

PROLOGUE

PARIS, 1793



A column of fire reached like the Colossus of Rhodes into the night sky.

Shadowed figures waving torches poured into the Place du Carousel.

There, a clamoring mob passed wooden chairs, carriage wheels, and empty wine barrels over their heads toward the center of the square. Anything to feed the growing fire.

The Palais des Tuileries loomed to Adélaïde's left. Its mansard roof jutted into a smoke-filled sky. To her right, the Palais du Louvre's long wings stretched into the dark. The stone walls of the gallery that connected the two palaces flickered yellow and orange.

Adélaïde had never felt as small and alone as in that moment, between the embrace of buildings, in a space designed to dazzle royal spectators with seven hundred horses and jousting riders. Tonight, the square was filled with thousands of milling Parisians. And this time, *she* was the spectacle.

She pulled herself up on the tongue of the wooden cart next to the fire. Squinting against the smoke, she searched for anyone familiar.

Not a soul.

Even the donkeys had balked against their traces and been set free. Their distant braying reached her over the noise of the crowd.

Around her, men lurched about, their faces reddened from the

bonfire, their sleeves stained purple from the wine they had scooped into their hands when the king's cellars were raided. The scent of Bourgogne rose into the air. Close by, a woman opened a dusty brown bottle and poured wine into the mouths of her companions.

Then the woman turned to Adélaïde. "Traitor!" she shouted, and drew back her arm, preparing to throw the bottle.

The crowd took up the chant. "Traitor! Traitor!" Others brandished their wine bottles.

Time slowed down. Adélaïde felt each sluggish boom of her heart, the constriction of her lungs, the loss of air she could not drag into her paralyzed chest. Was this the way she was going to die? Sliced to ribbons by a barrage of flying glass?

She raised her hands to protect her head and braced herself, but then a tall man in striped pants and a pointed red hat plucked the bottle out of the woman's hand and emptied the last drops into his mouth. "Any Parisian knows not to let good wine go to waste," he said.

Laughter.

The new citizens of France stomped their feet, shook their fists at Adélaïde, and threw the staves of the wine barrels into the flames. Arms brushed against her skirts. Bodies jostled the cart. She gripped the splintered seat to avoid being knocked into the fire.

The wind changed, and a rush of acrid smoke filled her lungs. She fought the urge to cough. Heat seared through her dress, burned her arms. Her mind screamed at her to run, but she had promised herself not to show fear, not to retreat.

The man in the red cap climbed into the cart. Sweat rolled from his face, and she smelled the sharp scent of his perspiration. Beneath his polished leather boots, the mountain of canvasses shifted. Fragile wood snapped. He stooped and held up a painting, still in its gilt frame. Black paint effaced the portrait sitter.

"Look at this travesty to art," he called to the crowd.

How right you are. She kept her eyes averted from his familiar face.

"Burn it. Burn it all!" the crowd roared.

The man laughed loudly and threw the painting into the fire. She flinched as yellow sparks flew upward. He tossed bundled sketches out to his audience. They cheered, grabbed the drawings, and did their part.

Go ahead, she thought, watching a sketch shrivel into a line of

black ashes. *It doesn't matter now. There is nothing left to fight for. It's all gone.*

The man picked up another canvas, paused for a moment, frowned, then held the painting up.

"Brothers," he called. "This sedition especially must be burned."

Adélaïde lifted her head, glimpsed the partially completed canvas.

She had been wrong. Everything did still matter.

"No!" She scrambled onto the cart. "Murderer!" she cried. "This art is innocent."

"Woman," the man said. "There is nothing innocent about your art. And nothing innocent about *you*."

The painting sailed into the fire.

CHAPTER I
PARIS, 1764



The day began in its usual way, with her parents arguing over her future.

From her window-seat perch, Adélaïde watched the parish of St. Eustache wake beneath her gaze. She sat with the window ajar—one really did not want *all* the smells of Paris drifting into one's bedroom, but the morning breeze bore the fragrance of baking bread from the *boulangerie* across the street and the voices of her parents from the room below.

"The boys are gone, Claude. Can't you find something better to occupy your time than educating the females of this household?" Her mother's voice, sharp as a crystal bell, clear for Adélaïde to hear on the floor above. "Husband, I tell you, no good will come from this experiment of yours."

"The world is changing, Maman." Her father's baritone, pitched lower, less distinct. "In this age of philosophy, it's the rational thing to do."

"You would do better to invest in Adélaïde's dowry, not waste money on tutors—especially for maids and shop girls."

"We can afford it. Educating the grisettes increases sales because they can better interact with our clientele. But our daughter, Marie-Anne. You should be proud of her. The tutors claim she has surpassed her brothers, God rest their souls."

“Adélaïde will have to marry soon.” Her mother’s voice rose. “Husband, all this education will be a liability to her.”

Maman always addressed Papa as husband when she thought she was right.

“She is too young for marriage yet,” her father said, his voice still mild. “Let her pursue her art for a while.”

Above them, Adélaïde knelt on the window seat, her hands clasped in prayer.

“She needs to take her place in the shop.”

“Marie-Anne, her talents lie elsewhere.”

Her mother paused. “I agree, she is a disaster with sales. Even the most laggard grisette does better.”

Adélaïde could picture her mother below, tapping her quill on the ledger in dissatisfaction.

“If only she would not be so direct,” her mother continued. “She should flirt a little. How will she attract a husband if she does not?”

Adélaïde cringed on the window seat. Her mother knew how to play the coquette, how to coax a reluctant customer to spend a quarter’s allowance in their shop, but when she tried, Adélaïde felt like a draft horse pulling a dog cart.

“Perhaps she is selling the wrong thing,” her father suggested. “Customers like her little drawings well enough.”

“We are not in the business of selling our daughter’s scribbles, husband.”

The lacings in Adélaïde’s dress constricted her chest. The golden weave in the curtain blurred. Was it going to be like her mother’s birthday all over again?

“Marie-Anne.” Her father’s voice was stern.

Her mother did not speak for a moment. “Perhaps she can serve coffee and chocolate to the customers.” But she sounded doubtful.

Adélaïde saw herself pouring chocolate and gossiping with the clientele. Dreadful. Maman knew she could never contain her tongue. It was Maman, after all, who had banished Adélaïde from the shop years ago because she was too boisterous. Adélaïde had joined her brothers in the schoolroom while Félicité, her older sister, served their customers. Now that Adélaïde was grown, she understood that working in the shop really meant that Maman could parade her before eligible suiters. With Félicité married, Maman

wanted to provide a dowry for Adélaïde, sell the shop, and retire to the country.

“She’s no maid, Marie-Anne. She’s our daughter. Let her stock the shelves if she must help—or total the ledgers at night. She’s good at that.”

Maman did not need to know, but Adélaïde would have added the columns in the entire ledger every night to avoid wooing customers and to continue her studies.

There was silence downstairs. Then her mother said, “Perhaps we should get some value from this education. But really, Claude, we have waited long enough to begin our search for a husband. Too long in fact. She is fifteen today.”

The window crank dug into Adélaïde’s side as she collapsed against the bedroom wall. It was almost worth the pain of Maman’s comment about her scribbles.

“Leave her alone today. It’s her birthday. And she will love her gifts,” her father said, anticipated pleasure in his voice.

Straining to hear, Adélaïde opened the casement window wide. To her right, the door of the wigmaker’s shop flew open. Barbers and hairdressers rushed out, covered head to toe in flour, the wig boxes in their hands shedding powder like sugared pastries. At that exact moment, three coffee house waiters scurried past her parents’ shop. They collided, the screech of the hairdressers sounding like fishwives in the market.

Doused in flour, shouting curses, the waiters adjusted the straps to the food baskets on their backs and steadied their steaming coffee pots. Dripping hot coffee, the barbers dried off their wig boxes and edged past the waiters on the narrow walkway with the wig boxes now balanced above their heads. Adélaïde laughed at the dance of penguin and powder puff. She grabbed her sketchbook. She had to capture the cloud of white that had flown into the air when the barbers ran into the waiters.

Downstairs, the window slammed shut. Adélaïde sighed. Sometimes Maman was right—a girl could learn a lot if she kept quiet.