

PROLOGUE.

JULY 1824.

The young men lounging on the steps of the Panthéon were a motley bunch, some without hats, some without cravats, all askew and wildly cheerful despite the sticky July heat. The young girl had been watching them from across the square for almost an hour now, hidden away amongst the columns of the law school and shielding her face with her parasol. At her side, her maidservant sighed, using an old handkerchief to dab away the sweat rolling down her face, and at last she dared to murmur, "Mademoiselle, shall we...?"

The girl seemed not to hear. Across the place du Panthéon, one of the men was singing the Marseillaise in a voice that was more enthusiastic than tuneful, and over this racket, another was calling to the passersby in a booming voice: "*Hé*, citizens, show your courage! Messieurs, show your manliness! Show the king what you think of his latest outrages! The French Republic welcomes you! The republicans welcome you!"

The servant, while pretending not to hear, managed a little huff of disapproval, a sort of "Hmf!"

The girl too seemed to ignore the ruckus, her chin tilted up, clear blue gaze fixed on the white Bourbon flag fluttering high on the law school's façade. The servant, at the risk of annoying her mistress, ventured to tap her arm gently, pleading, "Mademoiselle...?"

At the touch, the girl jumped and turned startled eyes on the servant. She gathered her thoughts quickly, and with a sudden resoluteness to her expression, she left the shelter of the law school columns, saying only, "Come, Laetitia."

The servant, rejoicing silently, contented herself with a grateful reply of, "Yes, mademoiselle!"

She was quickly dismayed, however, that the girl had chosen a path leading them much too close to the Panthéon and to that little band of ruffians cluttering up the steps with their yelling and their political pamphlets. Dismay turned to horror as she watched her young mistress walk straight up to the man who had cried out the call to arms.

"Citizen," said the girl to the man, pointing to the pile of pamphlets he was holding, "may I?"

"Mam'zelle?" mumbled the man.

"May I have one?" she repeated in a slow, deliberate tone, a solemn intonation of a voice colored perhaps by a touch of impatience.

Her servant felt faint, fanning herself frantically with her handkerchief, but she did not dare interrupt. The young man, for his part, seemed no less embarrassed, flushing deeply as he fumbled clumsily in his stack of pamphlets.

“Here you are,” he said at last, barely daring to meet the girl’s steady blue gaze as he handed her one of the pamphlets, a little folded treatise printed on cheap stock and smelling of cheap brandy. She turned it over in her hand and traced one gloved finger over the bold heading, which announced with great self-importance: **DOCTRINES RÉPUBLICAINES.**

Satisfied, the girl graced the man with a short nod of the head and a half-franc coin, and said simply, “Thank you, citizen,” as she tucked the pamphlet away into her purse.

She had hardly turned to go when suddenly, as if he had found his voice again, he cried out in a ringing tone: “Citizeness!”

Without a word, the girl glanced back at him.

“Long live the Republic!” he called to her, and there was something in the fearless pride in his voice, the strange, desperate fire in his eye, that pleased her. She smiled.

As she walked away, she said calmly to her servant, “Laetitia, I would be very grateful if you would not mention this incident to my aunt. It would only upset her.”

The poor servant, trembling from head to toe, could do nothing but nod with a mute vehemence.