

SEEKING LOVE

Almost as soon as the lift doors opened, Sir Peter sprang towards her, an expression of rapt appreciation on his face.

"The carriage is waiting," was all he said, but Marina could tell without his comment that she had made a deep impression upon him.

"Where are we dining?" she asked, as the horses drove along the boulevard.

"A business acquaintance of mine has always recommended this particular restaurant, but this is the first time that I have found someone who deserved to be taken there," he answered with a charming smile.

Marina could feel his warmth next to her and it made her quite dizzy. She found herself longing to sit even closer to him.

She wondered if he might take her hand as they trotted through Paris and, as he spoke, she watched his lips and wished that he might kiss her.

By the time that they arrived at the restaurant, Marina had the distinct sense of deja-vu. Was it not, on an evening such as this that Simon had sat close to her in a carriage and had eyes only for her? Did she not, in her foolish way, believe that he was about to at least declare his love for her and maybe even propose?

"Papa was forever telling me that I had a too-vivid imagination,' she told herself. 'I do not know where these silly romantic notions come from every time a man pays me some attention, but it is foolhardy of me and immature.'

SEEKING LOVE

BARBARA CARTLAND

The characters and situations in this book are entirety imaginary and bear no relation to any real person or actual happening.

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THE BARBARA CARTLAND PINK COLLECTION

Barbara Cartland was the most prolific bestselling author in the history of the world. She was frequently in the Guinness Book of Records for writing more books in a year than any other living author. In fact her most amazing literary feat was when her publishers asked for more Barbara Cartland romances, she doubled her output from 10 books a year to over 20 books a year, when she was 77.

She went on writing continuously at this rate for 20 years and wrote her last book at the age of 97, thus completing 400 books between the ages of 77 and 97.

Her publishers finally could not keep up with this phenomenal output, so at her death she left 160 unpublished manuscripts, something again that no other author has ever achieved.

Now the exciting news is that these 160 original unpublished Barbara Cartland books are already being published and by Barbaracardand.com exclusively on the internet, as the international web is the best possible way of reaching so many Barbara Cartland readers around the world.

The 160 books are published monthly and will be numbered in sequence.

The series is called the Pink Collection as a tribute to Barbara Cartland whose favourite colour was pink and it became very much her trademark over the years.

Titles in this series

1. The Cross of Love
2. Love in the Highlands
3. Love Finds the Way
4. The Castle of Love
5. Love is Triumphant
6. Stars in the Sky
7. The Ship of Love
8. A Dangerous Disguise
9. Love Became Theirs
10. Love Drives In
11. Sailing to Love
12. The Star of Love
13. Music is the Soul of Love
14. Love in the East
15. Theirs to Eternity
16. A Paradise on Earth
17. Love Wins in Berlin
18. In Search of Love
19. Love Rescues Rosanna
20. A Heart in Heaven
21. The House of Happiness
22. Royalty Defeated by Low
23. The White Witch
24. They Sought Dive
25. Love is the Reason for Living
26. They Found Their Way to Heaven
27. Learning to Love
28. Journey to Happiness
29. A Kiss in the Desert
30. The Heart of Love
31. The Richness of Love
32. For Ever and Ever
33. An Unexpected Love
34. Saved by an Angel
35. Touching the Stars
36. Seeking Love

THE LATE DAME BARBARA CARTLAND

Barbara Cartland who sadly died in May 2000 at the age of nearly 99 was the world's most famous romantic novelist who wrote 723 books in her lifetime with worldwide sales of over 1 billion copies and her books were translated into 36 different languages.

As well as romantic novels, she wrote historical biographies, 6 autobiographies, theatrical plays, books of advice on life, love, vitamins and cookery. She also found time to be a political speaker and television and radio personality.

She wrote her first book at the age of 21 and this was called Jigsaw. It became an immediate bestseller and sold 100,000 copies in hardback and was translated into 6 different languages. She wrote continuously throughout her life, writing bestsellers for an astonishing 76 years. Her books have always been immensely popular in the United States, where in 1976 her current books were at numbers 1 & 2 in the B. Dalton bestsellers list, a feat never achieved before or since by any author.

Barbara Cartland became a legend in her own lifetime and will be best remembered for her wonderful romantic novels, so loved by her millions of readers throughout the world.

Her books will always be treasured for their moral message, her pure and innocent heroines, her good looking and dashing heroes and above all her belief that the power of love is more important than anything else in everyone's life.

"I have always advised that everyone in love should write love letters to each other. Words expressed from the depths of the heart and soul can be kept, treasured and enjoyed forever."

Barbara Cartland

CHAPTER ONE

1897

"No, Papa! You cannot mean this!"

Marina Fullerton stood in the drawing room in front of her father with her eyes fast filling with tears. Even though she was trying her best not to show her emotions, she was shaking all over.

"My mind is made up, Marina, and I think it will be best for both of us."

"But to go away from here, so soon after Mama's funeral. Who will put flowers on her grave each week and tend to it?"

As she looked up at her father, she could see that to argue was futile.

Although only twenty years old, tragedy had already blighted Marina's life. Six awful weeks earlier, her beloved mother had suddenly been killed in a tragic riding accident.

She had been staying at the country estate belonging to an ageing relative who was ill, when she decided to go out for a ride on an unfamiliar horse. The stable boy had warned her mother that the horse was a trifle feisty, but, being a highly competent rider, she had ignored him.

She had been cantering along a hillside when a sudden shot from a nearby farmer's gun had alarmed the horse. He bolted and she lost control. She fell off into a ditch as the horse plunged through a hedge.

It was only because one of the ostlers had accompanied her that she was found as soon as she was. Sadly, her neck was broken and she had died instantly.

Marina remembered only too well the day that she had returned from a pleasant afternoon with her friend, Lady Henrietta d'Astuges, to find the servants weeping and the curtains in the drawing room ominously closed.

She had thought she might die from grief and had found no comfort in her father, who had locked himself away until the day of the funeral.

Marina had been forced to carry on and deal with all the arrangements as her father sat in his study and drank heavily.

When he finally emerged, the day before the funeral, he was a changed man.

Although always strict, he now was cold and distant. Every attempt Marina had made to bridge the widening gap between them was rebuffed.

She had never felt so alone in her life — and it was only through the support of her dear friends, Henrietta in particular, that she had kept on going.

And now, only moments earlier, her father had stood there and told her that he could not bear to have her, his only daughter, around the house any longer.

Marina's heart was breaking as her father turned his back on her and regarded the pale green walls.

She wished fervently that her tears would move him, but it was quite clear that he could not even bear to look at her.

She had often been told that she was the image of her mother and now, it would seem, it was counting against her.

After what seemed like an age, Sir Henry Fullerton turned around and, without meeting her imploring gaze, answered her. His voice was clipped and cold — his ice-blue eyes were without expression or warmth.

"Putting flowers on your Mama's grave will not bring her back, Marina. No, you must start your life afresh and a stay in France would be most beneficial. You were always weak on languages and now you will have the perfect chance to improve yourself.

"To this end, I have contacted a good family whom I have known for years. Monsieur and Madame Solange have written and expressed their willingness to give you a home for the foreseeable future. You should be grateful for such an opportunity."

"But, Papa," implored Marina, falling to her knees, "I do not understand why I cannot stay here with you. Surely you

will need me more than ever now that Mama is no longer with us?"

Sir Henry's expression darkened and Marina realised that she had taken one step too far. If there was one thing her father hated above all else, it was to be challenged once he had made up his mind. His fierce temper was not something she enjoyed provoking.

"Daughter, do you dare to question my wisdom?" he fumed, his words heavy with threat.

Although he had never laid a finger on Marina, she had grown more and more frightened of him and his unpredictable moods during these past few weeks She had seen the way he snapped at the servants — even Frome, their butler, who had been her father's manservant long before he had married her mother — and how testy he was with Monty, the family dog.

The poor, faithful, flat-coated retriever had found himself totally neglected by his Master and even now, was being walked by Jonas, the footman, as her father appeared to have lost all interest in him.

"No, Papa," she replied, after a long silence.

"Then, I am glad to hear it. You will leave for France next Friday. I will make all the travel arrangements. Ellen, your maid, will be travelling with you as chaperone. It would not be seemly for a young girl to go alone."

"Yes, Papa."

"Very well, I have said all I wanted to. You may go." Marina slowly rose from the floor, feeling utterly miserable.

She gave her father one last imploring glance, but he would not meet her eye. He stood by the window that looked out over Harley Street and did not turn round.

Sadly, Marina turned the brass beehive handle of the drawing room door and left, her heart breaking all over again.

'He dismissed me as if I was no more to him than a servant,' she moaned to herself, as she climbed the stairs up

to her room. 'I do not know what I have done to deserve this.'

Waiting for her in the room was Ellen, who had been her nurse when she was a small child and now that Marina was grown up had stayed with the family, tending to her every need.

Marina was not old enough to have a lady's maid, but Ellen performed most of the duties that one would have undertaken.

"Miss Marina. You have been crying. What is wrong?"

The motherly maid came rushing up to her as soon as Marina set foot inside the dusty-pink bedroom. Ellen was Irish, through and through, and did not think twice about hugging her young charge.

"Come and sit down on the bed beside me, miss, and tell me what on earth has happened."

"Oh, Ellen!" cried Marina, bursting into tears again. "Papa has abandoned me!"

"There, there, what nonsense is this? You'll be missing your Mama, that is all."

"No, Ellen. Papa does not want me any more. He has told me.

"Your Papa loves you very much, Miss Marina — "

"Then why is he sending me away to France?"

Ellen pulled away from Marina with a look of horror on her face.

"Surely you are mistaken. Your dear Mama has just left us. Why would he not want you by his side?"

Marina's slender frame was shaking with sobs, her face wet with tears.

"Nevertheless, it is true. He has just told me that I am to leave next week for the Continent and that you are to accompany me. Has he not told you of his plans?"

It was now Ellen's turn to look shocked. "No, he has not, Miss Marina"

"I do not think that Papa can love me anymore, Ellen,"

whispered Marina, her voice choking with emotion. "Nonsense!"

"So why is he sending me away?"

Ellen hugged her once again, a perplexed look on her broad, ruddy face.

"That I don't know, Miss Marina. But to be sure, he's not in his right mind, if you don't mind me saying."

"Could he not have sent me to the country, even? We have many relations in Suffolk and I should not have minded a long stay there. But France! I will not be able to visit Mama's grave or see my friends. It is as if he is sending me into exile for looking like Mama."

She began to cry once more.

"Perhaps Papa will change his mind," she sighed, in between sobs.

"Perhaps he will," replied Ellen.

But no sooner were the words out of her mouth than Mrs. Baines, the housekeeper, knocked and came into the room.

"Ah, Ellen. There you are. I have come to tell you that you will shortly be leaving for France with Miss Marina. Sir Henry has kindly given you permission to have the afternoon off to go shopping for whatever you will both require for the trip. Frome will give you the money after lunch."

Silently she left the room with a nod of her head towards Marina.

Marina stared at Ellen, miserably.

"So," breathed Ellen, after digesting what Mrs. Baines had just told her, "your Papa meant what he said after all."

"I did not doubt it for an instant. Papa is not a man who is prone to flights of fancy."

"I had better check your travelling clothes at once, miss, and I must make a list of what we will need."

Turning to look at the photograph of her Mama that stood on the nightstand, Marina wished fervently that she had not died and that she had not been so foolish as to ride such a dangerous horse — 'Mama! Oh, Mama!' she wept to herself.

'Why are you not here — alive and well. You would not have

allowed Papa to send me away as if I was a servant.'

The next day, Marina's father called her to his study and informed her that she would be leaving on Sunday.

"You had best say your goodbyes to your friends," he added, as he handed over the tickets to the boat train, "you will not be seeing them for a long while —"

"Yes, Papa," muttered Marina, feeling tears beginning to prick at her eyes.

She regarded the tickets in her hand and wished she could fling them into the grate where a small fire burned.

"The Solanges are good people, Marina, and you will enjoy their company. Monsieur Solange is very cultured — you will learn much from him. I trust him implicitly."

"Yes, Papa."

"Now, leave me, I have to pay a call on a friend and shall be going out very soon. Do not expect me back for dinner as I shall dine at my Club."

Marina turned around and left the room, the tickets burning her palm.

She went upstairs and made a list of the people she wanted to see and then crossed off the ones whom she would not have time to visit.

'Georgiana is at home this afternoon, so I shall call upon her. Luanda, I can visit tomorrow and Irena on Thursday. That just leaves Henrietta and Albert.'

Marina gazed at her reflection in her dressing table mirror. Her cheeks burned as she thought of her best friend's brother, Albert. She had long had a soft spot for him and had even fancied herself to be in love with the young man.

He was as fair as Marina was dark, with a dashing moustache and twinkling blue eyes. Henrietta said he was a rogue and a ne'er-do-well — far more interested in playing cards and chasing around stage doors. He had never looked at Marina as more than an insignificant friend of his sister and now she was being forced to leave him behind.

Marina took no joy in saying her goodbyes to her friends. Georgiana had been quite beside herself and Luanda refused to believe it until she showed her the tickets for the boat train.

On the Thursday, Marina made herself ready to make her most difficult call to see Henrietta. They had met at school and had remained firm friends ever since.

As she stood outside the house in Wimpole Street, Marina's hand shook whilst pulling the knob on the bell.

Her heart beat so fast that she could scarcely breathe as the familiar figure of Nicholls, the butler, loomed into view.

"Ah, Miss Fullerton, Lady Henrietta is in the morning room, do come in."

Nicholls opened the door for her and Marina hurried inside. Henrietta was sitting doing some embroidery, her face a picture of concentration. Upon seeing her friend, she tucked her needle into the stretched silk and rose to greet her.

"Marina. What a lovely surprise."

The two girls embraced and, almost before she could say anything, Marina felt tears pricking at her eyes.

"Oh, Henrietta. I have come with very sad news."

"What is it — it's not Monty?" asked the pale-skinned, fair- haired girl.

"Please tell me that Monty is not dead."

"No, it is nothing like that," began Marina, sinking down upon the sofa next to her and taking off her gloves. "I am being sent away."

Henrietta regarded her friend in disbelief.

"What do you mean — sent away? I am afraid I do not understand. You cannot have done something wrong. Why, you are still in mourning."

Marina looked down at her black dress of rough silk with its simple crepe frill at the cuff.

"No, it is nothing I have done. Papa has decided that he no longer wishes me to live with him and is sending me away to live with some friends of his in France."

Henrietta clasped her friend's hand and sat mute with misery.

"I think it is because I remind him so much of Mama," continued Marina, "he cannot bear to have me living under the same roof as him."

The emotion became too much for her and she burst into tears. Henrietta did her best to comfort her friend, but she could not stop her from sobbing.

Rising, Henrietta rang for Nicholls and asked for some tea to be brought at once. In a short while he appeared with a tray.

"This is terrible — terrible," muttered Henrietta, as she poured the hot liquid into a white bone-china cup, "have you tried pleading with him?"

Marina took the cup and sipped the tea and it soothed her immediately.

"Yes, I have. But Papa seems to have set his mind upon this course of action and I fear I cannot change his mind."

"Who will you be staying with?"

"Some family friends — the Solanges. I have met them once before when we visited Paris years ago. They have a charming daughter called Monique. I expect she will keep me company, but, oh, Henrietta, I do not want to leave London and all my friends.

The two girls stayed silent and simply drank their tea — united in misery. "What ho!"

A loud voice and the sudden opening of the door shattered the peace as in bounded Albert, Henrietta's brother.

"Immaculate timing, as usual," mumbled Henrietta, under her breath.

"I say, Henny old thing, you didn't tell me that Marina was visiting."

The tall, fair-haired young man stood, legs apart, hands on hips, in the middle of the morning room, a devil- may-care expression on his face. He seemed totally oblivious to the fact that Marina was deeply upset and hardly noticed that he had crashed into something private.

"Only passing through!" he bellowed cheerfully.

It was then that both Marina and Henrietta noticed that there was another person in the room with them. The man in question was around thirty and stood quietly in the doorway, smoothing down his golden brown hair, a look of discomfort playing around his handsome features.

Henrietta immediately took everything in, including the way the stranger was staring at the distraught Marina.

"So, to what do we owe the pleasure, Marina? I was dashed sorry to hear about your Mama, by the way. Rotten luck and all that"

Henrietta glared daggers at her brother, but Albert was too busy helping himself to a custard cream from the tea tray.

"Marina has come to say goodbye, Albert," said Henrietta, through clenched jaws. "Oh, why is that?"

"She is going away to Paris."

"Marvellous. Just what you need, I should have thought," answered Albert. "I am certain that you will find it most agreeable. The French are superb at making one forget one's miseries. We have French relations, as you know, and a spot of fresh air with them always sets one back on top."

"Albert, a spot of fresh air is hardly likely to bring Marina's mother back," countered Henrietta, a look of disgust at her brother's tactlessness crossing her face.

Marina was too shocked to know how to respond. She had always known that Albert was clumsy in the way he spoke and did not always think about other people's feelings, but his gaucheness had shocked her.

After a long silence, Henrietta took the initiative and steered the conversation.

"Albert, you are very rude — you have not introduced your friend to us."

The man in the doorway cast a grateful look in Henrietta's direction and pulled himself up to his full height. "Sir Peter Bailey, at your service," he announced,

bowing first to Henrietta and then Marina.

"Oh, you've met him before, Henny — don't you recall? At the Wiltshire's party for New Year."

Henrietta gave the man a searching look.

"I am quite certain that I would have remembered you, if that were the case," she murmured.

Coughing before he spoke, Sir Peter took up the conversation.

"I am afraid that we were introduced, Lady Henrietta, but that I was rather preoccupied at the time having just endured something of a disappointment."

"How so, Sir Peter?"

"I was engaged to a young lady who had broken it off just before Christmas, and so, I was not quite myself."

"She was a very foolish young lady, then, to pass up such a fine opportunity," replied Henrietta, mischievously.

Marina looked at her friend in disbelief. Henrietta was such a terrible flirt.

She sometimes wished that she could be more like her, but she was far too shy around young men.

She glanced at Sir Peter, hardly daring to look him in the face. He was certainly handsome, but he was far too old to be of interest.

"And I hope you have found someone else to heal your broken heart," continued Henrietta, quite shamelessly.

Sir Peter coloured and looked down at the carpet. "Oh, but I have embarrassed you!"

"Do be quiet, Henny," put in Albert, suddenly glad that the attention had passed from him. "Peter, old boy — you'll have to forgive my sister, but she is an incurable romantic. She's always trying to match-make me with her friends -"

'Goodness. I hope he does not think me in love with him,' thought Marina, suddenly horrified and wondering what on earth she could ever have seen in him.

"That's the trouble with women," blustered Albert, taking another biscuit, "they have no sense of what is really important in life. Now, I don't think I told you all about the japes that Heinrich and I got up to at the Masterson Hunt, did I, Henny?"

Henrietta rolled her eyes as her brother launched into a huge, long story involving hounds, foxes and a missing stirrup cup.

She cast an anxious look at Marina who seemed to be wilting under the verbal assault. Henrietta was well aware that her friend was still delicate after her recent bereavement and that the last thing she wanted was to hear tall stories of derring-do from Albert.

"You must forgive us, Sir Peter," interrupted Henrietta, clasping Marina's hand in hers. "My friend has come to say her goodbyes before leaving for the Continent and we have much to catch up on."

"Of course," replied Sir Peter, clearly mortified by Albert's behaviour. "I have an appointment in Holborn this afternoon and should be on my way."

Albert paused mid-sentence and quickly composed himself.

"Right-o," he said, clearly realising that he had been a crashing bore. "I'll see you out, old man."

Sir Peter turned to Henrietta and Marina and bowed to them.

"Goodbye, I wish you well on your journey," he said, gazing intensely at Marina.

"Thank you," she mumbled, unable to meet his eyes. Albert and Sir Peter left the room and, as soon as the door had closed, Henrietta stared long and hard at her friend.

"Well, you certainly made an impression."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Sir Peter. Did you not see the way he was looking at you?"

Marina shook her head, miserably. All she was thinking was that Albert had ruined her last few precious moments alone with her best friend.

"You are a goose, Marina. I would not be at all surprised if that is not the last you've seen of that particular gentleman!"

"But how could that be, Henrietta? I am about to be packed off to France for Heaven only knows how long! And in spite of what your brother said, I cannot just shrug off the fact that Papa no longer wants me and Mama is dead."

Marina burst into tears again. Squeezing her hand, Henrietta tried her best to comfort her.

"Darling Marina, my brother is such a fool You are not still harbouring silly fantasies about him, I hope? Much as I love him, he is not worth bothering about. He has his head in a horse bag most of the time and is completely oblivious to anyone's finer feelings —"

"No, no, I have long since given up any foolish ideas about Albert," replied Marina, wiping her eyes, "it is just that I do not want to go to France. The Solanges are very nice people, but I wish to be close to my home, my friends and Mama's grave. I cannot do that if I am in Paris."

"Dearest, your Papa is not quite in his right mind at the moment — he is torn with grief. I am certain that once you have been away for a few weeks, he will realise the error of his ways and send for you."

Marina shook her head.

"I am not so certain, Henrietta. Papa has become so distant since Mama died and I know that my presence irks him."

Leaving Wimpole Street, Marina felt as if she was never coming back. The two girls were both in tears as Marina waved from the corner of the street before disappearing into Harley Street.

She walked quickly back home and soon was waiting for Frome to open the door for her.

"Good afternoon, Miss Marina. You will forgive the disruption to the hall, but preparations are being made for your departure."

Marina soon saw that the hall was a jumble of trunks and boxes. She cast her eye over them and suddenly, saw something that looked very familiar.

Walking over to an open box, she saw that it contained some of her mother's possessions.

"But what is this?" she asked, picking up a white- leather glove. "These are not my things - these are Mama's."

"The Master has requested that all those articles were to be disposed of, Miss Marina. I could not say whose they are."

Marina looked at Frome in disbelief. Had her father taken leave of his senses?

"You are certain that Papa asked for these items to be thrown away?"

"Quite certain. Miss Marina."

All the blood seemed to drain from Marina's head as she regarded the sorry mess of handkerchiefs, linen and costume jewellery.

"Where is Papa?"

"In his study, miss," replied Frome, without a hint of emotion.

Marina did not hesitate. Without taking off her hat and gloves, she walked quickly down the passage that lead to the study. She knocked and then, without waiting to be asked to enter, walked in.

Her father was seated at his desk, writing. He looked surprised.

"Papa, I fear that there has been some mistake. I have just intercepted Frome with some boxes containing Mama's things. He is under the impression that they were to be disposed of. I came to you at once, naturally."

"There has been no mistake, I ordered them to be taken away."

"But Papa. It is too soon after Mama's death."

A dark look crossed her father's face. Me looked at Marina in such a cold fashion that it made her blood run cold.

"If you were the kind of obedient daughter I brought you up to be, you would not be questioning my decisions," he said in a strangled voice.

"But Papa-"

"Do not go against me, daughter," he shouted, the veins in his forehead throbbing, "I have made my decision and it is not for you to ask why. It is just as well that you are leaving tomorrow for I can see that you are becoming too much of a handful. A spell in France, where they understand what a daughter's duty is, should benefit you no end. Now, we shall have no further discourse on this matter before I do something I will regret. My word is final."

Marina looked at her father in horror. The way he had spoken to her was so cruel, so unfeeling. There were no words of love and no reassurances. Just an icy demeanour and harshness.

Without saying another word, she left before her tears started to flow freely. Running upstairs, she was forced to duck the footmen carrying trunks containing, no doubt, more of her mother's clothes.

Ellen was emptying drawers as Marina rushed into the safety of her room.

"Miss," cried Ellen, seeing her so distressed.

"Leave me, Ellen. Please," cried Marina, throwing off her hat and prostrating herself on the bed.

Hot, angry sobs rent the air as she cried and cried into her pillow,

'Nobody wants me. Not even my own Papa. Oh, Mama. How I wish you were here to protect and love me. I miss you so very much!"

And with that, she sobbed even louder, her fingers clawing at the lace on her pillowslip until she had made small holes in it.

CHAPTER TWO

Marina awoke the next morning with a very heavy heart.

"Come along, miss, it might not be so bad at all," trilled Ellen, as she bustled around the room checking that everything was packed. "I have heard that Paris is a beautiful city."

"Yes, it is," sighed Marina, sitting up in bed, "but I don't think that I could enjoy it even if I tried."

Ellen gave her Mistress a sad look and snapped shut the lock on the last trunk.

"There, that's all done now.' she announced, with some satisfaction.

Marina felt as if she had nothing to look forward to.

'Mama has gone, Papa does not want me and now I am being bundled off to France as if I was unwanted luggage.'

Hot tears began to course down her cheeks. She felt too miserable to even get up out of bed.

Just then, Ellen came back into the room carrying a tea tray.

"Oh, miss. You must not upset yourself," she cried, setting the tray down.

"I cannot help it, Ellen. I wish Mama were here. She would speak to Papa and make him see sense."

Marina felt utterly helpless.

"Today I will start my new life," she whispered, as Ellen poured her tea, "and yet I feel as if I have no future."

"Come now, miss," soothed Ellen, "your father has not said that you are never coming back, just that he wishes to be on his own for a while. To be sure, once he has had time to grieve for your Mama, he'll be sending for you to come home."

Marina sipped at her tea and felt a little better.

"I hope you are right, Ellen, because at the moment, I feel as if nobody wants me."

Unfortunately, Ellen's optimism was a little premature. After breakfast, they started to say their goodbyes, but when Marina asked Frome where her father was, he replied,

"He has gone out, Miss Marina He left early this morning to visit Lady Alice Win wood."

'Why would he want to go visiting that woman, when his own daughter is leaving the country? So, Papa has not seen fit to bid farewell to me,' sighed Marina, in a tone of despair.

She remained silent as her luggage was loaded onto the waiting carriage.

"I wonder if I shall ever return to this house?" she ruminated, as she stood outside and looked up at the elegant white facade.

"Of course you will, miss," answered Ellen, brightly. "The driver is ready to leave, Miss Marina," interrupted Frome, soberly.

Marina wondered if the man ever laughed or smiled. He always wore the same dour expression.

Without saying another word, she climbed mournfully into the carriage.

"I do believe I would not care if we never arrived in Paris at all," said Marina, gloomily.

"You must not talk like that, miss. I should feel responsible if anything should happen to you."

"Then, you would be the only one who would care. It is quite apparent that Papa does not share your concern."

"Do not take it to heart, miss. I am just glad that he allowed me to come with you - even if it is strange that he did so, don't you think?"

Marina thought for a while and had to agree. There would be only Mrs. Baines and the kitchen maids left at Harley Street with Ellen gone and even though she would not be there to need attention, Ellen's duties were more numerous than just taking care of her.

Very soon they were speeding past green fields and through sleepy villages. Marina looked out of the window yet she did not take in the views. She was too lost in thought

'I feel so lonely,' she said to herself, 'and the only person I have to confide in now is a servant I know I should not talk to Ellen in such an indiscreet way, but who else is there now that Papa has sent me away?'

She thought of Henrietta and next Albert.

flow foolish I was to fancy that I was in love with him once. Henrietta is right. He is only interested in horses and himself.'

"Oh, miss — you are going to kill me," came Ellen's voice, suddenly. "I forgot to give you this."

In her hand, she held a letter. Marina took it and looked at the writing.

"Strange, this is not the hand of anyone I know," she muttered, turning the letter over several times. "Did the postman bring it this morning?"

"Yes, miss,"

"It could not be from Albert. He would never put pen to paper."

"Then, open it. It won't bite you," suggested Ellen, excitedly.

Breaking the seal on the flap, Marina opened the letter. Reading it quickly, she let out a sigh and crumpled it in her hand.

"It is from a person I barely know and have only met once," Marina told her, dismissively. "It is of no consequence."

Ellen watched as Marina squashed it into a ball and absent-mindedly dropped it into her carpetbag.

Her thoughts returned to the day when she had first met Sir Peter Bailey.

The letter had been from him…

'How very presumptuous,' she said to herself, 'inviting me to some soiree when we have barely exchanged greetings.'

Her mind returned to how Henrietta had become so excited after Sir Peter had left with Albert.

"Did you see the way he looked at you?" she had said.

'Henrietta is such a romantic fool,' thought Marina, 'she is always seeing intrigue where none exists.'

What was true, however, was with each turn of the wheel of the carriage, Marina felt as if her old life was melting away behind her. The thought of her mother's funeral ceased to pain her and any feelings she might have harboured for Albert were fast disappearing.

'I must make the best of whatever happens next,' resolved Marina, in defiance of her father. "Mama would not want me to be so unhappy.'

It was growing dark by the time the carriage rumbled into the port of Dover. All around them, people thronged around the wheels — some with luggage, some dragging small children, but everyone seemed in a great hurry to get somewhere.

"Goodness, so many people," cried Ellen, "It is worse than Piccadilly Circus!"

"It is one of the busiest ports in the country," replied Marina, disinterestedly.

"All these people off on adventures and here we are about to start one of our own."

Just then, the carriage pulled up outside a brown squat building that Marina assumed to be the ticket office.

"Ellen, can you go and find out where we board our ferry, please?" asked Marina, stretching after the long journey.

Ellen got up rather unsteadily — she was no longer a young woman.

"Of course, miss. You wait here and I shall be back before you know it"

Marina watched Ellen's disappearing back as she climbed down into the crowds. Outside, she could hear the horses

They must be tired,' thought Marina, who was somewhat fatigued herself. 'I do hope that the coachman is going to stay in Dover tonight to give them a rest'

She was very tender-hearted when it came to animals. She loved riding and horses and fiercely hated any ill- treatment of them

Before long, Ellen returned.

"We are to go to the SS Saint Mary," she puffed, climbing back inside the carriage. "They will load our luggage as soon as we board."

"Thank you, Ellen," replied Marina, feeling strangely unmoved.

With a jolt, the carriage moved towards the dock. Almost as soon as they stopped, a throng of porters came rushing up to unload their belongings.

"Come along, miss," exhorted Ellen, "the man at the counter said that as we are First Class, we would be shown to our Saloon."

Although the journey ahead was not long enough for a cabin, Ellen had made certain that her Mistress would be as comfortable as possible. She, herself, felt a thrill at travelling First Class as she had never done so before. Marina had insisted that she did not leave her side even though it was not the norm for servants to travel with their employers.

"I can look after you and make sure that you do not have to fend off any unwanted attentions," fussed Ellen, as the Steward took them to the Saloon.

"Whatever do you mean?" asked Marina, whose last thought was engaging in conversation with any strange men.

"They say that these French gentlemen are very persistent in pressing their attentions upon single ladies," said Ellen with a worried look on her face.

"I doubt if there will be many French gentlemen on the passage and besides, it is too short for them to become too troublesome."

"Ah, I would not bet on it," answered Ellen, "with you being such a beautiful young lady, you are sure to attract attention."

Marina blushed. Although her Mama had often told her that she was growing into a highly attractive woman, she believed that all mothers thought the same of their offspring — it was only natural.

Marina was not overly modest as she realised that the reflection she caught each morning in her looking glass was pleasing and, certainly, Albert had always looked at her with a glint in his eye, but she would have stopped short of describing herself as beautiful.

She was very glad indeed that Ellen had been sent with her as chaperone. Supposing her father had sent some ageing relative with no sense of humour? She shuddered to consider it

Some minutes later, she found herself walking along the deck, trying her best to hold on to her hat.

"Goodness, it is so windy," she exclaimed struggling to keep herself warm.

"It will be the spring tides, miss," suggested Ellen, as she walked a step behind.

"Pardon me, but might I offer you a sheltered corner to sit in?"

Marina and Ellen looked up to find a tall gentleman with bright red hair standing in front of them. By his accent, he sounded Scottish.

"Thank you, but we are fine as we are," countered Ellen, feistily, giving the man a Keep-off look.

"You are like a lioness with her cubs," said Marina, laughing, as Ellen dragged her back inside the Saloon.

"And these gentlemen are far too forward for my liking." she answered, bristling. "Heaven only knows what the French men will be like if this is how English gentlemen behave the moment that they get out of the country."

"That gentleman was Scottish, Ellen."

"Well, they're all the same. Scottish, English and God forbid we meet an Irishman! They are bad enough on Irish soil —"

They were laughing as they entered the welcoming warmth of the Saloon.

"Anyway, in France, it is as natural to men to flirt with attractive women as it is to breathe," added Marina. "Mama used to say that they are the most romantic nation in the world."

"There is plenty of time for you to be having such thoughts," admonished Ellen sternly. "You have enough to deal with at the moment."

"Do not worry yourself, Ellen, I have no wish to become romantically involved with anyone. You have forgotten that I am in mourning and will be for some considerable time and no gentleman would press his suit given that."

"If these Frenchmen are as fond of romancing as you say, miss, then I would not have thought that a little discouragement would put them off."

It was quite late by the time they arrived in Calais. As soon as they disembarked, Marina was engulfed in a melee of different sights and sounds. She had passed through Calais before with her parents, but it had been daytime when they had arrived at the port

"Everything looks so unfamiliar," she commented, as a porter escorted them to the train.

"I am certain that the porter knows where we are going," answered Ellen, "he speaks very good English."

"And my French is terribly poor. He puts me to shame."

"Now, miss, here is your compartment, your Papa has bought me a Third Class ticket so I must leave you," announced Ellen, suddenly, as they reached the comfortable- looking carriage on the train for Paris.

"Oh, Ellen. You cannot leave me alone," pleaded Marina, suddenly feeling quite abandoned. She was terrified that she

would have to spend the long journey fending off the unwanted attentions of strange Frenchmen.

But no sooner had she uttered those words when a rather grand-looking elderly lady pushed her way past Ellen and sat herself down in the carriage.

"Good evening," she said, in cultured tones. "I do hope you will not mind me sharing this compartment with you?"

"Not at all," replied Marina, gratefully.

"I'll bid you goodbye until Paris, then, miss," said Ellen, smiling. "I can see that you will be perfectly safe with this lady."

"I am the Duchess of Wallsworth," added the elderly woman. "My companion, Miss Broome, will be with us shortly. She is just arranging with the porter for my dog to be put in the Guard's van."

"You have a dog, Your Grace?" asked Marina. "I am terribly fond of animals — we have a flat-coated retriever at home. By the way, I am Marina Fullerton."

"Delighted to meet you, Miss Fullerton. Yes, I have a fine mastiff called Marmaduke. He's huge but very friendly."

"And he likes to travel?"

"Oh, I could not bear to leave him at home," said the Duchess, horrified. "He has to come with me wherever I go. We are en-route to the South of France but are staying in Paris for a few days beforehand."

"I am bound for Paris," said Marina. "I will be staring with friends for an indefinite time."

"Fullerton, Fullerton — " mused the Duchess, thoughtfully. "Is your father the businessman, Sir Henry Fullerton?"

"Why, yes, do you know him?"

"My late husband was an acquaintance. I believe that it must be your mother who died recently? My condolences."

"Thank you so much. Yes, Mama died last month."

"And your father is not travelling with you to Paris?"

"No, he prefers to remain in London," sighed Marina,

hanging her head in embarrassment. "It was a terrible shock to all of us."

"Yes, it must be awful for you. A young girl needs her mother."

Marina could feel tears starting to prick her eyes. The lady's concern touched her deeply.

"Oh, but I have upset you," said the Duchess. "Let us speak of other things — we must have many friends in common."

Marina was grateful that she had changed the topic of conversation. She did not really wish to talk about her mother.

"Yes, we must Do you know my best friend, Lady Henrietta d'Astuges?"

"I believe I know a Lord Albert d'Astuges. Is he her brother?"

"Why, yes, he is. How do you know him?"

"He is a friend of a very close friend of mine. You may also know him. His name is Sir Peter Bailey?"

Marina nodded sheepishly and coloured at that name. She suddenly felt a little ashamed for having discarded Sir Peter's letter so carelessly and could not remember what she had done with it

A sudden wave of remorse swept over her.

If I had only kept the letter, I would at least be able to write to him from France,' she thought, 'and now he will think I am rude.'

"Is he a friend of yours?"

"Oh, no, I have only met him once at Henrietta's house."

"He is a most fine gentleman and so good-looking," continued the Duchess, quite oblivious to Marina's embarrassment.

"he comes to see me at least twice a week to take me for tea or for a turn around Hyde Park. I am always saying that he should not be wasting himself on an old lady like myself and should find himself a nice young woman to take out, but he is most insistent. Such a fascinating young gentleman and so interesting."

She trailed off into a reverie.

Marina felt sorry that she had not made more of an effort with Sir Peter.

If the Duchess thought him a fine man, then why had she dismissed him? She vowed to try and find the letter once she reached Paris.

'But I fear I may have thrown it onto the floor of the carriage,' she thought, as the Duchess began to drone on about the people she knew. Names flew about that Marina recognised, but she could not get a word in as the Duchess was in full flood.

Marina stifled a smile. The Duchess appeared to have a view on everything but for all her talk, Marina was glad of her company.

She certainly proved to be an effective deterrent from any unwanted advances.

A few hours later, the train finally arrived at the Gare du Nord. It was very early in the morning and Marina had not slept a wink.

The Duchess had eventually fallen asleep and had snored loudly during the last fifty miles.

Marina felt terribly cold as the heating did not appear to work.

'I do hope that the Solanges have sent a carriage,' she mused, as she yawned and stretched.

At half-past six, the Steward came along with tea The Duchess woke up and immediately began to talk.

"You simply must come and visit me when I am next in Paris," she said between sips. "If you are still here in May, I would love you to call."

"Thank you, I will," replied Marina, thinking that by then, she might be glad of some English company.

"I return on the fifth for a few weeks before returning South," continued the Duchess. "Of course, when the tourists arrive in August I return to London until September."

"Miss Marina."

She looked up to see Ellen standing in the doorway, eager and bright-eyed.

"This is Ellen, my lady's maid," said Marina, by way of introduction.

"Are you ready to leave, miss?"

"I should think so, Ellen. Goodbye, Your Grace."

"Au revoir, Miss Fullerton — it is au revoir"

"Of course," replied Marina, shaking her hand.

"Who was that?" asked Ellen, as soon as they were out of earshot.

"The Duchess of Wallsworth and she has given me her address in Paris."

"That will be nice for you, miss."

"Perhaps, now you must tell me why you are looking so happy at this early hour?"

Ellen giggled and then blushed.

"I had a wonderful time, chatting to a handsome sailor," she confessed. "He was so charming and such a gentleman — let me borrow his coat because I was cold and gave me coffee from his flask."

"But Ellen, you do not like coffee."

"I do now, miss."

Marina smiled to herself as they made their way along the corridor to the exit On the platform, she could see a porter was waiting with their luggage on a trolley.

"Where did the Solanges say they would meet us?" asked Ellen.

"By the gate, I believe," answered Marina. "I do hope that they will be here. It is a little early, but Papa assured me that they were most insistent that they meet me themselves rather than send a servant."

The porter began to push the trolley down the platform and Marina and Ellen were forced to walk quickly to keep up with him. He had a brisk manner and appeared to speak a little English.

"Do you have some change to tip him?" whispered Ellen.

"I will get some from my purse," said Marina, diving into her carpetbag.

She gave the porter half a franc and he thanked them in halting English.

Marina strained her eyes to see if anyone answering the Solange's description was waiting by the gate, but she could only see a few coachmen and the odd, solitary gentleman.

"We should stay in one place," advised Ellen, "they will be along shortly.

Marina thought privately to herself that they might have forgotten about her arrival, but she did not voice her fears to Ellen.

Fifteen minutes later, most of the people waiting had dispersed, leaving Marina and Ellen stranded on their own. No one had come forward and, as it was early, there were not many people milling about.

"Well, this is a fine thing," remarked Ellen, as the time ticked on. "Should I go and find a porter or someone to ask?"

"But I do not clearly remember what they look like," responded Marina. "It was so long ago when I last met them and Monique was a child. She is about my age, but I am certain that as I have changed a great deal since, so will she."

"Well, we can't sit here for ever."

"Would you go and have a look around the station for them, Ellen? Search for an elderly couple, a little older than Papa and a young girl around my age.

"Very well, miss," agreed Ellen, with a sigh.

She did not know how she would get on, not speaking the language and being in a foreign country.

Leaving Marina sitting on top of a trunk, Ellen bustled off.

Long moments ticked by and Marina began to feel somewhat nervous.

'Supposing they have not come for us or have forgotten altogether?' she thought, scanning the crowds until her eyes hurt. 'All alone in Paris. What will we do and where will I go if they have forgotten about me?'

She was just about to become increasingly desperate when she caught sight of the feather on Ellen's hat, bobbing above the crowd.

CHAPTER THREE

Marina waited anxiously as, slowly, the figure of Ellen came into view. She strained her eyes to see if the Solanges were with her, but to her disappointment, it was only a station official who was following in her wake.

"Miss Marina," puffed Ellen, reaching her at last, "I could not find a soul who spoke English, but this chap speaks a little and he seems to want to help us."

"You are perdu!" he asked haltingly.

"No, no," she responded, shaking her head, "we have lost our friends."

The man looked at her blankly for a moment. "Goodness, I wish I had paid more attention in classes.

Papa was right, I am weak at French," admitted Marina.

"Do you remember the word for 'friends', miss?"

"Amis" cried Marina, suddenly remembering, "nous avons perdus amis."

Although poorly expressed, the man seemed to understand and nodded.

"Ah, hien! Je comprends. V'aus ne savez pas ou ils soni?"

Ellen looked at her Mistress in dismay. "Do you understand what he is saying?"

"I believe so."

While she was talking to Ellen, she suddenly noticed out of the corner of her eye, a young girl with long dark hair who appeared to be looking for someone. Just behind her was a smartly dressed older couple.

When the girl caught sight of Marina and Ellen, a look of relief crossed her face. Walking towards them, Marina suddenly recognised her.

"Monique!" she called, jumping up from the trunk. "Ah, Marina. I am so sorry we are late. The wheel broke on our carriage just as we were leaving the house and we had to get it, 'ow you say, mended?"

The girl embraced Marina fervently. She was tiny and elegant with masses of black hair that hung loosely down her back. Marina was quite surprised, as she had believed French girls to be so sophisticated — yet, here she was — wearing an ingénue's hairstyle!

Monique spoke almost perfect English with a charmingly accented voice and her eyes sparkled like jet Marina thought her very attractive, much more so than she remembered.

"It is so good to see you again, Monique," she replied, "I was worried that you were not coming."

"Bonjour,; Mademoiselle Fullerton."

Monsieur and Madame Solange now came up to Marina and kissed her on both cheeks. Marina was slightly taken aback as it was some time since she had last been in France and she had forgotten the etiquette.

"I must apologise for our lateness," said Monsieur Solange, with a short bow.

"Monique will have told you of our misfortune."

"Yes, she has," replied Marina, "but I am just glad that you are here. I am afraid that I do not speak French very well and we were having difficulty making ourselves understood."

"Ah, but you will soon pick up our language," put in Madame Solange.

Marina was slightly in awe of the woman. She must have been a considerable beauty when she was younger and still carried herself with a certain pride.

"I do hope so," said Marina

The station official had now returned so Monsieur Solange explained to him that the English lady was now being looked after.

"You must be hungry," said Monique, slipping her arm through Marina's, "we did not have time for breakfast before we left and so I am certain that our staff will have prepared something for us when we return."

"That sounds delightful," replied Marina, eagerly anticipating her French breakfast. She remembered the last time she had been in Paris, how the}' had eaten many delicious pastries and thick, creamy butter. And the coffee. So different from London.

Before long they were on board the carriage, heading for the Opera district where the family lived. Marina had a clear memory of the house with its white stone frontage and elegant proportions.

She hoped that Ellen was not getting too cold sitting up on the box with the coachman. There had not been enough room inside the carriage, and in any event, the Solanges were sticklers for etiquette. However relaxed they might be, servants did not travel with their Masters.

"I was so sorry to hear about your Mama," said Monique, as they made their way through the busy streets. "Yes, it was a terrible shock," murmured Marina.

"But of course, she would want you to go on living your life — perhaps we can persuade you to leave your mourning clothes behind. You will not find many young girls in Paris wearing such retemcnts. We do not believe in keeping ourselves miserable because of the dead. Life is for the living."

Marina gave her a look of horror — she remembered what Albert had said about the French not being ones to dwell on gloom, and she was quite shocked at Monique's straightforward approach.

"Ah, but I can see I have offended you," countered Monique. "I must apologise, but we French do not have the same views on mourning as the English."

"It is quite all right," answered Marina, "but nevertheless, I shall continue to wear black until the proper mourning period has elapsed."

"You must not mind Monique," added Monsieur Solange, "she thinks of nothing but pretty clothes and cannot imagine not being able to wear them. We will not force our customs on to you, Marina. Your Papa is a good friend of mine and I know how difficult it has been for both of you."

Marina looked away miserably.

'He has not said anything about Papa sending me away,' she thought, 'It is obvious he did not tell the Solanges the real reason why he has packed me off to Paris.'

Her mood suddenly plunged into the depths and she fell out of the conversation.

'I wish Ellen was with me,' she thought, 'she would understand. I suddenly feel quite alone. The Solanges are nice people, but I am not sure I am going to understand their ways.'

Her thoughts were interrupted by the carriage suddenly drawing to a halt outside the Solange's house. It looked as elegant as ever. Almost as soon as they stopped, the front door opened and what seemed like a crowd of servants descended upon them.

A young footman began to unload the luggage while another helped Ellen down from the box. A tall, thin butler with steel-grey hair came to greet them and welcomed Marina to the house. He muttered something to Monsieur Solange and immediately his face lit up.

"Tres bon," he exclaimed. "Mesdames, breakfast awaits us."

"You will, of course, wish to go to your room before eating?" suggested Monique, indicating to one of the waiting maids that she should take Marina upstairs.

"Marie will take care of you and your every need while you stay here."

Marina was about to thank her when she caught Ellen's furious expression out of the corner of her eye.

She hesitated for a moment and then replied, "Thank you so much but Ellen will look after me." She could see that Ellen was most put out at the suggestion that she would not be looking after her Mistress while they were in Paris.

"Oh, but Ellen is your personal maid, is she not? Marie will answer to Ellen and do all the menial tasks — lighting fires, ironing clothes and so on. She will prepare Ellen's meals for her too. Is that acceptable to you?"

Marina had only to look across at Ellen's beaming face to know that she was thrilled at the prospect of her sudden promotion. She had never had anyone to boss around, apart from the odd nursery maid when Marina was very small.

"Oh, very," smiled Marina.

"Ah, bon, now Marie will show you to your room. She does not speak English, but she understands a little."

The tiny, blonde-haired maid curtsied to both Marina and Ellen, before leading them upstairs. Marina gaped in awe at the fine paintings and rich hangings she encountered on the way.

The room that Marie showed Marina and Ellen was magnificent with high ceilings and elegant furnishings. There was a four-poster bed with blue silk drapes.

Ellen had a room next door to hers with an interconnecting door. As the trunks and luggage began to arrive, Ellen wasted no time in issuing orders to the bewildered maid, who obviously could not understand her Irish accent.

"Over there, you silly girl," snapped Ellen, as Marie began to pile Marina's clothes into a chest of drawers.

"Perhaps Marie could launder this dress," suggested Marina, aware that war was about to break out in front of her.

Ellen handed it to the girl, who promptly tried to hang it

up.

"Pour laver" said Marina, in bad French. "Ah, oui, c'etait tres cher, n'esl-cepas?" Marina nodded her head vigorously.

"What did she say?" asked Ellen, bewildered.

"She asked if it was expensive and I said yes. I am certain she is accustomed to laundering Monique and Madame Solange's gowns, so I feel confident that she will do it well."

"She had better, miss," snarled Ellen, with a stern expression.

They were interrupted by a knock on the door. Monique poked her head around the door.

"Ah, you are ready. That is good because I am very hungry."

Marina left Ellen to struggle with Marie and joined Monique. As they walked downstairs, Monique told her that they would be going to the theatre that evening.

"We French do not like to rush dinner, so we are having a large meal now and will not eat again until after the performance. The servants will give us a morsel or two before we leave, but I would suggest that you eat as much as you can now."

"Oh, I did not think we would be going out in public. I am still in mourning for Mama."

"Oh, bouj to such rules! Would your Mama really want you to be in Paris and not to enjoy yourself simply because she wasn't here?"

'Goodness,' thought Marina, 1 am not used to such points of view — it is really quite shocking. But Monique is right in thinking that Mama would not want me to stay at home. She loved the theatre.'

"Oh, but I have said something wrong again," cried Monique in distress. "I keep forgetting how you English are!"

"No, you are right, Monique. Mama would want me to enjoy myself and not sit around moping when 1 am in one of the most beautiful cities in the world. I will come tonight, of course. I have an evening gown that is embroidered with jet beads that will be quite acceptable, I am certain."

"Mais oui, cherie," replied Monique, "and now, we eat"

The dining room was filled with the most tantalising aromas — the servants had laid out an enormous buffet of pastries, cold meats and a plate of tomatoes. Marina looked at them in bewilderment.

"Marina! How you have grown."

Marina turned round to find a tall handsome young man standing before her. She looked and barely recognised the boy she had played with as a child.

"Simon?" she asked, unsure that it was he. She certainly did not remember him being quite so good-looking as a child.

"Enchante, ma chere Marina, it is good to see you again."

He took her hand and kissed it Marina felt a thrill run up her arm and blushed.

"I am afraid I did not recognise you for a moment."

"But it has been a long time, n'est-ce pas? I was, I think, thirteen, the last time we met?"

"And I was ten," added Marina smiling.

"How time goes, yes? And you have grown into a beautiful lady!"

Marina blushed again and in an attempt to divert attention away from herself, began to pile her plate with pastries.

Simon did not leave her side throughout the meal and constancy asked her questions and flattered her at every turn.

Marina's mind was in a whirl as he was certainly very different from the gentlemen that she had met in England. Somehow, Simon seemed so much more sophisticated, even though he was only three years older.

After eating so many starchy pastries, coupled with the effects of a long journey, Marina suddenly felt tired.

Yawning, she excused herself from the table. She noticed that Simon leapt to his feet and pulled her chair out for her.

"What lovely manners,' she thought, as she left the Solanges to chatter loudly amongst themselves.

Ellen was waiting to help her when she returned to her bedroom.

"I am glad that you are taking a nap, miss, I will have your dress made ready for you by the time you awake. The butler has told me that there will be a light meal served before the theatre at five o'clock."

"Thank you, Ellen. I would suggest that you rest yourself if you can."

"I have precious little to do, miss, now that Marie has taken so much off my shoulders. I had the most delicious

sweet rolls for breakfast just now. I have never tasted anything so wonderful."

"They are called brioche," Marina told her dreamily. She was still thinking of Simon and his thick black hair and startlingly blue eyes as she slipped off her shoes and lay down on the bed.

Ellen woke Marina at half-past four.

She had slept very deeply and had dreamed about her mother. In the dream she was in Paris with her and was showing her the beautiful apricot-coloured gown she often wore and was saying that Marina should wear it.

The dream was so real, that when Marina woke up, she felt the most terrible sense of loss when she realised that her mother was no longer with her.

'I must not cry,' she told herself, as Ellen bustled round and tightened her stays. 'I must not ruin this evening by dwelling on my sorrow — it would be rude to the Solanges.'

As Ellen put the black silk dress over her head, Manna wished that it was the apricot gown instead.

'But that has probably been thrown out with the rest of Mama's things,' she thought, sadly.

From downstairs came the sound of the gong.

Marina sighed and, looking in the mirror, pinched her cheeks.

Even though she was dressed in black, she looked lovely. I Ier skin was like alabaster next to the dark silk and her eyes were bluer than ever.

Adjusting the crepe frill on her cuffs, she walked downstairs and into the dining room. Monique was already seated, dressed in a beautiful dark-red satin gown. Seeing Marina enter the room, her eyes lit up.

"You look so beautiful," she cried, clapping her hands in delight "You will put me to shame."

"Oh, Monique, I could never do that — and your dress is so lovely."

"Thank you, Papa bought it for me last week. I begged and pleaded with him to have a dress made at Monsieur Caron's and finally he relented."

She fluttered her eyelashes in a coquettish gesture and primped the front of her gown. Monique was certainly very enchanting and she knew it.

"Allow me," said Simon, rushing up to pull out a chair. Marina could not help herself from blushing again.

Simon was so gallant. When she compared his to the oafish behaviour of Albert, she found it hard to believe that the latter had any French blood.

"We hope you will enjoy the play, Marina," said Madame Solange as she sipped her highly flavoured broth. It is a comic piece by Moliere, who is one of our greatest playwrights."

"Yes, I have heard of him," replied Marina, breaking off a piece of French bread. "Papa used to be quite fond of the theatre -"

She trailed off — she was about to add "before Mama died", but the words stuck in her throat.

"Perhaps he will come and visit you here?" suggested Madame Solange, hopefully. "It is always a pleasure to have his company."

"I think it unlikely, madame," responded Marina, sadly. "Papa has much to occupy himself in London. He has not even been to visit our house in Rye for ages."

"That is indeed a pity. An attractive man like your father should not be moping around. He must get on and start living again."

"Madame, as you know, in England, there are complicated rules that govern mourning — " began Marina.

"Why make life so complicated?" asked Madame Solange, with a shrug of her shoulders. "I do not understand this."

"Maman, we should respect Marina's wish to remain in mourning," broke in Simon suddenly.

"Bouj! I would not want you two to go around with long faces when I die," replied Madame Solange. "I want you to wear red and go to lots of parries."

Both Monique and Simon began to laugh. Marina looked at them in horror. How could they laugh so at the prospect of their mother dying?

"You must forgive us," said Monique, noticing her friend's look of horror, "Maman has always said she wants a big party when she dies! That is the way our family have always done it"

"Well, it is quite foreign to me," commented Marina, a little stiffly. She was not certain that she liked their attitude one bit.

"Enough. You are upsetting our guest," interrupted Monsieur Solange, who, up to this point, had remained silent.

"Pardon, Papa, excusez-moi," answered Monique, suitably contrite.

The conversation ground to a halt while they ate their light meal.

The tension was finally broken when the butler came in to announce that their carriage would be ready in fifteen minutes.

"I am so looking forward to this evening," said Monique, rising from the table.

"You must allow me to take you into the theatre," murmured Simon in Marina's ear as he helped her from the table.

"Thank you," she replied, blushing once more.

Simon remained close to Marina. As they drove in the carriage to the theatre, he asked her lots of questions about London and how the young gentlemen amused themselves.

"I hear it is very fashionable to speak French in London at the moment?" he remarked. "I read something in the paper, I believe, about how young men are conversing solely in French when they go to their Clubs."

"Oh, ladies are not allowed inside those places," answered Marina, demurely, "so I could not possibly comment. However, you are right. Papa, Mama and I dined at Simpsons not so long ago and there were plenty of people pretending to have long conversations in French. 1 am told that it is quite the vogue and that even the Prince of Wales himself prefers to speak in French at dinner."

"That is certainly a compliment to us," smiled Madame Solange.

"Here we are," cried Simon.

Marina could have sworn that, during the journey, he had inched closer to her. She felt unnerved by his warmth next to her and the faint smell of cologne that hung about him.

She stole a glance at him as they waited for the carriage door to be opened. lie was certainly a very good- looking young man. There was something very neat and well- groomed about him that Marina had not seen in most Englishmen.

She had noticed that his hands and nails were immaculate and liked the way that his strong, brown hands curved around as if he were about to take up the reins.

'I wonder if he likes to ride,' she mused, noting that he sported incredibly long eyelashes for a man. Tie would be just too perfect if he did!"

A blast of chilly air hit her as the carriage door opened. Simon jumped out of the carriage and waited to help her down the steps.

Outside the theatre the thronging mass seemed highly excited. Everywhere people chatted noisily and with a great deal of animation.

For the first time in ages, Marina began to feel alive. The atmosphere was electric as they walked into the foyer.

Almost as soon as they arrived, people were coming up to the Solanges and greeting them Marina was introduced to at least a dozen theatre-goers before they had taken their seats.

"We have a box that the Boucheron du Barry allows us to use on the nights he does not come," explained Monique. "Maman always forgets her lorgnettes and we have to tell her what is happening onstage."

"You will sit next to me, of course," asked Simon, as he held the door to the box open for Marina.

She smiled up at him, her heart fluttering wildly.

"Are you familiar with this play?" enquired Simon, gazing at her as if she was the only girl in the world. "It is called Tartuffe."

"I know of the work, but I have not read it or seen it performed," replied Marina, breathlessly.

As he explained the plot to her, Marina could not stop looking at him. His tanned face that made his blue eyes stand out, his full lips that were the same shape as Monique's and looked odd on a man — she took in each and every detail.

At last, the lights dimmed and the play began, but still Marina was conscious of Simon leaning in towards her.

By the time the interval came she could not have explained one line of the plot to anyone had her life depended upon it

"What do you think of it so far?" asked Monique, as Madame Solange busied herself with her lorgnettes.

"It is very clever although I must confess that I have not understood very much of what the actors are saying."

"But you have an idea of what is going on?"

"Simon has kindly explained it to me."

Marina looked round but Simon was no longer in the box.

"Where is my brother? Off again on some mysterious errand."

Monique smiled to herself and Marina tried not to look too interested. The last thing she wanted was for sharp-eyed Monique to discover that she had taken a fancy to him!

The lights began to dim before Simon reappeared.

"Ou etais-vous?'' whispered Monique urgently to her brother.

His reply was rapid and in French, so that Marina could not understand it. He seemed different somehow — more distant, and he did not sit close to her as he had in the first half.

But as the play wore on, his mood lightened.

"Are you following it?" he murmured in Marina's ear. His lips were so close that they almost brushed her ear lobe. She felt another shiver of delight as his warm breath disturbed her hair.

"I-I think so."

"C'est bon" he replied, his mouth still close to her ear.

'Oh, I wish he would not sit so close to me,' thought Marina, in a panic. 'It does make me feel uncomfortable.' She was almost relieved when the play ended and the lights came up. She passed her hand across her cheek to find that it was burning. Suddenly, she felt incredibly warm and almost in a swoon.

She must have swayed in her seat because Madame Solange suddenly moved to her side.

"Are you unwell, ma cherie? Look, you are burning up."

"I think I need some air," muttered Marina, hoping that Simon would not take her arm again.

What are these strange feelings he stirs within me?' she thought, as Monique hurried her outside into the night air. Why am I behaving like this? It is not right.'

"Will you be well enough to dine with us, Marina?" asked Monique, who had stood fanning her friend for some ten minutes.

"I will be fine now, thank you. I must have been overcome by the heat."

"Come, the carriage is waiting. We are dining at Monsieur Leonard's and you are in for a treat!"

Marina made certain that she was wedged in between Monsieur and Madame Solange on the short journey to the restaurant. Simon continued to smile at her constantly and seemed very attentive when she spoke.

"Ah, here we are," said Monique, as the carriage pulled up outside an ornate door in a Parisian side street. "It does not look much from the outside, but once inside, it is huge.'

A crowd of glittering people brushed past as Marina was alighting from the carriage. Watching them enviously in their finery, Marina suddenly felt terribly dowdy in her mourning clothes.

'For the first time this evening, I wish I was not wearing them,' she considered, as Monique rushed ahead.

'Everyone looks so glamorous in Paris that I feel as if I have just come up from the country. No one would think I was from London.'

"Don't look so sad," said Simon, as if he could read her thoughts. "Let's go inside."

Marina gingerly took his proffered arm and made sure that she did not hold on too tightly.

Once at their table, she looked at the menu and suddenly felt overwhelmed.

There was not one dish on the menu that she cared to eat. Everything seemed to be in some sauce or other and she did not want to overload her stomach.

Meanwhile, the Solanges were chatting amongst themselves excitedly, poring over the menu and crying out loud with delight at what they found.

"What will you have?" asked Simon, as the waiter appeared at their table.

"Just a little grilled sole for me," she answered, nervously.

But when the sole came, it was swimming in a rich sauce that she could not eat. She suddenly felt tired and wanted to go home. However, the Solanges were so enjoying themselves that she did not feel that she could ask if she could leave.

It was nearly midnight by the time Monsieur Solange called for the bill.

"You have been very quiet," remarked Simon.

"I am sorry. I do not mean to be unsociable, it is just that I am still very tired from the journey."

"Of course. We shall go home at once," suggested Monsieur Solange.

Within minutes Marina found herself in the carriage speeding back to the house.

On arrival, Monique took her arm as they walked back upstairs.

"I do believe that my brother has taken quite a shine to you," she whispered, conspiratorially.

"Oh, I did not come to Paris in search of romance," answered Marina, almost too tired to make the effort of a reply.

"Even so, you must watch him. He is a terrible flirt. Goodnight, cherie. I think you will sleep very well."

Marina kissed Monique on both cheeks, as was the French fashion, and closed her bedroom door behind her.

Much to her surprise, Ellen emerged from the interconnecting door with a big smile on her face.

"Miss Marina. You look exhausted."

"I am, Ellen, I am."

"Now, you must tell me all about it."

Marina sighed as Ellen helped her with her dress. "Would you mind if we left it till the morning? I am almost asleep on my feet"

"Very well, miss."

Ellen gave her Mistress a searching look. She did not appear to her to have had a good time.

But once the oil lamp had been extinguished, sleep did not come for Marina.

She felt wide awake.

As she stared into the unfamiliar darkness, all she could see was Simon's face, his blue eyes and his strong hands —.

CHAPTER FOUR

When Marie came in with a tray of tea at eight o'clock, Marina did not want to get out of bed in the least.

"Goodness. I am so tired," she said, stretching and yawning.

"Good morning, miss," came Ellen's cheery voice. "Are you feeling rested?"

"No, I am not. I feel as if I have been awake half the night. I am not accustomed to keeping such late hours and as for eating a heavy meal so late —"

Ellen wrinkled her nose and Marina realised that her breath must smell of the rich food she had eaten.

"I do not care for the food here at all," stated Ellen, bustling around the room. "Oh, for some simple toast and butter."

"If you ask the chef, I am certain that he will give you some."

"Me did, but it wasn't the bread we have at home, miss, it was hard and hurt my mouth."

Marina smiled to herself for Ellen was a woman of simple tastes who was not about to embrace French cuisine eagerly.

"Are you feeling better this morning, miss?"

"Thank you, Ellen, I am. I am sorry if I appeared rude last night. I did not anticipate that we would have such a late night after our long journey. It has quite exhausted me. At home, we would not be dining at midnight!"

Marina fell silent and began to recall the events of the previous evening. She wondered if she had dreamt that Simon had been so attentive, as it all seemed so unreal now.

Tie is so handsome,' she thought, as Marie took her gown away to be laundered closely followed by Ellen issuing a stream of instructions.

'And so attentive. I think that English gentlemen could learn a lot from him.'

"Will you be taking breakfast in the dining room, miss?" asked Ellen, who had returned from bossing Marie about.

"Yes, thank you. Is my black taffeta dress pressed?" Marina wanted to look attractive for Simon. She had noticed that French women were very well groomed compared to the English.

"I'd like you to do my hair in the French fashion this morning —"

Ellen raised an inquisitive eyebrow.

"That will make a change — I may have to enlist Marie's help, miss."

Marina pretended not to notice Ellen's distinctly surprised expression. Normally, she would not have commented upon any request she might have made and it made Marina feel as if she had to offer an explanation.

"I feel that whilst I am in Paris, I should adopt their ways, at least when it comes to dress."

"Very good, miss."

Ellen left Marina to wash and went to fetch Marie.

As she sat and brushed her hair in the mirror, Marina thought once more about Simon.

'I have never seen such startling blue eyes,' she mused, 'and with that dark hair, it is quite an enchanting combination.'

She thought that he must be the most handsome young man she had ever seen. So different to the pale English gentlemen she knew back home.

'And he seems so sophisticated compared to Albert,' she thought, as she watched Ellen trying to explain to Marie how she wanted her hair. 'It is hard to believe that Albert is the elder of the two as he still behaves as if he was in the nursery and all girls are to be ignored.'

All of a sudden, she was overcome by guilt Was her dear Mama not six weeks in her grave and already, she was thinking frivolous thoughts.

'I should not dwell on stupid, romantic ideas — it is not appropriate to one in mourning,' she chastised herself sternly. 'Papa would be horrified if he knew that I had been out so late, let alone was allowing my thoughts to stray from Mama. I must stop this foolishness at once.'

Little did Ellen and Marie know the tumult of emotions that wracked Marina's body as she sat patiently while they wound her hair into an elegant chignon.

It took Ellen a long time to get Marina's hair just right and the gong for breakfast had long since sounded by the time she finally made her way downstairs.

As she walked into the dining room, everyone turned to greet her.

"Ah, you look so charming this morning," said Simon, coming over to take her hand.

"You have done your hair in the French style," commented Monique appreciatively, "and it becomes you." Marina tingled at the touch of Simon's hand. She could see by the way he was looking at her that she had not imagined the previous evening's attentions. She cast her eyes downwards as he led her to the buffet.

'I must not forget I am in mourning,' she reminded herself sternly.

"Will you have brioche or perhaps you would care for a pain au chocolat?'

Simon was standing so close to her that she could feel his warmth. She moved away and kept her eyes firmly on the delicious buffet laid out in front of her.

"I will try a pain au chocolat, please," she mumbled, not daring to meet his ardent gaze.

He handed her a plate with two pains on it. Marina took it quickly and then moved towards the table. Fortunately, the chair next to Monique was empty.

"Cherie," she began, "you must tell me what you would like to see today for there is so much to occupy you in Paris. We have the carriage to ourselves this morning and I am certain that you would like us to show you our lovely city."

"Thank you, that would be wonderful," replied Marina, removing a crumb of pastry from her lips. "I would very much like to see the Louvre, especially the painting of the Mona Lisa."

"Yes, it is very famous," added Simon. "Such a smile. It makes you wonder what she was thinking of when da Vinci painted it"

"Chocolate, of course!" exclaimed Monique, biting into her second pastry.

Marina laughed as she was enjoying the pain au chocolat very much indeed.

"Could we also visit the Arc de Triomphe?" she asked, trying hard not to meet Simon's eyes.

"Of course, it would be a pleasure," said Simon unexpectedly.

'Heavens. He seems to think he is coming with us,' thought Marina, panicking slightly. She had believed that it would just be Monique and herself driving out for the day.

"There is this wonderful little restaurant where we can enjoy le dejeuner, continued Simon, staring intently at her. Once again, she could feel the colour rising to her cheeks.

'I wish he would not regard me so,' she thought, as she tried to engage Monique in pleasant conversation, 'and I wish he was not coming with us today. It makes things so difficult.'

"Then it is settled," said Monique, clapping her hands in delight. "I will have the carriage made ready for us at once."

Twenty minutes later, Marina found herself in the carriage alongside Monique. Simon had seated himself opposite with his back facing the coachman so that the ladies could have the best view.

"Where are your parents?" enquired Marina, as they sped along the elegant boulevards.

"Oh, out seeing some dull friends of theirs. We are very lucky not to have to go with them. The Lormes are so boring — si vieux" confided Monique.

"I am sorry?" asked Marina, who was still struggling with the language-

"So old," explained Simon. "The Lormes are at least seventy and all they do is sit and drink coffee and moan about the weather. They are just like the English."

"Don't be rude about our guest's country," snapped Monique, giving Simon a warning glance.

"Forgive me," apologised Simon at once, bowing his head.

"I did not take offence," protested Marina "You are quite right the English are obsessed with the weather, but that is because we live in a country where it often rains and ruins our plans."

"It is no better in Paris," added Monique, "but at our house in Biarritz, the weather is always beautiful. We will be going there for a long break in a few weeks time and I hope you will be coming with us. Maman and Papa always insist that we accompany them whenever they travel."

Marina suddenly fell quiet. Inadvertently, Monique had reminded her of the reason why she was in Paris in the first place — her father had sent her packing.

The sun was warm and pleasing, but Marina was in a dark mood.

Monique chattered gaily to her brother in French and she did not even mind that she could not follow them. She was too busy thinking of home and her dear Mama

She was still feeling a little miserable when they entered the gallery. Monique and Simon took her immediately to see the Rodin statues.

"They are marvellous, are they not? So alive," breathed Monique, as they circled a sculpture of a man thinking.

"Breathtaking," agreed Marina, who marvelled at the marble form in front of her. It was not long before she forgot her sad frame of mind and became lost in the wonders she was encountering.

Eventually, they stopped at the edge of the crowd who were busy admiring the highlight of the gallery — the famous portrait of the Mona Lisa.

"I think she looks grumpy," whispered Simon, hissing in Marina's ear. "She is not beautiful at all."

"Well, I disagree," replied Marina, "she has a stillness in the same way that the Virgin Mary has and that is highly attractive. Everyone says that she is a great beauty and it is a shame that you cannot see it"

Simon paused before replying and stared deep into Marina's eyes.

"Then perhaps it is because I have been dazzled by someone far lovelier!"

Marina coloured deeply and looked away, expecting to find Monique at her side. But, in that short moment, Monique had disappeared. Search as she might, Marina could not see her friend anywhere.

"You are looking for someone?" asked Simon, a slightly hurt tone creeping into his voice.

"I was wondering where Monique has gone."

"Oh, I would not worry about her. She knows these galleries so well, she will not be far. She has probably seen a friend. Come, I will show you more great works of art."

Simon offered her his arm and reluctantly Marina took it. She did not like the way being so close to him made her feel. Her heart was racing and her mind a-whirl.

'Oh, Mama, I wish you were here. And not just to see these lovely paintings,' she thought, as they walked around the galleries.

But in spite of herself as the morning wore on, she felt swept up by his charm.

He is so attentive,' she muttered to herself. "Look, there is Monique," said Simon, suddenly.

And sure enough, through the crowds came the familiar figure of his sister.

"Oh, je stiis desolee," she puffed, as she drew to a halt by them.

"It was just that I saw Marianne and Arnaud and I have not seen them for ages. But I can tell that you two have had a wonderful time without me," she added, mischievously.

In spite of herself, Marina felt a pang of disappointment that she no longer had Simon's sole attention.

He ally, what can be wrong with me?' she asked herself as they left the Louvre and walked towards their waiting carriage.

There was no denying that she was a mass of unfamiliar feelings.

The next few weeks sped past for Marina and gradually her feelings of restlessness subsided a little. True, she still longed to be home in London, but she gradually became accustomed to the Parisian way of life — even the late meals and even later nights.

Monique had a glittering circle of friends, all of whom warmly welcomed her. They took her shopping, introduced her to more friends and generally included her in their day- to-day lives.

"You seem to be happier," commented Monique one day, as they returned from a hectic shopping trip for new hats. Monique had managed to persuade her to buy a lavender silk creation topped with an ostrich feather.

"Yes, I do believe I am," agreed Marina, clutching tightly onto her packages, feeling excited and wicked all at the same time.

"And I will soon persuade you to change those mourning clothes."

"I — I am not sure that I am ready for that yet, Monique," sighed Marina, almost wistfully.

Now that the weather was becoming warmer and the sun shone so brightly, it was too easy for her to immerse herself in the Solanges social whirl and put aside all thoughts of her Mama's death.

"Ah, look, Maman has come to meet us," cried Monique, as they settled down in a small coffee house near the Champs Elysees. "Maman, cheri."

Marina felt quite envious as she kissed her mother on the cheek. Madame Solange was beaming — she had just come from a friend's house nearby.

"There is to be a grand ball," she announced. "You are both invited and there will be music and dancing."

"And lots of charming young men?" asked Monique coquettishly.

"Naturellement," answered Madame Solange, "you may find yourself a good husband at such an event'"

As mother and daughter laughed gaily together, Marina pondered whether or not she would like to attend the ball. Being around the Solange's friends in small groups was one thing, but to be thrust in amongst the cream of Parisian Society was quite another.

'I should feel like a dowdy mouse in my mourning,' mused Marina, as the waiter brought them coffee and madeleines. 'I shall have to feign a headache.'

"I do hope that you will not disappoint Simon and not dance with him," said Monique, suddenly. Marina almost jumped out of her skin as she was so deep in thought.

She simply smiled politely in reply, as she did not wish to alert Monique to the fact that she was reluctant to attend the ball.

Much later back at the Solanges's residence, Marina walked into the library to find Simon sitting in one of the leather chairs, reading the newspaper.

"Oh, I am sorry to disturb you," she began, ready to turn around and walk out.

"No, please," he replied, rising to his feet, "it is I who am in your way."

"Not at all, this is your house," protested Marina, drinking in his handsome features that made her heart skip a beat. "I came in here to find something to read. I know that your father likes English novels and thought I might find a good book."

"Papa does indeed have many rides by English authors and poets," answered Simon, gesticulating towards a tall bookcase. "Shakespeare, Byron, Trollope, Dickens —"

Marina advanced towards the bookcase, scanning the spines for something that would appeal to her.

"Regarded" said Simon, softy, taking down a book from a shelf above her head. Marina's mouth went dry as she felt his arm brush hers. He handed her a leather-bound volume.

"Collected Short Stories by Anthony Trollops', murmured Marina. "I do not believe I have read it."

"Then I am glad that we have something here to amuse you," said Simon, still standing so close to her that his sleeve brushed hers. "I would have been disappointed had you read everything in Papa's English library."

Marina laughed as she looked around the room.

"It would take me forever to work my way through this vast selection," she remarked. "Your Papa loves reading, does he not?"

"Yes, and I am ashamed to say that I do not have the same dedication to reading as he."

He turned his brilliant gaze to Marina and she felt as if she was melting.

Suddenly feeling quite overwhelmed, she mumbled her excuses and left the library.

Standing outside in the hall, she caught her breath and tried to calm herself.

'What is happening to me?' she asked herself. 'I am not certain that I care for the way that this man makes me feel I have no wish to become romantically involved with anyone at

the moment and although he is keeping his distance, I wish that he was not quite so attentive.'

Gut Simon did not give up his gentle pursuit of Marina. She did indeed manage to feign a bad headache on the night of the Grand Ball and she could tell by his fallen face that he was upset not to have her company.

The next day, he sent flowers to her room with a sweet note that said he hoped she was feeling much better and would she dine with him and Monique that evening.

"Who are the flowers from, miss?" asked Ellen. "They are from Simon."

"I think the young gentleman is rather taken with you, if you don't mind me saying."

Marina tucked the note away into a drawer and resolved not to look at it again that day.

As she did, she found the note that Sir Peter Bailey had sent her.

'I wonder what has become of him, he was a most intriguing gentleman —

All of a sudden a vision of his good-looking face flashed up in front of her eyes.

She wondered if he had held his soiree and whether it had been successful. For a second, she wished she had been present.

Realising that Ellen was talking to her, she brought her attention back to the matter in hand.

'Will you tell Monsieur Simon that I would be happy to have dinner with him and Monique this evening, Ellen? Is my black silk gown pressed and ready?"

"I will make certain that it is, miss."

As Ellen left the room, Marina walked over to her bedroom window that overlooked a quiet street The May blossom was out on the trees and the day was fine and warm — she longed to go out for a walk, but thought that if she did,

"Who has been telling you such nonsense?" demanded Marina, a little testily.

"Mademoiselle, C'est vrai," intervened Marie, unexpectedly. For the girl had never so much as uttered a word to Marina in the time she had been in Paris.

Marina stared at Marie, as she understood all too clearly what she had said.

"See, I am telling the truth," crowed Ellen, triumphantly. "Miss Monique is in bed with a headache and it is just yourself and Monsieur Simon who are going to dinner tonight."

Ellen folded her arms for emphasis and wore a determined look on her face. Even if her Mistress did not care for romance, then six certainly did!

At that moment Monique's maid entered the room. She said something in rapid French to Marie, bobbed a curtsy and left

"Mademoiselle Monique, she say she not go tonight," explained Marie in halting English.

"But I cannot go on my own with Simon!' cried Marina, feeling suddenly very nervous. "That would not be the done thing!"

"Stuff and nonsense, miss," countered Ellen, taking Marina's evening cloak out of the wardrobe, "you are in Paris, now — not London!"

There then came a knock on the door.

'Oh, who is that now?' thought Marina, crossly.

Marina turned round to see Monique standing in the doorway with a beautiful pale-lemon gown in her arms.

"I thought you would like to wear this. I am certain that your Mama would not mind if you dressed up for one night. Besides, the Saint Georges is a very smart place and I would not want you feeling out of place on Simon's arm."

Marina gasped as she held up the dress. It was certainly very lovely.

"I cannot," she whispered.

"Yes, she can," came in Ellen, taking the dress from Monique who looked far from ill.'

"Now, I am going back to my room. Please enjoy yourself tonight, Marina, I am certain it is going to be a very special night."

With that she winked and left the room.

"Hurry up, miss, we will have to get you changed if you are not to be late."

Marina allowed Ellen to undo her black dress and she stepped into the lemon gown.

"Oh, miss. You look so beautiful," exclaimed Ellen. "Oui, tres belle" agreed Marie, who was smiling from ear to ear.

"Come along, Monsieur Simon will be waiting for you. I would not be at all surprised if tonight is the night he proposes."

"Ellen!" called Marina, shocked at what her maid had said.

"I have seen the way he looks at you, miss. I would wager that Mademoiselle Monique has deliberately made it so that you are left alone together. Come, Monsieur will be waiting."

She threw the delicate beaded wrap around Marina's shoulders and guided her out of the room.

Marina could hardly think because she was so excited. An evening alone with Simon!

As she descended the stairs, she could see him waiting for her. He looked up and his face flushed with pleasure — Marina knew what he was thinking.

"I am overwhelmed by your beauty," he said, as he look her hand and kissed it. "The coachman is waiting."

Marina felt as if she was walking on air as they stepped into the carriage.

All the way to the restaurant, Simon continued complimenting her and telling her how proud he would be to be seen with her.

"This is the finest restaurant in Paris and I will be the envy of all with you by my side," he murmured, looking deeply into her eyes.

She did not know how to respond, but her heart was urging her on.

Overhead, the stars were bright as they arrived at the Saint Georges. They were shown to their table by the manager himself, who made a tremendous fuss of Marina in impeccable English.

Simon nodded to a few tables as they waited for the menus to be brought.

"You know many people in here tonight?" asked Marina, a little nervous. She was aware that all eyes were upon her.

"A few," he replied with a studied nonchalance. "Friday is a popular night to dine out in Paris. We shall have champagne, of course —"

He clicked his fingers and within seconds, a waiter was at the table.

Marina delicately broke off a piece of baguette and ate it. Looking around the room, she was secretly pleased that Monique had persuaded her to wear the gown.

1 should have looked like a weed in a field of flowers if I had worn my black silk,' she thought gratefully.

The champagne arrived and the waiter made a great show of pouring it into two glasses.

Simon picked up his glass and raised it to Marina.

"To you and your incomparable beauty," he declared, looking at her with his brilliant blue eyes.

Marina blushed and took a sip. She marvelled as the bubbles coursed down her throat and almost immediately she felt light-headed.

Simon continued to pour compliments in her direction. So much so that Marina's heart felt full.

'Am I falling in love with him?' she wondered, as he put the best pieces of the lobster onto her plate, 'is this what it feels like?'

"A toi; ma belle.n

Simon once again raised his glass and drank her health. Marina felt as if she had touched Heaven, as he had eyes for no other save for her.

She even wondered if Ellen had been right about a proposal, but, much later, when Simon called for the bill, she chastised herself for thinking such foolish things.

"That was a wonderful dinner, thank you."

"The pleasure was all mine, ma cherie. Shall we leave?"

A soft breeze was blowing as they stood outside waiting for their carriage.

Marina shivered a little and suddenly felt very tired and not a little disappointed.

In her heart of hearts, she did wish that Simon had made a declaration of love for her at the very least — "Come, the carriage is here."

Simon's melodious voice interrupted her thoughts.

He helped her into the carriage and then sat very close to her. She could not help but notice that he seemed a little distracted.

'Perhaps he has someone else on his mind,' she said to herself, 'and he is only being kind to me.'

At last, the carriage drew up outside the Solanges's house and Simon jumped out and helped her as she stepped down onto the pavement.

She could see that most of the house was in darkness and that everyone was most likely in bed.

"I shall have to be very quiet so as not to disturb Ellen. I do hope she has not waited up for me," she said, as the butler opened the front door for them

"Mademoiselle Fullerton," he said in a low voice. "I am glad you have come home, as this came for you not long after you left this evening. Mademoiselle Monique wanted to come after you, but her father would not allow her." he handed Marina what looked like a telegram. She held it in her hand, her heart racing.

'What if it is bad news?' she thought, staring at the writing on the envelope.

She began to shake so much that Simon was forced to take her arm.

"Marina, what is it?"

"I do not know," she answered quietly, "it appears to have come from home."

"You must open it, chérie. Do not be afraid, we are all here to help you."

Marina took a deep breath and ripped it open —.

CHAPTER FIVE

Marina thought that her heart would jump right out of her mouth as she opened the telegram.

"No, I cannot read it!" she said, suddenly. "I could not bear it if it was more bad news."

Just then, Monique appeared at the top of the stairs, tying her dressing gown belt, her hair all awry.

"Ah, I thought I heard you come home. Cherie, I have been so worried — the telegram, it is from home, n'est-ce pas?"

"Yes, but I am too afraid to read it. Take it, Monique, you do it for me."

"No, chérie, it is private. I cannot do that."

"But I want you to."

Marina held out the telegram to her friend. With a sigh, Monique took it and read it quickly.

"Well?" asked Simon, impatiently.

"It is from Marina's father, but I do not understand — "

"What does it say? You must tell me at once," Marina implored her.

Monique shook her head and then began to read it out loud,

"Please come back to London at your earliest convenience. There is no emergency, hut you are required at home. Sincerely, Papa."

"What a very odd telegram," said Simon, taking Marina's hand. "What can it mean?"

"I have no idea. It cannot be that Papa is ill, or that someone has died. Otherwise he would have said so."

"Then why must you leave us?" asked Monique, yawning. "If it is not an emergency, then I do not understand the urgency."

"Papa is a very forceful man, as well you know, Monique. When he has made his mind up that something has to be done, I must jump at once to his wishes."

"But you are having such a good time. It seems a pity for you to leave now, when you have made so many friends."

Marina touched her friend on the arm.

"Dearest Monique, I shall be back. Perhaps Papa has had time to reconsider his position and has realised that it is best that I am at home with him after all."

Monique yawned again and turned to leave.

"I am going back to bed, chérie, we shall talk about this more in the morning. I shall ask my maid to find out the times of the boat-train to London. Good night"

Simon took her hand gently.

"Marina, do you want to have a brandy with me or will you retire?"

"No, thank you, I think I shall go up to bed. I will need to ask Ellen to begin packing at once."

"Surely not at this late hour?" he replied, a surprised look on his face.

"No," said Marina, with a short laugh. "I will leave it until morning. Good night and thank you once more for a wonderful evening."

For a moment, Marina was sure that Simon was going to kiss her. She could see in his eyes that he would dearly love to take her in his arms — yet he held back.

"Good night, Simon," she whispered, feeling disappointed.

The next morning Marina showed Ellen the telegram from her father.

"What do you think of this?" she asked, holding it out to her.

Ellen took it and then slowly began to shake her head. "I could not say, miss, but perhaps he has had a change of heart. Your father is not a cruel man, he was simply overcome with grief."

"Yes, that is true," agreed Marina, "but the wording is so strange and so devoid of any affection. If he meant me to come home for good, surely he would have said more?"

"Ah, miss, you know men. They never say what is truly on their minds."

Marina looked at her, blankly. With so little experience in the ways of the world, she did not have a clue what Ellen was talking about

'I have so much to learn,' she ruminated, 1 am an innocent in so many matters. A man like Simon has so much to teach me.'

Her heart skipped a beat as she thought of him and the disappointment of the previous evening seemed to melt away in the face of the more pressing matter of her father's telegram.

"Ellen, we must begin to pack at once. I do not know if we should take all our belongings with us as I have no idea when or indeed, if, we are returning to Paris."

"Then, perhaps I should only pack for a few days, miss? Just in case —"

"Ellen, I am hoping that we will be going home for good. No, please pack everything."

"Very good, miss."

Ellen had just finished the packing when Monique knocked.

"There is a train to Calais at midday for the ferry," she said, as she popped her head around the door.

"That means we have an hour before we have to leave. Only an hour."

Monique came in and embraced Marina warmly. "You will soon be back, I do hope."

"Much will depend upon Papa's humour when I reach home," replied Marina. "I am hoping that he now wants me by his side and will welcome me with open arms."

"Now, come, join us for a little drink before you leave. We have the servants bringing in champagne."

"But it is too early in the day," protested Marina "It is never too early for champagne!"

Even so, Marina eagerly ran downstairs some fifteen minutes later when Marie announced that the Solanges were waiting for her in the dining room.

She hoped that she would be able to spend at least a few moments alone with Simon before she left. She wanted to know that she meant something to him.

"Bon voyage, Marina," shouted the Solanges, as she entered the dining room. The moment she stepped through the door corks popped noisily.

Marina smiled and looked over to where Simon was standing. She noticed at once that he seemed preoccupied and that he stood some distance away from everyone else in the room.

"Come, Simon. Have a glass of champagne to toast Marina's journey," said Monique, walking up to her brother and fondly touching his arm.

"No, thank you," came the curt reply.

Monique raised an eyebrow and returned the glass to the tray untouched.

"I do not know what is ailing my brother this morning," she whispered to Marina, "he is behaving so strangely."

Marina's heart sank as she waited in vain for a glimpse of the Simon who had courted her so ardently the previous evening. He did not even look once in her direction.

She tried to ignore her feelings of desperation as the Solanges drank her health.

It is as if last night did not happen,' she thought, as the time approached for her departure.

All too soon, the butler came into the room to announce that the carriage was ready to take her and Ellen to the station.

"So soon," exclaimed Monique. "Tant pis!"

She embraced Marina tearfully promising to write to her every day.

But as she held her friend, Marina's attention strayed over her shoulder to the distracted figure of Simon, who stood by

the window, apparently oblivious to the fact that she was about to leave, perhaps for a very long time.

"Please come again. You are always welcome," sniffed Madame Solange into her handkerchief.

Eventually Simon approached her and took her hand. "Goodbye, I hope you have a safe passage," he said,

before kissing her hand in an almost desultory manner.

Marina withdrew her hand feeling quite upset. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see Monique casting worried glances at her brother.

"You will be back soon, I know it," she soothed, taking Marina by the arm and leading her into the hall.

However, Marina had the distinct feeling that something was going on of which she had no knowledge.

She felt quite desolate by the time she climbed into the carriage. Everyone seemed to be in tears. However Simon did not come out to wave her off.

"How odd," commented Ellen, as they drove off towards the station.

"What is?" asked Marina, fighting back her tears. "Monsieur Simon did not wave to you."

"He was probably busy," answered Marina, casting her eyes downwards.

' "Well, I think it's odd," persisted Ellen.

"I would appreciate you keeping your thoughts to yourself," snapped Marina, quite uncharacteristically.

Almost as soon as the words were out of her mouth, she regretted speaking to her loyal servant in such a sharp fashion.

"I am sorry, Ellen," she said, as they approached the station, "I am not accustomed to champagne so early in the day, it has made me quite out of sorts."

"No need to apologise, miss, I'm sure," replied Ellen quietly.

Marina felt that the journey ahead was going to be arduous in more ways than one.

It was, indeed, an dreadful crossing. The weather took a turn for the worse and a storm blew up tossing the ship from side to side.

Both Marina and Ellen were very sea-sick. By the time that they arrived in Dover, the pair were exhausted.

"It is too late to get the train to London," sighed Marina, as their luggage was loaded onto a waiting carriage, "we should find a hotel and stay the night We will feel better in the morning."

Ellen instructed the coachman to take them to the best hotel in Dover while Marina settled down in her seat. It was not long before they were in their hotel room, preparing for bed.

Both Marina and Ellen slept soundly that night. It was quite late by the time they arose from their beds and Ellen had to plead with the hotel manager to let them have some breakfast.

"We should make our way to the station, miss," said Ellen, as they finished their meal. "I have checked with the porter and there is a train at eleven o'clock."

"That means we should be home in time for afternoon tea," declared Marina, brightening up. "I do hope that Papa will be at home when we arrive."

She felt much lighter as she waited in the lobby for Ellen to return while the poor porter and bell boy were struggling with their vast amount of luggage.

They caught the train with plenty of time to spare, and Marina's thoughts turned to Simon's strange behaviour.

Rummaging around in her carpetbag, she pulled out the bundle of letters that contained the note from him that had been attached to the flowers he had given her.

Pulling off the ribbon that held them together, a rather crumpled letter fell out into her lap.

'What is this?' she queried, smoothing it down upon her lap. 'Oh, goodness. It is that letter from Sir Peter Bailey inviting me to his soiree on the twenty-fourth."

She thought quickly, and then turned to Ellen who, for once, was travelling with her.

"Ellen, what is the date today?"

"It is the twenty-first, miss."

Marina quickly decided that if Simon was no longer interested in her, she would explore a new option.

"I wonder if I reply today, whether the imitation will still stand?" she said out loud.

"What is that?" asked Ellen, a little puzzled.

"Sir Peter Bailey - I met him briefly before we left for Paris — he has invited me to a soiree at his home."

"I would expect he would be glad to see you, miss, if he wrote to invite you."

Marina felt reassured, but she remained curious over Simon's behaviour and spent the rest of the journey wondering if she had misread his intentions towards her.

At Victoria Marina waited nervously while Ellen found them a Hackney cab. London smelled and looked very much the same as when she had left

"It seems like only yesterday we were catching the boat- train to Paris," she commented, as the Hackney cab sped off laden with their luggage.

"I am glad to be back. My, I'm looking forward to some good honest toast and butter," declared Ellen.

Marina smiled to herself. Her faithful servant had hardly grumbled at all during their stay abroad, apart from bemoaning the state of French bread.

"I do hope that Papa will be there to greet us," said Marina quietly.

"To be sure he will, miss."

"I wish I shared your certainty." She sighed.

It was not long before the Hackney cab arrived at Harley Street

It was late afternoon and Marina felt quite tired. She had still to recover from their storm-tossed crossing, while Ellen seemed as bright as a button.

Almost on cue, Frome opened the front door and a strange young boy scurried out to bring in the luggage.

"Who is that?" asked Marina, as she greeted the expressionless Frome.

"The new hall boy, Miss Marina," he answered, dourly.

Walking into the hall, Marina looked to see if her father was at home, but there was no sign of him. Instead, she was surprised to see that the hall had been completely redecorated and that a new hallstand and two large ornate urns now stood at the foot of the stairs.

"Frome, where is my father?" she asked, rapidly taking in the changes.

"Out in his carriage, miss," he intoned, "he will be returning shortly."

'Well, this is a fine welcome,' thought Marina. It was then that Frome handed her two letters.

As Marina looked at them, she noticed that they both appeared to have been written by the same person.

'There is something familiar about this writing — ' she thought, then dived into her carpetbag to bring out her bundle of letters.

Sure enough, the handwriting on the letter from Sir Peter Bailey matched that of the two new ones.

As she walked upstairs, she began to open them. They had been sent the week before, asking her once more to attend his soiree.

He is really quite insistent,' she concluded, as she absentmindedly went to open the door of her bedroom. 'I shall have to write to him today and let him know the reason for not replying is that I was away. He could not have heard Henrietta and me discussing my imminent departure.' Looking up from the letters, she made way for Ellen who was attempting to carry in a large box containing the hats she had bought in Paris.

"Goodness. Where on earth has that cheval mirror gone to?" she demanded.

Marina took a good look around the room and her mouth fell open with shock.

The long minor that had always stood in the corner had disappeared and there was now a gap where it used to be.

"And did you notice those two hideous urns at the foot of the stairs? I think the Master has quite gone mad! They are far too large for the hall and no doubt will get broken by that clumsy oaf of a new boy."

"Yes, I thought it was very strange- Papa has never been one for unnecessary ornaments and did not allow Mama to clutter up the house."

"Well, one thing is for certain, someone has been in this room and has moved things around. Why is the chest of drawers over there and what is that lamp stand doing by the window? Tch!"

Ellen let out a huge sigh and bustled over to the offending article. Picking it up, she carried to the place where it had originally stood and plonked it down with a satisfied grunt.

"There. I shall have words with Mrs. Baines about the liberties that have been taken in here. Someone has been poking their nose in where it is not wanted."

Marina smiled at Ellen, but she knew she was right. Somebody had been interfering and she did not like it either. It made her feel odd to think that someone had been in her room.

She went and sat on her bed and once more took out the letters that Frome had given her from Sir Peter.

"He is quite insistent that his soiree will not be complete without me," she said, re-reading them both. "I must confess that it is very flattering to be so wanted by such a good- looking gentleman, especially when I have been apparently rejected by Simon Solange."

Ellen watched her Mistress as she looked at the letters and could not resist adding her opinion.

"Well, miss. If this Sir Peter is as handsome as you say, I would not be wasting my time wondering about other silly gentlemen who do not know when they have struck gold. If you write a reply now, I could run it down to the Post Office."

Marina smiled gratefully at her 'It is as if she can read my mind, sometimes," she thought fondly. 'Mama was like that — she always knew what I was thinking and if I was in trouble or sad. What would I do without Ellen in my life?'

"Thank you, Ellen. I will write to him after I have seen Papa. We cannot take anything for granted until I have found out what is at the root of all these changes around the house."

"If you ask me, miss, he is trying to rid himself of painful memories. Did your Mama not choose all the furnishings and colour schemes herself?"

"Yes, she did," remembered Marina. "Mama loved to decorate and was never happier than when she had just found the perfect ornament for a room. That missing cheval mirror used was hers."

"Yes, I remember, miss," replied Ellen, with a tinge of sadness in her voice. "When I first came to work for your mother and father, it used to stand in their bedroom. I think she brought it with her from her childhood home. It had been her grandmother's, if I remember rightly."

"Why, yes," murmured Marina. "I do believe that is what she told me."

"If you don't mind me saying, miss, your father will not easily rid himself of memories by throwing out a few sticks of furniture."

The mood was broken when a knock came at the door. It was Frome, wearing the same expression as usual.

"Your father has returned. Miss Marina. He is in the library and is waiting to see you, if you would make your way there at once."

"Good luck, miss," said Ellen, hugging her Mistress tightly.

"Thank you, Ellen. I must confess I am a little nervous."

"I am going down to see Mrs. Baines at once," bristled Ellen. "1 do not like it one bit when furniture is moved around without my knowledge. Most unsettling."

"I agree — now, I should go. Papa will be waiting for me."

Marina's heart was beating hard as she walked downstairs.

She paused for a second before opening the library door to smooth her hair and compose herself.

Opening the door, she could see her father standing, reading a letter. As he sensed her entry into the room, he barely looked up.

There was no word of greeting and no sign of affection. Marina felt quite deflated.

"Ah, Marina, you will no doubt have noticed a few changes around the house since you were last here and I want you to know that things are now very different. However, I deemed that the changes were necessary and I find that they are very welcome to me."

"Yes, Papa, I see that you have had the hall redecorated —"

"Please do not interrupt, daughter," he snapped, much to Marina's surprise. "That is not what I meant."

She hung her head so that he could not see the tears welling up in her eyes. Marina suddenly felt very scared indeed. What could he be referring to?

"Yes, Papa," she murmured, her mind whirling.

"Now, since your Mama left us, I have come to the conclusion that a man is not meant to live alone —"

'He is about to say how sorry he is to hate sent me away!' Marina thought, hopefully.

" — and I have to tell the truth, I have found my current situation quite unbearable. It is not enough to have just my

daughter around. I need a woman to care for me of my own age. So, with this is mind, I have summoned you back from Paris to inform you that I will shortly be marrying again."

Marina let out a small cry — she could not help herself.

'Replace Mama! What madness is this?' she thought, horrified and quite unable to prevent the tears from falling.

"Papa must be crazed with grief for that is the only explanation for such a turn of events.'

She was about to open her mouth to protest but her father simply raised his hand and shot her a look that begged no interference with either words or gestures.

"I hear from Monsieur Solange that you had a most agreeable stay in Paris and so I think it would be best if you returned there as soon as possible. Before the wedding, if you can arrange it. My new bride, Lady Alice Winwood, has no wish to be a stepmother and I want to spend time alone with her. Moreover, her wish is my command."

"No! This cannot be. Forced out of my own home!" she cried, getting up.

"Sit down, daughter. I have made up my mind and no one will change it," he replied sternly.

'But I thought that Lady Alice was just a friend. This is all so sudden. She does not know me, so why is she being so cruel? I would not be in the way as I have my own life. All I ask is that I can stay here in my own home.'

Marina wanted to run to her father and throw herself down at his feet, but as she regarded his angry expression and tense posture, she realised that he had detached himself from her and that any entreaties on her part would be futile.

"But Papa — " she began to say, hoping that her tears would soften him.

But even as she spoke, a look of pure fury crossed her father's features that made her think that he would not hesitate to strike her should she continue to protest.

"I have made my decision, daughter, and you will abide by it. Do not bother to unpack your things. You will find that Frome has tickets for you on the first train to Dover in the morning."

This was too much for Marina. She got up and ran from the room, sobbing her heart out.

"How could he? How could he?" she cried, running upstairs to her room. "My own father, disowning me in favour of his new wife. What will I do now? Oh, this is terrible, terrible.

Feeling utterly dejected, Marina did not know how she would cope with this latest blow.

"Have I not suffered enough?" she cried aloud, as she walked miserably along the landing.

"Oh, Mama. Why is this happening to me? I have done nothing, nothing to deserve it."

CHAPTER SIX

Ellen did not know what possessed her Mistress as she burst back into the bedroom crying profusely.

Marina ran straight past her and threw herself onto the bed.

"Miss. Miss. What on earth is the matter?" asked the puzzled servant.

"I — I cannot speak, please leave me alone for a while, Ellen."

"I'm not going to leave you while you are so upset, Miss Marina. I have never seen you in such a state."

She sat down on the bed next to the sobbing girl and stroked her hair.

"There, there, it cannot be so awful."

"But it is, Ellen! Papa has told me to leave."

"I don't think I understand, miss —"

"Papa wants me to go. He is getting married again and his new wife-to-be does not wish me to be around."

Ellen gasped.

"No. Your poor dear Mama must be spinning in her grave! I'm sorry, miss, it isn't right."

"Papa wasn't joking, Ellen, he meant every word he said. I Ie does not want me and that is the truth of it. Both Mama and I are being replaced by another woman. He could not have loved either of us really, if he can behave in such a cruel way."

"But this woman, who is she?"

"Lady Alice Winwood. I could scream! After Mama died she was constantly visiting the house and I thought how kind she was. Now, I realise that the entire time she was scheming to entrap him. What I do not understand is how this could have happened when she always had her maid with her as chaperone."

Ellen bit her lip and hesitated for a moment before speaking.

"Miss, I'm afraid that the maid was always sent below stairs for tea whenever Lady Alice visited. None of us ever minded as she was such good company and we always looked forward to her coming. Such stories she would tell us."

"But Ellen, I fail to see how they could have been alone for long periods as there were so many people visiting the house after Mama died. There was barely a moment of the day when the front door bell did not ring."

"Well, Lady Alice must have been very clever, miss. None of us saw what was happening."

"I should have been more watchful, Ellen. But I did not think for an instant there would be a cuckoo in the nest waiting to pounce!"

Marina felt comforted that she had someone to talk to. It would be too humiliating to discuss this delicate matter with her best friends. How could she explain to them that her father no longer wanted his own daughter?

"I must resign myself to my fate, Ellen. Do not unpack anything. We shall be leaving in the morning. Papa has already arranged our passage back to France."

"But the Solanges — they will not be expecting us."

"We have no alternative. We will have to return and hope that they are as good as their word about us staying whenever we wish."

"Perhaps if you spoke with your father again?"

Marina sat up on the bed, a look of utter desolation marring her pretty features.

"No, Ellen, his mind is made up. Papa is not someone to argue with once he has made a decision."

"I will go and tell Mrs. Baines of our new plans, then," answered Ellen, sadly.

Marina sighed as she watched Ellen leave the room. Turning to face the bed, she noticed that the two letters from Sir Peter had been sat on by either Ellen or herself and were now quite crumpled.

"I must write to him and tell him that I will be unable to attend as I have been called back to Paris,' she sighed. Tie would think me rude if I did not, at least, acknowledge his invitations.'

Going to her writing table, she took a sheet of paper and quickly wrote to him in her elegant handwriting, apologising for her delay in replying to his invitations.

'I will tell him that I am going back to Paris and cannot attend.'

Finishing the note, she thought for a moment and then added a postscript.

"Should you wish to write to me, you will find me at the following address — 24 Boulevard des Ingénues, Opera, Paris"

Marina held her breath as she wrote, feeling quite daring and, at the same time, wondering if it was terribly forward of her. After all, she knew nothing about him apart from the glowing report given to her by the Duchess on the train.

She did not consider that his being a friend of Albert was really any great recommendation.

As soon as Ellen returned, she gave her the letter and bade her take it straight away to Sir Peter's house.

"I would not send you out so late, but we have so little time left."

Marina also knew that she had another motive for sending Ellen.

She feared that if she thought about it for too long, she would convince herself that she was being foolish inviting him to write to her and would tear her note up.

As soon as Ellen had left, Marina rang to tell Mrs. Baines that she would not be down for dinner.

"But what will the Master say?" she asked. "He is expecting you to dine with him and Lady Alice tonight."

"Please tell Papa that I am feeling unwell, Mrs. Baines. I confess I do not have much of an appetite."

"But you must eat, Miss Marina."

"Then bring me a plain beef sandwich and a glass of milk. That is all, thank you."

"Very good, miss," replied the housekeeper, with a look that implied that she did not believe that Marina had told her the real reason why she would not be down for dinner.

Mrs. Baines left the room and closed the door behind her and Marina went to the window and looked out for Ellen.

'I wonder if she will have seen Sir Peter in person?"

she thought, anxiously scanning the street for signs of her.

The pile of trunks and cases that sat in her room made her feel claustrophobic. She heard the front door bell ring and wondered if it was Lady Alice.

'I know I am snubbing her,' she thought, "but as far as I am concerned, she is not welcome here. She has made me an outcast in my own home and I cannot forgive her. I will not be a hypocrite and be nice to her. I will not!*'*

At that precise moment, Ellen arrived back, looking flushed and out of breath.

"Miss Marina. I gave your letter to Sir Peter as you requested and he asked me to give you this."

Ellen handed her a slim package, wrapped in brown paper.

"What is it?"

"He did not say, but I would guess it is a book." Marina regarded the package for some moments before opening it.

"Oh, it is a volume of Lord Tennyson's poetry," she cried, reading the spine. "How could he have known that he is my favourite poet?"

Opening the book and flicking through it, she found that Sir Peter had marked several poems in the index with a star. There was also an inscription on the flyleaf.

"To Marina" it read, "in the hope that our friendship shall grow from hereon, warmest regards, Peter."

"Oh, how charming. Did he say anything at all to you, Ellen?

"He read your note in front of me and then asked if we were looking forward to returning to Paris, miss. He mentioned that he has Parisian friends and that if he should find himself there in the near future, he would be delighted if you would allow him to call on you."

Marina's heart leapt involuntarily. She recalled that Henrietta had said how attracted he had seemed to her.

"Did you tell him that I would be happy to see him?"

"No, miss. I did not think it my place to do so."

"Thank you so much, Ellen. I must write and thank him for this book as soon as we arrive back in Paris."

Paris. The city that was home to Simon Solange! Marina had thought of him a little since returning to England, but mainly, she had dwelt on her sense of having been snubbed by him, rather than being heartbroken.

'I do believe I have never truly been in love,' she decided, as Ellen retired for the night 'I am forever thinking that 'this is it, only to be disappointed when things do not work out. Surely if I had really loved Simon, I would be utterly devastated by his attitude when we last saw each other. Instead, I find that I am rather relieved.'

However, Marina did feel a little uncomfortable at the thought of returning to his house.

In fact, after this latest development with Sir Peter, she wished with all her heart that she could stay in Harley Street, regardless of Lady Alice's or her father's wishes.

The next morning, Marina looked around her room in misery as servants ran to and fro, taking her luggage downstairs. As she put the last few items in her carpetbag, she picked up the book of poetry by Lord Tennyson.

She opened the first page and looked once more at the inscription on the flyleaf. She read it over and over again.

'I wonder if he will come to Paris while I am there?' she said to herself. That would certainly be something to look forward to.'

She remembered, too, that she would have to see Simon again and she was not at all certain how the prospect made her feel.

'Perhaps it would be for the best if I carried on as if nothing had happened. To be honest, I feel quite embarrassed about my foolishness. No, I will treat Simon as a friend and that is all. It should not be too difficult.'

The truth of the matter was that Marina's pride had been badly hurt. She had not been brought up like Simon and Monique to regard words of love so lightly. If a man paid her compliments and attention, then she believed that he truly had intentions towards her — that is what her Mama had always told her.

'I shall not believe another man as long as I live,' she resolved. 'Unless he is prepared to go to the ends of the earth for me, I shall not listen to foolish sentiments.'

"Miss Marina. You will never guess what I have just seen?"

Ellen burst into the room, her face flushed with anger. Marina was quite astonished at the outburst as,

although a fiery woman, Ellen usually kept her temper in check.

"What is it, Ellen? You seem perturbed about something."

"The cheval mirror — I have solved the mystery of its disappearance!"

"Pray, continue."

Marina was intrigued. Although it was a trifle, compared to her father throwing her out of her own home, she was still curious to know what had happened to it. After all, it had belonged to her dear Mama.

"I went up into the attic to see if there was another trunk as the handle on the old black one had broken and as I passed Lady Alice's room — guess what I saw?"

"The cheval mirror?"

"The very same. And stood, large as life, in her room!"

The way that Ellen spat out the word 'her1 left Marina in doubt as to Ellen's feelings about Lady Alice. Being so loyal, she could not bear underhand behaviour and to her way of thinking. Lady Alice had committed a crime against her Mistress.

Marina felt a wave of hot fury rise inside her. Not only did Lady Alice have her own quarters in the house, but she had also dared to take furniture that did not belong to her and claim it as her own.

But it was no use complaining to her father for Marina knew that he had most likely told Lady Alice she could have whatever she wished.

"We must try not to think about it," said Marina, as Ellen was brushing up the nap on her black felt hat. "Once we have left here today, we must be prepared for the fact that nothing will ever be the same again and that I will not be welcome here."

As she spoke those last words, she could not help but suppress a sob. Ellen rushed over to hug Marina, dropping the hat onto the chair as she did so.

"There, there, miss. It will be all right. Once we get back to Paris, the Solanges will make you feel welcome. And you mustn't mind about that Simon, you should forget about him."

"I do believe I already have," replied Marina, dabbing at her eyes. "I must be aware that his way is simply the manner in which most French gentlemen conduct themselves and it does not mean that they are in love with you, simply because they tell you that you are beautiful."

Marina tried to compose herself, and just in time, as there came a soft knock on the door and Frome walked in.

"Excuse me, Miss Marina, but there is a gentleman in the library waiting to see you. I told him that you were about to depart for France, but he was most insistent."

Frome proffered a silver salver, upon which sat a simple calling card. Marina took it, read it, and then cried aloud,

"It is Sir Peter!"

"What, here, miss?"

"There can be no mistake as this is his card — look. What shall I do, Ellen?"

"You must go downstairs and greet him, miss. But first, go and wash your face and brush your hair. We do not want you looking like something the cat has brought in, now do we?"

Excitedly, Marina ran and splashed some cold water on her red face and eyes. As she dried herself on a towel, she regarded herself in the small mirror.

'I look a perfect fright,' she thought and then wondered why she was so concerned about her appearance.

By the time she was standing outside the library door, she felt incredibly apprehensive.

Opening the door, she saw Sir Peter jump to his feet eagerly. His whole face wore an air of expectation and his green eyes were quick and nervous.

"Miss Fullerton, do forgive me for calling without a prior appointment, but when your maid said that you were about to leave for the Continent, I simply could not allow the opportunity to see you pass by."

Marina was taken aback by this speech and yet was strangely charmed by it at the same time. She admired a man who acted upon impulse.

"You are fortunate to catch us as we are on the verge of leaving."

"Then I must not delay you," he began, moving towards the door.

"No, please, be seated. I have a little time before our train leaves Victoria and the luggage has yet to be loaded. Would you care for some tea?"

"Thank you, that would be most welcome."

Sir Peter sat down on one of the leather library chairs and Marina took the opportunity to take a good look at him.

Yes, he is indeed handsome,' she thought, 'and I did not notice before that he has green eyes. Such an unusual colour.'

It also did not escape her notice that his mouth was full and rosy or that his golden-brown hair curled delightfully about his ears.

She rang for Frome and ordered some tea- With a slight nod of his head, he left the room without saying a word.

'He's a taciturn fellow if I ever I came across one," remarked Sir Peter.

"Yes, he is. He does not say much but he is very loyal. It seems as if the whole place would fall down if Frome was to leave."

"I have a butler who is very much like that. He was my father's manservant for years until he died."

"Oh, I am sorry. I did not realise that your father was no longer with us."

"There is no reason why you should know," replied Sir Peter. "We did not make a fuss and held just a simple funeral. Being the eldest son, it meant that I had to take on the responsibility for his properties and as I was worried that the news might attract the wrong kind of attention, we refrained from placing a notice inThe Times!*'*

"Papa felt the same way when Mama died, but, of course, in the end he bowed to pressure from the family. However, you were right to be concerned. Announcing a death can only bring the vultures out in full force, as I have discovered."

Sir Peter was tactful enough to change the topic of conversation as he sensed that he had inadvertently hit a raw nerve.

"I gather that your return to Paris was unexpected." Marina shot him a surprised look.

"Forgive me, your maid told me that you had not planned to return quite so rapidly."

"Papa wishes to make some changes to the house and, as it entailed me moving out for a period of time and I had had such a wonderful time in Paris, I decided to go back there to stay with friends."

"Oh, I see."

It was clear to Marina that Sir Peter had already divined that there was more to the story than met the eye, but he was gentleman enough not to make further comment.

"Look, here is Frome with our tea. Would you care for milk and sugar?"

Marina poured the tea and rose to hand him the cup. As she did so, her fingers lightly brushed his and she felt the colour rising to her cheeks. Marina turned her face away and made haste back to her seat.

There was an awkward silence as they drank their tea, and then, at last, Sir Peter spoke up, "I do not know if your maid told you, but I, myself, have friends in Paris."

"Yes, she did mention it"

"They are really business acquaintances. My family imports French wines for some of the best restaurants in London and so I often have recourse to travel there."

Marina remained silent. She simply smiled acquiescently and listened.

"I am due to make a trip in the very near future, so one of the reasons I came to visit was to ask if I might call upon you. I know you said that it would be acceptable to write, but I felt I had to ask if a visit in person would not be out of the question."

"That would be most pleasant. I should like you to meet the Solanges."

She lifted her cup to her lips and, as she did so, she could feel her heart beating wildly. Sir Peter was smiling broadly.

'It would certainly serve Simon right if a handsome man came calling on me,' she thought, as she set down her cup.

"Thank you," replied Sir Peter. Now, I have taken up enough of your valuable time — you will want to make ready for your departure, no doubt."

"It was a pleasure," murmured Marina, casting her eyes downwards modes dy.

She rang for Frome to show Sir Peter out and felt sorry that he could not stay longer. She thought that there was much for them to talk about and she was certain that he was a fascinating man with many interesting stories to tell.

In a matter of moments Frome was in the room. Marina did not want these last precious few seconds to end, but she knew she had to let Sir Peter go.

"Thank you for being so hospitable and I do hope I will see you again soon in Paris," he said, holding out his hand to her.

Marina took the well-manicured hand and noticed that it was large and square. She liked such hands as they showed a man of character and strength. She shook it briefly and then withdrew hers. It still felt warm from being in contact with his.

"Goodbye," she said quietly as she tried to avoid his eyes.

"I hope it will be au revoir," he added smiling.

Taking his hat and cane from Frome, Sir Peter quickly left the room. It was as if his presence lingered, however,

and Marina tarried in the room drinking it in.

Her reveries were eventually interrupted by Ellen, who came to look for her.

"Miss, your father has requested that you take luncheon with him and Lady Alice before we leave."

"But do we have enough time?" asked Marina, puzzled at this latest turn of events.

"Frome says that we have had word that the boat train has been delayed for three hours. A messenger came from the ticket office while you were with Sir Peter."

"In that case, I do not appear to have a choice, do I, Ellen?"

"I am afraid not, miss."

Marina sighed. She wished fervently that the train had not been delayed and she also wished she had known before Sir Peter left.

'Luncheon with Lady Alice,' she thought 'I would rather be back on that ferry being seasick!'

She stayed in the library until Frome rang the gong for luncheon.

Smoothing down her dress, she walked to the dining room with a purposeful air. She would not be unpleasant to Lady Alice, but neither was she going to be her best friend.

The dining room door was open when Marina approached it and inside she could see the figure of her father standing over the table.

As she walked in, she noticed that Lady Alice was already seated and that her father was fussing over her. Seeing Marina enter, he laid a hand on Lady Alice's shoulder as if to show who was the most important person in the room.

"Marina, you will remember Lady Alice," he said, clearly a little uncomfortable.

"Yes, how do you do?" asked Marina, with a politeness that was quite icy.

"I am so glad to see you and sorry that you are not staying longer," replied Lady Alice with a smile.

'The nerve of the woman,' thought Marina, as she went to take a seat at the table. 'She is the one who is responsible for my sudden departure and now, she is sorry I am not staying?

All of a sudden, Marina's appetite vanished. She found it almost impossible to sit and eat in the same room as the woman who was the reason for her banishment.

"You are not eating, Marina?" enquired her father. "I had a large breakfast in my room, thank you."

"But you cannot travel on an empty stomach," put in Lady Alice.

"I travel better when I have not recently eaten," responded Marina stiffly.

There was a long silence while Frome removed the plates.

"I do hope that you will enjoy Paris," began Lady Alice.

Marina shot her frozen look. She had no desire to converse with the woman and heartily wished that she would get on with eating her meal and not attempt to engage her in conversation.

"I am very fond of it myself," Lady Alice continued. "Marina has made a great many friends there."

Her father took up the conversation ignoring the fact that there was clearly an atmosphere in the dining room.

"She is very fortunate. I would much prefer to stay with friends than in some odd hotel. I find that I can never sleep in a strange bed," replied Lady Alice, laughing a little too readily.

'No, but you sleep soundly enough in my house,' thought Marina murderously.

The meal continued in much the same vein. Lady Alice tried her hardest to engage Marina in conversation, but she refused to be drawn and sat there, her hands by her side, not eating a morsel.

After the pudding had been taken away, Marina asked for permission to be excused.

Her father coughed nervously and nodded his assent. To her horror, Lady Alice rose as she went to leave the room and attempted to embrace her. Marina stood as stiff as a board, while the woman kissed her cheek.

'To think that Papa has trampled over Mama's memory for that old crone,' fumed Marina as she left the room.

She was heartbroken that her father had not seen fit to bid her farewell or to take the opportunity to reassure her that he still loved her.

'It is quite clear that he no longer wants me, so I am really best off going back to France. At least the Solanges like to have me around. Madame Solange was inconsolable when I left.'

Outside in the hall, Ellen was waiting for her. She had just been to the kitchen to pick up a picnic basket.

"Best be prepared for the journey, miss. We do not want to starve. Frome said that you did not touch a crumb at luncheon."

"I did not care for the company I was forced to keep," stated Marina. "Now, Ellen, we must get ready to leave. I would rather loiter around Victoria station than stay here a moment longer!"

As the carriage finally pulled away from the house, Marina could not help but take a long look back at its elegant windows and tall columns.

"I wonder if this will be the last time I ever see it?" she said, quietly.

"Goodness, no," exclaimed Ellen, "do not think like that. Once your Papa has come to his senses, he will send for you — you wait and see."

Marina gave her a kindly look.

"That is what you said the last time he sent us away, Ellen. I wonder what Mama would say if she could see the changes that Lady Alice has wrought."

"We did not even have time to visit your Mama's grave," added Ellen.

"It is too far to go to the cemetery, Ellen," replied Marina, who was still gazing out of the window as they rolled down Oxford Street. "I have left instructions with Frome to have flowers sent once a fortnight. Papa will have to foot the bill."

The two women fell silent. Ellen fussed with her bag while Marina watched London whiz by outside.

'It is no use being regretful,' she told herself. 'My life here is over for the time being. It is to France that I must look for my happiness.'

Even so, she could not prevent tears from falling as the carriage sped past Buckingham Palace. Snapping down the carriage blind, she shut the outside world away from her view.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Marina did not feel like chatting with Ellen on the journey to Dover.

Sir Peter's unexpected visit to Harley Street that morning had unnerved her and she thought about him as they sped along the bumpy road to the port

'He is even more handsome than I first thought,' mused Marina, 'and he is also a very thoughtful man. I feel as if I could trust him with my life.'

The very notion quite shocked her as, if she was honest with herself, she had never felt that degree of safety with either Albert or Simon.

'There are precious few people I could really trust. Ellen, of course, and Henrietta. Even Papa betrayed me in the end by choosing that awful Lady Alice over me. I have heard men laugh at others who come under the influence of their wives, but I had never imagined Papa would bend to the will of a woman!'

"It looks like we're in for some rain, miss."

Ellen was peering out of the carriage window up at the darkening skies overhead.

"I do hope not, Ellen," murmured Marina, pulling her thin coat around her shoulders.

But the closer to Dover they drove, the more the skies turned black and full of angry-looking clouds. By the time the carriage was pulling into the harbour, the wind had begun to blow and the rain was lashing down. The poor coachman was drenched and the horses were steaming.

"Goodness. I wonder if the ferry will be sailing." said Ellen, making ready to dash to the ticket office. "I will run and find out"

Marina sat huddled in the back of the carriage while Ellen braved the elements. Ten minutes later she returned with a grim look on her face.

"There are to be no sailings until this storm has blown over," she announced. 'The clerk said that it was likely that nothing would leave until the morning."

"Stranded in Dover, yet again," sighed Marina. "Let us proceed to that hotel that we stayed in last time. We had better hurry as I am certain that everyone else who is due to sail will have the same idea."

When they arrived, there was a queue at the reception desk. Fortunately, as Marina had a good deal of money at her disposal, they were able to secure one of the more expensive suites.

"I wonder if the coachman will be staying overnight in Dover or braving it back to London?" said Ellen, as they followed the porter up to their suite.

"I gave him two pounds and told him to find an inn with a stable. Those poor horses have had enough of this weather."

"But they're only horses, miss, that's what they are meant to do."

"I am sorry, Ellen, but I would not take a horse of mine all the way back to London in this weather. I do not hold with this idea that horses are mere beasts — even though one was responsible for the death of Mama, I still love them."

"I am surprised to hear you say so, miss. If a horse had killed my Mama, I would not be feeling well disposed towards the whole nation of horses!"

"Then that is where you and I differ, Ellen. It was not the horse's fault it was unruly. It had bad masters, it is as simple as that. Someone should have prevented that horse from even leaving the stables."

The pair fell silent as the porter began to unload their luggage into the suite. It was pleasant enough and Marina felt certain that they would be comfortable.

She suddenly felt the need to write to Sir Peter. But as she went to sit down at the desk, she immediately felt foolish.

"Why would I want to send a letter to a man I hardly know and what would I say in it?' she admonished herself.

'Marina, you are being a perfect fool. What has possessed me?"

The storm blew fiercely all night and, when Ellen came to open the curtains the next morning, it was still raging outside.

"Heavens. I would not be at all surprised if we will not be sailing this morning," exclaimed Ellen. "I will go down to the port and find out when the next sailing might be."

"Thank you, Ellen."

Marina had her breakfast brought to the room, ate it in silence and then decided that she would like a change of scenery. Ellen had been gone for over an hour and she was becoming worried.

Downstairs in the hotel lounge, the conversation was very much on the state of the weather. Marina sat on her own and eavesdropped on others as they discussed the likelihood of there being any sailings that day at all.

At last, Ellen came into the lounge, out of breath and looking grim-faced.

"Ah, miss, I thought you might be in here. I am afraid I have bad news — there will be no ferries out of the port until this evening at the earliest"

"Oh, dear. I had hoped we would be in Paris for dinner," sighed Marina, "and now it appears unlikely. Perhaps I should let the Solanges know that we will be arriving tomorrow."

"But miss, they do not know we are even on our way. As far as they are concerned, you were going home for good."

"Then it is essential that I inform them of our plans. Go up to the suite, Ellen, and I will send a telegram. I am not looking forward to a long day spent in the hotel."

Ellen nodded and left the lounge. Marina got up from her chair and made her way to the concierge's desk.

"Good morning, miss. Can I be of service to you?"

"I would like to send a telegram to Paris, please."

He took out a sheet of paper and handed it to Marina. Seating herself at a small desk near the wall, Marina quickly wrote,

"Arriving hack in Paris tomorrow, Wednesday. Will he staying indefinitely due to unforeseen circumstances. Best wishes, Marina Fullerton"

There, that should be sufficient,' she said to herself. Taking it back to the concierge, she thanked him and then turned to go back upstairs. Emerging into the corridor,

she bumped straight into a very flustered Ellen. "Miss! Miss. We have been robbed!"

"I beg your pardon?" said Marina, not quite understanding what she was telling her.

"The room has been broken into while we were out and it looks as if the thieves have taken something out of your trunk."

"Oh, no! My jewels! I did not put them in the safe last night as we were so tired."

Marina ran to the room and sure enough, she could not find her bag of jewellery anywhere.

"Are you certain that you packed them in the trunk?" she asked Ellen, frantically.

"Yes, miss. I hid the bag in with your gloves."

Marina looked aghast at the trunk. The drawer containing her gloves was pulled out and had clearly been rifled through.

"Then they are gone," said Marina, in a quiet voice. Sinking down onto an armchair, she felt as if the whole world was against her.

"It is all my fault, miss," wept Ellen, tears running down her ruddy face. "I did not lock the door of the suite when I left."

"No, Ellen, it is my fault as I was the last person to be in the room," replied Marina. "I could not remember seeing you take the key and I did not want to lock you out. You must go downstairs and alert the manager at once."

Ellen bobbed a curtsy and ran out of the room dabbing at her eyes.

Marina felt sick. Although she did not own a great many jewels, she had now lost the pearl pendant that her grandmother had given her.

It was not long before the manager arrived, apologising profusely.

"Of course, I have called the Police," he informed her. "I am afraid that will not bring my jewels back," sighed Marina, "and in any case, we will be leaving as soon as the storm abates and will not be returning to England for some time."

"But you will want to give them details, surely?"

"I have lost so much of late, I confess that the loss of a few baubles is trifling in comparison. If the Police arrive before we leave for our ferry, then I will, naturally, co­operate, but I do not intend to linger in Dover on the off- chance of recovering my jewellery."

The manager bowed and left the room. Ellen went over to her Mistress and patted her arm.

"You are upset, miss?"

"Yes, Ellen, but we must put this unfortunate incident behind us. Did you find out at what time the boat leaves?"

"Half-past five, miss."

Marina got up and strode over to the window to look at the weather outside. Deep inside, however, her heart was full of sadness.

The weather cleared up that afternoon and the ferry did indeed sail at the appointed time. Marina went up on deck to watch the white cliffs of Dover as they vanished over the horizon.

'Goodbye, England,' she whispered, as the sun sank in the sky. 'I wonder when I will return.'

The crossing was relatively calm and swift, and, before she knew it, they were boarding the sleeper train to Paris.

Marina slept fitfully on the long journey. She had many- disturbing dreams about their luggage being stolen and her cabin was being broken into.

As a result she was awake when the Steward brought her coffee in the morning.

"I do hope that the Solanges received my telegram," she said to Ellen, as they reached the station.

"Of course, they will have," assured Ellen, "but it is very-early and so we must not expect them to be waiting for us."

"You are right. Perhaps we should wait awhile before we arrive at the house. None of them likes to rise at the crack of dawn."

She smiled to herself as she remembered how, at the Solange's house, she was always the first one down to the dining room,

'Simon was usually the first one to join me,' she thought, her face softening with the memory. 'I wonder if he will be here to meet us.'

But the thought made her feel slightly uneasy. She did not wish to reopen old wounds and as he had been so distant the last time they had seen each other, she rather hoped that he would not make the effort

'Eight o'clock,' she sighed, as a nearby Church bell struck the hour.

Walking along the platform, Marina's heart was beating so fast that it made it difficult for her to catch her breath.

Would Simon be waiting for her, having had a change of heart?

Perhaps Monsieur and Madame Solange, overjoyed at the prospect of her return, had made the effort?

Or would she find that Roux, the surly coachman, would be waiting for them, furious that he had been called into service so early in the day?

But Marina and Ellen left the platform and found themselves once more on the station concourse with no reception of any nature waiting for them.

"Do you think that the Solanges will come for us?" asked Ellen anxiously.

"I am not certain, but perhaps we should wait a while nonetheless."

"Shall I take a look outside to see if there is a cafe nearby?"

Ellen's stomach gave a loud grumble as if to emphasise her hunger.

"That is a good idea. I shall remain here just in case the Solanges arrive."

Ellen returned with news of a cafe nearby and so they retired there for coffee and croissants. An hour later, just after nine o'clock, they returned. But, as Ellen retrieved their luggage, Marina was forced to admit that the Solanges were not coming.

"It is no use waiting, Ellen. We should go straight to the house."

"And if they're not there, miss?"

"Then we shall find a hotel."

As the luggage was loaded onto a carnage, Marina had a distinct sinking feeling. She did not confess to Ellen her fears that perhaps the Solanges were not in Paris for she had suddenly remembered her conversation with Monique when she had mentioned their house in Biarritz.

Upon arriving at the Solange's house, Marina gazed anxiously up at the windows. Even though it was a dull day, they looked as if they were shuttered.

"Shall I go and knock, miss?" asked Ellen, sensing her Mistress's hesitancy. "Please do, Ellen."

She watched as Ellen climbed out, walked up to the front door, and knocked — and knocked — and knocked.

'I fear they are not at home,' she murmured, feeling sick to her stomach.

Ellen did not give up. After a tremendous volley of knocks, the door of the house next door flew open and a tiny woman with a round face and jet-black hair scraped back into a bun came rushing out

She flew into a torrent of French at the bewildered Ellen, who stood her ground and replied to her in English.

"I have no idea of what you're saying to me, but kindly do not shout!"

"Oh, so you are English?" asked the woman, in a heavily accented voice.

"Thank Heaven! You speak English," exclaimed Ellen. "Yes, I lived in London for a few years. My husband and I ran a restaurant in Soho. You are looking for Monsieur and Madame Solange?"

"Yes, yes" answered Ellen, excitedly.

"Well, I am sorry to tell you that they are not here. They are in Biarritz. They left only two days ago. I have the key if there is something you wish to get from the house."

'Oh, no,' thought Marina, getting out of the carriage and hurrying towards where Ellen and the woman were standing.

"Did I hear correctly, madame? The Solanges are away?" she asked.

"Why yes, mademoiselle. And I could not say when they will return."

Marina stood by the carriage with hot tears pricking at her eyes. With her worst fears confirmed, her brain whirled, trying to come up with a solution.

"Do you have their address in Biarritz, perhaps?" she asked finally.

"No, mademoiselle. I do not."

Marina thanked the woman and returned to the carriage.

"What on earth shall we do now?' she thought 'I suppose the only choice is to find a hotel. Oh, this is terrible. Terrible?

Once Ellen had climbed back on board, they asked the driver to take them to a good hotel. Marina had a job making him understand their request, as he did not speak any English and she struggled with her poor French.

At last he seemed to understand and cracked his whip over the horses.

"I wonder where he is taking us, miss," said Ellen, nervously, "surely he would look at us, and seeing that we are well-dressed and that you are a lady, he would not take us somewhere awful?"

So it was with some relief that they found themselves outside the Hotel du Nord some ten minutes later. It was a large hotel with a whole coterie of liveried bellboys and porters outside.

"All this to-ing and fro-ing is making me quite dizzy," commented Ellen, as the whirlwind of hotel staff milled around her.

"At least they will have a good command of English in such an establishment," suggested Marina, walking through the ornate doors.

Inside everywhere was rich and plush. It reminded Marina of glimpses she had seen of the inside of gentlemen's clubs in London.

The clerk behind the desk spoke perfect English and did not so much as raise an eyebrow when Manna requested a modest suite for an indefinite period.

"I will have your luggage sent up at once," he said, handing over the room key to a waiting porter.

"Suivez-moi, mademoiselle," declared the porter, waving his arms at the two bellboys who struggled with the luggage.

Marina soon found herself in a luxurious lift full of brass buttons and shiny surfaces. She squeezed in next to Ellen and watched as the floors docked by.

At the third floor, the porter ushered them out into the corridor.

Presently, they came to a door at the end of a corridor. The porter unlocked it and Marina entered. The suite was, indeed, not a large one and nowhere near as spacious as the one they had occupied in Dover, but it was tastefully furnished.

Ellen had a tiny room separated by a connecting door while Marina had the use of a sitting room and bedroom.

She tipped the porter generously and sat down whilst Ellen began to unpack.

"They seem very friendly here, miss," said Ellen. "Perhaps you could write to your Papa to find out the address of the Solange's house in Biarritz?"

Marina shook her head.

"No, I cannot, Ellen. I do not wish Papa to know of this latest crisis. However, you are right in thinking that we will need help to resolve this awful situation."

Ellen stopped what she was doing and thought.

"Is there no one in London you could ask for help?" she said after a while.

The face of Sir Peter Bailey suddenly flashed up in Marina's mind. It was not beyond the bounds of possibility that he might know someone in Paris, who would either know the Solange's Biarritz address or be able to find out.

Somewhere deep in her heart she was aware that this was the excuse she needed to get in touch with him.

"Ellen, I need to send another telegram," she said, seating herself down at the small desk.

She wrote quickly,

"Dear Peter, in Paris and need your urgent help to find the Solanges in Biarritz. Please contact me c/o the Hotel du Nord, Rue des Pins, Paris. Regards, Marina Fullerton."

"Can you remember Sir Peter's address, Ellen?"

"Oh, yes, miss. 25 Hay Hill, May fair. I memorised it when you sent me there."

"Excellent," replied Marina delightedly.

She wondered how quickly Sir Peter would get in touch. She really had no notion of what she expected from him, but she hoped that he might be able to at least make some enquiries in London on her behalf.

Marina's mind threw up many scenarios in the time that it took Ellen to send the telegram. On her return she asked her if she knew when it would be delivered.

"The clerk said that it would go this afternoon and be with Sir Peter by this evening, miss."

"Thank Heavens for such a speedy service."

"What do you think he might do, miss?"

"I noticed that there is a telephone on the main desk, so I am hoping that he will attempt to telephone me here at the hotel. Ellen, I think I should stay put tonight and tomorrow, just in case he tries to get in touch. Would you order dinner in the suite for us?"

"I am happy to stay in, miss. I confess I do not care for French cooking at the best of times."

Dinner that evening was a quiet affair and Marina allowed Ellen to eat with her as she did not feel it would be tight to let her dine alone in her bedroom.

In spite of her reservations about the cooking of the French, Ellen declared that her meal was 'extremely tasty,' and finished every last morsel.

"That was just steak and chips, wasn't it?" she said, dabbing at her mouth.

"I am glad that we have found something you like."

"Shall I go downstairs and tell the concierge that you are expecting a telephone message from London?" suggested Ellen.

"That would be most kind."

She did not believe that Sir Peter would be so quick to respond, but it would be as well for the concierge to be alerted that she was expecting a telephone call.

She waited anxiously for Ellen's return and was mildly disappointed when she appeared and said that there had been no message for her.

"Perhaps I shall write another letter this evening. I have remembered that there is another person who may well be able to help us."

"Who is that, miss?"

"A certain Duchess I met on the train when first we came to Paris. I am afraid I have lost her address, but she did mention that she knew Sir Peter and Papa."

"Then you must write at once. Would she be in London or here in Paris?"

"That is something I have no way of knowing, Ellen," answered Marina, moving over to the writing desk. "But I shall write to Sir Peter this very evening."

Ellen stifled a huge yawn. She had been up since before Marina had awoken and was very tired.

"I will not be offended if you wish to retire, Ellen," said Marina kindly. "I can easily take this downstairs in the morning or have someone fetch it"

Ellen thanked Marina profusely and retired to her bedroom.

Marina stayed up until quite late composing and recomposing the letter. She felt frustrated at her sudden inability to write to Sir Peter as naturally as she would anyone else. She examined each word, each phrase, a thousand times over and ended up discarding many sheets of hotel notepaper.

At last, she gave up and retired to bed. As she settled down, she could not help but wonder what he might be doing in London and who he was with.

Breakfast arrived promptly at half-past eight the next morning and Marina had to laugh at Ellen's face when she saw that it was croissants and brioches.

"Ugh! Not those sweet rolls."

"You should be grateful that the hotel does not serve French bread and conserves," teased Marina, as Ellen picked at the flaky pastry.

Marina had felt a little disappointed that there had been no telegram that morning from Sir Peter or telephone call, but she tried to put it out of her mind.

1 am quite certain that he will be in touch. Perhaps he is away and we shall just have to wait.'

But as time went on, Marina grew more and more anxious. She went for a walk in the morning and eagerly enquired again at the desk to see if there had been any messages or telegrams, but the clerk simply shook his head.

Luncheon came and passed and still no word.

"Why don't we go shopping, miss? That will cheer you up."

"I feel so dowdy in these mourning clothes," declared Marina sadly. "I confess that I do not like to visit fashionable establishments wearing them. It was different when 1 went out with Monique — she is so charming that the assistants were too busy with her to pay much attention to me. And they are all so snooty."

"Then perhaps an art gallery or museum," suggested Ellen, desperate to raise the spirits of her Mistress.

"No, I am not in the mood."

"Would you mind if I went out for a walk, miss?"

"No, please do. I am sorry if I do not fancy accompanying you, but I think I have a headache coming on."

Marina attempted to lie down, but found that she was too restless. She massaged her throbbing forehead, but it did not seem to work. Neither did dabbing lavender water on her temples.

After an hour, Marina decided to go downstairs and ask for an aspirin. Her head was splitting as she walked into the lift. It was not the usual concierge at the desk and the man who was on duty did not speak very good English.

'Oh, this is terrible. I cannot think of the right words,'

thought Marina, as she struggled to make herself understood. "J'ai un headache," she said. "J'ai besoin de medicine."

The man looked at her blankly. "Pardon, mademoiselle,je ne comprends pas." "Oh, goodness. What is the word for headache?" she cried aloud. "I wish someone around here spoke English."

As she stood there, trying to remember the word, her head pounding — there suddenly came an unexpected voice behind her that made her spin round.

"I think you will find that the word you need is 'mal a la *tete’.*"

Marina found herself staring straight into the handsome face of Sir Peter Bailey!

"You! Here," she cried and then threw herself into his open arms — sobbing.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"Oh, I am so pleased to see you! I cannot believe you are here," cried Marina, as she withdrew from Sir Peter's arms.

"It sounds as if I have arrived just in time," he replied, "now, allow me. I shall make sure that you get something for your headache at once."

Within moments, he had rattled off a string of fluent French to the concierge, who then produced two aspirins for Marina.

Gratefully she took them and a glass of water that appeared as if by magic.

'Would you like to return to your room or do you feel you are able to tell me what has happened?" Sir Peter asked kindly.

"If I sit somewhere quiet for a while, I feel certain that my headache will go now I have taken some aspirin."

Sir Peter led her to the back of the hotel where there was a small lounge.

"Sit down, I shall call for some tea," he said.

"No, that is quite all right — I do not want any, thank you."

Marina sat in silence for a few moments, scarcely able to look at Sir Peter who sat patiently opposite her. She now felt rather foolish for having dragged him all that way and thought that he might be annoyed when she told him the reason.

After a while, he spoke,

"Would you like to tell me what has happened? I confess that I am somewhat confused —"

"I have not told you the whole story," began Marina. "The reason that Ellen and I are in Paris is not for some idle shopping or to visit friends. The fact of the matter is that Papa is getting married again and his new wife does not want me under her feet. The reason Papa sent me away was because he could not bear me in the same house and his marriage has given him the perfect excuse to discard me forever."

"But a man cannot discard his own daughter as if she was a broken cup," exclaimed Sir Peter, a look of utter shock on his face. "This is terrible, terrible!"

It was the first time in ages that Marina had been in the presence of a sympathetic ear and she could not help but start to cry once more.

Sir Peter did not hesitate — he took out his handkerchief and handed it to her.

"Oh, I am so very sorry," choked Marina, through her tears, "this whole business is just too much to endure. It is bad enough to lose Mama, but now I feel as if I am in mourning for Papa as well. I have lost him, Sir Peter, and he wishes me dead!"

"Come, come, I will not believe that your father could be so cruel," he soothed, patting her arm. "And you must call me Peter. It sounds to me as if he is still so devastated by your Mama's passing that he is not himself. Who is this woman he is marrying?"

"Lady Alice Winwood. I had thought her a family friend, as she was so kind to both Papa and me after Mama's death. She was forever at our house, helping out and she sat with Papa for hours and hours at a time, keeping him company, or so I thought. Now, I know that she was scheming to ensnare him"

"There are women like that, I am sad to say," commented Sir Peter, with a sigh. "I myself was deceived by one —"

He suddenly looked away into the middle distance and Marina recalled that he had a broken engagement behind him that was obviously still painful.

But then he pulled himself together and continued, "And so, you returned to Paris, to find the Solanges were no longer there?"

"Yes, that is correct. Monique had mentioned to me that her family visited Biarritz each summer and that they would most likely be leaving in the near future, but I did not anticipate that they would be off so soon."

Sir Peter thought for a moment.

"Perhaps something precipitated their departure?"

"If someone had fallen ill, then Monique would have written to me."

"Then it is very strange."

"I have had a terrible journey. First, the ferry was delayed overnight by the most dreadful storms and then our suite was robbed and I lost all my jewels. The only things I have remaining are those I am wearing now."

She indicated the slim string of jet around her neck and a jet brooch pinned to her gown.

"Even so, you have been forced to endure many losses of late and it cannot have been easy."

'How kind he is,' thought Marina, as she continued to unburden herself. "So thoughtful and understanding. I cannot imagine why or how he is friends with Albert.'

"So, you wish to track down the Solanges in Biarritz?"

"Yes, that is correct."

"Then, naturally, I will accompany you."

Marina fell silent. It was a tempting offer but she felt uncertain if she should take it.

As if he had read her mind, Sir Peter jumped in.

"Of course with Ellen to act as your chaperone, it would not be considered unseemly for you to be travelling with a gentleman."

"Yes," she answered, slowly and deliberately, "that would be true."

"Then you will allow me to help you? I know Biarritz a little and have connections within the wine industry, who may be able to help us track them down. Monsieur Solange likes wine, I assume?"

"Yes, he does."

"Then he will have a wine merchant."

It all seemed so simple and Marina realised that she had no one else to help her, but still natural caution made her hold back.

"You must allow me to think some more about your very kind offer," she murmured.

"You must take as long as you wish."

Marina felt so at ease in his company that she seem quite forgot her misery and her headache. They laughed and chatted for quite some time and it was not until a worried Ellen came looking for her, that she realised that she had been gone for over two hours.

"There you are, miss. I returned from my walk and could not find you anywhere. I was out of my mind with worry. Oh, Sir Peter, what are you doing here?"

"Your Mistress sent me a signal from a damsel in distress," answered Sir Peter laughing.

"Ellen, Sir Peter has offered to accompany us to Biarritz —n

Ellen shot Marina a look that told her that she thought that it would not be a wise decision.

Coughing to hide her embarrassment, Marina made her excuses and rose to leave.

"Would you do me the honour of having dinner with me tonight?" asked Sir Peter. "That is, if you are not occupied elsewhere."

"I would like that very much, thank you," accepted Marina, trying to ignore Ellen's cross expression.

"I have taken a suite in the hotel so I will be close by. Now, if you will excuse me, I must register before I lose my suite."

"Come along, miss," urged Ellen, in a tone that told Marina that she disapproved.

"Until eight o'clock, then?" said Sir Peter. "I will meet you downstairs in the reception area."

Marina nodded and blushed to the roots of her hair. Ellen had not spoken to her in such a way since she was small.

Later, in their suite, Ellen remonstrated with Marina. "You cannot allow Sir Peter to waste his time like this.

Besides, you hardly know him."

"Me is a gentleman, Ellen, and that is all I need to know," replied Marina defensively.

"But you know nothing of him and his people," countered Ellen.

"Now you sound just like Papa," said Marina, suppressing a smile. "That is exactly what he would say."

"Well, miss, someone has to look out for you."

"And I am very grateful, Ellen. But I feel as if I can trust Sir Peter. He has come to help me at his own expense.

Besides, I have not yet said yes to him and have you forgotten that we cannot go back to England? We need to find the Solanges and we cannot do that on our own."

Ellen sulked for the rest of the afternoon and it was only when Marina suggested that she might like to accompany her to a dress shop across the street that Ellen began to thaw out.

"I cannot have dinner with Sir Peter wearing my mourning clothes — and what is more, I don't intend to," she declared, as they walked into the shop.

"Miss," cried Ellen, throwing her hands up to her face in shock. "What would your Papa —"

"Papa is not here and furthermore, he does not care. Mama would definitely not want me to wear that tired black silk to dinner with an eligible young gentleman and so I have decided that for tonight at least, I will not be wearing mourning."

Marina enjoyed watching the mannequins model dresses for her and Ellen tried her best to persuade her Mistress to order at least a lavender or grey dress.

"I rather like this one," said Marina, eyeing a gorgeous cream-silk gown that was being worn by a young girl with colouring very similar to hers.

"Miss. You cannot," protested Ellen.

"I can and I will!" replied Marina, before ordering the dress.

Back at the hotel, Marina sent a telegram to her father, requesting that he send funds urgently to a bank in Paris. By the time she arrived back in her suite, she had to begin to get ready for the evening.

Ellen said barely a word as she tried to do Marina's hair in the French style, as Marie had done. But it was a complicated style and Ellen took forever.

"It is a shame that you lost your pearls in the robbery," sighed Ellen, "now, where is that lavender silk shawl we brought with us? It is the only thing you have that will go with that dress!"

Ellen rummaged around in the chest of drawers, humming to herself and then her hum became a cry of joy.

"Miss. Look!"

Between her fingers she held a delicate string of pearls.

"Somehow, they must have got tangled up in the shawl the last time you wore it and so the thieves did not find them."

Marina felt that it was a sign from Heaven itself. It was as if her Mama was letting her know that she approved of what she was doing.

"Oh, Ellen. Bring them here, quickly."

Ellen fastened them around Marina's slender neck and stood back to admire her.

"You look a picture, miss. Even if you are wicked taking off your mourning — but I do think that your dear Mama would be very proud of you."

Marina laughed with joy as she regarded her reflection in the mirror. It was true that the pearls really set off her complexion and complemented the dress so well.

She cast a look at the clock on the mantelpiece and saw- that it was almost time for her to leave. She was to meet Sir Peter downstairs in ten minutes.

Taking one last look in the mirror, she could not help but stroke the pearls.

"My lucky charms,' she thought, as she swept out of the room.

Almost as soon as the lift doors opened, Sir Peter sprang towards her, an expression of rapt appreciation on his face.

"The carriage is waiting," was all he said, but Marina could tell without his comment that she had made a deep impression upon him.

"Where are we dining?" she asked, as the horses drove along the boulevard.

"A business acquaintance of mine has always recommended this particular restaurant, but this is the first time that I have found someone who deserved to be taken there," he answered with a charming smile.

Marina could feel his warmth next to her and it made her quite dizzy. She found herself longing to sit even closer to him.

She wondered if he might take her hand as they trotted through Paris and, as he spoke, she watched his lips and wished that he might kiss her.

By the time that they arrived at the restaurant, Marina had the distinct sense of deja-vu. Was it not, on an evening such as this that Simon had sat close to her in a carriage and had eyes only for her? Did she not, in her foolish way, believe that he was about to at least declare his love for her and maybe even propose?

"Papa was forever telling me that I had a too-vivid imagination,' she told herself. 'I do not know where these silly romantic notions come from every time a man pays me some attention, but it is foolhardy of me and immature.'

"Is something wrong?"

Marina was shocked out of her thoughts by Sir Peter's mellifluous voice.

"No, not at all, thank you."

"You are looking quite cross at something and I wondered if perhaps the carriage had jolted you too much. I must confess that was not the smoothest ride I have ever had."

Marina felt embarrassed.

'If only my face did not show my inner thoughts,' she scolded herself, as she tried to force a smile. 'Now, he will think me ill-tempered and ungracious.'

"Really," she insisted, "I am perfectly well,"

Sir Peter did not press her further. He simply offered her his arm as they entered the restaurant.

If Marina had thought that the Saint Georges was wonderful, then Les Trois Collines was even more luxurious.

She was dazzled by the glare from so many diamonds on so many necks and arms and she was glad that she had overridden her conscience to throw off her dowdy mourning.

As they were shown to their table, she caught a number of appreciative glances both from men and women and it made her feel more confident. She was proud too of having such a charming companion.

"I do hope you will enjoy dining here," said Sir Peter, betraying a slight hint of nervousness.

The menu was quite bewildering all in French and in a hand that made Marina's eyes spin. Sensing her confusion, Sir Peter suggested,

"If you wish, I can order for you, as long as you let me know what you do not care for."

"Thank you. I am not partial to veal or pork, but adore most other dishes."

"Then it will be lobster to start, followed by fillets of beef in red wine," declared Sir Peter, snapping the menu shut.

He clicked his fingers and a waiter appeared. Marina liked the way he ordered the food in beautiful French. Although not a brash man, he was certainly confident and that appealed to her.

'I ate lobster with Simon,' she thought to herself, almost nostalgically. Marina was quite surprised at the emotion the thought evoked in her.

The wine waiter hurried over and Sir Peter ordered champagne. Turning to Marina, his smile froze on his face as he saw her downcast expression.

"Is there something wrong?" he asked anxiously. "Are you feeling unwell?"

Marina blushed to the roots of her hair and felt quite embarrassed that she had been caught with a sad demeanour.

"No, not at all."

"But you looked so sad," he persisted. "If you are unhappy with what I have ordered or the restaurant, then you must tell me and we shall go elsewhere."

"I confess that I am a little overwhelmed by everything," she replied after a pause. "If I was still in London, convention would not allow me to be seen in such a place and I would still be in mourning."

"Of course, I understand," he answered, looking visibly relieved.

Marina wanted to say that she had also wanted to look beautiful for him, but was not certain that it was wise. She quite astonished herself for even thinking it.

The lobster arrived and she allowed Sir Peter to crack the claws for her. It was delicious — more delicious than anything she had ever tasted.

They chatted a little about Paris and then Sir Peter broached the subject of why she was here.

"I still cannot believe that your Papa would send you away."

"If Mama is up in Heaven, looking down upon us, she is probably horrified too," responded Marina, dabbing at her mouth with her napkin.

"If you had done something terrible, it would be more understandable, but I cannot imagine that you would ever be anything other than a most dutiful daughter."

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"Thank you. I tried my best to look after him after Mama died, but he was so distraught, all he did was push me away."

"That is sometimes the way of men and I confess that I laid the path for my own heartbreak by doing very much the same."

Marina put down her fork and looked at him searchingly. She remained silent and waited for him to continue.

"After my father died, I pushed away those I loved. As you may have heard, I was engaged to a young lady and I confess I was guilty of neglecting her. Six months after father passed away, she broke the engagement and immediately married a family friend."

His face took on a pained look as he stared into his plate of lobster shells.

"There were some who had said from the outset that she was not good enough for me and I was not the first to whom she had been engaged, but I did not want to believe what I thought to be idle gossip. In the long run, however, she showed her true colours."

Marina was so moved by his speech that she laid her gloved hand over his for a second in a gesture of sympathy. Even though she had not been through the heartbreak of a broken engagement, she felt an empathy with him. For had her own heart not broken when her Mama had died?

"But enough of such talk," exclaimed Sir Peter, smiling at her. "I wanted you to know the truth from me before you took notice of vicious, wagging tongues. There are many in London and in Paris who seek to make mischief by spreading stories and I wanted you to know what really happened."

"Thank you, replied Marina, a litde taken aback. She did not seek to share her confidences with Sir Peter, however, as what was there to tell? A stupid fascination with Albert that was almost school-girlish and her belief that Simon's easy flattery was more than that.

The lull in the conversation became drawn out and Marina tried to think of a subject that would not be difficult for either of them, but Sir Peter jumped in first.

"Marina, have you thought any more about allowing me to accompany you to Biarritz?"

She was so grateful that he had not forgotten that she could not help feeling relief. Even so, she made a show of polite reluctance.

"I am still considering your kind offer," she said, quietly.

"Of course," he replied, a little deflated. "But, I cannot possibly allow you two to go alone, as although it is a popular resort, it is still full of rogues and ne'er-do-wells who would pounce on you with hard-luck stories."

"I am certain we could manage on our own," said Marina, lowering her eyes.

"Well, there is no hurry. I can make some enquiries amongst my acquaintances. There must be one who supplies wine to the Solange Biarritz residence.

Sir Peter raised his glass of champagne.

"To you, Marina, and to finding the Solanges, whatever you decide."

Marina took up hers in response and clinked it with Sir Peter's. All the while, her mind was running riot. She did not know how she felt about seeing Simon again — it could prove quite embarrassing.

The band struck up at midnight and Marina could not refuse when Sir Peter asked her to dance. He whirled her around the room in an elegant waltz that made her head spin. She never felt so happy as when she was in his strong arms — in fact, she did not want the evening to end.

They danced until she felt she could not take one more step and then Sir Peter called for a carriage.

As he helped her with her wrap, she felt his hand brush her arm and it sent a spark deep down inside that thrilled her to her core.

'I must not allow myself to be carried away,' she thought, as he helped her into the carriage. 'I must remember that an evening such as this with Simon encouraged foolish thoughts and I must be wary of it happening again.'

Even so, as they sat close together in the carriage, she could feel herself wanting to edge nearer.

It was a wrench for her to leave his side when they arrived back at the hotel. He escorted her to her suite and politely bade her goodnight.

Marina had hoped for a kiss, even one on the cheek, but Sir Peter had simply bowed after thanking her for such an enjoyable evening.

She opened the suite door, half hoping that he would return and take her in his arms, but as she heard his footsteps die away, she knew that he would not.

"Oh, miss."

In the dark, Marina had stepped on Ellen's toe. The maid had been waiting for her behind the door and had surprised her.

Ellen lit the oil lamp and held it up to Marina's face. "You look as if you have had a good evening, miss."

"Yes," sighed Marina, sinking down into a chair and taking off her evening slippers, "it was wonderful!" "And?"

Marina gave Ellen a puzzled look. "And what, Ellen?"

The maid cast her eyes up to Heaven and tutted loudly. "Miss, you do not think I waited up till this hour for you not to tell me everything, now, did you? Did Sir Peter kiss you?"

"Ellen!" cried Marina in a shocked tone. 'He is a friend and no more."

"Oh, yes, and you go throwing off your mourning willy-nilly for a man who is only a friend?"

Marina blushed and was glad that it was too dark for Ellen to see her face. There was very little that her maid missed — she knew her far too well.

"No, he did not kiss me," admitted Marina, after a while, "and I confess that I am a little disappointed that he did not attempt so much as a peck on the cheek."

"Well, Sir Peter is a gentleman, miss. He's not forward and French."

Marina knew that Ellen was referring to Simon and it annoyed her to be reminded of him.

"Yes, he is,' thought Marina, as she climbed into bed, 'so, why in my heart do I wish that he had not been quite so proper towards me?'

Quite shocked at her own train of thought, she lay awake for hours. Should she allow him to go with them to Biarritz? Should she find her own way? All these thoughts and more kept her sleepless almost until the first light of dawn came stealing in through the curtains.

CHAPTER NINE

Ellen let Marina stay in bed until long into the following morning. Sir Peter called at the suite at half-past nine and Ellen sent him away, saying that her Mistress was still sleeping.

"Please tell Miss Fullerton that I am going to visit some of my French colleagues this morning to find out where the Solange's residence in Biarritz might be," he whispered through the half-open door.

Ellen gave him a long look that left him in no doubt whatsoever that she was appraising his character and simply nodded her assent.

She closed the door and then tiptoed towards Marina's bed.

'Ah, but she's a pretty lass,' she murmured under her breath, 'and I can see that I will have to be vigilant if we are going to Biarritz with Sir Peter.'

Ellen knew what her Mistress's decision would be even before Marina knew it herself and she had no idea that Ellen had promised her Mama to always keep an eye on her.

"Marina has such a tender heart and she offers it too readily," she had said to her, when Marina was just a child. "You must promise me, Ellen, that you will save her from herself."

Ellen intended to do just that as she had seen how hurt her Mistress had been by Simon Solange and his empty flirting, and she wanted to make sure that Sir Peter Bailey was not about to break Marina's heart.

After a late breakfast, Marina felt the need for some fresh air.

She took the news that Sir Peter was making enquiries on her behalf without comment As Ellen casually relayed his message, Marina could not prevent her heart from leaping just a fraction.

'Tie could be very useful to us, miss," said Ellen. "Yes, I know, Ellen. But I am not certain that it is seemly for us to take Sir Peter up on his offer."

"Why ever not?"

"Just because — " answered Marina, uncertain in her own mind what her objections might be.

"Are you thinking about Simon Solange, miss? Is that what is stopping you?"

"You are correct, Ellen," she admitted. "I am somewhat bruised by what occurred between myself and Simon, but I have to take responsibility for my own part in it."

"And what do you think that was, miss? From where I'm standing, he led an innocent girl on to believe that he was in love with her. So what part could you possibly have played in the face of such expert seduction?"

"I believed him, Ellen."

Ellen felt a surge of tenderness. She looked up at her with such pain in her eyes — eyes that reminded her of Marina's mother and it made her want to hug her.

She flung her arms around Marina and embraced her, as a mother would.

"I am so frightened, Ellen," she confessed, as the tears unexpectedly began to flow. "I am so innocent of the ways of men and I feel foolish for having believed that Simon harboured feelings for me."

"You should not blame yourself, miss. He is a very clever man. His sort likes to prey on innocent young things like yourself and it is he who is at fault, not you."

Later that day, Ellen and Marina took a turn around the Tuilleries once more and treated themselves to coffee and cakes in a pretty little cafe that they found in a street behind the Place de la Concorde.

As she tucked into warm madeleines, Ellen asked Marina if she had come to a decision about Sir Peter.

"I am in two minds what to do," she answered, wetting her finger and picking up the last few crumbs. "We have to find the Solanges eventually and although Papa has made more money available to me, the hotel is too expensive to stay in forever. If we are to remain in Paris and the Solanges do not reappear, we shall have to find alternative accommodation."

"Oh, I should not like that very much, miss," replied Ellen candidly.

"And I would rather stay with people we know. No, Ellen, I do not think we have an alternative. I have made the decision to allow Sir Peter to take us to Biarritz."

"I think it is a wise one, miss," answered Ellen, patting her Mistress's hand. "I always feel happier when there is a gentleman around."

"We should be making our way back to the hotel to see if Sir Peter has returned," said Marina, calling for the bill.

Arriving at the hotel, she enquired if Sir Peter had returned. The desk clerk solemnly shook his head and offered to give him a message as soon as he did. Marina took off her white, leather gloves and quickly wrote a few lines on a piece of hotel notepaper and gave it to the clerk.

"We shall just have to go back upstairs and wait," announced Marina.

The long hours ticked by and Marina tried to read to help the time pass.

"I do hope he will not have changed his mind," said Marina, as the clock struck four.

"He strikes me as a man of his word," responded Ellen, "and if he is not, then it is best that we find that out now, rather than when we are in Biarritz."

At last, there came a knock on the door. Even though she had been anticipating it, Marina jumped when it came.

"You may open it, Ellen," said Marina, in a calm tone that belied her nervous state of mind.

"It's Sir Peter, miss."

"I received your note," he said, slightly out of breath, "and I came at once."

"Is there any news of the Solanges?"

"Yes, I do believe there is."

Marina signalled for him to sit down and asked Ellen to fetch some tea.

"So," began Marina, "what have you discovered?"

"I met a wine merchant today who has connections in Biarritz and he has given me the address of Monsieur Solange's wine merchant. Once we are there, it should not be too difficult to locate him and to find out where they live."

"But would he simply hand over the address of Monsieur Solange?"

"Marina, I am very well known in wine circles. One look at my card should be enough to convince him to tell me what I need to know."

Marina looked thoughtful for a second. She could see that Sir Peter was regarding her expectantly and she knew that he was waiting for her to tell him what decision she had come to about going to Biarritz.

"In that case, I should very much like to take up your kind offer of accompanying us to Biarritz. It is a case of either finding an apartment in Paris or attempting to locate the Solanges with your help and I have decided that the most sensible option is to do the latter."

"Wonderful," enthused Sir Peter, standing up and nearly knocking Ellen flying, as she returned with a tray of tea.

"Careful, sir," she admonished, handing him a bone- china cup and saucer.

Sir Peter blushed and took the cup. Marina thought how charming he looked with his pink cheeks — rather like a small boy who had been told off by his nanny.

"I shall find out the train times to Biarritz and when would you care to leave?"

"As soon as possible," replied Marina.

"Biarritz is a very fashionable place. I am certain we shall find them."

"Good, then here's to success," toasted Marina, raising her teacup aloft

The way Sir Peter looked back at her, so intensely and meaningfully, made her stomach turn over. She wondered if something would happen during their trip and she found that thought both unnerving and exciting.

Marina had chosen a bad time to leave for Biarritz as Sir Peter found that all the trains the next day and the day after were fully booked.

It was a few days later when Ellen finally packed their bags for departure.

Sir Peter was already waiting for them downstairs with just one small suitcase. Marina looked at it aghast.

"I travel light," explained Sir Peter smiling broadly.

"I wish I knew how to," commented Marina, indicating her tall pile of trunks and cases with which the porters were struggling.

Sir Peter had been kind enough to buy a first-class ticket for Ellen, so that she did not have to sit on her own. Marina thanked him profusely.

"There is really no need," he protested, "after all, you could not travel with me without a chaperone."

"That is true," admitted Marina, who thought that she really would not have minded the opportunity to spend some time alone again with him, "and Ellen can be such a stickler for convention."

"How long will the journey take?" asked Marina, gazing out of the window.

"We shall not be there until quite late this evening. I believe the journey takes eight hours."

"I hope we are going to stop for luncheon."

"There is a very good dining car on the train, Marina, and I do hope you will join me."

"Of course," agreed Marina enthusiastically.

"I won't be eating no French train food," chimed in Ellen. "I have brought my own lunch from the hotel kitchen. One of the girls there, who spoke English, has made me some steak sandwiches."

Marina could not help but burst out laughing. It was so typical of Ellen!

Over lunch, Sir Peter asked Marina about the Solanges.

"What are they like? You have not really told me anything about them."

"They are friends of Papa," she answered, a little reluctantly as she did not want to get on to the topic of Simon Solange, "and very charming. They have a daughter and a son. Monique is a very sweet girl and we have become good friends. She must be wondering why I have not replied to any of her letters —"

Marina trailed off. "And the son?"

Sir Peter was not about to let her off the hook,

"Simon is slightly older than Monique and something of a buccaneer, so I did not socialise much with him," she answered a little curtly.

They both fell silent as the soup arrived — it was a delicious cream of asparagus and the waiter assured Sir Peter that the asparagus was the last of the English crop.

"I do so low asparagus, but the white stuff you get on the Continent is so tasteless," he mused, finishing off his bowl in a trice.

"I must confess that I did not know what it was at first," admitted Marina, "I had never seen such a strange, anaemic-looking vegetable before!"

They both looked at each other and began to laugh. Marina felt a warm glow inside. Sir Peter was so easy to get along with and she felt far less awkward in his presence than she did in Simon's.

'He hurt me more than I realised,' thought Marina, sadly, as their poularde a la crime was served.

The journey South was long and Marina was very tired by the time the train pulled into Biarritz.

"I have been recommended a small, but exclusive, family- run hotel," said Sir Peter, as the friendly porter hailed them a carriage.

"Will we be able to find a room at this late hour?" asked Marina shivering.

"I am assured that Madame Boucheron keeps late hours and that her doors are always open," answered Sir Peter reassuringly. "Apparently, although she can appear stern, she is rather fond of the British."

As Sir Peter predicted, Madame Boucheron was indeed still up and furthermore, she welcomed them with gusto.

"I am so 'appy to see you," she greeted them, in her heavily accented, throaty voice. "You will forgive that my English is not good but, as long as you follow my rules, we will get along, n'est-ce pas?"

She gave Marina an intense glare and looked her up and down. She felt quite nervous and tiptoed behind the fierce- looking woman as she ushered them in.

Sir Peter spoke to her in fluent French and, in no time, charmed her into giving them three of her best rooms.

Marina admired his easy way with the language and how confident he appeared when speaking it

He is almost more confident conversing in French than he is in his own language,' she marvelled as Madame Boucheron's demeanour changed from stern and unforgiving to almost coquettish. She patted her tightly coiled black hair and her piercing black eyes softened a little.

The rooms were small but elegantly furnished. Marina was placed next to Ellen, who was delighted to be occupying a

room of her own. Marina noticed that Sir Peter was shown to the floor above them.

"Well, I've met some hard women in my time, but she is the dragon to end all dragons!" said Ellen, as she put her head around Marina's door. "Is there anything you wish me to do for you, miss, before I turn in?"

"No, I will be perfectly fine, thank you," said Marina. The next morning, Madame Boucheron had prepared a huge breakfast for them, even before they had sat down to table.

"So, you are on 'oliday?" she asked, heaping slices of bacon onto Sir Peter's plate.

"Not really. We are looking for some friends of ours — perhaps you know of them — a Monsieur and Madame Solange?"

"Ah, Solange, Solange — " she muttered, "there is a son, n'est-cepas? A terrible boy. A friend of mine told me that he has scandalised the whole of Biarritz with his, 'ow you say, behaviour."

Sir Peter cast a worried look at Marina who had suddenly lost interest in her plate of eggs and bacon.

"Yes," continued Madame Boucheron, "the boy 'as 'ad to come to Biarritz to escape 'is angry women! Promised to marry two girls and then ran off leaving them. Cocbon!" she spat, "and now, 'e parade 'is new Italian fiancee along ze promenade!"

She banged down the pan and plonked herself down on a stool.

Marina could not help herself. The tears began to flow down her cheeks and plopped into her breakfast.

"Come along, miss," entreated Ellen, who had finished her meal already. "Come upstairs with me."

She quickly ushered the weeping Marina out of the room, leaving Sir Peter looking shocked.

"What 'as come over the girl?" asked Madame Boucheron.

"She has recently lost her Mama," answered Sir Peter, who was utterly bewildered by the scene he had just witnessed.

Sir Peter finished his breakfast in silence. He did not know what to think, but Marina's behaviour had left him with a distinctly uneasy feeling — Marina was inconsolable as she wept in her room. Ellen sat on the bed next to her prostrate Mistress and stroked her hair.

"There, there, Miss Marina, don't upset yourself. I thought you didn't care for Simon Solange?"

"Oh, Ellen. I am so confused. I did not think I cared about him either, but when Madame Boucheron told those stories about him, it made me feel even more foolish for believing he had feelings for me."

"My dear, you are young and innocent You are not to be blamed for believing the false words of men," soothed Ellen. "You have learned the hard way that not all gentlemen are as honest as they appear. You are young and beautiful and there are unscrupulous men out there who would woo you just to possess that beauty."

"I do not think I understand," mumbled Marina sitting up and drying her eyes. "Why would a gentleman do that?"

"Just as some desire money and power, others desire to own lovely things and that sometimes includes women!"

"But what of love? Romance?"

"My dear Marina, men are not the same as us. There are some who prize these things, but if you ever find a man who does, then cling on to him for dear life, for he is rare indeed."

'I wonder, could Sir Peter be such a man?' thought Marina, as Ellen gave her a hug.

After a while, she composed herself. Sir Peter would be wondering what had happened to her.

'I have to find the Solanges — now more than ever I want to discover the truth behind Simon's behaviour towards me,' she resolved as she splashed her face with cold water and prepared to go downstairs and make her explanations to Sir Peter.

He will think me very rude,' she said to herself as she tidied her hair.

"Shall I come with you, miss?" asked Ellen as they left the room.

"No, Ellen. I shall deal with this matter myself. You go back to your room and I will come and fetch you later."

Marina hurried down the narrow stairs and was relieved to see the outline of Sir Peter's broad shoulders through the glass of the dining room door.

Composing herself, she took a deep breath and entered.

"Marina. Are you all right?" demanded Sir Peter, whirling round to greet her. "I have been so worried —"

"You must forgive me, but I was temporarily overcome. The travelling has tired me. I am not used to it."

"Quite so," answered Sir Peter, but Marina detected a hint of distance in his tone as if he had divined the real reason for her sudden exit.

"When shall we begin our search for the Solanges?" she asked in an attempt to change the subject

"Madame Boucheron tells me that there is a very fashionable restaurant near the quay where the rich gather to take luncheon. I would suggest that we do likewise. She thinks that a family who sound like the Solanges often lunch there. If we do not find them there, we can try the wine merchant who is supposed to supply them."

What Sir Peter did not tell her was that Madame Boucheron had said that the Solange boy often flaunted his Italian fiancee there, further scandalising the assembled Biarritz Society.

"Perhaps you would like to walk around the town this morning to get your bearings?" he suggested, as she stood there uncertain of what to say next. "So, shall we meet in the hall in say, fifteen minutes? Will that be sufficient for you and Ellen to make yourselves ready?"

Marina nodded and left the room.

"Why do I feel so apprehensive about seeing the Solanges again?\* she asked herself, as she walked back upstairs.

There was no agreement with Simon about our relationship and his two so-called fiancées at the same time would certainly explain his erratic behaviour with me. He must have thought me some silly little girl whom he could temporarily amuse himself with in between dallying with his two paramours.'

Marina told Ellen to get ready and then returned to her room. It overlooked a row of fishermen's cottages with the sea beyond.

Biarritz had been the haunt of the rich and the nobility since the middle of the century and Marina knew that Napoleon III had built a house here for the Empress Eugenie, but it had never forgotten its roots as a fishing village.

The weather outside was fine and warm, so Marina simply tidied herself and made her way back downstairs.

Ellen was already waiting for her, as was Sir Peter. Madame Boucheron looked her up and down as if appraising her, grunted and vanished into a cupboard under the stairs. A few moments later, she re-emerged with a white lace parasol.

"Tenez," she commanded, handing the delicate object to Marina. "You cannot promenade without this. The sun will bum you."

"Th-thank you," stammered Marina, taken aback.

"Do not forget that we are quite far South. Spain is just across the other side of the mountains," chided Sir Peter.

"I did not realise — " answered Marina, feeling quite stupid. She really had no idea where Biarritz was apart from that it clearly was by the sea.

They walked out into the brilliant sunshine and almost immediately, Marina was glad of the parasol to protect her from the fierce rays. It was so much warmer than anything she had experienced in London.

They took a stroll along the promenade and nodded at the more obviously English visitors of which there seemed to be quite a few. Marina thought she recognised some friends of

Henrietta, but as she had not been formally introduced to them, she did not linger and speak to them.

At least twice, Sir Peter was stopped by people who declared themselves astonished to see him in Biarritz.

"Of course we must not forget that we are here for a reason — and are not simply tourists enjoying the sights," Sir Peter reminded her.

Marina was not really listening to what he was saying. She was too busy thinking ahead in her mind of the time when they would find the Solanges.

Knowing what she now did, she almost wished that they had not come.

'But I do want to see Monique again and I have nothing against Monsieur and Madame Solange,' she reminded herself, as Sir Peter led them down to La Grande Plage.

Marina looked on in awe at the line of bathing machines that dotted the beach and shore line. How she envied the women in their swimsuits enjoying the sea. She had not swum in the sea since she was a child and in the heat of the morning she wished she could run down to the waves and dive in.

Just as she was considering attempting to walk along the beach to be nearer the waves, Sir Peter interrupted her thoughts.

"Ladies, it is almost half-past twelve. Shall we go and find this restaurant?"

Now that the hour was upon them, Marina suddenly felt sick with nerves.

"Marina, are you ready?" he asked. He could see that she was feeling apprehensive.

"Yes, I believe I am," she replied, in a quiet voice. Ellen squeezed her arm as if to reassure her.

The three of them walked in silence to the harbour. Sir Peter asked a passing couple if they knew where the Pot an Feu restaurant was and they pointed to an elegant building with a striped awning.

Marina was shaking as they walked towards it. She could see that it was already quite full and wondered if they would even be able to secure a table.

Sir Peter strode in ahead of them and spoke with the manager.

Within moments they were being shown to a table. "We are fortunate, indeed," said Sir Peter, as they sat down. "There are only a few tables free for luncheon today."

While Ellen and Sir Peter scanned the menu, Marina looked around the room anxiously. The sound of chatter was so loud that it was a tangible hum.

She searched until her eyes ached and then, just as she was about to give up, the figures of Monsieur and Madame Solange appeared in the entrance.

Madame Solange was folding her parasol and Monique came in behind her, wearing a pale linen dress.

With a beating heart, Marina stared hard at the family, willing them to notice her.

As luck would have it, they were led towards a table just past them.

Monique's eyes came to rest on Marina and her mouth fell open.

"*Cheri!* It is you. Here. I cannot believe it!" she cried, and broke away from her family group to run towards Marina's table.

Automatically, Sir Peter rose to his feet.

Monique embraced Marina and before long they were crying with joy.

"I cannot believe you are here," repeated Monique, holding Marina at arm's length as if to make certain she was seeing correctly. "Why did you not answer my letters?"

"It is a long story," began Marina. "Papa has thrown me out."

"What is this nonsense?" exploded Monique, unable to believe her ears. "Monsieur Fullerton would not do such a thing."

"I am afraid that he has," replied Marina, sitting down. "Maman, Papa. *Regardez.* It is Marina!"

They came bustling up to the table and kissed Marina on both cheeks.

"Where are you staying?" asked Madame Solange, refusing to let go of Marina's hand.

"At a hotel not far from the fishermen's cottages," replied Marina.

She then realised that Sir Peter was still politely standing, so she made the introduction.

"Monique, Monsieur and Madame Solange, this is my friend, Sir Peter Bailey. lie was kind enough to accompany us to Biarritz when we could not find you at home in Paris."

Monique shook his hand and eyed him appreciatively. Marina thought for one awful moment that she was about to pass comment on him, but Monique simply smiled knowingly at Marina.

"So, you are to be thanked for looking after our friend," said Monsieur Solange. "After lunch, you must come back to our home and have coffee. Marina, I think there is much you have to tell us."

"Thank you, I would love to," answered Sir Peter. "Oh, Marina! How could your Papa be so cruel?" asked Monique, in a low whisper. "You must promise to tell me everything."

"Yes, I will," agreed Marina, with a smile. She could see that Simon was not with them and so she assumed that he was lunching elsewhere.

As the Solanges left for their table, Sir Peter spoke up. "They seem so very nice — the Solanges."

"Yes, they are," replied Marina, full of relief at the non­appearance of Simon, "they have become my second family."

They settled down to order as the waiter had returned and Marina felt quite light-hearted and full of optimism as she asked for a grilled sole.

"I can see that my work here is almost done," said Sir Peter, sipping at a glass of water, "but I fancy I might take a short break and enjoy the pleasures that Biarritz has to offer."

Marina was relieved as she had feared that he might decide to leave at once, now that she had found the Solanges.

She was just about to reply when she looked up in time to see the figure of Simon with a young, dark-haired woman on his arm. His face was set in an expression of arrogance as he led the girl towards his family's table.

Marina caught her breath and found that she could not take her eyes off him.

Too late, she looked downwards — for Simon had seen her.

His expression did not change one jot. He simply passed Marina's table, settled his lady-friend down and then said something to his father.

"Him," hissed Ellen, throwing a withering look in his direction. "Now, miss, don't be getting upset —"

Marina could not speak or form a single word as her heart was beating so fast that it robbed her of the power of speech.

She felt sick and dizzy as she watched Simon turn on his heel and walk towards their table.

Sir Peter gave Marina a searching look as she tried to avert her gaze from the approaching Simon. But she was like a moth drawn to a candle flame. She could not take her eyes off him.

She did not know what she felt as he drew up to their table and stopped.

He was as handsome as ever. His long eyelashes framing those dazzlingly blue eyes that Marina had once loved to gaze into. His face was brown from the sun and he had grown a small, clipped moustache that made him look even more dashing.

"Marina — " he said, in a low voice. Marina panicked.

She could not speak, she could only stare.

'Oh, what is it he wants of me?' she thought trying to compose herself. 'What is it that he has to say to me?'

There was an awkward silence while everyone gazed in Simon's direction and waited —.

CHAPTER TEN

"Marina, how pleasant it is to see you again. I trust that you are well?"

"Well enough, thank you," she responded, controlling her emotions.

"Then, I shall see you at the house soon, no doubt I hope that you will have a pleasant stay in Biarritz," he said, before turning on his heel and returning to his table.

Marina stared after him, unable to make sense of their short and polite discourse.

Something about the arrogant manner in which he was comporting himself made Marina feel annoyed. He had displayed no sign of contrition at his previous bad behaviour, just an overbearing confidence.

"What a strange fellow!" declared Sir Peter. "I do not know if I should be offended that he did not acknowledge me or introduce himself."

"Are you all right, miss?" asked Ellen, nervously. She could see how upset her Mistress was, but did not wish to draw too much attention to the fact

There was an awkward silence during which Marina felt that she could not think fast enough to make idle conversation.

Sir Peter, sensing that something was amiss, arose from the table and coughed.

"You will excuse me, ladies, but I have just seen a fellow on the other side of the room with whom I have had business dealings. I simply must go and pay my respects to him."

As soon as he had left the table, Marina almost collapsed in her seat.

"There, there, miss. Do not upset yourself," coaxed Ellen in a quiet but soothing tone. "You are well rid of a cad like that."

Marina pulled herself together just in time for the waiter to return with their food. Seeing that Sir Peter was not there, he asked if he should take his meal away.

"He will not be long," answered Ellen, "but I believe he would prefer his food hot than cold."

The waiter nodded his head and removed the dish immediately.

"Eat up, miss, or else your food will get cold too."

"I am not certain that I have an appetite now, Ellen. It was such a shock to see Simon — and the nerve of the man, coming over to my table like that and not apologising for his rudeness the last time we saw each other."

"Chances are he does not think he has done anything wrong," advised Ellen. "Arrogant little monkey!"

Ellen looked up across the room in time to see the figure of Monique hurrying towards them.

"Oh, don't look now, miss, but Mademoiselle Solange is coming over."

Marina smiled as Monique stood in front of her, breathlessly waving her hands.

"I am so sorry about my brother," she spluttered, bending over and lowering her voice. "He is terrible! I cannot apologise enough."

Marina bade her sit in Sir Peter's seat and Monique sank gracefully down.

"He has caused a scandal flaunting that woman," she continued. "She has been married before, of course, and Simon seems not to care at all for Maman and Papa's feelings."

"Monique, I am so sorry that your parents are unhappy, but truly it is of no consequence what Simon does," replied Marina calmly. "It is true I once believed myself in love with him, but I now realise that it was just a silly infatuation."

"Even so, I feel guilty. He led you on and all the time he was involved with not one, but two girls, one of whom was engaged to someone else and who broke it off to be with him. There was such a scandal. On the morning that you left, Papa had stem words with him about the situation. That is why he was so strange with you."

Marina received this news with a sage nod of her head. "It all makes sense now, but, Monique, you must not feel badly on my account. It really does not matter any longer."

Just then, Sir Peter arrived back at the table and seeing Monique, bowed to her courteously.

"No, please remain seated, I shall ask for another chair to be brought," insisted Sir Peter.

"And I must return to my family," demurred Monique. "But you and Marina will come to dinner this evening at our house, no? Here, I have written down the address and, Marina, you must come and stay with us — we cannot have you sleeping in some hotel."

"Thank you, Monique, I would love to. I will come at the weekend, if that is all right"

"Of course," replied Monique, appraising Sir Peter once more with her frank gaze. "I shall tell Maman and Papa to make two guest suites available. You will do us the honour of staying, I hope, Sir Peter? We would like to thank you for looking after our dear Marina,"

"Thank you, I would be glad to," replied Sir Peter bowing.

"A bientot!' she called with a flirtatious wave of her be- gloved hand.

"What a charming girl," commented Sir Peter.

"Yes, she is a dear thing," replied Marina. "Now, shall we ask for your food to be brought to the table?"

Sir Peter clicked his fingers and summoned the waiter. Ellen gave Marina a meaningful look. Marina tried to ignore her as she knew exactly what Ellen was thinking — 'is it wise to not only have dinner, but to stay at the Solanges?' Marina smiled back at her reassuringly.

'Simon can no longer hurt me,' she thought, resolutely.

'I will not let him.'

As she formed that thought, she had her eyes firmly on the handsome face of Sir Peter.

After luncheon, he announced that he had a surprise for Marina.

Her eyes lit up as she loved surprises.

"What is it?" she asked, hardly able to contain her excitement

"The chap I went to speak to — his name is Georges- Henri Martin. He has a large stable on the outskirts of Biarritz and he has offered to take us out riding this afternoon."

"Oh, miss - " started Ellen.

"Hush, Ellen, it is quite all right. Just because Mama died in a riding accident, it does not mean that I never want to go near a horse again."

"I am sorry, I did not think — " began Sir Peter clearly mortified that he had made a blunder.

"No, there is nothing to apologise for. I love riding and although I confess that I am a little nervous, I must not let it prevent me from enjoying something I have always loved. This Georges-Henri, is he is an experienced horseman?"

"The very best in all of France."

"And his horses, they are well cared-for and well- behaved?"

"Impeccably. He would not put anyone in danger, I can assure you."

"Then, we shall go!"

Ellen spent the remainder of the meal frowning at her Mistress, but she knew that once her mind was made up, she could not stop her.

Marina felt gay for the first time since her Mama had passed away. She smiled at Sir Peter gratefully.

"You must not mind Ellen, she is very protective of me, the more so since Mama died."

He leaned over to her and laid his hand over hers in an unexpected gesture of tenderness that quite took her breath away.

"And I am glad that she is, Marina. You are precious to her, as you are to all of us."

Looking into his green eyes, she saw something that unnerved yet thrilled her at the same rime. She suddenly felt overcome with emotion and withdrew her hand from underneath his.

He is so good-looking,' she thought, as she tried not to look at him.

She felt as if something had indeed changed. It was as if someone had closed the door on one part of her life and another was opening.

Ellen made her feelings quite clear on the subject of Marina going out riding with Sir Peter and his friend.

Back at their hotel, she fussed and fussed as Marina could not decide what to wear.

"Oh, why do I not have a riding habit with me?" she wailed, pulling at numerous black jackets and skirts. "I cannot go in any of these, I shall look a perfect fright."

"Now, what is this sudden worry about what you look like? Could a certain gentleman of our acquaintance have anything to do with it?"

Marina found herself blushing so hard that she felt certain her face was on fire.

She tried to hide it as Ellen tied up her boots.

'I wonder if this friend of Sir Peter's might have a sister who could lend me a riding habit?1 thought Marina.

'My skirt is far too long and is the wrong shape for me to sit comfortably on a horse for hours.'

However, she need not have worried herself.

At the appointed hour, Sir Peter knocked on her hotel door and handed Ellen a package to give to Marina.

"Tell Miss Fullerton that I shall wait for her downstairs."

"Very good, sir,"

Ellen excitedly gave the box to Marina. "What is it?" wondered Marina.

"Open it, miss, and then we shall see."

Ellen could hardly contain herself from undoing the ribbon that bound it. Marina pulled at one end and the knot came flying undone. Gingerly, she took the lid off the large box to find inside a beautiful, dark-green riding habit!

"Oh, my goodness," she gasped, "it is so lovely, but I am not certain that it would be correct to accept such a marvellous gift."

Marina held up the tailored jacket that was made of fine linen and admired it. The label inside told her that it was very expensive indeed.

"Now, miss, don't tell me that you are intending to go riding in your mourning clothes. They are not practical," chided Ellen. "If you tell Sir Peter that you will, of course, settle the bill yourself, then I cannot see the harm in it."

"Yes," agreed Marina. "I will insist on paying for it myself. After all, I am hardly poor just yet."

"Hurry up, miss. There is no time to stand there gazing at it Sir Peter is waiting."

Marina scrambled out of her black dress and could not wait for Ellen to help her into the new riding habit.

As she stood in front of the mirror, she took in the details breathlessly. The dark-green linen was light and cool and there was a pale-grey blouse to match.

"You look a picture, miss," declared Ellen, "now go at once and have a wonderful time. Be sure and take no chances, now."

Marina embraced her servant with affection.

She hurried downstairs to where Sir Peter was waiting anxiously for her.

"Thank you so much for ordering the wonderful riding habit. As you correctly surmised, I did not bring any such garment with me. Naturally, I shall pay for it."

Sir Peter hesitated for a moment and then nodded his head in agreement.

"Naturally, I did not expect you to accept it as a gift. Nevertheless, I am pleased that it meets with your approval. I must confess, I was a trifle unsure if it would fit you, but I can see that it does — perfectly."

Sir Peter's gaze lingered for a long time on Marina as she stood in the hall. At last, he ushered her outside to the carriage. It was open-topped with two fine white horses. Marina thought them very fine-looking animals.

"They are descended from the white horses of the Camargue," explained Sir Peter, "it is a very famous, French breed of wild horse. Some say that their coats are white so that they do not get bitten by mosquitoes."

"Mow fascinating," enthused Marina, thinking that Sir Peter had to be the cleverest man she had ever met. Each time she saw him, he told her yet another interesting fact that she had not known.

The journey to Georges-Henri's house did not take very long. It was an impressive building made entirely of a white stone that Marina could not name.

Almost as soon as the carriage pulled up outside the front entrance, a tall, handsome man with jet-black hair and a swarthy complexion emerged into the sunshine to greet them.

"Peter," he called with a very charming smile, "how kind of you to bring me such a beautiful visitor."

He walked up to the carriage door and, as the coachman opened it, held out his hand to Marina to help her down.

"Thank you," she murmured, taking in his striking appearance.

"You must be Miss Fullerton. Peter has told me about you. You are staying in Biarritz in the hope of finding some lost friends, are you not?"

Although well into his forties, Georges-Henri was a very attractive man. Marina did not doubt that he probably had many beautiful women at his beck and call.

"They are lost no more for I have located them," replied Marina, who found his steady gaze quite unnerving.

She was forced to remind herself that all Frenchmen were this way with women.

"Then, that is good news," he replied. "Will you stay on in Biarritz?"

"I do believe I shall. My friends have invited me to spend the summer here with them."

"I hope that Sir Peter does not keep you all to himself then," answered Georges-Henri with a dashing smile.

He led them inside and offered them refreshments before they left for their ride. A servant brought in citron presse that was heavily laced with ice.

"I had thought that you might like to see some fine Roman ruins that are nearby," proposed Georges-Henri. "It is not possible to reach them by carriage, so by horseback is the only way."

"I would love to see them," exclaimed Marina. "Papa and I used to visit the Isle of Wight before Mama died just to see the Roman villa at Brading. It has a very fine mosaic floor."

"Then, I hope you will not be disappointed with this one," replied Georges-Henri. "I believe there is just the one mosaic, although I do know that excavations are still taking place."

A liveried servant came in and announced something in French that Marina just about caught the gist of.

"The horses are ready, so shall we leave?" suggested Georges-Henri.

The stables were far larger than Marina had expected. As soon as they emerged into the courtyard, grooms began to run hither and thither, carrying saddles and bridles. Within moments three horses were led out

Georges-Henri and Sir Peter took the two larger beasts, while Marina was helped onto a bay mare.

"You will like Flora," remarked Georges-Henri, "she may be small, but she is as fast as the wind."

Marina immediately took a liking to the animal and stroked her silky mane.

"You and I will become friends today," she murmured, as Flora whinnied and snorted, eager to stretch her legs.

In contrast Sir Peter's mount was pawing at the ground and looked thoroughly bad-tempered.

"Oh, do not mind Nero," said Georges-Henri, laughing. "He is not as terrible as he appears. He just likes to make a fuss around new people so that they know who is the boss!"

Very soon, the three of them were cantering along a dusty track towards a valley. Marina thought the scenery breathtaking and was glad that she could see it all on horseback. She felt it was the only way to be close to nature.

They rode for quite some distance and Marina was glad that one of the grooms had given her a wide-brimmed hat to wear. Sir Peter and Georges-Henri persisted in riding on ahead, but Flora kept apace without seeming to exert herself too much.

Marina so enjoyed the sensation of once more being on horseback — the wind whipping round her face and hair, the rush of excitement as the animal picked up speed and the familiar smell of leather.

At last, they reached the summit of a hill and Georges-Henri pulled his horse to a halt.

"*Regardez!*" he proclaimed. "The finest view in the South- West of France."

It was indeed a breathtaking vista that was laid out in front of them. It made Marina forget all her woes and even the fact that she was supposed to be in mourning.

Sir Peter moved Nero closer to her.

"It is as wonderful as anything that the English countryside has to offer, is it not?" he said in a low voice full of emotion.

"I would not be a true Englishwoman if I agreed with that statement," chided Marina, playfully, "but it is truly beautiful nevertheless."

Their eyes met for a long moment until Marina averted her gaze as it made her tremble inside to continue to look at him.

'What is this I am feeling?' she asked herself, as she urged Flora into action.

Both Sir Peter and Georges-Henri had already spurred their mounts on down the side of the hill and towards a clearing below.

As she came to the bottom of the slope, she could see some ruins ahead of her. Sir Peter and Georges-Henri had already dismounted and were walking towards them.

"Come, Marina, you must look over here," Sir Peter encouraged her.

Marina brought Flora to a halt and dismounted. She let the mare nibble at a bush while she tethered her.

Walking over to where Sir Peter was standing, Marina could clearly see the outline of what must have once been a very fine Roman villa. There were bricks and channels laid into the dusty earth and all around her lay fragments of broken pottery.

"It looks as if someone has been here and taken things away," Marina commented.

"I am afraid that word soon gets out when someone discovers anything of any value," replied Georges-Henri. "Some gold jewellery was found here not so long ago hidden in a pot. Hence why you see so much broken pottery."

"You mean that people have vandalised this site? That is terrible."

"There are greedy people everywhere — yes, even in this civilised part of the world," observed Georges-Henri with a sad expression.

"Marina. Over here," shouted Sir Peter, bending over a trench.

Marina hurried over and saw that part of a mosaic floor was visible beneath the dust

"Why, it is beautiful. The colours are still so bright," she gasped, leaning forwards to afford herself a better view.

Sir Peter wandered away to view the remainder of the ruins, while Marina stood entranced by the mosaic in front of her. It held her spellbound.

She thought of all the ancient Roman feet that must have stood on that very floor and wondered what they must have been like.

"All those lives that we shall never know about," she said out loud.

Looking up, she caught sight of a trench that was still being dug at the edge of the site.

'I wonder what they have found there?' she said to herself.

Meanwhile, Sir Peter and Georges-Henri seemed in deep conversation over a fragment of pottery that Sir Peter held in his hand.

'I don't suppose that they will mind if I wander off,' she thought, moving away from the centre of the villa.

The trench was surrounded by a few lashed-together planks of wood. Marina peered down into it and could not see very much at all.

"Perhaps I should move over to the other side,' she mused, picking up her skirts. Even though they were ankle- length, they had become quite dusty.

She tried her best to brush the dust off, but in doing so, she only succeeded in knocking down one of the planks of wood that served as a makeshift barrier.

'Oh, dear,' she muttered under her breath. 'Never mind, I can get a bit closer now and see what is down there.'

But as she stepped around the hole, her foot turned over on a rough clod of earth and she stumbled. In order to save herself from falling, Marina put her hand out and grasped part of the barrier.

To her dismay, the wooden plank snapped as she grabbed it and she went plummeting down into the trench!

She hit the bottom with a sickening thud with one leg bent underneath her.

"Oh, I am hurt!" she cried, feeling that something was very wrong indeed with her ankle.

She looked up at the mouth of the trench, but found that it was deeper than she had at first thought. She could not pull herself out and pain seared through her like a hot knife.

"Help! Help!" she screamed, tears beginning to course down her face.

But her voice sounded feeble and distant. The heavy sides of the trench seemed to deaden the sound.

Overhead, she could see tufts of grass around the mouth of the trench and the clouds scudding across the sky.

'Surely they will soon realise that I am not to be seen and will come looking for me,' she thought attempting to call for help again.

At last the worried face of Sir Peter appeared at the top of the trench.

"She's here! Georges-Henri — quick!"

In a flash, Georges-Henri was also peering down to where Marina lay.

"Are you hurt?" he asked.

"It's my ankle," sobbed Marina, terrified and suddenly she felt thirsty. "I fell upon it and now I cannot move."

"Are you able to reach up to us?"

"No, the trench is too deep and I am wedged down it." Georges-Henri turned to Sir Peter with a serious expression on his face.

"I do not have any rope with me or anything else that we can pull her out with. I must go for help. Will you stay here with her?"

"Of course! Marina, dearest, did you hear that? Georges-Henri is going for help."

He called me dear!' thought Marina, as she tried to raise herself up a little higher.

"Marina? Did you hear me?" came Sir Peter's worried voice once more.

"Yes, I did. Peter, I am terribly thirsty, do you have some water?"

The dust and the dirt caught in Marina's throat even as she spoke and made her cough.

"Marina! Are you all right?"

"Yes, but please, some water."

Sir Peter's head disappeared from the mouth of the trench as he rushed over to his horse.

Thank Heavens I brought some water with us,' he said to himself, as he unhooked the leather bottle from Nero's saddle.

Running back to the trench, Sir Peter gently threw the bottle down to Marina.

"Thank you. Oh, thank you!" she cried, pulling out the stopper and taking a long drink.

The water tasted strange, but she did not care. She was so thirsty.

"Georges-Henri will not be long" shouted Sir Peter down into the trench.

Marina held the water bottle close and hoped that he was right. She was not feeling at all well and her ankle hurt her terribly.

"Are you all right?" asked Sir Peter, for the thousandth time in ten minutes.

"As well as I can be, given that I believe my ankle may be broken."

"Do not worry — help will arrive soon."

But an hour later, there was still no sign of Georges-Henri or a rescue party.

"What on earth is keeping the man!" sighed Sir Peter, as he tried his best to keep Marina cheerful. He realised that she had been crying and it tore him in two.

"Dearest, they won't be much longer, I promise," he shouted to a very quiet Marina. She had gradually become more and more silent as the moments wore on.

"What time does it get dark?" came her quavering voice after a long period.

"Oh, not for ages," he lied, eyeing the sun that was fast disappearing on the horizon, whilst at the same time, secretly praying that the rescue party was nearby.

At king last, Sir Peter caught sight of a group of people on horseback approaching.

"They're here. Darling, they're here!" he cried. "Thank Heaven," sighed Marina's thin tired voice.

Sir Peter ran over to Georges-Henri's horse as he dismounted in a hurry.

"You have been so long."

"I am sorry but we were trying to find the doctor, but he is not around. I have left word at the house that he is urgently needed."

"Do you have ropes and pulleys?"

"My men have brought all that is required, so do not fear," he assured him, laying a comforting hand on his shoulder. "I realise how much Miss Fullerton means to you."

"I believe I have only just discovered that myself," he answered thoughtfully.

"Ah, you see, we French — we see these things much more readily," added Georges-Henri with a wry smile.

Within moments Georges-Henri's men had rigged up a pulley with ropes, using the planks around the hole as a frame.

"Not long now, Marina," soothed Sir Peter.

The men let down a rope attached to a leather harness and Georges-Henri told Marina to wrap it around her waist.

"Now, be brave," he called, "you may find it hurts when we pull you up."

Marina winced in pain as the men heaved on the rope and the harness began to raise her up. The hole was not very wide and she had become stiff from being down it for so long.

With a huge effort, Marina emerged from the trench — filthy, tear-stained and in obvious pain.

Sir Peter did not wait for the men to help her from the harness.

He rushed forward and took her in his arms, kissing her hair and calling her 'dearest' and 'darling' many times over.

"You are safe," he cried, holding her gently. "I promise I will never let you out of my sight again!"

Marina looked up into his anxious face and saw in his eyes the look that told her how much he loved her.

Discreetly, Georges-Henri told his men to leave them be for a while, realising that this was a very private moment. "Darling Marina, 1 have only just realised how much I love you. I believe I have loved you since that first day we met at Albert's house, but I thought that you would never consider me. And then when you wrote to me from Paris, hope sprang anew in my heart"

"I have been a perfect fool," answered Marina, laying her head on his shoulder. "For all the time I could not see what was in front of my eyes. I, too, am guilty of not realising what you have come to mean to me. I love you, Peter. I love you so very much!"

"Then, can I hope that you might consent to being my wife?" he asked breathlessly. His hand caressed her cheek and wiped away the tears that had once more begun to fall.

Marina's heart felt as if it would burst with happiness. She could scarcely believe what he was saying to her.

But she knew inside that it was right

"I will," she answered, after a pause. "I could not think of anything in the world that would make me happier."

"Marina. Darling."

With that, he kissed her full on the lips - a kiss of love that would last forever.

A round of applause broke out over the site. Marina and Sir Peter looked up in astonishment to see that Georges-Henri and his men were all standing round with broad grins on their faces.

"I can see that out of this mishap has come much happiness," he said, looking almost as happy as Sir Peter. "But come, we should be getting back to the house. It will be dark very soon and there are wolves in these hills."

Marina let out a gasp and clung even more tightly onto Sir Peter.

"You did not tell me about the wolves!"

"No, my darling, because I did not wish to frighten you. But fear not, you are safe now. Georges-Henri's men are armed and will bring you back safely."

Marina was gently lifted onto the back of a sturdy- looking black horse and Sir Peter mounted behind her.

"I will never leave you again," he promised as he took the reins.

It was dark by the time the party arrived back amidst much commotion to Georges-Henri's house.

Marina was helped down from the exhausted horse and Sir Peter carried her inside.

There, to her immense surprise, were Monsieur and Madame Solange along with Monique and Ellen.

"Marina," they cried, getting up from their chairs as she was carried in.

"You. Here!" she answered and immediately began to cry with relief.

The doctor arrived not long afterwards and hurried to Marina's side. Ellen fussed around as ever, but was forced to move aside while he examined Marina.

"She has broken her ankle," he announced and proceeded to bandage it tightly.

"You must rest for a month, and no more horse riding," he prescribed.

As he left, Monique came over to where she lay on the sofa and handed her a folded paper.

"What is this?"

"Oh, I am sorry that we opened it in error," explained Monique, "it is from your Papa. It came to the house this afternoon."

With shaking hands, Marina pulled it open and quickly read it.

"Can you ever forgive me?" it read, "I have been a fool, please return to London where you will be warmly welcomed. Fondest love. Papa."

"Oh. I cannot believe it! I am so very happy," exclaimed Marina

"I thought you would be glad to hear that your Papa has had a change of heart," said Monique kissing her friend on the cheek. "And you will be pleased to hear that Papa has sent Simon back to Paris. He has outraged the family once too often."

"What does the telegram say?" asked Sir Peter moving forwards protectively.

"It is Papa, he has asked me to come home," she answered, not telling him that Simon Solange had been sent packing.

"And will you?"

"Of course — after we are married."

"Then it is he who is in for a surprise!" declared Sir Peter, before breaking into a peal of laughter.

"Darling, I am so happy for you," said Monique. "You are to be married to Sir Peter?"

"Yes, it's true," sighed Marina, feeling so full of love and joy that she felt as if she must be in Heaven itself.

"And when will this be?"

Marina looked over at Sir Peter and he added, "As soon as Marina would like."

"Here, in Biarritz?" exclaimed Monique excitedly. "If that is what Marina wants."

Monsieur and Madame Solange sprang up from their seats and bent to kiss and congratulate Marina.

A noise like a shot from a gun suddenly startled everyone in the room. Marina looked up to see Georges- Henri pouring champagne into glasses.

"A toast!" he called. "To the happy couple."

"Bonne chance," chorused everyone in the room.

As the champagne flowed and everyone in the room laughed merrily, Sir Peter knelt down by Marina's side and gently took her hand.

"Darling, I could not be happier than I am at this moment," he said, looking at her with eyes full of love.

"I cannot believe this is happening," she answered, softly, "but to have found you, after so much heartbreak, surely the Gods are smiling down on us."

"Perhaps it is your dear Mama."

"Mama would love you as much as I do," she replied stroking his golden brown hair.

Taking her glass from her, Sir Peter put his arms around her and held her close. Neither of them was aware of anything else in the room.

But if they had, they would have seen that Ellen had discreetly ushered everyone outside.

"Darling. You will be returning to London a married woman. I cannot believe my good fortune."

"And mine. Love is the most wonderful thing in the whole wide world."

They kissed. Their hearts flowing over with the love that Marina knew would last from now into the hereafter.

"Forever and ever," she murmured, as Sir Peter's soft lips found hers once more. "The Heavens will be as full of joy today as we are, here on earth."

"Forever, my darling," he answered and held her as if he would never let her go.