

Chapter One

My father was curtain maker to the King once, before the revolution. He used to sit, all day, in his cramped workroom at the top of our little Parisian townhouse, his spectacles perched on the tip of his nose, and cut and sew until his fingers bled. The room in which he worked was hung with all manner of different types of fabrics, from lightweight gauze to heavy brocade and, in the evenings, I would sit up there and watch my father do his work, his hands moving up and down as the beautiful fabrics turned into something magical. When he had finished a particular set of curtains, my father would take me with him to deliver them to the house of whichever nobleman or aristocrat required them, and we would watch as a whole team of men hung them from the high ceilings so they cascaded down towards the floor like waterfalls. And, as more and more curtains poured down these gilded walls, more and more money poured in and, by the time I was nine, we had moved out of Paris and into a grand château on the road to Versailles. Here we lived the high life, with servants, a butler and a chef, and I had my own special tutor to teach me English, for I had not been able to speak a word of the language before. Over time, though, I managed to pick it up rather well, and my father said that maybe we could branch overseas and I could deal with the customers. I knew by the grin on his face that he was joking, though.

I was sitting in the kitchen with a pantry maid called Marie when I first heard about the revolution. Two of my father's coachmen, who had just arrived back from a trip to Paris, brought the news. They had scampered into the kitchen, grins spread across their faces, shouting above the hubbub:

"It's happening! It's here! Equality for all!"

Marie, who had become a firm friend of mine over the time that I had known her, had stood up.

“What’s happening?” she had asked, “What’s here?”

“The revolution, of course!” the coachmen had screamed joyously,
“The bastille has fallen! Vive La Nation!”

It was then that the whole kitchen erupted. People were cheering, laughing, shouting “Vive La Nation!” over the din. I had laughed and cheered with them, but I did not fully understand what was going on. From my previous time spent with Marie in the kitchen, I had picked up little titbits of information that something was going on, that marches were happening and that the people were demanding bread, but when I had asked my mother and then my father, they had both dismissed my accusations of a possible revolution for just being ‘untrue rumours’. And I had believed them, until that day.

My father was not in his workroom when I had gone looking for him. Neither was my mother in the parlour when I had tried to find her. Eventually, I had discovered them both in my bedchamber, faces grave, waiting for me. My father had looked at me over his spectacles.

“Isabelle...” he had pulled me towards him, “we need to talk.”

“Is it about the revolution?” I had asked.

“Yes.” He had replied. “Yes, it is.”

And they told me all about it; about how the poor had no bread, so they had stormed the bastille, and killed the governor. How they were parading around Paris with his head. They explained to me what this meant for France, for Paris, and what may be on the road ahead for us.

“Be prepared,” my father had told me, “for us to go back to how we were before.”

I had nodded.

“I liked before.” I exclaimed, but it was just to make them happy; I had a hunch that this revolution would not end up with us like we were before. I had a hunch it would end up worse.

Chapter Two

The following October, many of our servants left us to march from Paris to Versailles to demand lower bread prices. Marie went with them. I bade her goodbye as she set off along the road with two coachmen, three footmen, my father's valet and the butler. Each of them was armed with either a pitchfork or a spade, and as they skipped towards the march they shouted "Vive La Nation!" at the tops of their voices. Marie's face was alight with revolutionary zeal. That was the last time I ever saw my friend.

My father informed me a few days later that the march had succeeded in forcing the King and Queen to move back to Paris. When I heard this, I cheered, for I knew that Marie would be delighted with their victory. However, my father had not looked quite so jubilant.

"But if the King and Queen are now in Paris, won't they need new curtains?" I had asked innocently.

"The King and Queen don't need curtains now that the Jacobin club has been formed; they need a miracle!" My father replied gruffly, and he sent me to my room before I could ask him what the Jacobin club was.

It was after the royal family tried to flee the country that my father stopped speaking to me. He would stay in his workroom all day, and only come down in the evening to go to bed. One of our few remaining servants would bring him his meals, and neither my mother nor I had any idea of what he would spend his days doing; after all, he had no curtains to make anymore, for much of the aristocracy had taken flight to England. My mother told me that my father would soon recover from this feeling of despair, and that we would live a fruitful life once more, but even then I

knew that the only lives that could be fruitful were those of the revolutionary leaders.

In this terrible time of loneliness, I would spend my waking hours in the kitchen, talking to the chef, who was greatly feeling the hefty weight of the revolution upon his back, for all his assistants had left him for the thrills of Paris. This left him to prepare our meals unaided, but for myself, and which chef would want an ungifted thirteen-year-old girl as their only helper? Both of us found little comfort in each others company, for the chef was too busy for a good conversation, and I was just getting in his way. I found myself longing for Marie, for my friend would have been a great help for me in these lonesome hours, and I had not seen her for nearly two years. However, Marie was in Paris, caught up in the excitement of the revolution, where she could give me no assistance.

Chapter Three

In the August of 1792, my father called me to his workroom. I had not seen him for several months, as he awoke with the first songs of the birds in the morning, and retired in the evening long after my eyes had closed. It was because of this that I was somewhat startled by his invitation, and even more astonished when I saw the change in his appearance. The last time I had seen him, yes, he looked pale and tired, but it was nothing compared to this. His skin was drawn so tight across his cheekbones that his face somewhat resembled a skeleton, great purple bags had formed under his eyes and he had looked one hundred years older. I did not tell him this though, partly because of politeness and partly because he looked as if he would snap if anyone dared utter a single word.

My mother had stood beside him, holding his hand. She too looked older, she was not wearing the immense wig that was normally piled so high that it touched the heavens – our château was made with unusually high ceilings so as to accommodate such wigs – and I realised then that neither her nor my father were dressed in their usual finery; but in the putrid rags of a common peasant. I was rather taken aback by this, for it would have taken a whole army to get my mother into clothes like that, for even when we still lived in Paris we were not peasants but of considerably higher class.

Still, I had said nothing, and listened intently as my father gave his speech.

“I have been informed,” he had said slowly, “that there is a mob of around thirty or so people from the nearby village marching towards this château. If we do not leave, then who knows what will happen to us. The servants –”

Here I had broken him off.

“Are we going to England?”

My mother had stepped in.

“Not just yet. We are going to Paris.”

I had been shocked. Paris? Paris was where all the action was, where the revolutionary leaders were, where we would be exposed! Had my parents suddenly become lunatics?

My mother had seen the expression on my face and had smiled sadly. “We are going to Paris because we don’t just have money, we have brains. If we go straight to the coast, we will be running straight into their net. They are expecting us to flee immediately, but we will go where they do not expect us to go. The servants have prepared a carriage and we are travelling with them, dressed as fellow servants heading for the revolution. In Paris, disguised as peasants, we will then wait a few weeks before leaving for the coast. We are different to all the others who they call ‘aristocrats’.”

It was then my brain froze. Up until that point, I had thought that because we were quite rich, the revolution may hate us, but still spare us. I had thought that peasants were marching on us

because they wanted bread, and we were leaving because we didn't have any. Up until that point, I didn't think we were aristocrats. Being considered an aristocrat made everything completely different: we were running for our lives. I told my parents this, but my father had laughed.

"In this day and age everyone who earns a living is an aristocrat, more or less."

With that I had collapsed, sobbing, as, on the horizon, a distant mob could be seen, advancing slowly towards us.

Chapter Four

Paris was completely different to how I had remembered it. The people were different, the atmosphere was different. Young men rampaged about the streets, beer bottles in hand, revolutionary cockades pinned to their chests, calling out "Vive La Nation!" and singing the Marseillaise. A dark cloud hung over Paris, and as I walked through the cobbled streets, I could feel in the air the anticipation that something was about to happen – something important.

My father had found for us a small apartment on a busy street, where we could go about our daily activities almost unnoticed. Each day I left early in the morning for the local market, taking a few meagre coins and pretending that one loaf of bread was all that we could buy.

It was on one of these morning excursions that I first heard about the massacres. It was early September, and the last rays of summer sun were shining down onto the little market in the heart of Paris. However, despite the warm weather, an eerie coldness seemed to shroud the market place as I entered it. The square was almost silent but for the whisperings of the stall owners and their

clients, and the distant roar of a large and angry crowd. As I neared the baker's stall, a woman came up to me. She was carrying a basket which held two loaves of bread, and as she spoke, fear danced in her eyes.

"You heard about the massacres then?"

Terror had gripped me in its sharp jaws; my father had anticipated something like this but we had planned to leave Paris before they even started.

"They say they're going to kill hundreds today alone."

It was then that I had panicked. I fled the market place with no more bread than I had started off with – all I had bought was dread.

Chapter Five

We left Paris the next day before the sun was even up. We had managed to hire a coachman, who was under the impression that I was English and I had been on a visit to my uncle, who lived in France. My mother and father were acting as my servants, pampering me greatly, which - I have to admit – I found rather enjoyable.

We had stopped for the night at a small inn near the coast. The place was dark, dank and dusty, and I could have sworn I saw a rather large rat scuttle across the floor as we walked inside. The innkeeper was a skinny, dirty creature, who did not seem to appreciate our rather late arrival. He had kept yawning dramatically as he showed us our rooms, and muttered as he walked away:

"Always turn up at nearly midnight, stupid aristos do!"

This had put my father greatly on edge.

"He knows!" he whispered to my mother through gritted teeth when he thought I wasn't listening.

“I’m sure we’ll be alright!” my mother had replied hopefully, “After all, he looks too lazy to tell them that we’re here!” I didn’t ask her who ‘them’ was. I wasn’t even supposed to have heard anyway.

I awoke the next morning to a loud hammering on the front door of the inn. At first I had thought nothing of it; we were in an inn, and these people probably just wanted breakfast or something. Then I heard the shouting, and that was when I knew that something was amiss.

The shouting grew louder as I heard heavy footsteps running up the stairs. Doors were being smashed open and I could hear someone screaming loudly over the commotion. I ran to the corner of my room and stood by the window, trying to conceal myself with the curtain that hung there. With a thud, the door was thrown open. A tall, burly man with stocky shoulders and a curly moustache stood in the doorway. He saw the window, saw me (I had never been good at hide and seek) and had growled: “Don’t you dare!”

Before he said those fateful words I had not taken jumping out the window as an option, for I had been raised to believe that rich girls like me were to never do something as horrifying as that. It seems strange to think that it was actually my intended captor who put that idea into my head, for the second he said that I hoisted myself up and dropped from the window. I landed with a thump on the gravelly floor outside. Without looking back, I turned and ran.

Chapter Six

To this day I don't quite know how I got away. The man with the moustache followed me across the fields, and though I had a head start, he was much faster and fitter than me and the gap between us got shorter and shorter with every step. Eventually, I reached a barn, where I concealed myself behind some bales of hay. I figured that the man with the moustache had given up on chasing me and just gone back to the inn, for I waited for what seemed like days and he didn't come.

After a while I went back to the inn. There was nobody there, but for the innkeeper, who I had quickly concealed myself from. After that, I just walked slowly along the road, following signs to Paris. I was in a sort of daze, not knowing where my parents were or what had happened to them, and it seemed a sort of miracle when I finally arrived at the city, many nights later. I staggered through the bloody streets like a living ghost, not really knowing where I was headed. It must have been fate that lead my way, for when I finally looked up from staring at the ground I found myself in the Place de La Revolution. I don't know how I did not hear the immense crowd that gathered around the guillotine at first, for they were roaring so loudly that I was certain that the sound would break my eardrums when I actually came to hear it. Stumbling, half blind, towards the scaffold, I looked up and an old man, hands tied and head shaved, lying beneath the blade. I recognised him at once.

But before I could call out his name, the blade fell, the curtains closed, and I bade my father my final goodbye.