzanne had been placed, waiting until she regained consciousness. She gazed at the thin face and her eyes filled with tears. She was remembering her vanished childhood and her devoted solemn friend at Saint Aure, and she wondered what possible blows of ill fortune had reduced Suzanne to a plight so desperate. She bathed her haggard face once more with eau de cologne and Suzanne moaned. Her head tossed restlessly on the pillow and she opened her eyes.

"Bread!" Her voice was hoarse and weak. "Bread!" She looked blankly at Jeanne, closed her eyes, then reopened them slowly. Jeanne tried to hide the tears which sprang anew to her own eyes at the sound of the pitiful rasping plea. She smoothed her brow; the cut on her forehead was now concealed by a soft bandage.

"Don't you know me? Look hard at me, Suzanne Picot."

Suzanne stared for a long moment. The room was silent except for the faint ticking of an enameled clock. Jeanne sat quietly, waiting for some sign of recognition. Suzanne's sunken brown eyes maintained their intense stare. At last they lighted with a faint gleam of remembrance. "Madame," she whispered; Jeanne had to lean closer to hear. "You are so very beautiful; for a moment you reminded me of a little friend I once had, long ago."

Jeanne took her hand. "I *am* that friend, Suzanne; I am Jeanne Bécu."

Suzanne's face worked, and silent tears coursed down her cheeks as she tried to repress her emotion. Her body shook with sobs and Jeanne gathered her into her arms. "You can talk when you are stronger. You must not be afraid; you are safe in the Château."

"The Château?" Suzanne started wildly and tried to sit up.

"Be quiet." Jeanne soothed her. She nodded to Morin, who stood waiting in the doorway, and he brought crisp hot bread and a broth of chicken. Suzanne allowed Jeanne to spoon the liquid into her mouth but her eyes never wavered in their unblinking stare. Jeanne tried to inject a cheerful note into her voice. "Do you remember our long talks, and the time we visited the Jardin

des Plantes and Sister Angélique became so angry? We will talk of those days after you have rested. You have much to tell me while I—I have much to tell you."

When Suzanne awoke the following morning Jeanne's maids had a bath prepared for her; first a tub of warm sudsy water, followed by a second tub of clear water for rinsing. Jeanne chose for Suzanne a simple morning dress of yellow linen in which she could comfortably relax, and the two of them withdrew to the small boudoir. Jeanne insisted that Suzanne stretch out on a chaise longue and she talked a long time, telling her childhood friend everything that had happened to her since they had parted at Saint Aure. Jeanne omitted nothing, from her abysmal experience with Lametz through her youthful passion for Charles Duval and her liaisons with the men who had succeeded him. She feared Suzanne might be shocked, for in their girlhood they had never discussed such aspects of life—they had been entirely unacquainted with them. "And now I am here," she concluded, "not as Jeanne Bécu, the innocent girl you knew, but as the Comtesse du Barry, mistress of the King."

Suzanne's face was a study as Jeanne talked; wonder was followed by amazement and amazement by a fleeting shadow of dismay, but the expression that finally settled on her face was one of unaltered affection. "It does not matter, Jeanne. I think you have known happiness, for you are more merry and kind and beautiful than I remember you, and only happiness could keep you so."

"Yes, Suzanne, I have known happiness—but never so much as now. Everyone who knows the King must love him. But enough about me; tell me all that has happened to you."

Suzanne began hesitantly but went on with increased confidence as she became immersed in her story. After she left the convent she had, as Jeanne knew, helped her father in his candle shop. She kept the accounts and at times made deliveries to the storerooms of the Château. Her father's trade had prospered even though there was war with the English, but strangely enough after the war ended times grew hard and payments dwindled.

Their livelihood depended mainly on the patronage of the Château, and the Royal Treasury had not paid any tradesmen of the town for the past two years. "They are starving; their wives and children beg for bread at the gates of the Château. That is what I was doing," Suzanne admitted, "when I stumbled against your coach."

Jeanne sat in stunned amazement. "But that is impossible! I do not understand . . . there are more than four thousand liveried servants in the Château . . . hundreds of stablemen and gardeners . . . and *they* get paid!"

"I doubt it," said Suzanne quietly. "Have you ever asked them?"

"No, it has simply never occurred to me. I have everything *I* want. This terrible situation is beyond my understanding."

"Many share your amazement. They are loyal subjects who love the King, but they cannot understand why they must starve. My aunt who kept house for us literally starved to death, and my father died last month of despair."

"Then you are all alone? No husband—or lover?" Jeanne wanted to bite her tongue.

"After I was grown I had no dowry to attract a husband, and never the looks to attract a lover." Suzanne's smile was one of pathos and Jeanne felt an impulse to hug her.

"*Le Bon Dieu* has sent you to me, Suzanne. Will you stay with me as my companion? I starve for a true friend. The ladies of the Court hate me. They dare not show it, but they envy me too. They want my place. I know I can trust you, and if you want a task you may act as my secretary and keep my accounts. Don't you remember how poor I always was at arithmetic?"

Suzanne smiled faintly. For the first time a gleam of hope shone in her eyes and to Jeanne's horrified embarrassment she fell to her knees. "It is to me that *le Bon Dieu* has sent *you!*" She seized Jeanne's hands and kissed them. "You give me back life and happiness. I have thought of you all these years, wondering where you were. I was sure you had forgotten me."

"I have never forgotten you, Suzanne," said Jeanne softly. "Once I wrote you a letter but no answer came—and times were hard for me then."

"I never received any letter!" Suzanne cried in distress. "You know if I had I would have answered. You must have thought me a faithless friend, when perhaps I could have helped you!" She wrung her hands.

"No, I knew there must be a good reason. But no more troubles; henceforth we shall help each other."

When the King returned Jeanne presented Suzanne to him. He removed his hat with the same exquisite courtesy he showed to all women regardless of their rank. "The Comtesse tells me you and she are old friends." Suzanne's shyness vanished beneath his warm smile. She had always heard that the King's personal servants adored him and now she understood why. "Yes, Sire, Madame and I were together at the convent of Saint Aure." Jeanne had insisted that Suzanne call her by name when they were alone but agreed that such familiarity would be impossible in the presence of others.

"The good sisters instruct well," the King remarked. "I sent Mesdames to the abbey of Fontevrault and I have never regretted it. Nothing surpasses religious training, especially for a lady." He nodded to Suzanne in polite dismissal, but as she withdrew he called after her. "Be a good friend to the Comtesse, Suzanne; I love her very dearly."

The door closed and Jeanne embraced him. "You are truly kind, Louis." She told him of the appalling hardships Suzanne had related and asked if he could not relieve his people's distress. "I am ignorant of affairs of State, but if your subjects could only see you as I do. . . ."

The King spoke sadly. "Once my people loved me, but they call me *le Bien-Aimé* no more." He sighed. "My successor will face troubles, but things will last as long as I." He shrugged and changed the subject, which was obviously distasteful to him. He had asked Jeanne not to visit her new apartments until their

decorating and furnishing were completed, and now he broke the good news that the work was finished at last. "Be there tomorrow at noon and I shall come to you from the Council."

The next day Jeanne and Suzanne climbed to the suite of rooms that faced southward on the Marble Court. Morin, Jeanne's valet, waited to admit them, his handsome face wreathed in smiles. He winked at Suzanne, who blushed and tried to ignore him, and then he spoke to Jeanne. "I am sure Madame will be pleased with what she sees here." He swung open the door and they entered the anteroom.

It was painted in a soft shade of pink, a hue which the King knew Jeanne liked. "Blue is his favorite color," Jeanne said, "so you see how thoughtful of me he is. Suzanne, I think this will be a suitable place for you to sleep." They hurried through the other rooms of the suite—dining room, salon, and library. Their ceilings were low and the furniture was almost miniature in size so that the proper balance would be maintained. Objects of satinwood and ebony, rosewood and rare mahogany, decorated with bronze and ormolu and plaques of porcelain, filled the rooms. Flower-filled vases of du Barry pink, the new shade which the manufactory of Sèvres had just created, stood on tables and cabinets. "It is a lovely color, Jeanne." Suzanne ran her hand over the cool smooth porcelain. "The tint is as fresh as your natural color. No wonder you never use rouge."

"The King does not like it, nor do I." They were standing in the library, a white and gold room with rounded corners. The shelves were filled with books beautifully bound in red morocco and stamped with the spurious du Barry arms. *Boutez-en-avant:* put yourself forward. Jeanne smiled to herself. The motto was appropriate for the Roué, who had invented it, but she reflected in all honesty that it hardly applied to her. She had never consciously striven for the successive levels of fortune she had known.

Colonel Marcien's parting words came back to her. "Follow likely fortune. . . ." he had said. "Select wisely and you will go

far." She had selected wisely, except for the Comte de Genlis, and she had indeed come far, to the very summit. She was gloriously happy and she could truly say that she had never harmed anyone to reach this pinnacle.

"Such a fine selection of books!" Suzanne's words roused her from her thoughts. "Cicero—Plutarch—Molière—look, Jeanne, here is *Lives of the Saints;* I memorized it at the convent."

Jeanne laughed. "I tried to, but that was all." She knew that the King had selected these books and she reminded herself not to display Sainte-Foy's *Encyclopédie* here. Nothing angered the King more than any reference, however slight, to the Philosophers and their *Encyclopédie.*

They looked at the bathroom which was yellow with light blue moldings and contained the usual two tubs and a porcelain stove. Beyond, on the side which faced the *Cour des Cerfs,* was a small door which Suzanne pushed open. To Jeanne's surprise she began to giggle. "Come and see *this!*" She beckoned and Jeanne followed her into a chamber, blue and yellow like the bathroom, which held the *chaise.* "See what I mean?" Suzanne pointed, trying to stifle her amusement. Jeanne looked more closely and saw that the *chaise* was a real water closet with a marble pan and *bidet.* "I have never seen one!" Jeanne exclaimed. "I have heard Milord March speak of them but I never dreamed I would own one! Sainte-Foy was right—this is an age of remarkable inventions!"

They retraced their steps and came to the last room—the bedroom. They stood in the doorway for a moment, speechless with admiration at the lavish elegance before them. The luxurious room was dominated by the enormous double bed, the four columns of which were carved with cupids and doves. The hangings of the bed and the draperies at the window were of white silk, embroidered with the same cupid-and-dove *motif.* Jeanne smiled as she recalled the King's association of doves with the goddess Venus.

She walked over to the dressing table, which stood in front of

the window in order to receive the maximum light. It was fashioned of rosewood embellished with ormolu, and had three Venetian mirrors. Jeanne was inspecting her reflection and rearranging her hair when she was startled by a sound behind the wall. A cleverly hidden door slowly opened and she looked up to see the King's smiling face. "What is your verdict?" he asked, holding out his arms.

"Oh, Louis, it is Paradise, a fairyland of beauty! You have thought of everything to please me."

"That was my wish," he said. "Only one item is still missing." He summoned Morin, spoke to him in a low voice, and the valet disappeared. A few minutes later Jeanne heard the sound of footsteps in the anteroom and two lackeys entered carrying a heavy object concealed in linen wrapping. "Put it on the mantel," ordered the King. "I shall unwrap it myself."

The servants left and he walked over to the pink marble mantel. He stood with his back to Jeanne so she could not see the mysterious object while he unwrapped it. When he had finished he stepped to one side. "I considered this to be the final touch."

On the mantel before Jeanne's shining eyes stood a gilt clock, its dial supported by figures representing the Three Graces. Above the dial Cupid with his arrow marked the passing hours. "The hours of our life together shall always be recorded by Love," said the King, his voice husky with emotion.

Suzanne had quietly withdrawn and Jeanne went through her new apartments again with her lover, pointing out objects which especially delighted her. He listened to her bubbling comments with a smile of amusement. "I have more good news; the renovating of Louveciennes has already begun; by next May it should be completed."

Jeanne started to speak but the King continued. "When your Château is ready I shall have a surprise for it."

"I can't wait that long. Tell me now!"

He laughed. "How can I tell you and surprise you too? Have patience, he has not even arrived in France."

"He?"

The King laughed again at her curiosity and went out the way he had entered. Jeanne realized now that behind the wall was a stair which led to his bedroom directly below.

Jeanne had only a few days to enjoy her new apartments before the Court went, as it always did in October, to Fontainebleau. The forest offered superb opportunity for the King's favorite sport but Jeanne cared nothing for the chase. To humor him she often followed the hunting party in her carriage. Sometimes she was accompanied by the Maréchale; she also disliked hunting and her formidable nose twitched with distaste. "I fail to understand why His Majesty, always so kind, relishes this incessant killing of stags."

"It is not that he likes to kill," Jeanne defended him. "It is the sport and above all the vigorous exercise. He feels unwell if he stays indoors."

"Zut! I feel unwell if I don't!" The Maréchale grunted. "Can't we go back to Fontainebleau and have tea?" Jeanne repressed a smile and ordered the driver to turn his horses homeward.

On days when the autumn rains fell Jeanne remained inside working with Suzanne or reading. Suzanne, quietly efficient, had proved to be a treasure of strength. She knew all Jeanne's secrets, guarded them zealously, and attended to the flood of correspondence that inundated the King's mistress. Requests from Drouais and Fragonard to paint her portrait, laudatory verses from Voltaire, and always a torrent of bills. Endless bills to be paid: Poirier the jeweler, Boulle the cabinetmaker, Réveillon, who crafted hand-painted wallpapers, sellers of glass and porcelain and enamel, and always the dressmakers and haberdashers, purveyors of fabrics and ribbons and laces.

The letters asking assistance required even more careful attention. Scores of pleas poured in daily, requesting help in obtaining

pardon for a deserter, a position for a relative or, more often, simply a direct demand for money. Jeanne indicated to Suzanne the answers she wished to give, Suzanne wrote the letters, and Jeanne signed them. "What would I do without you?" she sighed. "If I took the time to write these replies myself I would have no time for the King, I would be dismissed forthwith, and then there would be no more letters to plague me. That's a thought!" They looked at each other with amused smiles.

The most importunate demands came from the Roué. Her brother-in-law, as he now insisted on referring to himself, was unceasing in his demands for money. His letters were filled with constant reminders that her success was due to him alone. "That Gascon rogue!" Jeanne was half vexed, half amused. "I admit he helped me, but to read his letters one would think it was *he* the King met chasing butterflies in the garden. Go ahead," she told Suzanne, "send him the money he asks."

"But twenty thousand livres!" Suzanne was indignant. "It is a disgrace! When will he stop?"

"You don't know the Roué, my dear; he will never stop as long as he thinks I have five livres to spare."

By the middle of November the Court returned to Versailles and Jeanne settled with relief into her luxurious retreat high above the Marble Court. Now that she had the *entrée* she appeared with the King at every glittering function of the brilliant winter season. The courtiers flocked to pay homage and every morning her anteroom was filled with callers who vied for a nod, a smile, or—choicest of all—the tinkling sound of her merry laughter. Jeanne adored the attention and the flattery but she was not deceived. She knew she was beautiful but she knew too that should the King die or cease to love her, none of these fawning men and women would deign to glance in her direction.

The only persons she felt to be her friends at Court were Richelieu and the Maréchale, and even they had their motives—the Maréchale seeking payment of her eternal debts and Richelieu lying in wait for the opportune moment to overthrow Choiseul.

One evening when the King and Jeanne were playing whist in the *Salon de la Paix,* Richelieu presented his nephew, the Duc d'Aiguillon. She liked the firm-faced soldier and was pleased by his air of courteous deference. She was even more pleased the next day when the Duchesse d'Aiguillon appeared in her anteroom and paid her marked attention, for she knew that most women at Versailles detested her.

"The Duc d'Aiguillon will someday prove to be a fortunate replacement for Choiseul," Richelieu whispered slyly.

"I am not particularly interested in Monsieur de Choiseul's departure." Jeanne shrugged. "I only ask that he be civil to me!"

But Choiseul was not civil. Whenever he met Jeanne he tried to ignore her, although if the King were watching he would address her a brief remark, while his face flamed with repressed anger. Once she chose him for her partner at whist and exerted every effort to draw out the vaunted charm of which she had heard so much. In vain; the Minister replied perfunctorily to her overtures and played his hand as if she did not exist. His sister, with the stride of a trooper, approached the table and whispered in a rude fashion, ignoring the other players. Choiseul, laughing sarcastically, left the table without an apology and the game was disrupted.

That night Jeanne cried when she told the King of her humiliation. His face contorted and his dark eyes smoldered. "Choiseul goes too far! He thinks he is indispensable, but none of my servants is indispensable. I have told him that if everyone knew you as I know you all France would be at your feet, but I see I shall have to speak to him again."

The King might speak to his Minister of War but Jeanne knew that even the King could not alter the attitude of Mesdames. His daughters never acknowledged her respectful curtsies as they whisked past her in the *Galerie des Glaces.* Madame Adelaide stared bleakly through her while Madame Sophie hurried past glancing sideways like a hare. Madame Victoire, who was plump and looked amiable, glided purposefully to the buffet. Only

Madame Louise, still endowed with remnants of beauty, ever paused and looked directly into Jeanne's face. Six years older than Jeanne, she was the youngest of the King's daughters. Jeanne's heart beat hopefully; perhaps Madame Louise would speak to her. But no—she moved on abruptly, leaving Jeanne shaken by the unearthly expression in her eyes.

Lent came, slowing the Court's pace of stately delirium. The balls and card games ceased. At least in public they ceased. Behind the closed doors of private apartments thousands of livres continued to change hands over tables of *comète* and *picquet*, but in this the King took no part. Jeanne knew that he was devout and during the season of penance she struggled to ease his troubled conscience. He respected the laws of the Church and his inability to observe them only redoubled his anxiety.

One February morning Morin announced the Maréchale. Wrapped in sables she glided shivering into Jeanne's bedroom. She removed her hands from her muff and warmed them before the fireplace. "*Peste! Zut!*" she snapped. "*Ce-pays-ci* is the most magnificent Château in the world; also it must be the coldest. Water froze in my room and even the decanter of wine had ice in it."

Jeanne was still in bed, covered with soft thick comforts and wrapped in a robe of blue wool. She rang for her chambermaid and ordered a cup of chocolate for her visitor. "Morin sees to it that the lackey lights my fire early," she said. The Maréchale turned. "Your apartment is the only place of warmth in this entire Château," she commented enviously. She sipped the steaming chocolate. "I suppose you have heard about Madame Louise?" Her eyes were sharp with curiosity.

"The King told me only last night," Jeanne answered in surprise. "Maréchale, how do you uncover secrets so quickly?"

The older woman put down her cup. "I have ways." She smiled mysteriously. "Think of it, a Daughter of France entering the Carmelites! She is a madwoman seeking to annoy the Court in the name of Heaven!"

"Come, that's too strong, although I did tell the King that Madame Louise would have a wretched life in the convent. He disagreed; he thinks she will be the happiest member of his family."

The Maréchale's nose twitched. "If she is in such a hurry to get to Paradise it must be because she does not want to spend eternity with her family!"

"Not so loud!" Jeanne warned.

The Maréchale shrugged and shifted the conversation to the Dauphin's approaching marriage. She told Jeanne that Choiseul and Madame de Pompadour had arranged it long ago to cement the unpopular alliance with Austria. "Madame Adelaide will not be happy; the Dauphine will automatically take precedence over her."

Jeanne listened, keeping her uneasy thoughts to herself. Some things it was prudent to withhold from her garrulous friend, but she foresaw that the girl who would someday become Queen of France might fall under Choiseul's influence and she wondered how it would affect her own destiny. Jeanne raised her blue eyes in disarming innocence to the Maréchale. "I hear the Archduchess is fresh and beautiful," she said, "and such a pretty name she bears—Marie Antoinette!"

CHAPTER NINE

ITEM: Head, executed in porcelain of Sèvres, of the ci-devant Dauphine.

When the King and the Dauphin went in May to Compiègne to welcome the fifteen-year-old Archduchess, Jeanne was not invited to accompany them. She accepted her exclusion calmly, realizing that the ceremonial should include only the royal family. This was a time for her own role to be played with discretion. But in quick compensation the King asked her to attend an intimate dinner at La Muette in honor of his grandson's future bride.

Jeanne sat between Richelieu and d'Aiguillon at a respectable distance from the King, and stared at the young girl who would soon marry the Dauphin. She saw a face of radiant youth, fresh and unspoiled. A mass of ash-blond hair crowned a fine brow and the blue eyes had a clear direct look. Her nose is good, thought Jeanne, and her mouth is small—but that Hapsburg underlip! Nevertheless she admitted to herself that the defect was too minor to spoil the impression of dignified sweetness and grace.

The Archduchess seemed lively, laughing and speaking vivaciously to the King. Obviously she had captivated him, but the obese young man who would become her husband scarcely glanced from his plate. The Dauphin ate steadily and voraciously, indifferent to the lovely girl at his side. "The Dauphin is a clod," Richelieu remarked. "What an inspiring husband he will prove!"

When the company rose from the table Marie Antoinette approached Choiseul. She spoke a few words, turning her head as she did so to look at Jeanne with friendly curiosity. Choiseul shifted his eyes, smiled maliciously, and said something which brought an expression of blank surprise to the Archduchess' face. Jeanne felt a twinge of alarm. Stop worrying, she scolded herself; how can Choiseul hurt you? But an uneasy premonition gripped her that the Archduchess Marie Antoinette, soon to become Dauphine of France, might not always be as friendly and charming as she looked tonight.

As soon as she returned to Versailles Jeanne sent Morin to fetch the Maréchale de Mirepoix. Jeanne guessed, from the speed with which she appeared, that she bore news. She did; she was bursting with anticipation.

"Well?" Jeanne raised her eyebrows.

The Maréchale's face wore the pleased alert look which signaled that she had unearthed a rich vein of gossip. "The Archduchess," she began, "went up to Choiseul, of all people, and asked who you were. She said you were the most beautiful woman in the room." She paused, enjoying the suspense.

"Go on!" Jeanne was tense with impatience. "What else?"

"He gave her your name and then she asked him what is your function at Court." Jeanne held her breath. "Choiseul assumed that expression which makes him look like an amiable pig and said your function was to amuse the King."

Jeanne turned pale and the Maréchale patted her arm reassuringly. "That was mild, coming from Choiseul, and anyway the Archduchess did not understand what he meant."

"I hope not." Jeanne smiled faintly. "Perhaps you are right, but I shall have to do something about Monsieur de Choiseul. He forces me to it."

Jeanne did not attend the royal wedding; only the Princes of the Blood and the Peers of France were admitted to the chapel. She knew the King would have permitted her to come if she had

asked, but she tactfully avoided the issue. That evening the King and the entire royal family watched from the windows of the *Galerie* a display of fireworks on the Grand Canal. Jeanne, on the arm of the Duc d'Aiguillon, walked in the gardens below, exclaiming at the brilliant spectacle of blazing spheres and suns, flaming catherine wheels and exploding pyramids of fire.

Her eyes lifted to where the King stood at the window, his majestic figure outlined in the glaring light. She had never seen him so handsome. He wore a suit of *bleu du roi* and sparkled with diamonds. Even the buttons of his velvet suit were fashioned of the precious stones. Beside him was the newly wedded pair. The Dauphine was resplendent in a gown of rose and silver and resembled the future Queen she was. Her sleepy-eyed husband's bulky figure was attired in a puce-colored suit of velvet with sky-blue buttons. Next to his regal grandfather he looked like a provincial locksmith attending an improbable masquerade.

Jeanne tore her gaze from the royal family; her escort was speaking to her. "Comtesse, my uncle the Duc de Richelieu has told me of Choiseul's constant rudeness. If ever he should be dismissed"—he paused, waiting for his suggestion to penetrate Jeanne's consciousness—"be assured I shall be at the service of His Majesty—and yourself."

Jeanne knew, as did all the Court, of d'Aiguillon's ambition to succeed Choiseul and behind his eagerness she detected Richelieu's determination to overthrow his hated enemy. Although her eyes were open she was fond of d'Aiguillon. His soldierly bearing, courteous deference, and lack of malice appealed to her. She pressed his arm in a friendly manner. "Duc d'Aiguillon, when the time comes . . . if the time comes . . . I shall remember."

The royal family had withdrawn and Jeanne knew that the King himself was conducting the Dauphin and Dauphine to their nuptial chamber. She was anxious to hear the King's account of the day's events and asked d'Aiguillon to escort her back to her own apartments. She had changed from her heavy court dress

into a silk *négligé* when she heard the King's footsteps on the hidden stairway. He entered, still in his blue velvet suit.

"*Ce-pays-ci* has never witnessed so splendid a spectacle during my reign, but I am relieved it is over." He looked tired and Jeanne brought his dressing gown and made him comfortable. He relaxed in an armchair and looked at her gratefully. "Life without you would have no flavor. You have a sweetness I have never known in anyone before. Madame de Pompadour would not have shown your understanding—she would have insisted on being present."

Jeanne sat on the arm of his chair and put her hand on his shoulder. "Tell me about the wedding." The King described the splendid ceremony. "The Dauphine is enchanting," he concluded. "She has grace and inborn dignity but she is still young enough to betray her nervousness. She was so *distrait* she smeared her signature on the marriage register."

"What was the bearing of Monsieur le Dauphin?"

The King gestured impatiently. "He was bored. Only at the *grand couvert* did he shed his indifference and then his interest was solely in the food. Can you imagine what he actually said to me when I warned him not to overload his stomach on his wedding night?" Both amusement and dismay struggled for control in the King's face. "The Dauphin merely replied, 'But Sire, I always sleep better on a full stomach.'"

Jeanne's impulse was to laugh but sensing the King's underlying perplexity she kept silent. "I do not understand my grandson. He is no true Bourbon; exactly like his mother was, he is a phlegmatic German."

"Monsieur le Dauphin has good qualities, Louis," she consoled, "but he is certainly not like *you*, and he will never be the King you are."

The week after the Dauphin's wedding Jeanne and the King drove to Louveciennes. He told her its renovation was nearly

complete and he wanted to be certain she approved of the changes that had been made. The King added, like an abashed young lover, that in the confusion of the recent wedding he had neglected to give her a present to mark the second anniversary of their meeting. "It was a warm day in May, like today," he reminded, "and you were trying to catch white butterflies. Like those." He pointed to the open fields where the beautiful white insects fluttered capriciously in the sunshine.

"I need no gift to remember that day," said Jeanne. "I shall always remember it."

The King returned to his subject, saying he had transferred annuities to her which were worth several hundred thousand livres a year. "This is in addition to your bills; when you want them paid, simply write an order on the Treasury. But money is tiresome," he added. "Your real surprise, the one I promised some time ago, is waiting at Louveciennes."

Jeanne straightened, her curiosity aroused. Their carriage was sweeping handsomely up the sloping driveway to her own Château, which she hardly recognized. Gabriel, the greatest architect in the kingdom, had supervised the alterations and she realized that he had evoked all the charm and grace implicit in the neglected building she had seen the previous year. As she and the King stepped from the carriage she could discern from the portico the replanted gardens. She noticed that they were not formal and regimented like those of Versailles; while they retained dignity there was a suggestion of the new English style, rambling and natural, which she and the King had come to admire.

They crossed the portico and the great doors swung open. As she stepped into the marble foyer Jeanne's glance unconsciously sought the footman in order to nod a greeting, but no footman was visible. The King was watching her eagerly. "*Voilà!* There is your footman."

Jeanne looked down and saw a small dark-hued figure, the most enchanting child she had ever seen. He was dressed in green

brocade, fashioned in the style of India. On his feet were boots of shining black leather and around his head was wound a white turban. An ostrich plume, attached to the headdress by a diamond clasp, waved impudently as the boy salaamed in the way of the Orient.

Jeanne stared, speechless with delight. Suddenly, moved by an impulse she had not known since she had caressed La Rena's two little boys, she sank to her knees and hugged the child to her. *"Le petit! Qu'il est sarmant!"* She lisped in her excitement and looked up at the King, almost overcome with emotion. "What is he called?"

"I am called Zamor, madame." The childish treble went straight to her heart. His French was comprehensible but marked with an alien, remote accent. The boy stared back at her, his dark eyes gleaming. Jeanne kissed him and he grinned, showing teeth which were startlingly white in his dark-skinned face.

She begged the King to tell her everything he knew about Zamor. The King said that he was seven years old, a Bengalese kidnaped as an infant by the English and later sold to a French sea captain. The King's curiosity had been stirred when he read the Minister of Marine's report, and he had ordered the boy freed and brought to him.

"As soon as I saw him I decided he should be yours." The King smiled. "Today I signed this brevet naming him Governor of Louveciennes, but naturally the Governor will take his orders from you." He patted Zamor on his turban and the boy salaamed almost to the floor.

"His ways are charming," said Jeanne. "Quaint, and oriental."

"He may keep his heathen mannerisms if they divert you." The King was suddenly serious. "But he must be baptized in the True Faith."

"Of course," Jeanne agreed. "And I shall be his godmother! I shall treat him as if he were my own child, and he will always love me."

Zamor sat in the carriage at their feet on the return drive, the plume of his turban bobbing gaily in the breeze. Jeanne could hardly wait; she knew his exotic appearance would astonish Suzanne. She was not disappointed. "Oh, but how droll he is!" exclaimed Suzanne, staring at the small figure in his bizarre costume. To her consternation Zamor's round face contorted and he burst into angry tears.

"I am not droll!" He stamped his small booted feet. "I am no monkey—I am Zamor!"

"He is proud, and I have hurt his feelings," Suzanne said contritely. She stooped and tried to put her arms around him but he pushed her away. "No!" he screamed in his high voice. "You are not pretty like Madame." His liquid dark eyes shifted to Jeanne and not a tear remained in them. Suzanne smiled wistfully and Jeanne reassured her. "He will come to like you. Remember, everything here is new to him, but we will make the Governor of Louveciennes happy, won't we?" She smiled at Zamor and he snuggled up to her, hiding his face in her lap. Neither she or Suzanne saw his satisfied smirk.

Zamor possessed a serpentine intuition and soon realized he would please Jeanne by being polite to Suzanne. Jeanne asked her to commence his education and she held regular lessons for him in arithmetic, writing, and the history of France. Her pupil's mind was quick, and so devious that he could ultimately worm from Suzanne the answer to any question she asked him.

Jeanne liked to play with Zamor and he was often brought to her bedroom in the mornings. They invented a game of hide-and-seek among the satin sheets and downy pillows. Sometimes she caressed and spoke to him as if he were a pet or a toy and his eyes would flare with a look of resentment, quickly concealed. In the hour before she dressed for the day, when she moved easily about the room clad only in a chemise and peignoir, Zamor's eyes followed her with a fixed dreamy look.

In his insidious way he loved her and was obsessively jealous, but he was careful to hide this, especially from the King. He

understood the King's importance and the nature of his relationship with Jeanne. He pretended to enjoy his teasing, laughing and capering with calculated delight. The King would reach in his pocket for the sugared almonds he carried and hold them up, one by one, as if he were feeding a dog. Zamor would seize the sweets with his mouth and gobble them greedily.

Jeanne found in Zamor another outlet for her passion for clothes. She ordered for him satin suits in the shade of pink christened after her, and their buttons were real pearls which matched his white teeth. At a court ball to celebrate Carnival he followed her in full court dress, glittering with diamonds and carrying an ivory wand carved with a cobra's hooded head. The courtiers in the mirrored *Galerie* smiled at his dark face and cherubic grin.

Appointments with hairdressers and *couturiers,* audiences with jewelers and cabinetmakers, conferences with decorators and architects, all these consumed a large portion of Jeanne's days; there was also the endless round of court functions which she must grace. The King's demands upon her cheerful disposition to dispel his boredom and warm beauty to sate his desire naturally came first in importance. Little time was left for Zamor, but she had always loved children and she showed her affection for him as much as opportunity allowed.

The King's present of Zamor afforded her emotional joy, and his gift of financial security provided for those dearest to her. Suzanne, whom she loved like a sister, asked for nothing. She had recovered her dignified self-respect and was happy merely being near Jeanne. Suzanne's beautiful black hair was her best feature and Jeanne's hairdresser suggested a new arrangement which played down her solemnity and gave her an air of quiet appeal. Jeanne gave her simple but appealing gowns and Suzanne became softer, more womanly. Jeanne's practiced eye noted Morin's growing interest. She said nothing but was secretly de-

lighted; give him time, she thought, and when Suzanne asks my advice, as she surely will, I shall know what to say.

Jeanne arranged for a moderate income to be paid every year to Guillaume du Barry, but she stipulated that he must consent to a legal separation and never attempt to see her. To dispose of the Roué was not so easy. His demands for money grew so exorbitant that at last she summoned him to Louveciennes, considering it a more discreet meeting place than Versailles. His carriage rolled up the linden-bordered drive and she repressed a smile as his familiar figure approached the doorway. The Roué wore a frock coat embroidered on the sleeves with gold frogs, and in his hand he twirled the inevitable gold-headed cane.

She received him in the foyer and he bowed with an exaggerated flourish. "Ho! My dear!" He glanced at her quizzically and Jeanne knew the mocking smile would follow. "Two full years since last I saw you, and you are even more beautiful."

"Don't flatter me; we know each other too well. But tell me" —she could not repress the question—"am I still appealing, really?"

The Roué's smile vanished. "I am serious, Jeanne; you grow more lovely with the years. His Majesty is a fortunate man." He heard the patter of feet behind him and turned to see Zamor glaring at him with open jealousy. "Ho!" He chuckled and burst into his boisterous laugh. "What bejeweled ape is this?" He surveyed the scowling boy and turned back to Jeanne, who led the way into the library.

The Roué stooped to adjust the silver buckle of his shoe and Zamor crept up and bit him ferociously on his firm backside. "*Sacré Dieu!*" The Roué roared with pain. "*Diable!* What kind of brown beast is this you keep?" He straightened and swung his cane at Zamor, who gave a high-pitched whinny and fled. "He sounds like a foal, and he bites like one as well." The Roué rubbed the seat of his trousers.

He and Jeanne talked for over an hour. She tried earnestly to convince him that the Treasury was depleted and to make him

understand that her resources were not inexhaustible. She mentioned the vast expenses of her household, the sum she paid his brother, and the money she had spent on Anne and Rancon. She had bought them a comfortable house in Passy, complete with servants and a carriage. "But you," she concluded, "demand more than all of them. There must be a limit!"

The Roué crossed his knees and idly swung his silk-clad leg. He did not speak at once, and Jeanne guessed from his abstracted expression that he was calculating the maximum income to support his lavish scale of living. The motion of his leg halted and he stood up. "Your frankness makes matters clear enough, my dear. I understand now and I shall be satisfied to accept fifty thousand livres a year."

"Only fifty thousand?" Her voice was tinged with light sarcasm.

"Ho! That is the minimum for my poor needs." He wagged his head dolefully. "Grant me that and you have my word I shall leave you to your royal luxuries and your beautiful Louveciennes." His appraising glance swept the richly gilded room. "It is little enough to ask as a return on our partnership. I told you years ago we had a splendid future, you and I. Together we have turned that future into the present."

"Very well." Jeanne spoke resignedly. "Fifty thousand, but not one sou more. And," she added, "I fancy we shall not have many occasions to meet in the future."

As he prepared to leave Jeanne thought how pleased he looked. Well, she asked herself, why shouldn't he be pleased? For the rest of his life he would have enough money to indulge without stint his wenching and his gambling. No more vexations for him, while I—I must guard unceasingly against my enemies. She felt no bitterness for the Roué; on the contrary. She looked at him with no illusions and realized for the first time how much he had aged. Why—he must be nearing fifty! She felt a pang of compassion. He was a scoundrel, but a lovable scoundrel and he had only behaved in the way she had always known he would.

"Adieu." She held out her hand. A gentle smile played about her lips and her eyes were soft as they gazed directly into his. The Roué colored, suddenly moved by an unfamiliar feeling of embarrassment. For a moment he was no longer the debonair boastful man she had known. The mocking smile was absent as he kissed her hand.

"Yes, I know. This time it is really adieu. But if you need me, Jeanne, if trouble ever threatens, I shall come to you. Remember that." He turned quickly, grasped his cane, and almost fled through the doorway. He did not regain his swaggering air and customary jaunty stride until he had almost reached his carriage.

Back in her apartments at Versailles she told Suzanne of the agreement she had reached. It was not a subject she wanted to discuss with the King, nor one he would care to hear. Suzanne's thrifty bourgeois mind was outraged. "Your Roué is a *maquereau!* You have already earned him a fortune and now he intends to live off you for the rest of his life!"

"I know," said Jeanne, "but he is an old friend, and I suppose I can afford it."

"It is far more than you allow your mother."

"My mother and Rancon do not have his extravagant tastes. Oh, Suzanne," she cried longingly, "I want to see my mother again; it has been so many months."

The next time the King went hunting Jeanne and Suzanne drove to Passy. It was late summer and the trees were heavy with fruit and foliage as they neared the scattered houses in the country outside Paris. They passed Aux Deux Cerises, where Jeanne had spent the summer days with Colonel Marcien nine years before. Suzanne commented on its secluded rustic charm. "I should like to spend my honeymoon there." She added quickly, "But I shall never have one—who would marry me?"

Jeanne smiled to herself but did not reply, and the carriage came to a bend in the road. "There it is!" she cried, pointing to a small handsome house surrounded by an iron railing.

A servant admitted them to the small *salon* and Anne rushed

in. She threw her arms around her daughter and hugged her fiercely. "Jeanne! I was afraid you had forgotten me."

"Mama!" Jeanne reproved her. "My days are so full I rarely get away—this is Suzanne Picot. Don't you remember how I used to speak of her?" Anne and Suzanne embraced, each recognizing in the other an unselfish love for Jeanne that needed no rivalry on which to feed. "I remember, of course." Anne's voice was warm. "And you wrote me how you found her again! Jeanne is fortunate, Suzanne, to have a friend like you." She motioned them to be seated and Suzanne studied her with interest.

Anne was in her late fifties now but she retained a semblance of her figure and dressed with the same neat care she had always shown. Her hair was gray, her face was lined, and her hands were worn with constant sewing, yet a warm appeal still sparkled in her brown eyes. Suzanne's imagination visualized the seductiveness that had once captivated the males of Vaucouleurs, and she compared mother and daughter as they sat side by side on the sofa.

Both possessed the fascination that attracted men without any conscious effort. Suzanne thought of Morin's laughing eyes and the unnecessary frequency with which he brushed against her—but he must be making sport of her. How could she possibly attract him? She totally lacked the magnetic charm of the women opposite. Suddenly she realized what a vast difference there was between Jeanne and her mother. Both were warm and natural, but Anne was shrewd, experienced, practical, and Suzanne knew she had always been so, while Jeanne's blue eyes still held, at twenty-seven, a look of guileless trust. Suzanne thought again how she had been victimized by the Roué and wondered if Jeanne would always need to be protected from her own generosity. She registered a vow that she would stay with her, always.

She sat pensively while Jeanne's clear voice bubbled on. She was describing the festivities of the Dauphin's wedding and the entrancing freshness of the Dauphine, when Suzanne interrupted. "Madame Rancon, Jeanne is far more beautiful than she."

"No, Suzanne! She is innocent, yet stately; she was brought up an Archduchess."

Anne smiled at the friendly disagreement. "Do you think then I brought you up so badly, *ma petite?*"

"No, mama!" Jeanne was quick in denial. "I didn't mean that; it is only that the Dauphine is so unspoiled."

"Wait," said Anne wisely. "She is still very young. In time the Dauphin may spoil her."

"I don't know." Jeanne's tone was perplexed and she lowered her voice. "The King has told no one but me, but he is greatly concerned; there is no evidence that the Dauphine is *enceinte* —and her wedding was four months ago."

Anne narrowed her eyes. "Strange . . . why?"

Jeanne shrugged. "I tell the King to be patient, that the Dauphin is inexperienced and timid. But it is true that he shows little interest in his wife. He hunts all day, eats an enormous dinner, and promptly goes to bed. He had not spoiled her yet—in any way." Jeanne's laugh was open, untainted by malice.

She went on to tell Anne of the King's gifts to her: the generous annuities, Louveciennes and—enthusiasm carried her away—a precious Bengalese boy called Zamor. Suzanne stirred in her chair but refrained from comment. "So you see how the King spoils me, mama. But that is not why I love him. If he were not the King he would still be the most charming, most handsome man in France."

Anne's smile was meant to indicate agreement, but within her own mind she was reviewing the men Jeanne had known. Lametz had been repulsive, but only a brief annoyance; the Comte de Genlis a fleeting moment of horror—they did not count. But uneasy realization dawned upon her—she hoped it had avoided Jeanne—that Duval, Marcien, the Roué, and Sainte-Foy had all, each in his own way and for varied reasons, abandoned Jeanne. Would the King prolong the disturbing pattern? Would he tire of her, as everyone said he did so easily? Dismiss her? Looking at Jeanne's happy face, Anne prayed she would meet

no more disappointments. She remembered how she had consoled her after Duval's desertion. What had she told her? She searched her memory . . . that someday a real man would love her to distraction and that Jeanne must match his love with equal love. Was King Louis that man? Kissing Jeanne good-by, Anne hoped so.

After the annual sojourn at Fontainebleau the Court returned in mid-November to Versailles. Jeanne sighed with relief when she entered her warm luxurious apartments. Here she felt a measure of protection from the malice and envy that slithered like a winding serpent through the State Apartments below. Smiling perfumed courtiers buzzed and chattered every morning in her anteroom, and after they had made their calculated departure she could unburden herself to Suzanne or converse with the Maréchale, who usually remained to dispense the latest gossip.

Jeanne saw this morning that the veins of rumor were bursting. The Maréchale's eyes were sparkling and the fingers of her right hand drummed on her knee. Straining with impatience she waited until Jeanne had settled before she began, her hand traveling its familiar course across her lap.

"There is good reason why the Dauphine is not a fulfilled wife." Her eyes darted around the room to reassure herself that no one else was present. "The Dauphin has tried, but . . ."

Jeanne listened attentively; this was something the King did not know, or at least had not told her. "Where did you learn that?" she demanded.

The speaker hesitated. "I . . . you must promise not to betray me . . . but I had it from one with unquestionable knowledge . . . the Dauphine's chambermaid."

Jeanne glanced at her with distaste. Suddenly she was sick of this delving prying old woman who relayed the ribald whispers of domestics. "How can you believe such a story from such a source?"

The Maréchale drew herself up as if her honor had been

impugned. "That is not all. More important"—a note of triumph entered her voice—"the Austrian Ambassador has reported to Vienna that the Dauphin suffers from a curious defect which causes great pain when he . . ." she trailed off. "Anyway, the Dauphin will never become a father until he submits to an operation."

"I am sorry for the Dauphin—and the Dauphine too," said Jeanne feelingly. "And now, madame, if you will excuse me . . ."

The Maréchale departed peevishly and Jeanne longed for the hour when the King would come. She warned herself she must not transform Madame de Mirepoix into an enemy; the Maréchale's glib tongue would make her a dangerous foe. She voiced that thought to Suzanne, who remarked that there was nothing to fear and reminded her that the Maréchale's need of Jeanne's friendship was far greater. Jeanne nodded, her thoughts already reverting to the extraordinary developments in the Dauphin's marriage bed. Although the Dauphine had become openly contemptuous of her, she felt only compassion for the young royal pair.

Not one word had Marie Antoinette ever spoken to her. It was painfully clear that someone—hardly her lethargic husband—had explained the precise reason for Jeanne's presence at Court. Probably the King's eldest daughter, and from what Jeanne knew of Madame Adelaide's spitefulness she shuddered. She would be more explicit than Choiseul, who had contented himself merely with saying that Jeanne's function was to amuse the King.

The iron law of precedence forbade Jeanne, the lower in rank, to speak first. Whenever she found herself in the Dauphine's presence she curtsied reverently, trembling with nerves and hoping, praying, for a chance word from the young girl who was the highest ranking woman at Versailles. Jeanne did not ask or expect intimacy—only a kind meaningless phrase which would give her a measure of recognition and respect. But at sight of her the Dauphine's graceful neck would arch haughtily, her blue eyes

grow cold, and she would stare through Jeanne as if she were one of the windows in the *Galerie*. The watching courtiers smirked and Jeanne shivered with humiliation.

The more she brooded the more overwrought she became, and when the King finally appeared she threw herself weeping into his arms. She listed the long succession of snubs which she had endured for months and suggested that the Dauphine's attitude was as much a reflection on him as an insult to herself.

"I know," he said. "I have known all the time, but I tried to ascribe the Dauphine's actions to her youth. I see I shall have to drop a hint to her Mistress of the Robes, and if that does not produce any result there is nothing left except to exert pressure on the Austrian Ambassador. When he reports to the Empress she will write her daughter to acquire some sense—and some manners."

Jeanne's sobs subsided and she nestled against his shoulder. She decided not to mention the Dauphin's medical problem; that was the exclusive affair of the royal family and, unlike the Dauphine's snubs, did not directly concern her. "Louis," she said suddenly, "did you speak to Choiseul as you promised?"

He frowned. "I am displeased with him, and not only because of you. He is almost a deist, and courts popularity with the *Parlement*. But as for you"—he returned to her question—"I have settled that. I have told him you are beautiful and you please me, and that is enough. I ordered him to be agreeable and I added that you wish him no harm."

Jeanne felt a surge of relief; her disagreeable relations with the Minister of War would improve at last. It was an evolution she had longed for, the more so since she had received a disturbing letter a week before from Radix de Sainte-Foy. Strengthened by the King's words she resolved to pay a call upon the Duc de Choiseul.

The next day was surprisingly warm for December and she walked the short distance from the Château to the Ministry of War. She had sent Choiseul a note that she would appear at

eleven, and the clock was striking the hour when she entered his anteroom. The footman who admitted her bowed, and spoke in embarrassed tones. "I regret, Madame la Comtesse . . . His Excellency cannot receive you now . . . he says you may wait, if you care to see him."

If she cared to see him! Jeanne's pulse beat faster and her face flamed with anger. "I shall wait," she said curtly. She tried to calm herself and sat down. Perhaps Choiseul was holding an interview of importance. He supervised Foreign Affairs and the Navy as well as the Ministry of War, and a man as intelligent as he was said to be would surely have a legitimate excuse for keeping the mistress of the King waiting. She sat patiently for half an hour. At last a bell sounded and the footman sprang forward. "This way, madame." He preceded her toward the inner door and with another bow stood aside to let her enter.

Choiseul was seated at the same desk she recognized from her previous visit two years before, the day when he had been choosing a wig. From his casual expression he might have finished doing just that and she noticed in passing that a freshly powdered wig covered his head. He rose in a dilatory manner and bowed slightly. "And what is your pleasure today, Comtesse?" His voice was cool, assured, and a patronizing smile appeared on his lips.

Jeanne remembered the King's assurances and spoke in a confident tone. "A friend of mine—and yours—Monsieur Radix de Sainte-Foy, writes that you have discharged him as Treasurer of the Marine." She smiled as if she knew there were some mistake. "He seems to think his dismissal was caused by his friendship for me." She was being tactful, for Sainte-Foy had flatly stated in his letter that his refusal to incriminate her had caused his downfall. "I merely ask that you restore him to his post."

Choiseul's eyes were cold but his smile had become disconcertingly charming. "Madame, you are always pleading for others who are unworthy of you. Do you never plead for yourself?"

Jeanne felt her anger returning. "I plead for my friends, monsieur, because they are dear to me and because I thought

you had come to your senses. If I had cause to plead for myself there is only one man in France to whom I would go—and it is not you." She held her head high and looked at him steadily. His smile faded and he rubbed the end of his pug nose.

"I regret exceedingly, Comtesse, but Monsieur de Sainte-Foy's post has already been filled, and he deludes himself and flatters you to write that his friendship with you caused his dismissal. Why should it?" He assumed a guileless smile. "I was not aware that you concerned yourself with matters of State."

"And I was not aware that you are so stupid!" Jeanne burst out. How could this man's conceit blind his intelligence, she asked herself furiously, and how could he be so fatuous—treating her with such contempt? Either he thought himself indispensable or she a fool, or both. "Will you never grant my requests?" she persisted.

Choiseul shrugged. "That depends upon their merits."

Jeanne walked to the door. She turned and her blue eyes surveyed him with a coldness none of her friends would have recognized. "Adieu, Monsieur de Choiseul; I think *ce-pays-ci* will not see you much longer." Her last memory of him as he returned to his desk was the expression of smug disbelief on his face.

While Jeanne recounted her interview with Choiseul the King sat impassively, his eyes expressionless. Only the yellowish tinge of his face betrayed his fury. When she finished he was silent, staring out the window at the Marble Court below. Finally he spoke, his voice low, determined. "Do not upset yourself, my dear. My patience has ended, but allow me time to dismiss him in my own way. He smiled as though Choiseul were already gone. "And your friend Sainte-Foy shall have back his post, I promise you." He kissed her and walked out as if he shouldered no problems, no cares.

Jeanne knew that the King's mind, once made up, would never change, but she also knew how intensely he disliked unpleasant scenes and she wondered what he would say in dismissing the man who had been his chief Minister for over ten years. She

did not refer to the subject again but when nearly two weeks passed she concluded that the King had postponed his unpleasant task until after the New Year. She put Choiseul out of her mind and occupied herself ordering suits for Zamor, who was growing so fast he already needed new clothes for the holidays.

On Christmas Eve Jeanne gave a supper party, for which the King had drawn up the list. In addition to Richelieu and the Maréchale there were the Duc and Duchesse d'Aiguillon, the elderly Comtesse de Béarn, and the Marquis de Chauvelin, to whom the King was devoted. Chauvelin was a few years younger than the sovereign and his merry wit was an unfailing source of amusement. This was the first time Jeanne had used her own dining room for more than four; usually the suppers were held in the Little Apartments. She was naturally anxious that every detail be perfect. Suzanne had driven the maids to remove the last speck of dust and Morin had trained the footmen who would serve. All was ready, and the Sèvres plates, *bleu du roi* in honor of the King, shone in the soft candlelight.

After they had taken their places the King, to the right of Jeanne, tapped on his goblet with his knife. They fell silent and he arose, motioning for them to remain seated. "This day, December 24, 1770, I have dispatched the following to the Duc de Choiseul." He took a paper from his pocket and began to read: "The discontent caused me by your services forces me to exile you to your estate, where you will proceed within twenty-four hours. Send me your Seals of Office, and take care not to offend me further. May God protect you in His holy keeping. Louis."

The King's glance swept his companions. Their expressions ranged from incredulous delight to utter stupefaction. The King, a master of secrets, had kept this one well. Only Jeanne had known his intention, but she was surprised at the timing. The Maréchale, priding herself on her omniscience, sat stunned and a shadow of regret crossed her countenance, for she had once been friendly with Choiseul during the reign of the Pompadour.

Even Richelieu, so intimate with the King in personal matters, had not suspected the impasse which had developed between him and his once-favored Minister. A calculating glint shown in his small eyes and he was about to speak when the merry Chauvelin broke the silence.

"*Sacrébleu!* Sire, you have sent Ptolemy a fine Christmas greeting." At the mention of the nickname all Paris called Choiseul, in allusion to his unnatural love for his sister, everyone burst out laughing, even the Maréchale. The tension was broken.

"Come, Chauvelin," said the King with an attempt at sternness, but still laughing. "That is a canard and you know it; but anything else you say about Choiseul I will agree with."

Richelieu glanced slyly across the table at his nephew d'Aiguillon, and addressed the King. "Sire, may one ask who will succeed Monsieur de Choiseul?"

The King's eyes twinkled and he turned to Jeanne. "Perhaps the Comtesse has a nominee."

Jeanne felt everyone's glance upon her. She was relieved that her enemy had fallen but when she spoke there was no gloating in her voice. "Monsieur de Choiseul was his own enemy and he has brought his disgrace upon himself. Sire, you have greater knowledge of your statesmen than I, but can you find one with more loyalty and honor than Monsieur d'Aiguillon?"

An excited murmur filled the small room. Richelieu's smile was one of triumphant satisfaction and the Duc d'Aiguillon threw Jeanne a look of gratitude, while his wife's eyes filled with happy tears. The King sat down and leaning forward, said: "Duc d'Aiguillon, the Comtesse has read my mind and has spoken the choice which I had already made. You are now my Minister."

The Duc pushed back his chair, came around the table, and knelt before the King. His strong face was resolute and his voice was firm. "Sire, I swear undying loyalty to your commands." As he rose his eyes sought Jeanne's and their message was clear: *I swear loyalty to you also, Comtesse du Barry.*

Jeanne signaled Morin to begin serving and the dozing Com-

tesse de Béarn roused herself. "*Grace à Dieu!* I am starved!" They were the first words she had spoken, and her ill-fitting teeth rattled. As each of the supper's eight courses was served the company grew more animated. There was no further mention of statecraft. Everyone was in merry humor and Chauvelin fed their hilarity with his malicious imitations of the misogynous King of Prussia.

Jeanne, pleased with the perfection of her dinner and happy at d'Aiguillon's elevation, drank six glasses of champagne, far more than was her wont. She was not alone in her festive mood; the Comtesse de Béarn dozed off again after three glasses but the others, with the exception of the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, drank more than Jeanne and by midnight everyone was tipsy, even the King.

When he gave the signal to depart they all filed out through the anteroom. The King alone remained. "I know Suzanne was waiting for them to leave," he said considerately, "so she can go to bed. She is a fine girl, your Suzanne. I do not mind her presence anymore than I would that of a dog or a cat." Jeanne giggled at the analogy; she knew it was the King's way of saying he could relax in front of Suzanne.

"She worships you, Louis—and so do I." She threw her arms around his neck, and hiccoughed. The King stared at her in amazement. "You drank a lot of champagne—are you well?"

"Of course." She giggled again. "It is only that I am so happy. Are you staying?"

He hesitated. "No, I too have had enough. We both need sleep, and that I can find more readily in my own bed." He smiled mischievously. "One more thing to make you happy, and I shall go. The Dauphine knows that I am displeased, and she has promised to speak to you at her New Year's reception." He kissed Jeanne good night, walked across the rug and disappeared through the door hidden in the wall.

In spite of the late hour Jeanne was not sleepy. The excitement of the evening had stimulated her and she wanted to talk to

someone. She tiptoed into the anteroom to see if Suzanne was awake, but she had already fallen asleep on the small makeshift bed which during daylight hours was hidden in the alcove. Jeanne turned in mute disappointment and was startled to hear a clatter in the hallway outside. Who can that be making such a noise, she wondered; they will wake Suzanne. Morin and the other servants had gone, so she walked softly to the door and opened it. She peered inquisitively into the dimly lit passage and a man's deep voice came from the shadows. "Pardon, madame, if I disturbed you with my clumsiness, but I am unfamiliar with this part of the Château and I dropped my sword."

"Who are you?" Jeanne's heart was beating fast.

"I am the Duc de Brissac. I am the new commander of the Hundred Swiss, and I am lodged above you in the attic."

"Oh yes, monsieur." Jeanne relaxed; there was no cause for alarm. She remembered the King had said several days ago that the new commander of his personal bodyguard would assume his post on Christmas Eve. He mentioned that the Duc de Brissac bore one of the greatest names in France, and had added teasingly that he was far too handsome to lodge above Jeanne. "Monsieur le Duc," she said, "come closer, that I may see you."

The Duc de Brissac stepped into the lighted doorway and Jeanne focused her gaze upon him. Her eyes widened; she had never seen a man so tall. In his white breeches and red coat with blue facings he seemed a giant. He had the body of an athlete and she could see the muscles rippling beneath his tight-fitting uniform. She thought with a quick flash of contempt that there was no man like this among the effete courtiers, except perhaps the King. He too kept his body hard with exercise—but of course the King was much older than Brissac. Involuntarily her hand went to the bodice of her décolleté gown and she toyed absently with the diamond pendant which dangled above her breasts.

"I know who you are, Comtesse. I have heard your beauty praised, but what I heard was not enough."

Jeanne looked at him searchingly. Was he being ironical, inwardly sneering at her low origin and her dubious position? No, she decided—this man with the face of a Norseman was incapable of guile. He would say what he thought, directly, simply, or he would say nothing.

"You are gallant, monsieur." She laughed merrily. "But I like gallantry and it is reassuring to have a man so stalwart sleeping above me to guard His Majesty." She realized that the champagne had loosened her tongue and she blushed. The Duc de Brissac was watching her gravely but his blue eyes were warm with tenderness.

"Good night, monsieur." Jeanne spoke quickly and held out her hand. Brissac brushed it with his lips, and she trembled. "Good night, Comtesse; God keep you." He moved away, surprisingly agile for so powerful a man, and she heard his footsteps on the stairway leading to the attic.

She closed the anteroom door and leaned against it. She felt dizzy. "I shall never take too much wine again," she said aloud. "It makes me foolish." She undressed without disturbing Suzanne and climbed into her silk-hung bed. Footsteps sounded in the attic above and she could not erase from her mind the image of the Duc de Brissac.

So manly he was, and so handsome. Had she not known who he was she would have thought him a Swede. His hair was as blond as her own and his eyes, widely spaced in his tawny face, were the gray-blue color of northern skies. What an odd remark he had made! *God keep you!* Trying to chase the whirling thoughts from her heated brain she sat up, all at once overcome with emotion.

She forced herself to face the alarming truth: when the Duc de Brissac kissed her hand she had experienced a surge of physical longing such as she had not known since the days when she was in love with Charles Duval. But her first lover had been only a handsome boy and this was a man, virile and compelling. She put

her hand to her cheek. If it were not for the King . . . but nonsense! The King was her life and she loved him. Still . . . that need not prevent her from being on terms of friendship with the Duc de Brissac.

CHAPTER TEN

ITEM: Dog collar, consisting of sixteen linked diamonds.

On New Year's Day Jeanne, accompanied by the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, went to the Dauphine's apartments. The great white and gold chamber was crowded, and as they entered there was momentary silence. A wave of speculation and rumor had raced through the Royal Château and the courtiers, inveterate gamblers, had made wagers on whether the proud young Dauphine would unbend and speak to the King's mistress.

Jeanne, in full court dress and with her golden hair lightly powdered, trembled with anticipation. At last she was to have the promised word from Marie Antoinette, the vital recognition that she was a lady of the Court with intimate access to the King. No longer would she be treated by the Dauphine as if she were a harlot from the streets, no more need she endure the patronizing smiles of malicious courtiers.

She was approaching Marie Antoinette and the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, her own position already assured, gave her an encouraging smile. Now she was directly in front of the Dauphine and she sank to the floor in a full curtsy. She rose and looked eagerly at Marie Antoinette, who was pale with agitation. She murmured a greeting to the Duchesse and glanced at Jeanne, who stood waiting. The moment was here, now—at last. The Dauphine, her blue eyes flashing with anger, took a deep breath and opened her mouth.

At that precise moment the expectant hush was shattered by Madame Adelaide's strident voice. "Come," she shouted, seizing the Dauphine's arm, "we will go and wait for the King at my sister Victoire's." The Dauphine, overcome with confusion, threw a startled glance around her and fled with her husband's aunt, leaving Jeanne abandoned in the center of the room. She fought to keep back her tears and the Duchesse d'Aiguillon took her arm and led her through the door.

She did not clearly remember returning through the interminable *Galerie des Glaces* to her apartments. Hurrying up the narrow stairs she turned her ankle, but at the moment hardly realized it. Suzanne and her maids undressed her and when the King appeared she was in bed, her sprained ankle already swelling and her tear-stained face buried among the pillows.

"Louis!" She looked up at him and burst into fresh sobs, again hiding her face. The King softly stroked her trembling shoulder. When he spoke his voice was harsh with anger. "The Dauphine listens to the wrong advice and Madame Adelaide has an undue influence on her. I shall summon the Empress' Ambassador and you will see that I am in deadly earnest over these slights to you."

Jeanne summoned a faint smile. She knew tears made the King uncomfortable and she attempted to shrug away the Dauphine's conduct. "Don't fret yourself over me, Louis. I am not so important."

"But I am!" he replied. "And her rudeness is a slight to my wishes. You know what befell Choiseul."

Jeanne moved her foot and grimaced with pain. A look of concern crossed the King's face. "I shall send one of La Martinière's assistants to bind your ankle and until you can walk I shall come every day." She almost reminded him that he intended to dismiss the *Parlement* tomorrow but checked herself, thinking he would undoubtedly carry out his plan and come to her later. But to her surprise he appeared the next morning. She was sitting in a bergère, her bandaged ankle supported on a stool. "Louis! Why aren't you in Paris?"

"I said I would come every day to stay with you. Much as I detest the *Parlement,* and anxious as I am to rid myself of those babbling lawyers, I shall defer it until you are entirely healed." Now I know he loves me, Jeanne thought. Never before, even for her, had the King foregone anything he wanted to do, yet here he was postponing the longed-for dismissal of the *Parlement* merely because she was in discomfort. I am foolish to worry about the Dauphine; this is sure proof the King loves me for myself and not merely the pleasure I give him.

"Well then, your contentious *Parlement* has two weeks more of life," she laughed, "for that is how long the doctor orders me to remain off my ankle." She did not understand the complexities of the King's quarrel with the *Parlement* of Paris but she knew that he loathed it and she tried to draw him out. "Don't concern your beautiful head with those insolent factions," he told her. "They want a limited monarchy and I would prefer to be dead than see that; my great-great-grandfather in England lost his head by being too lenient with his Parliament." The King was showing signs of irritation at the distasteful subject and Jeanne was relieved when Morin announced the Austrian Ambassador.

The King brightened as Count Mercy-Argenteau entered. The diplomat bowed first to the King and then with exaggerated courtesy to Jeanne. She smiled in acknowledgment but said nothing, letting the King speak. "Monsieur de Mercy," he began affably, "you act with finesse as the Ambassador of Her Imperial Majesty the Empress Maria Theresa. I shall ask you to act for a period as mine." The Ambassador bowed again. "Sire, anything I can do to strengthen the ties between yourself and my august mistress, I shall do."

The King talked earnestly for nearly half an hour, referring to the Dauphine's youth and her susceptibility to ill-intentioned advice. His words were circuitous but the experienced diplomat was fully aware of his intended meaning and realized with dismay that the Alliance itself might be destroyed by the stubbornness of the

Dauphine. He promised fervently to write at once to Vienna. "When you do," the King suggested, "say to the Empress that the Comtesse du Barry is as enchanting as you see her now and that she asks only ordinary courtesy from the Dauphine. And say further"—he slowed to give his words greater emphasis—"that France is not indifferent to the fate of Poland." The Ambassador withdrew, his countenance still impassive but noticeably pale beneath his rouged cheeks. When the door closed the King nodded with satisfaction and placed his hand on Jeanne's. "It may take some months but we shall have results, especially from my last remark. The Empress is about to annex one third of Poland and she must have my support."

By the end of the month Jeanne's sprained ankle had decreased to its normal size and she resumed her varied activities at Court. The King in a haughty message ordered the members of *Parlement* to disband, and those who refused to obey were arrested. When he told Jeanne she saw with pride that he had never been so forceful. He was sure of himself, quietly triumphant, and she wondered how critics dared say he was a weak ruler. "This is a splendid event," he commented, "and the King of Sweden's visit next month is a timely occasion to celebrate it."

The dinner for Gustav III was held at Louveciennes instead of Versailles, for the young Swedish monarch was traveling incognito as the Count of Gothland. When King Louis presented Jeanne to him she found herself gazing at a slender blond whose refined features were indefinably elusive. He restrained her from curtsying. "No, Comtesse, I have little rank before beauty such as yours." When he smiled a look of soft charm came over his face and his pale eyes shone with interest. He presented his aides, two husky Scandinavians with fair coloring like his own. They spoke no French and he said a few words to them in their own guttural tongue. They glanced at each other, smiled knowingly, and bowed to Jeanne.

At dinner she sat between the French King and the King of

Sweden. He refused to allow the Swiss Guards who were serving the other guests to attend him, insisting that his two stalwart Swedes stand behind his chair. "They seem devoted, Sire," said Jeanne. "Do they always remain so close to you?"

A wary expression flitted across his countenance. "Yes, they honor me with their affection and therefore I indulge them." He looked at Jeanne and she was pleased at the admiration in his eyes. And yet . . . odd, she thought he has a look I have never seen. Admiration—she was sure of that, but intuition warned that he admired her as an exquisite ornament rather than a warm living woman.

She turned to say something to the King and when she looked back to her royal guest from the north she was astounded. The King of Sweden was oblivious of her. His blue eyes were fixed with inconceivable intensity on the virile figure of the Duc de Brissac, who sat opposite. Brissac was utterly unaware of the rapt gaze, and Jeanne watched the curious scene with incredulous comprehension. Now she understood the impersonal quality of the admiring glance King Gustav had cast at her—the gaze he was directing across the table was not impersonal at all.

He colored faintly when he realized that she was studying him, and then he smiled, a smile so frankly confiding that she warmed to him as though he were a small mischievous boy. He immediately began an animated conversation and his remarks, delivered in faultless French, were so laced with brittle wit that everyone within hearing was convulsed with laughter. Jeanne was delighted with the cordial atmosphere he created, but she observed that the young Swedish monarch was careful to glance no more at the Duc de Brissac.

Afterward there was a ballet to the melodic strains of Piccini, and the hour was late when they prepared to return to Versailles. King Gustav walked with a light graceful step across the foyer to thank her. "Comtesse, I shall depart for my own frozen country in a few days, but the memory of this evening will warm me for

many months. May I come someday to Louveciennes again?" They looked at each other with unspoken understanding before Jeanne replied. "Always, Sire—whenever you deign to return."

He beckoned to one of his robust aides, who brought a case of tawny deerhide and presented it to Jeanne with an awkward flourish. She opened the lid and the fire of sixteen large diamonds flamed and coruscated in the light shed by the girandoles. "Sire! You have given me a treasure! But what is it?"

"Yes, *mon cousin,*" added King Louis, who had joined them. "What is it indeed? It is too large for a bracelet, and I have never seen a necklace fashioned in such a way."

King Gustav laughed. "But it is a necklace, or rather it is a collar, a dog collar."

"A dog collar!" Jeanne repeated excitedly. "How droll! You have great originality, Sire."

"Originality!" grumbled the King afterward, when they were alone in the coach rolling toward Versailles. "My cousin of Sweden's country is bankrupt, he comes to France for subsidies, and then he proceeds to spend who knows how many thousands for a bauble!" Jeanne smiled in the darkness. She knew the cost of the diamond trinket was not the real reason for his irritation; she realized with joy that he was jealous. She drew her furs closer around her and pressed against him. The King was less easy to understand than most men, but tonight his feelings were remarkably transparent. She could have told him that he would never have cause to be jealous of the King of Sweden, but prudence stopped her. The King would hardly be tolerant of what she had divined at the dinner table. She stroked the deerhide case with one gloved hand and sought the King's arm with the other.

When she reached Versailles Suzanne was waiting up, although it was nearly three o'clock. As Jeanne passed through the anteroom she rubbed the mole over her eyebrow. It was their signal that the King would not be climbing the hidden stairway,

and Suzanne followed her into her bedroom. Jeanne showed her the sparkling dog collar. Suzanne had grown accustomed to the sight of Jeanne's fabulous possessions but she stared in wonder at this preposterous fortune in diamonds. "And you don't even have a dog!" she exclaimed factually.

"I don't want a dog! I agree with the King, who says a dog belongs outdoors. Besides, I want a more exotic animal—a marmoset could wear His Swedish Majesty's collar with equal aplomb."

Suzanne removed the pointed high-heeled shoes, unlaced the tightly corseted waist, and Jeanne breathed with relief. "I am exhausted, and freezing too." She climbed into bed and motioned Suzanne to sit by her side. "Why did you wait up in the cold? Something must have happened—you look like a pleased doe."

Suzanne blushed. "Yes. Jeanne, I never dreamed it could happen to me!"

"What?" Jeanne raised up, an unlikely suspicion creeping into her mind.

"I am in love!" exclaimed Suzanne. "And better yet, he is in love with me!"

"Are you only now discovering that?" Jeanne relaxed and gave Suzanne a tender smile. "I have known that a long time. One look at you and Morin is enough; even the King has noticed it."

Suzanne looked abashed. "I don't know much about love, Jeanne; I did not know it was so obvious."

"Love—real love—is always obvious. Does Morin want to marry you?"

"He says he does. And I want him to, so much. Do you think I should marry him?" She looked at Jeanne with childlike appeal.

"Suzanne! Don't be a goose! Of course you will marry him, and I shall arrange your wedding. Now go to bed; Morin won't find you so appealing if you have a cold tomorrow." Suzanne returned to her cot in the anteroom and Jeanne fell asleep with a smile on her lips. She dreamed that she was in the Jardin des Plantes

improbably pursuing an unknown man who hid himself behind a shrub. She crept nearer, hoping to discover his identity, and suddenly he emerged. It was the Duc de Brissac.

Suzanne and Morin were married on a mild April day in the chapel at Louveciennes. Jeanne was present as a witness and Anne and Rancon came from Passy. Obviously the King was not there, but he sent Suzanne a dowry of one thousand livres and paid for Morin's wedding suit. The clear-eyed handsome valet made a fine figure as he stood beside his bride.

Jeanne had given Suzanne her trousseau and a single modest diamond which was suspended on a chain around her neck. Although Suzanne appeared shy she was imbued with a quiet radiance. After the ceremony Jeanne embraced her and Suzanne whispered, "I have only now discovered that he is a year younger than I!" Her voice trembled with alarm.

"Twenty-eight then, the same as I." Jeanne hugged her encouragingly. "You *must* be more confident. You make a lovely bride and nothing matters except that he loves you. What has love to do with chronology?"

After the married pair departed Jeanne remained to arrange with the priest for Zamor's baptism the next day. As Suzanne and her husband had gone to spend their first week together at Aux Deux Cerises, only Jeanne was with Zamor for his induction into Christianity. He wore a red velvet suit with gold buttons and on his head, in place of the usual white turban, was a cockaded hat. Jeanne had decided that the turban was hardly appropriate for this occasion. She stood in the small chapel and watched with emotion as the kindly old priest annointed Zamor's neck and temples and sprinkled the Holy Water on his wavy dark hair. "I baptize thee Louis Benoit Zamor, in the Name of . . ." Jeanne could not help contrasting this scene with the nuptial Mass that had been celebrated yesterday before the same altar.

Perhaps it was fortunate that Suzanne was not present at the

ceremony. At times she suspected that Suzanne did not entirely approve of Zamor. What could it be? Jeanne looked thoughtfully at the dark face, not so cherubic now. Its roundness was gradually elongating and the lower lip showed signs of pendulousness. Even the childish nose seemed to be altering; there was the hint of a flare in the nostrils.

She signed the register as Zamor's godmother, gave some money to the priest, and taking Zamor by the hand led him to the waiting coach. "His Majesty will be pleased that you are now a Christian," she said, squeezing his arm affectionately. His dark eyes flickered, then resumed their opaque stare. "Yes, madame."

She wished that as he grew older his high thin voice would modulate, but quickly reproached herself; it was not the poor child's fault. "Zamor, look at me!" The brown face gazed at her expressionlessly and a feeling of near panic came over her. She could not fathom this boy's thoughts: was the gleam in those liquid eyes one of love and trust, or contempt and dislike? "Zamor," she persisted, "do you really love me?"

"Yes, madame." His affirmation sounded like the shrill neigh of a colt. He hugged her fiercely. "And most of all when you are alone with me."

Jeanne was touched by his display of affection. "And you are happy?" There was a pause, almost imperceptible, before the reply came; Zamor was staring out the coach window. "Yes, madame—I am happy."

Zamor had said he was happy; Jeanne *knew* she was. The next two years sped by as carelessly untroubled as Jeanne herself. The King's infatuation deepened, and if she had possessed the Pompadour's craving for power she could have ruled France. But she was content for the Duc d'Aiguillon, always attentive to her interests, to manage the affairs of State. All she asked was to be happy with the King and to enjoy her luxurious life.

Her vexations had disappeared. The Roué kept his bargain

reasonably well, for him. Only once had he demanded an extra sum of money, five thousand livres to settle his losses on horse racing in the Bois. Even the stubbornness of the Dauphine was broken. Marie Antoinette had finally spoken to the Comtesse du Barry. It had taken the passage of an entire year, the growing displeasure of the King, and a stream of frantic admonitory letters from the alarmed Empress in Vienna to soften Marie Antoinette's haughty determination.

But at her reception on New Year's Day of 1772, the anniversary of the public snub which had left Jeanne shaking with humiliation, the Dauphine gave in. The setting was the same—the actors were the same—only the ending of the play was different. Once more Jeanne, accompanied by the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, approached the Dauphine. Marie Antoinette murmured a greeting to the Duchesse before turning her head ever so slightly in Jeanne's direction. "There are many people at Versailles today," she said, her voice agitated and unsteady, her eyes glazed and cold. Jeanne curtsied and when she rose the Dauphine had already moved away. But the words had been uttered, seven of them, by which the future Queen recognized the official existence at Court of the King's mistress.

The victory was Jeanne's, but it was a victory which made her uneasy and she did not press it. After all, the King was sixty-two and a stroke or a severe fall from his horse could usher in a new reign. *Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette.* Jeanne trembled at the thought. The Dauphine had spoken, but Jeanne knew in her heart that she would never forgive her.

The next visit of the Maréchale confirmed her fears. The aging gossip tried to repress her excitement and assume a look of commiseration but the attempt failed ludicrously. Her eyes were snapping and her hand hopping on her knees as she related her tidbit. "*Zut!* The Dauphine said this morning at her toilette that she had spoken to you once to please the King and the Empress, but that never again would you hear the sound of her voice."

Jeanne had no intention of being provoked into a remark which, if repeated—and inevitably it would be—might further inflame the Dauphine's resentment. She merely smiled. "That is clearly Madame la Dauphine's privilege." The Maréchale looked crestfallen. The point, Jeanne was thinking, was that Marie Antoinette *had* spoken to her. That was enough; Jeanne resolved henceforth to forget the issue and pursue her own pleasant life.

The year, begun so auspiciously, rushed by in a cloud of fanciful and luxurious entertainments—*Fêtes Champêtres,* balls, elegant suppers, and frenzied gambling. Time dealt lightly with Jeanne as the year of her thirtieth birthday approached; her acquaintances and, more credibly, her mirror told her that she was even more radiantly beautiful than when Versailles had first seen her five years before.

The King too seemed amazingly impervious to age. That same year, 1773, Drouais painted his portrait. Although it was a faithful reproduction of his likeness he looked far less than sixty-three. His figure was still trim and firm. Beneath his powdered wig his face showed handsome maturity, not the weariness of an aging man. His dark eyes held a remarkably sweet expression—the same expression, Jeanne noted approvingly, that she had seen so many times in their intimate hours together.

In the last week of September, just before the annual pilgrimage to Fontainebleau, Jeanne gave a sumptuous supper at Louveciennes to mark the completion of the *Pavillon.* Ledoux's masterpiece had taken nearly four years to build, but when Jeanne saw it she said to the King that the time had been well spent. Tonight there were twenty guests who commented with surprise and wonder as they passed through the white marble vestibule into the grand salon. Mirrors in two small adjoining salons reflected and enhanced the scene of intimate elegance. Three silver epergnes filled with fruit and flowers occupied the center of the table, each supported by four columns and surmounted by a domed golden canopy.

Jeanne nodded toward the musicians and they began a lilting air as members of the Hundred Swiss began to serve the elaborate meal. In their booted white breeches, red coats faced with blue, and tricorne hats adorned with white piping they added a stirring martial note. She speculated, as she had done many times, about the father she had never known, who had been among the Hundred Swiss when her King was still a young man.

She turned to the Duc de Brissac, who was seated beside her. She had seen him casually nearly every day since their first meeting. Always he was courteous and respectful, but reserved, and always he left her with a feeling of restlessness. She wondered if he were conscious of his effect upon her. Probably not; it was obvious that he worshipped the King, and there could be no thought on either side of any relationship other than mutual liking. Still . . .

"Monsieur de Brissac," she ventured, "are all soldiers as quiet as you?"

He turned his blond head and looked at her, the hint of a twinkle in his gray-blue eyes. Never had he seen so beautiful a woman. She was dressed in pale rose and wore diamond earrings and a pendant which dropped between her breasts. She had been wearing a similar pendant, he remembered, when he had first seen her, half frightened and half tipsy, peering from her doorway. He smiled at the recollection.

"Not always so quiet, Comtesse, but I am not graced with the wit of a courtier—like Monsieur de Richelieu." He gestured across the table where Richelieu, enveloped in the scent of musk, was whispering to the merry Chauvelin. Both were shaking with laughter. "When the King of Prussia took me prisoner at Rosbach," Brissac resumed, "he expressed astonishment that a Frenchman could be so dull."

"A plague upon the King of Prussia!" countered Jeanne indignantly. "He is not so witty as he supposes, writing his ill-tempered inferior verses." She was thinking that Brissac's manly

lack of wit and malice was one of his most appealing traits. Rosbach . . . the name struck a long-forgotten chord; she hesitated.

"I had a friend once, long ago, who lost a leg at Rosbach. . . . His name was Colonel Marcien."

"Colonel Marcien! He commanded my regiment—a fine soldier, a fine man!"

Jeanne debated whether to change the subject, but after all, it was she who had brought it up. Her thoughts were diverted by a wild yell and through one of the paneled doors dashed Zamor, dressed as a jungle savage. Jeanne had forewarned her guests and they burst into warm applause at the sight of his authentic appearance. A red feather was in his greasy hair and he was naked except for a calico loincloth. Daubs of blue paint were smeared on his face and body and around his wrists and ankles were silver bracelets. A necklace of colored glass beads circled his neck. He pranced around the table brandishing a carved wooden club and uttering shrill cries which were meant to be bloodcurdling. "An Indian from Canada!" cried the Maréchale.

"If that is so," said Richelieu slyly, "we are well rid of it to the English."

The King frowned at the reference to France's lost empire and Jeanne wanted to slap Richelieu's sarcastic face. She hastily explained to the King that Zamor had agreed to imitate a savage if she promised that he would never again have to dress in bizarre costumes. "He is doing this for me against his will, Louis," she whispered. "He is growing up and wants to be considered a Frenchman."

Although the King was smiling at Zamor's antics, he agreed. "I cannot blame him, at that; he has feelings, and he is too old now to be treated as a toy."

Jeanne had a feeling of misgiving. She called Zamor and offered him sugared almonds and glacéed fruit. As he took the dish she was dismayed at the burning resentment in his eyes. He was

about to leave when Richelieu's dry voice held him. "Zamor—wait! Your brother is here!"

He signaled to a lackey in the alcove and the man stepped forward leading Jeanne's pet marmoset on a leash. The small bushy-tailed monkey was a grotesque replica of Zamor. It too pranced with tiny shrill cries, wore a loincloth of calico, and anklets and bracelets of silver. But the capering animal's necklace outshone Zamor's, for its simian neck was not adorned with glass beads but with the King of Sweden's diamond dog collar.

Everyone except Jeanne burst out laughing at the absurd travesty. Even the Swiss had difficulty retaining their military decorum. The Maréchale laughed so hard one of her earrings dropped on the floor, and Chauvelin was purple with mirth. He looks as if he might have a stroke, thought Jeanne angrily. She was furious, and as she saw Richelieu's cynical smile she guessed the truth. She knew that one of his grooms was the lover of the maid who had charge of her jewels. It would have been simple for him to obtain the collar, and everyone knew that the marmoset was kept in her alcove. Doubtless Richelieu only intended to be amusing, but his sense of humor was twisted beyond her comprehension.

She turned to look at Zamor standing behind her. His eyes were deep pits of hatred. He breathed heavily and foam flecked his thick lower lip. Brissac stretched out a compassionate hand to soothe him and with a whimpering groan Zamor bit him savagely on the finger. "I hate you all," he screamed. He was still holding the dish of sweets and he hurled it to the floor. "And most of all I hate *you!*" He glared at Jeanne and her heart froze. With a high sobbing sound Zamor turned and ran from the salon; the tiny marmoset, frightened by the uproar, snapped its leash and jumped onto Jeanne's lap, adding the glitter of the diamond collar to the stones she was already wearing.

A pall of strained silence enveloped the company that had been so merry a moment before. A footman brought water for Brissac

to cleanse his hand. Seeing Jeanne's distressed expression he smiled. "It is only a trifle, Comtesse. It will take more than a child's bite to kill me."

"Zamor is not really so bad," said Jeanne. "When he gets over his embarrassment he will be sorry for what he did. Anyway, it is all my fault." But she did not believe it was her fault, and she told the King what had happened. The King's face clouded with displeasure.

"*Son Excellence!*" His voice was harsh. "I think your trick a poor one. It ill becomes you to mar the Comtesse's first supper in her new *Pavillon.*"

Richelieu shrank beneath his sovereign's reproof. "I regret my gaucherie, Sire—permit me to offer my apologies."

"Not to me—to the Comtesse!" The King spoke sharply.

"But of course—to the Comtesse." Richelieu left his seat and came to Jeanne like a scolded child and kissed her hand. "It is all forgiven, monsieur. Take your instrument of mischief," she said, handing him the squirming marmoset. The animal wound its arms around Richelieu's neck and kissed him on the cheek. "*Parbleu!*" Chauvelin broke into a guffaw. "It resembles Richelieu more than it does Zamor." A ripple of laughter followed his remark and the tension was eased.

The Duchesse d'Aiguillon commented on the beauty of the painting which embellished the ceiling. "I like it too," smiled Jeanne, pleased at the compliment. "It represents love in the countryside. But my favorites are those." She pointed to the door panels which were adorned with scenes by Greuze and Fragonard. "Which artist do you prefer?" asked the Duchesse.

Jeanne frowned thoughtfully. "Fragonard, I think. His work is wondrously lighthearted and gay. But Greuze's *Broken Pitcher* is charming too. It hangs in my bedroom." Brissac was an interested listener to their conversation. He too loved paintings and was about to interpose a remark when there was a crash followed by the tinkle of broken glass.

"*Mon Dieu!* What is that?" Jeanne, her nerves already on edge, screamed. One of the Swiss picked up a stone which had landed on the polished floor. "It came through the window," he said, "and there is a note tied to it."

"Bring the note to me," ordered the King. The soldier handed him two folded sheets of paper and the King left the table and went into the vestibule alone. Everyone watched him curiously as he stood reading in the brilliantly lighted spot directly under the chandelier. "Comtesse! Will you please come?" His voice was controlled but Jeanne detected an unusual note of urgency. She excused herself and hurried to his side.

"Louis," she asked anxiously. "What is it?" In reply he handed her the sheet he had read. She stared in dismay at the words, written in a precise, almost feminine hand.

Hail du Barry full of Grace,
The King is with you—
Banished art thou from decent women,
And discord is the fruit of your commerce
With men.
Beautiful du Barry, Queen of Love,
Pray for us now and we
Will pray for your death.

Horrified, she looked at the King. His face had a yellowish tinge in the light from the candles. "If you think that is blasphemy, read this!" He handed her the second sheet, on which the writing was in the same fine hand:

Our Father who art in Versailles,
Glorified be not thy name;
Thy throne is cracked,
Thy will is no more done
On Earth than in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
That you have taken from us. . . .

Jeanne could not read on. She was as white as the marble walls. "But who . . . why . . . ?" She lisped in her agitation.

"We shall find out who!" the King exclaimed angrily. "I have seen scurrility before, but blasphemy goes too far! Someone shall pay for this!" They had started back to the salon when they heard a scuffling sound outside. The door to the peristyle was flung open and two guards entered, holding between them a wildly struggling figure.

"Your Majesty!" The guardsman, panting from his exertions, spoke in a heavy Swiss accent. "We have caught the criminal—it was he who threw the stone."

A third guard came up and tied the prisoner's hands and bound his ankles. Helpless though he was, Jeanne drew back fearfully. The captive was of medium height, stocky in build, and neatly dressed. He had a mean mouth and his small green eyes were set close together, but it was his ears that caught Jeanne's attention. They were the largest she had ever seen and protruded almost at right angles from his head. The man darted her a look of such sheer malevolence that she shuddered. She had never seen him before—he was a total stranger.

"Who are you, fellow?" asked the King. The man glared but did not answer. One of the Swiss struck him across the mouth. "Speak up! His Majesty asked you a question."

"Who are you?" repeated the King. "Do I know you?"

"You do not know me, but I am the foe of all tyrants." The clipped voice spoke correct French but the accent was unmistakably foreign. "My name is George Grieve."

"Are you an Englishman?" The King asked in surprise.

Grieve nodded. "We too have a tyrant, but he is a fool. You are sane; therefore you are more culpable."

Jeanne laughed nervously. "Send him back to England, Sire, and let him break the windows of Buckingham House."

The King turned to her. "You may go, Comtesse," he said

firmly. He knew that Jeanne's forgiving nature would insist on his freeing the prisoner. "And send Brissac to me," he called after her. She returned to her guests and Brissac went to answer the King's summons. At the sight of his resplendent uniform as commander of the Hundred Swiss the Englishman shifted his hobbled feet and tried to mask his fear with a sneer of defiance.

"Duc de Brissac," the King said in a commanding voice, "send this English dog to the Bastille, to stay there until he rots."

Grieve turned pale, his arrogance wilted. "Your Majesty," he whined, "not the Bastille! Deport me to England or better, to America. The Comtesse would——"

"Do not speak of the Comtesse!" said the King angrily. "Whatever I do pleases her. I am merciful; I should have you hanged." The King turned on his heel. "See to it, Brissac," he ordered.

As Brissac and the guards ushered Grieve out he clenched his fists. "This must be her doing, the brainless bitch!" he muttered softly. "He sends me to the Bastille to please his whore, but by God I shall pay her back."

"You will never leave the Bastille alive," Brissac said roughly. Grieve did not reply, but his lips twisted in a bitter smile.

Jeanne had developed a headache and canceled the musicale she had scheduled after the supper. The guests departed and she and the King were alone for their first night in the *Pavillon.* The architect had provided separate dressing rooms but they shared the one bedroom. The King seemed to have forgotten the evening's disturbing occurrences and talked in an easy tone. "This is truly a gem of a building, as I hoped it would be. Here I feel we are a simple married couple. Tomorrow I shall put on a white vest like any ordinary gentleman, garden a bit, and walk under your beautiful lindens." He kissed her gently. "Good night, my dear."

Jeanne, lying beside him in the darkness, thought miserably of her ruined evening; first Zamor's tantrum and then, far worse, the blasphemous scribbles of that sinister Englishman. There was

not the faintest connection between the two events, but what an ominous coincidence that they should happen on the same night! These last years had been so carefree, and now . . . She drifted into a troubled sleep, filled with an indefinable foreboding.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ITEM: Almanach de Liège for 1774, bound in gold-bordered red morocco; the arms of the ci-devant Comtesse du Barry are stamped on the covers.

In November, immediately after the usual return from Fontainebleau, the Court celebrated the marriage of the Comte d'Artois, the Dauphin's youngest brother. At the ceremonial dinner which followed, Jeanne sat with the King and the royal family. Marie Antoinette and Madame Adelaide ignored her, but the good-natured Dauphin spoke in a friendly manner between mouthfuls of food and Mesdames Victoire and Sophie made vapid comments on the weather. "I do pray there will not be a storm, Comtesse," said Madame Sophie, rolling her eyes. "I fear storms."

The Comte d'Artois, the sixteen-year-old groom, alone of the King's grandsons resembled him. Handsome and slender, he shone with the wit and animation his older brothers lacked. The Comte de Provence bore a striking resemblance to the bulky phlegmatic Dauphin but of the three brothers he was by far the cleverest. Jeanne studied the varied members of this haughty family with which improbable circumstance had associated her.

"What are you pondering so seriously?" The King's husky voice interrupted her thoughts. She turned her head to smile at him and saw that his beautiful black eyes were regarding her lovingly. "I was only thinking, Sire, what self-possession Monsieur has." She nodded toward the Comte de Provence. "I think he will always manage to avoid trouble. The Comte d'Artois has the most

appealing personality, probably because he makes me think of you."

The King pressed her hand under the table. "It would reassure me if Provence were the Dauphin. He knows how to attain his goal, but the Dauphin is all too indecisive." He lowered his voice to a whisper. "I shall not come to you tonight, Jeanne. I am weary from all these festivities. Tomorrow let us have an intimate supper *chez vous*—no more than six."

Jeanne took great care to arrange an exquisitely simple menu. The King complained of eating too heavily at the wedding banquet and had asked for a light repast. "Wine for the others," he added, "but only Vichy water for me." The four guests were the Duc and Duchesse d'Aiguillon, the Maréchale, and Chauvelin. Jeanne was especially anxious to secure him, for his high spirits always gladdened the King. But tonight she saw with disappointment that Chauvelin was strangely quiet. He made only one feeble jest and when the footmen began serving he asked if he might have two stewed apples. "I feel vaguely unwell," he said apologetically. "I must have overeaten last night."

"The same as I," interposed the King. "But come, Chauvelin—two stewed apples! This *omelette aux confitures* is light enough, even for me!" Chauvelin shook his head, and Jeanne ordered the footman to bring what he had requested. She noticed that he accepted a small glass of wine, and resumed her conversation with the Duchesse d'Aiguillon. "His Majesty of Sweden has sent me another supply of fine gloves. I shall give you a pair—and you too, Maréchale," she added hastily, seeing the Maréchale's nose beginning to twitch alarmingly.

The supper was quickly over and as they left the table the King suggested a game of whist. Chauvelin was leaning over to say something to the Maréchale when the King's voice, filled with alarm, broke in. "Chauvelin! What is the matter?" Startled by his tone, the others looked at Chauvelin. His face was crimson, contorted, and he stared vacantly at his royal friend. A gurgling sound came from his throat and without a word he pitched for-

ward, striking the floor at the King's feet with a heavy thud.

The Maréchale screamed and the King, pale with shock, shouted. "Send for La Martinière at once! And a priest!" It seemed only an instant before La Martinière hurried into the room, followed by a nervous priest. The physician bent over Chauvelin's figure sprawled grotesquely on the rug. He rose and looked at the King, shaking his head. "He is dead, Sire. It was apoplexy—instantaneous."

"Give him conditional absolution," the King shouted to the frightened priest. "Quickly!" The black-garbed cleric hesitated, but one look at the King's agitated countenance and he bent over the prone body; he muttered Latin phrases and made the Sign of the Cross.

The King leaned against the wall. An appalling change had come over him. He looked ill, and old. Jeanne hurried to his side. "Louis," she said softly, "stay with me tonight. I shall put you to bed and after a draught of Hoffman's Drops you will feel better."

"No!" The King spoke as though he were dazed. "I could not sleep here tonight—after this. La Martinière, come with me." He walked unsteadily from the room, followed by his physician. Morin and one of the footmen covered Chauvelin's corpse with a sheet and carried it out. The d'Aiguillons hastily departed and only the Maréchale was left.

"Poor Chauvelin!" exclaimed Jeanne, her eyes misty. "Always so merry and vivacious, and now he is dead! And the King—I know he was fond of Chauvelin, of course, but he was so distraught it frightened me!"

"Don't you know the reason?" The Maréchale spoke softly, a rare note of compassion in her voice.

"No!" Jeanne almost screamed. "Tell me! Was it because he died before he could receive the last rites?"

"Partly that, but much more besides. A soothsayer once told the King he would not live six months after Chauvelin. Since Chauvelin was seven years younger, the King never worried . . . but now . . ." She shook her head dolefully.

"Six months!" Jeanne looked at the Maréchale aghast and her eyes, as if drawn by a magnet, shifted to the calendar on the lacquered table. The current date engraved itself on her consciousness with an unforgettable impression: 23 *novembre*, 1773.

The King sank into a state of morbid depression after Chauvelin's shocking death. Jeanne sought desperately to supply new diversions, anything which might distract his mind from gloomy thoughts, from the memory of his friend lying dead at his feet and above all, from the ominous shadow of the fateful prophecy. Knowing his interest in shrubs and plants she talked of an *orangerie* and new garden for Louveciennes, but the King was indifferent. "Go ahead, my dear," he said apathetically, "do whatever you wish."

New Year's passed, followed in a few weeks by Carnival. This season, so gay in previous years, failed to stir the King from his lethargy. Jeanne grew seriously alarmed at his deterioration. His once-elegant figure had become increasingly obese and although he continued to hunt he now needed assistance to mount his horse. Twice in the Forest of Sénart he fell. He was not injured but the falls were unmistakable evidence that he was losing his equestrian skill and strength. La Martinière insisted that he eat sparingly at night and forego wine at all times.

Jeanne shifted her habits to adjust to the King's altered routine. Her excuse was that she was gaining weight. "You are in glorious health," he said wistfully. "I don't ask that you deprive yourself for me." Jeanne saw, however, that he appreciated her tact and she was overjoyed when his mood of fearful hypochondria seemed to lift slightly. But the coming of Lent, always a depressing period, affected him more adversely than usual.

She was also worried about Suzanne, who had been carrying a baby since November. Both she and Morin were touching in their eagerness to have a child. "If it is a girl I shall name her

Jeanne and send her to Saint Aure. I wonder if any of the sisters we knew are there now?"

Jeanne looked at her teasingly. "Yes, at least one is still there —can you guess who?"

"Not Sister Angélique!"

"Sister Angélique—but she is Mother Angélique now and I am told she is as sweet and mild as Sister Thérèse. But—suppose you have a boy?"

"Then I shall name him Louis Denis after the King and Morin, and he will be a brave soldier!"

"In that event," Jeanne promised, "I shall find a place for him in the Lightguards."

Suzanne was tired and pale and suffered frequent attacks of nausea. Jeanne insisted she leave the attic she shared with Morin and sleep in the familiar anteroom where she would be near her. In the middle of a cold night in late February Jeanne was awakened by groans. She flung a *négligé* around herself and rushed to Suzanne's bed. She was bathed in cold sweat, and deathly pale. "Suzanne!" cried Jeanne, frightened. "What can I do for you?"

"I am sick—so very sick," Suzanne whispered. "Send for the doctor, please." Jeanne pulled the cord which summoned her first chambermaid, and when the sleepy woman appeared, sent her for Lorry, her own capable physician. While they waited she held Suzanne's hand, which clung to her with surprising strength.

Lorry appeared in a short time, although the delay had seemed hours. One look at Suzanne's pale greenish hue and he asked Jeanne to leave. "But I am a woman, Lorry," she protested indignantly. "She is my friend, and I want to stay."

"Believe me, Comtesse," the doctor answered quietly. "It will be safer—I can work more easily if you are not here; leave your woman to assist me." Jeanne reluctantly returned to her bedroom. She huddled before the fire which the servant had lighted, and shuddered at the sound of Suzanne's pitiful cries. At last Lorry

reappeared. "She is sleeping now," he said. "I think she will be all right."

"And the baby?"

"Comtesse, I fear your friend is too frail to bear children. She has lost the child."

Jeanne nodded mutely. She sat beside Suzanne the rest of the night, smoothing her covers and bathing her forehead with a wet cloth whenever she stirred. Morin, his honest face twisted with grief, sat on the opposite side of the cot. Jeanne could not find the courage to tell him what Lorry had said, but instinctively he knew. "We should not try to have a child, madame," he said dully. "Suzanne is not strong enough." Jeanne reached across his sleeping wife and touched his hand. "France is full of poor children who need a loving home, Morin; perhaps . . ."

"No!" His vehemence startled her. "If we cannot have our own child, I want none."

"Morin." She spoke so softly he could hardly hear. "Look at me; I have always wanted a child, but *le Bon Dieu* has not seen fit to grant me one either." Morin saw the sorrow and compassion on Jeanne's face and a look of pity and understanding came into his own. "You are so kind, madame, so loving. People do not know how good you are. They do not understand you!" he finished indignantly.

"A few, perhaps, do," she sighed. "At least you and Suzanne are among them." Morin threw her a look of such devotion that Jeanne knew he would serve her willingly as long as he lived.

Suzanne's recovery was surprisingly rapid and she bore her bitter disappointment bravely. Only once did she allude to her miscarriage, one morning a week later when she was helping Jeanne with her correspondence. "It was the will of God, Jeanne. I am meant to take care of Morin"—she smiled—"and you. I need no one else, not even a child of my own. I was too selfish."

Jeanne could think of no appropriate reply and busied herself opening a heavy package. "Look, Suzanne! This year's edition of the *Almanach de Liège* which I ordered before Christmas."

She eagerly unwrapped a large volume bound in red morocco and stamped, as were all her books, with her arms. "Take it, and read what it predicts under my horoscope, while I finish my coffee."

Suzanne put the book on her lap and turned to the zodiacal sign of Leo. She ran her finger down the list of predictions, printed in violet-colored ink, until she reached August 19. "Well?" asked Jeanne. Suzanne hesitated; she had turned pale and Jeanne asked if she were ill. "No—I am all right. It is only . . ." she paused, then forced herself to read: "A most favored lady playing an important role at the Court of France will cease playing that role."

"Is that all? Why must these wretched fortunetellers be so vague?"

"Jeanne," observed Suzanne sensibly. "That is just the point —as you say, they *are* wretched. It is nothing but superstition. Besides," she added illogically, "why do you assume it refers to you? It could be anyone."

"Suzanne." Jeanne spoke flatly. "Who else but me fits that phrase?" Suzanne could not bring herself to agree to the obvious truth. "Jeanne, this is not like you. Be optimistic as you always are. Lent will be over in a month."

"Yes," said Jeanne. "Lent will have passed, but six months since Chauvelin's death will not have passed."

Before Lent did end the King received another shock. At Mass on Wednesday of Holy Week the priest, a fiery young zealot, concluded his homily by pausing dramatically, looking directly at the monarch, and thundering: "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed!" The King covered his face with his hands and Jeanne glanced fearfully around the Royal Chapel.

Afterward the King sat glumly in Jeanne's salon staring out the window. Richelieu, whom Jeanne had sent for in hope that he could cheer the King, stood by his chair. "Sire," he said angrily,

"that insolent priest should be deprived of his benefice. What he said from the pulpit was *lèse-majesté.*"

The King looked at him wearily. "No, *Son Excellence.* He said what he believed it his duty to say, and I cannot punish him for that. Forty days . . . the end of April will almost see . . . but it will be the twenty-third of May before six months . . ."

"Sire!" Jeanne and Richelieu spoke at the same instant, and he inclined his head for her to continue. "We beg you, for yourself and those of us who love you—put these black superstitions from your mind. Spring is at hand and you will be as vigorous as you ever were."

"Do you truly think so?" The King's eyes, so lusterless a moment before, looked at her hungrily.

"Yes—I know it!" Her laughter pealed with such convincing merriment that the King permitted himself a slight smile. "Let us pray that you are right. At the end of April we will go to Trianon—by then the lime shoots will be coral, and I want to see them."

"That is marvelous!" Jeanne exclaimed, thankful that his mood had brightened. "And if we stay until May we will see the white butterflies!"

At the beginning of the last week in April Jeanne and the King, with only their maid and valet—even Suzanne was left at the Château—journeyed the short distance to the charming Trianon where they always enjoyed such delicious privacy. Only there and at the *Pavillon* of Louveciennes did they feel free from the confining atmosphere of the Court. They wandered through the gardens, Jeanne on the King's arm, looking at his wonderful collection of shrubs and rare plants. She told the King of the day when Sister Angélique had delivered her memorized lecture at the Jardin des Plantes, and he laughed heartily.

The next day he went hunting and when he returned at dusk he was so exhausted he would not eat. "I think you have a slight fever," she said, placing her palm on his forehead. "Take a draught

of chicory water and go to bed, and tomorrow you will feel better." But during the night her maid wakened her. "It is His Majesty, madame; he asks that you come to him."

Jeanne paused only to throw on a light robe and hurried to the King's bedside. "My throat is sore," he said hoarsely, "and I have a burning fever. What kind of cursed indisposition is this?" Jeanne tried to reassure him. She ordered the maid to bring hot tea and as the King seemed easier when she was beside him, she remained the rest of the night. Even after he fell into a restless sleep she sat in the armchair listening to his heavy breathing. His handsome face was flushed; clearly the fever had risen. The King was rarely ill and she made up her mind that if his fever persisted she would summon the physicians tomorrow.

When dawn began to filter through the draperies he was still sleeping, so Jeanne returned to her own room. She stretched out on a chaise longue for two hours and then called her maid to help her dress. Shortly after nine she was back in the King's room. He was awake, and she knew without asking that he was worse. "Now I have a pain in the back of my neck, and I have been nauseated." He sat up and when she touched his brow it was hot.

"Louis," she said firmly. "I am sending for La Martinière and Lorry—and Bordeu too, from Paris. He is the best physician in France." She knew what a poor patient he was, and hoped to restore his confidence. He nodded, and reached for her hand. "Thank you, Jeanne." In his simple words was a reservoir of feeling.

By late afternoon when the doctors arrived the King's valet had shaved him and he was sitting up in his dressing gown. La Martinière, as First Physician, made the initial examination. "Sire, stick out your tongue." He was a humorless man and peered gravely at the King's coated tongue. Lorry and Bordeu in turn made their examinations, and after conferring in a corner of the room the three of them returned to the King.

"Well!" he grumbled. "What is the matter with me?"

"We are not agreed, Sire." La Martinière adopted his utmost

professional tone. "It is probably only an indisposition, not a *maladie,* but I must insist that you return at once to the Château."

"No!" cried Jeanne, who had entered and overheard his last remark. "I can take care of His Majesty here, where there is light and fresh air. The Château is dark and ill-ventilated."

"I agree with the Comtesse," said Bordeu warmly. "Furthermore, His Majesty will have here the quiet and privacy which he needs for a quick recovery." Jeanne threw the intelligent-looking Parisian doctor a look of gratitude which La Martinière intercepted. "I am sorry," he said with a touch of asperity, "but as the King's First Physician I cannot be responsible if His Majesty is ill anywhere other than the Château of Versailles."

Jeanne looked at the King, whose face reflected his indecision. Frustration and despair overcame her. She knew he was the prisoner of the ineluctable precedents and etiquette which encased the royal household in a strait jacket. He wanted to remain at Trianon where sunbeams danced through the wide windows, the air was scented and warm, and he could see her without restraint—his eyes eloquently told her so. But he shrugged and said fatalistically: "Very well, La Martinière—order my coach. I shall go as I am."

Darkness had fallen when the King reached the Château. He walked unaided to his own bedroom and lay down. His head felt heavy and his throat ached. He wanted to be left alone. But the wheels of protocol inexorably turned, and he was promptly surrounded by six physicians, five surgeons, and three apothecaries. They consulted in mysterious whispers, nodding their heads solemnly, and bled their patient, afterward administering the inevitable clyster. Whenever the King opened his eyes he saw their lugubrious faces ringing his bed. "Do you have to stand so close?" he asked irritably. "I can't breathe—open a window!"

"But Sire," reminded the First Gentleman of the Bedchamber, "the windows have been nailed shut since October, and until May the custom is——"

"I know that!" said the King. "Shut up!" He looked beyond

the doctors and saw a crowd of courtiers clustered in the doorway of the Council Chamber. Word of his illness had already raced through the sprawling Château. The Dauphin and Dauphine entered; the clumsy Dauphin was in such haste that he had donned shoes which did not match. The King was in no mood to see the grandson who might succeed him if his illness were serious, and quickly dismissed him and Marie Antoinette. But they were hardly gone before Mesdames rushed into the room.

His daughters threw themselves weeping at the foot of the bed. "Calm yourselves," the King said kindly. In spite of the vastly different lives they led there was a genuine bond of affection between the King and Mesdames. "I am not dying; it is only a fever which will soon leave me—eh, La Martinière?"

"Sire, the treatment should show results in two or three days," the doctor answered noncommittally. He glanced at his colleagues and saw with relief that the ignorance in their eyes matched his own.

"I want the room cleared," the King stated. La Martinière started to demur. "Of everyone," the King went on, "except the Swiss at the door and the Duc de Richelieu. Send him to me." The physician beckoned to his colleagues and they followed through the doorway, leaving the King momentarily alone. He sighed with relief.

"Sire." The King opened his eyes and surprised an expression of unwonted concern on Richelieu's sharp features. "*Son Excellence*"—he smiled weakly—"am I then so painful a sight?"

"Not at all, Sire." The courtier's mask reverted into place. "Of course you are flushed from the fever, but otherwise——"

"Do you think I am very ill?"

"No, Sire, I do not. Remember, you are fourteen years younger than I—and I am still quite active." He winked, and the King laughed for the first time in two days; his oldest friend could still cheer him. "You know whom I want," he said. Richelieu nodded. "I shall be quick, and discreet."

He hurried up the secret stairway always used by the King, and emerged into Jeanne's bedroom. She was seated at her dressing table, clad only in her chemise and a peignoir, talking to Suzanne. When Richelieu entered Suzanne excused herself, and Jeanne turned anxiously to him. "What is the nature of the King's illness, and what are the physicians prescribing for him?"

Richelieu described the scene below. "But he will stifle in that pesthole!" Jeanne cried. "They will kill him with their clysters and their infernal bleedings. Bordeu and I were right—he should never have left the seclusion of Trianon. *Ce-pays-ci* is a tomb." She wrung her hands in anguish and Richelieu let his wrinkled hand rest softly on her shoulder. Tears ran down her cheeks and for the first time she felt that a human heart beat underneath his cynical exterior. She made him promise to tell her everything he learned of the King's illness. "I am in a difficult position," she reminded him. "I cannot go to him publicly when he is surrounded by his family."

"You can go to him now. That is precisely why I am here."

Jeanne reached for the gown she had laid on the bed but Richelieu shook his head. "No time for that, Comtesse. "What you are wearing is very seductive"—he reverted to his usual ironical tone—"and will surely please His Majesty." She gathered the thin filmy peignoir around her and followed him down the stairs. Richelieu scanned the King's room to be certain no outsider was lurking, and led Jeanne to him.

He tried to sit up and she remembered when he had sprained his arm at the time of her presentation. Then he had been injured but now, looking at him, she knew he was really ill. She forced herself to be winsome and sat on the side of the bed. He drew her to him and the wrapper slipped from her shoulders. The King stroked her bare skin a moment before she replaced the peignoir. "I love you so much, Jeanne. More now, I think, than when I first saw you."

She bent and kissed him on the forehead. "I don't have to tell

you that I love you, Louis, but I will—*I love you.*" She squeezed his hand. "Now try to sleep, and recover your strength."

"Come every night by the stairway." His eyes were pleading. "*Son Excellence* will conduct you." As she left he murmured, "I detest being ill! If the doctors could only discover what it is that I have!"

Jeanne kept to her apartments for the next two days, receiving only Richelieu and the Maréchale, who brought what little news there was. Each night, after the King's bedroom was cleared of the doctors and Mesdames, Richelieu led her to the ill sovereign. He was growing worse and two more bleedings only weakened him further. Jeanne noticed on the second night that red spots had broken out on his face. She said nothing to the King but promised herself to mention the alarming new symptoms to Richelieu.

She did not have to—the next day before noon he rushed into her salon followed by the breathless Maréchale. "*Sacré Dieu!*" Richelieu swore. "The King has smallpox!" Jeanne stared at him in horror. He described what had occurred that morning in the sickroom. When the doctors entered and saw the eruptions on the King's face they had exchanged dismayed glances. La Martinière whispered that the disease was unmistakably smallpox, and Richelieu begged him not to tell the King. "I warned him it would frighten His Majesty into a relapse," Richelieu said.

La Martinière and the other physicians had agreed, and the King detected nothing unusual in their demeanor. He stuck out his tongue for each to examine, allowed his pulse to be taken, and submitted with a grimace to another clyster. While the physicians and apothecaries gathered at the window to discuss how to keep the truth from him, Madame Sophie had entered and rushed to her father's side.

She stared stupidly at the angry red spots and the King instantly realized from her awe-struck face that something was gravely wrong. "A mirror!" he demanded of his valet. "Bring a

mirror at once!" Too late the doctors heard him. He was already intently examining his disfigured reflection. The King put down the hand mirror. "I have smallpox," he said heavily. "And one doesn't get over it at my age."

Richelieu went on to tell Jeanne that because of the virulent nature of the disease the Dauphin and Dauphine could no longer approach the King. Mesdames, not in the line of succession, were still allowed to enter, and they insisted on ministering all during the daylight hours to their stricken father. Jeanne knew they had not had smallpox and she paid silent tribute to their courage. Silly spiteful fools they might be, but their bravery proved their devotion.

"Then I shall nurse him during the long nights," she declared firmly. "When one is sick, that is the worst time. Come for me this evening at the usual time, *Son Excellence*. . . ." Deliberately she used the King's nickname for Richelieu.

"But Comtesse . . . with your beauty . . . to expose yourself to . . ."

"I have had smallpox," she said, almost proudly. "And even if I had not, I would still go to him. That is where I belong." Richelieu gave her a look of admiration and the Maréchale ran to embrace her. "You are an example to us all; if we keep our heads there is nothing to fear."

But few in the huge Château were keeping their heads. Once the King's illness was identified a struggle began, not for the salvation of his soul, but for power. The long-quiescent partisans of Choiseul raised their heads and clamored for the King to receive the sacrament. Their real aim was to destroy d'Aiguillon and Jeanne, for everyone realized that if the King confessed, her dismissal would automatically follow.

"Those filthy hypocrites!" Richelieu said bitterly. He was sitting on a sofa in Jeanne's library, while she wept quietly in a chair opposite. "Choiseul was always openly contemptuous of religion, and now his followers cross themselves and bleat about

the King's soul. I told the Archbishop of Paris I would personally throw him out the window if he dared mention the sacraments to His Majesty."

"Tell the Archbishop," said Jeanne evenly, "that if he cooperates with us he shall have a Cardinal's hat. I take it upon myself and pledge my word."

"Anyway," replied Richelieu, "the King is not yet dying; these vultures already have him in the vault at Saint-Denis." Jeanne grasped at hope. "No, one does not always die of smallpox, but I had a mild case and I was young, while the King——" she broke off. "We must sustain his courage," she said earnestly. "As long as he has hope he will not summon a priest, but if he becomes convinced he is dying——" she paused once more. She had suddenly recalled the King's remarkable conviction that if he managed to die in a state of grace he could not be damned.

That evening when she crept into the King's dimly lighted bedroom she gasped. The tightly closed windows excluded any fresh air and the putrid stench had become almost unbearable. The King had, for greater convenience, been transferred to a small camp bed. Beside it stood a table holding a carafe of water and a single candle. The flickering light revealed his features and Jeanne caught her breath. His once-handsome face was covered with pustules, some of them already open. His skin had begun to darken and his eyes were puffy, almost shut. He peered at her.

"You know?" His voice was huskier than ever, almost a croak.

"I know, Louis, that you have smallpox," she said with an attempt at calmness. "But you will get over it. Others have—I myself have." A semblance of a smile twisted his swollen lips. "I did not know that; perhaps then I too shall recover." He seized her hand and covered it with kisses and it rubbed against the running pustule on his upper lip. Jeanne gave silent thanks for the mild attack which had brought her immunity from this loathsome disease.

"My fever is less, and oddly enough I feel some better—I think

I can sleep, my dear. Leave me, and come tomorrow night." As Jeanne bent to kiss the distorted face her foot collided with a pot under the bed and its contents spilled on her shoe. "Good night, Louis," she said, fighting for control. "Sleep soundly and you will surely be better." She gave him her sweet enchanting smile and he nodded faintly. He closed his eyes and relaxed.

Jeanne wearily climbed the stairs. She was exhausted from lack of sleep and her nerves were on edge from the eroding strain of the past four days. She sank onto a chaise longue in the library and Suzanne brought her a cup of steaming chocolate. "Thank you—I probably need it." As she stretched out her hand her eyes fell upon the crimson binding of the *Almanach de Liège* resting on a table. Her nerves gave way without warning and she dropped the cup of hot chocolate on the floor and burst into tears. "Oh, Suzanne, I am so tired—and so worried. What shall I do? What will become of me if——" She clung to Suzanne, her body shaking with sobs.

"You will go on living," said Suzanne gently, "as we all must."

"If only I could *do* something!" exclaimed Jeanne desperately. "This ghastly torture of waiting . . . this tearing uncertainty!" She was struck by a sudden idea. "The Roué—perhaps I should summon him. He said he would come if ever I needed him, and always, in serious matters, he gave me sound advice."

"What could he say to you that I am not saying? You cannot govern the King's health. You have only two choices, to stay or to leave and if you leave, the King will never forgive you."

"Yes, you are right, and I don't need the Roué to tell me that. I shall remain here—I owe it to my friends as well as to myself. I shall never leave of my own accord." Suzanne put her arms around her. "That is more like you. Don't despair—the King might not die."

"I pray to the Holy Virgin that he will not. Suzanne, he is so terrified of death . . . racked with the fear of Hell . . . and his room . . . the smell . . . he is unconscious of it because he is

accustomed to it by now, but Richelieu told me a scrubwoman fainted this morning from the stench. Yes, you are right . . . he might not die. . . ." her voice trailed off and she fell into a sleep of exhaustion, still in Suzanne's arms. *He might not die,* Suzanne repeated to herself, and shook her head. She knew better.

Three more agonizing days inched by, the King's strength slowly ebbing. On the fourth of May, a nightmare week after his first symptoms had appeared at Trianon, he sent for Jeanne. She was surprised, for it was noon, and she wondered who else might be in the confused and crowded sickroom. She need not have worried, because the King had ordered Mesdames and the retainers on duty to withdraw. Only La Martinière and a single footman remained and they had hidden themselves in a remote alcove. Jeanne and her royal lover were virtually alone.

The King's appearance was almost indescribable. His face and neck, and even his hands, were a mass of running pustulant sores. The remorseless disease which was devouring him had so blackened his skin that his face looked as though it wore a grotesque Moorish mask. And the odor! The stink of putrefaction almost overwhelmed her. He was rotting alive. She held a handkerchief drenched with rose water to her nose; never had she encountered such a stench—not in the fishmarkets of Les Halles, not even from the excrement-filled gutters of Paris.

The King reached out his hand and Jeanne, with a shudder, took it. "I have been thinking of you," he mumbled painfully, "and I have come to a hard decision." Jeanne held her breath and waited for him to go on. Ravaged though his body was, his mind seemed perfectly clear. "If I continue to grow worse I shall have to send for a priest, and if I confess he will not grant me absolution unless I dismiss you. To avoid that, which would cause a scandal and make your enemies think you were in disgrace, I consider it best that you depart now."

"But Louis—"

"Let me finish." He pressed her hand. "It is because I love you,

my dearest. I have told d'Aiguillon to shelter you in his Château at Rueil. It is not far, and if a miracle occurs and I recover, you will return—that I promise."

Jeanne sobbed uncontrollably. This dying man, this hulk of decaying flesh, had been her lover for six years. *Louis the Well-Beloved, King of France.* She looked at his rotting body on the stained bed, the face almost unrecognizable, and shivered at the contrast between his appearance now and the day she had first seen him.

She sniffled and blew her nose. "Louis, I shall do as you say, and when I get to Rueil"—she tried to smile through her tears—"I shall catch a white butterfly and think of you. Good-by—for a while." She knelt by the bed and gently—deliberately—kissed him on his suppurating cheek. A pathetic smile twisted his swollen lips. "Jeanne." She bent lower to hear him. "I fear I shall never see the white butterflies again . . . and as for the red ones——" He gave a hopeless sigh and Jeanne fled from the room, blinded by her tears.

At four o'clock that same afternoon Jeanne and the Duchesse d'Aiguillon departed. As their carriage crossed the Place d'Armes Jeanne glanced back at the immense Château which had sheltered her in love and luxury for so many years and which now housed a dying sovereign. Her face was pale and drawn, but she had recovered her composure. She looked at the Duchesse, who was regarding her sympathetically. "There is nothing I can do now," she said. "Except hope . . . and pray . . . and wait."

She had three days to wait before Richelieu came to see her. "You had barely left the Château before the King asked for you, and when I told him you had gone he half opened his eyes and sighed. 'What—already?' he said."

"But he himself ordered me to go."

"I know—and he was right to do so. He is sinking fast and last night he asked for a priest. He spent seventeen minutes confess-

ing, but he could not obtain absolution until he made a public confession this morning."

"A *public* confession!" repeated Jeanne, horrified.

"Yes," said Richelieu grimly. "It was barbaric." He described the scene. The Hundred Swiss had lined the route from the chapel to the King's bedroom and the priest carrying the Host passed between them. The dying King climbed painfully out of bed and knelt in his nightshirt before the courtiers crowded in the doorway. They were all terrified to enter the pestilence-filled room. The priest turned to them. "His Majesty says that if God spares him he will devote the remainder of his life to the cause of religion and to relieving the sufferings of his people." Richelieu went on, relating that the King had whispered, "I wish I were strong enough to say that aloud."

Jeanne hid her face with her hands. What she heard amounted to incontrovertible proof that never again would she be permitted to enter the Château of Versailles—even if the King lived. "What else?" she asked fearfully.

"When the King received the sacrament he stuck out his tongue as far as he could; he was afraid the pus on his face would contaminate the Host before he could swallow it. The spectacle was gruesome. When he climbed back into bed the bone of his thigh showed. He is literally disintegrating—and that putrid stench!" Unconsciously Richelieu lifted his handkerchief to his nose.

"Yes—I know."

"Thirty people in the Château have already caught the disease merely from passing in the hallway, and Mesdames are sure to contract it. *Grace à Dieu,* I had it as a boy."

"Poor Louis!" Jeanne murmured, almost to herself. "Release for him will be merciful now." But the King's release did not come until the tenth of May, after he had endured three more days of torment. His Calvary had lasted one day less than a fortnight.

The Duc d'Aiguillon reached Rueil as twilight was beginning to fall and he came at once to where Jeanne was sitting in the

garden. One look at his face and she knew. "The King is dead," she said simply.

"Yes—he died shortly after three this afternoon, and he was conscious until almost the last."

"Did he say anything . . . did he send me any message?"

He shook his head. "He had no opportunity—he was surrounded by doctors and priests." She nodded understandingly; perhaps it was best. She remembered the King's last words to her, and tears came into her eyes as she watched the butterflies winging in the clear air, outlined in the dying rays of the sun. "Tell me about it."

The Duc braced himself and told her that the instant the King expired, a lighted candle in his window was extinguished. It was the long-anticipated signal to the Court that a new reign had begun. The young King and Queen and the other members of the royal family fled the pestilential air, and only menials and those compelled by duty were left in the chamber of death. The miasma of fear was so heavy that no time was taken to open and embalm the King's body. Two valets and a scrubwoman wrapped his corpse in the same sheets on which he had died. Spirits of wine were poured in the wooden coffin, which was then encased in an outer shell of lead.

Jeanne sat numbed with horror when d'Aiguillon finished. She felt nauseated and was glad to be in the open air. "I have a still more painful duty, Comtesse." The Duc, watching her with an odd expression, handed her a sealed letter. She opened it and gave a despairing cry. The contents were brief and explicit. She was commanded by King Louis XVI to proceed to the abbey of Pont-aux-Dames, there to remain at His Majesty's pleasure. Permission was granted for one female companion to accompany her.

"But what have I done to deserve this? Tell me, why are they punishing me?" she pleaded.

The Duc's smile of resigned cynicism reminded her fleetingly of his uncle, Richelieu. "Comtesse, it is not what you have done,

or not done . . . but I am informed that the Queen has great influence on His Majesty. . . ." he paused, seeing comprehension dawn in Jeanne's eyes. So that was it! Marie Antoinette's Hapsburg pride could not forgive her for the seven words she had been forced to utter—the Queen hated her! Jeanne passed her hand wearily across her forehead.

"I received a similar letter," resumed d'Aiguillon. A wry smile twisted his features. "I am ordered to return my Seals of Office and retire to my estates."

"All because of your friendship for me!" cried Jeanne remorsefully.

"Do not be concerned, Comtesse," he said gallantly. "I shall survive it. You were a loyal friend and I do not forget so rare a trait. Meriting your regard has been the great privilege of my life." He bowed in his soldierly way and kissed her hand. Jeanne was deeply moved; she looked at him wordlessly. "Do not be afraid," he counseled. "The new King is not a cruel man. Your exile will not endure forever, and we shall surely meet again."

Jeanne asked if she should attend the dead King's funeral, and he advised her not to inflame the Queen's wrath by making a public appearance. Jeanne reluctantly agreed he was right. When Richelieu visited her three days later he said that if she had ridden in the procession to Saint-Denis it would have broken her heart. Only three carriages had followed the hearse and not one member of the royal family rode in them. "They give fear of contagion as their excuse," Richelieu sneered. "Except for myself and the Prince de Soubise, His Majesty was attended on his last journey by only a few grooms and fifty of the Swiss."

"Were there crowds along the route?"

"It was already dark," he answered. "That was calculated, and perhaps it was fortunate. Most of the mob who witnessed the cortège was drunk. They were beastly in their disrespect. They hooted in imitation of the King's hunting cry. And the jeers!" He shuddered with revulsion. "There goes Louis, the darling of the ladies!" Richelieu refused to say more, and Jeanne was thankful.

She had had enough; every cruel detail only wounded her more deeply.

Richelieu bade her farewell, promising to use whatever influence he might still retain to soften her exile. After he had closed the door there trailed behind him the scent of musk, growing ever fainter—evanescent as her shining brilliant years at Versailles.

Part Three

AFTER LOVE COMES DEATH

CHAPTER TWELVE

ITEM: Satinwood table inlaid with silver. Invoice bears notation: 1770, London—188 pounds sterling.

The abbey of Pont-aux-Dames was near Metz, in Jeanne's native Lorraine. When she first glimpsed the ancient structure of stone she burst into tears. "How depressing it is! And this is where they are sending me!" Her chambermaid, Henriette Picard, whom she had brought on the long tedious journey, attempted to comfort her. "Be tranquil, madame; the abbey will be cool during the summer heat." Jeanne fidgeted with exasperation. Henriette was a capable domestic but entirely unimaginative—hardly a congenial companion at so trying a time. Of course Jeanne would have preferred to bring Suzanne, but she was ill—not smallpox, she thought with fervent relief, but a heavy cold—and delay was impossible. She had been forced to leave Rueil the morning after Richelieu's visit. Perhaps Suzanne might join her later, but as for now . . .

To her surprise she was received at the postern gate instead of the main entrance. She heard the forbidding sound of heavy bolts being drawn, the rattle of chains, and the small wooden door cautiously opened. Framed in the aperture stood a middle-aged woman who was a study in black-and-white. Her gimp and robe were of spotless white serge, her veil was black, and a heavy crucifix of the same color was suspended from her waist. Her chalk-white face and piercing black eyes enhanced the chiaroscuro effect.

"I am the Abbess. A King's courier notified me two days ago to expect you, Comtesse, for an indefinite stay." Her voice was grave, but not unkind. She saw Jeanne peering into the dimness of the passageway beyond. "I apologize for receiving you so informally at the side gate, but I feared to embarrass the nuns under my charge . . . the notoriety, you know. . . ." the abbess smiled deprecatingly.

"I understand," Jeanne said quietly. She realized, halfway between indignation and amusement, that she was regarded here as a brazen figure of scandal. The only way to correct that impression was to accept her fate cheerfully, without demur. "Please conduct me to my room, Abbess. As you can imagine, I am very tired."

The abbess looked at her unsmilingly. "It is a cell, Comtesse. Your maid will sleep in the attic." She led Jeanne down the passageway to a small cell furnished with a bed, a table, and a comfortable armchair. Were it not for the last item Jeanne might have thought herself back at Saint Aure. Henriette and the coachman trailed behind them carrying Jeanne's trunk.

They deposited it in a corner and the abbess spoke once more. "Your maid will bring you supper, and tomorrow you and I might have a friendly talk. It is desirable that we understand each other." Jeanne nodded silently; she was too dispirited for conversation. The abbess looked at her questioningly. "Perhaps I shall see you at Mass in the morning?"

"Yes," Jeanne answered. "Certainly—I shall be there." The abbess, with a surprisingly elegant gait, left the room, and Henriette brought a cold chicken and a bottle of chilled white wine. "Well, Henriette," remarked Jeanne with a feeble attempt at jocularity, "they won't starve us here."

"No, madame. The larder is bursting; I never heard of an abbey like this." Jeanne dismissed her with a weary gesture. She could not find words in her troubled mind to waste on Henriette. She ate the well-prepared fowl and drank half the wine, which

was light and dry. In spite of her sadness she was hungry after the long journey.

When she had finished she removed her black gown and veil, and attired only in her chemise knelt beneath the crucifix which hung on the wall. She prayed long and earnestly for the soul of the departed King, and tears coursed silently down her cheeks as she thought of that once-handsome lover sealed in the royal burial vault. She started to rise, hesitated, and sank once more to the floor. "And vouchsafe, Holy Mother," she added timidly, "to pray for me, that I may be given the courage to endure this place." She crossed herself and as she stood up to snuff the candles she saw, through the wicket in the door, the face of the abbess regarding her with a puzzled expression.

As dawn was breaking she arose to attend Mass. She had understood the previous evening that she was expected to remain in her cell, but at least the abbess had not locked the door, and from her remark it was evident that Jeanne was free—indeed encouraged—to attend Mass. She found her way to the chapel and slipped into a rear seat. She was entirely in black, as she had been since the tenth of May, but her face was unveiled. Her golden hair was almost covered with a piece of fine Spanish lace.

A subdued ripple of movement, almost imperceptible, stirred the nuns as she entered the chapel. They affected not to notice her although one, closer than the rest, hastily shifted her chair. Jeanne saw none of this. She was intently following the ritual before the altar and her hands were clasped in prayer. But when the ceremony was over and she got to her feet she was astounded to see that the two nuns ahead were staring at her—not frankly and directly, but in small mirrors which reflected her grieving face!

When the abbess came later to her cell Jeanne told her of the strange humiliation. "Do the good sisters think I am a Medusa who will turn them to stone?" Beneath her attempt at insouciance lay profound pathos, and the abbess' handsome features relaxed. "I will tell you frankly, Comtesse—they did not know what to

expect, nor did I. Your sweet and sorrowful face, and your religious sensibilities, surprised *me*."

"But . . . I am not a monster!" Jeanne lisped; she was close to tears, and the other's face lighted with genuine warmth. "We hear so many exaggerated stories from Versailles . . . but let me tell you something of our abbey."

The abbess was born Gabrielle de la Roche-Fontenille, which Jeanne recognized as the name of an old and honored family. Most of the nuns at Pont-aux-Dames were, like herself, of noble families who had chosen this quiet comfortable existence for lack of suitable husbands. Jeanne spoke of her nine years at Saint Aure and the abbess smiled indulgently. "We do not have pupils, and we do not operate under rules so strict. You will not be uncomfortable here and perhaps in time you will be allowed more freedom of movement—but that depends upon Versailles. For the present you are allowed no visitors, although you may correspond freely."

Jeanne availed herself of the welcome privilege. She dared not write to the Duc d'Aiguillon, as knowledge of their correspondence would only increase the Queen's hostility, and the Maréchale was too indiscreet to confide in during a period so precariously balanced. But she wrote long letters to Anne and Suzanne and received faithful replies from them. Anne longed to visit her and was worried also about money, for Jeanne's enormous income had been stopped.

Suzanne wrote that she and Morin had directed the removal of Jeanne's beloved furnishings from her luxurious apartments at Versailles to Louveciennes. She added that her lovely rooms in the Château had been assigned to the Comte de Maurepas, who had succeeded d'Aiguillon as Minister. Maurepas. . . . Jeanne turned the name over in her mind. Yes . . . Richelieu had once mentioned that Maurepas had been overthrown by the Pompadour nearly thirty years before. Then perhaps he would feel kindly toward Jeanne, and—an ember of hope fired within her—

wasn't Maurepas the uncle of the Duchesse d'Aiguillon? Perhaps that relationship would in time prove an avenue of escape.

Suzanne's letters lamented the flood of bills which was pouring in. Jewelers, goldsmiths, clockmakers, perfumers—sellers of lace, tapestries, porcelains, and marbles—all clamored for immediate payment. Jeanne smiled wryly at the limitless credit they would have thrust upon the King's mistress only a month ago. Much as she adored her jewels she made a quick decision.

She authorized Suzanne to commission the Crown jeweler to sell a magnificent set of diamonds—tiara, earrings, bracelets, necklace and pendant—and a priceless rope of pearls. When she learned that the jewels had brought more than half a million livres she ordered Suzanne to settle every bill and use the remaining money to maintain her staff at Louveciennes. She stressed that not one servant should be discharged, and reminded Suzanne to continue Zamor's lessons and see that he enjoyed every comfort.

Her financial straits were ended, at least temporarily. Ultimately her resources would depend on the new King; perhaps he would not restore her annuities, perhaps—the thought chilled her heart—he would order Louveciennes forfeit to the Crown at once instead of at her death. She was desperately lonely and still weighted with melancholy memories of the deceased monarch's tragic final days.

In midsummer she attended a memorial service for him in the chapel of the abbey. She sat among the nuns, swathed in heavy mourning, her face hidden by a long black veil. She listened approvingly to the fulsome encomiums heaped upon Louis XV, but the heavy irony of the situation did not escape her—the dead King showered with adulation, which the woman he had loved heard in exiled disgrace. Behind the concealment of her veil she sensed timid glances of compassion from the nuns around her.

A few days later the abbess said orders had been received to transfer the Comtesse du Barry to a comfortably furnished suite consisting of a bedroom and a small salon—and henceforth she

was allowed to walk in the garden. "No explanation was given," the abbess remarked, "but we at Pont-aux-Dames are happy for you. You deserve this amelioration, and I have further good tidings—your mother is coming to visit. She has already left Paris."

Jeanne had not seen her mother since the lighthearted days before Chauvelin's death—nearly a year ago—and she could hardly wait for Anne to arrive. When she was finally ushered through the doorway Jeanne threw herself into her arms, and the tears which sprang to her eyes were tears of mingled joy and nostalgia. "Mama!" she cried. "I have never been so glad to see you—not even when you came for me my last day at Saint Aure." She dried her eyes and looked lovingly at her mother.

Anne had mellowed into a handsome older woman and her natural dignity was enhanced by the expensive clothes she wore. Only the style in which she arranged her white hair suggested her provincial origin. She answered Jeanne's eager questions: Rancon was in good health at Passy, where he had remained to safeguard their house. Suzanne disbursed money whenever they needed it; as for the Roué—she laughed. "Suzanne tells me he prudently fled to the Low Countries the instant he heard of the King's death. She sends him his regular income. He frequently asks about you, and swears he will write."

"I doubt it," Jeanne commented. "He is too occupied with his gambling and his ladies. And here I am, buried in Lorraine. Mama . . ." it flashed upon her that in this province were her own beginnings. "Does it occur to you to revisit Vaucouleurs? It is in that direction"—she pointed to the southwest—"not too far distant in a fast coach."

Anne shook her head firmly. "I never want to see the town again. That is over, long ago."

"I have only the dimmest memory," Jeanne admitted, "not of the town itself, but of a creaking cart and dusty roads and endless fields." Anne put an arm around her. "That was the journey you and I made with Monsieur Davoste to Paris. You were hardly

more than a baby. Don't try to recapture the past, Jeanne—it is usually unwise, and always impossible."

Anne stayed four days at Pont-aux-Dames. "I hate to leave you with only stupid Henriette for companion. Shall I tell Suzanne to apply for permission to share your exile?"

"No. I confess I am sorely tempted, but you and Suzanne say I am never practical. This time I will be. Suzanne is more useful at Louveciennes; together she and Morin handle my affairs capably. I shall manage to endure here, for as long as necessary. But Mama"—she kissed Anne good-by—"if only a visitor would come, once in a while!"

Two months later, in early October, another visitor did come—one she least expected. The abbess said he refused to give his name. *He?* Jeanne waited expectantly in her small salon, her brain in a flurry of speculation. Richelieu? But he was too old to journey so far, and both d'Aiguillon and the Roué were in exile. Who, then? Footsteps sounded in the passageway, the door swung open—and there stood the Duc de Brissac.

"Monsieur de Brissac!" she lisped, pale with emotion. "What brings you so far to see someone who is all but forgotten?" He was not in his familiar uniform of the Hundred Swiss, but wore a riding suit of fine blue linen. He swept off his hat and kissed her hand, and a tremor ran through her body. "I am on an inspection tour of the garrison at Nancy and I thought I might stop here. . . ." His gray-blue eyes looked into hers.

He is not accustomed to dissimulation, she thought, and her liking for him increased. Nancy was not so near that he would casually ride by; she realized that he had come to see her with characteristic deliberation.

"Why do you say you are almost forgotten?" he asked. "You have many friends, all of whom remember you with love." His tawny face colored slightly and Jeanne's heart skipped at the implication of his words. She motioned for him to sit and he settled in a fragile armchair. "My surroundings are not lavish"—

she looked around the small room—"but this is an improvement on the cell I previously occupied." She described her first lonely months at the abbey and told him of the greater freedom she now enjoyed.

"I can tell you why," Brissac said in his forthright manner. "The Duchesse d'Aiguillon has interceded with Maurepas for you and her husband. I think you can hope for your freedom before many months are past."

Jeanne's eyes lighted with hope. "If I am only permitted to return to Louveciennes. . . ."

Brissac shifted uncomfortably in his small chair. "I am stiff from my long ride. Perhaps we can walk and stretch my legs?"

"Of course! Anyway, it is too fine a day to sit in this stuffy room." She did not even take time to put on a hat, and they walked outside into the garden. She slipped her arm through his and they strolled along the graveled path. "This garden is well planned," he observed, "and the autumn flowers are lovely, but the center lawn is too bare. It needs a fountain to give life and movement to the setting." Jeanne heard his words but made no comment. She was conscious only of his arm's firm pressure and she relaxed in the reassuring company of the first man she had seen in five months.

They reached the end of the path and turned to retrace their steps. Brissac halted and faced her. "Comtesse, I am a soldier, not a courtier, and I cannot be devious. I had no mission in Nancy—I came to see you." His eyes were riveted on her golden hair bathed in the waning sunlight.

"I had hoped so," she whispered.

"Ever since the night I first saw you . . ."

"You felt that too?" she asked. Her eyes were shining with happiness.

"I have a wife, as you perhaps know. She and I are only good friends, but it was always the King's presence which prevented my speaking . . ."

"I loved the King, Monsieur de Brissac."

"I know that—and you gave him the happiest years of his life. I loved him too, as a charming gracious master. But he is gone and we still have our lives to live." He fumbled with his cravat. "Dare I hope that we might live them together?"

She looked at his stalwart figure and handsome face. His eyes, in which sometimes there was a suggestion of a twinkle, were now grave and appealing. She longed to throw herself in his arms, here in the garden of Pont-aux-Dames, to be encircled and sheltered from the fears and loneliness which haunted her. "It is too soon after the King's death," she said in a low voice, "and I can make no plans. My future is uncertain and I might be a detriment to your career. The Queen——"

"No!" He struck his boots vigorously with the riding crop in his hand. "I am not ambitious for place or power. I need nothing—and I want nothing, except you." He clenched and unclenched his free hand, tense with emotion. "I shall wait until you are free, and then you will tell me with your lips the answer I already read in your eyes."

The sun was sinking toward the west and they walked to the garden gate which opened on the outer courtyard. "Tell me," she begged, clinging to him with more hunger than she knew, "what you meant the night we met, when you said what you did?"

"I said you were beautiful. Is that not clear enough?"

"Not that; something else."

He stood a moment in thought and a tender smile curved his full lips. "God keep you?"

She nodded.

"I was asking God to keep you for me, and He has answered my prayer." He bent and kissed her quickly on the mouth, opened the gate, and was gone. Jeanne softly touched her lips with her fingers and walked dreamily to a wooden bench nearby. She sat until dusk fell, torn between sorrow for the past and a dawning hope for the future. She quivered at the memory of his lips on hers; sensual excitement mingled with the emotional security which he imparted was a novel experience. Even the King had

never stirred her in this way. She rested her cheek in her hand and her eyes glistened with happy tears. She gave thanks for Brissac and the future which he offered beyond the confines of the abbey. She would wait with what patience she could muster.

It was a blessing that the Holy Virgin answered her prayer for courage to endure exile, and fortunate that Brissac's visit had renewed her hope, for six long months of autumn and winter crept by without the longed-for release. An unexpected letter from the Maréchale told her that the Queen was still adamant in opposing her return. Marie Antoinette had been overheard saying to the King that in order to extinguish *the scandal,* the Comtesse du Barry should be altogether removed from the Court. But in May, a full long year after the old King's death, the Queen's hatred apparently softened. Jeanne received a letter from the Comte de Maurepas stating that she was free to return to Louveciennes provided she conducted herself with decorum and never reappeared at Versailles.

She wasted no time leaving Pont-aux-Dames. Her own berline, dispatched by Morin, stood at the main entrance of the abbey. Her trunk was stowed and she turned to the abbess who was waiting to say good-by. "Adieu, Comtesse." The nun's fine aristocratic features showed sincere regret. "Since we have come to know your gentleness and serenity of character we are ashamed of our former feelings. Forgive us, I beg of you."

She held out her arms and Jeanne embraced her warmly. "Of course, Abbess—but there is really nothing to forgive. You have treated me with kindness, and if ever I make a retreat I shall come here." Her foot was already on the step of the berline when she turned once more. "As a pledge of my feelings, allow me to present a gift to the abbey. I shall commission a fountain, carved of pink marble, for your garden."

The four horses pulling the berline were strong and fast, and the return journey to Louveciennes was rapid. A slight detour

would have taken her through Vaucouleurs, but anxiety to reach home outweighed Jeanne's natural curiosity to view her place of birth. It was early evening of the second day when the heavy coach passed through the gilded gates of Louveciennes and rolled up the familiar linden-bordered drive. Suzanne and Morin, and Zamor, stood waiting at the portico.

"Suzanne!" cried Jeanne joyously, throwing her arms around her. "How happy I am to be home at last, and how wonderful it will be to make myself forgotten!" Morin bowed and gave her a welcoming smile of respect and affection. Jeanne patted him warmly on the arm and turned to Zamor. He had grown an inch or more during her absence. He was already taller than Morin and his face had altered so radically that he bore little resemblance to the round-faced child she had loved. Only the liquid dark eyes remained, but their occasional merry gleam had disappeared, replaced by a slumberous sullen look.

"Zamor!" She hugged him impulsively. "You are no longer a little boy!"

"I am thirteen, madame." His voice, still high and thin, pierced her ears. Soon it will be changing, she thought, and then it will deepen. "Come upstairs with me, Suzanne—there is so much I want to hear. Zamor"—she called over her shoulder—"come to my room in the morning."

When the door of Jeanne's bedroom closed behind them Suzanne spoke, her voice grave. "I had not wanted to greet you with this, but since it has come up . . ." Jeanne looked at her curiously. "It is Zamor. He will not pursue his lessons, he sulks most of the day, and if Morin or I reprove him he flies into a terrifying rage—he screams and bites like an animal. He hates me; I can feel it."

Jeanne tried to hide her genuine concern. "Suzanne, I think you make this more serious than necessary. It is natural that Zamor is restless now . . . he is well developed physically and has reached an age . . ."

"That is just the trouble!" exclaimed Suzanne distastefully. "Morin has surprised him more than once——" she blushed and whispered the remainder of the sentence in Jeanne's ear.

"He needs more exercise," Jeanne said. "He should learn to ride. More time spent in the open air and he will soon cease that disgusting habit." I may not be practical about money, she told herself, but in matters like this I am infinitely more mature than Suzanne. She changed the subject, which she knew was embarrassing to her companion.

"You know my taste perfectly," she said, looking approvingly around the room. "You have arranged the furniture just as I myself would have done." Her glance traveled from the four-columned bed to the mantel, on which stood the gilt clock supported by the Three Graces. "The King's clock!" She smiled tenderly. "Suzanne, do you remember the day he gave it to me? He considered it the final touch to round out the *décor* of my apartments."

Suzanne nodded in agreement and began to tell Jeanne of the innovations which she had effected in the household. Jeanne listened with interest, interrupting occasionally with a question or a comment. "It sounds efficient and well regulated," she said when Suzanne had finished. "You know, I have never really lived at Louveciennes, but now I shall have the time to enjoy it. In a way it will be a relief after the artificial constraints of *ce-pays-ci.*" They looked at each other and laughed. Suzanne said good night and Jeanne went to bed, falling into dreamless slumber between her own satin sheets.

The next morning after she had finished her coffee and roll, a knock sounded on the door and Zamor entered. He was neatly dressed in a green broadcloth suit of conventional cut, its bilious shade singularly unbecoming to his dark skin. "Good morning, madame." His expression was one of mingled suspicion and longing. "Good morning, Zamor," Jeanne answered in a natural voice. "Come sit by the bed and tell me all about yourself." He

sat on a tabouret and she put a hand on his arm. "It has been such a long time since we talked."

Zamor spoke a few words but he seemed preoccupied. All at once he got up and began to climb into Jeanne's bed, his face unsmiling.

"Zamor! What are you doing?"

"Our game, madame . . . the one we used to play. . . ."

"Wait, Zamor." Jeanne spoke calmly. "You were a little boy then, and now you are getting to be a young man. You have always disliked being treated as a child, so don't you understand you are now too big for childish games?"

Zamor stood by the bed, breathing hard. Jeanne threw back the covers, hastily flung a *négligé* over her chemise, and put her feet to the floor. "Don't you understand, Zamor?" she repeated. "Yes, madame . . . I understand." But his thin voice quavered with disappointment and his eyes followed her moodily as she moved across the floor in her filmy *négligé*. Observing his glance, Jeanne resolved to make it tactfully clear that he was no longer welcome in her bedroom.

The remainder of the year passed rapidly. Her household ran so smoothly that it required little of her personal attention; nevertheless she took an active interest in the small details of domestic life. She rehung her fine collection of paintings and spent long hours supervising the planting and cultivation of a kitchen-garden. When autumn came she took as much pleasure in preparing *confitures* from her orchards as if she had been a simple peasant woman.

She was happy in the atmosphere of healthy informality, so vastly different from the frozen routine of Versailles. Instead of tightly corseted court attire she dressed in loose flowing gowns, took a cold bath daily, and went on long walks through the gardens and woods of Louveciennes. What a relief to be free from constricting protocol, wearisome details of precedence, and cease-

less vicious gossip! As she had said the night of her return, she was content to be forgotten.

She had not the least regret for the fawning parasites who had flocked around her when she was the Favorite, but she felt an occasional pang of loneliness for her real friends. She could forgive their reluctance to visit; she was still in semi-disgrace and they were understandably wary of incurring the Queen's displeasure—but where was Brissac? He was not a man to fear anything, even royal disfavor. He had risked his career to visit her at Pont-aux-Dames when her future was more clouded than now.

The nagging question which continued to haunt her mind was finally answered by the Duc d'Aiguillon. He and his wife paid a formal call shortly after the New Year. The weather was bitterly cold and Jeanne and her two guests sat before a roaring fire in the small upstairs salon. "Seventeen seventy-six is beginning as a fearsome year," said the Duc, warming his hands. "The records indicate it is the coldest winter since 1709."

"I can believe it," Jeanne answered. "There is great distress in the village and I send soup and warm clothing to the poor."

"You are kind as always, Comtesse," the Duchesse said.

"No kinder than you, madame. I cannot thank you adequately for asking Monsieur de Maurepas to effect my release from the abbey."

"She asked him to revoke my exile also," the Duc broke in, "and the King agreed. I think we are now free from worry," he added smilingly. "The Queen dislikes me, but I am still permitted at Court, and that is more than our old friend Choiseul can say . . . The King detests him, and even the Queen's influence cannot contrive his recall."

"Where . . . where is the Duc de Brissac?" Jeanne could restrain neither the words nor the lisp with which she uttered them. The Duc looked at her in astonishment. "Do you not know? The King has sent him on a four-year mission to the courts of Europe. He will report their views on the revolt of England's colonies."

"Four years! But—why Brissac?" Her disappointment was evident and comprehension began to dawn on d'Aiguillon's face. "The Queen persuaded His Majesty to choose Brissac because . . . because of his military knowledge." He shook his head and added superfluously, "She learned of his visit to you at the abbey."

"Yes," Jeanne sighed. "I might have known."

A swirling snowstorm had begun and the Duc and Duchesse hurried to depart before it grew worse. Jeanne thanked them warmly for coming. "Don't forget me; please come again, and convey my compliments to *Son Excellence.*"

The Duc d'Aiguillon smiled. "He is ill, but not seriously; after all, he is only eighty!" Jeanne laughed. "Bring him the next time," she called after them as they struggled through the snow to their waiting coach.

Jeanne tried to put the absent Duc de Brissac from her mind. She began to go among the poor and sick of the village at the bottom of the Bougival hill, ministering to their desperate need. Suzanne usually accompanied her but sometimes she took Zamor instead. His disposition brightened when they were alone and in rare moments she glimpsed flashes of the impish charm which once held such promise.

One freezing day in March they knocked at the dilapidated cottage of the blacksmith. He was a simple friendly giant who welcomed her with almost incoherent gratitude. "Madame la Comtesse," he stammered. "You are an angel of mercy to come. My good wife is nigh unto death with hunger and cold . . . and the babe she bore last week is already dead. . . ." He looked as if he would break down, and Jeanne put her gloved hand on his arm.

"Henri," she said compassionately. "Keep your courage." She motioned to Zamor and he placed a hamper of broth, eggs, cheese, and wine on the rude table. Jeanne walked across the earthern floor to the dying woman who lay on a pallet before the empty

hearth. She knelt beside her. "Have faith, Yvette; give thanks that you still have your eldest and"—she spoke a charitable untruth—"*le Bon Dieu* will send you another child."

The blacksmith's wife sobbed weakly and tried to raise herself to kiss Jeanne's hand. "*Restez tranquille.*" Jeanne soothed her. "I have brought food and warm blankets and sturdy clothes for all of you, and every day until spring——" she was frozen in midsentence by a shrill scream from the kitchen. A pale thin girl of eight or nine ran into the room, her blue eyes wide with terror. "What is it?" Jeanne asked, clasping the crying child to her bosom. "Tell me, little one, what frightened you?"

"That ugly dark man"—the child panted—"he touched me, all over . . . he is hateful!" She burst into fresh sobs. Jeanne turned in anger and her eyes darted to Zamor. He leaned in the kitchen doorway, a defiant leer on his thick lips. "To the coach, Zamor, at once!" she ordered him furiously. She stroked the child's dirty blonde hair and wiped her tear-stained cheeks. "I apologize, Henri," she said, crimson with shame, "for Zamor's lewd behavior. He shall be severely punished." She pressed a golden louis into the child's fist and left the cottage.

Zamor huddled sullenly in a corner of the coach. "Madame," he whined, "I did no harm to the girl—I only frightened her." Jeanne looked straight ahead and did not utter a word on the return drive. When they reached Louveciennes she ordered Morin to lock Zamor in his room for a week and to feed him only once a day. "Madame!" protested Morin. "He needs more punishment than that—a sound flogging is long overdue."

"No." Jeanne shrank from the thought of physical violence. "Zamor has an enormous appetite—this will be punishment enough." Morin shook his head skeptically and Jeanne wondered uneasily if she should have followed his firm counsel.

The years rolled by, placidly and peacefully, and when a new decade dawned Jeanne looked back to the hard winter of 1776

and wondered where time had gone. Life for her was serene and free from care. It had been many months since Maurepas wrote that His Majesty was graciously pleased to restore her income and to confirm her life tenure of Louveciennes. It had been even longer since she received her first letter from Brissac, penned in the large angular hand which had now become so familiar.

Comtesse, I have completed my mission in Saint Petersburg and now depart the Tsaritsa's Court for Berlin. The months and years pass all too slowly but my thoughts for you remain. I do not write often enough, but my heart is yours. Wait. . . .

TIMOLÉON DE BRISSAC

She had read and reread the short missive until it was worn from repeated foldings, and it was the same with those which followed—from Berlin, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Dresden, and now Vienna. I shall wait, she vowed. If necessary I shall wait until eternity. But in her heart throbbed a ceaseless prayer that the man she loved would soon return to fill her loneliness.

The days of the past four years had been pleasant and full. The Duc and Duchesse d'Aiguillon came several times a year. Sometimes they were accompanied by Richelieu. The first time the aged sinner saw Jeanne again he kissed her hand with his old flourish. His eyes peered sharply from his wrinkled face. "Comtesse, for you the years are kind; you are more alluring than when you presided over the Roué's tables." He embraced her. "And you were lovely then. . . . I once even thought of asking——" he paused, the old sly smile curving his thin lips. *"Son Excellence!"* Jeanne tapped him playfully with her fan. "The years also deal kindly with you, but you are still incorrigible."

After Jeanne's income was restored the Maréchale reappeared. *"Zut, ma chère!* I have been so busy or I would have come before." The animated old woman embraced her as if they had parted only yesterday. "Since the Emperor Joseph was here there is an auspicious change in the royal family. He persuaded his brother-in-law to submit to that embarrassing operation, and now

Her Majesty is *enceinte*. High time, too," she cackled, "after seven years of wedded virginity!"

Jeanne laughed. "Maréchale, you never change. To hear you carries me back so long ago." In response to the Maréchale's eager questions she described the visit Marie Antoinette's brother had made to Louveciennes. She had shown him the storied *Pavillon* and explained that it witnessed no more merry suppers, and he had condescended to offer his arm as they strolled under the lindens.

Jeanne had found him humorless and dull, entirely lacking the Queen's spirit, but she prudently refrained from revealing her thoughts to the Maréchale. She dared not risk rekindling Marie Antoinette's dormant hostility—the Queen had been angry enough when she learned of the Emperor Joseph's pilgrimage to Louveciennes.

"He was agreeable, Maréchale, but I do not deceive myself. He came out of curiosity only—to see the shameless extravagant harlot. You know," she laughed merrily, "I think His Imperial Majesty found me disappointingly respectable!"

"Do not accuse yourself of extravagance," said the Maréchale surprisingly. "The Queen indulges an extravagance *ce-pays-ci* has never known. Compared to the rivers of gold she squanders, you and the Marquise were misers." Once more caution stilled Jeanne's tongue. She too had heard disquieting tales of the Queen's vast outpouring of money, the pensions and sinecures she heaped upon her grasping friends, and the inept helplessness of the King to stem the flow. Jeanne remembered Richelieu's saying, on his last visit, that the Queen's folly added to the ruinous cost of the American war would bankrupt the kingdom.

"Perhaps when the Queen has her child she will become more sensible," Jeanne had said tolerantly. "Remember, she was only a young girl when she came to France, and those protracted years of frustration . . ."

The Maréchale shrugged. "*Zut!* I hope you are right. Her

frivolity has already earned her too many enemies. I find this Court dull, a dreary change from the one we knew so well." She rose to go and her spade-shaped nose twitched. "*Ma chère* . . . will you lend me three thousand livres? There is a small obligation to my jeweler and the wretch is pressing me. . . ." Jeanne went to her desk for the money and the Maréchale stuffed it in her purse. "*Merci* . . . I shall repay it on my next visit." She and Jeanne exchanged disarming smiles. Each knew that the transaction was not a loan but a gift.

That visit had taken place nearly two years ago, just before the Queen had given birth to Madame Royale, and the Maréchale had never returned. The Duchesse d'Aiguillon told Jeanne she had wormed her way into Marie Antoinette's circle. The Queen found the garrulous Maréchale amusing and had settled a handsome pension on her. "In that event," said Jeanne, "she will not risk her new-found security by visiting me again, and that is the end of my three thousand livres."

Yes, the days had been pleasant and full . . . but the nights were maddeningly lonely, and many times Jeanne cried herself softly to sleep, racked with yearning. In her restless state of mind the approach of her thirty-seventh birthday frightened her. Thirty-seven now . . . soon forty . . . and the man she loved and had wanted so long was not here to shower her with caresses, to whisper reassurance that her beauty had not faded.

It would be futile to ask Suzanne if she was still alluring. Suzanne's love and loyalty would blind her and Suzanne could not view her with a man's eyes. Jeanne looked anxiously at her nude reflection in the tall mirror of her bedroom. Her skin was still smooth and pink, her hair shone with its golden lights, and her eyes were the same deep blue. Their expression was as soft as when she had first gone to Versailles, but there was an added glow of knowledge and a touch of sadness too. Jeanne stretched her neck and ran her hand beneath her chin. Did she feel the faint threat of a double chin? She moved closer to the mirror.

No—not yet. True, her waistline was larger than when she had worn tight corsets but she had to admit, even in her sharply self-critical mood, that she was still a desirable woman—but to whom? She sighed.

On the Feast of the Assumption Jeanne left the private chapel at Louveciennes and went for a walk. She skirted the white *Pavillon* which overlooked the Seine and stood for a moment surveying the scene below. The wondrous construction of the Marly Pump had never lost its fascination for her and she stood on the crest of the slope staring at its intricate machinery. She thought of the first time she had heard the rumbling groan of its gears and how the King had laughed at her amazement. The noise had never since disturbed her; it was an integral part of Louveciennes, as fitting and natural as the singing of the swallows and the croaking of the bullfrogs. The one time the Maréchale had remained overnight she had complained vociferously of the din, vowing she could not sleep a wink.

Well . . . the Maréchale would not be coming anymore. Jeanne started down her favorite path, the one which wound around the hill to the main road. She was dressed in a loose flowing gown which permitted her to walk vigorously. Long ago she had discarded the absurd gait which was peculiar to Versailles. She reached the bottom of the hill and walked along the road, intending to re-enter the grounds of Louveciennes through the main gate. It was a warm August morning and she was beginning to perspire when she reached the gatekeeper's cottage. As she rang the bell she noticed a magnificent English bay tethered to the gate.

The old caretaker limped from his cottage and opened a small side gate for her. "A fine day for your walk, Madame la Comtesse." Jeanne laughed. "A little warm, Philippe!" She was fond of the old man because the King had like him. He had fought under the King at Fontenoy, where he received the wound which had made him a cripple. "Whose beautiful horse?" she asked.

"The animal is mine, madame. He has thrown a shoe and I have sent for the blacksmith." Jeanne identified the accent as English, and swung around to face the man who had followed Philippe from the cottage. "You sent for a good man, monsieur; the blacksmith is conscientious in his work." She smiled at the stranger.

"I am Henry Seymour." He kissed her hand. "We are close neighbors. I can see your *Pavillon* from my Château."

She smiled at him and adjusted the blue taffeta bow on her straw hat. She had noticed across the fields his Château of Prunay and Morin had told her it was occupied by a rich Englishman. "Will you join me for tea while waiting for your horse to be shod?"

Seymour pulled at his scarlet riding coat, which seemed too tight for his thick body. He replaced his felt jockey hat on his powdered cadogan wig. "You do me great honor, Comtesse." He offered his arm and they walked up the sloping roadway to the Château. "You know me?" she asked in surprise.

"I know who you are, and I have long wanted to know you in person." It flashed through her mind that his small mouth held the suggestion of a smirk, but she dismissed the thought impatiently. Not every man could be as unbelievably handsome as Brissac, and this English gentleman was most attentive. She was pleased to note that his gray eyes glanced frequently at her—it had been so long since a man had looked at her with undisguised admiration. All at once she felt years younger; she tripped with light grace into the foyer and rang for a footman.

While Jeanne poured tea Seymour began to talk about himself. She realized with amusement that the subject was an obvious favorite with him, but nevertheless her interest was unfeigned. He said he had a fortune in England but preferred to live in France, which he considered more elegant in style and taste. The only pastime he missed was the superior racing and riding to be found in England. Jeanne observed that the Comte d'Artois and

many other young nobles had raced English-style in the Bois for several years, but he waved her remark aside.

"That is nothing," he said loftily. "I prefer to ride alone; they know nothing of true racing." He swept on, his voice tireless in self-absorption. "Riding is my first passion," he assured her, "except, of course, the company of alluring ladies"—he paused, and seeing that Jeanne ignored his digression, reverted to his principal theme—"riding is my chief activity. My wife is even jealous of my horse! Egad!" His sharp exclamation startled Jeanne. "Do you have a child?" she asked. She was enjoying his company but had wearied of his monologue.

"Yes, a girl of five. Her name is Pamela."

"Then allow me, Monsieur Seymour, to send her a gift. We have new kittens at Louveciennes, and little girls love them."

Seymour seemed genuinely touched. "You are kind, Comtesse, to think of my child." Jeanne said a few words to the footman, and when her visitor rose a few minutes later to depart, the servant returned with a small kitten, its pure white fur enhanced by a pink satin bow around its neck. Seymour took the pet in his arms. "Comtesse, may I call again?" He pursed his small mouth into a foolish smile.

Jeanne hesitated. . . . He was friendly enough, but a trifle tiresome in his smug English assurance. . . . Still . . . she thought of the lonely birthday facing her. "Yes, monsieur," she said impulsively. "Will you come to dine four nights from now?"

"Capital! I shall be here." He turned to go, and as he strode to where the groom held his newly shod horse Jeanne saw that his short legs were absurdly bowed. She smiled inwardly. A self-important little man, this Monsieur Seymour, but he was better company than none.

The following day a heavy farm cart drew up at the service gate of Louveciennes, and Suzanne rushed into the library. "The English gentleman has sent you a gift," she said excitedly. "Come and see it." Jeanne closed her book and followed Suzanne into the salon. "There, in the corner!" Jeanne looked in the direction

she had pointed and saw a polished satinwood table inlaid with silver in a curious Greek design. Jeanne clapped her hands with pleasure. "The new classical *motif!*" she exclaimed. "And that is the most fitting spot for it."

When Henry Seymour came three nights later Jeanne waited until they had dined and then thanked him profusely for the table. "You did not know it, monsieur, but you have given me a birthday gift."

"Egad! I was only repaying you for Pamela's kitten—and the table is already ten years old. Birthday?"

"Today," Jeanne admitted. "Do I look thirty-seven?" Instantly she reproached herself for such a foolish question. "Thirty-seven! You appear no more than twenty-five!" He got up from his chair and seated himself beside her on the sofa. "And you are more beautiful than I had thought possible." He moved closer and his hand rested on her knee.

Jeanne was astounded, and removed his hand. An attempt at amorous dalliance was the last thing she had expected from this pompous little man. She wondered wildly if her years alone had destroyed her knowledge of men. "Perhaps you misunderstood my invitation, monsieur. I intended only a friendly gesture. We are neighbors and sometimes I do get lonely."

"Exactly!" He slapped his thigh. "Lonely, eh? I can provide company for you, Comtesse, especially tonight. My wife is ill anyway, and she is agreeably understanding." He tried clumsily to encircle her shoulders and his face drew closer to hers.

"Monsieur Seymour!" Her voice was tense with irritation and she stood up. "It is clear you do misunderstand me. I thank you—and your wife—for the compliment, but my loneliness is not so unbearable as all that. Adieu, monsieur."

The Englishman's face was a study in stupefaction. "But I thought . . . you . . . your reputation." He halted. "Forgive me, Comtesse; I see I have done you an injustice. I am more stupid even than I must seem." His self-assurance had dissolved, and Jeanne was torn between indignation and pity at his ludicrous

expression. She saw him now merely as a plump pretentious man whose pomposity had vanished.

"Our acquaintance has been brief," she said, "and pleasant until now. I am sorry it is so quickly ended."

"At least do me the favor of keeping the table," he begged. His voice sounded so sincere and he looked at her with such humble pleading that she relented. His vast opinion of himself was grievously deflated and Jeanne had no desire to humiliate him further.

"Very well," she agreed. "It is handsome, and it will serve to prevent me from misleading gentlemen in the future." His fleshy face turned scarlet. "Good night, Monsieur Seymour." She smiled with genuine feeling. "I hope Pamela will like her kitten."

The sound of Seymour's galloping horse had already faded in the distance when Jeanne rang for Suzanne. Halfway between laughter and tears she told her of the preposterous evening. "At least I am still attractive, Suzanne—to Monsieur Seymour!"

"Jeanne." Suzanne's eyes were full of compassion. "I think I know what your longings must be, and it breaks my heart to see you in this idyllic spot without the man you love—the man you deserve."

"Do I deserve him, Suzanne? He is so honorable, so manly—and so *handsome!*" She wrung her hands in anguish. "It has been so long. . . . I could almost have taken Seymour . . . he was not that repugnant . . . but I won't! Suzanne, I won't! I shall wait for this man if it means another six years without——" she paused. "Mama told me when I was very young not to accept a man unless I was fond of him, and except for Genlis I never have." She gave a short laugh. "His behavior was punishment enough for that mistake."

She was interrupted by the sound of a horse coming up the roadway at full gallop. "Not Seymour again?" She voiced her thought aloud. She hurried to the window and drew back the draperies. She was seized with an unaccountable trembling, her throat was dry and constricted, and she put a hand to her heart.

"Suzanne!" she screamed. Before Suzanne could move Jeanne had fled through the doorway into the warm night, propelled by a resistless force, an intuition which her heart told her was true. She rushed to the graveled drive, dimly lighted by the windows of the Château, and threw herself into the outstretched arms of the Duc de Brissac.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

ITEM: Pair of gold spurs, engraved with the arms of the ci-devant Duc de Brissac.

For the rest of her life Jeanne remembered their first night together. Instead of going to her own bedroom in the Château they went to the room she and the King had once shared in the *Pavillon*. The small marble building, a gem of beauty, became a temple of love. She had loved the King deeply, devotedly, and he had given her the security of a father and the affection of a lover. But nothing in her previous life had equaled her feeling for Brissac.

She clung to him in near frenzy all during the long night, alternately trembling with passion and relaxing with fulfilled desire. His lightest touch shook her to the depths and the reality of his firm tender demands exceeded her wildest hopes. And as they lay together in the waning hours of darkness she realized that she derived another feeling from his presence. His nearness not only stirred and satisfied her physical need—it also gave her a feeling of emotional security, entirely new.

They lay in each other's arms in the clean light of the approaching dawn. Jeanne ran her hand through his thick blond hair. "So long have I waited," she whispered, "so long have I lived for this moment. If I died now I would die happy." He raised on his elbow and looked deep into her eyes. "Do not speak of death, my darling—we have life and love before us, always."

Her fingers played along his firm neck and traced the line of

his broad shoulder and muscular arm. His appearance in attire had not been deceptive. He had the taut controlled physique of an athlete and she saw with awed wonder that his entire body radiated the same warm tawny glow as his face. "It is odd," Jeanne said, a catch in her throat, "but for the first time I feel as if I were married." Her eyes filled with tears and he pulled her close to him.

Her head rested on his chest and she could feel the sturdy beating of his heart. Brissac rubbed his forefinger lightly across her closed eyelids. "We *are* married, in all but name. My wife is an invalid. . . . Someday, perhaps . . ." Jeanne opened her eyes. "No." She put her hand on his lips. "As you said, we have life and love ahead. Let us be grateful, and enjoy both."

In the blissful years that drifted rapidly by, Jeanne came to think of herself as if she were, in truth, Brissac's wife. Unlike many whose union was consecrated by the Church, they remained passionately attached to each other and neither had the faintest urge to be unfaithful. When Brissac's gentle wife died on the family estate in Anjou he asked Jeanne to marry him, but she shook her head. "You pay me the greatest honor a woman could ask, Timoléon, and I worship you for it. But why confuse our lives? I am forty and you are within a year of becoming fifty. You have a grown daughter. . . . No, we are happy now . . . it is best to continue as we are." She added teasingly, "Besides, if we were formally married I might not trust you." In spite of his disappointment he understood the wisdom of her refusal and never reverted to the subject.

The King appointed Brissac Governor of Paris and when his duties held him in the city Jeanne joined him at the Hôtel de Brissac, which was in the rue de Grenelle. In the large building Brissac had ample space for the hard physical exercise he enjoyed: a fencing room, a court of battledore and shuttlecock, and one for tennis.

In his high official station he entertained at lavish balls and

suppers, always with Jeanne by his side. All of Paris and Versailles knew of their liaison but their lives were so decorous that scandal did not batten upon them. The tongues of gossip and calumny were too obsessed with the Queen's delirium of extravagance and her involvement in the affair of the Diamond Necklace—no one believed her innocent—to waste time on the former mistress and her noble dignified lover.

Jeanne had always adored Paris. She wandered through the Louvre and sometimes attended the Opéra, always heavily veiled to avoid notoriety. But her heart lay at Louveciennes. It was there she was most happy, gardening, walking in the long summer afternoons with Brissac or sitting on a bench while he schooled a new horse. His skill as a horseman equaled the former King's, and when she watched his superb body triumphantly straddle an unruly steed she breathed a prayer of gratitude for her fortune.

Many years ago, when she was weeping over the wreckage of her love affair with Charles Duval, her mother had told her that someday a real man would love her to distraction and that then she must match his love with equal love. That time had come, and life for her was radiant, filled with a profound happiness which could never have survived in the poisonous atmosphere of Versailles. No cloud shadowed her skies—except Zamor.

Three years before, when he was twenty-one, he had committed a crime which enraged the village and froze Jeanne with horror. On the pretext of showing her the *Pavillon* he had lured the daughter of the blacksmith—the same whom he had molested when she was a child—into the vestibule and tried to rape her. The girl, who was fifteen by then, had enough strength to flee, and she told her father that the tall Bengalese had threatened to strangle her if she did not submit.

Henri, followed by a muttering crowd, had burst into the Château at Louveciennes and demanded Zamor, who lay whimpering with fear in a concealed loft. "You are too kind, Comtesse, to that filthy heathen. He deserves a hanging—give him to us!"

Jeanne was white with terror. Brissac was in Paris and the only men in the Château were Morin and two footmen.

Henri's huge frame, usually so placid, shook with fury. "Henri," she said, summoning courage from some unknown reservoir of strength. "He shall be punished, but not by private vengeance. Be thankful he could not carry out his vile attempt." She went up to the giant blacksmith and put her hand on his arm as she had done years before when she visited his dying wife. "Trust me, Henri," she begged. "Zamor shall be punished."

The big man hesitated. His simple face relaxed and he looked at Jeanne with the dumb trusting expression of a farm animal. She wanted to weep for him. "Comtesse . . ." he groped for the words. "I believe you . . . we will go now . . . but only because of your kindness . . . always kind to us poor." He turned and awkwardly herded his rough companions from the gold-and-white salon.

When Jeanne told Brissac he exploded with anger. She had never dreamed he could show such rage. "Jeanne, this Zamor is a monster! I well remember the night ten years ago in that same *Pavillon* when he revealed his true feelings. He screamed that he hated us all—even you! I think he meant it then and means it now. Someday he will try to destroy you." Jeanne could not speak. She too was remembering the ominous evening of Zamor's tantrum, which had been followed immediately by the blasphemous Englishman whom Brissac himself had marched off to the Bastille—what was his name? She had forgotten, for she had not thought of him since.

Brissac's angry voice recalled her to the present. "It is impossible to send him back to Bengal; I wish I could. But I can send him to the galleys."

"Not the galleys!" She burst into nervous tears. "He is my godchild, Timoléon. I vowed before the altar to guard him, to protect him always. . . ."

Brissac swore, a revealing measure of his anger. Jeanne had

never before heard him use an oath. "As you wish, but I say you are harboring an adder. The least I can do is commit him to the Bastille. I shall send the order to Versailles tomorrow for the King's signature."

Zamor spent a year in the Bastille and although Jeanne's heart ached for him she knew there was no alternative. He was fortunate to have escaped the vengeance of Henri and the infuriated villagers. When he returned to Louveciennes she consoled herself with the thought that his punishment had profited him. His manners and disposition seemed miraculously improved. He was always respectful to her, showed a new politeness to Suzanne and Morin, and fairly jumped whenever Brissac addressed him. His obsequiousness was spuriously excessive, Brissac said, but Jeanne replied that his heritage was, after all, oriental.

Henri had died from the kick of a fractious horse and his daughter had married and moved to Passy. Jeanne provided her dowry and suggested that she apply to Anne Rancon if she needed employment. The embarrassing presence of Henri's family was removed, but Zamor was careful to avoid the village, fearing the hostility of the inhabitants. On rare occasions he strolled through the gardens of Louveciennes, arching his long neck to sniff the tuberoses and jasmine, but if any member of the household approached he fled.

He spent most of his time, even on the most brilliant summer days, alone in his attic room surrounded by books. Jeanne asked Suzanne what he read and she shrugged. "As far as I can tell, the works of that madman Rousseau, although this morning when I entered to see if his room had been cleaned he was buried in a volume by a writer named Thomas Paine."

Jeanne frowned. Thomas Paine. . . . Brissac had once mentioned the name in revulsion . . . some English-born agitator, if her memory was correct. Brissac was concerned at the moment about the Assembly of Notables, which was attempting to solve the chronic deficit—but politics was always bewildering to her. She was more interested in sitting for her new portrait.

Madame Vigée-Lebrun was a slim pretty brunette whose lively conversation made Jeanne forget she was posing. She sat motionless in her loose gown of tulle, wondering if the large-brimmed hat of Tuscan straw was on her head at the right angle. She had argued with the artist about the hat. Madame Lebrun had wanted her to wear one more elaborate, preferably of taffeta adorned with an ostrich feather, but Jeanne had insisted on the simple straw. "It is what I usually wear at Louveciennes and," she affirmed decisively, "Monsieur de Brissac likes it."

While Madame Lebrun worked on the canvas she talked of the portrait she had just finished of Marie Antoinette and her children. "Tell me about them," Jeanne begged. "They are enchanting, Comtesse. Madame Royale is quiet, but the Dauphin and his brother—such charm and good looks! They are like the Queen."

"And how do you find Her Majesty?"

"Oh, Madame!" The young artist exclaimed in a tone of near worship. "She is so beautiful, so noble, and those who criticize do not guess how loving a mother she is. If you but knew her!"

"I knew Her Majesty once," said Jeanne softly, and Madame Lebrun blushed. Jeanne tactfully shifted the conversation to her own portrait, which had only now received its final brushstroke. She walked around the easel and inspected the fresh informal likeness. "It is most appealing," she complimented the pleased artist, "but I fear you make me appear too youthful." After Madame Lebrun had left, Jeanne stood before the painting but she was still thinking of Marie Antoinette. She knew from the Duchesse d'Aiguillon that the Queen, radiant in maternal fulfillment, had curtailed her senseless extravagance. But in thoughtless younger years she had sowed a harvest of hatred among her subjects—a harvest which appalled her during the Diamond Necklace trial. Marie Antoinette had known adversity and perhaps it had made her wiser—and more tolerant. Jeanne shook her head thoughtfully, and hoped the Queen's misfortunes were past.

The next year Jeanne suffered in alarming succession the loss of three persons dear to her. The Duc de Richelieu was found dead in his *own* bed, a mocking smile on his ancient features. Jeanne had not seen him for several years but she had known him for over twenty-five, and when Brissac pointed out that *Son Excellence* had been a young man when *le Roi Soleil* died and that he was ninety-two in this year of 1788, she could feel only an awed wonder. Richelieu's death seemed inevitable and yet unthinkable because he had lived a century, but the Duc d'Aiguillon's sudden collapse was an unexpected shock. He and his wife had been an uncommonly happy pair and Jeanne invited the widowed Duchesse to Louveciennes after the funeral.

In October her mother died. Anne had been in failing health for some months but with characteristic calm refused to admit her increasing weakness to Jeanne. Unwilling to face the fact that her mother was an old woman—Anne had reached seventy-five—Jeanne was stunned. She had been summoned to Passy in the middle of the night and when she reached the bedside Anne was still alive.

She opened her once beautiful eyes and although now almost blind she recognized her daughter. "My darling"—she whispered —"my little girl." Jeanne tried to stifle her sobs. "Mama," she said lovingly. Anne's breath was shallow but still she tried to gasp broken disconnected phrases. "You say you were robbed on the Pont-Neuf by an ointment-seller . . . take care . . . I tell you there are those in this world who will . . . do you harm." She gave a light sigh and ceased to breathe. Jeanne realized sadly that Anne's mind had been wandering in the past as she was dying. How else could she have fastened on an incident so long forgotten?

Rancon's sorrow was so abject that in trying to assuage his grief Jeanne lightened her own. She had been very close to her mother, but since Brissac's return had seen her less often. As she stood beside Rancon and heard the words of the priest committing Anne's body to the tomb she reflected how the living links which

bound her to the past were breaking one by one. Richelieu . . . d'Aiguillon . . . and now, above all, her mother. Rancon had been kind to her when she was a child, she had always liked him, and she would continue to support him. But he was not a communicative man. Suzanne alone remained to share the distant memories of childhood.

As they walked from the cemetery she thought of another absent figure from the past, the Roué. She had not seen him for nearly twenty years but she knew from his dunning letters that after the death of his long-neglected wife he had remarried, incongruously enough, a demure young girl and retired in sumptuous style to Toulouse—on the income which Jeanne still faithfully remitted.

The deaths which had followed one another so closely this year—could they be an ill omen? But no, they were simply signs of the ineluctable ebb and flow of life. She still had Brissac for companion, lover—husband, in reality—and the future lay serene before her.

When the Estates-General convened the following May at the King's command Brissac was confident it would restore the stability of the kingdom's finances and speedily adjourn. But when the Third Estate seceded from the Clergy and the Nobility, transformed itself into a National Assembly, and demanded far-reaching reforms, he was less optimistic. "I agree France needs moderate reforms," he explained to Jeanne. "Many feudal abuses remain, but I fear the flaring tempers in the Assembly and most of all I fear the King's indecision. His Majesty's intentions are good but he vacillates from hard rigidity to soft acquiescence."

He was obliged to spend more time in Paris, and at the end of June sent word he would not be able to see her for several weeks. "Do not try to come here," he wrote. "Remain in the coolness of Louveciennes and I will join you when tensions have lessened." On a sultry Tuesday at dusk—it happened to be the fourteenth of July—Jeanne, dressed in cool muslin, was sitting in the garden

when she heard his horse galloping up the Bougival hill. She hurried to meet him and was surprised at his disheveled appearance. He was sweating and dust-covered, and two buttons were missing from his coat.

"Timoléon! I did not expect you. . . . Why didn't you send word? I would have delayed supper."

"No time!" He was breathing hard and when he kissed her only perfunctorily she knew he was gravely disturbed. She walked with him into the Château, rang for a valet to prepare his bath, and ordered the chef to relight his fires. After Brissac had bathed and eaten he sipped his brandy and told her what had happened. An inflamed mob from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine had seized arms and rioted through the streets. They laid siege to the Bastille, promising its commander that he and his garrison would not be harmed if he surrendered the fortress. "Poor foolish de Launay! He believed the wretches, and no sooner was the drawbridge lowered than his gullible head was on a pike, borne through the streets by screaming savages. It was ghastly!"

Jeanne listened uncomprehendingly. "But why the Bastille? Wasn't it virtually empty?"

"The garrison was only a handful, and a few pensioned veterans lived there for lack of other quarters. As for the rumored political prisoners, only two were found. One was a common thief and the other was some Englishman who faded into the mob. No one seems to know why he was there. These stupid mobs!" He snorted in disgust. "And at times I think stupidity is not confined to mobs. When my aide Maussabré informed the King that the Bastille had fallen, His Majesty was peevish because he had just returned from an unsuccessful hunt. He remarked that the disturbance in Paris was only a riot!"

"What did Maussabré say to that?"

No, Sire—it is a revolution! "That is what he said!"

"A revolution!" Jeanne exclaimed. "But Timoléon, really——"

"I am afraid the fearsome word is correct, Jeanne." Brissac looked at her gravely. "We hope not, but events will soon show.

. . . I must leave early tomorrow for Le Mans. His Majesty has ordered me to assess the temper of the provinces."

After Brissac's departure Jeanne received a brief note saying he had found some disaffection in Maine and would write at length when he reached Le Mans. Days passed with no word and she began to fret. She could not take this unrest seriously, and yet . . . At the end of July the Chevalier Maussabré, Brissac's trusted aide, called on her. He was a youth of nineteen, whose dark handsome looks reminded Jeanne of Charles Duval.

"Comtesse, I have received word that Monsieur le Duc has been arrested at Le Mans." Jeanne paled. "I know it is foolish to tell you not to worry, but I know my master. He will safeguard himself and return unharmed." Jeanne looked at him imploringly. "I have no details," he added, "but should I learn more I shall inform you at once." He declined her offer of refreshment and hurried away to Paris.

The next week dragged by with no word from him and worse, nothing from Brissac. What was happening to him? Why should her lover be the target of ill will? It was the middle of August before he returned. There were circles of fatigue under his reddened eyes and he had lost weight. Jeanne clung to him in a paroxysm of relief, crying with joy. "Calm yourself, my dearest." He forced a weary smile. "I am unharmed. Only a little tired—I have ridden fourteen hours without pause. Let me sleep and then I will tell you what I have seen." He frowned, shook his head in a dazed sort of way, and walked slowly to his bedroom.

He slept the rest of the afternoon and all through the night, a sleep of utter exhaustion. Each time Jeanne tiptoed in to see if he had waked he did not stir; only the sound of his deep regular breathing reassured her that he was well. She wondered what experiences had tested him and looking anxiously at his handsome face she noticed two faint lines running from his nostrils to the corners of his mouth. She had never seen those lines before.

When he was awake she insisted he eat an English breakfast. "You must be famished and"—she tried to smile playfully—"I

want you to remain sturdy." He grinned and momentarily the years fell away and as she looked at the outline of his taut body beneath the sheets she could almost have believed he was a lusty youth. She sat beside his bed while he ate his eggs and slices of ham. "It is like another world here, after the sights I have seen." He struck his forehead with his fist.

"If you prefer, don't tell me."

"Some of it I should not tell you, but perhaps sharing will ease the memory. They arrested me only because I am the Governor of Paris. They did me no harm but I was forced to watch and . . . suppose it had been my own peasants in Anjou? I don't know. What have we done to deserve such hatred?"

"What were you forced to watch?" Jeanne reminded him.

"Their—diversions." He laughed bitterly. "They bound the tax collector and threw him on a pyre of burning faggots, and did not drag him away until his hands were burned off. The local butcher spat in his face and dared him to steal their hard-earned sous without any hands. The mob roared with laughter at that."

"I thought we were enlightened," Jeanne gasped. "What you are telling me is medieval!"

"The next incident was worse. They threatened the local *seigneur*—he was as poor as a sparrow hawk anyway—and his pregnant wife with scythes and pistols for three hours before they stripped him naked and dragged him to a dunghill. They danced around him shouting obscene taunts about his physical characteristics and his wife's condition. She was forced to watch his agony; all the time he kept calling piteously to her while they yanked out his hair and eyebrows, and then——"

"What?" Jeanne had covered her face with her hands as if she too were witnessing the inhuman spectacle. She did not want to hear more, but perhaps if he told it all, to the end, he would be partially relieved of his emotional burden. "And then," he finished, "it was over. They stood him up, caked with filth, and before his wife's eyes butchered him—literally cut him to pieces with scythes and knives and axes."

Jeanne was sickened with horror. "Timoléon," she pleaded. "What is going to happen? Has France gone mad, or will this soon pass?"

"I don't know," he answered honestly. "Anyone with intelligence knows that there has been heavy oppression in the past. Above all, the tax system has been unfair and burdensome to the peasants. They have grievances—I am the first to admit it. Their bloody vengeance is the price we are paying for our years of stupidity and neglect." Jeanne thought of the dire starvation in her own village at Louveciennes. Was it her fault? She had not created the tax law but she had done her best to alleviate distress. She remembered too the unpaid tradesmen at Versailles dying of hunger, and Suzanne's plight when she had found her.

"I still have some hope," Brissac was saying. "The Clergy and the Nobility renounced their feudal privileges last week. With that I am in full accord, although I think I was not oppressive to the peasants of my own lands. Now the Assembly can proceed to re-establish order and give the kingdom a constitution. Perhaps I have been unduly influenced by the isolated horrors I saw at Le Mans—perhaps the worst is over."

Jeanne, always tending to optimism, hoped he was right. Paris was in a fever of excitement and crowds wearing tricolor cockades thronged the arcades of the Palais-Royal fighting for the latest newssheets and political pamphlets. In the town of Versailles the National Assembly debated, passed resolutions on the Rights of Man, and enthusiastically swept away the last vestiges of feudalism. But Louveciennes itself was a quiet pond lying between the cascading passions of Paris and the torrential reforms of the Assembly. Jeanne's unhurried routine was unaltered. She gave her customary orders to gather the grapes and bring in the harvest; she continued to go among the villagers receiving their usual friendly welcome; and except for Brissac's more extended absences, her life was as satisfying as it had been before the fourteenth of July.

Nevertheless throughout France there were symptoms of deep

unrest among the people and uneasiness in equal measure among the nobles. Brissac told her that a trail of arson had flamed across the countryside. Châteaux were burned by the score, their masters often tortured and murdered. The long-suffering peasants, freed at last, made certain the torches fired the records of their feudal bondage. Hundreds of the nobility, headed by the King's own brother, the Comte d'Artois, fled beyond the frontiers. "*Émigrés!*" said Brissac with a soldier's contempt. "They scurry to safety when their place is beside their King!"

He went on to say that tempers were rising in Paris. There was an acute shortage of bread, and hunger stalked the poorer sections. The stalls at Les Halles were empty and the fishwives gathered angrily, swearing and cursing in their flavorful idiom. Jeanne nodded, remembering with vivid clarity the pungency of that idiom. Brissac added that the city mob was maddened by rumors that the King had summoned the Flanders regiment to arrest the Assembly. "I disbelieve it," he said, "but I shall return to Paris and try to restore calm."

"But today is Sunday!" Jeanne protested. "And it is nearly dark. Why not wait until tomorrow?" He took her in his strong arms and kissed her. "Jeanne, dearest—our Parisians do not curb their wrath out of respect for the Sabbath. I must go now." He mounted his horse and rode rapidly away. He preferred horseback in these excited times to the slower pace of a heavy coach.

Jeanne went back into the *Pavillon* where they had been talking and wandered aimlessly through the empty graceful rooms, trying to subdue her disappointment. She looked at the great double bed she had once shared with the King and which she and Brissac usually occupied. In the Château itself their bedrooms were separate. She could not bear the thought of sleeping alone here and returned to her own room where she tried to read herself to sleep.

The next day, being Monday, was the busiest of the week. She spent the entire morning conferring with her intendant, who reported that all the grapes were gathered and the crops safely

stored in the tall barns. Reassured that her estate was prepared for the onset of winter she took a long walk in the afternoon. The coloring of the trees was glorious, adorning the woods with brilliant shades of russet and gold. The day seemed to hover in delicate balance midway between summer and winter. It was late afternoon and darkness was already approaching when a chill autumn rain began to fall. By the time Jeanne reached the Château she was soaked.

She wrapped a heavy peignoir around her and while she was still drying herself Morin burst into her bedroom. In his excitement he had barely paused to knock. "Pardon, madame, but I thought you should know at once—" he stopped, trying to catch his breath.

"Something is wrong," Jeanne said, noting the startled look on his usually calm face. "What is it?"

"One of the grooms has just returned from Versailles. He tells me an unruly mob of fishwives and prostitutes has marched all the way from Paris to demand bread."

"Fishwives?" repeated Jeanne in astonishment.

"Yes, madame, but the mob is not all women—it is only meant to appear so. The groom says he noticed the legs of many *sans-culottes* under the skirts, and many of those men were carrying pikes and muskets."

Jeanne began to be alarmed. A hungry mob massed before the Royal Château in a driving rainstorm could prove menacing. She knew how easy it was to gain entrance to the King's residence. No King of France had ever needed protection from his subjects; the only guards were the Hundred Swiss, and the immense gilded gates had not been shut for decades. Probably they were so rusty that closing them would be impossible. "Thank you, Morin," she said. "Order one of the footmen to remain awake, and tell him to call me if there is any news."

"I myself shall keep watch, madame." Morin bowed and went out. Jeanne watched the door closing and sank back on the chaise

longue. The sound of the rain beating against the windows underscored her feeling of anxiety. She could almost visualize the mob, growing ever more restive and drunken, pouring from the Place d'Armes through the gates. Perhaps some of its members had dared penetrate as far as the Marble Court—perhaps even now they were beneath the windows which had been hers. Were they quiet—orderly? If they had ventured so far into the royal precincts they were more likely shouting insults at the King's windows.

She thought of the sleepy-eyed heavy young man she had known as the Dauphin fifteen years before, and of his proud beautiful wife. She feared for Marie Antoinette. How that ugly mob surrounding the Château must hate her! Jeanne tried to sleep, but over and over the thought recurred: if only *her* King were at Versailles now instead of his weak-willed grandson! He would have known how to deal with such *canaille,* she thought, falling into a light troubled doze.

When she awoke she realized with a start that she had slept all night on the chaise longue. She remembered Morin's fearful information, dressed hurriedly and went to the library, where the maid was dusting. "I will have my coffee here," she said to the servant, "and please send Morin."

When he entered he was freshly washed and shaved. "An hour before midnight," he said, "there was a distant sound of marching, but I did not waken you. There was nothing more and at five I went to bed."

"You have not had much sleep, Morin," Jeanne said, glancing at the clock. Its hands pointed to nine and beside it on her desk the calendar had already been turned for the day—*mardi 6 octobre.* "Four hours' sleep is enough for me, madame," answered Morin. "Anyway, I am worried and I know you are also."

Shortly before noon he rushed into the salon where Jeanne and Suzanne were examining the new winter draperies. "Madame, come quickly; there are wounded Swiss in the garden be-

hind the icehouse." She and Suzanne ran hatless into the cool October air, following Morin to the spot where five men of the Hundred Swiss lay scattered on the ground. The familiar red coats with blue facings were torn and bloody and the white trousers were covered with mud.

Jeanne sent for jugs of water to wash the wounds, jars of healing ointment, and sheets which could be ripped into bandages. She and Suzanne, aided by Morin and two footmen, worked tirelessly until the soldiers' wounds were dressed. Jeanne was heedless of the blood and dirt which stained her linen dress.

With a single exception the Swiss were not seriously injured. One suffered only from shock and exhaustion, another had a broken arm, and two others had severe abrasions received in climbing a wall; the forehead of one of these also displayed a nasty cut from a scythe. The fifth soldier's condition was grave; his lung had been pierced by a pike and he was coughing blood. Morin and one of the footmen bore him gently into the Château and laid him on the floor. "No!" ordered Jeanne sharply. "Put him on the sofa. What does blood on it matter at a time like this?"

The other guards staggered into the room and Jeanne offered them brandy while the food she had ordered was being prepared. "Thank you, madame." The soldier with the cut on his head seemed to be their recognized spokesman. "We never needed brandy so badly as now." He grinned bravely. "I never knew the French are such devils," he said. "Madame, during the early hours of this morning a mob of cutthroats smashed its way into the Château and raced up the Queen's Staircase to Her Majesty's apartments. One of her guards barely had time to shout a warning before he was knocked senseless with the butt of a musket. When daylight came I saw"—the soldier's voice broke—"I saw his head displayed in the Marble Court on a pike."

"And the Queen?" demanded Jeanne. "Was she harmed?"

"*Non, Grace à Dieu!* Those fiends intended to murder her

but she fled through a secret passage to His Majesty's bedroom. The royal family is safe for the moment but with that mob . . ." He shook his head dubiously.

"Where were the Hundred Swiss—where were you?" Too late she checked herself; the tactless words had been spoken.

"Our first duty is to protect the King, madame," he answered simply. "Most of us were near his chambers, and the onslaught was so sudden—so unexpected. The rabble shouted that we were base foreign mercenaries and vented its special fury on us. You see my companion." He pointed to the gravely wounded man on the sofa. "Several of our company were killed, including the guard at the Queen's doorway."

Jeanne listened to his tale in horrified incredulity. The Château which she had known intimately for six resplendent years, the apotheosis of royal splendor and majesty, desecrated by a murderous horde! It was unbelievable, yet the wounded men here in her salon were living witnesses of its truth. "The National Guard arrived from Paris about midnight but did nothing to halt the violence." His voice was heavy with professional contempt. "Monsieur de Lafayette seems to have no control over his men. They abandoned all discipline and drank with the rough workmen and slept with the whores in the Place d'Armes. . . ." He blushed furiously. "Your pardon, madame . . . a soldier's blunt language."

"It is nothing, *mon brave,*" said Jeanne kindly. "I should like to know how you found your way to me."

"The Duc de Brissac, who once commanded us—ah, there is a true soldier!—arrived from Paris after daylight, and told us to come here. He said the Comtesse du Barry would care for us. You are the Comtesse?" he asked shyly, his honest eyes shining with admiration.

"Yes, and I am glad Monsieur le Duc sent you. It is an honor to shelter such men."

Her compliment caused the Swiss to blush again. "Monsieur

le Duc asked me to say that he will come to you as soon as he can."

It was four tantalizing days before Brissac appeared. He was worn with fatigue and had acquired a bad cold. The guard with the punctured lung had died the night before and the priest of the chapel at Louveciennes conducted the simple rites of burial. The murdered Swiss was laid to rest in the sunny garden, far from the blue waters of his native Lucerne. Brissac sent the remaining four back to Paris in Jeanne's coach.

"You were an angel, as you always are, to care for those guards." He hugged her close and she raised her face, waiting for his kiss. "No," he smiled. "Even for that I will not give you this miserable cold." He stretched out his tall body on the blood-stained sofa and related the epochal events which had occurred at Versailles. "When I reached there the *canaille* had broken in looking for the Queen——"

"I know that." Jeanne stopped him. "What happened after my five Swiss escaped?"

"The crowd milled about in the courtyard brandishing the head of a murdered guard and shouting for the Queen to appear. She came out on the balcony holding the Dauphin by the hand, and a fishwife screamed at her: 'No children, you filthy Austrian!'" Then the Queen took her son into the Château and came back to the balcony; she stood there alone staring calmly at the rabble beneath her. I never saw anyone so courageous. She knew her life hung in the balance. There were muskets in the crowd and one of them was pointed directly at her. But she showed not a tremor of fear."

"How magnificent!" exclaimed Jeanne. "I could never have been so brave."

"After a moment," Brissac resumed, "Lafayette came out and bowed and kissed her hand and the fickle ruffians actually cheered her. Lafayette is a fool," he said scornfully. "He always

plays to the crowd. He deceives himself thinking he is a great general."

Brissac finished his story of that eventful day. "Voices in the mob began to shout demands for the royal family to be brought to Paris, and the King gave in. The long slow journey is almost indescribable," he sighed. "The royal coach was surrounded by dancing drunken devils, who waved the murdered guard's head before the Queen's eyes, and the air was shrill with their raucous taunts and obscene insults."

"Is the royal family held prisoner?"

"The Parisians say the King is their beloved guest, but in reality His Majesty is no longer a free man." His voice was edged with bitterness. "He and his family are in the Tuileries, where no one has lived since his grandfather was a young man. It is filthy, and the first night no sheets could be found for their beds!"

Brissac remained with Jeanne only overnight. He had been named Commander of the Constitutional Guard authorized by the National Assembly to protect the royal family, and his heavy responsibilities called him back to the Tuileries. But ten days later, with the city apparently calm, he managed to arrange a long week end at Louveciennes. He had shaken off his cold, and when he and Jeanne retired to the bedroom in the *Pavillon* she felt in the encircling warmth of his arms as if the last three months were a bad dream.

But the next morning his first words restored her to reality. "Her Majesty requested me to give you a message."

"A message for *me* from the Queen?"

He smiled at her bewilderment. "She is a wiser woman, Jeanne; she is no longer the haughty self-centered girl you knew. Yesterday as I was leaving the Tuileries she came up to me and asked me to thank you in her name for your mercy to the Swiss Guards. She took my hand and said: 'Monsieur de Brissac, tell the Comtesse du Barry that if she were here I would *speak those words to her myself.*' She stressed her words and said you would understand." Jeanne's eyes glistened with tears of happy fulfill-

ment. "I understand," she said softly. Marie Antoinette had forgiven her at last for the seven words she had been forced to utter so long ago in a world that had vanished.

When Brissac returned to the Tuileries he carried with him a letter in Jeanne's clear flowing hand, addressed to the Queen:

Madame—

I only did for those brave soldiers what they deserved. Louveciennes is yours should you ever desire it. Was it not your kindness that restored it to me?

Everything I possess comes from the royal family; I can never forget that.

JEANNE DU BARRY

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

ITEM: Pair of spectacles in green sharkskin case, stamped with the arms of the ci-devant Duc de Brissac.

After the stirring events of October relative quiet descended on France. A year had passed since the Court abandoned Versailles for Paris. Outward respect was paid to the royal family, living comfortably now in the sprawling Tuileries, while the National Assembly, meeting in the nearby *Manège,* struggled to forge from its molten mass of conflicting opinions a constitution for the kingdom. At Louveciennes the days rolled by, the even tenor of life there undisturbed. Brissac came as often as he could and if his absences were too long Jeanne escaped her loneliness by journeying to the Hôtel de Brissac in Paris.

Jeanne commented to Suzanne on Zamor's intense interest in the evolution of political events. He continued to devour books on radical theories of government and his brooding eyes burned with a somber light when he thought himself unobserved. "Morin has noticed," Suzanne said, "that Zamor has begun to take regular walks along the overgrown path beyond the ice-house, even in this chill November weather. One day he followed, and saw him meet a stranger where the path ends in the main road." Jeanne was surprised; Zamor had never cared for the outdoors or any form of exercise, however mild, but she dismissed his new pastime as insignificant. "Perhaps he has made friends with one of the villagers at last," she remarked. "It will do him good."

A few days later Brissac brought from Paris a copy of *L'Ami du Peuple,* a vicious journal edited by the scrofulous Marat. He was angry and apprehensive as he showed a leading article which attacked her savagely. It was filled with salacious lies about her early career, excoriated her for the millions she had cost the Treasury, and concluded by describing her luxurious life as the paramour of the reactionary Duc de Brissac.

She had been so long removed from the center of popular attention that she was frightened by this unwelcome notoriety. Even more disturbing was the writer's knowledge of intimate details of her life now. Brissac agreed with her. "Vicious as this commentary is about events which are long past, its uncanny knowledge of your present life is even more ominous. How can this monster Marat know the fashion in which you live at Louveciennes?"

Jeanne was unable to solve the mystery but the next time she went for a drive she unexpectedly came upon the truth. As the carriage rounded a sharp turn she saw Zamor and another man in earnest conversation. Her approach was so sudden there was no time for them to hide. She glanced from the carriage window and Zamor's companion returned her gaze with a glare of utter malevolence. She caught her breath; her heart was pounding. She had snatched only a glimpse of him, but a sickening wave of weakness settled in her stomach. The small green eyes, the mean mouth—what ominous portal of memory did they threaten to unlock? And those extraordinary ears! Enormous—attached to the head almost at right angles! She gasped. The memory of that disastrous inaugural supper in the *Pavillon* flooded her brain—Richelieu's ill-judged prank on Zamor, and the Englishman who had hurled his sinister blasphemies through the window! It was he! No doubt remained in her mind and the puzzling pattern all at once became blindingly clear.

Opportunely Brissac was staying with her for a few days, and she ordered the driver to spur his horses back to Louveciennes. Breathless with excitement and a nameless terror she told Brissac

of her discovery. "Yes—it is obvious now!" He smacked his fist against his palm. "I myself conducted that devil to the Bastille and he must have been there eight years later when Zamor——" he halted, the blood momentarily ebbing from his tanned face. He was recalling the Englishman's furious threat against Jeanne, something he would never tell anyone. "That explains Zamor's uncommon interest in radical ideas; you remember how curious you were? This man is surely the same unknown Englishman who escaped when the Bastille fell. *Sacré Dieu,* how could I be so blind? And the final piece of the mystery, Jeanne—it is he who relays to Marat the information Zamor betrays to him." Brissac paced up and down, his brow furrowed with concentration. "But *what* is the devil's name?"

The sound of Zamor's thin voice drifted from the hallway and Brissac threw open the door. The Bengalese had tried to sneak up the staircase but one of the footmen had spoken to him and in replying he had inadvertently revealed his presence to Jeanne and Brissac. "Zamor!" he roared. "Come into the salon!" When the door was closed Zamor leaned against it, quivering. His dark eyes rolled with fear at the sight of Brissac's fury, and his breath coursed violently through his flaring nostrils. Brissac stared piercingly into his shifting eyes. "The Comtesse and I know where you first encountered your English friend. Only his name escapes us—what is it?"

"Monsieur le Duc," Zamor whinnied. "I don't know; truly I don't."

"You spent a year in the Bastille!" Brissac thundered. "Perhaps you shared this revolutionary's cell or occupied one adjacent to it; he subverted you with his radical ideas and you tell me you don't know his name?" Brissac advanced as through to strike him and Zamor cowered, covering his long face with his hands. "Monsieur le Duc," he whimpered. "His name . . . I think I remember now. . . . his name is George Grieve."

"That's it! Grieve!" Brissac gritted his teeth in furious triumph.

"The King was indeed too merciful—he should have had him drawn and quartered; and I should have sent *you* to the galleys!" He threw a reproachful look at Jeanne. "The Comtesse, the devoted benefactress you so shamelessly betray, saved you from that fate—a fate you deserved then and deserve even more now."

Zamor turned pleadingly to Jeanne. "Madame," he whined in his repellent voice. "I meant no harm to you, believe me!"

"You are lying," Jeanne said. "Just as you lied when you molested Henri's little girl, and later——" she broke off. "How long have you lived a lie, Zamor? I have closed my ears to repeated warnings, I have defended you blindly——" tears of sorrow and anger glistened in her eyes. "I should have listened to Morin when you were a boy and to Monsieur le Duc after you became a man." She took a deep breath, regaining control of herself. "But this is your last respite; if you ever see this man Grieve again, if you have any further contact with revolutionaries, I shall dismiss you at once."

"And then you will starve, you stinking heathen!" Brissac shouted the words. "In the streets you will starve, while your Grieves and Marats pass you by!"

"You may go to your room, Zamor," Jeanne said coldly. "Remember my words well." Zamor kept to his room in the weeks that followed. His meals were served there and he refused to emerge even for the celebration of Christmas and New Year's. Jeanne was at least sure he was no longer seeing Grieve, and she did not encourage him to leave his attic.

She was sick with disillusion and occasionally in the stillness of night her mother's dying words returned to haunt her: "Take care . . . there are those who will do you harm." She knew she should have summarily expelled Zamor from Louveciennes but her conscience restrained her. Somewhere in the unplumbed depths of his childhood he had become grievously twisted, but she had vowed to care for him. Distasteful as the sight of him had become, she was reassured that he was engaged in no further intrigues and she tried to put him out of her mind.

Ten days after New Year's she went to the Hôtel de Brissac to attend a ball and remain overnight. Morin and Suzanne were also away from Louveciennes, having gone to visit one of his cousins near Sèvres. Jeanne spoke to Zamor before her departure, telling him to sleep on the ground floor and make certain the shutters were bolted. In the servants' wing were the footmen, valets, and maids, and Jeanne told herself that Louveciennes was secure even in the absence of the trustworthy Morin.

She was speedily disillusioned. Suzanne and Morin returned after daybreak to find Zamor in a drunken stupor and Jeanne's jewel cases rifled. Morin hurried to the Hôtel de Brissac to break the news. "Madame," he said in distress, "Suzanne has inspected your room and tells me your loss is grievous." Jeanne, still sleepy from her late evening, quickly dressed and sped back to Louveciennes.

When she compared the missing jewels with her inventory she realized in consternation that she had been robbed of more than a million and a half livres' worth of diamonds. The thieves overlooked another compartment where rubies, sapphires, emeralds, and some of her diamond trinkets were stored. For that she breathed a thankful prayer, but the stark truth remained—her best diamonds, her favorite gems, were gone.

The thieves had pried open a shutter at the rear of the foyer and Zamor, asleep in a nearby anteroom, would surely have heard them had he been sober. Jeanne looked at him with angry reproach. "Madame," he said dully, "forgive me; I did not mean to drink so much. I am not accustomed to brandy." She brushed aside his feeble excuse—always some weak justification, she thought impatiently. Ignoring Zamor's whining monotone, she penned a note summoning her jeweler from the rue Saint-Honoré.

After he compared her recital of the loss with his own invoices he ordered a circular printed which listed the stolen jewels in minute detail. It covered eight pages and read like a description

of Golconda. When Brissac learned that the circular was posted on public buildings throughout France he was aghast. "Jeanne, you are mad, in times such as these, to draw attention to your wealth. This can only please those who hate us."

"But it has nothing to do with politics," she retorted. "It is merely common thievery. They are *my* diamonds and the circular offers two thousand louis' reward for their recovery."

"I know," he said grimly. "I have read it."

A month went by before Jeanne received a letter from London informing her that jewels believed to be hers had been recovered. The five men who had aroused suspicion by attempting to sell them at absurdly low prices were being held in Newgate Prison. Would it be possible, the letter inquired, for the Comtesse du Barry to come to London to identify the diamonds? "London!" exclaimed Jeanne. "I cannot speak a word of English!"

"But Maussabré can," Brissac replied, "and he shall go with you. And I shall pay for your journey because it was my insistence you attend the ball which made the robbery possible. When will you go?"

"At once," she answered. "It would be folly to delay."

To her surprise Jeanne found that the legal complexities involved in securing her jewels were endless, and during the next six months she made not one but three trips to England. On the first, undertaken in bitter February weather, she was accompanied by Suzanne, Brissac's young aide Maussabré, a maid, and a valet. The well-paved French roads were almost empty and the one hundred and eighty miles to Calais consumed only two days. Jeanne had never been to sea and the rough crossing to Dover, tossed by the winds of a gale, made her violently sick. Suzanne was also ill and the two of them lay moaning in the small cabin. After they had landed they proceeded as rapidly as the poor state of the English highways and the astonishing amount of traffic would permit.

Jeanne's initial impression of London was dismal. Although Paris winters were rigorous the air there remained clear, but in the English capital the fog, thickened by coal smoke belching from innumerable chimneys, made the days somber. Rain fell constantly, gradually turning to driving sleet and finally to snow as the temperature dropped.

She stayed only ten days and was treated with courtesy on her brief visit. The Lord Mayor sent his own carriage and tendered a banquet in her honor. She was shown the impounded diamonds and although she unhesitatingly identified them she was told that there would be a delay. One of the accused prisoners, a Frenchman named Levet, refused to admit they had been stolen from Louveciennes, although his three German companions and the single Englishman, Harris, readily confessed the crime.

Rather than endure the freezing winds of March, Jeanne and her retinue went back to France, all of them returning to London in early April. Their second visit was more pleasant and this time they stayed six weeks. "English novels are truthful in describing the glorious spring here," she remarked to Suzanne. "I would never have believed it." They had taken rooms at a cheerful hotel in Bruton Street near Berkeley Square. Jeanne enjoyed strolling around the square, admiring the soft green of the leaves and listening to the mingled sound of the singing of birds and the laughter of playing children. "This is a peaceful country," she sighed. "If only our beloved France can find her way to such contentment."

Jeanne went to visit the uncommunicative thief Levet at Newgate. He was villainous-looking, squat and dirty. "Here is the elegant Comtesse," he sneered, "giving herself airs as if she had been born an aristocrat!" He spat on the floor of his cell. Jeanne knew from his accent that he was Marseillais. He hates me, she thought, but at least he speaks French.

Levet finally broke down and admitted to her his complicity in the robbery. Jeanne, noting the welts and bruises on his swarthy face, surmised that his confession had been forced by

his brutish jailers. He and his four companions had heard of her fabulous jewels, he said, and had spied on her Château for weeks. After she left that January evening for Paris they peered through a crack in the shutter and saw Zamor on the floor in drunken sleep. "After that it was easy." Levet grinned impudently at her.

"Was stealing my jewels your only motive?"

"You mean did we single you out because of who you are?" He laughed obscenely. "No, Comtesse-*née*-Bécu, we were not concerned with your politics; we simply wanted your diamonds." Jeanne sighed with relief. Above all else, she dreaded becoming a political symbol in the swirling passions which divided France.

When she returned to the hotel Suzanne met her in the hallway. "Jeanne, the Duke of Queensbury is waiting in the salon; he says he is an old friend of yours." Jeanne frowned in bewilderment, searching her memory. "I don't recall the name," she said. She stepped into the salon which these strange foreigners insisted on referring to as a *sitting room,* and a tall man rose from his chair; his left foot was bandaged and encased in a felt slipper. She stared at him without recognition, yet there was something about his elegant clothes, his air of jauntiness. . . .

"Zounds! I have a paunch, I limp with this damned gout—no wonder you don't know me, Jeanne." She started; the distant past engulfed her and for a fleeting moment she sat again at the Roué's tables. "Milord March!" she gasped.

"The same," he said, taking her hand. "My title is different but I am the same, only thirty years older than when you first saw me." Jeanne was almost overcome with emotion. Milord March, as she persisted in thinking of him, was now an old man but his infectious heartiness minimized his age. She pressed his hand warmly. "What has become of La Rena?"

A shadow crossed his face. "Dead! She died years ago, bless her! I loved that woman!"

"I know you did," Jeanne said gently. "I was in love then with Radix de Sainte-Foy, and he too is dead. Do you remember the night he and I came to dine? You gave me a copper teapot which

I still use." He laughed at her. "Your French love of possessions —I hope the unrest in France is stilled before you lose them all." His smile vanished but Jeanne remembered that his solemn expression had always concealed a jest. She spoke hopefully. "Conditions in France are calmer; if the King accepts the new constitution our government will be more like your own."

"The cowardly *émigrés* who infest England do not agree with you. They condemn King Louis' action as that of a weakling."

"He has little choice," Jeanne retorted indignantly. "The *émigrés* abandoned His Majesty, so criticism ill becomes them!"

"I entirely agree, but enough of politics—I want to hear more about you. Do you realize how famous you are?"

"There is no longer any reason for it," she answered. She talked for a long time describing her splendid years at Versailles, followed by the interval of depressing exile. He nodded his head. "I heard of that unfeeling punishment; but since then you have faded from attention."

"I am content to be forgotten, Milord March. I am gloriously happy"—she paused—"happier, I might as well admit, than when I was at Court." With this old friend she could be frank and she told him of the deep satisfying love which she and Brissac shared. "Sometimes I think all my earlier life was shaped for this fulfillment." Her blue eyes were starry and Milord March was moved by the feeling in her voice. "Well," he said gruffly, stifling his emotion, "the Duc de Brissac is a lucky man. You are still an incredibly beautiful woman—I shall take you to be painted by Cosway."

"At my age?" Jeanne laughed but her voice was appreciative. "I shall be fifty in two years more."

"I know that, but no one else would ever guess." Jeanne was surprised to feel herself blushing like a girl at his compliment. "Tell me about your sons," she asked. "They were such handsome little boys, and I adored them." His face broke into an unashamed smile of pride. "They are still handsome. Of course," he added solemnly, "they resemble their mother. The elder is in

India with Lord Cornwallis and the other is with the Fleet at Gibraltar."

They talked a while longer, mostly reminiscing of the days in Paris before Jeanne became the King's mistress and Milord March became a duke. As he limped to the door to take his departure he issued an invitation which sounded to Jeanne more nearly like a command. "You will come to my house in Richmond on Saturday next, the sixteenth. An important personage who is curious to meet you will be there." Jeanne begged for his name but he shook his head. "Your curiosity will have to contain itself; I am bound to secrecy."

Milord March's house had recently been refurnished. "Zounds!" he swore. "I became weary of that carved heavy oak from another century. These men Hepplewhite and Chippendale are modern and much lighter in design." Jeanne was about to compliment his taste when the bewigged footman's voice sounded. "His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales." She looked at her host and he answered her unspoken question. "Yes, it was the Prince himself who asked to meet you."

Jeanne found the Prince of Wales charming—he spoke French almost as well as Milord March himself. He wore his wavy brown hair unpowdered and had nice blue eyes. Involuntarily she contrasted his plump softness with Brissac's hard muscular body; Brissac was thirty years older but of the two he was stronger and more vigorous. "Madame," the Prince was saying, "you do us honor to come to England." He seemed thoroughly familiar with events in France. "Your Revolution may yet prove beneficial if it does not go too far; the proposed constitution leaves your King with more power than my father has. But take care"—he jabbed a bejeweled finger at her—"that King Louis grants no further concessions. Revolutions, once launched, are almost impossible to halt." Jeanne wanted to point out that she had not the slightest influence at Court but instead she made a noncommittal reply. She preferred not to discuss events in France,

even with the Prince of Wales, and was relieved when he digressed to the comparative merits of French porcelain and English china. She was surprised at his extensive knowledge; he had an expert acquaintance with the finer points of tapestries, furniture, and jewels. He spent the entire evening at her side, talking incessantly and lacing his remarks with generous draughts of brandy. When he departed he was somewhat unsteady on his legs, but his manners were as exquisite as ever. "If you come again to England, Comtesse, I shall be pleased to see you."

He kissed her hand in farewell, and as he vanished through the doorway Milord March shrugged. "His Royal Highness is going home to that woman—clearly he is still in love with her."

"Who is she?" Jeanne's voice quickened with curiosity.

"A Papist whose name is Mrs. Fitzherbert; many believe he has even gone through a marriage ceremony with her."

As it turned out, Jeanne did have to come to England again. Her lawyers informed her that certain papers proving her ownership of the jewels must be validated in France and as it was necessary to apply in person for the documents she made another hurried trip home. She remained only a week and Brissac came from Paris to spend the time with her. "It is maddening!" she complained. "The English officials and lawyers know the jewels are mine, yet they require these interminable proofs."

"The English have a great respect for the niceties of law, my dear; they never take any chances where property is concerned. I will go with you to obtain the proof you need." They went to the town of Versailles where Jeanne signed an application, witnessed by Brissac, for the necessary documents. The handsome young clerk who attended them went out of his way to expedite details. "I shall send the affidavits to Louveciennes tomorrow, Comtesse," he promised. Jeanne smiled her thanks and realized he was regarding her with youthful infatuation.

As their carriage turned homeward it passed the deserted Château. The most splendid royal residence in the world dis-

played an appearance so forlorn that tears came to Jeanne's eyes. The long rows of shuttered windows repelled the gaze of the curious, and untidy clumps of grass were growing between the cobblestones of the Place d'Armes. "This is the first time I have seen it since I left it forever," she sobbed. "I cannot bear to look at its departed glory." She hid her face against Brissac's shoulder.

She had told Brissac everything which had occurred during her recent sojourn in London, especially her joyful reunion with Milord March. "You and he would like each other, Timoléon," she said fondly. "It was he who chose the two horses which I bought for you."

"I never owned a finer pair. The horses of the English are superior to ours; on your coming journey buy me two saddles of fine English leather. I hope your stay will not be prolonged," he added pensively. "I miss you too much."

As Brissac needed Maussabré at the Tuileries, and Suzanne languished when she was absent from Morin, Jeanne returned to London with only the valet and her personal maid. Maussabré had been helpful with his knowledge of English but Jeanne now believed she could manage without him. Her lawyers understood French, even though they spoke it abominably, and she could always call upon Milord March to assist her in an emergency.

She did not expect to be gone long but when she reached London once more she found to her frustration that the Crown official conversant with her case was seriously ill and had been ordered by his doctor to rest for at least two months. She resigned herself to spending most of the summer in England and decided to enjoy herself.

Milord March invited her twice to Richmond, where she sat on the green velvet lawn watching the colorful display of boats and yachts on the Thames. Many *émigrés* had settled near Richmond Green and she met some whom she had known at Court. Most of them bewailed and grumbled incessantly, blaming Mirabeau, Lafayette, the King—everyone but themselves—for their

impoverished exile. Jeanne thought of Brissac steadfast at his post in the Tuileries and felt only scorn for these whining refugees. But her innate generosity betrayed her and she bestowed several thousand guineas to help sustain their pretentious useless existence.

At Richmond one afternoon in late June an aged marquis who had been among those who flocked to her anteroom at Versailles hurried to where she was seated on the lawn. "The royal family has made an attempt to flee from France!" he shouted. A hopeful murmur ran through the *émigrés,* quickly subdued by his next remark. "But they were stopped at Varennes and have been dragged back to Paris; only the Comte de Provence was successful in crossing the frontier." Jeanne was not surprised; the King had remarked long ago that the clever Comte de Provence knew how to attain his goal.

The nobleman turned to her. "Do not go back, Comtesse. The King's attempt to escape will enrage his enemies and conditions will inevitably grow worse. I warn you; stay here where safety lies."

"Marquis," Jeanne replied with dignity, "my heart lies in France and I have done nothing which causes me to be afraid." His cowardly suggestion annoyed her and she walked across the grass to join Milord March. "Zounds, Jeanne—I have been looking for you. I want to know if you are free for the theater tomorrow."

The following evening they attended a play by Sheridan at the Haymarket Theater. The lines were incomprehensible to her and the theater itself was a dark narrow hole, far inferior to the spacious well-ventilated theaters of Paris. Afterward they went to dine at Ranelagh's, which was also a favorite establishment for dancing. Jeanne was amazed at the abundance of multicolored lanterns. "Three thousand, they tell me," said Milord March, "and from the size of this multitude I judge there is one patron for every lantern. Don't you want to leave?"

But Jeanne liked the noise and cheerful movement; it made

her think of Nicolet's which she had delighted to visit as a young woman. They stayed late at Ranelagh's, stuffing themselves with venison, English ham, turkey, and oysters. "This is why I suffer from the gout," Milord March grumbled, pushing aside his empty plate. As they prepared to leave he reminded her that he was taking her the next morning to sit for the painter Cosway.

Jeanne spent considerable time before the capable artist and between sittings she tried to see something of historic London. The blighting coal smoke was absent during the clear summer days and she enjoyed riding in an open carriage past Buckingham House and the Palace of St. James's. To Milord March's astonishment she insisted on stopping at St. Paul's, where she donated money for the poor. They visited the Tower, crimson with bloody memories, and he commented that Anne Boleyn had requested a French headsman when she went to the block. "Even then your countrymen were considered skillful in that distasteful art." He became serious. "I have grave misgivings if you go back to France, Jeanne."

She gently told him it was useless to try to dissuade her. His attentive kindness had transformed her visit into three months of pleasure, but she was homesick for Louveciennes, and her heart longed for Brissac. She explained that her jewels were still in litigation; the convalescent Crown official now refused to release her diamonds until she came to an agreement with the pawnbroker who had informed on the five thieves. He was claiming a reward far in excess of the two thousand louis she had offered, and she refused to meet his exorbitant demand. "My bankers in Pall Mall have the jewels in a sealed box," she said to Milord March, "and when a compromise is reached they will be restored to me. But my patience is at an end. It is already the middle of August, and I am going home."

Jeanne was happy to be back at Louveciennes and no longer worried about her diamonds. The atmosphere in France had grown so tense that flaunting expensive gems would have been

perilously indiscreet; the jewelry was safer in England. She learned from Brissac that the Assembly deeply distrusted the King and hated Marie Antoinette more than ever, blaming the Queen for the royal family's attempted escape.

Within the Assembly bitter factionalism reigned between Girondins and Jacobins, unrestrained even by the declaration of war the following April against Austria and Prussia. One of Jeanne's footmen and two of her gardeners volunteered for service in Lafayette's army and Brissac remarked acidly that their chances of survival under his inept leadership were small indeed.

As reports of repeated French defeats filtered back to Paris, frustration and anger mounted against the occupants of the Tuileries. The Queen was openly accused of betraying military secrets to her native Austria, and Brissac, as Commander of the Constitutional Guard, became a target of savage hatred. When the false rumor raced from the thronged arcades of the Palais-Royal through the stinking seething alleys of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine that he had begged the King to order his troops against the mob, the people's fury was boundless.

One afternoon near the end of May he and Jeanne sat talking in the mirrored salon of the *Pavillon*. Brissac, with a soldier's contempt, had shrugged at previous attacks against him but this time his face was serious as he handed her a cheaply printed sheet. "Read that! It was posted on the very walls of the Tuileries."

Brissac, former Governor of Paris, Commander-in-Chief of the Comtesse du Barry's pleasures and of the King's Guard, is a traitor to the nation. Authentic proof of this is his wish to massacre good Parisians. Send him to the High Court at Orléans; even better, let some patriot arrange an accident for Monsieur Timoléon de Brissac.

"It is not myself I am concerned about," he said when she had finished reading the poster, "but why do those filthy scribblers involve you? Swine—to slander a woman so warm and beautiful!" His eyes flashed with anger. "If it is a crime to love you," Jeanne said, caressing his cheek with her hand, "then I am guilty. No

harm will come to me, but I fear for you." She looked at him anxiously. He could flee, there was still time for him to escape the country, but she knew he would reject with scorn the idea of becoming an *émigré*. "I am not afraid," he said, as if he had read her thoughts. "I am guilty of nothing except loyalty to His Majesty."

Jeanne's misgivings were amply confirmed two days later when Maussabré galloped up the sloping drive with the news that Brissac had been arrested by order of the National Assembly and sent to Orléans for trial before the High Court. Trying to hide her alarm, she sent him a letter of encouragement. "If reason and good sense prevail," she wrote, "there is nothing to fear." But in her mind lurked a dreadful suspicion that reason no longer resided in France.

Maussabré, when his military duties did not keep him at the Tuileries, traveled back and forth between Louveciennes and Orléans, carrying the letters which Jeanne and Brissac dared not entrust to the post. Maussabré told her Brissac was comfortably lodged in the former Minimes Convent and confident he would regain his freedom when his case came up. "Be hopeful, Comtesse," the young aide urged, "like Monsieur le Duc. He has infused courage into his fellow prisoners and is so cheerful he has turned the refectory into a court for battledore and shuttlecock." Jeanne was heartened by this unmistakable indication of Brissac's good spirits, but after the capture of the Tuileries on the tenth of August a fearful gloom enveloped her.

The Paris mob, reinforced by a horde of cutthroats from Marseilles, had stormed the royal residence on that sweltering Friday, forcing the royal family to flee for their lives to the Assembly. The Swiss Guard had bravely resisted, only to be slaughtered to the last defender by the bloodthirsty invaders. Maussabré had barely escaped, and fled to Louveciennes, begging Jeanne to conceal him. He described the headless eviscerated bodies of the loyal Swiss dragged through the gardens where she had walked in her youth. She begged him to stop. "I cannot bear anymore,"

she blurted. "We are living a nightmare." Without considering the peril to herself she sheltered Maussabré and swore her household to secrecy.

She knew Brissac had heard of the terrible events at the Tuileries, for he smuggled from his prison a letter which he had written on the night of August the eleventh. Its foreboding was in bleak contrast to his former buoyant tone. After referring to the slaughter in Paris he penned words of devotion which brought tears to her eyes. "I received this morning the most wonderful letter from one who has for so long meant everything to me. I thank you and kiss you thousands and thousands of times. Oh, my dearest Jeanne, I wish I were in a desert with you rather than here in Orléans. I have no idea what will happen but I shiver and tremble. You will be my last thought. Good-by. . . ."

Jeanne read and reread the precious letter until its words were engraved into her soul. *I shiver and tremble* . . . utter despair must have inundated Brissac's prison to evoke from him words so uncharacteristic. *You will be my last thought* . . . the words throbbed in her brain like a presage of doom.

During the year since her return Zamor had been quiescent. He had withdrawn into sullen reticence, rarely leaving his secluded attic. But after Maussabré took refuge at Louveciennes his behavior changed ominously, as though the turmoil in Paris had freed him from all inhibitions. When Morin reported that Zamor was openly meeting a bat-eared man by the gatekeeper's cottage Jeanne unhesitatingly confronted him. "Zamor!" she said sternly. "As you obviously feel free to disobey my commands, I feel equally free to dismiss you, as I threatened to do if you saw Grieve again."

"Do as you please, madame," he sneered. A gleam of unmistakable hatred flared in his eyes. "You will soon be in no position to command anything, and as for the traitor you conceal upstairs——" As if to underscore his words a confused sound of shouts and murmurs penetrated the room and Jeanne, motionless

with terror, saw him move to open the door. A noisy rabble with red Phrygian bonnets on their heads stormed into the foyer, led by George Grieve. "Ah, Comtesse!" He bowed with spurious courtesy. "I regret entering your Château without an invitation from its gracious châtelaine, but my call is in the interests of the nation. My friends and I have come for the traitor you are hiding." His cold green eyes mocked her and a cruel smile twisted his mean mouth. Jeanne stared at him for a moment and turned a look of loathing upon Zamor. "You monster! You heathen piece of filth!"

Zamor's nostrils flared angrily but instead of replying to her he turned to Grieve. "You will find him in the remote room on the south side of the Château." The Englishman nodded and ordered his men upstairs; after a brief interval Jeanne heard scuffling on the stairway and the red-bonneted men reappeared dragging the struggling Maussabré. He was pale with terror and clung desperately to the banister. "Comtesse!" he begged. "Don't let them take me! It will mean my death!"

Jeanne approached Grieve. "He is hardly more than a boy," she said pleadingly. "Do not harm him."

Grieve fingered the tricolor cockade on his hat. "Comtesse," he answered, "if he is old enough to fire shots at the people in defense of the tyrant Capet, this is no boy." He nodded to his men to take Maussabré away; he started to follow, but paused in the doorway. "You may as well know I am fiercely loyal to the Revolution —it freed me from the Bastille to which you had me sent." His eyes glittered furiously and the thought came over Jeanne that he must be mad. "*I* sent you to the Bastille?" she repeated, astounded. "The King sent you there and"—her voice rose defiantly—"he was right to do so!"

"Your royal satyr only did it to please you," he insisted, and it was your lover Brissac"—he ground out the words—"who took me there. Sixteen years in hell, Comtesse, which cry for vengeance. Louis the Fifteenth's putrid corpse was flung into a pit of quicklime on the tenth of August, Brissac I shall deal with when

he is brought back from Orléans next month, and you—I shall see you at the proper time." He gave his mocking bow and walked into the summer twilight.

Jeanne sank into a chair, overcome with anguish and terror. What insane path of vengeance was the man pursuing? She racked her weary brain, probing relentlessly into the most remote recesses of memory. The night in the *Pavillon* returned to her and she remembered clearly that she had asked the King to deport him instead of adding another inmate to the Bastille. Was Grieve mad enough to hold her responsible? His abhorrence combined with Zamor's open hatred formed an alliance heavy with menace. And his oblique remark about Brissac—why was he being shifted from Orléans? She recalled from Brissac's optimistic letters, written earlier, that five of his fellow prisoners had been acquitted. If his transfer was motivated by the Jacobins' dislike of the High Court's leniency—she shuddered. *You will be my last thought.*

The remaining days of August slowly fluttered one by one from the calendar. Jeanne could not remember a summer so hot, and September brought no relief. One torrid morning early in the month Morin returned from the village flushed with excitement. "Madame, the Republic has been proclaimed and terror runs wild in Paris. Danton has incited a horde of murderers and they are butchering the priests and aristocrats without mercy. I will not describe the hideous obscenities perpetrated on the body of the Princesse de Lamballe. . . . I shall tell Suzanne and if you wish to learn from her . . ." he paused, blushing at the details he had heard of the immolation of Marie Antoinette's friend. "The young Chevalier who was here——"

"Maussabré?"

Morin nodded sadly. "He tried to escape up a chimney but those fiends lighted a fire to force him down. When he climbed out blinded by the smoke they impaled him on their bayonets."

Jeanne's hand clutched her throat. "How do you know?"

"The Englishman, the one with the big ears who took him

away, made a point of telling me. He is up to mischief in your village, styling himself a representative of the Republic and delving to uncover royalist sympathies. I fear that man, madame."

"You are right, Morin; have nothing to do with him."

"Madame . . ." Morin was hesitant. "I dislike telling you this but I think you should know. Monsieur de Brissac and his fellow prisoners are being convoyed from Orléans and will reach Versailles on Sunday. When the Englishman told me he grinned wickedly, almost as if——"

"If what?" Jeanne asked in desperation.

"As if he knows what will happen," Morin concluded unhappily.

Jeanne lived in agonized suspense for the next four days and early Sunday morning dispatched Morin to Versailles to observe Brissac's arrival. "If you can speak to him," she said anxiously, "tell him I love him and pray for him."

The day crept on, hot and cloudless. When Morin returned it was late afternoon; one look at his haggard face, drawn with horror, and Jeanne felt as if her world were evaporating in the heated September air. "Morin . . ."

"Oh, madame!" His clear eyes dimmed and his voice shook with emotion. "I saw it happen, by the gates of the *Orangerie*. The National Guard stood looking on, making no move to protect the prisoners. They were hacked and cut to pieces, every one of them, with knives and bayonets, sabers and scythes—not one shot was fired." He placed something in her hand. "I picked this up later from the cobblestones." Jeanne looked at the object; it was a pair of spectacles in a case of green sharkskin, stamped with the familiar arms of the family of Cossé-Brissac.

She sank into a chair, fighting for control. "*Every* one, you said?"

He nodded. "I saw Monsieur de Brissac sitting on some straw in the bottom of the third cart. He was holding his hat in his hand. He was pale, madame, but resolutely calm—although that mob was ravenous for his blood. I heard one ruffian shout that

the other fifty-two prisoners would be spared if Monsieur de Brissac was turned over to them. That was when the cursed Englishman shouted for attention and said, 'Yes, citizens, give Brissac his deserts and all the other aristocrats as well!'" Morin hesitated at the sight of Jeanne's staring eyes and blood-drained face but resumed his tale of carnage, impelled by a force too strong to resist.

"Madame, that man was spawned in hell. It was he, and only he, who incited that multitude to slaughter, and Zamor stood at his side with a leer on his dark ugly face. The mob flung itself on those unarmed helpless prisoners like maddened savages. Their exultant shouts almost drowned out the piteous shrieks of the victims. Monsieur de Brissac did not utter a sound. He raised an arm to shield his face, but it was useless. A screeching market woman severed his nose with a vicious saber blow and——" Morin looked again at Jeanne's face frozen with shock and said no more. He could never tell his revered comtesse that her lover's body was hacked and sliced beyond recognition, that one monster had ripped out and eaten his heart and another, striking the nadir of depravity, had sliced off his genitals and suggested making a present of them to her.

Suddenly Morin trembled with foreboding. In the distance, from the direction of the gatekeeper's cottage, sounded a sullen murmur, growing ever louder. Dusk had fallen and Morin saw from the salon windows a straggling crowd of men advancing on the Château. Some pranced drunkenly, singing, and the discordant strains of *Ça ira* drifted through the open window. Several bore lighted torches and one in the front ranks carried something on a dungfork. "Madame!" Morin shouted frantically. "Flee upstairs at once!"

His warning came too late. The man had already lifted the object from the dungfork. "Citizeness, kiss Brissac!" he bellowed, and hurled through the window the bloody disfigured head of Timoléon, Duc de Brissac. It struck with a repellent thud and rolled across the rug in front of Jeanne's chair. She gave one

terrible cry, heart-rending in its agony of soul, and slipped senseless to the floor.

The days that followed seemed to merge into a hazy dream of horror. Every time Jeanne shut her eyes she saw Brissac's severed head at her feet, the open eyes staring blankly at her. Sleep was impossible unless Suzanne shared her bed and at night she sobbed brokenly in her friend's arms. She became so pale and listless that Suzanne was seriously concerned. "Jeanne," she said compassionately. "Do you remember when the King was dying and I said you would have to go on without him? You did so, bravely, and you will have to show as much courage now—as much courage in living as Monsieur de Brissac showed in dying."

Suzanne's calm soothing voice cleared Jeanne's benumbed thoughts. "You are right," she said, sitting up and drying her eyes. "I am weak and spineless but oh"—her voice rang with despair—"I loved him so much; my life is over."

"No, Jeanne—it is not over. You are kind and good and much remains for you to enjoy. Why not return to London? The change will partly ease your terrible grief. If you wish, I shall go with you."

Jeanne smiled gratefully. "You are unselfish, Suzanne, but I shall not separate you from Morin. It will be sufficient if the maid and valet accompany me."

She went in October to the office of the newly created Department of the Seine-et-Oise to apply for a passport. After the violent deeds of the preceding month she was agreeably surprised to be received with courtesy. The young Secretary of the Department seemed dimly familiar. "Do I know you, monsieur?" she asked timidly. He grinned warmly. "My name is Lavallery, Comtesse—Citizeness." He quickly corrected himself and looked around to see if anyone had overheard his unrepublican lapse. "I served you when you came for documents relative to your stolen jewels." Jeanne looked at him curiously and detected the look of infatuation she recalled from the previous year. "The

Republic has no objection if you visit England," he informed her. "I can give you a passport immediately." Lavallery's friendliness reassured her; she had feared the new French Republic would deny her a passport in the belief she would emigrate.

She traveled once more to the neat hotel in Bruton Street, where she stayed for nearly five months. She tried vainly to erase the gory scene which had been etched in her mind on that dreadful September night. Milord March sought to supply pleasant diversions, escorting her to the theater and the opera, but in the middle of a love scene or a lilting aria some tender fragment from her life with Brissac returned to lodge in her thoughts and plunge her into renewed melancholy.

The dismal weather of the English winter fed her gloom. On a dark January day, swathed in mourning, she attended a memorial service for the guillotined King. Tears came to her eyes when she thought of the clumsy obese Dauphin gourmandizing on his wedding night so long ago. His grandfather had predicted that he would encounter troubles when he came to the throne, but only Cassandra herself could have foretold a martyr's death for the well-intentioned Dauphin.

"You are not returning to France, Comtesse?" A voice whispered beside her and she turned to recognize the aged marquis she had seen at Milord March's house on her previous visit.

"I am thinking of it," she admitted. "I have not implicated myself in politics and although I do not like the Republic I have done nothing to injure it."

"But they will kill you!" he warned. "Don't you know that? If they murder a son of Saint Louis"—he crossed himself—"they will stop at nothing. Your association with the former King——" he checked himself. "I implore you to remain in England," he finished earnestly.

After she returned to her hotel she turned his words over in her mind. News from France was certainly ominous; unrestrained violence was sweeping Paris. She had recovered unencumbered title to her diamonds but had left them with her bankers for

safekeeping. She could sell them and live luxuriously in London on the proceeds. But why would the men of the new Convention wish to harm her if she returned to France? The Republic would never have issued her a passport if it harbored hostile intentions. The memory of Lavallery's reassuring smile encouraged her. No, she would not be molested; even the demonic Grieve was powerless against her. She thought of the affection always displayed by the villagers at Louveciennes; if danger threatened they would act in her defense.

Milord March gave a farewell dinner at which the Prince of Wales made an impassioned attempt to dissuade her. "Comtesse," he said, "Hell is transferred to France, devils are loose, and all things warm and beautiful there are doomed to perish. For the sake of God—stay here!" Jeanne was moved by his devoted anxiety, but secure in her innocence, desperately homesick for Louveciennes, and mercifully ignorant of the future, she crossed the Channel, arriving at Louveciennes several days after Great Britain declared war on the French Republic.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ITEM: Inventory of contents of the Château of Louveciennes, compiled by Citizeness du Barry.

Jeanne instantly sensed the change at Louveciennes. The open terror of the September massacres had vanished, but in its place lurked a slimy atmosphere of conspiracy. Ugly suspicion prowled through the village and the inhabitants' faces reflected their dread and uncertainty. Morin explained that the local Jacobins, organized by Grieve, had been holding their meetings in her own salon. "I protested, of course, but I had no means to prevent them, madame." His voice was full of chagrin. "Zamor showed him where your correspondence was hidden, and—" Jeanne paled, torn between outrage and fear. "Go on," she urged.

"Grieve has induced some of your domestics to desert and has tried to undermine your prestige among the villagers. Most of them, remembering your charity, are still faithful but even they are obsessed with fear of this man. He is a friend of Marat and stands high in the eyes of the Committee of Public Safety."

"But what is he after, Morin?" Jeanne demanded in alarm. "He hates me for an imagined injury but that is not justification for persecuting my household."

"I heard him say to Zamor that evidence must be found to implicate you with the *émigrés*."

Jeanne shook her head in bewilderment, mentally reviewing her conduct since the Revolution. She had only followed the promptings of her heart and the elemental dictates of mercy to

those in need of care and refuge, but she had carefully refrained from overt political expressions. As for the *émigrés*—she had traveled openly, with a valid Republican passport, and had returned of her own free will. What was culpable in that?

She was unable to understand her danger. She intended to say nothing adverse about the Republic, much less plot against it. She even forced herself to send Grieve a message by Morin, granting him permission to use her salon regularly for his Jacobin meetings. In reply Grieve described her with a foul epithet and threatened Morin with arrest if he did not abandon her service at once. Morin did not tell this to her; it was Suzanne who revealed the threat. "Jeanne," she said, "Morin and I will never desert you, but I cannot be fearless as long as Grieve and Zamor are slithering among the environs of Louveciennes."

The gentle months of spring passed without apparent danger, and Jeanne tried to stifle her latent misgivings. The war raged with accelerated fury against England and her Continental allies, and often Jeanne's thoughts went out to her friends across the Channel. Milord March—and the courteous Prince of Wales—so solicitous for her safety. The question insistently recurred to her, had she been foolhardy to return? No, she answered herself angrily. France was her country, Louveciennes her home, and no fanatics would drive her away. But she admitted to Suzanne that she was glad she had left her diamonds in England. Someday, God forbid, they might prove her last resource.

On the fourth anniversary of the fall of the Bastille she received an unexpected caller—Lavallery. Blood rushed to the face of the handsome young official when Morin ushered him into the great salon. He nervously fingered the republican cockade on his tall beaver hat. "Citizeness, it is gracious of you to receive me." He looked at her longingly and Jeanne was deeply touched. Even though she was old enough to be his mother and her heart still grieved for Brissac, she could feel a woman's joy in his unalloyed admiration. The realization that she was desirable to this virile

youth sent a thrill of pleasure down her spine. Her wise mother would have told her that a woman is never too old or heartbroken to relish a man's desire for her.

"It is a rare privilege for me to receive a visitor in these times, citizen," she answered his salutation. "How may I serve you?"

He blushed from his surging emotions. "It is I who have served you, citizeness," he stammered clumsily. He saw the look of surprise in her blue eyes and explained that Grieve had sécured an order for her arrest on this day. "But the Committee of Public Safety has revoked the order," he added hastily. "The murder yesterday of Citizen Marat was providential for you, and also the Committee was impressed by your villagers' petition in your favor —your charity to them speaks well in your behalf. And I——" he paused self-consciously.

"And you, Citizen Lavallery——" she spoke softly, giving him a smile of gentle understanding. "What did *you* do for me?"

"Oh, it was nothing." He attempted a nonchalant shrug. "I merely wrote a deposition that you never intended to emigrate and that your application for a passport was a truthful statement of your desire to return to France. The Committee accepted my opinion but the Englishman Grieve was enraged. He hates you—as if such a perversion were possible!" His ingenuousness was winning and Jeanne felt a throb of affection for his devotion. "He even went so far as to threaten me!" he continued angrily. "I hope there is nothing more to fear from that sinister alien."

Jeanne thanked him feelingly for his selfless defense of her. "Come to visit me again, citizen, when your duties permit." He halted in the doorway and from his expression Jeanne wondered, in a swirl of conflicting emotions, if he intended to embrace her. He repressed his ardent impulse and kissed her hand as if he had been a polished courtier instead of a tradesman's son. She sighed as he walked toward his horse, and wondered if Citizen Lavallery was as devoted to the Revolution as he was to her.

A month later she wrote a note inviting him to dine the following Monday, omitting to mention that it was her fiftieth birth-

day. She received no acknowledgment and concluded that he was absent and had not had the opportunity to read her invitation. Anyway, she had not intended a sumptuous celebration. Suzanne and Morin, dear friends rather than servants, dined with her in the small upstairs salon, Morin serving the meal himself. The informality made Jeanne think of the *petits soupers* in the Little Apartments, when the King had delighted in serving his guests. The three of them reminisced of the shared experiences which the years had so lavishly bestowed; they spoke of faces which had vanished forever, and in their desire to recapture the blessed security of the past were swept along on a current of nostalgic longing.

Jeanne noticed with some uneasiness that Suzanne's color was gray, and her face looked ill and drawn. But Suzanne had never been robust and Jeanne ascribed her worn appearance to apprehension for Morin's safety. She forced herself into a cheerful mood. "We three old friends are all the same age," she said gaily. "Forget our worries—Lavallery's tidings last month encouraged me; let us drink to the future!" To her dismay Suzanne began to cry. "I fear there is no future, Jeanne," she sobbed. "Let us drink to the past."

September came again, heavy with memories of the previous year. On the anniversary of Brissac's murder Jeanne secluded herself in the *Pavillon* where they had spent their tenderest hours together. She could not bear the thought of passing this sorrowful day in the salon where—she shut her eyes as if to blot out the hideous memory of his gory head at her feet.

During the next few days she stayed at Suzanne's bedside. Suzanne had complained of increasingly severe pains in her chest, and her breathing was labored. One morning Jeanne was idly looking out the window while Suzanne was swallowing a dose of Hoffman's Drops. Suddenly Jeanne clutched the draperies in alarm. A closed black carriage was coming at a fast clip up the drive from the entrance gates, followed by an open wagon filled

with soldiers of the *Garde Nationale*. Fearing to excite Suzanne, Jeanned quietly left the room and walked to the top of the stairway.

In the foyer below Morin opened the door and George Grieve entered, followed by four soldiers. "Citizen Morin," he said mockingly, "I come to invite you on a long journey." Morin turned pale beneath his healthy tan as Grieve thrust a paper at him. "This is an order for your arrest from the Committee of Public Safety. These men will convey you to La Force, while I shall enjoy the inestimable privilege of escorting the *ci-devant* Comtesse herself to Sainte-Pélagie. Her fatuous admirer Lavallery can no longer help her, and the new members of the Committee are less impressionable than their predecessors."

"No!" Jeanne's cry was involuntary, but its note of fear penetrated the closed door of Suzanne's room. Suzanne rushed into the hallway, clad only in her chemise, and with one glance she understood; she gave an anguished cry and ran down the stairs, flinging herself into Morin's arms. "They cannot take you! Jeanne and you are all I have in life—without you I too shall die!" She clutched her husband hysterically.

"Come, citizens!" Grieve's voice was impatient. "My time is valuable when I am on the Nation's tasks." He signaled to the waiting soldiers and they tore Morin from Suzanne's tearful embrace. Morin's face was pale and set. He bestowed a final loving look on Suzanne and walked out the door surrounded by his guards. Suzanne staggered, made a choking sound, and slumped inert to the floor.

"Citizen Grieve!" Jeanne begged, "have mercy and help me carry her." Grieve's face was a mask of cold indifference. He shrugged slightly and lifted Suzanne's feet, while Jeanne held her head. Suzanne was so thin and frail that her body was a light burden to carry to the chaise longue. Jeanne's eyes widened with fright when she gazed at Suzanne's gray face. She was dying. Jeanne knew it. Suzanne, her companion and beloved friend, whom she loved more than a sister—Suzanne was slipping from

her. Jeanne could think of nothing else. At that moment her own deadly peril was far from her thoughts. She leaned over to kiss Suzanne and heard an ominous rattle in her throat. "Suzanne, speak to me . . . it is I, Jeanne . . . who love you." Suzanne's eyelids fluttered, she drew one final labored breath, and died. On her pale lips was wreathed a gentle smile, a last benediction to the friend of her childhood, the friend of her life.

Jeanne's grief was too deep for tears. She summoned the two footmen who were still in her service and in a faraway voice which she did not recognize as her own gave instructions for Suzanne to be buried in the garden. One more lingering look at Suzanne's sweet peaceful face, and she turned to the Englishman. "I am ready to go," she said simply. She did not delay even to take a change of linen with her, but followed Grieve quietly to the waiting black carriage.

It rolled down the familiar linden-bordered drive and involuntarily she glanced back at Louveciennes, the Château which the King had given her, the spot above all others where she had been happiest. As the swaying vehicle rounded the turn her glance fell on the white marble *Pavillon,* and she wondered if she would ever gaze again on this beloved scene.

Grieve's mocking voice penetrated her consciousness. "Citizeness Morin," he began, and Jeanne realized with surprise that he was referring to Suzanne, "is better off dead. She would never have seen her husband again because he will leave La Force only to travel to the guillotine." Jeanne refused to give him the satisfaction of a reply, and an irritated frown creased his brow. "You are unlucky for those who love you, citizeness," he goaded. "Your lover Brissac—your footman and his wife—and Citizen Lavallery."

"Lavallery?" she said faintly. Lavallery had been her principal hope of aid.

"Did you not know? Citizen Lavallery drowned himself last month in the Seine to escape trial before the Revolutionary Tri-

bunal for lying in your favor. The same Tribunal," he added gloatingly, "before which you will appear."

"Citizen Grieve," she asked calmly, "why do you hate me so?"

"I told you I consider you responsible for my years in the Bastille, and anyway," he hurried on to forestall her denial, "I hate immoral women—they are daughters of hell!" He drew his thin lips together in a tight hard line and a wild gleam flared in his cold eyes. "You are worse than immoral," he accused. "You are depraved."

"Depraved?" she repeated blankly.

"A woman who seduces and corrupts a child is a monster of perversion." He spoke the words with a primness which in other circumstances would have been ludicrous.

"What do you mean?" she burst out. Incredulity and disgust had roused her from her numbed state.

"Zamor, whom you took to bed as an innocent child—that is what I mean!"

"Oh!" She covered her face in horror. "You are the monster, the freak of depravity, not I. What kind of life do *you* lead, Citizen Grieve?" Her voice rose exultantly as she fathomed the twisted hidden truth. "You and Zamor are authentic monsters, and if France is infested with your kind I shall have more agreeable company in prison than here." She shrank from him in revulsion, and neither said another word until the carriage creaked to a halt before the grim gates of Sainte-Pélagie.

The wearisome weeks lagged and Jeanne thought she would go mad from the monotony. Sometimes she lost count of the days but she knew it was now December, whether the fourth or the fifth she could not say. December—*Frimaire* by the outlandish republican reckoning. She had been within the walls of Sainte-Pélagie since the twenty-second of September; at least she was certain of that. How many times had she relived that somber morning when Suzanne had died and she and Morin had been dragged away to their respective prisons!

Morin, she thought sadly. Grieve had smilingly told her on one of his malignant visits that Morin had traveled the terrifying road to where the guillotine waited, stark and lethal, in the Place de la Révolution. Grieve seemed to take special gratification in pointing out that Morin's execution had occurred on the same day that the Queen's head fell in the wicker basket. He described Marie Antoinette's death with ferocious joy. "Capet's widow did not merit the closed coach in which her husband made his final journey. She rode in an open tumbril which formerly hauled dung—and it never carried a bigger piece of filth than Antoinette!" He laughed sardonically at his lewd jest.

Jeanne knew that her silence under his taunts infuriated him, so she did not reply. She had heard through the miraculous channels of prison gossip that the Queen, white-haired at thirty-eight, had retained her majestic composure to the end. When she accidentally trod on the executioner's foot as he was about to seize her she had apologized with the fine graceful courtesy of her former days. Jeanne thought of the high-spirited girl who had come from Vienna glowing with hopes for a radiant future—a future which had ended with her corpse, the head wedged between the legs, tossed into a ditch of quicklime in the cemetery of the Madeleine. Jeanne said a silent prayer for the martyred Queen—her Calvary was finished. Jeanne was still in the agony of Gethsemane.

Grieve had grudgingly allowed her chambermaid to bring fresh linen from Louveciennes. But the solitary cell where she vainly sought sleep during the lonely nights was rudely furnished and the stinking common room where she passed her days with other prisoners was close and fetid. However, her real travail was not physical but mental. She was tormented by her fears and her memories.

At first she had lain awake listening to the huge gray rats scurrying across the floor of her cell, and the sound evoked some dim unpleasant memory. During one prolonged interval she finally realized what it was. Her earliest memory—she was a little

girl sleeping with her mother in some rural loft, and big gray rats—that was it! Nearly half a century had not obliterated from her subconscious the childhood horror she had felt.

So long ago . . . her thoughts reverted insistently to the past. In the hours of solitary wakefulness she dwelt on names from the vanished years . . . backward, ever backward. Suzanne and Morin . . . her mother and Rancon . . . *Son Excellence* . . . Guillaume du Barry, the bucolic husband she had seen but once . . . Elizabeth Valdin . . . La Rena . . . Monsieur Billard . . . dead, all dead. And the men who had loved her . . . Charles Duval . . . Colonel Marcien . . . the Roué . . . Sainte-Foy . . . the King . . . and Brissac. Where were they? The two who had loved her most—the King and Brissac—had been snatched by death in uncommonly hideous forms.

She forced herself to think of the future. Suzanne had cried despairingly that there was no future, and for herself she had been right. But Jeanne was alive, still pulsing with vigorous health and a passionate desire to live. Did she have a future? She vacillated between terror and hope. Perhaps she should have heeded the Prince of Wales' warning, perhaps she should have kept to her safe English haven. If only the Revolutionary Tribunal would summon her and end this agony of suspense! She was sure she could answer their questions and win her freedom.

The very day after these reflections her uncertainty came to an end. When she was transferred from Sainte-Pélagie to the even grimmer Conciergerie she knew her trial was at hand. She dressed with meticulous care in a simple dress of English linen and arranged her hair in soft waves around her face. She had never used powder or rouge and she needed none now; her face glowed with fresh beauty.

She was ushered into the great room where the Tribunal sat, the same room where the *Parlement* had convened in the days of the monarchy. She anxiously scanned the eager spectators, the three impassive judges, the twelve jurors chosen to give her life or death and—most intimidating of all—the Public Prosecutor,

Fouquier-Tinville. Quill poised in his hand he sat at his desk, his burning eyes fixed upon her. She summoned her waning courage and held her head high as she walked to her place.

Fouquier-Tinville arose slowly and began to speak to the improvised courtroom. His voice, at first almost toneless, rose in fervor as he read the indictment. Jeanne leaned forward, holding her breath. She was guilty, he charged, of the following crimes: conspiring to emigrate from France, conspiring with the Prince of Wales and other Englishmen against the Republic, furnishing large amounts of money to the *émigrés,* attending a memorial service for the traitor Louis Capet, and squandering the people's money when she was the paramour of the former King.

Jeanne listened with growing apprehension to the accusations. Their flimsiness was patent, but the most alarming aspect of her plight was that they could be made at all and delivered with such seriousness. She felt she could appeal to the jury's common sense in refuting all the charges except two. She *had* attended the service for Louis XVI from common pity and a desire to pray for his soul, and she had injudiciously given money to *émigrés,* but only so they could live. The other charges were absurd.

"Citizens . . ." Jeanne rose to her feet, her voice controlled. "I appeal to your intelligence as good Frenchmen. I freely admit I attended a service in memory of his late Majesty"—she paled at the hostile stares—"that is, Citizen Capet. I merely followed the dictates of my religious beliefs. And I admit I was in error to give money to *émigrés,* but my motive was charity. I have never conspired against the Republic with the Prince of Wales or anyone else, and I never intended to emigrate. Is my presence here today not proof of that? I could have remained in England had I intended to abandon my country, but after recovering title to my stolen jewels——"

"Merde!" Jeanne trembled at the coarse word . . . that high thin voice. . . . Zamor had risen from his seat beside Grieve. "I say to you, citizens, that the robbery never took place. I was there

that night and saw nothing. It is a fabrication to justify this woman's trips of intrigue to England."

Jeanne gasped at the audacity of his lie. "You saw nothing because you were in a drunken stupor!" she screamed. "To prove the reality of the theft I can write to England and if the Tribunal wishes"—she turned pleadingly to the judges—"I shall send for the jewels and bestow them to the Nation." The judges looked at her stonily. One of them shrugged and leaned over to whisper to the Public Prosecutor. Fouquier-Tinville had been writing with incredible speed, committing every spoken word to paper.

He laid aside the feathered quill. "Citizen Grieve has sworn that in searching the effects and correspondence of the accused he discovered a medal bearing the effigy of the Englishman Pitt. What do you say to that?" He looked at her unblinkingly. "It is true," admitted Jeanne, "that I possess such a medal. It was given me by the Duke of Queensbury as a memento of my stay in London. It has no other significance."

She sank into a chair and wiped her damp forehead. Fouquier-Tinville rose to his feet and walked in front of the jury. He recapitulated the charges one by one. "You will notice, citizens, that the accused did not even attempt a defense against the fifth charge—that she squandered the people's money."

"But everything was a gift from the King," Jeanne cried. "I had no power of my own!"

The Public Prosecutor droned on, his voice rising and falling with the regularity of a metronome until he worked himself into a final peroration. "You see before you this *Lais* celebrated for the looseness of her morals. You must decide if this Messalina, born among the people, has conspired against the liberty and sovereignty of the people!" He sat down, his eyes alight with satisfaction at his well-rehearsed delivery.

Jeanne twisted the handkerchief in her lap as the jurors filed out. She had detected a look of covert sympathy on three of their faces, but obviously they were in dread of Fouquier-Tinville and fearful that an unwelcome verdict would place their names on his

proscribed list. Five minutes had barely elapsed when they returned with the inevitable verdict—guilty! The presiding judge cleared his throat. "The accused Citizeness du Barry, *née* Bécu, is guilty as charged. The Revolutionary Tribunal in the name of the people condemns her to execution——" an anguished scream sounded through the enormous hall and Jeanne fell to the floor in a faint. The judge continued unhurriedly ". . . such execution to be administered tomorrow morning."

Jeanne did not sleep that night. She paced her cell in an agony of terrified despair. What recourse did she have? What could soften these implacable men cursed with fanaticism and riddled with fear of each other and the Revolution they had made? Her jewels in England? No—her suggestion at the trial had met no response. *Dieu me garde!* She grasped at hope. Many precious objects of inestimable value were concealed at Louveciennes—would the Republic spare her life if she revealed their hiding place? She called for the jailer and begged him to summon the Public Prosecutor. The long hours of darkness wore on. Her cell was cold, and she shivered.

Shortly after ten in the morning a short man with a round apple-face entered the cell. "I am Citizen Jules Metray," he informed her, "member of the Committee of Public Safety and delegate for the Public Prosecutor."

Jeanne, almost incoherent with anxiety, offered to reveal the location of her valuables in return for her life. "I shall retreat to some small village and remain there forever," she pledged, "if only my life is spared!"

Citizen Metray's thin lips smiled but his porcine eyes remained cold. "That is an interesting bargain you offer, citizeness. I have authority from the Public Prosecutor—and I accept it." Tears of joy and relief sprang to Jeanne's eyes. The tumbrils with their daily burden of victims had already left the Conciergerie; she had heard their wheels rumbling over the cobblestones of the Quai. She had been promised her life—she was saved!

Metray ordered writing materials brought, and seated himself

imperturbably while Jeanne took up a quill. The words flowed on, page after page. She tried to remember everything—even the most modest object, if it had monetary value. A ring of emeralds and diamonds . . . a portrait of Louis XV in a gold frame . . . a Sèvres bust of the Dauphine . . . a diamond dog collar . . . a necklace of pearls . . . a small pair of diamond earrings . . . a diamond brooch . . . goblets of rock crystal, gold-chased . . . two Turkish daggers set with rubies . . . a diamond pencil . . . an unadorned mouche box of blue enamel. . . . The quill halted its rapid tracing. Had she overlooked anything? She furrowed her brows in concentration. Yes . . . a small stickpin, its head a miniature windmill of silver.

She signed the inventory and affixed the date: *8 décembre, 1793*. "No," Metray firmly corrected her. "Today is *18 Frimaire, Year II of the Republic.*" Jeanne, chastened, altered the date and handed the sheets of paper to him. "Most of this you will find in the spot opposite the icehouse at Louveciennes where the garden tools are kept." She smoothed her brow with a relieved gesture. "When may I expect my freedom—when you have verified the inventory?"

Metray smiled thinly. "All in proper time, citizeness; adieu." He squeezed his short stout body through the door and was gone, taking the inventory with him. Jeanne relaxed wearily. She was exhausted from the sustained effort she had made, but her life was saved—nothing else mattered now. She even managed to summon an appetite for the uninviting noon meal, but had barely finished eating when the cell door was noisily flung open and two warders entered. The older was carrying a pair of heavy shears. "Come, citizeness," he said heartily. "Be a good woman and let me cut that pretty hair of yours."

Jeanne turned dead-white and shrank against the wall. "What —what is this?" The man laughed at her lisping query. "The citizeness does not seem to know she is going on a journey in the tumbril." He winked jovially at his companion. Jeanne screamed. "No! No! It is a mistake—I swear it!" The man with the shears

smiled indulgently. "I know—they all say the same thing." Impervious to her cries and frantic struggles he snipped off her golden hair to expose the nape of her tender neck. His companion deftly bound her hands behind her and they dragged her from the cell, down the dim corridor and through a doorway into the cold cloudy afternoon.

In the courtyard a tumbril waited. Jeanne, already half mad with terror, shrieked when she saw it. "No!" Her scream rang out piercingly in the chill damp air. "Listen to me. . . . It is a mistake, call Citizen Metray . . . he will tell you." Her captors shrugged and thrust her into the rough open cart, which at once began to move. It rolled through the Conciergerie gates and turned left on the Quai de l'Horloge until it reached the Pont-Neuf.

The Pont-Neuf! Her mother had warned that there were those in the world who would do her harm. . . . She shuddered. This must be a hideous dream. This was not herself—not little Jeanne Bécu, who had never harmed anyone.

Her extreme fright numbed her perceptions, although she was vaguely aware that the tumbril had crossed the Seine and was already turning the corner of the rue Saint-Honoré. Another bound victim, mute with fear, shared the cart—a man she dimly recalled as a merchant, or a banker. She could not think . . . where was she . . . the rue Saint-Honoré. A short distance down the rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs, within easy view, a gold-lettered sign swayed in the breeze: MAISON LABILLE. But Jeanne did not see it; her eyes were unseeing, blank with mortal terror.

Now the tumbril had turned left once again and was approaching the vast Place de la Révolution. The bleak outline of the guillotine against the dismal winter sky galvanized Jeanne to movement. "No!" she cried, trying to stand upright in the jolting cart. "No! It is a mistake!" She turned her pallid face toward the spectators jammed in the windows along the way. "Citizens—everything I have I give to the nation—life, life!" she pleaded piteously.

A thin red-haired man standing in the crowded street sneered. "Everything you have already belongs to the nation, you whore!" A stonecutter standing alongside struck him soundly on the mouth. "You will pay for that," the red-haired man whined.

"Will I, you *salaud?*" retorted the burly artisan. "And who are you to make me pay for a decent instinct?" The other man sniffled. "I am Paul Lametz," he said, wiping his runny nose with his sleeve. "I am the hairdresser of Citizen Robespierre." The stonecutter's rugged features paled and he fled, seeking to hide himself in the passing throng.

But Jeanne was oblivious of the scene before her staring eyes. The creaking cart was now crossing the Place de la Révolution which was filled with clusters of spectators huddled together for warmth. They were enduring the light drizzle and cold wind in order to slake their morbid hunger for the smell of blood. The tumbril drew up at the foot of the platform which supported the instrument of death. Jeanne's eyes were glazed and she stumbled as she started up the steps. To her right the Seine sullenly coiled like a long gray snake, but she did not see it—or the forlorn tenantless Château of the Tuileries—or George Grieve's cold smile of triumph as he stood in the crowd beneath her. She saw only the glittering razor-sharp blade which hung poised at the top of the guillotine.

Her cries and shrieks had momentarily died. She was trembling with cold and fear as strong rough hands forced her faltering steps. "No!" The executioner had placed his hand on her neck, forcing her to her knees. "No!" She gave one final despairing cry. "You are hurting me! Please, don't hurt me!"

His hand's pitiless pressure forced her into prone position, he nodded to his assistant, and the weighted slanting blade rumbled down its path to smash cleanly through her bared neck. Her headless trunk, blood gushing from the severed arteries, was thrown into a wicker basket and her head, the blue eyes closed in a final spasm of terror, was tossed contemptuously after it.

The cold drizzle was turning into a downpour. Grieve turned

to go and the apple-faced man behind him jerked at his sleeve. "Now that we have seen it, Citizen Feuille and I are off to Louveciennes immediately," he said. "We have a lucrative inventory to verify."

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Many mysteries exist in the life of Madame du Barry, riddles impossible to solve by documentation. For this reason I concluded that her personality could be most effectively brought to life in the form of a biographical novel, although as much research has been devoted to this work as to my straight biography: *Madame de Pompadour, Mistress of France.*

For the purposes of this novel I have omitted several characters who seemed to me uninteresting and basically irrelevant to her story, but those which are in this book were, with one major exception, real human beings. How I have interpreted them, naturally, is a matter of opinion.

In addition to the wealth of memoirs and letters written both in France and England by her contemporaries, I have consulted the great number of biographies subsequently written about the leading figures of the *ancien régime.* It is my honest belief that the background and customs herein described are authentic.

Several years ago I was attached to the American Embassy in Paris and had ample opportunity to study at immediate range the stage on which Madame du Barry played out her extravagant career. Much remains as it was—Madame de Pompadour's Hermitage at Fontainebleau, the Little Trianon where Marie Antoinette followed Madame du Barry, her apartments at Versailles, recently restored to their original state, and of course Paris. The changes which have occurred in the city during nearly two centuries have been mostly changes of expansion rather than destruction. The Pont-Neuf, the Jardin des Plantes, the Conci-

ergerie, the Place des Victoires, many of the very streets Jeanne Bécu walked, selling her toy windmills—all are still there. This is her story as it might have been, as I would like to think—and do think—it was.

A few weeks after the execution of Madame du Barry her brother-in-law, deprived of his income from her confiscated estate, went into hiding to evade his inevitable creditors. Denounced as an intended *émigrée*, the seventy-year-old Roué disdained to defend himself, and mounted the steps of the guillotine at Toulouse with characteristic jaunty indifference.

George Grieve boasted that he sent seventeen victims to the guillotine, but always Madame du Barry was his chief prize. Little is realized of the role played by several Englishmen during the Reign of Terror. One of them, J. J. Arthur, was more prominent than Grieve, but it is Grieve, obsessed with his implacable hatred for the hapless former mistress of Louis XV, whose memory has more vividly survived. He never returned to England, and died in Brussels in 1809 at the age of sixty-one.

Zamor was arrested shortly after the execution of his benefactress but Grieve's influence secured his release. He sank into obscurity and lived through the era of Napoleon into the reign of Louis XVIII. In 1820 he perished of starvation in a Paris garret, still consumed with bitter hatred for Madame du Barry. His sole possessions were three francs, the writings of Rousseau, a portrait of Marat, and one of Robespierre.

New Orleans
January–August, 1959