

In the Shadow of the Sun

E. M. Castellan



Feiwei and Friends
New York

A FEIWEL AND FRIENDS BOOK

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For Lumen

Paris

March 1661

Cardinal Mazarin dies.

*After eighteen years living in the shadow
of his prime minister, King Louis XIV
announces he will rule France alone.*

He's twenty-two.

*Eliminating all the obstacles to his absolute
power is going to take him*

one

summer.

SPRING

CHAPTER I

The fortune-teller surveyed me with a watchful expression as her deft hands shuffled the pack of cards. Her kohl-rimmed eyes were soft, but the way she examined my disguise, as if she could see right through it, still sent a shiver down my spine. Despite the fire crackling in the hearth, cold permeated the low-ceilinged room, and I tightened my plain borrowed coat around my chest.

“What do you want to know, child?”

An encouraging smile stretched the lines on her thin face, and she handed the deck to her assistant. Warm amber light shimmered off the cards when the woman, as wrinkled and stooped as the seer, displayed them facedown on the worn wooden table.

“Well?”

Her gentle voice and calm demeanor were meant to put me at ease, but I shifted my weight in my seat, reconsidering my decision to come here. The rickety chair creaked, and I cast a nervous glance around the dark corners of the one-room flat. The pale dawn that filtered through the dirty square windowpanes

brought very little light to my surroundings, while the single candle lit on the table cast shadows along the dried herbs hanging from the rafters and the jars and clay bowls on the shelves.

“You’re safe here, child,” the seer said, guessing my thoughts. “Now, why have you come?”

I tilted my head to the side. By now, she’d likely surmised my clothes were borrowed and the name I had given upon my arrival was a false one. Despite my efforts to hide my true station, she’d also likely noticed the shiny gloss of my hair beneath my simple plait, the healthy complexion of my skin, and the delicacy of my hands under the grime I had scrubbed into them. Truth was in the details, and I feared there was no denying what I was—a noble girl alone in the seediest part of the French capital at an ungodly hour of the day, in a *magicienne*’s lodging, no less.

I sprang to my feet, my heartbeat quickening. What was I thinking? This had been a mistake. There were magicians and seers at court. I didn’t need to be here. I *shouldn’t* be here. The risk of discovery was too great. Reputations had been ruined for far less than this. But then, my good name would be the least of my concerns if this woman chose to tell her neighbors and acquaintances about me. I could very well not make it back home alive at all.

My feet had taken me to the door when the woman’s quiet voice rose behind me.

“Today is a most significant day, isn’t it?”

I bit my lip, my bare hand hovering above the lock.

“You wouldn’t be here otherwise,” she added.

She was right, of course, but it was easy to guess. Despite her reputation as the most talented fortune-teller in Paris, a lady in

my position wouldn't have risked visiting her in this part of the city if not for a great motive. I glanced back at her, and she motioned to my empty seat.

“Let me help you, my dear.”

I let a couple of seconds tick by. The aromas of rosemary and thyme mixed in the air, along with a more heady scent I couldn't place. From the street below and the building around us, what little sound reached us was strangely muffled. One could have thought this strange small room was out of time and place.

It seemed silly to run home without answers after all the trouble of coming here in the first place. And this soft-spoken woman and her quiet assistant did appear harmless. I took a deep breath along with my decision. Magic glowed golden in the old seer's irises. She couldn't know it, but thanks to my own condition, I knew she was the *magicienne* she claimed to be. So I would stay and see if she deserved her reputation.

“I want you to tell me about my past.” I sat down again. She nodded, but I went on before she could reply. “And about my present. And about my future.” It was my turn to fix her with narrowed eyes, waiting for her reaction.

Her serene expression didn't waver under my scrutiny. “Pick a card, then.”

Careful not to touch any, I pointed at one in the middle of the displayed pack. She nodded at her assistant, and in a well-practiced move, they pulled out the card together.

“*Révéle*,” the assistant said.

Since the dawn of time, magic has required three components: a wielder—in France we called them *magiciens*; a conduit—in this case, a deck of cards; and a Source. The seer's assistant was her

Source. *Magiciens* had the power to wield magic, though they didn't have magic themselves. Sources did, but they couldn't use it. Neither could exercise their power without the other: God's or nature's way of keeping both gifts in check.

When both women set the card faceup, more light rippled along its surface. I had expected tarot cards, but it was a simple pack of playing cards, worn and yellowish. The card I had picked was the king of hearts. The fortune-teller shot me an impressed look.

"This is the card about your past. A king." She was fishing for a reaction, but I knew better than to give her the answers I sought myself. I kept my face expressionless. "You have a king as a family member," she added, to my surprise. I couldn't help my eyes widening at her insight, but I didn't reply. Maybe it was a lucky guess. A lot of courtiers could claim to be distant relatives of the king after all. She studied me for a heartbeat, then waved at the face-down cards. "Another."

I gestured toward the right end of the fanned-out cards. The two women repeated their little ritual and revealed the king of spades. The seer's brow furrowed.

"And you have a king in your present. A foreigner." This time the look she gave me was overtly questioning, and even her Source's face, impassive until now, betrayed interest.

My heart beat harder. Were they playing me? Had the *magicienne* recognized me and was she telling me what she already knew?

"What about my future?" I asked, my tone clipped.

If she'd guessed my identity, she knew playing tricks with me wouldn't end well for her. I pointed at a card at random, and light

gleamed off it when both women flipped it. King of diamonds.

The seer gasped. “Who are you, child?”

So she didn’t know. She exchanged a glance with her Source, but I ignored the fright in their eyes.

“What about my future?” I repeated.

With trembling hands, she lined the three cards on the table. “There’s a king in your future as well.”

I leaned in to catch her gaze. “Which one? And how will he impact my life?” I had to know. This was too important.

But she shook her head, distress crossing her features at the intensity of my question. “I don’t know, my dear. There’s so much power surrounding you, I can’t tell, I’m sorry. Maybe if you told me who you are, I—”

I huffed a frustrated sigh. This was a waste of time. “I was told you were the best seer in Paris.” I gestured at the cards. “The best seer in all of France, save for the Crown *Magicien* himself. Yet this is all you can tell me?”

“The cards’ meaning isn’t always clear.”

Her apologetic answer made my temper rise. Her magic was genuine. Her reputation reached even the French court. Yet she couldn’t give me the answers I sought. I pressed my palms onto the table. Already the light in the cards—witness to the power the Source had infused them with—was fading.

“But you’re right,” I said. “I do have a king in my past, one in my present, and one in my future. I know my fate is linked to theirs. I’ve always known that, believe me. What I came here to know—what I want you to tell me—is what it means for *me*.”

All the women in my life had had kings for husbands, fathers, brothers, or lovers. And not a single one of them had led a long

or happy life. Just after my birth, my own mother had gone from being an English queen to a destitute widow in exile. My father had been an English king beheaded for treason by his own Parliament in a country torn by magic and civil war. My brother was the newly reinstated king of England. It was thanks to the charity of the young French king that I had grown up in France. Now, at seventeen and on the eve of my formal entrance at French court, I needed to know if all these kings in my life, and all the decisions I was making now, would ensure I never had to endure my mother's ordeal, or if they would lead me to a similar fate.

The old woman folded the cards back into the pack. "The cards won't show me that. I'll need to try something else."

I pulled my purse from the folds of my gray cloak—no point pretending I wasn't wealthy, now—and dumped it on the table with a clinking sound. "Then please do."

She didn't touch the leather pouch. Instead, she exchanged a conniving look with her Source. The old woman pushed herself off her chair and shuffled to the shelf to retrieve a small bowl, which she set between us and filled with water from a pitcher.

"Why have you come here, today?" the fortune-teller asked as her assistant took her seat again.

"Aren't you the one supposed to tell me that?"

"It is your wedding day, isn't it?" She spoke with a knowing look and placed the bowl closer to me. My silence confirmed her suspicions. "And you want to know what your husband will be like?"

She was seeking clues again. I knew what my future husband was like. I didn't love or know him well, but I was ready to marry him if it meant ensuring my safety and welfare. What I wanted to

know was what my future held; if living in a world of kings and queens would save or crush me.

When I didn't speak, she produced a small knife from her dress pocket and pointed a crooked finger at the bowl of water. "I need a drop of your blood."

I froze. Only Sources could recognize *magiciens*—never the other way around. This woman couldn't even begin to suspect I was a Source myself.

Misreading my hesitation, she added, "I only need one drop."

But she had no idea what she was asking. I couldn't let her touch me, let alone my blood. I didn't know what channeling two Sources at once would do to her, but I doubted it would be good. And I had no intention of revealing the reason behind my reluctance to grant her request. Whether high- or lowborn, Sources had always been far fewer than *magiciens*. Magic wasn't hereditary, and no one could predict when or where a child with magic in their veins would be born. In the past, Sources had been hunted and enslaved, and although our modern times had brought a stark change to these practices, being a Source was still a fate I had no intention of embracing. I had already too many constraints on my life to count—the last thing I wanted was to be tied to a *magicien*, whatever prestige and wealth it brought me. My mother and I had spent seventeen years keeping my secret; I wasn't about to expose it now.

"You need answers," the seer said. "I can provide them, but you have to trust me, child. Just a drop."

She was right though. I had come here for answers, demanded them of her. My condition didn't have to stop me from getting them. She couldn't use me as her Source if I didn't let her, and the

magic contained in a drop of my blood couldn't be very potent. The only risk was for her to realize what I was, but my station and money could ensure she never divulged this information to anyone. Hopefully.

My mind made up, I grabbed the knife to prick the tip of my forefinger. A single crimson drop formed, which I let fall into the bowl.

“*Révèle*,” the Source said.

When it hit the water, my blood separated into red tendrils that turned a shiny gold. I squinted in the sudden light as both the *magicienne* and her assistant closed their eyes and lowered their fingers to the liquid surface. The moment they touched the water, both women's bodies went rigid and the seer's mouth opened wide in her otherwise calm face. The candle flared while the temperature dropped, and a cloud of steam formed in front of my lips.

My heartbeat thundered in my ears. “What's wrong?”

Neither woman reacted. Instead, the fortune-teller spoke in a deep, gravelly voice that didn't sound like her gentle tone of the moment before.

“Four maidens come to the palace,” she said. “The queen of hearts is light as air, and of having her heart broken she should beware.”

I opened my mouth to ask if this queen was me, but she carried on with her eyes still closed, lost in the trance.

“The queen of spades is full of fire, but the higher she rises the harder she'll fall, and she should be wary of her desire.”

Who was she talking about? Who were these four maidens? And, most important, which one was I supposed to be?

“The queen of clubs is as constant as still water, but secrets and betrayals will undo her.”

The more she spoke, the more I wished I had refused to let her perform the spell. Whoever she was talking about, these four girls had terrible futures ahead of them, and I wished no part in it.

“The queen of diamonds will shine the brightest, but the world won’t hold her light for long on earth.”

Her voice broke and she slumped in her chair, her hand falling to her side and her head lolling against her chest. Her Source inhaled a deep breath and shot bewildered looks around her. Suddenly the room was dark again and the meager fire crackled faintly in the hearth.

I jumped to my feet. “Are you all right?”

The seer’s eyes snapped open, and her thin lips spread into a near-toothless smile. I breathed a sigh of relief and held the table for support, my heartbeat still wild and my corset too tight. The cold air tickled my throat and clawed at my fragile lungs, until a coughing fit tore through me. I buried my mouth in my handkerchief, the cough shaking my body and moistening my eyes.

Worry darkened the fortune-teller’s features as she reached for me. “You’re ill. Is it why you’ve come?” She spoke as if she had no recollection of the words she’d just spoken.

I pulled away from her with a shake of my head. My throat tight and raw, I struggled to get out the words. “No. I’ve been ill for years, and I’m likely to be for still quite some time. But you—” My temper ignited as my fit subsided and my thoughts cleared. “You were talking nonsense, and I still have no idea what I’m supposed to expect.”

She gave a start at my raised voice, and a pained expression

descended on her brow. My frustration saddened her, but I didn't care. She had played with magic she didn't understand, wasted my time, and given me a fright. And I was no closer to knowing whether my upcoming marriage would lead me to a path of destruction and sorrow or if it would be the saving grace I hoped for. I gathered my skirts and walked to the door, until the Source's soft voice stopped me.

"You're upset."

I met her kind gaze, and my anger melted despite myself. Predicting the future was never a perfect art. I had expected too much, and taking out my irritation on them wasn't fair.

"I'm sorry we can't give you the answers you came for," she went on. "I do wish we could have helped you." Her smile was apologetic, the concern in her eyes genuine. She stood up to hand me back my money. I took a step away from her.

"I know." I refused the purse she pushed into my hand. "You both earned this. Thank you for all you've done." I pulled my cowl over my hair and walked out of the cramped lodgings.

Outside, mist rose from the muddy street as the gray dawn crept over the slanted roofs of the city. At this time of day, street merchants came out of their lodgings still bleary-eyed, their wares piled in wicker baskets, while craftsmen opened the shutters of their workshops and called out to one another. Few spared a glance for me—I wasn't the only girl about walking to her destination, lantern in hand bobbing with each step in the chilly air. Still, I hurried along the mismatched facades, my face hidden and my eyes down, as quickly as I could without triggering a coughing fit. I kept to the main thoroughfares, which became busier by

the minute as the traffic of horse-drawn wagons and pedestrians grew.

I reached the river Seine just as the church bells rang seven times. The stench of the gray waters mixed with the smell of manure and rotting refuse in the street, and I covered my nose with my hand in a feeble attempt to shield my delicate lungs from the foul air. On the other bank, the silhouette of the Louvre Palace emerged from the morning fog. My shoulders unwound in relief. With any luck, I would be back in my chambers at the Palais-Royal, in the shadow of the palace, before my ladies-in-waiting awoke and found my bed empty.

I made my way to the stone bridge until the crowd became too thick for me to navigate. Forced to a halt, I craned my neck to catch a glance of the blockage, to no avail. The gathered onlookers around me all displayed grim expressions and shook their heads at one another.

“Isn’t it terrible?”

It took me a heartbeat to realize a young flower girl was addressing me. A pale bonnet of tattered lace framed her thin face, enhancing the darkness of her vivid gaze. The old basket she clutched with dirty fingers held daisies and roses.

“What happened?” I whispered, in the hope that my low voice would disguise my educated accent.

“They found ’nother one,” she replied. “Floating in the river.”

Blood drained from my face. “A suicide?” I had heard the priests condemn those desperate souls at mass, but I had never come this close to the reality of their fatal despair. However, the girl shook her head.

“No. A murdered one.” The glint of excitement in her eyes stole the last of the flush in my cheeks. My mind slow to process the information, I opened my mouth to ask another question, but she carried on without my prompting. “Just like the others. Magic sucked out of them and their body bled of life like some dried fruit. No idea who did it. It’s the third one this month. Those Sources are dropping like flies, they are.”

Alarm rose in my chest, stole my breath, and sparked a coughing fit. I turned away and closed my eyes, having no choice but to wait until my breath settled. When I looked up again, the flower girl was elbowing her way through the crowd, away from me, eager to take a closer look at the body dragged from the waters. A matron in a large apron snapped at her to wait her turn, but the birdlike creature remained unfazed.

“I wanna see the dead Source! I got the right to see it just as you do!”

I forced a shaky breath down my searing lungs and gathered my wits. The last thing I wished was to catch a glimpse of that poor soul. Killing Sources to take their magic had been banned during François I’s reign, a hundred and fifty years ago. Yet I had heard some unscrupulous *magiciens* still resorted to the illegal practice in order to channel enough magic for complicated enchantments. The power surge didn’t last, but it allowed them to perform special spells.

Above the city, the mist lifted and the sky paled in the morning light. I had to return to the Palais-Royal as soon as possible and leave behind the streets of the capital and their dangers. The life that awaited me at court was by no means devoid of complications, but at least it would keep me safe from murderous *magi-*

ciens. Now I just had to ensure I made it back to my bedchamber without further delay.

Because the fortune-teller was right. Today was my wedding day. And nothing would cause an international incident more than the king of England's own sister vanishing on the morning of her nuptials to the only brother of the Sun King of France.

CHAPTER II

Light rain fell outside the tall windows of my bedchamber, droplets of water streaming down the glass like tears. The gray light cast everything in shadows and lent a gloomy feel to my apartments, where the servants had lit again the candles extinguished earlier in the morning. I stood in the middle of the bustling room, the only motionless figure amid the hive of seamstresses, ladies-in-waiting, and maids struggling to get me ready on time for my wedding ceremony.

The magic clock on the mantelpiece chimed half past nine, and its mechanism, enchanted long ago by the Crown *Magicien*, released the image of a colorful bird in a puff of gold dust. A chorus of exclamations greeted the illusion and its melodic sound. In my mother's lap, my favorite spaniel, Mimi, let out a bark. The two of them sat nestled in an armchair by the fireplace, Mother's black mourning gown a stark contrast with the whiteness of my own dress.

"Such dismal weather," she said, her gaze on the condensation forming on the windows.

“Mariage pluvieux, mariage heureux,” one of the seamstresses replied with a smile. She was busy lacing my long, tight satin bodice while another checked my panned sleeves and petticoat.

Rainy wedding, happy wedding, I repeated to myself like a mantra. I straightened my back and took in a calming breath, unwilling to display my nervousness in front of such a crowd. I sought my mother’s eyes, but her attention was still on the rain, her thin hand petting my dog in a mechanical motion.

Barely a year ago, we’d been living in a convent outside Paris, she a disgraced and impoverished former queen, I a girl with nothing to her name but a delicate constitution and unfulfilled dreams. Although we lived in his country thanks to the king’s generosity, our visits to the French court were rare, and never the delight they should have been. Courtiers either ignored or mocked us, and the king joined them more often than he chastised them. Then all had changed. My older brother had regained the English crown taken from my father, and I was a royal princess once more, with a powerful king on my side and wealth beyond what I had ever hoped for. Meanwhile, the French king had married a Spanish princess. A cruel smile had stretched Mother’s lips at the news.

“He’ll wish he’d wed you instead, now. They all will. You’ll see.”

Her vengeful comment made me frown. I bore no love for Louis of France, but I wished him no harm or sorrow either. Yet I knew that the time had come for me to marry as well. In the past year, my body had grown and filled out, and although still too thin, I wasn’t as waiflike as I had been all my life.

“You’ll wed a king,” Mother said.

“You’ll be a queen,” my brother said.

All I knew was that I would have no choice in the matter. So I waited for a decision to be made, and when it was, it surprised everyone, including me.

“Your jewels, Your Highness.”

The timid voice brought me out of my reverie. My newest lady-in-waiting stood before me, my pearls in her hands. Louis’s mother had sent her to me the previous day, either as a spy or as a welcome gift, I couldn’t yet tell. Her name was Louise de La Vallière, and we were both seventeen, which was enough to suit me for now.

“Yes, thank you.”

My hair was up in a mass of tight curls, which allowed her to put on the necklace and eardrops easily.

“Look how lovely you are,” Marguerite said. Louis’s cousin and a year older than me, she’d invited herself to the preparations with such cheerful confidence I hadn’t had the heart to refuse her. In a palace where nearly everyone I encountered was an indifferent and judgmental stranger, I welcomed any attempt made at befriending me. Marguerite’s red gown sparkled with magically bright gemstones as she held a mirror before me. “Go on, give us a twirl.”

I obeyed, and my audience let out appreciative gasps and soft giggles. Despite my refusal to have any magical enhancement to my outfit, the seamstresses had managed to make me look adequate for the occasion. I was still too slim and pale to be called a picture of health, but my nerves had brought some color to my cheeks and a liveliness to my eyes that I hoped would be, along with my smile, enough to hide all my other shortcomings.

“Are we ready?” Mother asked.

She stood up, releasing Mimi, who used this as an opportunity to run a lap around my ankles. My dog had been a gift from my brother, and her antics made me laugh as everyone filed out of the bedchamber. I followed my mother, my ladies-in-waiting bringing up the rear.

“She looks happy,” Louise whispered to Marguerite, oblivious to the fact I could hear her.

“She always does,” Marguerite replied. Before I could linger on the meaning of her reply, she added, “I’m getting married very soon too, you know. To a Medici.” Based on her tone, I didn’t have to stretch my imagination to guess she’d just rolled her eyes behind me.

“Congratulations,” Louise said. “Such a good match.”

“Don’t remind me,” Marguerite snorted. “But I suppose it could be worse.”

We turned a corner, and the clicking of heels on the parquet floor almost prevented me from hearing her next words.

“At least I’m not marrying the king’s brother.”

* * *

The king waited for me in the corridor leading to the chapel of the Palais-Royal, flanked by two musketeers. His silk coat, bedecked with gold galloon and buttons, glittered magically in the candlelight of the dim corridor—a not-so-subtle reminder of his nickname. Even the gilded-handled cane he held shone an unnatural light, casting the corners of the corridor into shadow. He offered me his free hand with a bow and an unreadable smile.

“Henriette. You look a vision.”

I performed a quick curtsy. “Thank you, Sire.”

His calculating gaze raked over my silhouette, his magic lending an amber glow to his pupils. It was well-known that Louis XIV was a *magicien*. However, and as far as everyone knew, his talent was limited and he rarely used his gift, letting the Crown *Magicien* perform all the spells required by the exercise of royal power. Under his scrutiny, I was never more grateful for the *magiciens’* inability to sense a Source. When the king looked at me, all he saw was a girl he’d overlooked long enough to let her slip out of his reach.

“Well?” he said, bringing me back to the present. “Nervous?” He had one eyebrow raised, more in challenge than in genuine concern.

I held his gaze and kept my composure. “No.”

It wasn’t an outright lie. Even if my fate was about to be forever tied to a man with whom I barely had anything in common, I wasn’t afraid. Since the French and English crowns had agreed on our betrothal four months before, the king’s brother had shown me nothing but respect and consideration the few times we’d met. And once we were married, I would be his wife first and everything else second. Even if the fact I was a Source somehow became public knowledge, no *magicien* would be able to claim me without my husband’s consent, which I planned on never letting him give.

“Shall we, then?” the king said, with a nod toward the double doors of the chapel, which his musketeers opened.

I linked my arm with his. “By all means.”

The chapel’s modest size meant a limited number of guests in attendance—the king had wished it so, arguing this wasn’t a royal

wedding after all. Since his ascension to power following Cardinal Mazarin's death, he'd been relentless in his quest to avoid being outdone by anyone, under any circumstances, including my nuptials with his brother. I'd had no objection, for the result was fewer people witnessing my walk down the aisle and having the opportunity to gossip about it later. My head held high and my steps steady, I feigned a coolness I didn't feel as I made my way to the altar. No music echoed under the painted ceilings, the rustling of colorful gowns and the whispers of the assembly the only sounds greeting my slow procession between the pews.

I caught sight of Louise with Mimi in her arms next to Marguerite and her two sisters, their eyes wide with excitement and their dresses shimmering with magic. Their smiles gave me strength to meet less sympathetic gazes: My mother and the Queen Mother both appraised me with cold expressions, while Louis's queen Marie-Thérèse's mouth puckered into an unimpressed pout. Swathed in a red-and-gold gown, the Spanish infanta's round figure drowned in glittering fabric, her plain face planted atop it like a pale *ballon*.

Next to her, Nicolas Fouquet, the Crown *Magicien*, narrowed his eyes at me. A middle-aged man with a round, open face and a benevolent smile, his whole demeanor strived to convey congeniality and goodwill. Yet as I walked by him, a shadow crossed his features and his bejeweled fingers tightened around his silver cane. His golden gaze—the same color as the king's, and the mark of all magicians—followed my progress without any hint of warmth. Since he was among the advisers who'd arranged my marriage, I couldn't begin to guess the reason for the sudden darkening of his mood, but before I could dwell on it, my attention landed on my groom.

Philippe stood at the end of the aisle, in an outfit more flamboyant than all the guests' combined. Where his brother favored golden tones, my fiancé seemed to have made a point of wearing every single color of the rainbow, and as many gemstones, rings, and bracelets that could fit on him. Seeing the two brothers together was like looking at two sides of a coin: the same handsome profile, the same self-assured stance, the same clean-shaven face and long hair. Only two years apart, they could almost have been mistaken for twins. The only striking difference was that Louis's hair was blond, while Philippe's was raven black.

I reached the altar, my white dress settling at my feet.

"Look," Olympe de Soissons stage-whispered behind me. "The dove and the parakeet."

A titter of laughter greeted her comment, which I pretended not to hear. The superintendent of the Queen Mother's household, Olympe had all the confidence of a stunning young woman with an enviable position at court, a high-ranked husband, and the ear of the royal family. Her witticism had been for her neighbor, a dark-haired beauty I had never seen. They exchanged a stealthy glance and hid their mocking smiles behind their jewel-studded fans. Like Fouquet's, Olympe's eyes were a pale gold, and the air her fan produced was cold as a winter draught, welcome in the heat of the chapel's confined space.

The king let go of my arm with a nod for the priest, drawing my attention back to the matter at hand. While he took his seat in a gilded armchair before the front row, Philippe's firm grip closed around my fingers. For the first time since entering the chapel, I allowed myself to meet his gaze.

He tipped his head slightly, raising his eyebrows in a silent question.

“All right?” he whispered.

My heart hammered against my rib cage. I swallowed, my throat dry, and gave the briefest nod. He squeezed my hand in response, either to reassure or scold me, I couldn't tell. The priest started talking, and soon the ceremony unfolded, faster than I could comprehend. My pulse and my mind racing, I sang hymns I knew by heart and listened to readings without paying them attention, as if I were witnessing the whole ritual from someone else's point of view.

Then I became aware silence had settled over the assembly. I blinked. The priest stared at me, expectant, while the guests behind me seemed to hold a collective breath.

Realization hit me like a splash of cold water. While my thoughts drifted off, I had been asked for my consent to marry. And as the seconds ticked by, the silence thickened in the warm chapel, turning awkward and oppressive. Behind me, people shuffled their feet and flapped their fans. And they all waited. Waited for me to speak. Waited for me to utter the expected word. Waited for me to play my part.

An involuntary smile teased my lips. For a suspended moment in time, I had power. In all my seventeen years, it had never happened. I had no control over my fate, or my health, or my condition. I never would, except for this moment. An alliance between two mighty nations rested on me. The difference between war and peace, between honor and scandal. No one—not my brother, not my mother, not the French king, not their advisers, not the Crown *Magicien*—had even contemplated I could refuse.

So for a short time, I reminded them I wasn't the puppet they wished me to be.

In the end, the king cleared his throat. I didn't have to glance behind me to feel all eyes boring into me. Still, I paused.

As Mother had often reminded me in the past year, I was a royal princess now. Before my brother's ascension to the English throne, my choices had been limited—the convent or a marriage—but at least an option had existed. My sudden change in status had made even that small freedom vanish: I had to marry. I had accepted this as my responsibility, and in many ways I was glad to play a part in helping to ensure the future of my family. Yet, a smaller, hidden part of me also longed to escape the confines of the French court while I still could and to refuse to tether myself to a life in a gilded cage populated by birds of prey.

Philippe clutched my hand tighter, snapping my attention back to him. His brows pulled together in a concerned frown, he inclined his head and mouthed, *Please?*

His request, worried and oddly shy, prompted me into action faster than any hint from his brother ever could. He wanted me to consent. *He* was asking me to agree. Up until then, I had been willing to marry him out of fear of what would happen to me if I didn't, out of duty for my two countries, out of respect for the French king, out of devotion for my family. I hadn't occurred to me I could marry him for *him*.

"*Oui*," I said, my voice loud and clear. *I do*.

Everyone released a breath. A smile crinkled Philippe's eyes, and he gave his own answer to the priest, who pronounced us man and wife. A relieved murmur rippled along the small crowd as my new husband kissed both my hands and guided me out of

the chapel. I let him lead me through the double doors into our new life, calmer than I had felt in months.

* * *

My sense of triumph was short-lived.

At dinner my nerves returned, along with a complete loss of appetite. The smells of roasted meat in sauce turned my stomach, and the mere sight of the fish and seafood made me want to gag. From her seat a distance away, Mother shot me warning looks, but all I managed to eat was a few vegetables. I fared better once the desserts arrived, by which time everyone had already exchanged knowing looks and nods, and commented on my health under their breath.

“L’Anglaise ne mange rien.”

The English girl isn’t eating. The comment was fair. The nickname I had been saddled with since my first visit at court, however, puzzled me to this day.

“They’re snakes. It’s just an excuse to exclude you,” Mother had said. Yet of all the things the French courtiers could have picked on me for, they’d chosen my nationality, which still struck me as utterly silly. I had never known my English father, and my mother was French. Smuggled into France at the age of two, I had grown up away from my home country, the English ambassadors visiting my mother the only English acquaintances in my life. It was fourteen years later that I had set foot in England again, for a brief visit to my brother, the newly reinstated king. Ironically, everyone at the English court had then commented on how French I now was. It appeared that I was doomed to never

fit into either country, forever too English to be French and too French to be English.

Thankfully Philippe seemed oblivious to both my lack of appetite and the whispers around us. He heartily made his way through each course and several carafes of wine. Much like him, his brother ate a lot, but he kept a shrewd eye on me the whole time.

I was glad to hear the king announce the ball—an escape from his calculating gaze and the whispers of the courtiers. However, before I could get rid of his attention, he and I had to dance together, as was customary.

“Congratulations,” he said as he led me around the parquet floor. “You make a beautiful bride. My brother is lucky.”

His smile didn’t reach his eyes, his face unreadable. Did he ever let anyone see behind this mask?

“Thank you,” I replied with a lightheartedness I didn’t feel. I chose not to mention the fact *he* could have been the lucky one, if he had bothered to notice me before. I wasn’t my mother, after all.

Under the guests’ watchful gazes, we moved in a rapid synchronized pattern around the gilded room, along the lively melody of the string instruments in the corner. My lungs protested, my breaths turning shallow and raspy, but I ignored them in favor of the thrill of the dance.

“You’re an excellent dancer,” he added after a moment.

I couldn’t help it when a flush crept over my cheeks. The king was by far the best dancer at court. His acknowledgment of my own talent was a true compliment, especially from a man who so rarely gave any.

“Thanks to an excellent partner, Sire,” I said.

His smile grew warmer. He enjoyed the praise, and I congrat-

ulated myself on scoring a point here. His next words confirmed my small victory.

“Please, call me Louis. You just married my only brother. You’re like my sister now.”

I nodded my agreement. We reached one end of the room and turned around in time with the music, to a little applause. If the glittering crowd still stared at me without much sympathy, the guests at least made an effort to show approval of their king. He grabbed my hand again.

“What else do you enjoy?” he asked. “Besides dancing?”

“What any woman likes,” I replied, emboldened. “Reading. Running. Swimming. Hunting.”

For the first time, his golden eyes glinted with interest. Here was a king who liked women and mischief and nature. I was all three.

“So do I,” he said, his tone thoughtful.

I raised an eyebrow. “I know.”

The music concluded before he could dwell on my impertinence. Louder applause greeted the end of our dance, and we bowed to our audience, then the orchestra struck up another buoyant number and everyone took to the dance floor. Louis led me back to my husband, who stood by a glass-paned door with a gathering of guests around him.

“Oh,” Louis said in an offhand manner, “the Comte de Guiche is here.”

My good mood evaporated as the crowd parted to let us pass. Next to Philippe, his arm resting on his shoulder in a careless gesture, stood Armand de Gramont, a glass of wine in his hand and a devilish grin on his lips.

“Armand,” Louis said, his expression and his tone smooth. “I didn’t realize you’d been invited.”

The count bowed. “Wasn’t I?” Exaggerated concern pulled down at his mouth. “Does His Majesty wish me to leave?”

The courtiers around us bit back smiles. Only my rising pulse prevented me from rolling my eyes, and I mastered my mounting temper enough to keep a straight face.

“I don’t see why,” Louis replied, unperturbed. “Brother, I return your wife to you.”

But before my husband could take my hand, Armand put down his glass and grabbed my fingers. “Allow me. I would love to have this dance with the blushing bride.”

To my horror, I *was* reddening, in anger if not in timidity. I opened my mouth to retort, but Philippe waved a dismissive hand at us both.

“By all means.”

Armand shot me a rakish smile. I closed my gaping mouth, unwilling to contradict my husband before witnesses on our wedding day, which would only cause a scandal the court would gossip about for weeks. As graciously as I could, I curtsied to the king and gave my husband a nod, before allowing Armand to lead me back under the burning chandeliers at the center of the ballroom. Whispers trailed after us as we took our positions. I ignored them, focusing on the music and the pattern of the dance and not on my dance partner, who happened to be, as everyone knew all too well, my husband’s lover.

* * *

By the time night had fallen and the gaggle of guests had followed us to the bedchamber, my nerves were frayed and weariness threatened to overcome me. Despite Mother's training, I still wasn't used to being the center of attention, sustaining witty conversations and keeping a cool facade for so long. I longed for quiet and rest, but the day wasn't over yet.

The bedchamber prepared for the consummation was a sight to behold, however, and it was enough to shake me out of my lassitude for a brief moment. The *magicien* in charge of the court entertainment had obviously been called to turn the place into a dazzling nest for newlyweds. Dozens of candles burned bright around the room, and flower petals floated in the air along with gold-dusted feathers. A buffet sprawled along one wall, heavy with silver dishes and delicacies. The decor itself mixed crimson, gold, and white fabrics, from the thick carpets under my feet to the curtains in front of the windows. When I walked in, a sweet smell enveloped me, the air crackling with magic.

After well-wishers and courtiers had withdrawn, only my ladies-in-waiting and my husband's valets remained with us, and the atmosphere grew quiet and thick with trepidation. My heart rate picked up while Louise helped me out of my dress and layers of petticoats. When I was in my silk shift, I took out the pins holding up my hair and removed my jewels. Behind my turned back, fabric rustled and Philippe whispered to his menservants words I couldn't make out.

"Anything else, Your Highness?" Louise's clear eyes met mine, full of kind attention.

I pasted a brave smile on my face. “No, thank you. You may all go.”

Philippe dismissed his own valets at the same time. Then we were alone together for the first time.

CHAPTER III

To hide my nervous state, I sat on the high mattress of the canopy bed and folded my damp hands in my lap. The large ruby of my wedding ring sat heavy on my thin finger, and I fiddled with it as Philippe, in his nightshirt with a glass of wine in hand, surveyed the buffet.

“Would you like something?” he asked. “You haven’t eaten anything at dinner.”

So he had noticed. I pushed a strand of hair behind my ear to hide my embarrassment. Oblivious, he bit into a slice of orange and refilled his glass.

“How about a drink?”

He closed the distance between us to offer me the wine. Alcohol seldom agreed with me, but if I were to make an exception, tonight seemed as good a time as any. I drank, and Philippe sat next to me, reclining until his back rested on the velvet covers and his bare feet dangled off the bed.

Above us, the magic holding the feathers and petals airborne was fading. They twirled down to the floor one by one, my body

relaxing by degree at the soothing sight. Unlike earlier, the silence was comfortable, and when Philippe reached to loop a long strand of my hair around his finger, I didn't flinch.

The previous day, Mother had spent an excruciating amount of time explaining to me what would happen tonight, with more details than I ever wished for. Yet now that I found myself alone with my new husband, I was glad for the unwanted advice: At least my imagination wasn't running wild and my fears didn't overcome me.

"Come here," Philippe said.

I reclined next to him, close enough that his perfume tickled my nose and the color of his eyes stood out. They were brown. Unlike his brother, he was no *magicien*, which was why I had agreed to marry him. He would never want the magic inside me.

He reached for me, and for a heartbeat I thought he would caress my face, but instead he drew me closer and kissed me on the mouth. I gasped, but our collision was gentle, his lips soft against mine. He tasted of orange and wine, and I felt I would forever associate these flavors with him.

To my surprise, he didn't withdraw, instead pulling me to him until my palms rested against his chest, and deepening the kiss. I closed my eyes as my body relaxed in his embrace. The world fell away, the bedchamber, the palace, and the kingdom vanishing from my thoughts. It was my first kiss, and the fleeting thought that it was perfect crossed my mind.

Until he abruptly pulled back.

"I can't do this."

I gaped, wrenched out of the moment and too stunned to move. He stood up, his legs unsteady, and wiped his mouth with

the back of his hand. He was more drunk than I had thought.

A pang of humiliation shot through me. In her lecture, my mother had warned me about the various courses this night could take. But she'd never considered the possibility my husband might simply not want to touch me at all.

My irritation flaring, I sat up. "What's wrong?"

Philippe paced around the room, blowing out candles. "Just . . . just go to sleep, all right?" he said, the words rushed and quiet. He wouldn't meet my gaze.

"What about you?" I struggled to keep my temper out of my tone.

He gestured at an armchair by the window. "I'll just—"

"And that's it?" I crossed my arms and stared him down. "Philippe, this is our wedding night."

He finished his round of the bedchamber and let a single candle burn on the abandoned buffet. In the sudden darkness, the lone light cast flickering shadows on the wall, turning his silhouette into an ominous specter. Yet fear wasn't among the turmoil of feelings that tumbled through my chest.

"Is it because of Armand?"

I didn't care how inappropriate this conversation was becoming. I wouldn't back down until I knew the reason for his behavior. He grabbed the glass I'd left lying on the bedcovers, and glass clinked in the half-light as he poured himself another drink.

"No. Armand understands."

I wanted to believe him: As permissive as the French court was, Philippe was still a prince, with a duty to marry for his country. Whether he and the Comte de Guiche shared a real bond or not, it was expected to dissolve after his nuptials.

A silence followed his answer as he drained his wine and I waited for him to elaborate. When he didn't, I chased after another explanation for his conduct.

"Is it because I'm a girl?"

He let out a hollow laugh. "No, my love, it isn't. I happen to like girls."

His reply hit me like a slap. My occasional visits at court had allowed me to witness his brief affairs with some of the young women here. But given his very public love for young men, I had always wondered—along with the rest of the courtiers—if these relationships were genuine. Evidently they had been.

"So you like men, and you like women," I said, just to make sure I wasn't leaving out any aspect of the situation at hand.

Philippe opened his arms wide. "What can I say? I don't see the point in favoring one side over the other, when I can enjoy both."

Except I didn't appear to fall into any category he liked. Humiliation bloomed in my core.

"So it's me." I couldn't keep my emotions from my voice this time. It wasn't that he didn't want someone of my gender. He just didn't want *me*. I took in a quick breath and swallowed my dismay. Whatever his feelings, he'd agreed to marry me. He didn't have a choice now. "But I'm your wife."

He faced me at last. "You're right. We're married. And we'll still be married tomorrow, and the day after that. What is or isn't between us won't change that. No one has to know it."

I shook my head at the naivete of his words and left the bed. He stood taller than I was, but I still advanced on him.

"I'm an English princess! You're the heir to the French throne!

At some point, people will know. They will care. And it will definitely change things.”

Was he so deluded that he thought we could pretend at being married and no one would notice? We were royals. Gossiping about us was already half of Europe’s favorite pastime. Did he really think we could keep *any* secret for long?

He raked his fingers through his hair and grimaced, as if refusing to let my words sink in would render their meaning void. “I just need some time, all right?” He sighed and took hold of my arms. I tensed, but he only leveled eyes with me. “I just need time.”

The candlelight played on his face, highlighting its youth and weariness. My anger deflated. Maybe I could give him a little time. After all, he was forced by the king into this marriage just like I was, and I was as much a stranger to him as he was to me. The situation wasn’t easy for either of us. My own stance turned stern.

“I will not be shamed.”

He nodded. “You won’t. I promise.”

I gave him a little push, and he released me. I returned to the bed, but this time I slipped under the sheets and sank into the lavender-scented pillows. After a pause, Philippe grabbed a pitcher of wine and refilled his glass again.

“So that’s your plan?” I asked. “Drinking yourself into a stupor?”

He sat in the armchair, gave me a wide smile that didn’t reach his eyes, and held up his glass. “Yes, my love. That’s exactly what I’m planning to do, until I’m drunk enough to forget who I am and to fall into a blessedly dreamless slumber.”

I almost threw a pillow at him, then decided it wasn't worth the waste of energy. He was welcome to wallow in self-pity to his heart's content. As he'd said himself, we would still be married tomorrow. He'd still need me, and I'd still need him. For better or for worse, we were in this together.

I closed my eyes to avoid staring at the dancing shadows on the ornate ceiling. My traitorous mind chose this moment to replay the memory of our earlier kiss. The taste of orange still lingered on my tongue, along with the soft feel of his lips. For the briefest instant, I'd thought I could be happy. I clenched my jaw at my own naivete. Marguerite and my mother had been right. I was wed to a man who would never love me, and rain on my wedding day hadn't brought me happiness.

We were royals. Our happiness was irrelevant.

* * *

The following day, I woke to an empty bedchamber and a letter from the Queen Mother. With a few words penned in tiny handwriting, Anne d'Autriche invited me to visit her that afternoon at the royal palace.

Rain was still falling down in sheets as my carriage left the Palais-Royal to rumble through the narrow streets of the capital for the short ride to the Louvre. To my surprise, my new mother-in-law met me at her apartment door, wrapped in a long black cloak and with only two ladies for company.

"I thought a bit of fresh air would do us all some good," she said. "I hear you're not one to be afraid of a little exercise?"

I couldn't help but smile. Given the choice, I always preferred the

outdoors and a walk to sitting around in a drawing room making small talk to ladies with a better sense of fashion than mine. And rain had never stopped me before, much to my mother's dismay.

"I'd be delighted," I said.

She linked her arm with mine, and we proceeded along the corridor, ladies and palace guards trailing after us. However, the moment we reached the palace's inner courtyard, it became clear there would be no risk of us getting wet. Above the quadrangle, a translucent shield shimmered with magic and turned the pouring rain into a shower of golden flecks.

I closed my gaping mouth before the Queen Mother noticed my reaction, but wonder lingered in my chest nonetheless. A quick glance around confirmed my instinct: There was no *magicien* here, which meant the spell had been cast by the Crown *Magicien*, Fouquet. Any court *magiciens* were allowed to do magic in the royal palace, but only he was able to perform such long-lasting and flawless magic. Much like the rest of the kingdom, I knew little of his power, except that it was vast and unique. Indeed, for reasons mysterious even to the best magic scholars, Fouquet was the only man who combined the skills of a *magicien* and a Source. Cardinal Mazarin had discovered his gift and brought him to court, where he'd entered the king's service.

Unimpressed by the remarkable spell at work above our heads, Anne d'Autriche steered me around the courtyard, while our retinue hovered on the doorsteps.

"I'm pleased you were able to make time for me," she said.

I bit my lip to keep from admitting aloud I had nothing better to do and focused on maintaining a sure footing on the cobblestones.

“And how are you feeling today?” she went on. “Believe it or not, I do remember how draining one’s wedding day is.”

I couldn’t tell if she was referring to my poor health or not, so I pasted a reassuring smile on my face. “I’m well, thank you.”

She tilted her head to the side to observe me, much like Philippe. Her gaze, however, was as shrewd and knowing as Louis’s, with the same golden tone. It was clear who the king had inherited his skills as a *magicien* from.

“And I trust all went well last night?”

Now that was far more direct a question than I cared to hear from my new mother-in-law, but I didn’t let my confidence waver. “Yes, all went well.”

I wasn’t about to tell her that there’d been no consummation. Before my ladies’ arrival in my chamber this morning, I had cut my finger and smeared some of my blood onto the bed sheets. The incision smarted under the fabric of my glove, but it would heal soon enough and save me from suspicion in the meantime. I would keep the secret of my wedding night for as long as I could, and my mother-in-law would be one of the last people to find out about it. I was more used to lying about my magic than about my private life, but her expression betrayed no mistrust as she patted my arm.

“Oh, good.” She flashed me one of her rare smiles, the relief clear in her voice. “Philippe can be so mercurial, one never knows what to expect from him.”

It seemed to me both her sons were impulsive men, but I didn’t comment. My silence allowed her to go on: “I know that, given the choice, he wouldn’t have been your first pick. But even if my other son had favored you, as king he had to marry for his country.

From a diplomatic and political point of view, Marie-Thérèse was his only option. He needed a Spanish queen who could give him heirs.”

That stung far harder than I was prepared for. It hadn't occurred to me the French advisers had considered the possibility that I might not be able to bear children. I stared at the cooing pigeons swooping around the courtyard to avoid her gaze. The golden flecks dropping from the sky dissolved as soon as they touched the birds' feathers, lending a sweet smell to the air around us. I noticed for the first time the way the magic turned insubstantial the moment it came in contact with anything solid in the quadrangle, whether it was the birds, the cobblestones, or us.

Oblivious to my unease, the Queen Mother distracted me from my train of thought. “But as much as I wished you'd married my son,” she said, “I'm now pleased you wed Philippe instead.”

It struck me that she called Louis “my son,” but not Philippe. I felt a twinge of sympathy for my husband, who'd been raised in the shadow of a boy-king by a mother convinced of the superiority of one of her children over the other.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Philippe is heir to the throne, you see,” she replied. “Until Louis and Marie-Thérèse have a son, of course. It shouldn't take them long, but in the meantime, it's important Philippe is, shall I say, under control. You, my dear, support my son. While giving France an alliance with England, you also provide the means to keep Philippe's influence to a minimum.”

I couldn't help but frown. “How so?”

“By being your lovely, clever, and delightful self.”

My heart jolted. Surely she couldn't mean my being a Source was my way of strengthening the king? How could she possibly know? But then, the Crown had spies and contacts everywhere. While my mind raced, my confusion must have been plain on my face, for she added:

“Oh, Henriette, don't be coy. You know Marie-Thérèse can't compare when it comes to the two of you. Until she has a son, you'll be the focus of all the court's attention. You'll draw everyone's gaze away from Philippe.”

My frown deepened at the coldness of her prediction. I had heard the rumors about how she'd always favored Louis over Philippe, but until now I hadn't considered how far she'd gone to ensure the king's supremacy.

“My son has just claimed his right to rule alone,” she concluded. “He can't afford to be outshone by anyone, including his brother.”

She was right. Only twenty-three days had passed since the death of the Cardinal Mazarin and Louis's unexpected announcement that he wouldn't replace his prime minister, ruling alone instead with only three ministers to advise him. He couldn't allow anyone to question his authority or think of an alternative to his rule at this stage. Philippe was heir to his throne, and despite his colorful character, many nobles might support his claim should Louis prove a hindrance to their power.

We'd completed a full circle around the courtyard, our stroll bringing us back to our waiting ladies and guards. A new addition had joined their ranks though, one that made my steps slow but softened the Queen Mother's features.

“Athénaïs, I'm so pleased you could join us.”

A couple of years older than me, the lady had curves and beauty I could only dream of, but her expression hid no contempt when she curtsied to my mother-in-law. I could have almost forgotten she was the dark-haired woman who'd laughed with Olympe at my wedding.

“Your Grace.”

“Henriette”—the Queen Mother turned to me—“may I present Athénaïs de Rochechouart, whom I’m hoping you’ll welcome among your ladies.”

I had enough self-control to suppress a surprised look as the lady curtsied to me.

“Your Highness.”

Away from court for too long, my mother had left Anne d’Autriche with the task of handpicking my ladies-in-waiting. Her selection had pleased me until now, but I wasn’t certain this Athénaïs and I would get along. I made an effort to appear gracious nonetheless and opened my mouth to reply, when a blood-curdling scream echoed in the corridor behind us.

Stillness descended upon us like a cold mist. Another shriek rang out, and my legs propelled me forward into the hallway. Whoever made this terrible sound needed urgent help. I vaguely registered the Queen Mother hissing my name as my heels hit the flagstones, my skirts rustling in my wake. A third screech sounded, and I rounded a corner. There, I stopped in my tracks.

A sobbing maid in uniform crouched by the wall—the source of the commotion, no doubt. Sprawled on the floor lay the body of a young man, with terror etched upon his face. The emptiness of his eyes and the stillness of his limbs gave no doubt as to his condition.

“Don’t come any closer!” a male voice barked.

I froze, too taken by the sight before me to be offended by the stranger’s tone. Out of breath as he reached the scene himself, the black-clad man extended one hand to keep me from stepping forward and focused his golden gaze on the servant who sniffled by the wall, tears running down her cheeks.

“He’s dead,” she said. “Oh God, he’s dead.”

Shock tightened my throat. His face a severe mask, the man in black bent down to search for the young man’s pulse. No wound appeared on his skin, and no blood marred his expensive clothes, but a thin layer of gold dust shimmered on his face and silk shirt. Glittering on his ears, eyes, and mouth, it had settled onto his skin like cosmetic powder.

“Heavens!” Athénaïs reached my side, panting, and let out another, less-dignified curse at the sight of the body. She grabbed my arm, whether to hold on to me or keep me from swooning, I couldn’t decide, and spoke to the stranger still kneeling by the dead man. “Is that magic? Was it drained out of him? Is it . . . murder?”

The *magicien* nodded. “It is. And I believe it was, yes.” He met her gaze. “You should take Her Highness away.”

“Her Highness can hear you, and she can decide whether she should leave or not,” I replied. My heartbeat was still out of control, yet now that the shock of the discovery was over, I wasn’t about to faint.

The man bowed his head in apology but didn’t stand up. Dressed in black leather, his clothes bore no ornaments, and mud covered his boots. Not a courtier, then, but the confidence of his

bearing and the signet ring on his little finger suggested he wasn't out of place in the palace either.

"Who is he?" I asked Athénaïs. I wasn't about to speak again to the man before a proper introduction was made.

"This is Monsieur Moreau," she said. "The *magicien* in charge of His Majesty's security."

I should have known. Here was a man who looked like he belonged in the palace yet could melt into the crowd of courtiers without much notice. Louis needed men such as him to look out for him—in other words, spies.

"And," I added, my gaze shifting from Monsieur Moreau's grave face to the young man on the floor, "who is that?"

"Henri de Granville," he said. "The Comte de Saint-Aignan's Source."

This time, my breath hitched. The count was the *magicien* in charge of the court entertainment. The royal palace should have been one of the safest places in the kingdom for his Source. Yet here his Source lay, brutally murdered and drained of his power. My sense of safety following my marriage had lasted barely a day. I wasn't any safer at French court than I had been all my life.