

CHAPTER ONE



STORMING THE TUILLERIES PALACE



CHAPTER I



August was strangely cold that year. In the chill, leaves abandoned their branches early, swirling down onto dirty streets. They crunched beneath Papa's *sabots* as he dashed across the square toward my brother and me, his red felt cap tumbling down over his face. He caught it in one hand, shouting, "Great news! We're taking the palace. I'll tear Louis to pieces with my bare hands! No more king for France!" His face was flushed and he panted heavily. He drew a jackknife from his vest pocket, the one he used for cutting string from around the bundles of journals he delivered. "Josette, take the cart straight home, and tell your mother to come quick. She won't want to miss this." Then he turned and trotted off.

My brother, Rémy, stood stupefied. Suddenly his eyes caught fire and he made a little crouching movement, as if about to spring after Papa.

"No!" I said firmly, seizing him by the arm. "You're helping me push this cart."

He obeyed. He was only nine years old, bone thin and runty. At fourteen, I was nearly twice his

size. His lower lip protruded in a defiant pout as he gripped a cart handle and pushed alongside me.

Together we strained against the gathering crowd. Some people were barefoot like Rémy and me; some wore sabots, which clopped on the cobblestones like horses' hooves. Citizens poured out of the side streets onto the *rue* Denis; they coursed down it like a swollen river and surged toward the Tuileries Palace. *Pikes* and sticks jutted skyward. Blood ran down one pike from the cow's heart impaled on its tip. The man who carried it kept yelling, "This is the heart of an *aristocrat!*" I might have believed him, but I knew a cow's heart when I saw one, for the butcher on our street often displayed them in his shop window.

"Give me the queen!" shrieked a woman whose *fichu* had torn loose, exposing bare shoulders. She brandished a broken table leg whose tip had been hacked into a crude point. "Give her to me, and let me pull the hair right out of her head!"

Panicked by the commotion, a donkey hauling a farmer's cart reared, tipping the cart and spilling its contents into the gutter. A swarm of women paused long enough to scoop stray turnips and carrots into their aprons. They tied them up in bundles and marched on toward the palace, the loot bulging and bouncing at their waists. We struggled mightily to maneuver the cart. Only when we reached the opening to our narrow street did I notice my big toenail, blackened and throbbing from someone's sabot crushing it.

Our street was empty. Here and there a door,

left unlatched in the mad rush to the palace, swung back and forth on its hinges. Only old Odette, brittle and hunchbacked, sat on a stool in front of her doorway. With restless fingers she wadded up her stained apron and smoothed it out, only to wad it again.

"What did you see, Josette?" she called out to me as I limped past.

Seeing me distracted by her question, Rémy abandoned me and the cart, darting straight for home.

"Citizens are attacking the Tuileries Palace," I panted.

She rocked back and forth on the stool, muttering, "Well, well, is it finally come to that? Well!"

My mother appeared in the open window of our apartment, holding Victoire in her arms. "Josette!" she called down. "Hurry inside."

Isabelle was whimpering, clutching at *Maman's* skirt.

"Papa said to tell you..."

"I already know," she cut me off. Her gray eyes flickered with a hard, steely light. She had tied a kerchief around her head and pushed up her blouse sleeves as if preparing for a difficult chore. "The whole neighborhood is aflame."

She handed Victoire to me. "Feed the little ones." She pointed at a small carp on the table. A handful of carrots lay beside it, along with a quarter loaf of bread and half a bottle of wine. "Save a bite for your father and me. We'll be home late."

She took up the knife with which she had just gutted the fish, wiping it on her apron as she started

out the door.

“Maman, take me with you!” pleaded Rémy.

“No. What happens today is not for children to see.” She fixed me sternly with her gaze. “Josette, he is not to follow me.”

Bolstered by this charge, I gave Rémy a look that defied him to challenge me. He sighed and began to pout. When the downstairs door slammed, he ran to the window and leaned halfway out, watching Maman until she disappeared.

We had seen her like this before. Nearly three years earlier, on a rainy October morning, we Parisians had awakened to find no bread in the bakeries. The whole city ached with hunger. Maman and thousands of angry women gathered at City Hall, then set out on foot for the king’s palace at Versailles. They carried scythes and kitchen knives, pikes and sharp sticks. Though muddy and exhausted from the long trek, they burst into the palace, captured the royal family, and dragged them back to Paris. The city exploded with joy. People climbed trees and leaned out of high windows, just to catch a glimpse of King Louis and Queen Marie-Antoinette, who were now our prisoners. We cheered and clapped when the royal carriage, surrounded by a mob of angry citizens, passed by. They could keep their thrones, but perhaps now that they were forced to live in Paris, among the People, they would treat us more fairly.

Those were the early days of the Revolution. In those days we tied ribbons to trees and called them “Trees of Liberty.” We danced in rings around them, holding hands. Those of us who lived in neighbor-

hoods like Saint Antoine – who didn't have enough wooden shoes to go around and didn't always have enough to eat – at last believed there was hope. Surely now things would change! We longed for the King and the deputies who had taken charge of the government to find a way to give us what we needed.

But things had not changed fast enough. The people of Paris now hated King Louis and Queen Marie-Antoinette more than ever.

Victoire wiped a runny nose on my sleeve and whimpered.

"All right, all right," I said. "I'll boil the fish."

I sent Rémy down to the courtyard well to fetch water while I peeled the skin off the carp. Its strong odor stung my nose, but I didn't care; we were lucky to have it. Papa didn't always find work and we seldom ate meat. Sometimes for days on end Papa's cart sat idle in the courtyard, chained to a post for fear some other tenant in our building would snatch it and sell it to earn a few *sous*. The cart was Papa's livelihood; he hired himself out to deliver goods or haul people's belongings as they moved from one home to another. But too many hungry people shoved and pushed each other aside these days as they searched for work, and often Papa arrived at a place, only to find that someone else with a cart had beaten him to it. It wasn't his fault. Sometimes Papa drank too much, slept half the day, then tumbled out of bed and complained that his head hurt and all the jobs were taken. That was his fault.

I boiled water in a *Dutch oven* and added the carrots, greens and all. Isabelle insisted on dropping

in the fish, while I held her dress back to keep it from catching fire. When the stew had cooked, the little ones sopped bread into the broth and devoured it hungrily, even Rémy. But I had no appetite. Whenever I closed my eyes I saw the gory cow's heart on the pike. My swollen toe throbbed painfully.

Long after my brother and sisters had fallen asleep, I kept watch in a chair by the open window. Faint shouts and the crack of musket fire drifted toward me on the wind. Slowly the sky grew pink, then faded into a dusty blue above the rooftops. Below me, the street remained silent.

I must have dozed, for a voice startled me awake. I leaned out the window and saw our neighbor, Citizen Foulard, straggling home, flanked by his two gangly sons. Each boy carried an elegant brocade chair on his shoulders. Their father clutched a roll of drapery cloth. The shimmering fabric looked oddly out of place against his filthy shirt.

"Citizen, have you seen my parents?" I called down.

Foulard squinted up at me in the dusky haze, his face streaked with soot. Ignoring my question, he crowed, "It's a victory for the People! Long live the Republic!"

"Long live the Republic," I replied weakly. Trembling, I closed the window and sank onto the hearth. The palace guards had muskets and cannons. What good were Papa's jackknife and Maman's kitchen knife against such weapons? Victory didn't mean no one had died in the battle. I hugged my drawn-up knees tightly. Had I believed in God, I

would have prayed. But when the Revolution came, our family, along with many in France, had discarded the Catholic Church and all its lies. We had seen enough greedy bishops, dressed like princes in furs and jewels, riding through Paris in elegant coaches. They cared little that we were hungry and lacking enough firewood to get through the winter. We didn't need their God – and we certainly didn't need to give them any more of our hard-earned sous. What did prayer have to do with me? I squeezed my eyes shut and repeated in a firm voice, "I believe they are safe. I know they will come back safely. Long live the Republic!"

Maman found me curled up on the hearth before a nearly dead fire. She nudged me with her foot. "Josette! Fan those embers before they go out completely."

Overjoyed, I jumped up and threw my arms around her. She was soaked with sweat, her muslin cap hanging around her neck by its strings. Damp, red-gold hair curled around her ears, making her look suddenly young and carefree. She grabbed my hands and we twirled around the room, chanting, "Victory! Victory! Victory!"

The stairs creaked and Papa appeared in the doorway with a gash on his nose. His thick fingers clutched a silver goblet and candlestick. Black hair clung to his damp forehead, beneath the red revolutionary cap with its red, white and blue *cockade*. He showed off his loot with a triumphant grin. "We've done it! We've pulled those louts off their thrones once and for all. No more king and queen for France!"

Gazing in awe at the prizes he held, I burst into tears of relief and joy. Maman let me cry; she knelt down and fanned the embers herself, then dragged the Dutch oven into the flames to warm up the leftovers. "You should have seen it, Josette," she said. "It was a terrible fight. But glory to the People...the Revolution lives!"

"Where are they?" I asked, incredulous. "Where are the king and queen?"

"Dragged off to prison!"

It was scarcely believable. Only four years before, when I was ten, I had stood with my parents and Rémy along the Notre Dame Bridge and watched the king and queen pass by in their magnificent carriage. Six prancing horses wearing plumes on their heads and ribbons in their tails pulled the royal family along, and we caught a flashing glimpse of jewels, fur and silk as they dashed past. Columns of armed soldiers accompanied them. Had anyone told me back then that the barefoot, starving people of Paris would one day topple them from their thrones, I would have laughed at the utter absurdity of it.

And now it had happened.

Papa set his treasures down and uncorked the wine bottle. Taking a gulp, he sank onto a chair and propped both feet on the table. "A job well done!" he crowed, and took another swig of wine. "Did you see me, Sylvie? Did you see how I clobbered that guard in the hallway? I finished him off with a..."

"I saw it," snapped Maman, hurrying over to him and slapping him on the side of the head. "Hush up!" she hissed. "Not in front of Josette!" Then her

eyes fell on my black, swollen toe. "Josette, that looks frightful. Sit down by the fire."

I did as she said, casting a sideways glance at Papa. He was chuckling to himself, thrusting an imaginary knife into the table. His own jackknife bulged in his vest pocket, bloody stains seeping through the fabric.

Maman heated the tip of her kitchen knife in the fire, then set the point on my toenail. The hot steel melted the nail until blood oozed out and relieved my suffering. She tossed me a rag. "Now wrap it up and go carefully on it," she instructed.

As they sopped up their stew, Maman and Papa recounted the day for me in vivid detail. Somehow they had found each other amidst the chaos. Side by side they had smashed through a barricaded door and attacked the Swiss Guard standing watch over valuables in the room. Everyone snatched what he could of the royal finery; Papa had had to fend off other invaders in order to lay hold of these two treasures. Maman had come very near to the queen's own apartment, but was pushed back by National Guardsmen with muskets.

"You're lucky we came home alive," she said, sipping the bit of wine Papa had left at the bottom of the bottle. She noticed me eyeing the silver goblet and candlestick. "Now don't you go feeling ashamed, Josette, 'cause we've done nothing wrong. We did what we had to do. It's not the same as stealing, and even if it was, there'd be no need to go confessing to a priest. We're through with religion! No more bowing down and confessing for us. What we do is



nobody's business but our own."

"To the People!" said Papa, holding up the empty silver goblet.

"To the People and the Revolution!" echoed Maman, holding up the empty wine bottle.

A contented calm fell over me and I felt myself growing drowsy. Crawling onto a straw-filled mat-

dress in the corner, I disentangled the blanket from Rémy's legs and lay down beside him. On his other side, Isabelle and Victoire sighed and shifted in their sleep. Had I known it was my last night at home, I surely would not have slept so peacefully.

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