

DAY OF REVENGE



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In memory of my grandparents, Longin and Mildred Reich.

“They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.”

Isaiah 40:31

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DAY *of* REVENGE

CHAPTER 1

MARSEILLES, FRANCE

25 JULY 1793

Dusk is rapidly turning into night. Dark shadows loom over every corner of the parlor in the La Font manor. Emmanuel shudders in response to the cold shivers that run up and down his spine. *Where is Samuel? He was supposed to return over two hours ago. Is it possible that he met Monsieur La Metz? Or did something terrible happen to him and I do not yet know about it?* Emmanuel nervously twists a lock of his thick, wavy hair around his index finger. Nausea grips his stomach. The only sound to be heard is the soft murmur of servants' voices in the kitchen and the bustling of Madame La Font's skirts as she walks to and from the library and drawing room. The noises in the background intensify his anxiety.

He fixes his caramel brown eyes on the grandfather clock across from him. He squints his eyes but the room is so dark that he cannot see the hands of the clock. Emmanuel uncrosses his legs and firmly sets both feet on the polished floor. His buckled shoes create a loud clap when they come in contact with the hard oak.

Emmanuel has known about Samuel's intent to fight the revolutionaries for a number of months. But now, Samuel's desire for revenge against the Robespierre government is more urgent than ever. That is why he sent for Emmanuel—so he can discuss his entire plot with him.

As Emmanuel stands out of his seat, prepared to alert the servants and Madame La Font of Samuel's absence, the familiar click of the entrance doors being opened rings throughout the large manor. Emmanuel stops.

His young, handsome face beams with a mixture of joy and relief. He lets out a huge sigh. *He's here. Nothing dreadful happened. Thank goodness.*

"My God is it dark in here," Samuel says upon entering the parlor. "Emmanuel, are you here?"

"Yes, Samuel," he says from out of the darkness.

A bewildered look appears on Samuel's sun-kissed face. "If you were here the entire time, why in God's name did you not light the candles in the wall sconces? You know perfectly well where I keep extra candles."

"Samuel, I..."

"Never mind! I will have the servants come and light the room," he says. "Have you eaten dinner?"

"No," Emmanuel says. *I would really like to know who Samuel was visiting.* His curiosity gets the better of him.

"Samuel, I do not mean to interfere in your business, but what kind of errands would keep you away for more than two hours? Did you meet Monsieur La Metz?"

There is a long pause. A nagging pang of anxiety beats against Emmanuel's chest. He rubs his sweaty palms over his legs. *Oh no, I hope he doesn't have terrible news.*

Samuel slowly takes off his wide brim hat and presses it against his muscular chest. "We will talk over a meal. I'm feeling rather hungry myself."

"Alright," Emmanuel says. He slowly makes his way over to Samuel, being careful not to trip over any furniture.

Normally, the thought of dinner enlightens Emmanuel's mood, but not tonight. The anxious look remains on his face even after he is comfortably seated at the dining room table. Just as Samuel is about to confront his troubled friend, a short, chubby cook enters the room carrying two large platters filled with the finest Mediterranean cuisine—Ratatouille, stuffed Turbot Provencale, croissants and Banon cheese.

"Bon appetite, Messieurs," he says as he sets the platters of steaming food before the hungry men.

"Merci Monsieur Edouin," Emmanuel says. His face brightens a little.

"Do not forget the wine, Edouin," Samuel says.

“As you wish, Monsieur La Font,” Edouin says, bowing out of the room. He promptly returns with two tall bottles of *vin Mourvedre* in his hands. Samuel takes one of the bottles and fills two medium-sized crystal goblets with the burgundy liquid.

For a moment Emmanuel studies Samuel as if he had met him for the first time. The candle light accentuates the stern look on his face. His grey hair is powdered and held together by a red ribbon at the nape of his neck, above the tall stiff collar. For his fifty-three years he looks stunningly handsome in his new burgundy silk suit. The top three buttons of his waistcoat are left undone, revealing the frills on his white blouse.

Emmanuel has known Samuel his entire life. Samuel was his father’s best friend. The two men attended the Military Academy of La Fleche and fought together throughout the Seven Years War. Shortly after the war ended, Louis XV appointed Jean d’LeVasque as his new military advisor and made Samuel the Captain of the French Royal Army. But, in June of 1783, Jean died in a tragic accident on his way home from Versailles. Emmanuel, the oldest son of four children, was not quite fourteen at the time of his father’s death. Everyone loved Jean dearly, so his death was a tragedy, a tragedy that took years to heal from.

Once news of Jean’s sudden death reached Versailles, the King hastily appointed Samuel as his new military advisor. But, this did not compel Samuel to end his relationship with the d’LeVasque family. He loved them and was determined to keep them as close friends. On several occasions after Jean’s passing, he frequented the d’LeVasque estate for visits, with a faint hope that Julienne would make him hers. But, he was married and Julienne knew that, and she had no desire to remarry.

Over the years, Emmanuel and his younger siblings came to accept Samuel as a surrogate father. But, no matter how much Emmanuel loved Samuel, he was only a friend and he could never ever replace his real father. It took years for Emmanuel to recover from the loss of his father, but some days he longs for his father’s companionship, especially now that France is in social upheaval.

“IS YOUR WIFE—I MEAN—MADAME LA FONT GOING TO DINE WITH US?” Emmanuel says in attempt to initiate a conversation.

“No, I assume she already had her dinner. And no, I did not see Monsieur La Metz. While I was at the market, my coachman approached me with a letter in his hand,” Samuel says, abruptly changing the topic. “He told me that my sister, Irene, was at the port and she desperately needed to see me.”

A puzzled frown appears on Emmanuel’s face. “How could it be your sister is here in Marseilles when she lives in Corsica?”

“Emmanuel, the Mediterranean Sea is not nearly as vast as the Atlantic Ocean. It does not take one long to travel from one end to the other.” Samuel digs his silver fork into the Ratatouille.

“Oh, then where is Irene now? Have you not invited her to stay here for the night?”

Samuel firmly places his fork and knife down on his plate. “Emmanuel, you ask far too many questions. I would greatly appreciate it if you would let me explain the details. Once I have finished talking, you can ask as many questions as you like.”

Emmanuel lowers his gaze to the table cloth. “I’m sorry Samuel. Continue.”

“I asked Irene if she would stay here for the night and return to Corsica early in the morning, but she declined. She came to tell me that they—my entire family—have decided to give me their full support. They are willing to fight the revolutionaries and have already recruited several skilled soldiers.”

Emmanuel beams all over when he hears the good news. “That is excellent!”

“But,” Samuel continues, “My family had to persuade my cousin, Maximus and his two sons, to fight with them. And it was not easy.”

His response wipes the smile off of Emmanuel’s face. “I do not understand you Samuel. I thought you said your entire family is willing to take up arms with us.”

Samuel’s heavy sigh is followed by a long pause. To Emmanuel, the silence is sickening. He pushes his plate of food away from him and fixes

his eyes on Samuel. The indignant look on the older man's face does not put him at ease.

"Maximus and I have never been on good terms," he says.

"But Samuel, how could that be? You hardly know him. I mean—how many times have you actually seen your family since you moved here to France?"

The resentful look on Samuel's face darkens. "I've been to visit my family in Corsica more times than you know, Emmanuel. I know him well enough to realize that he hates me for absolutely no reason. He is only doing this for his family—not for me." Emmanuel gives him a bewildered look. He is so taken aback by Samuel's sudden outburst that he cannot find the right words to ease his friend's pain. Emmanuel rubs his temples in effort to stimulate a reasonable response.

"I sure hope he does not withdraw his support," is the only remark he can come up with.

"He will not. All Maximus knows is the art of warfare. Nearly every day of his life was spent fighting the Genoese. I am certain that he, like the rest of us, does not want to let that tyrant Robespierre destroy our country. Of course, he would never admit that to me."

The urgency in Samuel's voice suggests to Emmanuel that he is trying desperately to overcome his doubt by convincing himself of Maximus's loyalty to his cause.

"Who was the letter from?" Emmanuel says, straying away from the original conversation.

"It was from my good friend, the baron de Batz. He has been planning to rescue the *dauphin from the Temple prison for some weeks now. He has the help of the Chevalier de Jarjaves and Lady Atkins—two of my other good friends—but also needs my assistance." Samuel says.

"Well, that changes our plans," Emmanuel says.

"No it doesn't. I've been planning to do the same for weeks. I've been meaning to write the baron de Batz for a while, but he beat me to it."

"Alright," Emmanuel says. He leans forward in his seat. "Why didn't

*Dauphin is the French word for Prince.

you mention this to me? I've been here for over a week and you have told me nothing about this."

The look on Samuel's face hardens. "That is because I had not yet written the baron de Batz. I had every intention of telling you Emmanuel, but my plan has not been written in stone."

Emmanuel's eyes narrow. "Samuel, every time this subject comes into the conversation you refer to it as *your plan*. Yes, you have made the decision to stay here in France, but what you fail to realize is that we—speaking of my family, the Dupre's, my best friends—Elle and Emile—and myself—have all willingly risked our lives to support you when we could have left France before the king's execution." He cringes when he sees the furious expression on Samuel's face.

I loathe how Emmanuel always forgets who I was before this god damned revolution. But, he sighs. At the same time I should learn how to trust them. His expression softens. He surprisingly finds it hard to stay angry at Emmanuel.

"EMMANUEL, YOU ARE ALL WONDERFUL FRIENDS AND I AM MORE THAN pleased to know that you are supporting me. But, it is my duty to protect you," he says.

Emmanuel breathes out a short sigh. He is quite happy that Samuel did not lose his temper, but at the same time displeased by his response. "I understand, Samuel. But miscommunication is not going to do us any good." He hastily wipes his mouth with his kerchief. "I am quite tired. It has been a long day and I need a good night's sleep."

Samuel clears the residue of dinner off his lips. "Well, I must write the baron and Monsieur La Metz. Tomorrow, I will be sending the letters with you back to Lyon."

Emmanuel's attention is perked. He gives Samuel a confused look. "I thought that you wanted me here until the weekend. Today is only Wednesday."

"Yes, that was the original plan," Samuel says with a sigh. "But, Emmanuel, the Jacobins have gained a stronghold in Lyon and it won't be

long until they take Marseilles. So, if we are to be successful in our plans to overthrow the Robespierre government, we must act now.”

“I completely agree,” Emmanuel says with a nod of his head. “Why don’t you let me deliver your letter to Monsieur La Metz. He does not live far outside of the city, so it will not take me long to return home.”

“No. I have instructed my hired coachman to deliver the message to Monsieur La Metz, and from there he is to travel to Beauvais to deliver the other letter to the baron.”

“So, in that case, is he going to take me back to my manor?” Emmanuel says.

“Yes.”

The kitchen door bursts open and in walks Edouin. “I’ve come to clean the table Monsieur,” he says as he gathers the dinner trays in his arms.

“Merci, Edouin. It was a delicious dinner,” Samuel says, patting his full belly.

Emmanuel smiles at Samuel. To see a content look on his face is quite refreshing.

“I’m off to bed now,” he says. He carefully pushes the cushioned seat of his chair underneath the large table.

“Goodnight, Emmanuel. I shall see you tomorrow at the crack of dawn,” Samuel says. He accompanies his young friend out of the dining room.

Emmanuel slowly makes his way up the stairs and to the guest sleeping chamber in the east wing, across from Samuel’s study room. He unbuttons his new, navy blue satin coat and waistcoat and drapes them over the chair beside the mahogany nightstand. He then unties the cotton collar around his neck and unbuttons his white silk blouse. As he reaches into the nightstand for his night clothes, Emile and Elle, cross his mind. *I wonder what they are doing right now.*

EMILE GENTLY PULLS THE REINS, BRINGING GEORGES, HIS BROWN

Stallion, to a slow trot. He can feel Elle's warm hands pressed tight against his lower torso.

She whispers into his left ear, "Where are we, Emile?"

Emile looks around. Night has fallen over the Rhone-Valley. Twinkling white stars appear in the dark sky and the last remains of daylight over the eastern horizon rapidly sink beneath the tall blue hills of the Rhone-Alps. The gentle rolling hills shine almost as white as snow underneath the bright moonlight and the potent smell of lavender drifts from the fields nearby, and fills the air around the two lovers. Elle and Emile are aware that they are all alone, but that does not frighten them. In fact, the silence is rather comforting.

"We must be at least ten miles south of my manor, if not more," Emile says. He carefully slides himself off his horse without kicking Elle. Elle clings to his free arm while he leads Georges to the bank of the river.

"I am enjoying this so much that I could stay here alone with you all night," she says.

Emile pats Georges on his back as the animal greedily drinks the water. He then turns his attention away from the horse and slips his arms around Elle's tiny waist. He gently runs his fingers through her long, thick, black curls.

"Elle, I could stay here all night and all day alone with you, but I fear what Robert Couchon would do to you when he finds you," Emile says.

The smile instantly fades from Elle's face. She tries desperately to hold back the tears that spring to her eyes. "I do not want to spend another day at that horrid vineyard, and I certainly do not wish to endure another beating."

"Shh." Emile places his index finger on her cherry lips. "You will not be there for much longer." He brushes his lips against the smooth skin of her forehead.

Elle backs away from him. "Emile, you have said that every night for the past five years." Tears stream down her ashen cheeks.

"Elle, look at me," Emile says. He takes her hand and holds it in a firm grip. "I really want to enjoy this moment with you."

"Then, why don't you take me back home with you?"

Emile lets out a deep sigh. Just as he is about to explain himself to her, he hears the sound of men's voices in the distance. The forlorn look on his face is replaced by one of fear.

Elle, though, does not hear the voices as she is too caught up in her distress. When she sees the horror-stricken expression on Emile's face, she gives him a puzzled look.

"What on earth is wrong, Emile?" she says.

Emile tightens his grip around her wrist. "We must leave—now."

By now she can hear the men's voices—revolutionary soldiers—and they are headed in their direction. They both can even hear the faint rumble of the wagon's wheels on the dirt road and the jingle of the horses' harness. Without warning, Elle feels Emile's strong arms around her back and upper thighs. As if in a dream, her body is lifted up into the air and placed on the backside of Georges. Within seconds Emile is seated in front of her.

"Hold onto me tight, Elle." His whisper is loud enough for her to hear his words and to respond to his request.

As Georges races over the vast landscape, the sound of the men's voices rapidly disappear. Before long, the lovers veer off the road and onto the dreaded lane that leads to Robert Couchon's vineyard.

"Wow, that was a close call," he says in a loud whisper.

Elle does not respond. Her stomach churns when she peers up at the large stone manor before them. The window near the top of the tower is the attic where she eats and sleeps. The tiny, stuffy room has been her home for nine years.

WHEN ELLE WAS AGE SEVEN, HER FATHER ABANDONED HER AND HER family. Her mother passed away from consumption when she was nine. The day after her mother's death, the village priest gathered Elle and her six younger siblings and took them to the small orphanage in Avignon. All of her siblings were adopted within the first fortnight of their arrival, but Elle remained in that horrid place for three long months.

When the Rouchon's came to the orphanage to adopt a child, Robert

strictly told the head nun that he wished to adopt a boy to work on his vineyard, but all she had to offer him was a skinny and undernourished girl—Elle. Robert refused to leave the orphanage without a child, so he begrudgingly took Elle. When he returned to his vineyard, he immediately put her to work.

The first four years at the vineyard were the most dreadful years of her life. The only friend she had was an elderly woman, whose name was Adeline. On their spare time, Adeline would visit Elle in her small room at the top of the tower and teach her how to read, sew and write. Those were the only good moments that Elle truly enjoyed. But, they too did not last long. A week before Elle's twelfth birthday, Adeline moved to Bordeaux to live with her daughter. After a forlorn goodbye, Elle cried bitterly for several days. Determined not to let herself fall in love with another person, she spent the rest of the year making as little contact with the other servants as she could possibly manage. But, her coincidental encounter with Emile at the city's food market changed her life forever.

Actually, it was Emile who first approached Elle. Elle did not see him until he spoke to her. When Elle set her eyes on this handsome nobleman for the first time, she was intimidated. She did not even trust that he was genuine. So, she hastily paid for Robert's food and fled Emile. A few times he called out to her, but she kept running. Every time he met her at the food market, he presented her with a scented rose and each time he was met with a cold response. But, Emile did not care that she was a lowly servant girl. He was drawn to her extraordinary beauty and humble nature and so was determined to have her. His persistence finally paid off when, one day he offered to take her back to the vineyard in his posh coach. Elle reluctantly agreed. But, as she sat inside that coach with the graceful stranger, she instantly felt at ease. The two struck up a lively conversation and by the time they arrived at the manor, she felt like she had known him her entire life. A farewell-until-next time kiss on her cheek made Elle feel warm and fuzzy all over. All barriers came crumbling down and she allowed herself to become vulnerable to love. That familiar apprehensive voice in her head tried its best to hold her back, but she could not force herself to resist Emile's love.

From that day forth, the two spent much time together as lovers and as friends. With Emile, her stagnant and unhappy life bloomed into one full of adventure, passion and friendship. It was through Emile that she met Emmanuel and the other d' LeVasque children. Although Elle got along well with Richard, Jeannette and Adele, she considered Emmanuel her closest friend second to Emile. Emmanuel's solemn, yet gentle and caring nature attracted her to him. And it is still like that to this day. All the precious moments they shared made her harsh life on the Couchon vineyard much more bearable. But that only lasted for the first two years of their relationship. Elle can no longer endure the malicious treatment she receives from Robert and his detestable family.

ELLE'S HEART POUNDS HARDER AGAINST HER CHEST AS THEY NEAR THE wooden door at the northeast wing of the manor. *You've snuck out of the manor and received more beatings than you can count, so you should be used to this by now.* She tries to focus all her attention on Emile, but her attempts are futile. Once both feet are set on the ground, Elle smoothes down her wrinkled skirts, making sure that her petticoat is hidden beneath the cotton skirt of her daily work dress.

"Elle, dear, the moonlight cannot hide the look of fear upon your face," Emile says. He flips the mass of curls behind her thin shoulders.

Elle lowers her head so to avoid the worried look on his face. "Then why do you bring me here every night? You know how I feel, Emile."

On impulse, Emile grabs her by her shoulders and presses his lips against hers. He can feel the tension in her body as she struggles to free herself from his embrace. But, soon enough, she gives in and allows herself to feel the warmth of Emile's lips against hers and the sweetness of his breath on her face. Feelings of pleasure and comfort envelope her body, dispelling all of the anxiety from the trenches of her soul.

"I will stay the night with you," he whispers.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes Elle. Nothing will happen while I am here. I promise you that,"

he says. He drapes his arm around her shoulders, and leads her over to the door.

The two lovers slowly make their way up the dimly lit, winding staircase to the attic room at the top. Fortunately, the only means of entering the tower from inside of the manor is through a short wooden door in the right corner at the foot of the stairs. The door leads into the parlor. But, most of the time it is locked by a heavy iron padlock. Elle can remember the several times Robert locked the exit door from the outside. One time she spent an entire week locked inside of the tower after she returned from the city market hours later than instructed. The only comfort she had was her mother's rosary beads. She spent the entire lonely week studying it while the tears flowed.

Oh, get out of my head. She shakes her head to rid herself of that terrible memory.

Emile gives her worried look. "Elle, my love, what is wrong?"

"Oh—nothing. I'm just dreadfully exhausted," she says, faking a yawn.

"Well, here we are," Emile says. He pushes open the heavy oak door.

Elle lets him scoop her up in his arms and carry her over to the small cot beside the stone wall. He nudges himself closer to her than he already is and kisses her again on her lips. "Elle, I cannot find the right words to explain my love for you. I just wish you would trust me," he says. He then traces his fingertips over her oval face.

"I pray this night will never end." She effortlessly unbuttons Emile's blouse and lifts it over his arms and head.

Caught up in his excitement, Emile lets his shirt fall to the dirty floor below. He then unlaces the back of her dress and petticoat and eagerly pulls them down her thin torso. Normally, she would be humiliated, but tonight she feels strangely comfortable in her nakedness. She loves the way he lays on her cot and the way he looks up at her with that seductive smile on his face.

"I've been waiting for this moment for years," she whispers. A strong feeling of bliss comes over her when she feels Emile's cool, smooth hands against her body. His hands are wonderful and playful. They caress her chest, her small breasts, and down her torso to the bottom of her thighs.

Elle smiles as she glides the palm of her hands up and down his back and around his neck. As she locks her right leg around his, she feels his body press harder against her. Elle lets out a muffled groan. Beads of sweat break out on their bodies.

“I love you,” Emile says over and over again.

She brushes the damp hair from his face. “I love you too, Emile. I want this moment to last forever.”

But it doesn't. Both lovers fall asleep without even realizing it.