

Hear Now the Tale of a Jet-Black Sunrise

Chapter 1

The letter had come from Marseille, which was not unexpected, but the handwriting was not Henri's. Julien tore it open in haste.

Monsieur,

We have had our differences, but there comes a time when one must put aside personal feelings and accept responsibility and the necessity of action. Emilie Duchamp is dead, killed in an accident. Henri tried to slit his wrists the same night. Luckily, no great harm was done, but he will not speak to me. This is all your doing, and I pray that you may be able to fix it, because I cannot.

Please come if you can. I do not know what else to do.

*Sincerely,
J-P Enjolras*

Dead? Attempted suicide? The greater part of the story was certainly untold, but it could not be appropriate for inclusion in a letter. Julien scribbled a brief response:

Monsieur,

I thank you for the news, if one can be grateful for such news. I put this letter into the post today, but I hope I may follow it so closely that it will not precede my arrival.

Please give Henri my most heartfelt sympathies. I will be there as soon as I can.

Julien Combeferre

His affairs were not much to tidy up. There was to have been a ball that evening, but his hosts were most polite when he informed them that he had just received news of a family emergency. The staff helped him to pack, and in the morning, he was on his way to Dover, carrying sympathies from Mrs Carter and her (rather pretty) younger daughter Miss Laura in the form of a packet of sandwiches for the journey and several jars of jam for his mother. Mr Carter and M. Combeferre had somehow met during the war and had become friendly enough that Julien had spent the past seven months in their company, treated more as a visiting cousin than as a foreign guest. He had lately agreed that the original nine months be lengthened to a full year, that he might return to Paris in the spring – or perhaps even the summer – when the letter came and upset half-formed plans. What were possibilities of a few more months of the happiest family life he had ever experienced when he was needed at home? To Dover he had to go.

The weather was cold and had been dry for several days, which at least had hardened the road out of London. Unfortunately, one could see the fog grow as they approached the coast. The packet out of Dover would be delayed until the fog cleared, and all Julien could do was huddle down in an inn with the few other travelers who could not wait until finer weather to venture to the Continent. He did manage to get a room to himself, though he mostly spent his time pacing the docks, hoping to be the first to note a break in the gloom. He slept little and broke down weeping more than once, though never for long. Too much medical knowledge was a dangerous thing – he kept imagining an infection setting in. “Tried to slit his wrists” was so vague it could mean a close-run thing or that he was prevented before he was ever truly able to make contact of blade and skin. The one would be more difficult medically, but the other could be more damaging in the long run. And while Julien was certain he would be less emotional if he were actually traveling, making progress toward where he was needed, being stuck in Dover was worse than sitting in London in ignorance. He had given up a ball with Miss Laura in order to sit in Dover, given it up gladly, but to no real purpose.

Julien cursed his presumption in not waiting comfortably in London with the Carters for one of the steam packets directly out of the city. He had thought he might cross sooner by going overland to Dover, but it was five days before the weather cleared enough for the packet to dare the crossing. He paced the deck during the entire four-hour trip and pushed his way to be among the first through Customs on disembarkation. But no one was leaving Calais until the following morning, so all he could do was book a place in the diligence to Paris and sit and stew for another night.

He reached Paris on the third day and immediately hailed a cab to take his trunk to his parents’ house. He had transferred a couple shirts and other simple needs into a valise back in Dover, on the first of the interminable days of waiting, and kept that with him as he went to see if he could book a place on the mail, at least to Lyon, rather than endure all the stops of the diligence. It was impossible to leave immediately, but for the first time, he had the good luck to get one of the few seats on the mail for the next day. It would still save him two days, and in turn, that could hasten the trip down the Rhône valley.

It was not a pleasant conversation he had at home, however. His mother had visitors whom she had to leave in order to find out what was going on in her own house. “What on earth are you doing here?” she asked disapprovingly. “You were supposed to stay in England.”

“I am only here for the night on my way to Marseille.”

“And what in God’s name would take you to Marseille at this time of year?”

“Henri is ill,” Julien answered with the firmness he had learned in his years at the hospital.

“Henri is ill,” she mocked. “And if it were your own family, you would not be here at all.”

“That is unfair. You would not tell me if there were something wrong in the family.”

“The staff will prepare your room. How long will you be with us?”

“A few hours only. I’ve booked a place on the mail for seven o’clock tomorrow morning.”

“You’ll catch your death.” The mail only offered outside places.

“I am in perfect health, Mother,” Julien replied tiredly. He had made the same protest for years, to no effect, but still it must be said if only because it was expected.

“You will dine with us tonight.” It was an order, not a request.

“Since you wish it.”

His trunk and valise had been brought up to his room. He asked for hot water, so he might wash up for the first time since leaving Calais. Charles came before the water did.

“You’re home.”

“Not for long.” Julien was too distracted to pay much attention to his little brother.

“Why?”

“Emergency. I have to go to Marseille.” The staff had begun to unpack for him, a vexing liberty that meant he had to begin all over to determine just what he would need to take with him.

“Something happened to Henri, didn’t it?” Charles asked, trying not to pout too obviously.

“Yes, and it’s very bad. Shouldn’t you have a lesson right now?”

“M. Vidal went to the kitchen for tea.”

“Then I assume he will return at any moment.” Only after Charles left did Julien regret his stiff and somber tone. But he simply had neither the time nor the energy to explain things he did not know.

Once he washed up and changed his clothes, he told the servants he would be return for dinner. The afternoon was well-advanced, the streets plunged into December gloom. For warmth, and to kill time, he sat in a café for a while, drinking coffee and pretending to read a newspaper. He needed, more than anything, to be on the road, because only in Marseille was there anything worth doing, anything even worth knowing.

He took to the streets again, the movement at least better than sitting idle and waiting for morning. He found himself gravitating towards the mixed neighbourhoods, where one could find the working class sharing the streets – and the houses – with their betters. It only made sense that after a week of bearing this tragedy alone, he was looking for a friend. Courfeyrac would try to take him out of himself; Feuilly was the sensible head he needed. He would not have pushed through his own tragedy so well without

the common sense in lieu of plain sympathy.

Feuilly had once let slip where he worked, a slip that seemed to cause him more embarrassment than necessary because everyone knew he earned his own living. There were lamps lit in all the windows of the workshop, but Combeferre waited as the winter darkness increased. The street grew more crowded as other workshops shut up for the day, and eventually, the lights began to go out in the one where Feuilly worked. Soon enough, the men and women filed out. Combeferre pushed across the street to fall into step with Feuilly, who nearly jumped out of his skin when he realized who had come up next to him.

“Christ, I thought you were in England! You’ll scare a man half to death. What the hell are you doing here?” But his voice was bright and he casually punched Combeferre in the arm in a friendly gesture that made Combeferre want to weep with gratitude.

“There’s been bad news from home.”

“Shall I buy you a drink?” Feuilly asked with concern.

“Shouldn’t I buy you one?”

“Do you even have French money on you?” Feuilly took him by the elbow and pulled him into a dark and smoky café, where he had the woman at the counter bring up two glasses of brandy rather than wine. “You look like hell.”

“I feel like hell.” The burn of the cheap spirits in his throat and his stomach reminded him that he had not eaten that day. “I shouldn’t lay my sorrows on you again.”

“Didn’t we cover this before? I’m glad you came.”

“Very bad things have happened in Marseille in my absence.”

“Are you going to make me ask you how bad?”

“I don’t know how bad.” He passed M. Enjolras’ letter to Feuilly, who read it silently then passed it back.

“Very bad, indeed. Be on your guard – the cops are probably involved.”

“What? I know you are paranoid – with reason – but they are the police. How is public order served through murdering a woman? He says ‘accident’ – you can’t be right.”

“It doesn’t matter if I’m wrong. It only matters if I’m right. I know an euphemism as well as you do, and an accident doesn’t set a man of strength to suicide.”

“And a murder does?”

“An accident is neutral. It could happen to anyone, right? That’s what makes it an accident. Bad luck, lack of intent. A murder is personal. There’s emotion in a murder. At the very least, there’s desire. A need for that particular death in that particular moment, even if nothing else. It’s intensely personal.” Combeferre was uncomfortable whenever Feuilly went on these jags, and he was never sure if it was because of the subject matter or because Feuilly had the unfortunate air of the unintended expert. “I don’t know your friend, but I know you. I don’t see you attached to a man who would hold his own life so lightly.”

“Have you ever thought about it? Suicide, I mean.”

“No. There’ve been plenty of times I didn’t much care if I lived or died, but to put an end to it all myself?” He shrugged. “Paris will do it for me sooner or later. Or His Majesty. Which is not to suggest I consider myself a man of strength, but it’s not a fear of God that stays my hand or keeps me off a bridge. How long do you have to stay in town?”

Combeferre was grateful to hear someone acknowledge that he was here only by duress. “I was lucky enough to get the last place on the mail coach tomorrow morning.”

“Thank God for small favours.” He clinked Combeferre’s glass before taking another sip of his drink.

“If it is not an accident, what do I do?” Combeferre asked softly.

“I’m not an expert on revenge.” But he rapped on the table anyway, a gesture not entirely comforting.

“But if it is the police?”

“Keep out of public view.”

“It can’t be the police,” Combeferre suddenly insisted. “It can’t be. M. Enjolras is too important. My father is too important.”

“And your friend isn’t the one who’s dead.” Combeferre shuddered. “I’m sorry. I never know when you want truth or comfort, and I always err on the side of truth. I shouldn’t say anymore.”

“If I wanted plain sympathy, I would have sought out Courfeyrac.”

“That doesn’t make my truths any easier to hear. I am profoundly sorry for what has happened. Accident or not, a woman is dead who ought to be alive, and a man you love is grieving in unimaginable ways.”

“What does your god have to say to this?”

“My God? Well, I suppose you’re right. I’ve less use for the priests with every passing year. Not everything He does seems just. The things you find in your path, that you take personally, that seem designed to test you, are rarely all about you. You can seek His favour, you can beg for His understanding, but He has a whole world, of which you are only the smallest part. You can never know your place in everything, but He has marked out a place for you if are willing to accept it. I don’t know how to explain it; I just feel it. Ignorance isn’t bad when it comes to God. That’s why it’s faith. I know that when I put myself in His hands, things go better. Not perfect, not even right half the time, I still lose jobs and worry where a meal will come from, but I don’t feel that the struggle is pointless. In the end, everything will be as it must be, not just for me but for everyone. Not everything is just, but it has its place. In the end. That’s not a consolation. It just – is.”

“You’re no more a Christian than I am.”

“When did you last take communion? You see, I am a good Christian, while the priests are not. How can they be when they are beholden to the earthly monarchy here? My salvation comes from Christ – just because I do not wait for the Last Judgment does not mean I don’t think it will come. But I do not have to confuse God and Caesar. I can take both as I must without hypocrisy. But I know that look,” Feuilly added with a half smile. “We will set God aside. What shall we discuss?”

“Anything. How are you? You’ve not written at all.”

“And what is there to write that is worth sending through Courfeyrac? He keeps you up to date on meetings.”

“But what of you?”

“There has not been anything in my life of any interest to you in the years you have known me.”

“That is not true. There must be something. The riots last month? Have there been no girls? Any further attempts with oils?”

“Neither. Though I do hope, for selfish reasons, that you are able to wind up your business in Marseille in due time. You cannot miss the Salon entirely.”

“I had completely forgotten there was to be one this year. Have you been?”

“Three times so far. Twice with Prouvaire, but I can’t do it anymore. He may be a thorough-going Romantic, but he has no sense of technique. I long for your opinion.”

“What is the overall tone this year?”

“Greeks as far as the eye can see. And plenty of attempts to suck His Royal Highness’ cock.”

“Which rather explains the great volume of Greeks.”

“The Romantics and Ultras sort of in agreement. I can only take so much of Prouvaire going into ecstasies over corpses.”

“I thought you liked carefully draped corpses.”

“Corpses are like salt – a few to bring out the flavor, but too many and you’re looking at the morgue, not an art exhibition.”

Combeferre smiled and shook his head. “A sentiment with which Prouvaire is certain to disagree. Just go to the café des Variétés of a Sunday evening and join in whatever conversation interests you. There will be at least one to interest you at any time. I’ve no idea who might be there, but use my name if you think you must.”

They chatted for a while about the Salon – Feuilly’s grasp of the appropriate vocabulary had increased considerably since they first began to discuss art in the aftermath of the ’24 Salon – and it was the sort of conversation Combeferre could have without exerting much effort, perfectly designed to keep his mind off the needs of the immediate future without taxing his attention too much.

“I don’t suppose you would permit me to buy you dinner,” Feuilly asked after a long time.

Combeferre looked at his watch. “I promised my mother I would return for dinner. I’m going to be late as it is.”

“Let me walk you back.”

“Gladly.” Traffic was thick enough that hailing a cab would save little, if any, time. They spoke little in the street, but it was comforting to have Feuilly’s presence. There would be no understanding silence once he stepped inside the family home, so he held to it for as long as he could, even if it did come as they dodged carriages and other pedestrians.

“This is where you live?” Feuilly asked when they entered the square. “Which one?” Combeferre pointed it out to him. “Which floor?”

“The whole house.” He was rather amused to hear Feuilly give a low whistle of approval.

They clasped hands. “Be careful. And tell him – well – it won’t mean much, or anything, really, coming from a stranger, but I am sorry. I don’t know the half of it, but from what you’ve said, she was a hell of a dame, and I mean that in a way proper French can’t possibly express.”

“It means a great deal to me. Thank you. I’ll write when I can.”

“You won’t, but I appreciate the intent,” Feuilly said, with a hint of humour in his voice. He tipped his hat before he disappeared into the night.

The family dinner table was far less pleasing than an evening in Feuilly's company would have been. "It may be fashionable in England to be late, but you know we dine on time," his mother said. He spent the meal mostly fending off questions, choosing instead to quiz Charles about his studies when he could do nothing else to turn the attention away from his sudden appearance.

After dinner, he followed his father to the library. "What is all this about?" M. Combeferre finally asked.

Without his mother present, Julien felt more comfortable answering. "I don't entirely know." He showed his father the letter from M. Enjolras. "I had to come."

His father sighed. "Family is more important than anything."

"I made my excuses very politely. I should hope my departure will not reflect poorly on you."

"You need money, I suppose." Julien looked down. He did need money, though he hated the thought of asking for it. He had only paid through to Lyon, and Feuilly was right – he was not able to scrape together enough out of the money he had changed to pay for his own brandy, all but a stray couple of very small coins having gone to coachmen. "When do you leave?"

"At seven."

"How far can you get?"

"I've paid through to Lyon."

"Very good." M. Combeferre pulled together a decent sum in coin. "You should be able to get home on this. I'll write you a draft on the bank that you can cash in Marseille."

"Thank you, sir."

"I don't know why I'm encouraging this."

"Because this is not about politics anymore."

"Spend the evening with your mother. It will please her."

"Father –" Julien started to protest. But there would be no point. It was better to keep the peace than to make a fuss.

In the grand salon, his mother looked at him disdainfully. "You may not have changed for dinner, but could you at least pretend you did? I have guests coming."

It was far more tempting to retire to his bedroom and stay there, but Julien had the sensation that he had just been paid to keep his mother happy. When he returned, she kept her eyes on her needlepoint and said nothing to him. Charles slunk away into a corner and buried his nose in a book when Julien met his eye. At least he was permitted to stare into the fire until his mother's guests arrived.

"Guests" proved to be the Lauriers and two couples Julien had not met before. The Lauriers had brought their daughter, Isabelle, who was barely sixteen and looked as if she had been pulled out of the convent that afternoon. M. Combeferre entered the salon and whispered to Julien that the draft had been left on his bedside table. Julien thanked him, and the necessary social round began in earnest.

The men seemed determined to talk politics, and Julien had proved himself unwelcome to interject his own ideas ever since he stated that Fourier made some interesting points, though at least he had always had enough sense not to speak directly against the Charter. Obviously, his presence was required so he might ingratiate himself with Isabelle Laurier, or her presence required so she might ingratiate herself with him. Such a task was not to his taste in the best of circumstances, and tonight, when he wanted nothing more than to be on the road to his best friend and mourning the loss of a woman to whom a girl like Mlle Laurier could never compare, the effect was intolerable. Miss Laura Carter would have been more understanding than a convent girl. He found himself drinking several cups of tea in quick succession, then retreating to the library to select a random volume in which he might justifiably have a burning interest. De Vigny's poetry it would have to be.

Surprisingly, the girl released from the convent might be said to have escaped from the convent. It was not that she had read de Vigny, of course, but that she expressed an interest that seemed genuine. "Read a bit for the ladies," his mother ordered. "We are so tired of overhearing politics." So he did, until one of the women realized what the volume was and decided to be scandalized, though he had made his selections very carefully. But Mlle Laurier managed to whisper to him, "How I wish I could read it all!" and in pity, he said he would manage to leave it in her carriage. It gave him a reason to invent an excuse for retiring early, and he did wedge the volume into the seat cushions as he had promised. If de Vigny would buy him peace for the rest of the awful evening, he would gladly give up all the volumes of *Cinq-Mars* as well. He retreated to his bedroom and let his mother's salon evening continue without further interruption.

In the morning, a servant woke him before dawn with a pot of fresh coffee. While breakfasting, he wrote a letter to his father, thanking him again for not preventing him from going and promising to write when he reached Marseille. The carriage was waiting to take him to meet the mail, and promptly at seven, huddled on the seat wrapped in oil cloth against the steady drizzle, he was on his way.

Catching snatches of sleep when he finally grew tired enough to ignore the bounce of the box and the cold wind and the other passenger's complaints, Julien reached Lyon in two days. The weather turned absolutely frightful on his arrival, and the Rhône had ice, preventing the river coaches in any case. The diligence waited for the rain to stop, completely ignoring the scheduled three departures a day. The temperature hung near freezing and the mud could turn to ice at any moment. Another wasted day sitting in a warm inn while other travelers plied him to share in a bowl of hot punch. But he did eat heartily for the first time since setting out on the interminable trip – two days of freezing on top of the

mail coach was enough to force anyone to recognize his personal needs.

He was not able to secure an inside place in the first diligence of the morning, however, so the trip continued cold and miserable. The temperature had warmed just enough to keep the roads muddy rather than slick with ice but not enough to keep the cold mountain ice out of the river. What was in spring a three day trip down the Rhône to Avignon stretched to five days over at times execrable roads. The rain stopped before Avignon, however, and south of the city, the roads were nearly dry. The temperatures at night were close to what he had experienced during the day in Lyon, which was a great mercy. Even in cloudy weather, the South was warmer and more welcoming than anywhere else.

In Avignon, he hired a horse and set out on his own. The diligence would reach Marseille on the second day, but he knew he could do it in one on horseback. He did not count on a mild drizzle settling in again as he reached the northern outskirts of the city.

Someone saw him come up the drive and a servant waited to take the horse from him. Giving the poor animal one last pat in thanks for taking an unfamiliar rider so far, he bounded into the house, nearly knocking over the maid who waited at the door. "Where is he?"

"M. Henri is in his room. Your coat, monsieur!" she called after him. He dropped his hat and coat on the stairs, unwilling to wait any longer and ignoring the mud his boots must be leaving everywhere.

The door to Henri's room was not closed entirely. He knocked, but there was no reply. "Henri?" he called as he dared walk in. Henri was sitting in a chair, staring out the window. It took him a moment to turn to see who had called his name. He looked terribly pale and thin and haunted, but at the sight of Julien, he stood. Within moments, they were in each other's arms, Henri weeping, Julien tearing up himself. "I came as soon as I could. You look like bloody hell, brother."

Chapter 2

"M. Combeferre!" One of the maids had followed him in. "Your boots!"

"I'm sorry. I brought no other shoes."

"You'll borrow from M. Henri." She took away his mud-spattered boots and was replaced by another servant who started to clean up the mud he had tracked in.

"This was not exactly how I intended to make an entrance."

In better days, Henri would have shown some sign of humour, but as it was, he had already sat down again, looking exhausted. "However you enter, I'm glad you're here." But he went back to staring out the window.

Julien took Henri's pulse, which was slower than he would have liked. His skin was dry, as well. His wrists were no longer bandaged, the cuts healed, but the fresh scars were rather ugly. "You haven't

been eating.”

“I haven’t felt like it.”

The circular decline of grief, Julien reminded himself. If one does not eat, one grows fatigued and does not feel like doing anything, eating included. “Have you been drinking?”

“I haven’t felt like it.” He yawned, then apologized.

“How have you been sleeping?”

Henri shrugged. “It’s all I can do and not even that well anymore. You don’t have to play the doctor.”

“I have diagnosed and treated patients before. You must eat. Starvation is a very nasty way to die.”

“I’ve been eating. I’m not starved,” Henri protested.

“You think I’ve not seen a starving child?”

“It doesn’t matter. Go see my father.”

“He’s at home?”

“He doesn’t spend much time at the refinery or the salt works anymore. Go see him. I’d like to lay down for a while. But I am glad you’re here.”

Julien found a servant to take him to his bedroom, instead, and asked that he be announced to M. Enjolras and that he might wash up in the meantime. When he was ready, he was taken into the library, where the father was keeping an eye on the same landscape as the son one floor above.

“Thank you for coming.”

“I am glad you still feel I can be trusted.”

“I shouldn’t trust you,” M. Enjolras snapped. “This was all your doing. But since you did it, perhaps you can fix it, because I cannot.”

“May I ask what happened?”

“He slit his wrists is what happened, and he hasn’t said a word to me since.”

“What happened to Mlle Duchamp?” Julien explained as calmly as he could.

“She was going home at night after one of their ridiculous little meetings. Henri was at a party, and I’ve

never been more pleased that he listened to reason for once. I don't want to think what might have happened had Henri been with her. She was beaten very badly. And, according to the police, attacked in other ways. She was found before dawn, carried home, and one of her brothers dispatched to find Henri. The results I knew at the time were that he did not return home from that party until daylight was well advanced. I had some words for him; he informed me that he had been at her deathbed. Then he went up to his room and tried to follow her." His voice broke.

Julien felt hollow and rather hoped Henri had not been told about the other ways in which she had been attacked. "What happened to the others?"

"The others?"

"Marc Gérard, Thierry Lameire, Didier Valland. Henri's friends."

"I've heard nothing."

"Then perhaps it was not a political attack." But the thought rang hollow even in his own ears. Julien had never trusted Valland in particular – there was something unsettling about a man he knew only through Henri's letters. "How well known is what happened?"

"It was in the *Daily*." Julien winced. "I know. But it would have been worse to keep it out."

"Unfortunately, you are right. Has anyone written him or tried to see him?"

"No one."

"Did he attend the funeral?"

"He was in bed. I didn't dare call a doctor. Can you imagine the scandal if it got out?"

"I'm here now. Whoever treated the wounds did a good job, though the scarring might have been less had someone sewn them up. May I ask a few questions about his health?"

"How can you stand there so calm?"

"I am clinging to the details so as not to lose myself. May I ask about his health?"

"I suppose someone must."

"What has he been eating?"

"Very little. The staff will know precisely what comes back to the kitchen."

"Has he been drinking?"

“I wish he would. That would be something I could understand. I sent up a bottle of brandy; the servants co-opted it when it was refused.”

“Has he left the house at all?”

“No. That may be my own fault. I haven’t the heart to ask him to do anything. When my wife died . . .” He broke off to try to get a hold of himself. “If it were not for Henri, for the daily needs of my son, I do not know that I would have been much better. But I never thought of suicide.”

“He wasn’t thinking very strongly of suicide, either. No matter how long it took to find him, he was not going to bleed out from those wounds. Have you told him any of this?”

“Through the door when necessary. He won’t listen.”

“May I do what I must for him?”

“It is why I asked you to come. You might at least get a few words out of him, cheer him up.”

“That, I believe, is beyond the capacity of medicine. I cannot cure grief.”

“I didn’t ask you here to be a doctor.”

“I may have left the medical school, but I did not leave behind an entire way of viewing the world. I cannot cure his sadness and I have no wish to try. You know yourself that it will end, or moderate, in its own time. But there are other symptoms on which I may have some effect. I should tell you now that a change of scene may be advised.”

“You can’t take my son.”

“I hope I might restore him to you.”

“What am I saying? You’ve taken him already. Why, after everything, do I still trust you?”

“Because I would give my life to protect Henri. My greatest fear is that he feels the same for me.”

“How I hope you are not right. Do what you can.”

“Thank you, monsieur. And thank you for your hospitality.”

“Oh. Yes. You’ll stay as long as you need. The staff will look after you as if you were family, not a guest. Take what you like.”

Julien thanked him again. He did take the opportunity to ask a servant to draw a full bath for him. It

had been a long, cold, dirty, dreary trip with no joy at the end. As the water cooled around him, Julien broke down into hard, wracking sobs. He had to admit to himself that with the month that had passed, it was to be hoped that M. Enjolras' letter was premature, or had arrived too late, that of course something would have resolved during his panicked flight across France. But he was the only one who came. There were men here in Marseille who had known Emilie, who were considered Henri's friends, and not one had sent his sympathies or been reported dead in the daily newspaper. Feuilly would denounce them as police spies, Julien felt certain, but he rather thought them merely cowards. That when there came a time for action, the thought of a casualty of war sent them scattering. They played at what he and Henri and Emilie had taken so seriously. What she had died in service of, regardless of the exact motive for her death. And in the end, who could be blamed other than himself? He had started them all on this path. It had been no accident, which made it his crime.

He was asked to join M. Enjolras for dinner. Henri did not come down, and his absence was a constant weight on the solitary diners. M. Enjolras was patently lonely and desperate for any conversation whatsoever, while Julien was not entirely able to keep up his end. They rather quickly descended into a question and answer session about England, designed more to produce sound than to produce sense. Julien was almost grateful to be called to the kitchen to examine what Henri had left behind when offered dinner. It was a dismal plate, cold yet still quite filled, as if he had pushed his food around but eaten nothing.

"This is the most he's eaten since it happened, monsieur. I thought we might try two slices of beef tonight, and one's gone, at least."

"Has he been surviving on bread?"

"Some vegetables. I don't give him whole pieces of poultry anymore – he manages to pull it all apart so it looks as if he's eaten more than he has."

"What about wine?"

"I thought he was at least taking that, until I caught Jacques finishing off the dregs. I don't bother sending it up anymore. He drinks water."

"What about in the morning? Coffee?"

The cook shook her head. "Not even a little weak tea."

"I'd like you to put together a custard. If he will not eat much, it should at least be more nourishing than bread."

"I've tried that, monsieur. He wouldn't even touch it."

"Then I shall also assume that you have spent these weeks trying to tempt his palate, his favourite foods, sweets, anything?"

“He eats more if it’s plain, but not at all if it looks prepared for an invalid.”

“This is very helpful to me. Thank you.”

“Is there any good news?” M. Enjolras asked when Julien returned to the table.

“Perhaps. It is too soon to tell. I would like to see a clear pattern emerge before I make any determinations. One observation tells us only what has happened in the moment – it has no predictive power.”

“I see.”

“I think it for the best if you resume normal activities, or at least the appearance of normal activities. Look after your business. At least leave the house. He may open up more if he has a sense of privacy outside his bedroom.”

“Perhaps you are right.”

“I have some business in town I should like to take care of as soon as possible.”

“Go whenever you like.”

“Thank you, monsieur.”

Julien retired early but could not sleep. He walked into town rather than accept the use of the carriage in the hopes that the exercise would help him to think. After leaving his papers at the hôtel de ville and cashing his father’s draft, he bought a couple of pocket pistols on Feuilly’s advice. He was not going to stay out of the public view, but he could at least be cautious. He also stopped in a bookshop and purchased a copy of the final volume of Thiers’ *History of the Revolution*. But he could not bring himself to see the Duchamps, and there was something strange about Marseille in winter, so grey and the wind so different to the summer breezes he knew so well.

Henri was awake when he returned, sitting in the window as it appeared was his constant occupation. “Come join me in the library,” Julien offered.

“I don’t know.”

He waved his acquisition. “I’ve got Thiers.”

“Then you can give it here. I’ll not take a bribe. Certainly not one so clumsily offered.”

“Your father has promised to spend all day in town.”

“Do what you will. I’m fine.”

But he did come down to the library before Julien had finished reading the second chapter. Julien rang for coffee. “I got Thiers back in September,” Henri admitted.

“And you didn’t send me a copy?” Julien asked in mock offense, his tone a little forced.

“And give up my one chance to get ahead of you?” The usual excitement was missing in his voice, but at least the words were familiar.

“So what did you think?”

Not even the entry of a servant with a tray of coffee and rolls put a stop to the flood of what, under other circumstances, would have been a long letter sent to London. Even when Henri’s voice began to grow hoarse, Julien managed to push more coffee, well-tempered with milk, on him, though he still did not eat. But he trailed off, coughing, after a while, and Julien did not push further. Even if Henri returned to bed, a breach had been made, and Julien was pleased if it was all he could manage for the day.

But Henri did not return to bed. He did return to the window to stare at the garden, but it was the library window, and he made no complaint about Julien’s presence. Julien addressed several comments to him as he continued to read Thiers, and Henri even responded to a few in the course of the afternoon. He retreated only when they heard the carriage in the drive, signaling that M. Enjolras had returned home.

An entire week passed in similar fashion. Julien did not tell M. Enjolras that Henri was making the necessary efforts, and M. Enjolras did not press for information. Julien did finally get Henri to show a flash of personality by annoying him with a volume of poetry read aloud. He had never taken to verse in any tongue and finally forcibly removed the volume from Julien’s hands. “Shakespeare, not Byron. That’s the deal.”

“You’re a heathen. It’s Wordsworth.”

“I didn’t know I owned Wordsworth.”

“I accidentally left it here a few years ago. Your father borrowed it of me before he decided he hated me.”

“He doesn’t hate you.”

“He has good reason.”

“You’re not the one who has disappointed him.”

Was that a key to anything? Julien wondered. “He adores you too much do anything other than blame

me. And he is right – it is my fault.”

“Nothing is your fault.”

“I set us on this path.”

“I won’t hear you blame yourself for my failings.”

“Then I won’t hear you blame yourself for what no one could have foreseen. I love you too much for that.”

Chapter 3

They did manage to settle into a pattern. After M. Enjolras left, Henri would join Julien in the library in his own time. For three or four hours, they might talk of utterly impersonal things – history or the sights in London, but never friends or family or even the news though every day, Julien read the conservative local newspaper to which M. Enjolras had a subscription – or they might play chess. Or Henri might take to staring out the window again while Julien played patience with an old tarot deck.

They did not go out. Julien itched to get out of the house, but he dared not leave Henri. Only on Sunday, when M. Enjolras returned from mass, would Julien take a horse out and try to calm all his fears in mad dashes over the winter roads.

The real trouble became evident the day they were fully engrossed in a chess match and M. Enjolras had figured out their trick of hiding from him. He must have left the coach at the bottom of the drive, for there was no sound of hooves and wheels on gravel. When the door to the library opened, Julien expected it was one of the servants come to clear away the dirty cups. Julien had never drunk so much coffee in so short a span, but it was the only additional nourishment he had managed to get Henri to take, so he kept up the example. M. Enjolras did not say anything, but his lack of movement made his presence evident. Henri looked up at the interruption, gave his father a withering look, and stalked out without a word.

“What did you do?” Julien was not nearly so capable as Henri of a devastating glare, but he did not lack authority.

“I don’t enjoy that tone. I’m his father. He’s not one of your orphaned patients.”

“If you want me to ‘fix what is wrong’, as you put it, I need to know what is wrong. Why cannot he stand to be in the same room as you? No wonder he did not leave his bedroom for a month – if he will not go outside, where else could he be safe from your interference?”

“Are you suggesting his illness is my fault?”

“No,” Julien said evenly. “It is mine. Neither of us is foolish enough to believe otherwise. But

something you have done has made it worse, or at least set him against you, and I cannot very well restore him to you if he has no wish for a reconciliation. I must know what your role has been.”

“Did you know he never took her to bed?” M. Enjolras asked, looking out the window into the twilight garden rather than at Julien. “Who would have thought it?”

“His honour would not permit him to use her in that way.”

“He came in well after sunrise. Returning at dawn, I would have counted the evening a success. Returning whilst I was breakfasting, I was certain he had ended his evening with that girl. I must have said something along the lines of ‘Keep her as your mistress if you must, but this has really got to stop’. It had got back to me that they were talking marriage with utter seriousness. Marriage! All he answered was, ‘You need worry no longer. She is dead.’ Then he went upstairs, and before I could begin to make sense of anything, one of the girls screamed fit to wake the dead. He had walked calmly upstairs and sliced himself open. Blood everywhere.

“I tried to apologise, of course. He won’t see me. I tried to explain that I know all too well what it is to lose a wife. I even used those words! He wouldn’t answer.”

“Don’t force it. You know what you’ve done.”

“Christmas is going to be miserable.”

“Look at it this way: they barely keep the holiday in England. At least here I get cake.”

“How did you manage to live among such people?”

“The country has its own charms,” Julien answered dryly. “Please, for Henri’s sake, I ask that you leave him as wide a berth as possible. I think that if I can get him outside, without fear of meeting you, the exercise will do something to bring back his appetite.”

M. Enjolras sighed. “Very well.”

“It may be a very long process. He may also improve naturally, in the spring, either from time or from the change of weather. You must have noted yourself that it is easier to dwell on setbacks under cloudy skies and easier to look forward when the days have been sunny. I do not think Goethe could incite a fashion for suicide among the Italians.”

“How I hope you are right. I will do my best.”

“That is all I can ask.”

The week of Christmas, M. Enjolras was able to bring himself to stay out all evening one night and was careful to announce this intention in advance. With a great deal of coaxing, and some pointed

complaints about dining alone, Julien managed to get Henri to join him in the dining room. Little food was consumed and only the barest sips of wine, but it was progress of a sort.

“I thought I might go to Les Goudes at Christmas.”

“I thought you gave up your mother’s condescending notions of charity.”

“It may be outdated noblesse, but since someone from the family is here, someone from the family ought to go and do something. Nothing as condescending as blankets and shoes, but some poultry, perhaps, and some sweets for the children. So that the larger needs might be discovered and resolved in time.”

“Père Bornat is dead.”

Julien was shocked. It was the sort of news that Henri would have written him immediately. “When?”

“Not long before – before – ” He shut down. Julien reached across the table to squeeze his hand sympathetically, but Henri permitted only the briefest touch.

“Then I must go. Were my family here when it happened?”

“They had left.”

“They must think we have abandoned them. I must go tomorrow. Please come with me.”

“I can’t.” Julien tried to get more out of him, but he simply kept repeating “I can’t” until he was fed up with the line of conversation and walked out.

Les Goudes was a profoundly depressing place in the winter, with the little low houses shut up tight against the spray blowing in from the rough grey sea. Père Bornat’s house had been taken over by his granddaughter Antoinette and her second husband, a man whom Julien did not know well at all. Ten years earlier, he had brought Henri here and spoken against paltry charity, but what else was to be done in the moment? He listened as best he could to their needs and complaints, finally enlisting the assistance of another of the fishermen to translate when necessary.

Before he left, he asked one of Tonette's children to take him to Père Bornat’s grave. Julien knelt before the poor marker and crossed himself, out of habit, for display, out of guilt – he didn’t know entirely why his hand unconsciously made the sign he had avoided for years. He felt it sacrilegious in the unbeliever to make such gestures, but he had no other way to signal his respect for the old man and the sadness he felt at hearing of his passing.

“How are they?” Henri asked. He had been waiting in Julien’s bedroom for him to return. It seemed to Julien that he had finally been broken of the habit of hiding in his room, but he still wanted nothing to do with his father. Julien thought he remembered that M. Enjolras had lands somewhere toward Lyon

and wondered if perhaps he might be persuaded to take a couple of weeks to look into those affairs personally.

“As well as can be expected. I need to go back tomorrow after I pick up some medical supplies in town. There are some cases that could use proper treatment.”

“How can you do it after what happened?”

Julien looked away. “It’s changing bandages, not performing surgery.” He had never quite managed to put his own breakdown into words, and he still felt guilty that it had been Feuilly, with some assistance from Courfeyrac, rather than Henri who had helped him pull himself back together. He simply had not had the energy to climb into the diligence, even when Courfeyrac was willing to pay so that no one would have to tell his father.

They sat in silence for a while, though somehow lacking the awkwardness of all the silence in the past two weeks. “It wasn’t the surgery,” Julien finally admitted. “It was the autopsy. The assigning of blame. Only they didn’t assign blame; they determined I was not in the least the cause of his death. But a child was dead, and I had done it. I failed to save him. And what of the others who might come under my knife? What if I failed them, too? How many victims, how many lives stolen, not by incompetence but by our failings as a profession? How many lives ended in greater pain than if we had done nothing? And we pretend that we can save men’s lives, cure disease, prevent suffering. How could I walk back in there when I extended suffering rather than life, took rather than gave? My guilt is all the greater because it is not acknowledged.” It had not been the first patient he had lost, nor had it been the first autopsy conducted on a case with which he had been intimately involved. But something in this autopsy, in the expression on the dead boy's face, the expression he had put there, had meant more than every success, than every other failure. The life that was so obviously gone, with the body not at peace but in an unnatural suspense. Julien feared that something within him had died with the boy.

Henri moved as if he were going to touch Julien’s shoulder but hesitated, seeming to think better of it. Instead, very softly, he finally began to speak of what had been gnawing at the entire household. “I said I would try to leave before one, that I would come to see her before I went home. I couldn’t get out until after three, I don’t know where the time went, and I had to take the carriage home because it was so very late. She would never have waited up so long; I never wanted her to. It was raining by then. Raining. She had been lying in the rain. They sent Bernard to find me, some back way, I don’t know how he was waiting at the gate when we ought to have passed him on the road, he said he hadn’t been waiting long. We went back, it was hard as anything to get back into the city at that time of night if you weren’t a wagon full of cabbage. She gave her last breath the moment I reached the house, they said. She was gone before I could be at her bedside.” Tears were streaming down his face, but he pushed on. “The priest was there, giving her last rites, and the police came and took her away and had so many questions that I can’t remember, and our driver just left at some point, and how could I possibly look at her parents because look at what I had done. If I had only been there – if I couldn’t protect her, I could have at least shared her fate. But I don’t want to follow her.”

Julien held Henri as he began sobbing and mingled their tears. His greatest concern had been trying to

keep Henri together, to prevent any second attempt that might succeed on the lessons of how the first attempt had failed. There was relief in not having to worry about a suicide, in no longer struggling with the idea that he had never really known his best friend at all. All the sympathy in the world from his father would never erase the embarrassment at having been caught in a suicide attempt that wasn't even desired. The awful details of Emilie's death could be processed later by the scientific part of his mind; tonight, he was more concerned with the living than the dead.

"What sort of husband would I have been if I don't want to follow her? That isn't love."

"Isn't it?" Julien tried to keep the tears out of his own voice. "I would give my life for you. But if I failed, does it mean you were any less my brother if I do not seek to share your grave immediately? How could I grieve for you if I were dead? How could I honour you if I were dead? How could I make the world worthy of your memory if I were not in it? You never let me teach you the poetry of the soul. Byron may be fascinating, Walter Scott's mimics are destroying letters across Europe, and they may be emblematic of the age, but they should not be the sole arbiters of our emotions."

"My own father said he might have done violence to himself if not for me. How can I possibly look at him when he and I both know I ought to be dead? When all of Marseille knows I ought to be dead. Since they came for her, they must want me as well. How could they not?" Since when was Henri as paranoid about the police as Feuilly? Julien wondered. Had someone said something? Was one of his friends actually a spy? Valland, in particular? "I don't even know what might have happened to the others. I don't want to follow her, but it's the only thing left to do."

"No one else is dead," Julien told him as calmly as he could. "Your father has been monitoring the papers. Her attack was reported, but no one else is dead. Is this why you did not attend her funeral?" he dared ask.

"I was in bed," Henri admitted, the tears slowing but the shame evident. "What have I permitted our enemies to do to us?"

"You have permitted nothing. Even Bonaparte would walk away to marshal his strength."

"That is not a comparison I would prefer."

"Wellington, then?"

"One day, you will turn into an Englishman."

Julien was so relieved he wanted to break down into tears again. The tone was all wrong, but the sentiment was what he had longed to hear.

Henri moved to embrace him, but he suddenly pulled back. "What's this?" He had felt the hard, heavy metal of the pistol in Julien's pocket.

“The paranoia is contagious.” He put his pistols on the table and explained Feuilly’s fears. “He has good reason to think along those lines, and I didn’t want to listen, but when your father told me what happened, I started to think that Feuilly might have had a point. That it doesn’t matter if he is wrong, but beware not considering he may be right.”

“I don’t know if your friend has sense or I’ve lost mine, but I’m glad to see you taking precautions. I don’t want to think how I could do without you, brother.”

Chapter 4

The salon was orange in the light of the *chalendal*, the yule log, blazing brightly after its consecration of oil and wine. Julien had, as a friend of the family, knelt beside M. Enjolras as he crossed himself and lit the huge olive log, murmuring the traditional prayer for blessings in the coming year. His father had often added something in Latin and in Provençal, a joking acknowledgement of the pagan origins of the rite, but M. Enjolras did only as his neighbours did and as the servants would expect. One could not keep decent servants if the house were not properly protected by the remnant of the *chalendal*, after all. In other households, in other years, the lighting of the great fire would be the beginning of the festive season, the illumination that presaged the mass celebrating the illumination of the world by the saviour’s birth, but here, only M. Enjolras and Julien were the true participants, with the servants lingers in the shadows to see that it was done properly. Henri remained on his room.

Julien stood, brushing the dust from his knees, hoping it had gone unnoticed at least by his host that he had not joined in the prayer. “If you wish to go to mass, please go. At the very least, it is another opportunity to pray. And things will seem much less bleak to an outside observer if you appear. My presence in town is reason enough for Henri to stay with me rather than join you.”

“But is there a benefit besides perception?”

“I don’t know. But we must be aware of how we look. It must be known by now that I rode in from Avignon, which may not look very good now that I consider it. I perhaps should have waited the extra day to come by diligence instead of sneaking in.”

“I am glad you did not wait the extra day.”

“Thank you, monsieur. But now that I am certain his life is not in danger, we must attend to appearances. And appearances require that you not be seen to be in a continued panic. This has gone on too long for you not to return to your normal activities. If mass is a normal activity, then you must go. And I will do my best to get Henri into the salon when you return so that we might have *réveillon* together. I make no promises,” Julien warned. “It is merely a hope that the duties of the day might be deployed in your favour.”

M. Enjolras went to mass, or at least left the house with the stated intention of going to mass. “Come walk in the garden with me,” Julien ordered Henri after the carriage had gone.

“It is the middle of the night.”

“Exactly. No one could possibly see us.”

“I have never been so low as to believe in sharpshooters posted at the borders of the property.”

“Then you have no excuse to sit indoors. The clouds have fragmented enough that the moon is terribly bright. Please? It’s Christmas.”

“Give me my coat since I know you have it in your hand,” Henri relented.

The moon was at the first quarter, a bright half circle against which thin clouds rushed through the night, occasionally opening tattered bits of star-filled sky. They walked in silence, without a lantern, the only sound their boots against the gravel walks until Julien turned aside into the grass, where they disappeared into the night. It was perhaps a bit too warm, even at midnight, for Julien’s heavy coat, proof against Parisian rain and snow, but Henri wore his buttoned to the neck. Sitting in the grass, looking up at the heavens, it was almost possible to lose oneself in the infinity. It would have been easier were there fewer clouds, Julien thought.

“We were supposed to meet at mass at la Major,” Henri finally said, breaking the silence of the night. Somehow even the owls had been quiet, either scared away by the presence of the young men or deferential to the holy night. Julien waited for more, but no more came. The silence descended again, but Henri had slid a bit closer – or perhaps Julien had done unconsciously, he was unsure – so that they were shoulder to shoulder, the touch of bodies evident through the layers of fabric. Julien could not speak, even if he had wanted to – it was not his silence to break. He dared not look at Henri, but he could feel his touch, could hear his breathing, and with the scientific mind noted that the breathing was calm, the voice steady, the body not rigid in holding in emotion though not entirely relaxed, either. The breathing was too shallow for perfect health, but it was not terribly disordered.

He heard the wind in the trees before it hit their faces, damp and chill but not the frigid wetness he had endured on the journey south. He wondered idly if he would witness the famed mistral – it was an unpardonable sin that he be a southerner and yet not know the winter weather of the region. Henri shivered a bit with the wind but made no movement to rise and leave. Julien finally dared glance over – he could not tell Henri’s expression, just the glint of the blue moonlight on his pale hair and cheek. That in itself was not unusual – Henri had never quite worn his heart on his sleeve the way Courfeyrac seemed to, enthusiasm being very different to emotion – but it was not entirely encouraging.

He was surprised when Henri took his hand and pushed under his cuffs to finger the scar Julien had made himself. At one time, they had matched well enough, a slash in the left arm the remnants of childhood ritual, but Henri had mangled his badly in his suicide attempt. “How much have I ruined?”

“Far less than I have done,” Julien answered.

“You created everything,” Henri protested.

“Then without me, there would have been nothing to destroy.”

“I should have ignored my father and come to Paris. You needed me this spring.”

“Can you imagine the row that would have resulted?”

“You came from England for me.”

“I would have gone to Moscow for you, or Peking, even if I was certain I would find only your grave when I arrived at last. I have no ties as strong as our brotherhood anywhere. But I had no grief or disappointment when you did not turn up on my doorstep. You have your family here.”

“Had,” he corrected. “Your friends in Paris – do you trust them?”

“With my life, else they would not be my friends. One false word and we are all done for.”

“You know them quite well, then.”

“I know what I must of them. A man’s character is not always found in the details of his life. But I trust none as I trust you.”

“One forgives the coward since he was born without a heroic nature. How can he be blamed for nature’s deficiency? But what does one do to the traitor who is traitor because he is a coward?”

“I knew it was Valland,” Julien spit out. Henri pulled away. “I’m sorry.”

“I do not know whom it might have been, if any of them could be so weak, but if they are not dead, and they have not written, they are cowards. And the coward may turn traitor as a result of his fear. They do not know you well.”

“Am I thus to play the spy? Could you really ask that of me?”

“No, forgive me,” Henri corrected. “The cowards will give themselves up without subterfuge. But they should know I forgive them. They cannot help their natures. I am only sorry that they were mistaken in their courage.”

“I will look into everything I can after the holidays.” Henri shivered again. “Perhaps we should go back to the house.”

“Not yet. The air is so clean.”

When they finally did return to the house, M. Enjolras had been home for some time. Julien rather expected him to say something, anything, that would end up annoying Henri, but he refrained, with

visible effort, from saying anything at all and retreated to the fireside in silence.

“I wish you a joyous Christmas, monsieur,” Julien addressed him politely.

“And I, you. Would you join me in a small *réveillon*?”

“You are both behaving as amateur actors who are pleased to remember their script,” Henri burst out. “If you cannot pretend nothing is wrong, then do not make the attempt.” But he did drop into a chair and accept a dish of custard his father timidly offered.

Julien answered M. Enjolras’ querying look with a shrug but filled a plate and settled in next to the fire. It was perhaps the quietest *réveillon* of any of their lives: awkward, unpleasant, with little drinking and little cheer. The Enjolras family, consisting only of Henri and his father, must have had little of the boisterous tradition Julien had been forced through so often as a child – the table laden with cold dishes and salads and he and his cousin Jérôme forbidden to touch the sweets until they had eaten something properly, a harder task for Jérôme as Julien always got the unpleasantness out of the way as quickly as possible, regardless of the situation. But here, the table was set in the petit salon rather than the formal dining room, and it bore only three or four plates of vegetables and cold fish, a bowl of custard, and small portions of the requisite holy desserts. The only abundance was in a great pile of oranges, perhaps for decoration as much as for consumption, but then, there was abundance enough for three in grief when Julien was accustomed to a spread for eight in celebration. Henri mostly stayed to the periphery, at times pacing in the shadows, but if Julien set aside a sausage roasted over the fire, the traditional northern concession to hot food on such a day, it would soon disappear. He at least seemed to cut a large swath through the mendicant orders and much of the sweetly fragrant *pompe à l’huile* and white nougat. Julien forced conversation with M. Enjolras, in large part to keep him from addressing Henri. They were in a room together, possibly only for the sake of Christmas, but it was a start. He did not think Henri ready for whatever flood of apologies his father might want to make.

Henri did finally speak again when M. Enjolras offered a bottle of champagne. “This is not a celebration.”

Julien poured out three glasses, however, and raised his to the memory of Emilie Duchamp. “The world had great need of her, but it was not worthy of her. There was a brief moment when she would have been hailed; perhaps her true day is still to come. But I drink to her, and to those who ought to lift their voices so that her words and dreams were not alone or in vain.” He drank, then tossed the rest of the glass into the fire. It seemed a more natural dedication for the yule log than any traditional call upon God and Christ, if the purpose were the pagan superstition of protection and success for the family. This was the success they needed if prayers were necessary for the new year. Henri and his father both stared at him for a moment, the break with tradition so obvious Julien began to doubt his gesture, but Henri followed his lead and thanked him with a touch. M. Enjolras took an awkward sip, since both young men were now watching to see what he might do, but he was not one to waste good wine on fligid sacrilege.

Henri seemed satisfied enough to at least nod to him and wish him a somewhat sarcastic “Merry

Christmas” before walking out. Julien followed him halfway up the stairs, but Henri merely went straight into his bedroom and shut the door.

“What happened tonight?” M. Enjolras asked when Julien returned to the salon.

“I have no idea,” Julien answered, completely shocked by the evening’s events. He had not expected Henri to stay as long as he had, and as he examined the plates, it seemed Henri had eaten far more than usual as well, even if much of it were cake and nuts. Something beyond the necessary traditions of the day had improved, if not his spirits, than at least his physiological processes, yet he had been more directly cutting to his father than Julien had yet heard. It might have been better to spend the night out on the lawns, in the dim blue light of nature, than to have come in and endured the harsh orange of human superstition.

“More champagne?”

“Since the bottle is already open.” There was something very strange about sitting by the fire with M. Enjolras at a time of night that was usually reserved for family or sleep or the occasional mistress.

They did not really speak, just watched the fire and drank champagne and picked at the rest of the *pompe* without the least sign of holiday cheer. When Julien finally made his excuses and left for bed, sneaking a final piece of black nougat on the way out, M. Enjolras merely bid him goodnight. It was certainly not much of a Christmas.

Chapter 5

For the New Year, Julien privately gave Henri his own set of pistols. “Will you consider coming riding with me?”

He did consider it, or at least waited some time before answering, “Not today.”

Julien went riding anyway. He had sent the borrowed horse back to Avignon days after his arrival and had brought a much finer animal from his own stables. Othello had a temperament to match his own, and Julien took pleasure in currying him down himself after a swift run through the countryside rather than merely throwing the reins to one of the stablehands.

He was surprised to see Henri come looking for him there, however, particularly as he had come bearing sugar for the horse. “It is no better for him than it is for you,” Julien told him.

“Yes, Doctor, but it does supply the hay.”

“Is something wrong?”

“No more than usual. I wanted some air, and I saw you returning. I’ve not seen Othello in far too long – should I be remiss with our guest?” Julien hoped there had not been an argument in his absence. There

was something rather strange in Henri paying more attention to the horse than to anyone else. “I fear I did not thank you properly for the gift,” Henri finally said in a low voice. “I do thank you. If my father knew . . .”

“He would fear you would turn them on yourself.”

“Exactly. And I haven’t that intent at all. What on earth did you say to the gunsmith? He must be curious as to your purchase of two sets of pistols within a month.”

“There is more than one gunsmith in Marseille. Each thinks I am in the unenviable position have been ill prepared for the duel to which I have been challenged. If your worry is the police, unless they have tracked my every step, they will not think me stockpiling weapons.”

“No, they will fear you murdering a man.”

“Let us hope they shall not be used.”

“Ever?”

“Never in Marseille, perhaps. Though ‘never’ would be a delightful prospect.”

“Can you really still believe that?”

“It would be a delightful prospect,” Julien insisted. “It is a complete fantasy, for every step forward will exact a price, but it would be a beautiful thing if it were real. It is a beautiful fantasy as it is.”

“I fear my imagination has left me.” He still seemed to be addressing Othello, stroking the horse's dark muzzle, rather than Julien.

“Can you no longer see our future?”

“I see a dark and bloody road, and I fear we will not live to see the dawn.”

“But the dawn will come.”

“In the next century? In two? Not in the next score of years.”

“The king will not survive a score of years.”

“Why did we not strike when Louis lay on his deathbed?” he asked, his voice rising with bitterness.

“Why did Paris not rise up against the coronation of this would-be tyrant? You were there – why did no one act?”

“It was expected that we would. The police were out in force, the army was on the march – to act

would only have been to provoke repression.”

“And the repression would have galvanized the rest of the populace.”

“The repression would have reminded everyone that Paris is ruled by mobs. Could we give Charles such a victory over his foes and thus solidify his rule within days?”

“You may try to justify your actions, but it does not change that Paris is full of cowards.”

“Yes, we are cowards. Forgive us. Because you do not know Paris. Here, you are an object of fun, the police watch and laugh and so does the populace. You are well-known as the son of a rich man, and no one will actually touch you. In Paris, there are hundreds of us, thousands of sympathizers. There are also hundreds of police spies, well paid, and thousands of people willing to take a bribe from them to denounce someone. I am anonymous in that my family is not particularly special or well-known, and anonymity is no protection when the fingers of the government are anonymous, too, silent and everywhere. Only in Paris can any change take hold, thus only in Paris do the political police exert real power over our lives rather than just keeping liberals out of government appointments. Men have been arrested for a card game. And do not blame me personally, if you feel the urge. I had little political acquaintance in Paris when Louis died and certainly none that I would have trusted. One gentleman who enjoys English poetry and street brawls does not a political circle make.”

Henri hung his head. “Forgive me, brother. I do not know what I want, but my intention was not to blame you.”

“I know,” Julien replied gently. “I wish we lived in light, that none of what has happened had to happen, but the dawn will come,” he insisted fervently. “I am certain of it. Perhaps not for us, but for those who come after. Even now I know it to be true.”

“When you say it, I can almost see it. But the image doesn’t quite come anymore.”

“It will.”

Julien was fairly certain that much of Henri's illness was caused by his father. Not directly, for M. Enjolras would never have knowingly hurt his only son, but by his actions nonetheless. Or perhaps less in his actions than in his expectations. Julien had come to realise that he, unlike many of his peers, was very lucky. While his father made no secret of his expectation that Julien succeed him in managing the family firm, he saw it as a far-off event that would happen only when circumstances required. In the meantime, he could afford to be indulgent. Very few, if any, young men would have been permitted to pick up then set aside a medical career so easily and without recrimination.

M. Enjolras was not so liberal as M. Combeferre, and Henri had always tried to please his father even as he tried to go his own way. He had not pressed hard to go to Paris and had turned down a grudging offer to attend the law faculty at Aix instead. Rather than outright rebel, he had spent the past four years half-heartedly working for his father while whole-heartedly working to revoke the privileged

status of men like his father. He had applied himself to the work before him, both that of learning how his father's business interests ran and that of spreading his political sympathies beyond the capital. The revolution could only be made in Paris, but to bring peace and development rather than strife, it would have to take hold in the provinces. There was no shame in preparing the ground.

Julien knew full well how much his life was envied, and he was sorry he had won Henri no greater freedom. But Henri had not pushed, either. Had he pushed, his wishes might have been granted, but that would leave his father completely alone. There was no harm in M. Enjolras, and it was hard to wish him such a life even as Henri was chafing under the expectations he had laid out for himself as a good and obedient son. It was these expectations that Julien feared, the belief Henri had in his father's expectations for him and his desire to keep his father from further heartbreak.

Before seeing the second gunsmith, Julien had stopped at the Enjolras family's tailor and ordered a black coat for himself and a full suit of mourning for Henri. He had initially been surprised that Henri was not dressed in mourning, though his soul certainly mourned Emilie as if she were wife rather than intended, but he quickly realised that it was not the sort of thing M. Enjolras would offer or that Henri would request. It was an accident of the law, not lack of intent, that had postponed the marriage, and that marriage was the one thing for which Henri had been prepared to insist. What did a few youthful years in Paris matter when a lifetime was at stake? He could have Paris once he had his wife. Indeed, the allure of Paris was stronger once Emilie had been brought into the family, for only in Paris would the strength of her mind be of any use to their great cause. They had talked it out in letters, begun to hint at hopes and vague plans, and after what had happened, Julien was certain Henri needed his six months of mourning, properly conducted, whether it be socially prescribed or no. Mourning was for the living and not the dead, after all, the dead having no need of it. It was not merely the end of one life that was commemorated but the loss of all that life had touched. Henri had lost not only a wife but an entire future at one stroke. As for himself, Julien dared not go to the Duchamps in a coat of green or blue, which were all he had unthinkingly brought to Marseille. It would be wrong to approach a mourning family in such a manner, and he had no wish to appear to hold their daughter's memory so lightly, even if he had not been thinking of their needs when he had packed his bag.

The garments were delivered after the new year, luckily at a time when M. Enjolras was out. When the parcels arrived, Julien had them sent to Henri's room. "Come with me. We shall be able to garb ourselves more suitably." Both young men were hardly what Courfeyrac would consider well-dressed, but they were not so far out of the fashion as to make believe they were priests. The household did not at all resemble a condition of mourning.

Henri gave him a skeptical look, but he did follow Julien up the stairs. Julien tore into the smaller parcel first to free his coat, which he changed into immediately. Henri opened his parcel slowly and stared at the contents therein.

"I do not need your help to dress myself," he told Julien, though without sarcasm or rancor.

"That is not at all what I meant. I seek only that you might have all the tools, that you can make a fair choice."

“My father . . .” he trailed off.

“The choice is yours, not his and not mine.” He left his friend still staring at the gift.

The surprise was that Henri came down for dinner, rather defiantly, as if daring his father to say something about the black suit. M. Enjolras certainly looked disapproving, but he said nothing. Only later, when he managed to corral Julien alone, did he have anything to say.

“What is the meaning of this?”

“I merely ordered the garments. It was his own choice to put them on.”

“Do you have any idea how this looks?”

“It may not be socially prescribed for a fiancée, but if he wants the six months expected for a wife, then why not give him them?”

“Because she was not his wife.”

“But he mourns her as if she were. Why not permit him to go as far as he must? You made the comparison yourself,” Julien reminded him.

“In the heat of the moment, at the time of her death, it was one thing. But it has been nearly two months. Do you suggest I should wait another four?”

“Yes,” he replied firmly. “Even another year, if that is what it takes. I have told you, I cannot cure his grief, and I do not seek the impossible. If his outer appearance more closely match his inner feeling, then perhaps he will find an equilibrium. Perhaps he will appear in public if he be seen visibly in mourning. Perhaps he will continue to keep to the house and gardens. I don't know. But I am certain there is no harm, and perhaps a great deal of good, in a black suit.”

“This was all your idea. You put the notion in his head.”

“I doubt that. Society puts the notion in all our heads,” Julien tried to remind him as reasonably as possible. “It is bad enough that I have not made a visit to the Duchamps myself in all this time, but society does not permit me to present myself in a coat of green to a mourning family. The colour of our souls is of more import than the colour of our habits, but when society expects a black coat, to do otherwise is a mockery I will not perform. If you understand that much, then you can understand why Henri would want to make the same gesture. It is up to him whether he take the six months.”

M. Enjolras shook his head, as if he were about to argue further, but instead sighed and waved Julien away. Julien thought he looked very old in that moment – indeed, he had passed his sixtieth year, but ordinarily, one would not have thought it, he being so vigorous and his hair still not wholly grey nor

thinning more than at the crown, as it had somehow stayed ever since Julien had met him. But tonight, he looked very old, his sorrows heavy on him, and Julien regretted the impulse that had again set father against son. But Henri had put on the suit, and he had come down for dinner. He had wanted to make that display, despite his father's preferences, and his own desires had at last won out.

Chapter 6

“Would you like to come with me?” It was rather early, and Henri was not even dressed, but Julien hoped to take the carriage into town with M. Enjolras.

Henri shook his head. “I can't.”

“Is there any message I should take?” Julien asked gently. It was a hard thing to ask – he had no sense of what his own reception would be, much less what response a message from Henri might bring.

“No message.”

It was awkward breakfasting with M. Enjolras after he had explained the errand he had to make. The meal, and the drive into town, were silent. Julien was certain M. Enjolras disapproved of the errand as he had disapproved of the relationship, yet it was a social requirement that Julien pay his respects, and M. Enjolras could not disapprove of the social graces.

They parted at the sugar refinery – M. Enjolras to speak to the foreman and Julien to walk to the Duchamp forge. It was a grey day, the wind piercing to the bone with a salty dampness from the sea. At least it was more appropriate to his mood than Marseille in summer would have been.

The forge was glowing brightly when Julien arrived, M. Duchamp hard at work, hammer in hand, sparks flying, while his eldest son, a boy of sixteen, assisted. Julien watched for a long time, until Bernard noticed him. “Papa, customer.”

M. Duchamp turned to look. “That's not a customer. Go tell your mother we've got a guest.” He plunged whatever he had been working on into a vat of water and closed the distance to Julien with long, firm strides. Taking him by the shoulders, he practically bellowed, “Look at you. How many years has it been? It is good of you to come.” With an arm around Julien's shoulders, he nearly dragged him into the detached kitchen. “Look who came,” he announced to his wife.

“Oh, M. Combeferre!” Mme Duchamp dropped her sewing and greeted him. “We didn't know if we should think to see you. It is so good of you to come.”

“Henri's father wrote me. How could I not come?”

“She would have been glad to see you. Look at us – receiving important guests in the kitchen! Bernard, go and start a fire in the salon.” Bernard was the only one of the children at home, it seemed, since only Mme Duchamp had been in the warm kitchen.

“It is all right, really. I'm hardly an important guest.” He found the whole situation awkward – he had delayed so long, but they seemed to know none of it, and though he knew well enough that they had been on a familiar basis with Henri, having finally accepted in the last year that he truly would become their son-in-law, he had some of the benefits of familiarity but none of the privileges of familial acquaintance. They were terribly welcoming and did not seem wholly devastated this long after events. Emilie was not the first child they had lost; perhaps that was how they seemed to better deal with their grief than Henri did.

“You've come all the way from Paris. No, where did Henri say he was?” she asked her husband.

“London, wasn't it?”

“Yes. How could I not, once I heard the news? Henri is my brother; Emilie was nearly my sister. How could I not come?”

“It is good of you to come,” she repeated.

They ended up sitting at the kitchen table, sipping strong coffee while Mme Duchamp tried to push slices of almond cake on them. Julien rather thought that fully half the attraction for Henri had been the family – they were well-enough off that there was cake, and Catherine Duchamp had a pleasantly round figure and pushed food on any guest as if she were everyone's mother. Albert was quite as liberal a father as Richard Combeferre, seeing his only daughter had the time and permission to read nearly anything she might want from the subscription library at a cost only of teaching her younger brothers. The younger boys must be in school now, Julien realised, with their teacher gone. Bernard, the eldest of the boys, had of course left off academics a couple of years ago in order to apprentice to his father. He retreated to the forge after giving Julien a suspicious glare but not before stuffing his mouth full of cake, an unexpected treat for the morning. The rings of his hammer punctuated the discussion.

At first, they talked not at all of Emilie and tried to make polite conversation about Julien's experiences in England. The kitchen was delightfully cozy, but it was hardly right that Mme Duchamp be in black. Julien finally, with difficulty, softly admitted, “Henri has been very ill. May I ask what precisely happened? You must throw me out of the house if you think the request inappropriate,” he insisted.

Mme Duchamp started to make another pot of coffee. M. Duchamp stared at his work-hardened hands on the rough old wooden table. Julien knew in his heart that he had been wrong to ask, that a grieving family should not be made to recite their troubles for the benefit of an acquaintance. He stood to take his leave. “Please forgive me. It is not for me to know.”

“November. A Friday night. Henri was at some party. She was meeting with the others.” The whole story came out hollowly, detached. Julien dared not move. Mme Duchamp bowed her head when her husband began to speak and only seemed to come to consciousness when the coffee boiled over. Julien found himself concentrating on physical details, on the grain of the table top, the acrid scent of burned

coffee, the shiny burn scar on M. Duchamp's forearm, in order to not break down in tears.

Mme Duchamp finally cried out, as much a sob as a cry, to stop her husband. "Albert!" Trying to blink back tears, Julien helped her to a chair. He had seen plenty of awful ways to die and could probably diagnose what the exact injuries were that had killed her now that he had more detail, which did not at all assist his equilibrium.

"The police came?" he asked as calmly as he could.

M. Duchamp nodded. "And pretended to make an investigation."

"What do you mean 'pretended'?"

"As if those bastard royalists were going to do anything for us." M. Duchamp had lived quietly for most of his life, but in his youth, he had tried to follow his brother north with the great revolutionary army, which proved more exodus of radicals from Marseille than local support of the Revolution. Marseille still had some of the characteristics of a small town though it was a metropolis of over 100,000 people, and such youthful rashness was hardly forgotten. The elder Duchamp had died in the wars, leaving Albert to take over the forge from his father and care for his mother instead of following his brother to glory; Marseille had become a reactionary town after the departure of those volunteers and never recovered. Julien had to agree that little investigation into the death of the republican daughter of a republican blacksmith was likely.

"Have there been any other attacks? Someone with an interest in harming young women in general?"

"If there had been, there would have been a real investigation. How awful, that we look for consolation in the destruction of other families."

"How awful, indeed, yet I cannot help wishing it were so." Julien realised he still had his arm around Mme Duchamp's shoulders. He broke away to pour her a cup of what coffee remained in the pot, and she forced a smile in thanks, though she really just clutched the warm cup. "Have you heard from any of the others?"

"We did have a letter – well, a note, really – from M. Gérard," Mme Duchamp told him. "I'll get it for you."

"We heard from no one else. And he didn't even show up for the funeral, just sent three lines instead."

"I'm sorry I missed the funeral."

"You would have had to be able to predict the future and fly in order to make it here for that. We don't hold it against you that you're a mere mortal."

"But what of Henri?"

M. Duchamp shook his head. "I don't know what to think. Grief takes a person in strange ways. I didn't want to let him go that morning, for fear he'd do something, but you know you couldn't speak sense to either of them when they got going. Either of them," he repeated hollowly.

"He was sick in bed, otherwise he would have come," Julien insisted. But then he decided the whole truth must come out, that only here would there be understanding, and perhaps forgiveness, for what might otherwise be seen as selfish behaviour. "Blood loss. He went home that morning and slit his wrists."

"Christ. I knew it had to be bad that he didn't come. He'd have done anything, I thought. Well, he did. Christ. Is he all right? No infection or anything?"

"No, he has been very lucky. His illness is all here," Julien tapped his forehead, "if grief may be called illness."

"I don't blame him. It wasn't the first party he'd gone to. Tell him. I don't blame him. Trying to talk sense to her – to either of them. What use is wishing there were two dead?"

Mme Duchamp came back in, her eyes red with crying. "Here, the note from M. Gérard."

To the Duchamp family:

I am so sorry for what has happened. I wish I had insisted more strongly that I walk her home that night. I cannot imagine the depth of your grief. Please forgive me.

M. Gérard

Julien thanked her and handed back the note once he had read it. Brief, indeed, ineloquent, but not without feeling. "I must let you return to work," he insisted. "Thank you." He clasped hands with Mme Duchamp. M. Duchamp insisted on walking him out through the forge.

They stopped in the yard, M. Duchamp's big hand grasping his shoulder. "You'll have children of your own one day. And you'll think you know what's best. But you don't. Ideals are meant to be tested, it seems. The priests will say it was because I mocked God, that I did this to my own daughter. But God, He tests ideals, you see? Job was a righteous man. You have these ideas, and you think you are right. It made so much sense to me. 'He created them male and female.' Citoyen and citoyenne. We were all citizens, with rights and responsibilities. It couldn't be enough that a girl merely learn to sign her name on the marriage license and do sums so she wouldn't be cheated by the grocer. It couldn't be enough that she be able to pick out the words in a newspaper. You cannot have rights without responsibilities, and you cannot have responsibilities if you cannot think. And that is where we went wrong, don't you see? Because once you teach a person to think, you cannot control what they think about. But I could do nothing less. A woman is passed from her father to her husband, and that is supposed to be good enough. But look at the widows, the orphans? How can we continue to permit the mothers of our sons

to be incapable of raising these children should the worst happen? Men die daily, and until we can defeat death, we cannot leave so great a portion of the living in thrall to it. How could I do less? Is the lesson that I ought to have kept her chained, her mind asleep? Could I have lived with myself should the worst have happened? Or should I have treated her like a girl, circumscribed her thoughts, told her 'no' when my heart wanted to shout 'yes'? She is dead in the ground, but God help me, if I could do it all over, I could change nothing."

Julien did not know what to say. There was no comfort to give, certainly not in the notion that he must have had the same ideals had he bothered to think so far ahead, and he feared he might not have the strength not to play the hypocrite. "She had a finer mind than many men I know. For it to have been destroyed by false notions of womanhood would have been a crime nearly as great as that which stamped it out entirely."

"Many men you know?" M. Duchamp asked defensively. "I should think she was better than most."

"I travel in intellectual circles as much as I can," Julien apologised. "Indeed, she was a far better thinker than nearly any boy I was at school with. That was the real disappointment of school. They did not want you to think, merely to remember. A translation was not a show of understanding but merely of regurgitation."

"She should have been a boy. There would have been honour in what happened if she were a man."

"Saint Joan. Saint Catherine. Saint Cecelia. Her name belongs with theirs. Not with the virgins like Saint Barbara, but with women who threatened kingdoms and empires."

M. Duchamp shook his head. "I've been told you don't even believe in it."

"I don't believe in miracles the way they're so often told. I believe in belief. It was not Jesus Christ himself that changed the world through magic tricks and poorly reported history. It was the belief in him that threatened the Roman Empire, that eventually was made to stand for beauty rather than ignorance, that could still stand for charity and mercy but doesn't have to stand against rights and duties and obligations. If we are all capable of salvation, then we must all be capable of citizenship. Man and woman. And if we are all capable of the fight, then we must all be capable of the martyrdom. If I cannot bring justice to those who did this, then I have no choice but to share her fate."

"Does that mean you're investigating what the police won't?"

"Someone must look into it."

"You'll get yourself killed, you know that, right?"

"I know. Someone must look into it," Julien repeated firmly.

M. Duchamp shook his head. "Do you think I want that on my head, too?"

“My life or death is only the least I can do for my role in the entire business.”

“My daughter is dead because of my political opinions and my indulgence. Her fiancé tried to kill himself. You go poking your nose in people's business, I've no doubt the same will happen to you, and it will be on my head. Henri may think it his fault, that if he were with her, she would not have been attacked, but I am certain it would have ended in them both dead. I'm not blind, and I know what my girl could do. She would have been too much trouble for one man. And with a crowd, what does another victim matter? Particularly when it is someone as republican as your friend.”

“I know how to be careful. How could I have survived so long in Paris without the police on my back?”

“I can't talk you out of it, can I?”

“No, monsieur. I'm sorry. At the very least, I must speak to the other young men, and if someone knows something, I cannot promise I will not follow the trail.”

“Be as careful as you can. There has been death enough.”

“Has there? If I found a name, I would gladly share it with you and join in what must be done.”

“That is my duty, as her father. Vengeance is not for schoolboys.”

“No, it is not,” Julien was forced to agree. M. Duchamp had more right than he did. “But I will do what I can. Thank you, monsieur.”

They shook hands. Julien left through the forge, earning another glare from Bernard for daring to politely tip his hat and tell him good day.

Chapter 7

After stopping by the cemetery and laying a few ragged flowers on the recent grave, Julien walked back to the Enjolras estate. The wind was cold, but the walk gave him something active to do while his mind was racing. He had never considered it before, but perhaps the working classes did live out their lives in fear of the authorities. Both Feuilly and M. Duchamp discounted the objectivity of the police, Feuilly going so far as to insinuate that they may have committed murder themselves. Henri's paranoia must have come from the Duchamps. Of course Julien would be careful in his investigations, but there was a vast gulf between a blacksmith's daughter and the son of one of the local magnates, regardless of who was responsible for the original crime. But he chastised himself for even having such a thought – Feuilly would do it were he not in Paris. I am learning, Julien thought.

When he finally returned, Henri was waiting in the hall. “How are they?” he asked quickly, failing utterly to betray no emotion. Julien had a distinct feeling he had been pacing. So much the better –

pacing was exercise for the body when the mind was agitated, and agitation of any sort was sorely needed after what had seemed weeks of stasis.

“They are well. The younger boys are in school now, I think. Bernard was the only one there.”

“Thomas began an apprenticeship with the carpenter Journés this summer,” Henri told him. “They are well?”

“Yes. They are very well,” he repeated. “They were grieved to hear you had been too ill to attend the funeral,” Julien added as gently as he could.

“You did not tell them why, did you?”

“I told M. Duchamp, and he was not surprised. I fear he knows you better than your own father.”

With a twisted smile, Henri told him, “I fear that, too.”

“You've this, also, in common with him: a suspicion of the police. What are you not telling me? He warned me not to make inquiries myself. Something has happened that no one will admit.”

“Nothing else has happened,” Henri insisted. “Isn't this enough?”

“But you both latch onto the police. Feuilly, from reading your father's letter to me, latched onto the police. It is to be expected with him – he has been arrested on political grounds before – but what has happened here? I thought you were still objects of fun rather than threats to the monarchy.”

“You're one to talk,” Henri tossed back with a glare that would have been more effective had his assailant been someone other than Julien. The first time he had received such a look, Julien was taken aback, but he had soon learned that the force of the glare was generally in inverse proportion to the duration of the emotion that prompted it. And Henri had no control over his looks – intensity was merely an aspect of his native character. “You accused Valland of being a spy.”

“Was he or wasn't he? Have you your own suspicions?”

“My suspicions do not matter. I cannot condemn a man who may be innocent.”

“M. Duchamp does not disapprove of an eye for an eye, and I think I agree.”

Henri shook his head. “Valland, or any of the others, may be innocent. Did we not vow we would not start another Terror? If we cannot trust each other, then society is doomed whether it be under a monarchy or a republic. If you find evidence . . .” he trailed off.

“You do not forbid me to look into the matter?”

“I should have done it myself weeks ago, despite whatever danger may exist. You must. You may do it better, having the necessary objectivity I have not been able to muster.”

Julien managed to pull him into the dining room for a second breakfast and was gratified to see that whatever pacing had been done had favourably affected the appetite. Over cold chicken and potatoes with garlic and vinegar, Julien recounted the entire visit in as much detail as he could remember, though without anything M. Duchamp had related about his daughter's death. He merely stated that he had received the necessary information from M. Duchamp. Henri mostly listened with his attention on his plate as he ate, but when Julien came to the letter from Gérard, he looked up in surprise.

“Gérard?”

“It surprises you?”

“Do not think that I ever thought him a spy,” Henri insisted. “Merely that I was certain he was the greatest coward of the three. It must have been a very hard letter for him to write.”

“It was brief.”

Henri pushed his plate away, empty but for the bones, though it had not been a large plate to begin with. “That makes it no easier.”

“The sun is coming out,” Julien suddenly noticed.

Henri turned toward the window. “Mistral coming.”

“Really?” He followed Henri out into the garden, servants chasing after them with overcoats.

The real wind had not yet picked up, but the direction of what breeze there had been was more firmly from the north and more wholly frigid. Henri lifted his face to the sun, his eyes closed, his hair whipping about his face. “How could all of December pass without a blow? This will be a twelve-day wind. You'll see. It's been bottled up too long to be otherwise.”

The wind was icy, but the clouds were fast disappearing and the Mediterranean sun returning properly for the first time since Julien had arrived. This was the southern sky he knew so well, the southern sun. It was said that depression preceded a mistral, but Julien felt his mood lift just at the sight of the sun. Thrusting his hands into his pockets, he found a small parcel.

“Forgive me, I forgot.” He passed to Henri, wrapped in his handkerchief, a slice of Mme Duchamp's almond cake.

He opened it and stared almost reverently at the contents. “She probably thinks me starving if she is not feeding me. She thinks the world starving if she is not feeding them.” His voice broke, but his eyes were dry for once. “Thank you.”

“They would like to hear from you. You have been wanting to hear from them.”

Henri shook his head, but he was eating the cake. “The connection has been severed.”

“It was never an appropriate connection, therefore it cannot be severed merely by death.”

“Merely?”

“Forgive me. It is one act, is all I mean.”

“The greatest act. The last act. The act of which I am the beginning and the end. It must be the end.”

“M. Duchamp asked me to tell you that he does not blame you. He was very careful to insist on that. ‘Tell him I do not blame him.’ It was not the first party. It would not have been the last. The same actions performed by the same people how many times without incident? He does not wish you dead, and he greatly fears that anyone who had been with her would have been killed as well. The deaths of her comrades would not satisfy any of us, only our enemies.”

“It is all very well for him to tell you such a thing, but I doubt he believes it.”

“It was the only time all morning I saw him near tears. Could you truly doubt his honesty?”

Henri scattered the remaining crumbs into the wind, which was coming in longer, stronger gusts. “He is not the one I doubt. Nor is it you,” he added quickly, seeming to realise he had made an inadvertent attack. He faced into the coming storm, the Mediterranean sun brightening everything it touched, particularly him. “A twelve-day blow, at the very least. One could perhaps see Corsica from your house.” Indeed, the air had completely cleared, everything standing out in the sun in sharp relief.

“Shall we go and see?”

“The servants would hate you for making them open. And I cannot imagine being stuck in your house during a twelve-day blow.”

“My ancestors do not come to life during a mistral.”

“I do not trust your ill-painted Castelnau forbears. The mistral drives man to madness – might it not wake the provençal dead?”

“It was the style of the time,” Julien protested. “We are quite lucky to have portraits from more than two hundred years ago.”

“That makes them no less frightening.”

Julien had no words to describe his relief. The conversation had suddenly taken a turn to the normal. Indeed, he had to admit that the one sixteenth century painting his family owned had come down through the Castelnau line but he believed it unlikely to be of any of them. Certainly it was of a provençal gentleman, a very pale and slightly scary provençal gentleman who might cause nightmares in small children if encountered on a cloudy night, but Marseille saw few cloudy nights where the moon did strange things to pale sixteenth century gentlemen. And there had been many times when one could acquire a portrait of a provençal gentleman and claim it an ancestor. Molière knew the phenomenon of the upstart well enough.

“I do need to stop at the house before returning to Paris. I may be able to identify the Egyptian gentleman.”

“So he is no longer a noseless king?”

“The headdress style was worn by important members of the court, if the current scholarship is correct. He could be a king or a minister, but I am hopeful I can at last get the hieroglyphs translated so we might learn his name, at the very least.”

The wind pushed them into retreat in the shadow of the house, the great stone façade shielding them from the brunt of the northern attack, but they stayed outdoors, despite the cold and the wind, to take in the sun Julien had not realised he so desperately needed. In the sun, he did not have to force the conversation onto utterly innocuous topics such as Egyptian hieroglyphs – it came naturally. The mistral was said to be preceded by depression and drive men to madness, but Hahnemann may have had a point after all. If a disease is caused or exacerbated by a particular stimulus, and a melancholy is exacerbated by a particular stimulus, then perhaps a dose of the same stimulus will cure the melancholy just as cinchona will cure malaria. It was a stretch to compare grief and malaria, perhaps, but if the traditions about the mistral had any truth to them, as some of the old tales did, then perhaps Hahnemann was not such a quack after all. Or, more likely, Julien thought, every quack hit upon some partial truth that permitted him a success. It was a theory of which he should be mindful as the case developed, not a method of treatment. A doctor could never control the wind or sun in any case.

When they finally went inside, as much in search of coffee with which to warm themselves as to get out of the growing wind, they found the shutters had been put up and the place very dark and eerily quiet. A shriek announced the coming of the real wind, the true mistral, at a pitch Julien had never heard. He had seen the winds of June, of course, that were technically the mistral, but they did not bring ice down from the mountains so much as bring the cold sea waters up from the deep. Two and three day affairs at the most, nothing to the storms of winter, not entirely deserving of the name “mistral”. This was an entirely different wind, though it had the same origins.

M. Enjolras arrived home early to find the young men in the library, playing chess by lamplight. “We're in for quite a blow.”

“Twelve days, I should think,” Henri answered, his attention on the game and the sharpness out of his voice.

M. Enjolras seemed rather taken aback by the sudden change that had been worked. "I would not be surprised if it lasted fifteen. We've a month's holiday to make up for."

Julien lost the chess match, his attention taken up in watching father and son. Instead of retreating, M. Enjolras settled in to read the paper, in the same room, and Henri made no complaint nor did he leave until the match had finished. Only then did he retreat to his room, but without even bothering to look at his father.

"What has happened?"

"The weather has changed. That is all I know."

"The mistral brings depression and madness."

"Perhaps to others, but I see none here. You've gone a good month without a blow. Indeed, it is a dry wind, and my trip down the Rhône valley was exceedingly wet, so it must be more than a month. Which would put the last instance at November."

"That is true."

"The mind is still opaque to all the greatest science. But there are certain effects of weather on the mind as well as on the body. This is easily observed. From the scientific perspective, sunshine generally brings happiness. But the sun accompanies the mistral, which brings madness. Is there a correlation in rates of suicide to the effects of the mistral? I wonder. It might be a method of testing whether it is truth or superstition that the mistral causes madness. But then, if he were taken ill under the mistral, might not the wind itself affect a cure? I had thought the return of sunshine might be enough, but we went into the garden – he went into the garden and I followed – where he positively revelled in the wind as much as the sun. The illness is grief, but perhaps it has been exacerbated by the weather, and weather that appeals to him, in whatever form it comes, may be the best cure. Or, weather that approximates the weather of the onset of his melancholy may, like a drug that causes similar effects, force out the disease. Was the mistral blowing that day?"

"Let me think. I never considered it. It's merely a fact of life in winter, you know. No. No, it was raining. But we did have a short blow, three days or so, just after I sent off the letter. I remember hoping it would not delay the mail too long."

"Fog on the Channel did far more than any wind here, I am sure. I was five days at Dover, and I cannot imagine how long the mail might have sat at Calais. So perhaps there is something to it, that depression precedes the mistral. Henri goes about everything that interests him with a certain intensity, but suicide certainly seemed outside of what might be expected. However, if one combines the shock with the effect of the weather, the depression that precedes the mistral, perhaps we have the source of the illness. And if like cures like, then it required the onset of the next blow, which was oddly delayed. He was agitated all morning, I suspect, and while I attributed it to the anticipation of my visit to the

Duchamps, perhaps it owed as much again to the coming change in the weather.”

“If I said such a thing, I would think it nonsense. Why does it scientific when you say it?”

“Science is entirely about making sense out of nonsense. You would not believe half the new discoveries were they stated so baldly. Please forgive me; I am merely thinking aloud. But how I hope we may have turned the corner. We spoke this afternoon in ways we have not spoken in all the time I have been here. I think we may be cautiously optimistic, but as I have said before, only when there are enough data to form a pattern can we truly begin to identify the progression of the illness.

“Cautiously optimistic. How I hope you are right.”

Chapter 8

It was a ten day blow, though M. Enjolras insisted on calling it nine - “it is always an odd number of days.” Henri argued that there was no place for such superstition, that there was as much evidence that it comes in threes as that it comes only as an odd number, and while “nine” may satisfy both conditions, that makes it no more accurate. He called on Julien for support, as a scientist, though Julien preferred to stay out of it. But it was not a real argument, merely dinner conversation of a sort that had not happened for too long in that house.

The sun was brilliant, but the wind made it impossible to spend much time outside. M. Enjolras went into town only three times, and on horseback, the wind making the carriage too worrying to manoeuvre. The young men stayed at home, often huddled against the cold as the wind had a tendency to blow down the chimneys and douse the fires or fill the rooms with smoke. Even though the great windows all faced south and were covered in shutters for safety, they still shook from time to time. The only benefit to the wind was that it seemed to make Henri as anxious to go out as Julien felt, and Julien had great hopes that once it calmed, Henri might agree to go riding. Whether it merely be the passage of time or the change in the weather, any cause for agitation had to be harnessed to the best possible purposes. Henri tried to go out into the garden daily, but even he could handle the icy wind for only a few minutes.

They passed the time with books and chess and occasionally managed to include M. Enjolras in conversation. It was not at all a return to the normal life of the house – the conversation was often sombre, abbreviated, awkward – but there was a lack of rancor at last. Henri's agitation seemed to leave him neither the time nor the inclination to hate his father, which permitted Julien to relax his vigilance over every conversation. Yet on the whole, it was easier for him to talk about poetry with M. Enjolras while Henri paced and looked annoyed. M. Enjolras enjoyed pretending that he understood enough English to follow Julien's line of thought on Wordsworth, and Julien did not mind having to translate some of the more beautiful passages on occasion. He had not had the chance to make the sort of literary acquaintance in London as he had in Paris, so it had been far too long since he had a sympathetic audience. There were only two conversational stops with Henri – poetry and science. M. Enjolras had not the scientific temperament, but he enjoyed the poetic, even if his grasp of English, learned so much later in life, was not as good as he wished.

The sun stayed for a whole day when the wind died down. Henri finally agreed to go for a ride with Julien, though after a run, he managed to turn it to business.

“I need you to find Gérard.”

“Tomorrow. I must have an evening, and I need some excuse to give your father. Will you not come with me?”

“I think it best I not. He cannot speak freely to me of what has happened.”

“But I am of all things your emissary. I have never known him well; my very presence will merely be an extension of you.”

“I need your opinion.”

“And I cannot form an opinion in your presence?”

“He let her go off alone. I do not trust myself.”

“What excuse shall I give your father?”

“What do you do in the evening in Paris other than study?”

“I have friends in Paris who go out with me. You are my only friend in Marseille.” Julien sighed.

“The opera? Is there an opera up? I can perhaps make a plausible claim, but heaven forbid he want to join me.”

“He hates the opera.”

“Does Gérard still stop with his parents?”

“He can't otherwise. He thinks he will have enough saved by spring to manage a full three years. He wouldn't if he had to pay rent.” Marc Gérard had been a scholarship boy at the *collège royal*, which was how he and Henri had met. He now worked as a clerk in order to earn enough money to pursue a law degree at Aix and lived at home, above his father's grocery.

“Does he still work for Serre?”

“He's with Lucien Granier now.”

“Brilliant,” Julien complained. “Their office is immediately opposite my father's. Why did he leave Serre?”

“The Graniers offered more money. And he no longer had to go out to the mills.”

“Fair enough. But I will be painfully obvious waiting for him to leave work.”

“You cannot turn your father's office to your benefit?”

“Not willingly.”

“What did he have you doing in London?”

“Accounting.”

“My sympathies.”

“Thank you. Also, watching how English brokers interact with the stock exchange and each other.” Julien sighed. “I suppose I could look into matters in Marseille. I do not know whether my father will appreciate the effort or not. Then I can way-lay Gérard the moment he leaves work, and my excuse to your father then that I met an acquaintance and had a drink, which is unlikely to be far from the truth.”

Henri thanked him solemnly, then took off at a gallop. Julien watched for a moment before spurring Othello to follow. They met again at the stables, and Julien was pleased to note that Henri was out of breath but did not seem tired or withdrawn. The colour in his face was very good, his hair utterly disheveled from the wind, and as he curried down his horse, there was the trace of a smile on his face. But the line of his coat was somewhat dragged down from the weight of the pistols in his pockets.

“Are they permitted sugar, Doctor?”

Julien laughed. “One lump each, no more.”

The clouds had come back by the next morning. Julien insisted, when M. Enjolras had the carriage drop him off first, that he would find his own way back to the estate. “I do not know how long my business will keep me,” he found himself saying several times before M. Enjolras finally agreed.

But instead of going directly into the office, he turned and went to the café at the corner. They had acquired a buxom counter girl in the years since he was last in, he noted. Much of the morning passed by reading the newspapers – liberal newspapers for the first time since he had been in Marseille – and allowing the counter girl, who called herself Chantal, to flirt with him. But as noon approached, he knew he had to make an appearance before he was spotted by any employee who might know him. What was the plan to be? A thorough examination of the books? A query about the state of the business?

He decided to start by asking for any news he might send on to his father that would actually be appreciated, perhaps the consequences of the late wind. With a tip of his hat to the lovely Chantal, and the intention of telling Courfeyrac that Paris was not the only city with beautiful café girls, he went to

take his business in hand.

Julien had no love for the family firm, but he had no hate for it, either – it was as it was. It had been built for the Levant trade in the seventeenth century, then slowly expanded into the colonial trade, but even after the bankruptcy of so many firms during the Revolution and the blockades in the wars, it was hardly the oldest firm in Marseille. It was, however, large and growing: they had only ocean-going ships, none of these small coasters to Cette, and a small office in Bordeaux that had been acquired a couple years earlier when his father succeeded in buying out a rival firm. They employed only clerks and sailors, all at decent pay, so far as he could tell, and the largest factors in the business appeared to be the wind and the government. Since no one could control the former (and steam for ocean-going cargo vessels was ridiculous to contemplate even in future, so much space taken up for fuel with so little benefit), much time and energy were taken up with the latter. Colonial policy, trade policy, defense of the state, alliances – he knew very well that his father was, by necessity, an opportunist rather than an adherent of any political faction, but while the nuances were fascinating, the subordination of ideal to selfish necessity troubled him. But the business was what it was, and there was no reason it should not coexist peacefully with a republican government, and there were certain benefits in trade that could not be denied. The needed political change would still permit the firm to last another two hundred years, perhaps more. It was tragic to see his father toadying up to whatever way the political winds blew when a stand for right would not even mean his personal destruction.

But it was what it was, and Julien knew he had not earned the right to say differently to a man who had ably steered through revolution, war, and restoration. He was also uncertain if he had the right to poke his nose into the business at all without being asked.

The clerk who greeted him was new, or perhaps both had forgotten each other. “Is M. Savin in?”

“Who is it?” Savin called from the inner office.

“If I might have a word, monsieur,” Julien called back.

Savin came as far as the door, then nearly threw himself at Julien's feet. “M. Combeferre! I did not know you were coming. Your father never said – was I supposed to know? Is this an inspection?”

“Not at all. I have been familiarising myself with the business, as I'm sure my father has told you, and since I was in town, I thought I would stop in and see if there were anything of importance.”

“Come in, come in. Farron, take his hat. He's the owner's son, you idiot,” Savin muttered to the clerk.

Closeted in the private office, Julien forced himself to ask pointed but simple questions about the weather, the trade, the employees. He found the whole business awful and feared he sounded absolutely ignorant, but of course Savin, the manager in M. Combeferre's absence, was willing to do whatever was necessary to please his employer's son. And Julien could ingratiate himself well enough when he cared to, chore that it was. He was not been raised by Cécile for nothing.

He managed, in the late afternoon, to have himself set up near the window to peruse the accounts. He kept more of an eye on the Lucien Granier offices across the street than on the ledgers, and when he noted movement, gave his thanks and escaped into the cold, quickly darkening street. Now he was actively hiding, like a hunter stalking prey, and he felt utterly ridiculous until Gérard came out, looking as mousy as ever. Julien quickly managed to fall into step with him. “Marc Gérard?”

Gérard practically jumped out of his skin. “Christ. Scare a man to death. You're in town? Has something happened to Enjolras? Oh god, it has. We shouldn't be seen together.” Gérard had always been of a nervous temperament, but this seemed excessive even for him.

“He's fine. I promise you, he's fine. And I don't think the police have been waiting hours in this cold, watching me go over ledgers. I was at the office all day. Can I buy you a drink?” Gérard acquiesced, and Julien found himself once again with the lovely bosom of Chantal presented for his approval. “Henri is fine,” Julien insisted. “Why did you not write him yourself? It was very brave of you to write to the Duchamps. They appreciated it very much.”

Gérard seemed to prefer to look at his glass rather than at Julien. “I don't want anything more to do with cops. Ever. She's dead, they came to the shop, I'm lucky to still have a job. I breathe one way they don't like, and I'm ruined.”

“They did investigate?”

“It wasn't an investigation. It was a threat. I knew I should have insisted harder on walking her home, even just followed her. It's my fault.”

“It was not just you and she that night. What of Valland? Lameire?”

“Valland never liked her. I can't blame him – poor girl should have been born a man. I thought for ages she was just parroting Enjolras, but no, she and him, it was almost like the two of you. One brain, two bodies, and not because he put everything in there. Valland didn't want to think about it too hard. And it was so far out of Lameire's way.”

“It's out of your way, too.”

“It's not exactly across town like it is for him. I should have kept an eye on her. And I didn't. And she's dead. Of course he sends you. How could he look me in the eye?”

“It's your fault, it's her father's fault, it's Henri's fault, it's M. Enjolras' fault, it's my fault – somehow, we all want to blame ourselves, but whoever actually beat her to death is still walking the streets. That's whose fault it is. That's who could have prevented it,” Julien insisted. “What did the police say?”

“It was awful. They came before the shop was closed for the night. They wanted to interview me in plain sight. I don't know if they wanted me to confess to doing it, which of course I didn't, I rather

liked her, but I wasn't jealous of Enjolras, I don't even know how he could like her enough to marry her, or if they just wanted to very publicly tell me they knew who I spent my time with and that it was a very bad idea. I always knew it was a bad idea. I'm not like you and Enjolras; I get no protection from my surname. But you're right, both of you. If it all comes to pass, this sort of thing wouldn't happen. But I can't do it anymore. I didn't sign up to be a martyr."

"Nor did any of us. I know it's hard, but I need to know what happened. When did the police come? What did they ask? They only spoke to Henri once, right after it happened, never again."

"Figures. I knew it was a threat." He took a swallow of his drink and choked on it. Through coughs, he managed to spit out the little he knew. "We parted later than intended. I tried to walk her home, but she insisted she would be fine. I offered her money for a fiacre, even, and she laughed at me, saying she had money. I let her go. I was going to be late home as it was, and I got a thorough tongue lashing for waking my parents when I came in. How is it my fault the door squeaks? Less than six months and I'm out of here, and it won't come soon enough."

"Congratulations. I should have said earlier. Henri told me you've finally got enough."

"Thank you. I didn't hear from anyone for two days, then I saw it in the paper. No one told me. Well, I suppose they had enough on their minds. But Enjolras didn't tell me. You'd think he'd have been the first outside the family to know, and that he would have said something. And that night, the police turned up at the shop. They would not go upstairs. I had to go down to them. In the shop, all lit up for everyone passing by to see. My father wanted to throw me out after that; I'm only still there because my mother begged. Christ, I'm going to catch it for coming home late."

"What did the police ask you?" Julien asked firmly, trying to keep the poor boy on topic.

"First, they asked if I knew her, but it was obvious they knew that. Then they asked if I knew Enjolras. Again, ridiculous question. Then they tried to make out that I had been jealous of Enjolras. I didn't admit to anything, and they didn't like that at all. They also didn't like that my father was willing to testify as to what time I had arrived home that night. If they wanted to lock me up, they could have, I'm sure, but they didn't. They kept poking at trying to make me admit to something, but I wouldn't say yes to anything. Then they said something like 'Don't leave town – we know where to find you, and your little friends.' That's when they left and my father wanted to kick me out."

"So their theory of the crime was that you were in love with Emilie, jealous that she was to marry Henri, and murdered her to prevent such a tragedy from coming to pass."

"Apparently."

"Have you seen any of the others? Do you know if they tried this theory on Lameire or Valland?"

"I don't see anyone," Gérard insisted quickly. "I keep my nose to the ground. The only café I ever go to is this one, where we never met. I'm getting out of here in June, even if Enjolras isn't coming with

me.”

“Coming with you?”

“We'd only just finalised the plan. I can't enroll until November, but I have got to get out of my father's house, and June seems as good a month as any. Enjolras and Mlle Duchamp were going to come with me, in the hope that running off together would force his father to agree to the marriage.”

“I don't think M. Enjolras was going to be swayed by the idea his son was being ravished and had to marry to protect his reputation.”

“No, that wasn't the point. There's something about an inheritance that he'll come into then, and he was going to use the combination of factors. I didn't want to know too much, so I never asked for particulars.”

“It is very good of you to have wanted to help.”

“I know I'm not as good for anything as you are, but it was nice to be asked.”

“You're plenty good enough in your own way. You've been very brave these past years, especially these past weeks, and I know that has not entirely been in your nature. Forgive me, that sounded kinder in my head.”

“No, it's fine. I know well enough I'm not like you. I didn't write to Enjolras because I didn't know what to say. I didn't actually send that letter to the Duchamps. My sister found it and sent it for me. It was an awful letter.”

“It was a true letter.”

“You really don't blame me for what happened?”

“I blame myself,” Julien stated solemnly. “I started Henri on this path, and none of you would have been on it if not for him. What do you think happened? The police wanted, perhaps, to blame you. But you've got a good mind. You know Marseille far better than I do. What do you think happened?”

“The police know all about us. They weren't investigating anything. I don't know if they were looking to make me the scapegoat for their disgusting crime or if they just didn't care to actually investigate. I couldn't tell. I was too scared to tell anything in the moment. But I think it was because of what we were doing. You knew her. She could have beaten me in a fight single-handed. It had to have been at least two men, and well marked up they'd be at the end of it. It has to have been because of us. Either her own sort of people angry that she was refusing marriage in order to wait for Enjolras, or anyone angry at what we were doing. But either way, it's because of us. I can't see it any other way.”

“I can't, either,” Julien replied sympathetically. “And I don't know that I'll ever be able to find and

punish whoever did this, but I have to try.”

“If they were trying to punish all of us, you'll end up dead, too.”

“That's what M. Duchamp said. But I have to try. And I do need your help.”

“No. I'm keeping my nose to the ground.”

“I ask two things of you only,” Julien coaxed. “The first, that you write to Henri. Ill-phrased, brief, it doesn't matter. No one has written him or visited him since it happened. The second, that you tell me where Lameire and Valland are living now.”

“They might have changed lodgings if the police came.”

“That may be so, but I need somewhere to start.” He pulled a small notebook and stub of pencil from his pocket and laid them in the centre of the table. “Please. Could you live with yourself otherwise?”

Gérard stared at the notebook for some time, but he finally pulled it toward him and scribbled down the addresses in a shaky, spidery hand. “They didn't come from me.”

“Of course not. I wish we were meeting again under better terms.”

“I am sorry. Tell him I'm sorry.”

“Tell him yourself,” Julien insisted kindly. He left some money on the table to pay for the drinks, and for the lovely Chantal, but he walked out without seeing her or even saying goodbye to Gérard.

Chapter 9

Julien was surprised to see that his trunk had been placed in his room. He had not thought to ask that it be sent, yet here it was. A letter in his mother's hand lay on top of his things, a surprisingly kind letter with a statement of sympathy, a regret that he must have had a dismal holiday, and a wish that his affairs might be wrapped up by the usual pilgrimage after Easter so they might all have a pleasant summer together. The usual cutting remark was nowhere to be found.

He did not manage to catch Henri alone until after dinner. Henri was at last regularly taking his meals with his father, which heartened M. Enjolras and Julien. It was a step in the right direction. After dinner, however, Julien pulled Henri aside in the hall as they followed M. Enjolras to the salon. “I saw Gérard. When shall we talk?”

“Now?”

“I must see your father first, briefly.”

“Come to my room when you are ready.”

“Monsieur, I have a rather difficult question to ask.” Julien did not particularly want to ask it, but he did need to know. “Have the police ever come to you to make any sort of inquiries?”

“If you mean about the girl, no. They came and told me what happened, but they never asked for him, thank god. I don't know what I would have told them, considering what he had done to himself that morning. Now before this whole mess, certainly. Not inquiries, really, more a plea that I exert some influence on him. And what was I to do? Banish him? Lock a grown man in his room until he agrees to give up his ridiculous politics that harm him more than the government? I ended up commiserating with the *commissaire central* over what is to be done about youthful indiscretions.”

“Thank you. I am glad to hear that the police seem to find no danger in him.” That did not absolve them from finding danger in Emilie, however. Unlike the magnate's son, the blacksmith's daughter could be a serious threat: her class had the most to gain politically, being of education and organization while the labourers were not, and she was a woman who involved herself in political questions. Gérard, too, could be dangerous in theory, as his family were a bare step up, shopkeepers, with their eldest son the only possibility for social advancement. Lameire's father worked for one of the local companies in a position similar to that which Savin filled for M. Combeferre. Thierry was expected to break into the next higher rank if he could place himself well and marry better, but his taste at the moment was for excitement instead. If Courfeyrac or Bahorel were in Marseille, they would have been boon companions, Julien suspected. Valland was the only one of the three men who had not been at school with Henri, and Julien did not know how he kept himself or what his family were like. The police could have a deep interest in Valland.

But before he could push his inquiries further, he had to break the news of the police investigation to Henri. There was no way to talk about what he had learned from Gérard without admitting that the police had threatened the boy.

“I hate to ask,” Julien began as carefully as possible, “but do you recall anything of what the police said to you?”

“Do I have to?”

“They threatened Gérard, interrogating him publicly in his father's shop and insinuating that he had murdered her out of jealousy.”

“Christ.” Henri stared at the floor for a long time, then finally closed his eyes and shook his head. “I can't. There's nothing there.” Tears were evident in his voice.

“I'm sorry I must cause you such pain. I need to know as much as I can, that's all.” He related his conversation with Gérard, though without any mention of the letter. “I can't consider him a coward, really.”

“No, his nature is what it is, and I have always known that. For him, to have any conversation at all with you is bravery.”

“I intend to speak with Lameire and Valland at the earliest opportunity. Even if neither of them know anything, just following the movements of the police may tell me something.”

“It is to be hoped,” Henri said hollowly.

Julien felt ill at the thought that just as Henri had started to recover, he had brought all the sadness back to the forefront. “I’m sorry. I am so sorry.”

Henri met his eyes and took him by the arm. “You have always apologised too much for what is not your fault.”

“But it is.”

“No, it is not,” he said carefully. But then he pulled away, so obviously on the verge of tears. Julien put an arm around his shoulders and sat with him in silence, neither of them outright weeping, but neither in a real position to speak.

The mistral came down again in the night. Julien preferred to delay looking for Lameire, as somehow the wind seemed even stronger and more bitter, though he suspected he merely misremembered the force of the previous blow. It lasted only four days this time and was followed by an utterly dismal rain.

“How do you like our Southern winters?” M. Enjolras asked Julien at dinner to the sound of rain hitting the windows.

“I have not missed much, I fear.”

“I don't quite know how you can abide Paris, though. Sure, the wind here will drive a man mad, but in Paris, you never see the sky.”

“And often it is cold enough we have snow. Winter is winter – it is not a particularly interesting or happy season anywhere. I would not mind staying until spring, however.”

“You'll not have long to wait, if indeed you stay. You are welcome to it, is what I mean,” M. Enjolras clarified, though he looked away as he said it. Julien thanked him anyway, preferring to accept the words in the moment; emotional meanings could be clarified once Henri's recovery had progressed somewhat farther.

When the weather cleared again, Julien ventured out to look for Lameire. The man had left his lodgings before the beginning of December, the concierge said when Julien inquired. She did not know where he had gone, just that a wagon had taken everything away. “I'm glad of it, too – I don't need the

police coming around here again.” She knew nothing of why the police had come nor where Lameire had gone. The easiest solution was to simply ask his father, though that was a task Julien did not at all relish.

He went in search of Valland, as something easier than looking up M. Lameire. He knew Valland was likely to be at work, though where he worked was unknown, but he could at least verify whether or not Valland still lived at the address Gérard had given. It was a poorer building, and the concierge immediately took him for police. “I don't know where he's gone, and I told your men that before!”

“I'm sorry, madame?”

She took a look at him properly, and though she did not apologise, he knew perfectly well that his expensive clothes and fine accent marked him as something other than a policeman. “What do you want with him?”

“I have a message from a friend, that is all.”

“He moved out. Didn't tell me where.”

“Before the police came?”

“Same morning the police came. Would have been back in November, I think. Well before Christmas, anyway. He paid down an extra week's rent and said he was leaving.”

“Where did he work?”

“I don't know. Kept to himself, did M. Valland.”

“Thank you, madame.”

Both had flown, Valland barely ahead of the police. If he had been working with the police, would they have visited him at all? Would they have deliberately delayed their visit so as not to visit him? Or would they have been careful to interrogate him as publicly as the others in order to hide their disinterest in the case? Perhaps the police were not it at all. Or the murder had been planned at a higher level in the ministry of the interior and the police in Marseille were kept ignorant of the whole thing, little pawns investigating a crime they cared nothing about but had to examine perfunctorily because they did not know their superiors did not want it solved. He could play at conspiracy as easily as Feuilly or M. Duchamp, but it was hard to believe anyone outside Marseille could care enough to want any of their cell dead. Cell was a rather polite term, when it came down to it, in any case. No, whatever had happened, it concerned Marseille alone.

M. Lameire worked for Amiot, if Julien remembered rightly, and there was a chance that he, like many in the Port district, would take a midday meal at one of the finer cafés. It would be more polite to find him there than to attempt to see him at work. Julien found himself again presented with Chantal's

lovely bosom as she would know as well as anyone where the men from the various firms chose to drink.

“Amiot? The little ones, from time to time, but the big fish go up the hill, not down. Why do you care so much?” Though the question seemed more a means of flirting than of ascertaining his intentions.

“A friend of mine's father works for them, and I'd rather not be interrupted.” He'd managed to take hold of her hand and stroked it insinuatingly.

She giggled, then said quietly and quickly, “Not here. In the alley behind. Two o'clock.” She left, but brought an unasked for second cup of coffee and managed to trail her hand across his back. It had been a long time since he had felt a woman's touch, particularly in that manner, and he was surprised to find he was grateful for the café girl's attention.

The café began to fill with, as she had said, the little ones from the neighbouring firms, stepping out as much for something to break the monotony of the day as to provide nourishment to the body. Gérard happened to be one, and when he saw Julien, he disentangled himself from his companions and slipped into the chair Julien pushed towards him.

“What are you doing here?”

“I was about to leave, then I saw you. They're both gone. Left their lodgings, no notice, no word as to where they've gone. Where does Valland work?”

“I don't know.”

“How do you not know?”

“We never discussed it. It wasn't important.”

It was tremendously important – while in Paris, no one really dared outright ask Feuilly where he worked, he had dropped a few hints and finally let slip his current employer, because to never answer the unspoken question was to never make clear that one had no ties to the government. One could be embarrassed by the admission, but the admission eventually had to be made. If one could not trust one's friends to be discreet but still find you and warn you as necessary, then it was not going to be an effective revolutionary cell. But to say any of that would only scare Gérard further, and for him, at least, deniability was a necessity.

“If I cannot find him, then I at least need to see Lameire. Where does his father drink?”

“Why do you think I know?”

“Because you are in this neighbourhood every day, and I think you keep your eyes open, even if only to avoid people you don't want to chat with. Thank you for coming to me,” he added, throwing a bit of

praise to the nervous boy. "I know this must be very hard for you."

Gérard sighed. "The managers usually go to the Rabbit." Up the hill, just as Chantal had said.

"Thank you." He got up to leave – it ought to be the right time to arrive in advance of the bosses, who generally dined later than the clerks.

"I put a letter in the mail this morning," Gérard announced, his voice even higher than usual in his nervous strain.

Julien smiled and clasped his hand. "Thank you." Gérard wasn't so bad, really, he thought.

The Rabbit – really the Café Victor after several changes of hands, but colloquially still the Rabbit – was finer than where the clerks drank, but it was still a comfortable café of the old style. Only after the latest change in hands and slight redecoration did it acquire the class separation that now characterised it, as much from the higher prices as from the tables that were not covered in old graffiti. Julien arrived at the same time as several older men, including Savin, whom he did not acknowledge as was his right as an owner rather than an equal. He took a table from which he could watch the door, ordered only a glass of wine, and hoped he still recalled M. Lameire with any accuracy.

He did, indeed, and rose to greet the gentleman at the door. "My name is Julien Combeferre. I knew your son briefly. May we speak?" M. Lameire nodded his agreement and joined Julien at his table.

"You've come because of the girl."

"Of course. May I ask what happened to your son?"

"He has returned to Aix to finish his legal studies."

Julien's astonishment quickly faded as he focused on the logic – of course someone with resources and permission would want to put a police inquiry as far behind him as possible. "When did he leave?"

"After the police paid him an unwelcome visit." From his scandalised tone, it seemed that M. Lameire had not shared M. Enjolras' relationship with the *commissaire central*. "As a favour to me, one of the professors has agreed to mark him as present since the beginning of the semester, and I have hopes that Thierry can manage the rest himself. The only good this circumstance has engendered, monsieur, is that it has broken him of all his nonsense. I am sorry it came at the cost of a girl's life, and the interest of the police, but what is done is done, and may the outcome be happy. Good day to you."

"And to you, monsieur." They shook hands politely. The brief conversation had been rushed, but there was no need to keep M. Lameire against his will when there was so little to be said.

Lameire had run back to Aix. Well, it was for the best, Julien thought, and he would not suffer for it. Valland had bolted for who knew where, but no one really knew from where he had come, Lameire was

finally doing as his father believed he should, and Gérard would follow, in the middle of a semester but understandably eager to leave his parents' house at the earliest opportunity. They were scattered, but none seemed to be ruined, at least. But that left Henri completely alone in Marseille. He could not stay, Julien determined. Without companionship, he would stand alone on a street corner and give the police no choice but to follow up with him.

But how to convince M. Enjolras – and Henri himself, for that matter – that Julien must take Henri back to Paris with him?

Chapter 10

Julien wandered up and down the streets skirting the port, trying to think what he ought to do. He ought to go to Aix, find Lameire, and hear from him rather than his father what had happened. He ought to go straight to M. Enjolras, admit everything, and obtain his permission for Henri to go to Paris. He ought to go straight to Henri, tell him everything he had learned, and beg him to return with him regardless of what his father might want. He ought to find Valland and get the whole truth at last.

He suddenly heard someone call his name, and turned to see who might willingly know him. Chantal, hand on hip, smiling. Of course, he had not rejected the rendez-vous, merely forgotten it. And indeed, there was comfort of a sort to be found in his arm around a café girl, a firm breast in one hand and her round arse in the other, lips and bodies pressed together. “How did you know my name?”

“I asked who the handsomest man in Marseille was,” she replied with a cheeky smile.

“I fear you've got me confused with another.”

“I can't imagine there'd be anyone half so handsome as you.”

They kissed again, but Julien's heart was really not in it. He looked into her eyes, and stroked her cheek, and wondered what her sweetheart must think. Because she was a café girl, and she didn't take everyone into the alley for a kiss, he was certain, and how could a café girl who looked like her not have a sweetheart? “I think you're a decent girl, mademoiselle, and you wouldn't be out here for just anyone, but I think you'd be better off if you stayed decent. I'm not staying. There's no smart flat here for you, just me going back to Paris.”

“You've got a girl there.” She pouted, rather prettily. “I'm sorry I'm not fair and blonde like she must be.”

He smiled in spite of himself. “I haven't got a girl anywhere at the moment, and you're pretty as anything, and you know it, too.” He kissed her again, but quickly, without any real meaning. “Come, let us be friends and forget everything. I'll come in, and you can bring me a glass of wine and paper and ink. I've a letter to write.”

“To your girl?”

“To a friend, to whom I should like to praise you as the epitome of Marseillaise women.”

Indeed, he began his letter to Courfeyrac with the statement, “You will never forgive me for telling you that I have rejected the advances of the loveliest café girl I have ever seen. Her breasts, her hips, the curve of her jaw and the curl of her dark hair are all finer than any I have yet found in Paris. Yes, I do write to make you jealous, for you must admit that our native wind and sun produce a healthier complexion than Parisian gloom, even if the consumptive is in style.” He even let Chantal read it over his shoulder and suggest corrections before continuing.

But I do not write to discuss café girls. I hope Feuilly has told you what has brought me back to France. I need your help. Henri's friends have all scattered in the face of the police, all but one who had planned to leave town in a few months in any case and does not change his plans. Two of those friends are now or are soon to be attached to the law faculty at Aix. You and I both know that Aix is no place for anyone who can afford otherwise and certainly not for anyone who lives for the activities all our friends share. But for once, I am incapable of going forward.

Henri has rarely been out of Marseille, never out of his father's company. M. Enjolras is a good man whom I respect, but he is a widower, and none of us have had the heart to deprive him of the company of his only child. Henri did not go to Aix after sitting his bac not because he did poorly but because he could not bring himself to abandon his father against his father's wishes. And that is only to Aix, a mere 30 kilometers, not even a journey. I want to bring him back to Paris with me, where I know he will fall in with good company and where he will not daily be confronted by the false friends who left him at such an awful time.

But, and here I require your assistance, I do not know what arguments to marshal in support of such a plan, either for father or son. M. Enjolras was in Paris for some period of time, in the winter, prior to the Revolution. His memories of the city are very poor indeed, and one can understand it well enough. But you come from here, or nearly so, as does Prouvaire. How is it that neither of you were consigned to Aix? What arguments can I put forth as to the supremacy of Paris for purposes other than our usual one? The beauty of the café girls is hardly an inducement, as I am sure you will know, and he has not our tastes for theatre or opera.

I was lucky in that I was simply placed on my own in a city I already knew, that had been a home to me for my entire life, and I was under the guardianship of family, with some acquaintance though no great friends until I met you. How does one take that step into the unknown, without family, without friends, and with so much sorrow in one's heart? He would not be alone, of course, and he would not have to flit about from café to café in search of like-minded company, but how much easier I fear it would be to stay where everything is known, even if so much of what was known is gone. I do not want him to feel as if he has chosen to go into exile or that he must agree to the plan for my sake.

I know you do not know him, but you have an innate understanding of people; you seem to

always know just what to do and what to say. What do I do? What do I say? This letter is not private – all of our friends, except perhaps Feuilly, have had the experience of coming a great distance, of leaving behind family, all the things I have never had to bear. I wish to hear from them all, but I wish to hear it soon. Please write as soon as you can.

J. Combeferre

On a separate sheet, he addressed Feuilly:

My dear friend,

I have not forgotten to write, and I think you ought to be rather proud to receive this letter, particularly as I have sent it postage paid. I am in need of some very practical advice, and I do believe you are the only person who can help me. I will come straight to the point, as I know you would prefer it.

How does one find a man who does not want to be found? A man who has left his lodgings and does not admit to his place of employment. A man who very possibly might be a police informant. I do not know where to turn, but I am loath to let the matter drop. It is the matter we spoke of when I passed through Paris a few months ago. It proved not an accident at all, and I fear you may have been right. My friend and I are taking precautions, but I would like to get to the bottom of the matter if at all possible. To do that, I think I must speak with all my friend's acquaintance, and thus I should try to find this man. Please tell me what I should do. In this, as in so many things, I rely on your counsel.

In friendship,

J. Combeferre

“Have you got any sealing wax?” he asked Chantal when she came by again.

“Come to the counter.” She sealed the letters herself with the remains of a stick she found in a box under the counter, melted in one of the wall sconces. “I won't see you again, will I?”

“It's best not. You're a decent girl, I'm sure, and I hope my business will not keep me in town much longer.”

“There's prettier boys in town, anyway,” she said defiantly, bitterly.

Julien smiled. “I know that to be true. A good day to you, mademoiselle.”

He posted the letters, paying the postage for both, and hoped that he might receive a reply to either or both within a couple of weeks. Upon returning to the house, he closeted himself with Henri and broke what news he had.

“Lameire has gone to Aix, and Valland is gone. Gérard has no idea how to find him.”

“That's because Gérard prefers to know as little as possible, and it is better that way. Aix.” Henri nodded slowly. “Yes, I understand.”

“Do you?”

“The police came, he admitted everything to his father, and his father agreed to try the law experiment again. What else could it be? Have you looked for Valland at work?”

“Gérard does not know where he works, and I must admit, I know nothing about the man. You told me very little in your letters, and I never had the opportunity to meet him.”

“He is bookkeeping assistant for Southern Soap.” It was strange that what had felt a mystery was solved by such a bald statement.

“I shall look for him there tomorrow. I cannot help wishing you had a better class of friends.”

“Coming from you, I hope you do not mean what my father would mean.”

“I fear you have lowered yourself by going directly into business and spending your time with clerks,” Julien at last admitted. “And I do not entirely mean it in the sense of class, more in the sense of calibre. Not everyone has the opportunity to use all their talents, I know that as well as anyone, but I do wish you had a better circle of acquaintance.”

“I can find the flaws in the little I know of your friends, as well.”

“I do not doubt that you can.”

“If I listen to you, your greatest friend in Paris is a fan maker.” Was Henri mocking him?

“And I must not disparage a bookkeeping assistant at a soap factory. But where is he?” Julien insisted. “Feuilly spent a week of evenings at my side when I needed him. No, the police were not involved then, but I do not think a police investigation could keep him away if I needed his help or even just his friendship.”

“You never thought anything ill of Emilie.”

“No, I never did. I think little ill of Gérard as it is. He was always timid. I also rather think he has stayed away as much to keep the police away from you as for his own peace. It is the sort of thing he would do without telling anyone.”

“Yes, it is the sort of thing he would do,” Henri admitted, though he quickly returned to the attack.

“But you think ill of Valland.”

“I do not know Valland. He is an outsider.”

“You knew none of your current friends five years ago.”

“That is fair,” Julien replied, his even tone rather forced. “But I also think you could tell me more of my friends than I could tell you of Didier Valland. You wrote very little about him.”

“What was there to write?”

“I don't know. You are the one who knows him.”

“What is it you wish you knew?” Henri asked rather coldly.

What did Julien wish he knew? Anything he could ask would tell him almost nothing about the man's character. “Is he a native?”

“No. His father was promoted within the postal service to director in Marseille. A very pious man, it seems. Didier was supposed to go to the theological faculty at Aix, but he refused. He speaks no further about his family, and I need no further information. He is one of us, even if he was educated at the communal collège in Grasse. There is no reason for you not to trust him.”

“I don't mean to argue.”

“Then don't.”

“I'm sorry.”

Perhaps he had been in the wrong to trust so much to Gérard, Julien thought. He was the sort to want to know as little as possible to preserve the safety of his friends, because if he were caught, he would not hold out long under interrogation. It was something of a relief that the police cared more to insinuate jealousy rather than investigate the actual circumstances that had led to Emilie's death – a true investigation could end in all of the survivors arrested for various political acts, and Gérard's confessions would be a significant part of the prosecutor's case. Yet Julien could not hold it against the boy – he was as he was, and they all knew it quite well. It was no mystery when Gérard was frightened because it was his daily expression. That he had acted at all, and for years, had been immensely brave.

One did not think that of Valland. Southern Soap. It was unexpected, though Julien was uncertain why. The position was little different to what Gérard had done for Serre and now did for Lucien Granier, only with a bit more arithmetic. Perhaps it was merely that he could not imagine the police using an assistant bookkeeper at Southern Soap as a spy. And not because of the bad puns Courfeyrac would make on him being too clean to be an informant, either. Southern Soap. The office was connected to the workshop, which meant he would have to spend the day in the industrial sector of the

city. Even if Henri were annoyed, Julien felt he had no choice: the investigation had to be made. He could not rest if he left such obvious stones unturned.

Chapter 11

Southern Soap occupied a large, dirty building on the northeastern outskirts of the city, a stinking haze surrounding it in the temporary absence of a wind to blow the smoke and stench away. Julien knocked at the office door and told the man who opened that he was looking for Didier Valland.

“Join the queue. He left without notice, a few months back.”

“How far back?”

The man thought for a moment. “November? His idea of notice was to send a letter after he didn't show up for two days.”

“Have the police been here looking for him?”

“How would you know about that? I told them the same thing I've told you. I don't want any trouble; I don't know anything.”

“Thank you. I won't trouble you any further.”

So the police had come for him at work. They had missed him at his flat and had missed him at work. Would they have put up such a show for their man? Their man would allow himself to be caught and interrogated and gone looking for the others and complained in false fear, wouldn't he? Which means he was not a police spy, in all likelihood, but the killer himself, or at least the connection to the murderers. But where was he? Would he have left town? Where would he go? To Italy? To Corsica? Toulon? Back to Grasse? Marseille was the largest city in the region, the best place to hide. Anywhere else was small enough he would be noticed. Of course, it being a port city, he could have hopped a ship months ago and be halfway to China by now.

Julien knew he had to go to Aix. Lameire might have a clue.

He did not relish telling Henri that Valland had truly disappeared, but it was necessary. “The police were looking for him, too.”

“You see, they would not have to put so much effort into finding their own spy.”

“That is well enough, but it does not mean he is innocent.”

“Will you not stop until you can completely destroy the man's character?”

“But you agree with me, don't you? There's something not at all right here.”

“Everything was fine until someone murdered my wife,” Henri insisted with a fierceness he usually reserved for others. But he permitted Julien to apologise and embrace him.

“I’m sorry. Is it such a terrible thing to want answers? I cared for her, too. She was nearly my sister.”

“Do you truly want to know? What if it were Valland? I do not suspect him,” Henri insisted, “but you will have it so. Therefore, let us have it so. Would that make you happy? Would that be a relief? That she and I took her killer into our bosom? That is what you will have. Would you really have that sort of a truth? Could you live with that sort of a truth?”

“The only unbearable truth would be if you were guilty or her father were guilty, and I know those cannot be true. The rest is the world we must live with.”

“What if it were my father?”

“What?”

“What if it were my father?” Henri repeated harshly. “You can accuse a man without any sort of proof. So can I. Could you live with that?”

Julien looked away. “You have made your point.”

“Have I?”

“Yes,” he snapped. “We are not the Terror. I’m going to Aix tomorrow,” he added tiredly. “I may be away for a couple of days.”

The mistral came up about halfway there, causing what had been a quick jaunt to become something approaching the feel of a journey. Julien was grateful to take shelter in the first inn he came to inside the walls. Seeing that Othello was well taken care of, he warmed himself by the smoky fire. He had been riding into the bitter wind most of the morning.

Aix was small, and seemed somehow faded, not with the brightness of the sun or the strength of the wind, but merely with age. Julien had spent most of his life in Paris and Marseille – even his English sojourn was conducted primarily in London. Aix was not on the road between Lyon and Marseille as Avignon was, and it did not have the history of Avignon, either. But because there had been a medieval university there, when the entire educational system was reordered under the Revolution and then under Bonaparte, Aix retained the law faculty and the theological faculty for the region. Yet despite the presence of students, it was a sleepy town. Yes, it was winter, and the wind was up, so none of the cafés spilled out into the streets, but there was not even a café on every corner. It was a profoundly depressing place – just as old as Paris (Marseille was older, with claims that the Greeks had been there, but in the constant rebuilding through commercial and industrial expansion, it felt new), in a far more beautiful setting than the capital, yet it was so obviously dying.

Asking his way to the law school, Julien managed to find both the edifice and a selection of cafés where the students almost certainly drank. Ducking into one, he found it not full at that time of day, but not wholly empty, either. Most students in Aix actually went to class, it appeared. He ordered a some wine and settled in, pretending to read a slim volume he had brought with him but listening to the conversations around him as best he could. His presence finally got the attention of a young man who had been haranguing his companions as to the state of his gambling debts, a state that would be unthinkable in Paris because Julien could pay it out of his pocket right now.

“Hey. Hey!” he called until Julien deigned to look up. “Haven't seen you around here before. Who are you waiting for?”

“I'm waiting for no one, but I thought I might find a man I know here.”

“Who? I know everyone.”

“He is only recently arrived in Aix.”

“Trust me, I know everyone.”

“Thierry Lameire?”

“He doesn't drink here. If he did, I wouldn't be here. Thirty francs I owe him. Thirty!”

“Dice or cards?”

“Cards. He doesn't lower himself to dice.”

“I should have known. As it happens, I have been asked by a friend of his to discharge a debt. Where might I find him?”

The gambler checked his watch. He was not in bad shape if he still had a watch. “Lectures will let out in probably ten minutes. He'll go straight to René's. In the rue Courteissade.”

“Thank you.” To be sociable, he paid for their drinks before he left.

The wind was stronger – the mistral back in earnest. It was hard enough to keep hold of his hat, much less to keep his coat wrapped tightly around him in the bitter onslaught. He took a wrong turn, ended up utterly lost in the medieval streets, and had to ask directions again. Still, he was safely inside just before the hordes of students descended.

Julien recognised Lameire immediately, the only dandy in the café, though Lameire stared at him as if trying to place him. But when he introduced himself, Lameire blanched. “Look, I'm sorry about what happened, but Christ, why the hell do you follow me here?”

“Because I need to know what happened.”

“I wasn't there. I didn't kill her, I wasn't jealous of Enjolras, I wasn't jealous of her – I had it all out with the police, and I really want don't to talk about it any further.”

“Please? I need to know what there is to know.”

“Not here.”

“Your rooms?”

“Hell no.” He sighed. “Follow me.” They ended up at a quiet restaurant near the Hotel de Ville, no obvious students in sight. “What do you think you need to know?”

“What did the police try to ask you?”

“Ask? It was more 'Please, monsieur, confess to this murder, because we really don't want to do our jobs'. You know how you felt when whoever it was told you the news, so you can imagine how awful it was to hear it from the police. Did I like her hanging around all the time? I don't know. A girl shouldn't make me feel that stupid. But by the same token, I wouldn't have minded at all if she'd been a man. You know how confusing it all was. But dead? Kicked to death in an alley? I did not sign up for girls getting kicked to death in alleys.”

“I don't blame you for coming back here,” Julien insisted. “But could you have told Henri something? Expressed some sympathy to her family? He intended to marry her, and he thought you were friends.”

“What could I say? 'Sorry I didn't protect your would-be-wife, who could have beat any of us in a boxing match'? I'm not built like the rest of you. He's out there on street corners again, of course, with you beside him. Because this is proof of something, either the unfeelingness of the police, the cries of the people unheard, maybe even the lengths to which the high ones will trample on those who dare to make a noise. I can't do it. We got a girl killed. I had to get out of there, and yes, I am ashamed that I'm not like him.”

“He isn't on street corners,” Julien told him sadly.

“In the cafés, then.”

“He leaves the house only to walk in his own gardens, and even that took a great deal of coaxing. I have gotten him off the property only once.”

“Christ.”

“I came from London. You were not even across town and did not send a message. Neither did

Gérard, though I think in his case his courage was wanting and his sense of duty misplaced, a fatal combination but not unexpected. Valland is gone. Henri was with her family when she died; he answered the police questions then. Even they never came again for him. Her family have had a letter from Gérard, but no visits except for me. Henri has had no visits except for me, no letters, not a single word or sign from men he considered his friends. Gérard is afraid, and you are ashamed. And Valland has left his flat and his job, so can you see why I think there is something no one has dared to tell me?"

Lameire looked away for a long time, but he made no effort to go, and he seemed chastened rather than angry. "Valland did not kill her, I'll swear to that, but if anyone was jealous, it was he."

"I liked her quite well, we would have been good friends if she had been a man, but even I can't see her as being quite to other men's tastes if they aren't looking for a laundry maid."

"Not her. You and I and everyone else with a pair of eyes knows perfectly well that Henri Enjolras is considered a more eligible match than men of longer fortune and better name – a better match even than you, I'm sure, and I note you don't argue – strictly because he is beyond handsome. That's a bloodline anyone would want to invite in. He's a lucky bastard and I hate him for it. Did Enjolras tell you anything about Valland?"

"Never very much, and it has worried me. Valland's father runs the post office, held a position in Grasse before coming to Marseille, and Valland himself was educated there, certainly with a strong emphasis on religion if Henri is correct that M. Valland is a pious man. Something about preferring not to enter the priesthood and a break with the family. He worked at Southern Soap as an assistant bookkeeper. This is all I know, and I have learned it all within the past few days."

"It's all true, as far as it goes. I mean, it's all what Valland told us, at any rate. He was at Southern Soap, Henri was speaking in one of the cafés that cater to the actual workers, he somehow saw us and waited around to talk to us. About a year ago, it probably was. It was definitely winter. There wasn't much to tell, really. Until a few months ago. If any of the five of us were jealous of any of the others, it was Valland, and he was jealous of Mlle Duchamp."

"This is not a time for jokes."

"It isn't a joke. I've two eyes in my head and a decent enough brain to put together what I saw. I've been a dilettante, not an idiot. I saw how he'd look at Enjolras, and how he'd look at Mlle Duchamp, but I didn't quite know what I was seeing for a long time. It isn't exactly unexpected that someone would appear to not take kindly to a girl among men, doing men's intellectual work. But the way he'd look at Enjolras, like the café girls would look at him. That interest, that need to follow him with his eyes, but not too eager, not desperate, not as if one would actually do anything. Except one day, I come in on them, and Valland is wiping blood from a split lip, and Enjolras is wiping his hand with a handkerchief. No one said anything, and I said nothing to Gérard, but it's pretty obvious what happened."

"Spell it out for me," Julien insisted.

“You know Enjolras as well as any of us – better probably – but you haven't always been here. Valland wouldn't be the first idiot to try to make his affections known. There was an older boy at school who tried to make advances, and yes, I know this one for certain because Enjolras asked me afterwards what he should have done. What he did do was push the boy off and say nothing ever again. He probably gave him that look, which is enough to scare anyone away. Valland had little sense of tact. He probably said something about Mlle Duchamp being mannish and therefore Enjolras should get the real thing, and thus earned himself a punch in the jaw.”

Julien dismissed the whole thread. “You're speculating.”

“Enjolras punched him for some reason. That much I saw. And those looks were hard to mistake, and they didn't go away, either.”

“You said yourself that you did not know what you were seeing.”

“It fits together.”

“No, what fits together is that Valland idolised Henri and despised Emilie. He did or said something that was egregious enough for Henri to lash out, but not so bad as to be banned from your company.”

“Then why did he run?”

“That's what I'm trying to find out.”

“The police are focused on making one of us out to be jealous. He really was, so he bolted.”

“Or he was a spy of some sort, sent into your midst, and he gave information to her killers and then left once he was paid. The police only came looking for him after he was gone. Did you see him after you were questioned, in order to tell him that the police were bent on making everyone out to be a jealous lover?”

Lameire paused for a moment. “He wasn't a spy. Trust me, he wasn't a spy. The police down here are stooges.”

“The police are not the only people who would benefit from silencing all of you.” What had that pause meant? Julien cursed himself for taking the bait when he should have pressed Lameire to answer the question.

“Yes, they are, actually. We're a sideshow, and at least I know it. It was fun playing at revolution, but it's Marseille. The government treats us like we're a backwater, and politically, we are a backwater. No one cares. Not even 'the people'. We make noise, the cops stare, people point and laugh, and it's all in good fun. Come, you've been working at the centre of things. You know perfectly well that we're doing nothing. We might as well be Calvinists in Rome.”

“Do you really believe your own story?”

“I do,” Lameire said firmly. “You weren't here. You didn't see.”

“You saw a look and the end of a fight.”

“Enjolras had blood on his lip. It came away on a glass, later. There was no cut.”

“So now you are suggesting that Valland insulted Emilie, received a punch for his pains, and then forced a kiss on Henri.” Julien shook his head. “I'm done hearing stories.”

“Where else did the blood come from, then?”

“Perhaps his hand, the one he was wiping when you walked in. I was hoping for information, not prurient speculation.”

“It's a theory, not speculation.”

“Yes, that much is true, something that has yet to be proved. Good day.”

Julien got as far as the door before Lameire called him back. “I am sorry. About everything that's happened. And he didn't do anything, except possibly try to kiss Enjolras and feel guilty as hell when Mlle Duchamp turned up dead. I swear he didn't do anything.”

“Nobody did anything, then or after. That's the trouble. None of you did anything, anything at all. You did not put yourselves out for her or for him. I could never forgive myself if I abandoned a friend, even if it was safer for him that I not act. No one has yet been prosecuted for sending a note that says 'I'm sorry' for an event that was published in the newspaper.” He let the door slam on the way out.

Chapter 12

Julien stayed the night in Aix, hoping that the wind would calm down by morning. It hadn't, but Othello was rested, so he set out late and arrived back in Marseille sometime after noon. It appeared there had been a bright spot in his absence – not only was Henri back out in the wind, but there had been a self-flagellating letter from Gérard. It was hardly the condolence, or apology, Julien had hoped he would write, though it included both those elements among the rambling insistence of fault, but it was something. There would be nothing from Lameire.

But the days were strained. Henri had not entirely forgiven him for his implications that Valland was a spy, and Julien could not entirely give up his paranoia. Lameire's theory, which he refused to impart to Henri, kept eating at him. It was such an odd theory to invent. Why claim a man a deviant when he was in no position to defend himself?

Even worse, the next time he went into town, merely to see if there were anything of the least interest in one of the bookshops, a much older man fell into step with him and directed him to the hôtel de ville. The police had finally decided to take note of his inquiry.

“You have a reputation, M. Combeferre,” the commissaire central told him. “You have a file. This file even contains a note stating that there is further information in the ministry's files in Paris. Do you dislike how we have conducted our investigation?”

“If I may speak freely, monsieur?” Julien asked, his tone mixing a great deal of courtesy with the insistence that he had learned from his mother.

“Go on.”

“You and I both know that my friend runs a side show. The only people in Marseille who believed anything they said were they themselves. Regardless of how we feel about it, it is the truth. But Henri Enjolras intended to marry Emilie Duchamp, and she is dead, which of course leads me to wonder just what happened. It has been my investigation, to try to set my mind at peace, and it has no bearing on the legal issues. I was under the impression that your investigation had been completed and that I was not inserting myself into your business.”

“My business. Why did I get myself into a business where dead girls are my business?” the commissaire central muttered. “Do you know what has happened because of this mess? I didn't have a political report to send to Paris. I had a dead girl to send to Paris. Paris doesn't care about one dead girl. I can think of eighty people, at least, who wanted to teach her a lesson, and I don't know that I blame them, but I certainly didn't need a body.” Julien let him rant. The commissaire may have talked about his file, but he was certainly treating him as Richard Combeferre's son rather than a possible suspect in any political investigation. “Look, I'll make you a deal. Make a nuisance of yourself, and I'll let you investigate to your heart's content.”

“This deal strongly implies that you need me more than I need you. What if I have completed my investigation? What if one of your men already told M. Enjolras everything I care to know? My actions in Marseille – and in Aix, since I know you know I went to Aix – have been strictly legal.”

“But do you know everything?”

“One of your men told M. Enjolras that she had been raped. At least, that is how I understood the idea of 'other violence' in a girl who had been beaten to death. I also know the general extent of her injuries from discussion with her father. She probably died of a punctured lung, when someone kicked her and broke a rib. I have seen these injuries before. I would not rule out the idea of head trauma, as she was unconscious from when she was found until her death. Based on her height and weight, she was attacked by several men in concert. And since no appeals or reports of other attacks were published in the newspaper, she was singled out. I am not a fool, monsieur, and the one thing I did not know, you have since told me. You and your men had every reason to want her alive, not as one of the people you have sworn to protect but so that you might continue to file political reports to Paris. As a gentleman, I

wish you good luck, but please excuse me for preferring not to assist you in such endeavours. Am I free to go?"

Julien was free to go. But it had taken all the strength he had to maintain such a front, to spit out the known facts in a detached manner to the commissaire central himself, and he felt terribly weak and terribly close to tears. He hailed a cab to take him home, rather fearing he might collapse publicly otherwise. Indeed, once hidden from view, he fell into harsh, wracking sobs and had trouble getting his breath, though he managed to force himself to put on a semblance of equilibrium as the carriage came to a halt at the gates of the Enjolras estate. He said nothing of the afternoon's events to either Henri or M. Enjolras. It would merely upset them further to know the police continued to take an interest.

When the mail came a few days later, and Julien had replies from Paris, it was as if spring had come.

You think I always know the right thing to say? You really never heard how I met Prouvaire? I accidentally completely offended him, and I'm lucky he's forgiven me. I swear I have my foot in my mouth more often than out.

But the bigger issue here is why would a person not want to be in Paris? It's Paris! The centre of the world. Shouldn't our interests be reason enough for anyone who shares our interests to want to come here? But setting that aside, since we cannot admit certain interests to our fathers, why are we here? For the simple reason that only the poor who are desperately trying to raise themselves to the level of the bourgeois are at Aix. Socially, we are too good for it. Oh, sure, my brother did his degree at Aix, but there was still the war going on and it was thought he'd be safer closer to home. No accidental conscription and unlikely there'd be a sudden desire to run off and join the army's last-ditch effort against the English. But the war was the only reason Gilles was at Aix. My father never considered sending me there, and after some of the stunts I pulled at home, you'd think he wouldn't have wanted me so far from sight. Jehan's father never considered it for him. Have you ever been to Aix? It's smaller than Avignon, even, and everyone is local. You'll make better connections with southerners in Paris than you will in Aix.

Bahorel comes from Languedoc. He may call his parents peasants, but even they know they get better value for money supporting their son in Paris than in Toulouse. He's been here for years and he claims he barely even suggests he's still studying anymore – the benefit is in the friendships, the connections. If everything these days is back to whom you know rather than what you can do, and everyone of importance is in Paris, why would any man of ambition stay in the provinces? A farmer in Languedoc can figure that out. I can't possibly understand your question because I cannot comprehend a man of wealth and intelligence who would not deprive himself of company for three years in order to advance the family name. What sort of a bourgeois is your M. Enjolras?

As for your friend, he has to be longing to get out of there. The South has only natural beauty – the people are stifling. It was actually in one of the papers the other day that only in the South are there enough priests for all the parishes. That says everything right there, doesn't it?

Anyone who enjoys what we enjoy cannot possibly want to stay. He's been there too long already. What is that scientific phrase you would enjoy so much? Inertia has set in. (And here I thank Joly, because I know neither physics nor physic.) He can't move forward without a push because he's stuck in conservative mire. What does he think he can do in Marseille? If he stays only out of loyalty to his father, then you've got to convince the old man that he's keeping his son back. Bahorel says to tell him that he's acting like an Ancien Regime peasant and he needs to enter the nineteenth century. (Because that worked ever so well on his parents? His parents aren't stupid.) You know better than to listen to him, but it isn't wholly bad advice. I suppose everyone feels sorry for the old boy, but there is something he will love as much as his son, and you've got to play on that. It may be as simple as money, it may be social position, he may even be an eccentric who can be made to believe that one simply gets a better education in Paris than in that hole known as Aix. But play on whatever he loves in order to get permission, and then get you both the hell out of there.

Let me know what I can do. If I'm at all convincing, it's in person, not by letter.

I'm holding down the fort just fine, and, I'll have you know, I even have a new recruit. Turns out your friend Joly is friends with a chap I know from around the law school, called Lesgle. So we've got another pair of hands. It's been quiet since November – aren't you lucky you didn't get back until after the riots? None of our set is in any trouble, if you've been at all worried. But then, Feuilly would have told you when you met with him if there were any real trouble. I might say I'm jealous, except for that kind of trouble, I know I'd go straight to you or Feuilly. You've got the head for it, and he's got the experience (speaking of trouble, he hasn't missed a riot possibly ever; lucky bastard – make sure he tells you about November, because I know he didn't say a word when he saw you). I do hope to see you back here soon, and to meet your friend. Joly's been saving some medical articles for you, he wants me to say, if you're up to that sort of thing. He won't be offended if you're not. They're more scientific than practical.

Tell me what you need, and I'll send whatever I can or set up whatever I can. I have two sisters who like me, one in Orange, one in Avignon, and I am absolutely willing to put these good married ladies at your disposal if either may be of use. You can't leave anyone to rot in Aix. I'd never forgive you.

RC

Julien could not help smiling. Courfeyrac's good humour was always contagious, even in a letter. And he was right – no one who could manage better should be permitted to rot in Aix. Aix was rotting away as it was, and to send anyone there would be to lose him. Everyone else of his class was in Paris – even men of lower class went to Paris if they thought they could scrape together the money. He had fixated so much on Paris, but Courfeyrac was right – Paris is not necessarily about Paris but about all the worthies in France. Indeed, in Europe. M. Enjolras was a climber – one could tell from the house alone, much less from the divided nature of his economic holdings – and he would give in if pressed because he could not justify ruining his son for his own selfishness. And if he agreed, Henri would have no more reason to stay.

The other letter, folded into Courfeyrac's even though Julien would gladly have paid the receipt, was from Feuilly:

Let us come straight to the point. How to find a man, you ask? That depends upon the man. Is he a man like you, a man like me, or a man of an altogether different sort? A man like you has money, high acquaintances, the possibility of getting a passport written out very quickly with no questions asked. He will have left town, possibly even the country. A man like me, on the other hand, has no money. To disappear entirely costs money – lost wages at the job left without notice, possibly advance rent paid to avoid the landlord sending collectors on a search. He can walk out of town, certainly, but he will have no passport if he must leave quickly, and he may not have great facilities with falsehood. Marseille is a large city, is it not? It will be easier for him to move across town and take whatever employment he can for a time. Also, you are on the sea. What does it take for a man to become a sailor? That may be the way for a poor man to escape town, which will certainly hinder your search. But if he is a man of an altogether different sort, then you will never be able to find him. His entire life that you think you know, down to his identity papers, is a lie. His appearance may be false as well. He may hide in plain sight under a different name, different appearance, different voice, different class. You do not want to find such a man – leave that to his fellows and the police.

But that does not wholly answer your question. Let us suppose that your man has not left town, that he can still be found. If he is an honest man, he will not have changed his name, though he may try to rent a room under a different name. Do you go to every business in search of him? Of course not. He will get wind of what you are doing long before you ever come close to him, and it may force him out of town.

But you know as well as I do how to find a man. How would you find me? Think about it. Where would you look for me if I left my flat, left my job, avoided the cafés you know I frequent? Everyone has something they cannot leave behind, even if they are hiding. An interest, a need, something that makes that man who he is. For me, you would scour the churches of Paris. Another man might be found in the balcony of a particular theatre that he cannot quite bring himself to give up, even if he were accustomed to the pit in happier days. Yet another might exchange the Tuileries for the Luxembourg. There will prove one thing he cannot set aside, and that is how you will find him.

I wish I were not giving you such advice, that you were not in need of such advice. Things are not at all well with you, and I hope you will return soon and put this business behind you as best you can. Not because we should avoid the nasty events in life, but that they will swallow us if we pay them too much attention. You care so much for others and so little for yourself that I must insist you be selfish, just this once. Be as careful as ever you have been.

F.

Julien was so grateful for the letters because they they came from his friends, men he knew and trusted,

who sought to help a person they had never met simply because that man was also his friend.

Was it worth trying to find Valland? To see if Lameire's idiotic theory had a kernel of truth? To at least find out what had happened, why everyone defended him halfheartedly? Would that mean seeking out the deviants in Marseille? Where did the deviants go in Marseille? In Paris, everyone knew they paraded certain walks in the Tuileries and in a certain dance hall, none of the women were actually women. What were the equivalents in conservative, pious, mercantile Marseille? And would Henri know enough of the man's habits so that Julien would not have to be taken for a deviant himself, searching among the deviants? That would at least add interest to his police file. Was he giving too much credence to Lameire's theory by even worrying about the deviant population of Marseille?

It was time to apologise, at the very least, and admit to Lameire's theory, to see what Henri's reaction might be. Henri was outside, in the wind and the sun, almost looking like the child of nature he quite patently was not. This would be easier in nice weather, Julien thought, if we could do this in the garden, under starry skies. But he could not wait for the weather. February was the worst month for the mistral, M. Enjolras had told him, and it seemed to be true. One had perhaps a day to catch one's breath, often a day of rain that had been held back by the wind, before the battle began all over again. They had only just recovered from the last, when snow had been blown down from the mountains. Julien was beginning to discern the difference in the winds, how the stronger came more from the north and brought nothing but misery for periods of time he thought impossible, while the wind purely out of the west was only a touch more mild, but lasted only a day or three at the most. This was the wind in which Henri was prone to go walking, and it had some of the characteristics of the summer mistral, if one could forget how bloody cold it was. Julien watched him from the window for some time – he was obviously cold, clutching his coat tightly around him, but there was something delightfully natural in how he faced the wind, his golden hair streaming behind, the red in his cheeks a welcome contrast to the pale, shaken figure Julien had found two months ago. February was passing quickly. The parties for Mardi Gras were only two days away, and Julien found it strange to be so isolated at a time when he was usually in Paris, partaking of the fêtes that had more of the Pagan than of the Christian to his mind. Even as a child, he would watch the carriages arrive to take his neighbours away and try to guess what costumes they might have hidden under their cloaks based on the wig or mask or hat he could see. Here, the balls would be in the city, and he could probably wrangle an invitation to one, but perhaps it was best this year to set aside the usual festivities. He was embroiled in masks enough.

Out in the garden, the wind gusted into a roar before falling back into a howl. Henri permitted Julien to slip an arm around his shoulders and guide him back to the house. One simply could not have a conversation in that wind. “I'm sorry for my suspicions about Valland. But you must admit his behaviour has been suspicious.”

“It hasn't been suspicious in the least. He is not a local, he does not get on with his father, there is nothing to keep him here if he seeks to avoid the police.”

“It hurts me to think your friends do not care for you as I do.”

“Could anyone?”

Julien couldn't help smiling. "Perhaps not. But while I love no one as I love you, I would find a way to express some sympathy in this sort of situation. I am glad Gérard has finally discovered his own backbone. But I would like to know if Valland knows something, if his fear is perhaps more justified than the others'. Do you know how I ought to try to find him?"

"So you can accuse him to his face of being a spy and a murderer?"

"No," Julien said firmly. "To see if he can find his own backbone. If he is not involved in the crime, he will almost certainly know nothing about it, but if he was your friend, perhaps he may want to express his sympathies in a form that will not be intercepted by the police."

"There is no point."

"Isn't there?"

"He will do what he will do, and he must be left to it. Perhaps he has taken ship and is long gone, in any case."

Julien examined him curiously. "You don't actually think that, do you?" The statement had not been terribly promising.

"It doesn't matter."

"A man in hiding always has something he cannot let go, something not wholly obvious, but a part of his character that he cannot cut out. What is in Valland's character that he cannot cut out?"

"How am I to know?"

"You are his friend, are you not?"

"We have not been friends for some time. He was an associate, a useful one, a man who understood struggle and who wished to help the cause."

Lameire was a least right that there had been a falling out, an awkward one by the way Henri would not look at him as he continued to press his case. "But you were friends once. You trusted him with your life, your freedom – even in the end, you trusted him. He is not a stranger to you. What must I do to find him?"

"How can you go from calling him a spy to calling him my friend?"

"If he was not one, he must be the other."

"That is a fallacy I never expected to hear from you. In theory, he could be both or he could be

neither.”

“No, because if he were a spy, then he was never your friend.”

“Judas was never Jesus' friend? Then why did he hang himself?”

“Why did he betray him at all? Isn't that the difference between a friend and an acquaintance? That a friend is someone you would go to any lengths for, even if it meant accepting the consequences yourself to keep them from him?”

“Who are your greatest friends in Paris?”

“Courfeyrac and Feuilly,” Julien answered without hesitation.

“Would you go to prison for either of them?”

“Yes. And they would do the same for me.”

“Can a man so divide his affections that he can have four where there once was one?”

“I have taken no affection away from you, brother. You took none from me when you fell in love, did you? One does not have a finite supply of love that must be split among all one's acquaintance.”

“I care for the future more than I care for either you or her,” Henri finally said softly, fervently. “I could sell you both out and string myself up tonight if it meant that tomorrow, all the ills of the world could be washed away. I love you more than any man, but I do not love you more than mankind.”

“I do not expect anything else of you.”

“Emilie understood. She said something to Valland about it. He mistook the statement as being about something else entirely. Once he was corrected, he chose not to leave, and I forgave him his selfish impulse. He has done nothing wrong.”

“But there is a vast gulf between nothing wrong and something right. Gérard and Lameire have done nothing wrong, have endured questioning from the police and not turned traitor in their fear, but neither have they done anything right. No, I take it back. Gérard is too often too scared to do anything right, but he has in this instance, just rather late.” Julien would never admit that he had pushed Gérard into writing that letter. “But Lameire cares more for his own skin than for anything else. Valland may have done nothing wrong, but what has he not done?”

“He does not think as the rest of us, that is all. How can I tell you where to find him if I do not know how he thinks?”

“How is he different from us? Tell me,” Julien asked, as kindly as he could.

“Lameire told you something. Just say what you want rather than try to push me into saying it for you.”

“Lameire has ridiculous theories that concern no one but himself. What he admitted to, objectively, was one day seeing Valland with a cut lip and you wiping blood off your hand. He then drew unwarranted conclusions.”

“Yes, I hit him. There was a misunderstanding. All has been forgiven and forgotten.”

“Lameire thinks there is something unnatural about Valland.”

“Unnatural? You may as well tell me what ridiculous gossip you've been sold.”

“I am not saying I believe it, merely that I cannot get the insinuation out of my head. Lameire thinks you punched Valland because he tried to kiss you.”

Henri stared at him in what Julien feared at first was horror, that Lameire was terrifyingly correct. And then he started laughing, actually laughing. “He thought – Christ. I admit to him once, about one boy, years ago, and he thinks the world wants to fall at my feet. Valland is a bitter misogynist who made some unfortunate comments about Emilie, but he is well attuned to the nature of the semi-skilled labourer, and thus he continued of use once he apologised. We must educate ourselves, not only the people. There is no use looking for a man who is innocent and not particularly sorry. He probably ran from the police because he knew Lameire would tell them about the fight.”

Henri sounded perfectly normal for once, but Julien was not soothed in the least. “Why did you not tell me any of this before?”

“Because it doesn't matter.”

“If he hated Emilie so much, and she continued to meet with them without your protection, is it not possible he could support the cause but want her removed?” he pressed.

“It may be possible, remotely, but it is not probable. He could not face us if he had done something so underhanded.”

“He does not face you now. How may I find him?”

“So you can chase down Lameire's ridiculous theory?” Henri sighed. “He has broken with his father, but he still attends mass every Sunday. Try the churches.”

“Thank you.” Henri may have found the whole thing ridiculous, but Lameire was not an utter fool. He did not see deviants everywhere, and something had to have put the idea into his head. There had been no kiss, but something was still not right. A pious deviant would try to keep his temptations in check,

and such an endeavour would be impossible aboard ship. It made sense that a man of that character would not have escaped town in the easiest manner. And he would stay in the South, where there were enough priests to help him. He may even hate women more than the average man because they have no utility to him. Nothing Henri had said had ruled out deviance, merely the single deviant act Lameire hypothesised. And the deviant always left himself open to discovery and blackmail, which, in a man more devoted to his own safety than that of a woman he hated, could be a direct route to betrayal. Julien felt he had no choice but to get to the bottom of the matter before it consumed all his thoughts.

Chapter 13

Julien had given up on religion a long time before, possibly even before his first communion, he feared. Feared because he had a distinct sense now that he had looked upon the first communion as a test and had found it wanting. Other people found consolation in religion, a sense of their place in the world or an external arbiter for their warring emotions, but he found none of it. Feuilly had tried to explain belief, but they both learned from that experience only that belief cannot be explained. It didn't help that by that point, he had loaned Feuilly enough books that the fanmaker could say, "Objectively, an interventionist god is ludicrous, and calling on the saints as personal intercessors even more so. That alone could allow a man to label me a Protestant, but I do believe in transubstantiation. What a tragedy, to deny it! It may be a matter of only wanting the miracle, but isn't the miracle itself about belief? There is no miracle without belief. There may not even be a god without belief. If the classical gods existed only in the minds of their believers, then my god doesn't exist in the objective world, either. And I'm fine with that."

"But you're not actually a Catholic. You don't know for sure you've been baptised, I don't even know how they let you take communion when you've never had catechism, and to be perfectly frank, you don't even listen to the priests when you go to mass."

"The priests are bureaucrats, and the government is on their side. They don't let a child be born without baptising it. I swear they try to baptise the Jews. God isn't in those priests. God is in the church itself, in the music of the mass and fading gilt on the altar. That is God, and He is my salvation, in this world and in the next. I'm no more crazy than you," he had added, which was perhaps true.

But Restoration Catholicism mixed ill with a scientific mind. Julien had been fascinated by the Protestants among whom he lived in England. So much of what he had seen published in France was about religion, about faith, about the act of believing – the English pulled apart the Bible and analysed the text and talked about why a thing was so. Their faith was designed around investigation, it was a thing to be supported rather than entered into blindly. Aspects of Genesis were not holding up so well as new scientific discoveries pushed up against the boundaries of ancient belief, but even the ancients had argued over the circumference of the earth. If they continued the investigation, they seemed certain it would all fall into place. In the end, English Protestantism was interesting, but it tried to lead to the same end, an omniscient, omnipotent being who controlled all, except for the demon he had created, because he had created all. But the world was too messy for such a god, a god who seemingly left his creation in the mire and turned away when they begged for his help, yet could dole out salvation once everyone was dead. The ancients had sought solace in the idea of many gods, that of course there

was chaos because the world was a battle, all these great but equal beings fighting for supremacy and we humans merely their pawns. A medieval combat of still higher order, the knights going at each other bravely and beautifully but without real harm to their well-armoured selves, while the peasants were flattened in droves beneath their hooves for their sometimes petty aims. Factions were a natural order in which he could more easily believe. It saddened him, but a man could only embrace what he felt in his heart. To make any further attempts would have seemed a mockery of those who truly believed. He would be glad to be proved wrong, or right, that there might be some justification in any view of the world, but he could not even imagine what such a proof might be.

Still, he found himself at a different church every Sunday, seeking Valland. And he had to admit that Feuilly was right, the sung mass was beautiful, even in chapels tucked away in working class neighbourhoods. It lacked the majesty of the choirs of the great cathedrals, but it was beautiful all the same, even when focused on the altar, the priest with his back to the believers. The only beauty in these people's lives. Feuilly had put himself into a position where his work was beauty, but there came days when he would end up muttering, "If I never have to see another fucking wood nymph, it will be too soon." If Bahorel were about, there would be some lecherous plays on words, and discussions of wood nymphs fucking, which generally considerably lightened Feuilly's mood, but the point was that even the creation of a beautiful object was work, and when repeated, all beauty was leached from it. No girl who made silk flowers or did fine embroidery would consider her product an art, merely a living achieved with some skill. Did the priests still see the beauty in the churches where they served? Did they hear the music of the mass? Or did they, like any other worker in the luxury trades, see only the needed repetition after so many years of repetition?

A different church every Sunday. Feuilly said he had spent one spring in like manner, and it was fascinating to hear him talk about it, perhaps especially because few young people of any class spent any time in Parisian churches. The performance was the same, but the audience and theatre differed wildly. Marseille was perhaps only one-sixth the size of Paris, but it still provided enough churches to occupy Julien through Easter, and those churches enough variety that he did not find himself bored. The differences in art and architecture alone could keep his interest through a sermon, should it be dull enough to require the examination of the altar and most visible chapels in minute detail.

It was Palm Sunday, in the medieval church of Saint-Laurent, when he finally caught up with his quarry. (He had accidentally found the father two weeks earlier at Saint-Ferréol.) Saint-Laurent was heavy, solid, with no external decoration and little internal. The nave was lighted by small windows only on the south side, and a heavy monumentality reigned. Elemental rather than beautiful, the church overlooked the port, and great families mingled with the lowest at the holiday service. By asking a few questions of an elderly woman, Julien learned that Valland had been attending services all through the penitential season. He even managed to have her point Valland out to him, which helped immensely, though Julien slipped out before the service ended.

The late March morning was glorious – the brilliant blue of the sky was reflected deep in the water of the port, where it could occasionally be glimpsed amidst all the shipping. Hints of flowers mingled with the constant smell of hemp and tar and salt. Spring was wholly arrived in Marseille, and it was a glory he had experienced only once before. The sun was warm, though the air had not quite caught up,

and it was delightful to wait in the morning sun for the patrons to leave the church. It seemed more polite, since it was something of an ambush, to find Valland outside the church.

He did not have long to wait, and Valland was readily identifiable as the crowd flowed out. He was dressed rather shabbily, and Julien suddenly felt sorry for the man. Boy, really – he may actually have been younger than the rest. Of course, as the youngest and an outsider, he would be the easiest to approach if someone sought to harm the group, but at first look, there was nothing guilty or even obviously deviant about him. Julien called his name and fell into step with him when he paused to see who had hailed him.

“You don't know me. My name is Julien Combeferre,” he began.

“Oh, God. Oh, God. He sent you. I didn't do anything. I swear. I did not do anything to her.”

At least his name was well known. And looking at the boy, as scared as Gérard, Julien knew what everyone had been trying to tell him. He was as innocent as the rest. “No one thinks you did. I'm just trying to see what we do know about what happened. Would you take a walk with me along the docks? A friendly walk, that's all.”

Valland followed. Sunday work was illegal, so the only activity concerned the watchmen left aboard ship calling to their friends and the local whores. “It's sort of my fault,” Valland admitted, cringing.

“What do you mean?” It was hard to hate him once they were face to face, even with Lameire's theory echoing in his head. He didn't look at all like a bitter misogynist, nothing twisted or hateful in his aspect. If anything, he was more handsome than the rest, or would be if he did not look so miserable.

He held his arms tightly across his chest, his shoulders slumped, not with cold in the bright March day but likely with shame. “I didn't like her, and I wanted her out, and then she ended up dead.”

“How did you find out about it?”

“It was in the paper. I knew the coppers were going to come for me, and my father would kill me if he found out what I'd been mixed up in. It's not like I told any outsiders anything,” he insisted, “but I wanted her gone, and then she was gone, and that wasn't what I wanted at all. It's like God was mocking me. Or maybe Satan, I don't know. There shouldn't be girls like that. There just shouldn't. It's unnatural. It's not appropriate. He only thought he was in love with her because that's the only way he could be in love with a girl, anyway, if she wasn't a real girl. But I didn't want her dead!” he ended, his voice rising with panic.

“Wishing alone has never made anything happen.” Julien had not come here to comfort anyone other than himself or Henri, but Valland seemed so desperately in need of comfort. It seemed only right, looking at him, to permit him to forgive himself for something terrible men had done. Julien saw nothing the least bit terrible about the shabby boy who walked next to him.

“It wasn't wishing. It was prayer. It was active and fervent and constant prayer. To keep us safe and to purify our cause. And now there's blood. What was it Enjolras said? Liberty trees must be watered with blood. A woman's blood isn't food for a liberty tree.”

“The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure.”

“That's it! You must agree with me that a woman's blood is not to be sacrificed in such a cause. It ruins the cause to mix our blood with the female.”

“Do you mean because women, as the representatives of home and family, must remain innocent, and thus when their blood is spilled it is an outrage? Because I agree, that the destruction of home and family are an outrage. But anyone born in France, willing to give one's life for the freedom of all, should have not only the right, but the obligation to make that sacrifice. It was women who stormed the Bastille, and I honour them.”

“Shrieking harridans reflect poorly on a revolution.”

“I never once knew her to be a shrieking harridan. Henri had far better taste than that, don't you think?”

“He could have done far better.”

“I've spoken with Gérard and Lameire already. Months ago, in fact. The police had everyone scared. I can't imagine how awful it must have been. Everyone disappeared. Henri doesn't blame you.” Valland looked up, and his face lit up at the very idea of forgiveness. Was this what Lameire had meant? “Any of you. Some people are very brave and terribly cool when faced with danger. I admire those people so much. Possibly because I fear I'm not like them at all.” A year ago, such a statement would have been false, designed only to elicit a response. But now, Julien rather feared there was some truth in it.

“Enjolras would have made a brilliant show for the police.” Valland obviously looked up to Henri – he was admiring a vision even as they talked.

“I'm sure he did. They only talked to him once. Which is interesting, because from what Gérard and Lameire tell me, the police wanted to frame it as a crime of passion. But they never went back to him to take another stab.”

“He's also a little too important to be forced to confess. Not like the rest of us.”

“What about you? Your father is the director of the post office.”

Valland shrugged. “Sure, it's a royal appointment, but it doesn't mean anything. In some towns, they appoint women. I'm nothing. And he's made perfectly clear that I'm not his son. His son is a priest. His son is eager to serve the king. His son is going to be an archbishop, at the very least.” He spat into

the water. “Therefore, I am not his son. If I ended up arrested, he wouldn't try to hush it up, he'd just outright disown me.”

There was the bitterness of which he had been warned, but Julien was inclined to think it reasonable. The law only provided that a child could not be disowned upon the father's death; during his lifetime, he could make it very hard, indeed, for a young man who sought his own future. “How are you fixed up for money? Forgive the personal question, but I know you left a job without notice. It can't have been easy.”

“I don't need charity from my betters.”

“I only meant I could put in a word for you with my father's firm. In the office or even aboard one of the ships, if you'd like to get out of here,” he offered. “Everyone else is leaving town.”

“Everyone?”

“Lameire is in Aix, Gérard is headed there this summer, and Henri will come to Paris with me.” There had been no agreement about Paris – Julien had not yet dared mention it – but he was certain it would happen. It had to happen, therefore they would make it happen.

“He's leaving? Really?” Funny how the boy could look so stricken at the thought that someone he had been avoiding for months would be leaving town.

“Really. Is there anything you'd like to say to him before he goes?”

“No.” Valland closed up again.

“I know something happened between you and Henri. Lameire has theories.”

“Lameire can shove his theories. I misunderstood the situation, that's all. I thought Enjolras could do better than that girl, I said so, and I was wrong. Because I didn't understand the situation. I apologised. It's over.”

“You obviously care for him. Why did you not even write him when everything happened?”

“He didn't want to hear from me. Because I still don't understand the situation. Would you want to hear from me upon your girl's death after I'd made it clear I didn't like her? Why did he send you after me? It wasn't to say he doesn't blame me. He does blame me, doesn't he? I didn't like her, and she's dead, so it must be me.”

“He didn't send me. I sent myself. He's been insisting on your innocence for months.”

“Really?” That hopeful look again, Julien noted. Yes, one could see how Lameire would think he saw something, but nothing in Valland's stance or manner of speech was tremendously effeminate. The

explanations had to be perfectly innocent. Unless Lameire saw something further he would not relate.

“Yes. And I had horrifically misjudged you. You must understand the impulse to find answers. I feel certain someone must know something, and yet on a dark night, in a narrow alley, in the shadows – a carter found her and one of the marketers recognised her. Whoever had beaten her was long gone. Those men are the only ones who know what happened, and if they followed her, if they never tried to get information from any of you, tried to turn any of you into traitors, then I've been on a fool's errand. Someone knows what happened, and I cannot get to him. The tree of liberty. How much more patriotic blood will we spill before it is all over?” Julien tried to clear his brain, shake the musing away. “Forgive me. I've been looking for you for so long, and there was really no reason.”

Valland looked rather dreamy, almost Prouvaire-like for a moment. “He can have mine.”

“Pardon?”

“He can have mine. My blood. To spill. For liberty, I mean. But -” He paused, looking out at the shipping in the port. “You could get me aboard one of the ships?”

“As something rather better than a common sailor. Sometimes we have to leave our country behind and see the world in order to focus our views. Thomas Jefferson, the brilliant American who wrote that beautiful line about the tree of liberty, came to Paris. I was in London when M. Enjolras wrote to tell me what had happened here. There's no shame in having more to give than just your blood. To give your life to France can mean many things. Why limit it to death?”

“I'd like that. To leave Marseille. If you can.”

“Take my card, and if you wait a moment, I'll write out a note for you.” He scribbled out a note, introducing Valland as a friend of a friend with a good accounting background who would like to see a bit of the world. “When you are ready, take my card and this note to M. Savin. Not one of the office boys; be sure you hand it to Savin himself. He runs our office here, and I promise you, he will do his best to set you up in an appropriate manner.”

Valland thanked him. He looked for a moment as if he were about to say something else, but he merely repeated his thanks and bid Julien goodbye.

Nothing obviously deviant about him, and nothing of the spy, either, Julien thought as watched Valland walk away. Just a boy, out of place somehow. Perhaps a rather eager desire for approval from Henri, but that is not the same as deviance. Lameire was seeing things.

Chapter 14

But as he walked back to the Enjolras estate, along the docks and the beach to make the most of the spring sunshine, what stuck with Julien was something Valland had said. “He only loved her because he could only love a girl who was not a girl.” It was patently untrue – it had to be. They had been

courting for years; they were planning to try to force a marriage this summer. Emilie had been, in many ways, not much of a girl, but she was terribly bright and penetrating, an Olympe de Gouges for a new generation. Julien's imagination ran to the pamphlets she might have produced in years to come, perhaps even a newspaper just for women. How wonderful that would have been, the three of them and a printing press. They might have been able to push a women's publication out without direct political appeals for a few years and thus more easily slide in under the censors. That was the future he had wanted to have. The three of them, as one.

“He could only love a girl who was not a girl.” Such a statement, combined with his expressions, was very close to saying, “I was jealous because if he loved the masculine, he should have loved me.” Valland was a deviant, after all. But nothing in the boy's manner made it remotely plausible that he had made a physical pass at Henri. He wanted acceptance. Henri could be very forgiving, if he chose, but this was a very different sort of circumstance. No one ever mentioned the name of the boy who had tried to kiss him at school. Valland had not looked stupid, and he had been with them until the end. It was impossible that he had made a pass at anyone.

Julien walked along the beach, intending to return to the house through the garden. The sun was high, the sky clear, the sea a deep, brilliant blue. And only then did he realise that he had been avoiding the sea itself all winter. The port was not the sea – it was crowded and the water was generally murky where you could see it at all through the crowded shipping. Even at Les Goudes, which was built entirely to face the sea, he had studiously kept his eyes on the land. If he did not see the Mediterranean, did that mean he was not there at all? Why such an avoidance? Because he was not supposed to have been here this long? More than a quarter of the year, gone, and with so little to show for it. No answers, and no closer to a cure. Yes, Henri had been pulled outside, he was at last eating normally and taking exercise, he had stopped entirely ignoring his father, but it was not a situation that could persist. Yet the only thing Julien could now do was to take Henri back to Paris, to try to put the collapse of the Marseille cell behind them and focus on a different future, perhaps even a future of seven or eight or even more where there had once been three or perhaps five.

But how could a man want to leave a provençal spring?

Henri was sitting outside with a book, though it was still a bit chill to merely sit and read. “Are you waiting for me?” Julien called from the bottom of the garden.

“Well?”

“Success!” he called back.

Henri met him down in the paths and they strolled and talked instead of going directly back to the house. “He knows nothing.”

“I'm sorry. I know I've been foolish. I even gave him my card and told him he can ask Savin for a job. That's the end of it. I don't know where else to go. There has been a great deal of betrayal, but entirely after the fact. No one is guilty.” His voice started to shake. “There is no obvious path to follow to

truth. I thought I could find an answer, but I can't. I failed.”

“Is it the autopsy all over again?”

“I don't know. Logically, there should be no connection. I'm no more to blame than anyone else this time.” He found a bench and sat down, starting to feel a little light-headed. The walk in the intense sun had perhaps not been the best idea, considering he had not taken breakfast that morning. “But if I can't solve it, why am I still here? Full on winter when I told that girl I couldn't possibly take her to bed, and here it is spring, a full penitential season gone.” He realised Henri was not looking at him. “I'm sorry. I didn't realise I was musing aloud. What a terrible thing for me to have said when we both know why I am here.”

Henri said nothing, but he did clasp Julien's shoulder before silently walking up to the house.

When M. Enjolras returned, not long after, Julien could feel a headache coming on, but he knew he might have few chances to speak to his host alone.

“I hate to ask it, monsieur, because you have been very, very good about everything.”

“You want to take him away.” The stern tone of M. Enjolras' statement was less welcome than its prescience.

“He is much better, and I thank you for not provoking him,” Julien began, forcing a calm and reasoned tone. “I know it must be very difficult for you, having me in the house day after day. I cannot stay forever. Neither can I leave him. All of his friends are gone or soon will be. By the end of June, he will not have a single friend left in Marseille. And he is seemingly not anxious to stay. How long has it been? And still he will not go into town. He has not even written to the few people he does still know here.”

“What am I to do?” M. Enjolras asked quietly, avoiding Julien's eye.

The conversation was more painful than Julien had feared. How could one ask a man to cut out his own heart? “You once offered to permit him to study at the law school at Aix, and he chose not to leave you. He loves you so much that he was willing to give up his youth for your happiness. I ask for three years.” He knew it was too much the moment he said it. Three years. Three months, to see if he might enjoy Paris, perhaps. But the full three years?

“Three years? No. Absolutely not.” M. Enjolras' tone was final.

Julien bowed politely. “Please forgive me, monsieur. It was too much to ask.”

“Yes, it was,” M. Enjolras argued. “I was not a young man when I married. I do not know how many years I have left on this earth, and you wish to deprive me of three of them?”

“I wish to save your son.”

“Three years. Why three?”

“It is the necessary amount of time for a law degree.”

“You don't mean in Aix, do you?”

“Have you not noticed that there are no other young men in town of our class? They are not in Aix, either. Everyone goes to Paris. To keep him from Paris is to keep him from his fellows. Have you not wondered why his friends are all clerks and the sons of clerks? It is not because of a particular fondness for the petit bourgeois. There is no one else here.”

“And I suppose your friends are the sort of whom your mother approves.”

“No, actually. But she does not approve of you, either.” The attempt to inject some lightness into the conversation felt misplaced the moment he attempted it, and Julien settled back into cold facts. “Let me describe a few of them for you. Courfeyrac's father is the mayor of Sorgue, the Vaucluse, selected by the last king himself for that post. Bahorel's family did very well out of the public lands in the revolution. She might approve of Prouvaire; his father is a subprefect in the Gard. They are men of wealth, men of importance. Electors in their districts. All Southerners – Bahorel comes from Languedoc. All the men of money and influence send their sons to the capital.” Julien left out his other Parisian acquaintance, since many of them were indeed Parisian, and while Joly also came from the Midi, his family background was rather chaotic and sounded little better than that of Lameire or Valland. He had already elided that the Prouvaires were a Protestant family and that Bahorel had grown up speaking the Gascon patois.

“And now you are suggesting I am a bad father.”

“Not at all, monsieur.” Yes, a headache was definitely coming on. “Please forgive me if I have given that impression. I simply suggest that there are benefits in Paris, despite the opinion you justly have of the city. There are two parts to an education, as you of course know. The book learning itself, and the interaction with the other students. The book learning is precisely the same at Aix as it is in Paris. But two of Henri's friends are leaving him for the law school at Aix, and I think it important you understand what that means to our generation. Thierry Lameire is the son of Auguste Lameire, who manages affairs for Amiot. Marc Gérard's father owns a grocery and cannot afford to pay for his son's legal studies. They are perfectly fine young men: Gérard is intensely driven towards a very modest increase in his position, while Lameire has the charm that might have permitted him to climb very high, indeed, were society still as liberal with newcomers as I understand it had been for your generation. Aix exists to sate young men of this sort, while those of a higher class go to Paris. Managers and shopkeepers. Doesn't Henri deserve better?”

“That's rich, coming from you.”

“Perhaps. But I have never denied hierarchies; nature proves them too often relevant. I hope you will consider what I have said.”

M. Enjolras waved him away. “I’ll consider it.”

A week later, nothing more had been said. Julien dared not push the subject. “Please go ahead to mass,” he told M. Enjolras when the invitation was made, rather politely considering the subject they were avoiding. “I’d rather stay here.”

“But it’s Easter,” M. Enjolras said with a seriousness of religious purpose Julien had not yet seen from him.

“And look at that sky! That shall be my cathedral. That shall be our mass.” It had rained much of the past week, but coincidences such as the blue sky and warm breeze on the holiday itself made almost convincing proof that there was a god. If one ignored how often it rained in Paris on Easter. God must not like Paris very much, Julien mused. It had been the sort of Romantic outpouring more akin to Prouvaire, and Julien was not entirely certain where it had come from, having not seen Prouvaire in nearly a year, but it did send M. Enjolras away, shaking his head indulgently rather than otherwise.

“Shall we go for a ride?” Henri offered, when his father was safely gone.

The roads were empty, since everyone else was at mass, the processions having concluded earlier that morning, and despite the mud, they could fly along as fast as they wanted. Julien pulled up abruptly in sight of town, looking out over the bell towers to where the masts of the port stood above so much of the rest of the city. Henri pulled up next to him, but soon turned away with tears in his eyes. It was still too soon. They could not leave without his papers in order, and that would necessitate a trip to the hôtel de ville. How could he possibly convince Henri to enter the city he was so obviously avoiding? There had been so much progress, his health fully restored, yet the willful blindness was still there.

Henri turned and rode away without a word. After one last look, Julien followed. They tired out the horses long before M. Enjolras could return. The staff had all left, too, permitted to attend mass. It was rather nice to be alone, to perform what labours the horses required without the kindly meant interference of the grooms. Julien knew that there would be movement at his own house the next day, as the permanent staff began to prepare for the impending descent of the master and mistress. But today, all humanity was quiet even as all nature seemed to rejoice. December to April; Christmas to Easter. All the great holy festivals he had never seen before in Marseille. So much time had passed, and he still felt the tightness at his throat that had begun the moment he received M. Enjolras’ letter. Marseille had always been where he could breathe, but now he wanted nothing so much as to be in Paris, where he did not feel the weight of the world bearing down on his shoulders alone.

Henri was silent. Julien tried to find at least temporary solace in the sun and poetry, but the silence was oppressive. It was the wrong silence. It was not companionable. It was not quite the fearful, grief-stricken silence of the early days, either. Henri was pacing in the garden, back and forth, up and down the paths laid out the year he was born. Julien sat on the terrace, but the continual back and forth of

that golden head was a constant distraction.

“What's wrong?” he asked when the circuit brought Henri nearest to him.

“Nothing.”

“Something's different. I can feel it. You can feel it. I can't place it.”

“Can't you?”

“What is it?” Julien asked, suddenly worried.

“I'm bored.”

Julien started laughing, the relief palpable. “Easter Sunday. I can't offer you anything at the moment. We could go into town tomorrow.” But Henri shook his head. “The work must begin again. Where can we start? What can I do?” He almost said “in exile” but managed to catch himself in time.

“I've taken you from the centre.” It was an apology even if it lacked the usual petty phrases.

Julien sat down on the ledge of the terrace, his legs dangling like a schoolboy. “I'd gladly take you to the centre.”

“I don't dare dream of Paris anymore.”

“How can you not dream of Paris? Paris is France. Whatever we do must be done there. If you would sell me out tomorrow for everything we've wanted, how can you not want Paris?”

“I've never stopped wanting it. But I can't have it. Is my father ill?”

“What?”

“He looks so much older than he used to.”

“Your sorrows are his sorrows.”

“How can I leave him?”

“How can you deny yourself a future?”

“I've never known what to do.”

“Neither have I. I tried, last week, to put a flea in his ear about Paris. He said no, but he kept listening. He asked me here so I might restore you to him, and now I propose taking you away entirely. I warned

him when I arrived that it might happen, but I don't think he believed me.”

“Don't think I'll somehow be happy in Paris.”

“I imagine you surrounded by people who respect you, care for you, and devote themselves to your work. The work must go on. I have always wished that it be with you at my side. It is not about something as small and brief as happiness, though I do hope that it may be possible again, someday. But we are not dilettantes and dandies. Our lives must be about utility and fulfillment of purposes beyond our own petty desires. And where but in Paris can you be most useful? But how can I explain that to your father?”

Henri smiled, briefly. “I will always want it.” He reached up to clasp hands with Julien.

“I am doing my best to see that you may have it, my brother.”

Chapter 15

But M. Enjolras still said nothing about Paris, even as he took to skeptically examining Julien at the dinner table. Julien dared not broach the subject further. He might gain Aix at such a time, but the only true victory would be Paris. He was certain M. Enjolras could be brought around, but Julien feared he was being very clumsy. How could he convince France that the monarchy was illegitimate if he could not even convince M. Enjolras to permit his son to go to Paris? Arguments based in the state of nature and willful alienation of rights were hardly of use. Courfeyrac was much better at reading people – if he were here, he could charm M. Enjolras into anything. He had charmed Prouvaire into a close friendship despite however it was they had met. He was right, of course – Julien simply had to hit on the element M. Enjolras cared most for and then subtly keep at it. Easier said than done when he spent dinner wondering how you were going to steal his son. And of course it was impossible to simply ask Henri. “What does your father love more than you?” was rarely an appropriate question.

Thus Julien had to puzzle it out himself, but it was not at all like making a diagnosis. He knew a little of M. Enjolras' background: he had come from a village near Lyon, he had no contact with whatever family he might have, and he had made his own money through unknown means. After some twenty years of hard work, he had bought the sugar refinery, married a girl of some fortune, and built this house for her. The salt works had been acquired within Julien's memory. There were lands near Lyon, which Henri had visited once, but whether they comprised M. Enjolras' original holdings or his wife's dowry was unknown. There was no contact with his late wife's family. People did not speak of him as either ambitious or miserly: he was a man of business, never content with what he had but never in a hurry to grasp at an acquisition. Julien rather hoped to get his father's advice. He suspected his father might have preferred to have someone like Courfeyrac for a son, but he had always encouraged Julien's friendship with Henri and might even now use what connection he had once had with M. Enjolras in their favour.

In the meantime, until his father might arrive from Paris – it was useless to write after Easter as the family could be on the road at any time – he and Henri were doing what could only be described as a

feeble pretense of charity work. They could easily range as far as Cassis on horseback, though Henri seemed to prefer the inland villages. Julien was rather sorry he had not had the idea earlier. While he performed what medical care he could, Henri took an interest in everything but assisting him. It was unfortunate that both of them together had so little of the patois; the tragedy was particularly acute for Henri in his investigations, since Julien had met many immigrant patients at Necker who spoke little or no French. Henri's spirits did indeed seem stronger, more like himself, when he struggled to question peasants about the rent they paid and size of their holdings; despite the language barrier, at times he was almost at ease as he counted grapevines and olive trees. Julien treated injuries and fevers, the usual spring cares of the local health officer, and more than once had to turn to the family to assist in the bandaging as Henri was oblivious to everything but his own interrogations. He was pleased to see the natural absorption in place of the introversion of the past months. It was not the real work, yet at least Julien's portion badly needed doing, and it filled those days that were not filled by spring rains.

Precisely twelve days after Easter, coming back along the Cassis road, Julien saw a coach in the distance. The horses were post, of course, but there was something familiar in the coach itself. "Hold up!" he called to Henri, who would have kept going whether he meet the coach or no. "I think that's my parents." They watched in silence for the coach to make the inevitable turn.

"Summer has begun rather early."

Indeed, they were rather before their time, and Julien could only think that a departure was made the day after Easter precisely because of his long months of residence in Marseille. He had never intended that his entire family upend their ordinary plans to better match his own. His father's arrival would certainly hasten the half-formed plan to elicit his assistance, but Julien felt guilty all the same.

Not long after the young men returned to the house, a servant brought the note Julien expected, and the dilemma: to find his father in town or to more publicly make his appeal? The note was polite enough. "Dear Julien, We have arrived safely. I have missed you and should like to see you if you are able to get away. CC."

"If you are able to get away" meaning "If you do not wholly privilege your friend over your blood", but his mother could be far more cutting if she chose. He had no choice but to pay a visit to his mother, but he could, instead, see his father at the office in the morning and his mother at home in the afternoon. It might even be possible that his father find a way to meet with M. Enjolras that very day. Yes, he would see his father at the office.

He sent a note to his mother in reply: "I hope I shall have the honour to greet you tomorrow at two. Your adoring son." It was at least as honest as "I have missed you".

"I must see my parents tomorrow," he informed Henri.

"Of course. I shan't keep you from them."

"I may be out all day. If you want to do something of use in my absence, you can start to collate the

notes you've been taking on peasant conditions. I can add the medical remarks when there is something coherent to add them to."

"You make it sound as though you have a publisher."

"No, merely an idea. It came to mind that Prouvaire would have an interest, and I'd like to send everything on ahead."

"You're leaving."

"Not without you. And I am hopeful that we may very soon both forge ahead."

"I'm not still afraid of your mother."

"I never said you were. I don't mean at all to imply that her presence will force me out of town. My intention is to enlist my father's aid. He has admitted to being persuasive in your cause before, and he, as a father, can bring vastly different arguments to bear."

"Considering your father produced you, I fear he may not be the ideal emissary you think."

"That may be true, but they may also enjoy commiserating over what failures we are. I intend to try."

"I wish you luck."

Julien dressed carefully in the morning and even stopped at a barber for a professional shave. His heart was in his throat as he stepped across the threshold of the office and announced, "I wish to see my father." He had placed all his hopes on the outcome of this visit, and that now seemed a very bad idea. Nevertheless, his father greeted him heartily and asked after Henri's health.

"His health is quite recovered, for which I am grateful. It has not been easy. My concern now is his spirit."

"He's able to let you go for a morning, at least."

"Oh, yes. He is in no immediate danger. I mean that I am concerned what may happen should I return to Paris. What may happen a month or two months hence, when he is alone in a city that he no longer loves."

"What of his friends here? I wondered about that, you know. Of course you'd go to his side, but then you never came back."

"His friends have abandoned him."

"Some friends." Julien was always rather intimidated by his father, but there were flashes when he

could see what they had in common, that he had inherited his father's humanity and concern for others rather than his mother's pure self-interest. M. Combeferre's obvious condemnation of Henri's so-called friends was one of those moments where Julien could relax and speak freely, regardless of how embarrassing or shameful the truth, knowing his father would listen sympathetically.

"I had hoped I might win permission for him to travel to Paris with me, but I made a very foolish error."

M. Combeferre sighed. "I know exactly what you did. You continually allow the perfect to be the enemy of the good. You leave no bargaining position. It is one thing for a physician, but you are not a physician."

"I am trying to learn. It is not easy for a man to change his nature."

"What did you demand that was vehemently denied?"

"I demanded nothing. I merely suggested that Henri would be better off, for a variety of reasons, in Paris and asked that he be given the necessary three years." He winced at the memory.

"Three years!"

"I knew it was wrong to ask for the full law degree the moment it came out of my mouth. If I could have taken it back unheard, it would have given me a profound joy. Is there any way to repair the damage?"

"When did it happen?"

"Palm Sunday."

"Has anyone broached the subject since?"

"No."

"At least you have not admitted further destruction to your cause."

"But what am I to do?" he begged. "From a medical perspective, a change of scenery is absolutely necessary. It has been five months, and he will go anywhere now except into town. And my greatest fear is that after I leave, M. Enjolras will try to push him, and there will be a terrible quarrel should that happen, and neither will ever forgive me, or each other. I know that their relations are not my business, but M. Enjolras asked me here to restore his son to him, and I do not think that can be done if Henri stays in Marseille. It is too dangerous."

"Very well. What do you want me to do about it?"

“Father?”

“You couldn't play dumb when you were six. You are here because you think I can do something. What do you think I can do?”

“I'm sorry. You're right, it is not your business,” Julien apologised.

“I never said that, though it is true that it is not my business.”

“You didn't have to.”

“Why do you give up so easily at the first hint you might be wrong?”

“I don't,” Julien replied reflexively.

“You do with me. Have I ever told you 'no'?”

“No, monsieur, but -”

“But I don't have to because you tell yourself 'no' before ever giving me the chance. How Henri gets on with his father is not my business. Neither is it Enjolras' business how you and I get on. That has never stopped us from discussing our children. Nevertheless, though I think it appalling how he is ruining his son by keeping him here, I have not said anything along those lines.”

“I wouldn't have it any other way.”

“Then what would you have?”

“Paris is not a den of iniquity, and the reason Henri's friends are all lower class is because anyone who is anyone of our age is in Paris?” Julien suggested.

“Yes, that would take a touch you do not have. I shall at least do my best to discern what his motives may be. Afraid of Paris as a den of iniquity – no wonder your mother continues to turn up her nose. He hasn't even the ambition for his son that most peasants could muster. I will see what I can do.”

“Thank you, father. Thank you!”

“When are you seeing your mother?”

“This afternoon.”

“Good. She'll like that.”

She'll like picking at me until she draws blood, Julien thought, though he kept that thought to himself.

Henri was fully surrounded by papers when Julien found him. "My father will speak to your father."

"Your father never ceases to amaze me."

"Me too." Julien did not know why he always expected the worst – he could blame his mother, but that was not entirely fair. He supposed it was just a flaw in his nature, that he could expect great things from anyone except his own family. Perhaps it was Henri's doing, making it possible to accept that great things could happen, though that did not explain why M. Combeferre had never told Julien "no" to anything, yet it was the first answer Julien always expected.

Cécile was well settled in by two, when Julien came by the front door rather than the garden as was his wont. The visit itself, however, was a nightmare. Julien felt as if he were entertaining one of his mother's friends with small talk rather than making a visit to family he had not properly seen in many months. It was the effect of Cécile's best behaviour. The expected claws would come out soon enough, but the suspense was an even greater torture. He was rather surprised by the way in which the blood was drawn this time, however.

"Oh, this is yours, I believe." She languidly handed him a volume of Alfred de Vigny's poems, which he accepted with a great deal of confusion. Why on earth was she making a production over a book of modern poetry that they both knew perfectly well was his? "It was very naughty of you. It is much too early for a gift, particularly one of such a personal nature." Julien let her run on – it was easier to wrack his brain for the meaning whilst she repeated inanities. "Mlle Laurier asked me to send her regards," she finally ended insinuatingly.

Julien's first reaction was "Who the devil is Mlle Laurier?", but he remembered the convent girl just in time to refrain from an unfortunate outburst. Doubtless the volume had been discovered immediately by her mother, a confession of the loan solicited and then gloated over, transmuted into a love token by Mmes Laurier and Combeferre. He was certain that if little Isabelle had sent her regards, it was only because his mother, or her mother in collusion, had sought them. "It was merely a loan, and I am grateful to have it back," he managed to say. He thanked her and rose to take his leave – there was no point staying to hear more about the convent girl. "Shall I say hello to Charles before I go?"

"He's probably in the library," she answered with a dismissive wave of her hand.

Charles was in the library with a young man of perhaps Julien's age who had to be the current tutor. "Julien!" The winter diffidence was dropped in favour of a tight hug around the waist.

"You grew."

"You haven't been home in forever!"

"Five months is not forever." He ruffled his little brother's hair. "I'm sorry," he apologised to the tutor. Offering his hand over Charles' head, he introduced himself. "Julien Combeferre. The elder son."

“Guillaume Vidal.”

“Charles, how old are you?” With a sigh, Charles disentangled himself, as aware as everyone else that at nearly twelve, he was a little big to be hanging on his brother. Julien kept a friendly hand on his shoulder, however. “Were you with us in December?” he asked Vidal.

“I was, but I had an evening out when you came through town. I was sorry to have missed you.”

“Family emergency. I hadn't intended to blow through quite like that. My reputation has preceded me?”

“Merely that every interesting book in the house is said to belong to you.”

“I could perhaps arrange the continued parental storage of some of my things when I return to Paris. What interested you most?”

“The poetry, mostly, though the diversity of the medical literature was astounding.”

“You're welcome to it all, if you like.”

“I'm not a physician.”

“Neither am I.” Charles looked up at him, picking up the darkness in his voice, but he did not interrupt.

“I was also pleased to see a copy of Champollion's book.”

“You are also a student of the ancients?”

“Of the moderns of the region, actually.”

“An orientalist.”

“In the scholarly sense, not the artistic.” His disdain for the fad of pashas and odalisques was obvious, and Julien immediately liked him for it.

“I quite agree. Do we lay the blame on Ingres or Byron? Or on the poor Greeks? A friend of mine was at the Salon and told me it featured Greeks as far as the eye could see.”

“I hesitate to blame a valiant people for bad taste, but they are seen as an Eastern people, and exotic, and so are the Turks who oppress them. Indeed, it is interesting that such a barbarian race has come to power and maintained it so long. The Turks are not natives of the region, you know.”

“I did not know. Next you will tell me the Greeks are not Greek. Actually, the Greeks are only as

Greek as the Egyptians are Egyptian, aren't they?"

"You have it precisely. The Turks followed the same path as the Mongols, and like the Mongol horde, they took on the trappings of the civilisations they trampled under their hooves. In this case, it was the Islamic caliphate that once produced art and literature from Baghdad to Granada. Now they are ruled by Turks. Egypt too, of course. All the Arabic lands. And they remain Arabic at heart, not only in their religion. The Turks merely skim off the bounty. But your family understand that, don't they?" he asked, looking around the room.

"Have you been taken on the Grand Tour?" Julien asked, unable to keep the sarcasm out of his voice.

"Your mother's pride in the paintings might well have made of them a tour of classic antiquities."

Julien laughed. Vidal would fit in very well with certain of his Paris acquaintance. "Those show off the blood. Here we have the produce of Western and Eastern civilisation. The table is Florentine Renaissance, the porcelain is Chinese of the seventeenth century, the busts were at least purchased in Italy though they may not actually be Roman, and the Egyptian gentleman was a gift from one of Bonaparte's men."

"From Napoleon himself!" Charles corrected.

"Charles is the true believer. I'm skeptical that the portraits my mother so loves even show our family. I think we bought them off the neighbours."

"Julien!"

"Who are the neighbours?"

"Historically, a noble house who lost their heads in the Revolution but their fortunes long before. Which house was it?" he asked Charles, but Charles just shrugged. "Mother knows. It isn't even her family, but she knows. The current neighbours, with whom I am staying, are M. Jean-Pierre Enjolras, who owns a sugar refinery and the government salt concession in Marseille, and his son Henri."

"Henri is Julien's best friend. Mother doesn't like him."

"This is all true," Julien confirmed.

"Are you coming home?" Charles asked hopefully.

"Only if I must." Charles's face fell. "I'm right next door."

"It's not the same," he protested quietly.

"You know, while I'm here, shall we take the Egyptian down?"

“Why?” Charles asked warily.

“Because his name is carved on the back, and I've got some friends in Paris who can puzzle it out for us.”

“The cartouche is intact?” Vidal asked excitedly, his light voice rising in pitch.

“If I remember rightly. We've only ever had him down once that I know of. Would you like to help me?”

“Gladly.”

They threw their coats down on the table to provide some padding for the ancient bust and freedom of movement for themselves. As the shorter one, it was agreed that Vidal would mount the ladder to hand the bust down to Julien. Once it was safely ensconced on the table, Julien pointed out the cartouche, and the three of them stared in abject wonder at how something so old had survived at all, much less came to sit before them. Julien copied the symbols into his notebook as Charles asked, “Does this mean you're leaving?”

“No, but I'm not sure I'll have another chance to get him down before I go.” He started to attempt to sketch the Egyptian's face, or what was left of it, but Charles grabbed the pencil away.

“You're making a mess of it. Let me do it.”

Julien fell into easy conversation with Vidal while Charles drew. They were about the same age, and Vidal's accent reminded him of Bahorel – Languedoc overlaid with Paris – but in a higher octave, a tenor rather than a bass. His knowledge of Egypt was quite as good as Julien's own, so that it was a real pleasure to chat as Charles performed his task with childish intensity. Indeed, in the end, he produced a nearly flawless full-faced drawing and a quite good profile view of the old Egyptian. Julien thanked him for his trouble. “This is very good. Did you teach him?” he asked Vidal.

“No, he does that all on his own.”

“This is very good, indeed.” Charles grinned at the praise. “Don't ever let Mother tell you otherwise. You stick with this.” He turned back to Vidal. “It was a real pleasure to meet you.”

“You're going?” Charles complained.

“I must. And I have completely interrupted your lesson.”

“It's quite all right,” Vidal said. “This was far more interesting than puzzling through Ovid.”

“Ovid would be more interesting if you used my unabridged copy. If it wasn't in Paris, then it's

somewhere here. Let's get him back up," Julien suggested, gesturing at the bust. "I don't want the maids to take the blame if he's shattered." Once the Egyptian was safely back on his shelf, Julien started again to bid Charles goodbye.

"Can I walk back with you?" he begged.

"Very well. Come with us," he invited Vidal. "We'll go through the gardens. You can see more of the property."

Julien spent the walk chatting with Vidal, with Charles dancing attendance. It turned out that Julien and Vidal did know a few of the same people in Paris, and Vidal was only teaching until he might save enough money for an Arabian expedition.

"Not the Holy Land, mind you. Any fool can join a package holiday. To the cradle of civilisation itself, and the great Arab cities, or what the Turks have left of them."

"Do you speak the language well?"

"I have the classic, which is more useful than the classic Greek, I must say, being of more recent vintage, but the dialects are quite diverse. I've been learning the Egyptian, but I do not know how far it will carry me." They talked along in this manner, much to Julien's pleasure. He had been months without this sort of conversation, and he felt the lack exceedingly. The walk was over much too quickly for his taste.

"Can I say hello to Henri?" Charles asked.

"I will ask. But you mustn't be upset if the answer is no. He is still recovering from a very difficult illness." Leaving Charles and Vidal in the garden, he found Henri still at work in the library. "Charles would like to say hello. Only if you do not mind. I can send him away."

"No, it's fine," Henri agreed, through without enthusiasm. He met them on the terrace outside the library.

"Hi!"

"Good afternoon." It was awkward – Charles was staring, rather, and Henri was in quite good spirits for how he was these days, but not quite as Charles must remember him from previous summers. Julien introduced him to Vidal, then asked after his father. "He is not yet home. Dare I hope it be to our benefit?"

"I have hope." Julien kept wondering why Charles was staring and Vidal seemed to think nothing amiss. Henri was in mourning, yes, but that was no call to stare. Charles did find his tongue at last and exchanged a few words with Henri, but it was only going to get more awkward, Julien feared, so he put a stop to the unsought visit. "Come on. You've got lessons."

He walked Charles and Vidal back to the boundary between the properties. "I can see why Mme Combeferre disapproves."

"Really?"

"I don't think Charles has been permitted to see a Romantic before."

Julien was utterly confused by what Vidal might have meant, but it did recall to him the conversation with his mother. "Speaking of Romantics, I left a copy of Vigny's poems in the library. You can have it, if you like."

"A very kind loan."

"No, I mean you can keep it."

"He is not to your taste?"

"I've had what I need from him, that's all." If his mother wanted to transmute de Vigny into a love token, let her see it in the hands of the tutor and draw whatever conclusions she wanted.

"It is very kind of you. Thank you, monsieur."

"And please, you needn't address me as 'monsieur'. I'm not the one paying your salary, and if you weren't working for my family, I rather think we'd be friends. Let's not let permit ourselves to be defined exclusively by labour relations."

Vidal smiled and shook his hand. "Agreed."

Julien liked Vidal, and a part of him wanted to insinuate the young man into the Enjolras household as part of their coterie, but it would be profoundly unfair to Charles. The other part of him was intensely jealous that his father had procured an Eastern scholar, and he would never forgive Charles if he did not take this opportunity to learn at least the rudiments of the Arabic language.

Henri met him down in the garden, and only then did Julien note why Vidal called him a Romantic. It had been more than five months since Henri had ventured near civilisation, and knowing him, several months before that since his last visit to a barber. His blond hair had grown long enough to flow over his shoulders. Julien had not fully noted it in the day to day concerns, but it must have been a shock to Charles, revising all his memories. But what did it matter? There were barbers enough in Paris; Romantics, too, for that matter.

He said nothing to Henri about something so trivial. They merely spoke of Vidal and waited for M. Enjolras to return, hopefully bearing a change of heart.

Chapter 16

M. Enjolras returned just in time for dinner, but he made no mention of why he was late, and neither Julien nor Henri dared ask. Instead, Julien found himself talking again about his afternoon visit to his mother because he had nothing else to discuss. Some of his warmth toward Vidal must have made an impression, however, because M. Enjolras perked up considerably. Julien had not known M. Enjolras to take an interest in oriental studies, but at least the topic was not awkward. Perhaps it was merely that there was someone new in the neighbourhood.

“Tell me, do your parents still treat their tutors as servants rather than as men of education?”

“Yes, but I rather think that a blessing. No one should have to feel compelled to dine with my mother when she is not entertaining guests.”

“Invite him to dinner.”

“Monsieur?”

“Invite him to dinner. Here. Tomorrow? No, that might be a bit precipitous. Monday? Monday. Dinner on Monday. You’d like that, wouldn’t you?”

“I would indeed. Thank you, monsieur.”

The idea seemed to put M. Enjolras into a better mood, though even after private discussion much later, conducted practically in whispers in Henri’s bedroom, neither of the young men seemed to know why.

“Your father isn’t an oriental scholar.”

“He’s much too late to try to pull one over on your family by hiring away a tutor. What would he do with him?”

“I don’t know. He’s your father.”

“I don’t mean to suggest there is anything wrong with Vidal, but we have met him once.”

“The police are not so crafty as to infiltrate a revolutionary cell by placing a tutor in the family of one of the members when that member never sees his family. There aren’t enough police in France for that to be a reasonable strategy.”

“I did not say I was worried about that sort of involvement.”

“Then what does worry you?”

“I don’t know. But you do like him.”

“Not all my Paris acquaintance is political. It is not only safer that way, it is better that way. If I listen only to my political friends, I might be convinced that all of France wants the new order that has always eluded us. As long as we say nothing about politics and your father makes no comment, there is no reason to worry about Vidal. It is your father that concerns me. He’s not inviting him for my sake.”

“No, that much was obvious. It’s for himself. He’s been bored with me for years, and I think he fears he’s exhausted your conversational abilities. Which is fine, as far as it goes, but your family’s tutor? He must have some scheme.”

“If my father angered him today, what benefit would come from pinching our tutor?”

“I have no idea. Let me consider the possibilities.”

In the morning, Julien dutifully wrote the invitation with the key line, “if you can get away without having to tell my mother”. “Be sure this goes to the kitchen,” he ordered the servant who was to take the note, “and don’t stay for a response.”

He went riding with Henri in an attempt not to think too much of M. Enjolras’ sudden interest. There were too many points of analysis, and those points could act together in myriad ways. Henri had no explanation that he liked. “Either he is simply so desperate for other conversation that he is resorting to Vidal, or he thinks he can somehow turn Vidal to advantage himself over your father. I want no part in the latter.”

“Neither do I. Did your father used to have people to dinner?”

Henri shook his head. “He generally stayed in town if he were to meet friends. And if that were the case, I stayed to look after my own business. Generally. Lameire has been to dinner here once.”

“With your father?”

“No, but he came home earlier than expected. He appeared to like Lameire just fine; his only objection was that I seemed to only make friends based on politics.”

“Does he know how often you had Emilie in the kitchen?”

“I don’t know. He hasn’t let on if he does.” Henri pulled a face, as if he were trying to hold back his emotions.

“Then he doesn’t know. Well, Vidal may not come at all, or the dinner may go very badly, and then it won’t matter what your father wanted out of it.”

But Vidal did send back a reply that very afternoon. “I shall do my best, but please forgive me if I am not as punctual as I would like.”

Indeed, he was a bit late on Monday night, and not dressed for company, for which he apologized profusely. “Forgive me. I was almost afraid I could not get out at all tonight. I feel rather cloak and dagger, which is ridiculous, but thank you for the invitation.”

Henri was mostly silent – he simply could not keep up with the thread of conversation. M. Enjolras managed to coax a great deal of information out of Vidal, from his birth to his future hopes, as well as his opinions of every poet published in France in the past ten years. He seemed in good humour to Julien, which was a blessing, though it did render his motives thoroughly opaque. For his part, Vidal seemed flattered by the invitation and grateful to have been released from the tyranny of the servant hierarchy for an evening. Julien did not know which system best: his father’s preference that the tutor remain a servant, or M. Enjolras’ need to have the tutor at table every night. An educated man could not long be happy dining with the servants or alone, but it must be so much pressure to have to entertain the master every evening after teaching all day. But the dinner was a success and ended in M. Enjolras issuing a standing invitation to Vidal, which the young man accepted with every sign of genuine pleasure.

Julien rather had the idea that, for at least the summer, they could use Vidal to their advantage. Their company had palled next to the orientalist – perhaps they should take themselves off the scene. Vidal could perhaps fill the gap through the summer, provide the youth and conversation that M. Enjolras would lack once they had gone. Perhaps the conversation with his father had gone well, not badly at all, and M. Enjolras was seeking this sort of replacement on his own. But that would be far too much to hope, Julien told himself, and so he said nothing to Henri.

Instead, he received a summons from his own father, and spent much of the next afternoon in a café in town with him.

“You put a flea in his ear, all right. He was actually grateful to see me so that he could complain about you.”

“I’m sorry.”

“You’ve been playing the physician terribly well, it seems. He’s done everything you have asked, and he hates everything you’ve asked him to do. In some ways, it’s a pity you’ve decided to drop medicine. Be that as it may, he wants me to tell you it’s time to go home. You’ve got him too afraid to do it himself.”

“I shall shift my baggage when I return.”

“You’ll do no such thing. Bargaining position is everything, and you will lose it all if you move. He doesn’t have to know that I’ve passed on his message. And frankly, if he wants a guest to leave, it is poor form not to even hint at it to you himself. He admits that Henri is greatly improved under your care.”

“Greatly improved, perhaps, but not as he was. I don’t know that that’s even possible.”

“It may not be. He’s lost more than just his fiancée.”

“He’s lost what innocence he had left.”

“So have you, I’m afraid.”

Julien shook his head sadly. “It doesn’t matter. I’m not the issue here.”

“But you are the issue. You have asked not merely that Henri have a change of scenery, something that his father could arrange on his own. He has lands near Lyon that would provide a change of scenery. You have asked that you take Henri to Paris. His concerns, therefore, are twofold: Paris, and you.”

“He asked me here to do precisely what I have done,” Julien reminded his father. “And I warned him when I first arrived that it might be necessary that Henri leave.”

“I cannot change his opinion of Paris, though he may grudgingly accept that there is no alternative. Certainly there is no alternative as long as the government continue to treat Marseille as if it were a fishing village rather than the third city in France. And we will overtake Lyon. But for now, they have given us only a single overcrowded royal college, and the university remains at Aix. One has to leave for a time, and if one has to leave, one ought to go to the capital rather than a backwater. With time, I have every confidence I can talk him around to that. But you are the only one who can change his mind about you.”

“But what have I done? Oh, very well, he continues to think Henri would have absolutely no political opinions if I had never turned him into a republican. All I did was take him to Les Goudes when we were children so he could say he had been somewhere other than home and to listen to Père Bornat’s stories. It is not my fault that he has eyes in his head and a sense of right.”

“I shouldn’t have let O’Brien have so long with you.”

“I loved Mr O’Brien, and you know perfectly well you would have kept him on for years more if he hadn’t had to leave. He may have given me a few tools, but Mother showed me the poverty when she took me with her to Les Goudes, and Bonaparte himself displayed to every Frenchman the failure of all that is just. My conscience is not Mr O’Brien’s fault, and Henri’s conscience is not my fault. Our natures are as they are. Were his nature different, he would not have seen what I saw and wanted to help me alleviate at least some of the suffering and injustice in the world. He certainly would not have held to it for all these years.”

“A man’s nature can change. He grows older, he has more experience, he discovers setbacks he could never have imagined.”

“But his core, his very soul, is constant, otherwise he is not the same man.”

“You are not the same man you were a year ago.”

“I rather hope I’m in better shape than I was a year ago.”

“You know what I mean.”

“We misjudged what the weakness would be, that is all. Mother only had Charles because she thought I was going to die. We thought the weakness was in the body. It turned out to be a flaw in the soul,” Julien explained bitterly.

“There is nothing wrong with your soul,” his father insisted. “It is your spirit that worries me.”

“I have done everything you have asked. If I was not cheerful enough for the English, it is because it is very difficult to live up to them.”

“Did you enjoy your time in England? You wrote us that you arrived safely, then never again. I shouldn’t have to rely on Carter for news of my own son.”

“I didn’t want to enjoy it. I was there to work. I was there because I had done a terrible thing. But London is brilliant. The newspapers alone! Absolute freedom to publish and sell anything. Censorship only of bawdy material and what is on the stage. No sign of police watching your every move. The food was mostly awful, they only import the worst wines in the world, and they condescend to foreigners in an utterly shocking manner. If events had been different, I would still be there. But what I loved in England was not, I think, why you sent me there, and it would not interest you in the least that one of my greatest pleasures was listening to the parliamentary debates.”

“I’m grateful to hear any enthusiasm at all from you – I was rather afraid it had all burnt out.”

“I was afraid of that, too, until I saw London.”

“And Miss Laura Carter?”

Julien flushed. He had not thought about Miss Laura in months, and the question was really more in his mother's line than in his father's. “She was very kind to me, and rather pretty, but even if I had inclinations in that direction, which I do not, her father would never permit her to marry a Frenchman.” He rather feared he was not showing very well that he had no inclinations in that direction, but it was true. There was a vast gulf between sharing Lord Byron and a few dances at a ball and making the lifetime commitment of marriage. “But what can I do for M. Enjolras?” he asked, trying to return to the much more important subject at hand before he embarrassed himself further over Miss Laura. “Express enthusiasm for Paris?”

“His fear is that despite your proficiency in other topics, your only real enthusiasm is for your absolutely ridiculous political activities. A wider set of companions, perhaps, might set his mind at

ease.”

“I have a wider set of companions in Paris. If Henri had any interest, I know the opera goes, several amateur art critics, more than a few would-be poets, a couple of linguists, more natural philosophers than I can easily count – and even a couple of opium eaters for variety, if you really want to know. I can introduce him to a very wide acquaintance if he wishes it. But he hates poetry and science, and I do not think he would take kindly to my artistic acquaintance. I can certainly introduce him to people who might be able to introduce him to other people, in the ways in which a city as broad as Paris works, but I do not intend to make promises I cannot keep. You know, he is rather old for it, but I find myself curious – what if Henri were consigned to your care?”

“You must be joking.”

“I don’t mean signed over to Uncle Félix, who throws the worst parties I have ever attended. I mean if you were to chaperone. M. Enjolras likes you. He trusts you even when he does not trust me. And you’ve said yourself that you think he is ruining Henri.”

“There is a difference between complaining and handing over one’s son. What was your plan, assuming M. Enjolras agreed?”

“To depart for Paris as soon as possible. That would give us a number of months before classes begin in November. I cannot imagine how difficult it must be to arrive in a foreign city, find lodgings, learn one’s way around, register for classes, and find a friendly café all in the space of a week. I would never inflict such a disaster on anyone. And the higher order of socialisation will have ended for the summer, so we should not be annoyed by invitations from Mother’s friends.”

“Such a schedule would also provide a chance for Henri to return home, should he feel he must, without any sort of financial loss of inscription fees he paid and did not use.”

“Well, naturally.” Julien suddenly realized what his father had been trying to say. “To go earlier is to provide, for little to no cost, a chance to reverse course. A way for M. Enjolras to justify to himself a positive answer without committing to three years. I tried to close the door on him to secure my own aims, but as long as he thinks there is an escape, he will agree, and my aims are flexible.”

“To a point. He could always cut off the flow of funds.”

“He wouldn’t do it. And even if he did, Henri would hardly be the only student in Paris without a steady income. He’d be better off than most – he’s had some practical experience of the world and how to earn one’s living. So I must apologise to M. Enjolras, eat all the dust under his feet, and humbly ask him to consider the possibility of a stay of a couple months duration, at the end of which, I will remain in Paris.”

“If you manage to do that, I will see what I can do to moderate his opinion of the city.”

“Thank you, Father.”

“And you will do me one additional favour. You will spend what time you can spare with your brother.”

“I do not wish to interrupt his studies.”

“If you are successful, the interruption will not be for long.”

“I will do what I can.”

Julien waited until after dinner to make another attempt on M. Enjolras, hopefully a better one since he could perhaps parlay Vidal’s very presence into a way to make the next couple of months rather less painful.

“Monsieur, I would like to apologise.”

“For what?” he asked suspiciously.

“I was absolutely in the wrong. Henri’s education is your affair, not mine. You asked me here to see to his health. Please forgive me.”

“His health is much better.”

“His spirits, however, are not as you would hope. I am saddened by the change in him, as I know you are. I still think a change of scenery may do him some good. A couple of months, perhaps, especially if those couple of months are among new acquaintances, people of his own class. Is it impertinent to suggest that you have a fondness for M. Vidal?”

“I think I rather like the boy.”

“I do, as well. I wish he were not employed by my family, because that sort of connection makes it very difficult, indeed, that we be friends. However, Vidal and I have some common acquaintance in Paris.”

“Paris again,” M. Enjolras complained. “Always Paris.”

“A couple of months. Perhaps you would prefer, instead, that we look into your lands in the Isère. A change of scenery and useful work may help, though I would rather try to put him in touch with other people. His friends have deserted him, really, and if you are bored with me, I fear he may be, too. I know there are good men in Paris with whom he might be able to relate. Certainly men of better birth, or at least a more suitable sort of upbringing, than his friends here have been. Trustworthy men. Men I have known for years. A couple of months. Three at the outside. I beg you to consider it. Vidal may even keep you company over the summer.”

“I don’t need to rely on other people’s servants.”

“Of course. I merely meant that you enjoyed Vidal’s company last night, and he appears to have enjoyed yours.”

“You are convinced this will help.”

“I can think of nothing else that will restore his spirits. Indeed, is it not likely that with absence, he will miss you, he will miss Marseille, and he will return eager to take up again those activities from which he has left off these many months?” Julien lied, hoping his voice did not sound so strained as he feared it must. It was not the sort of lie one told to the patient’s family or to the police – it was too personal, and too important, too much a false accounting of Henri’s nature to sit comfortably in his mouth. “I do not mean those of which you disapprove, but you must see that he is in no fit state to socialize, to begin to consider courting again, possibly even to return to active work. This is the mood you seek to revive, is it not? That he take an interest in the necessities of life again. I think it more likely to happen in a place with the activity of Paris rather than the solitude and quiet of the Isère or the limited scope of Aix. He has had his solitude, and he is much the better for it, but now he must have activity. And I believe such activity would be best in a place that has no memories for him. I am sure you must understand.”

“I will think on it,” M. Enjolras told him firmly, perhaps not keen on the veiled reminder of his own loss. “You may go.”

Chapter 17

No one said anything further about Paris for days, however. Julien dared not push his luck – it was for M. Enjolras to consider. And as M. Enjolras became no friendlier, Julien rather feared it would be a long, drawn-out process that he had no idea how to conduct without assistance. For the time being, it seemed prudent to do as his father asked and spend a few afternoons with Charles.

Henri found him saddling Othello. “So you do actually wear your hat.”

Julien smiled. “I’m going for a ride with Charles. One must try to be a good influence.”

“In all things or merely sartorially?”

His tone was off, but Julien laughed as much in relief as in the joke. “I can only do what I can. You can come with us, if you like.”

Henri shook his head. “I think I saw the carriage on the road.”

Julien nodded. “He’s taking advantage of my absence. Very well. Let us meet him as he chooses.” He took Henri by the shoulder. “You must think of yourself just this once. Not what I want. Not what he wants. You must do what you believe is best for you.”

Henri nodded. "The current plan is a couple of months, correct?"

"Correct."

"Take care, brother."

Julien met Charles and Vidal on the road, though Vidal immediately left them. "Henri isn't coming?" Charles asked.

"Not today."

"He hasn't come yet."

"Am I not good enough?"

"Yes, but –" But Charles dropped it and they rode in silence. Julien was too worried about what M. Enjolras might be trying on Henri to keep up any thread of conversation. Henri could keep his own council perfectly well and not let on that they considered the current plan able to be lengthened indefinitely, though he had agreed to it with Julien. Julien's fear was that Henri always kept his word, and if his father managed, through guilt or duty, to elicit a promise of a particular duration, Henri would adhere to that timeframe regardless of cost to his health or spirit.

He tried to return his attention to Charles, but everything else seemed so much more pressing. The timing was delicate. Charles would always be here. But if things went very badly with M. Enjolras, Julien feared he could at last force a break between them. Ten years of friendship that had been more than friendship, severed by filial duty. It could kill Henri, but he would obey for fear the alternative would kill his father.

Instead of anything that amused or interested them both, Julien ended up pointing out various of the trees and flowers as a way to attempt to take his mind off events he could not see and to pay at least some attention to his little brother. Charles' interest was obviously feigned, his disappointment in the outing obvious. They had nothing in common, that was the trouble, Julien thought. Perhaps in another three or four years, when Charles was old enough to have opinions and better-read so that a conversation might actually be possible. But for now, "How do you like Vidal?" and "What has he been having you read?" were quickly exhausted. Charles even looked relieved when Julien bid him goodbye at the gate rather than take him all the way to the stables.

He rather expected Henri to meet him in the stables, but no one came to him while he rubbed down Othello. The servants steered him away from the library, where at least it was quiet enough that there was not an obvious row. "M. Vidal is coming to dinner tonight," one of the maids told him. Julien feared it poor timing on Vidal's part, but perhaps it might restore M. Enjolras' mood as Henri was hopefully being very recalcitrant. The interview had certainly been extended far beyond a reasonable discussion of terms or direct capitulation would have allowed.

Vidal met him on the terrace, where Julien had been pretending to read for the past two hours. "Is everything all right?" he asked.

"I don't know," Julien sighed. Yes, Vidal was a stranger, but in the absence of his own friends, Vidal might do. "Please don't be offended if tonight is less amusing than your previous visit. They've been rowing all afternoon. Well, perhaps 'rowing' is a bit strong. They have been locked in the library for the past four hours or so, but there has been no shouting that I have heard. Forgive me, this must all seem horribly opaque to you."

"It is none of my business, and I think one gets along best in this line of work if one takes as little notice as possible of what is not one's business."

"You are a wise man."

They were called in for dinner. Henri was already at table, eyes burning, but he looked away the moment he saw Vidal. M. Enjolras greeted his guest with every show of courtesy, however, and permitted Henri to remain in what might have appeared to Vidal a sulk. Julien knew Henri's moods too well, however, and knew that he had rowed with his father. The shouting he had expected to hear was from M. Enjolras – Henri was coldly insistent, even at the height of anger. And he was at the height of anger.

The conversation was almost exclusively between M. Enjolras and Vidal. Julien kept looking to Henri in concern since the topic was Paris itself. He did not at all like the tone in which M. Enjolras had said to Vidal, "Julien tells me you have some common acquaintance in Paris." There was something insinuating in the remark, but it was so deftly made that one had to wonder if one's own perception was more at fault than M. Enjolras' tone.

Vidal took the bait, if bait it was. "Yes, it happens that he has attended several lectures with some friends of mine."

"What sort of friends?"

Vidal named a few, with their professions and scholarly interests. "I cannot remember: do you know Laffitte?" he asked Julien.

"Yes. Not a sharp analyst, but a good memory."

"Laffitte as in the banker?" M. Enjolras asked with eager interest.

"No," Vidal tried to correct.

"Yes, actually."

“Really? He always denies it.”

“I once met him at one of my uncle’s parties. He was mortified at being found out to be one of those Laffittes. I was just grateful I had found someone who could hold a conversation for more than two minutes about anything of substance. We ended up talking about Egypt while everyone around us kept repeating inanities about racehorses, sometimes in execrable English. Come to think of it, it was the only one of Uncle Félix’s parties I ever enjoyed.”

“Scholarly circles can be rather singular,” Vidal explained to M. Enjolras. “A man of steady wealth is of course welcomed as a source of funding, but he is often looked on as a dilettante, someone who is currently dabbling in knowledge but will soon grow bored.”

“A law clerk, however, is welcomed with open arms because as poor as he is, his interest is genuine.”

M. Enjolras seemed about to say something when Henri broke in, with a firmness of tone that surprised even Julien, “The law clerk also has the superior mind to the man of wealth. Ease may as well be mental stagnation. Class is not a replacement for intellect.”

Julien desperately wanted to continue the conversation on those lines, but he reminded himself that the argument was not his and permitted M. Enjolras to change the subject.

The subject kept coming around to Paris, however. Vidal did not know of the difficulties Paris was causing in the family, and it was his only experience of a great city until coming to Marseille. He could talk nearly as well on foreign cities, but he had never visited them. Of course, Paris to Vidal was as Paris to Julien – the centre of Europe, the hope for intellectual progress. Vidal was asked to join them in the salon after dinner, which he did with pleasure. Julien could hear M. Enjolras attempting to engage him in a discussion of the women of Paris, perhaps hoping to hear confirmation that they were all indeed either whores or bitches, as he was well known to believe. It at least gave Julien a few moments of semi-privacy with Henri.

Henri was standing in a corner, his arms crossed, glaring at his father. “What happened?” Julien asked quietly.

“I haven’t promised him anything. I want out of here. I don’t care anymore if it is Paris or Lyon or Aix or even Baghdad, but I cannot stay here.”

“What did he want?”

“First, that it be only a trip. He suggested you might enjoy taking me to Italy. What is there to do in Italy unless one is Italian? Then, the conditions. No, I will not put off mourning. My spirit is as black as my coat, and I do not care to change either. Then, I may do anything I like so long it is not in your company.”

“He has not the heart to ask me to leave his house, but he asks that everyone else do it for him.”

“Everyone else?”

“He asked my father to ask me to leave.”

“I fear I would drown without you. You must not leave me, brother. And when I would agree to none of his outrageous conditions, he tried to beg me to stay. As if we had already decided to go. As if I wanted to abandon him. He folded his hands and begged me,” he added with disdain. He had not taken his eyes off his father at all.

Julien slipped his arm around Henri’s shoulders. “We can leave whenever you feel strong enough to go the hôtel de ville for a passport. A man can always find a way to get by in Paris. But can you leave without forgiving your father for loving you above everything?”

“I cannot love him above everything.” There was a hint of anguish beneath the cold anger in his voice.

“Only a fool would ask you to.”

“I could not even love my wife above everything.”

“She did not want it of you.”

“When did he become so petty?”

“All his generation are petty,” Julien reminded him. “You only now see how completely they think everything, even one’s own spirit, can be bought and sold. They cannot help it. The events of their lives could not fail to corrupt their natures. One cannot survive tyranny uncorrupted. Even we are not as good as we might have been.”

Henri finally looked down. “This house will stifle us both if you are not here. Unforgivable things will be said, and I fear they will come from me. I am not myself.”

“May I tell him of your original plans? That I am not taking you away, merely accompanying you on a journey you had sought to take with another?”

“He will never forgive me.”

“I think he will. He’ll forgive me if I can introduce you to a Laffitte.” Henri glared at him, but Julien forced a smile. “We must get you a passport. Then we can try to explain everything.”

“When we are prepared to leave on poor terms.”

“I hope it will not be necessary.”

M. Enjolras seemed to finally notice them standing in the corner. Henri glared at him again and stalked off to bed. Julien forced himself to join M. Enjolras and Vidal for a bit, though Vidal made his goodbyes soon after.

“May I walk you back?” Julien asked him.

“Certainly, if you like.”

In the dark, quiet garden it was easier to ask just how difficult M. Enjolras’ opinions of Paris were. Vidal laughed, but he took the inquiry seriously. “His son is not well.”

“From grief, not mania. He had hoped to be married a month from now, if he could convince his father to approve. But his fiancée is dead, and M. Enjolras is relieved rather than saddened.”

“A marriage of love, but a poor match.”

“Precisely. I wish to take Henri to Paris with me, a course of action any father would approve, one would think – a change of scenery, a wider acquaintance, the possibility of meeting a far more suitable woman – but M. Enjolras is not most fathers.”

“Yes, his opinion of Paris is singular. He has only half the provincial prejudices.”

“The bad ones.”

“I fear I have not changed his mind tonight, though I do not think I have given him additional cause for alarm. Is this a commission?”

“I should drag a stranger no further into a family affair.”

“Of course. But have the family been of no help?”

“You have seen all there is of the family.”

“Your parents, I mean.”

“My father has done what he can, and I am grateful for that service. But it is my business, not his.”

“But – the family – ”

“Forgive me for all the confusion. We have no blood connection to the Enjolras family. My connection is to Henri alone.”

“Ah. That sort of family,” Vidal said significantly.

Julien chose to ignore what he feared was Vidal's meaning. "You have been of tremendous help to me, and I thank you for it."

"Give your friend my sympathies if you think he will have them." They parted in the darkness of the Combeferre garden so Vidal might be seen to be returning alone.

Julien paused to look at the stars. A seemingly infinite number of points of light, perhaps as many points of light in the sky as people on earth. Had one of them winked out in November, never to be seen again?

He ran into M. Enjolras in the garden. "I've been thinking."

"Yes, monsieur," Julien replied with all the courtesy he could muster.

"You should spend time with your own family."

He had finally mustered the courage to remove the thorn. "Thank you for your concern, monsieur. I shall pack in the morning and shift myself by noon."

"Enjoy the rest of your summer."

Julien went directly to Henri's bedroom. He knocked and slipped inside without waiting for a response, ignoring the glare Henri gave him for coming upon him in bed. "I'm being removed. Tomorrow morning."

"What will you do?"

"I will pack my things and go next door."

"He'll avoid you all morning."

"The servants will pack and shift my trunk. You and I will ride into town."

"I don't know."

"You may not want to trod those paths again, but when will we have another chance?"

They clasped hands. "You understand."

"And I will be at your side," Julien swore fervently. "You must do what you must do, not what I want, not what he wants. Come to me in the morning with your decision."

He slept poorly and began packing early. Early enough that when someone tapped on his door, he was certain it was M. Enjolras. Instead, it was Henri, looking as if he had not slept.

“He is gone. We must go.”

They rode together silently. When they arrived before the hôtel de ville, and he sought a couple boys to hold the horses, Julien noted that Henri did not look around at all, and in such a public setting, he refused the touch Julien had intended to comfort him.

Before the clerk to whom such business was delegated in a large city, Julien prodded Henri to explain their errand. Presenting his identity papers rather stiffly, and without any of the polite trivialities that convention prescribed, Henri stated that he wished to travel to Paris in the company of his companion, who maintained residence in the city. Papers were presented, examined, questions asked of Julien as to his address and what their business might be, but no objection appeared.

The issue came when the description for the passport, as a travel permission separate from the identity documents, had to be prepared. “Have you any additional distinguishing marks, scars, etc?” the clerk asked in a thoroughly bored tone.

Henri looked at Julien as if there had been some sort of betrayal. “Just show him. They’ve got mine on record.”

He pushed up his sleeves and presented his wrists for official examination, glaring at Julien all the while.

“Any others I need see?” the clerk asked, no more interested than before he had seen the angry marks on Henri’s arms.

Henri transferred his glare to the clerk, who did not even notice because he was still writing. “That is all,” he said firmly.

“I just need the mayor to sign off. When are you planning to leave?” He looked up at last and seemed rather shocked to be stared at in such a manner.

“As soon as possible.”

“Whenever we might be permitted,” Julien amended. “It is not that pressing.”

The clerk took another look at Henri, but quickly turned back to Julien. “Come back at three.”

Henri stalked out, and Julien had to hurry to keep him from running away. “I am sorry for that, but it is entirely necessary.”

“That’s part of the official description now, is it?” His voice was icy. “Henri Romain Josèphe Enjolras, 181 centimeters of height, complexion fair, eyes blue, distinguished by a nasty suicide attempt.”

“Left wrist, underside. Puckered scar, white, so many centimeters long, cutting across older scar, so many centimeters long. Right wrist, underside. Puckered scar, red and white, so many centimeters long. The official description. You and I both know it means nothing.”

“It means everything.”

“It means they can identify your corpse should you turn up in the morgue,” Julien rather snapped. He apologized quickly. “Forgive me. That was an unfortunate example. But the official description is just that, a means of distinguishing the confidence man with the false papers from the unfortunate gentleman with the true. It means nothing.”

“I wasn’t officially marked until today.”

“And now you are. Recognised for surviving your struggles.”

“Recognised for my failure. If I could set them aside like a coat of mourning, I would.”

“And I would not. The state of your heart, made manifest.”

“We will speak no more of it.” Henri mounted his horse, but Julien tugged at his trouser leg.

“You may not be able to come back at three o’clock if you go home.”

Henri sighed, but he did step down. “Then what am I to do?”

“I must see my father. He has been an ally in our plans. Dine with us.”

Julien could see in Henri’s face that he wanted to say no, but he followed almost meekly. M. Combeferre was surprised to see them both. “What are you doing here?”

“I’ve been forcibly removed at last. My trunk should be arriving at home as we speak.”

“I see. Good morning, Henri.”

“Good morning, monsieur.”

“Why are you both here?”

“We’ve been to the hôtel de ville to procure a passport.”

“But you’ve been thrown out of the house.”

“Yes.”

“The implication being that M. Enjolras does not give his permission to the two of you going to Paris.”

“I have decided that I will go anyway, monsieur.”

“I’ll have no part in anything that smacks of schoolboys running away.” But he took them up the hill to the Rabbit, and Henri permitted Julien to explain both the original plan, were Emilie still there, and the current plan. He interrupted only with corrections to Julien’s rather hot characterization of the previous afternoon’s discussion.

“Permission has not been decidedly revoked, but you are continuing anyway.”

“It will be worse if Henri stays,” Julien insisted.

“You will do nothing for a week,” M. Combeferre ordered. “Neither of you give a man time to think. Julien, it will be pleasant to have you at home. You are not to provoke M. Enjolras. Henri, you will be pleasant to your father. As pleasant as you can be, at any rate. You will both have a little patience.”

“And after a week?” Henri dared ask.

“You may review the situation. Go home. Both of you.”

“We have to pick up Henri’s passport at three o’clock,” Julien told his father.

M. Combeferre sighed. “Then you will stay here until then, where you can stay out of trouble.” He ordered an early luncheon. Henri sulked. Julien made the barest of conversation with his father. When M. Combeferre finally left them, with two hours more to wait, Henri at last began to speak.

“Why do you trust him?”

“Because he has bought you every summer freedom you have ever had. Well, except for that incident with Duval and the chambermaid, of course. My father has been very convincing in the past, and he thinks your father is ruining you.”

“Does he realize what we will do in Paris?”

“He must think fear of arrest will chasten us. He has been intensely grateful that I have had any friends at all, and he hates that your father has kept you from the benefits due your station. I have to agree. My father is concerned that you make excellent connections and, eventually, a brilliant marriage, neither of which will happen if you are kept so tightly at home. My concern is that we need to leverage what benefits we have, even if those benefits merely be freedom of movement and money. France will be better if you have the freedom of the student rather than the servitude of the clerk. I am grateful for the advantages I have had, and I would like to extend them to everyone. Shouldn’t I start with my brother?”

“You trust him.”

“He trusts us. Despite everything, he trusts us.”

They did as they were told, mostly. Julien stayed at home, was as polite as he could be to his mother, took Charles riding and for walks on the beach, and sat reading poetry aloud in the garden. But it palled after a couple of days, and it was a great relief to see Henri come striding through the garden.

“I need a rest,” he replied when Julien and Charles, in various states of shock and glee, asked what had brought him there.

“Can you stand a little poetry?”

“Right now, I can stand anything that is not my father.”

Julien read a bit more of Heine, mostly for Charles’ benefit – it had been Charles’ New Year’s present to him, after all, delivered terribly late – before setting it aside to walk with Henri in the garden, Charles in attendance.

“Things have been going ill?” Julien asked in English, hoping to keep Charles from becoming too interested.

“You must speak more slowly if I am to follow. I am not the Englishman like you. He has said nothing. Patience is hard.”

“The English say ‘Patience is a virtue’. Only one of many, but it sounds more attainable that way, does it not? You may come as often as you like, if you do not mind him,” Julien added with a brief gesture towards his little brother.

“Thank you, my brother.”

The rest of the week passed much more quickly for Julien. Henri found a way to come every day, though never at the same time, and he even succeeded in being perfectly polite to Mme Combeferre the one time they happened to meet.

“That is the Enjolras boy?” she asked Julien when Henri had left. “He takes after the mother. Let us hope it extends only to his looks.”

“What do you mean?”

“Naïveté is not as attractive in a young man as in a young woman. No wonder your father is so anxious that he go to Paris. That face could almost make up for his utter lack of blood. I don’t know that I want you in his company too often. You are a positive thundercloud in comparison.” Henri had not even smiled, but Julien had long known his mother was unhappy with her sons’ dark complexions. After the

collapse of the Empire, olive looks had fallen out of fashion, and he would not put it past his mother to have selected little blonde Isabelle Laurier precisely to lighten the family bloodline.

The agreed week had nearly run out when Julien and Henri met M. Enjolras as Julien was walking Henri back to his own property. M. Enjolras gave them an odd look, but Henri walked silently past his father and up toward the house. Julien bowed politely and was about to turn and go when M. Enjolras beckoned to him.

“Two months?”

“If it please you, monsieur.”

M. Enjolras said nothing more, simply walked back up to the house.

Julien was startled when Vidal came to him the next morning with a note. “He's making you his messenger?”

“I wished to bring the news myself.” Something in his expression reminded Julien so strongly of Courfeyrac in a good mood that he had to refrain from embracing him. Instead, he tore open the note.

Unsigned, but in M. Enjolras' handwriting, the single line read, “Not before next week, but yes.”

Julien thanked Vidal with an enthusiasm he only later feared was inappropriate.

“I am glad there is finally some good news.”

“I wish there were good news for you.”

“We shall see.”

Julien dashed downstairs to catch his father before he left for town. “Thank you. Whatever you've done this week, thank you.”

“I haven't done anything this week.”

“You haven't?”

“What did I tell you? Patience. Let him think it over before you hammer him again.”

“Thank you, Father. For anything you have said to him, all the advice you have given us. Thank you.”

“What is the final deal?”

“I intend to see to it this evening.”

“Remember, patience,” his father ordered indulgently.

“Yes, Father. Thank you.”

The details were simple. M. Enjolras would permit a stay of two months in Paris, the only condition being that Henri leave off mourning before his departure. “Your six months are up, and no one needs to wonder what errands take you around the country at such a time.” They would stay in the Combeferre family home. Julien would introduce him to a wide variety of trustworthy people, preferably anyone from Provence or Lyon. Henri agreed to the limits and the condition, though it had been a sticking point just a week before. There was an agreement at last. Julien said he would make the arrangements.

He returned to the house feeling more cheerful than he had in months. Charles took one look at him and frowned. “You’re leaving, aren’t you?”

“Yes. At last. The gods have finally decided to smile on our plans.” He turned to Charles and ruffled his hair. “But I still have a whole week with you.”

Not that Charles was having any of it, he quickly discovered. The only time Charles was in a good mood was in the intervals when Henri came over. Henri paid him very little attention, but Charles did not seem to mind. He looked more satisfied to watch as Julien and Henri made plans than when Julien tried to do brotherly things. Julien soon gave up the pretense and just let the boy do whatever he wanted. It was easier. Just as it was easier to pretend to listen when his mother spoke of the families to whom Henri was and was not permitted to be presented. He had already tried logic. “Mother, we are leaving next week. By the time we can see anyone, it will be June. Everyone will be gone to the country.” Logic made no inroads.

He dared once suggest that Henri might like to say goodbye to the Duchamps. But Henri looked away and shook his head, and Julien could not bring himself to mention the matter again. For himself, he sent a letter, uncertain how else to explain what was now happening. He was careful to mention the exact date and time of their departure.

By necessity, they spent the final night in Marseille with their respective families. Julien was certain that M. Enjolras was making everything terribly awkward and emotional. In his own family, Charles was sulking in a corner, dragging the mood down for everyone. When he bid his parents goodbye in the morning, they were polite, but they were all thoroughly accustomed to goodbyes, and the October return to Paris would come soon enough. Charles did repent long enough to give him a very tight hug, and he managed to thank Vidal one last time.

The carriage left him in front of the inn where the diligence would load. The Duchamps were already there.

“Thank you for telling us.”

“I cannot promise you he will have anything to say.”

Mme Duchamp nodded. “He did write, at last. The poor, dear boy.”

“Half of it was illegible from the tears,” M. Duchamp explained. “The rest is now illegible from her tears.”

“He took the blame on himself and said he understood you could never forgive him, didn’t he?”

“For three pages.”

“It is best that he go.”

M. Duchamp was dry eyed but neither disappointed nor angry. “Yes,” he echoed evenly. “It is best that he go.”

The Enjolras carriage arrived as the diligence was starting to load. Henri saw the Duchamps, looked away for a moment, but finally came to them with tears in his eyes. No one said anything at all, but Mme Duchamp embraced him, crying. M. Duchamp took his hand; they both nodded at some unspoken agreement. Finally, he embraced his father.

“You will look after him?” Mme Duchamp asked Julien.

He kissed her hand. She always flushed when he treated her as a lady. “His welfare is my only concern.” He looked to M. Duchamp and patted the pistol he still kept in his pocket, sharing a nod of understanding. He then shook hands with M. Enjolras.

Henri climbed into the diligence and stared straight ahead. Even as it pulled away, Julien waving to Henri's assembled family, Henri merely looked straight ahead.

Notes

Chapter 1: Thanks again to Marianna Starke for the travel information. “The riots last month” refers to the November 1827 riots, including the first barricades in the streets in a century, that materialised after elections under a new electoral law returned a majority of Ultraroyalist candidates to the Chamber of Deputies. The Salon of 1827 is the next Salon in Paris after the great 1824 Salon. It is also nearly as great, with Delacroix exhibiting the results of his English sojourn, and as characterised, Greeks as far as the eye can see. The religious conservatives favoured the Greek fight for independence because the Turks were Muslim; the Romantics enjoyed self-determination with pretty costumes. Alfred de Vigny published *Poèmes antiques et modernes* in 1826. He's of the depressing, suffering Romantic genres – all beings suffer, therefore we must be resigned to the shittiness of life. His novel *Cinq Mars*, one of the early historical novels in French, was also published in that year, and was insanely popular as the French response to Sir Walter Scott – and also thus not exactly “the thing” to hand to a girl who just left a convent school, as Combeferre perceives to be the case with Isabelle Laurier.

Chapter 2: Adolphe Tiers' *History of the Revolution* was the first major leftist history of that period, published in ten volumes from 1823 to 1827. I am completely inventing an actual publication date solely for my own purposes. It was apparently encyclopedic yet inaccurate, but it served as a counter-balance to the dominant theme of the Restoration, particularly after Charles X ascended the throne in September 1824, thus ensuring it an important place in the development of liberal thought.

Chapter 3: Tarot was a provençal card game before it was used to tell fortunes. Indeed, fortunetellers of this period were more likely to use a regular deck of playing cards than a tarot deck. Patience being a form of solitaire, the addition of the extra cards ought to make it more difficult, but not impossible, to win.

Chapter 4: Christmas in England was rather sporadic before Dickens guilt-tripped everyone with *A Christmas Carol*. In France, however, Christmas was always a major holiday, intended to be celebrated with the family. Traditions were highly local, and the Enjolras family would likely celebrate a combination of what M. Enjolras experienced in his childhood in the Rhône and the common celebrations of Marseille. The tradition of the yule log, the *bûche de Noël* or, in provençal, *chalendal*, was followed throughout France; in Provence, it was often a piece of a fruit or olive tree. The log was prayed over and blessed with wine and olive oil and lit before the family left for midnight mass (traditions vary on if it was blessed before or after being lit). In general, throughout the nineteenth century, the *réveillon*, the dinner eaten upon return from midnight mass, would have been prepared in advance and left for the family to serve themselves, the servants being permitted the night off. In Paris in particular, later in the century, sausages and waffles cooked over the fire were the hot foods that supplemented the large cold buffet. Christmas Eve was a fast day rather than a feast day, thus the dinner ought to be meatless, but strict observance declined over the course of the century rather in proportion to the decline of the church. The major provençal food tradition that comes up in modern writings is the “Thirteen Desserts” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirteen_desserts), but they come together in the early twentieth century as a combination of older traditions. The “mendicant orders” are dried fruit and nuts that were often served as a representation of the mendicant orders on celebrations

that the Church declared a fast, thus they would often be seen on Christmas Eve. *Pompe à l'huile* is an olive oil-based sweet bread flavoured with orange blossom and is traditional to Marseille. Today, black nougat and white nougat are both included on the table as representations of evil and good, but gourmand guides of the 1820s note nougat as a particularly provençal inclusion in the all-important *réveillon*. But to be completely clear on this chapter, I have used what traditions within all of France throughout the century suit my purposes rather than set the entire evening according to provençal custom as described by publications between 1800 and 1850.

As for Marseille geography, *la Major* refers to the cathedral of Ste-Marie-Majeure, a 12th century Romanesque structure that, prior to 1852, was directly on the waterfront. A portion of it was knocked down in 1852 in preparation for building a new cathedral next door, but the outcry was enough to save most of the rest of the structure. (Welcome to the 19th century, where something declared a “Monument Historique” in 1840 can get knocked down twelve years later.)

Chapter 5: Presents were traditionally exchanged both at Christmas and a week later at the New Year. Occasionally, it was emphasised that Christmas gifts were for children and New Year's gifts for adults, but in practice, people did either or both as they preferred. Mourning traditions fluctuated slightly historically – they were cut shorter under Louis XVI then lengthened again during the Second Empire. Men were expected to mourn for less time than were women: the requirement for a widow mourning her husband was one year.

Chapter 6: When written, Saint Joan was meant to be Joan of Arc, but she was not yet canonised. However, she shares a name with Sainte Jeanne la Myrophore, one of Christ's followers, who not only took him from the cross and prepared his body for burial but is also credited with retrieving and properly burying the head of John the Baptist. These acts fit easily enough into a political reading for my purposes (particularly as Flavius Josephus insists that John the Baptist was killed precisely to avoid the outbreak of revolution), though she was not a martyr. Saint Catherine of Alexandria is the famous one with the wheel. She was condemned for the crime of having converted the Empress of the Roman Empire to Christianity, an intensely political act in that it was part of a campaign she led to convince Emperor Maximus to end the persecution of Christians. She also refused to become one of his wives, which may well have added to why he was pissed off at her. Saint Cecilia and her husband, Valerian, buried executed Christians in direct defiance of governmental order. She also preached publicly and made hundreds of conversions. These are major female saints who committed what can be construed as deliberate political acts and may only later have had the stories of virginity pasted on (I'm thinking of Cecilia here, though a lot of early Christians maintained a fanaticism about virginity to directly contrast with a Roman world in which temple prostitutes were part of religious observance). Saint Barbara, on the other hand, merely refused marriage at all (not even in a political alliance sense – she isn't characterised as having been of important enough family for that) and was brutally murdered by her vindictive bastard of a father. While this is of course one of the few ways for women of the era to hold out against patriarchal domination, it's a more diffuse political act and can very easily be taken as ridiculous. A large number of the early female saints were of a very similar brand of outraged virginity, their sainthood resting not on their actions for the collective but on their individual bodies.

Chapter 7: The mistral is a dry wind from the north, sometimes from the west. It blows a good third

of the year, sometimes only for a day at a time, sometimes for as long as two weeks. The reason that Provence has so much sunshine is because the wind inhibits cloud formation – as a storm moves in, it appears to push the clouds away. It is said even today that Marseille has the cleanest air in France because the mistral pushes away the pollution. The force and length of these weather events is such that trees often grow at a slant, bending away from the direction of the wind. It is also said that during a mistral, the air is so clear that one can see Corsica from the top of Mont Ventoux, approximately 130 km north of Marseille – the joke being that no one can actually stand at the summit during a mistral, when wind gusts of 320 km/hr have been recorded. (A category 5 hurricane has wind speeds of over 250 km/hr, though the average sustained wind speed on Mont Ventoux during a mistral would be something over 90 km/hr, more akin to a strong tropical storm.) When the summit is accessible and the air is clear, one can see all the way to the sea and can even identify the basilica of Notre Dame de la Garde, which stands on a hill above Marseille. But from Marseille itself, La Ciotat and Toulon would intervene even before the 200 km of sea between France and Corsica, rendering all comments on that score a definite joke.

Samuel Hahnemann was a German physician who developed homeopathy in the 1790s. His major book, *The Organon of the Healing Art*, laid out his theory that “like cures like” and had a French edition in 1824. His writings generally asserted that mainstream medicine, particularly the drugs, killed more patients than it cured. Basing his theory on experiments with cinchona bark, which was a source of the quinine that treated malaria, he asserted that disease was caused by stimuli which could be faked through the judicious use of highly diluted drugs that mimicked the effects of the disease, the false reaction taking over from the natural reaction and expelling the disease from the body. He also believed at one point that coffee caused disease. He was a fruitcake, but people often had better outcomes in homeopathic infectious disease treatments than in traditional treatments (he at least avoided purgatives for cholera and did not permit bloodletting, so of course more people were going to live when they only had to battle the disease and not the medical treatment).

Chapter 8: Stendhal reports that during the mistral, he was traveling in a diligence that, when crossing a bridge, had to be held down by men hanging off the roof with ropes to add additional weight to counteract the top-heaviness of the vehicle in the wind. While one would certainly get the greatest trouble on an exposed bridge, I cannot imagine it would have been easy at any time during the mistral. With the Restoration, the *lycées* set up by Bonaparte were maintained but re-named *collèges royaux*. Scholarships were rare (approximately 1700 for all the *collèges royaux* in France) and usually amounted to half-tuition.

Chapter 9: Each town of 5,000 inhabitants was required to support a *commissaire de police* (CP) hired by the Ministry of the Interior; for each additional 10,000 in population, an additional CP was required. In 1830, Marseille had eleven CPs, including a *commissaire central*, a CP tasked not with an area of the city but with the co-ordination of all police work within the city. One could think of it as a CP was a precinct head, while the *commissaire central* was the police chief, though answering to Paris rather than to the local mayor.

Chapter 10: A *collège communal* was of a lower order than the *collèges royaux* – the one at Grasse was one of the slight majority that could prepare a student to sit the baccalauréat, but nearly half (in

1852, 150 out of 311) did not offer classes at a high enough level. Grasse, in the 1860s, was attended primarily by the sons of small shopkeepers and peasants. In 1821, with a population of over 12,500, Grasse would have been considered a medium-sized city (the average market town had fewer than 5,000 people).

Chapter 11: Thank you, Google, for managing to send a streetview camera down the tiny little alleys of Aix. The brief mention of Marseille history is accurate, and the comparison of the cities is largely derived from travelogues of the period and the growth of Marseille during the Restoration and July Monarchy.

Chapter 12: One of the primary duties of a CP was to make political reports to the Ministry of the Interior. Complaints were frequent that the Ministry cared more about the political situation than about the crime rate and often privileged reports and demanded that CPs organise their work accordingly. Courfeyrac's report on the staffing of parishes is accurate for the entire period of the Restoration. The “events of November” are a couple of nights of rioting: celebrations of Liberal victories in the 1827 elections got somewhat out of hand with firecrackers set off in the street and roving bands of men demanding that householders and shopkeepers put lanterns in their windows in solidarity with the Liberal victory. The gendarmerie and the Army had been put on alert and, the night of 19 November, sent cavalry through the streets to brutally suppress the initial rioting. They also injured and killed a number of women and children and several men who claimed to merely be bystanders, some of them being professional men and men of property rather than the ragged marauders who were tossing firecrackers. This violence led to larger demonstrations the following night and the construction of barricades to protect the demonstrators from additional cavalry charges. The whole thing was put down and to a modern eye reflected poorly both on the government and on the populace – there was some looting, but the government had been looking for excuses for repressive action all year. (Bahorel probably thought Christmas came early.)

Chapter 13: Before the Revolution, women often succeeded to post office positions in medium-sized cities on the death of their husbands, often as an interim measure until a son was old enough to assume the position. While most of these widows were cleared out by 1834 through natural attrition, women continued to be nominated to direct post offices in small towns where the mail volume was not enough to justify a full-time job as post-office director. The phenomenon increased considerably after an 1830 law expanded the reach of the postal service in rural areas, as hundreds of new post offices were constructed and required management.

Chapter 14: Censorship was constantly fluctuating as the king and his ministers attempted to silence opposition as quietly as possible. In 1827, the law was roughly that all periodicals, regardless of frequency of publication or subject matter, had to be examined by the censors prior to publication. Publication became far more difficult with the law passed in July 1828, which made the publication of “anything that would incite hatred or contempt for the king's government, provoke disobedience to the laws, or attack the rights of king and parliament under the charter of 1814” a prosecutable offense.

Chapter 15: Jean-François Champollion was the French linguist, a specialist in Eastern languages, given the task of deciphering the Rosetta Stone. He had several publications out by 1828, but

Combeferre almost certainly had his *Précis du système hiéroglyphique* of 1824 – that single book pretty much created the entire field of Egyptology as a specialty. Baghdad was the intellectual centre of the Abbasid Caliphate, and the entire city was destroyed in 1258 by the Mongols: great architecture torn down, the library – the greatest repository of ancient Greek texts on earth – dumped into the river, the vast majority of the population massacred, and a comparatively few artisans were spared, only to be forced east to work in the Mongol capital. The Mongols preferred the people who made jewelry and furniture, but they destroyed the intellectual products of millennia. The Turks followed the Mongol example a few hundred years later when Timur (Tamerlane) sacked Damascus, again destroying a major library and sending local artisans back to his capital city. Granada (really al-Andalus, all of Moorish Spain, rather than just the final rump of Granada that finally fell in 1492) filled a similar role in the west – at a time when the rest of Europe was mired in the Dark Ages, al-Andalus was producing major innovations in science and philosophy, plus some really beautiful decorative art – the Alhambra in Granada has been an influence on art and design in Europe since a restoration that began in 1828.

Chapter 16: Demographically, in the ten years between the 1821 and 1831 censuses, the population difference between Lyon and Marseille declined from approximately 22,000 to 4,000. By the end of the century, Lyon had begun a decline while Marseille continued to increase in population, finally becoming the second city in France around 1900. The political censorship laws in Britain were removed near the end of the 17th century; the modern policing of London did not begin until 1828. Combeferre's visit would thus show one of the greatest contrasts between the countries at this period, not to mention that visitors were outright banned from the Chamber of Peers under the Restoration and access to the Chamber of Deputies seems to have fluctuated based on political concerns. Parliament had not managed to eliminate many of the rotten boroughs until the reform of 1832, and the electorate was as elite as in France at the time, but the comparative openness must have been astonishing.

Chapter 17: The implications here should be vague enough to be historically passable – Jacques Laffitte, the banker, only ever had one daughter, but he was one of ten children and did well by his family. One of his nephews, Charles Laffitte, was a founding member of the Jockey Club. Laffitte hits too many important social, economic, and political buttons for me to leave alone, both in sifting how Combeferre's extended family fits into the socio-economic framework in Paris and in reflecting M. Enjolras' own history, ambitions, and desires for his son.

Internal travel was regulated for citizens as well as foreigners. One needed a passport in order to legally travel outside the département of residence, and if stopped on the road without a valid passport, or with a passport valid for a journey that should take you in a completely different direction, one could be arrested for vagrancy. This section is still somewhat speculative, based on several secondary sources below, and I admit to making the assumption that at 21, Henri can travel without parental permission, or at least being of an important name in town, he will not be interrogated and asked to prove parental permission. Naming conventions for the period suggest that each godparent provide a name at baptism, thus the double middle names here.

The French proverb is “*La patience est mère de toutes les vertus*” - Patience is the mother of all virtues.

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