

Enchantée

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For Lukas and Tim,
who believed

♠ 1 ♣

Paris, 1789

Yves Rencourt, the chandler's apprentice, had lost his wig.

After the last customer left the shop, he searched through baskets of curling wicks and blocks of beeswax and teetering stacks of bills. *Rien*. It was nowhere to be found. And he needed the wig for tonight: he alone was to deliver candles for the Comte d'Astignac's party, which would last until the sun came up. This was Yves's chance to be noticed. To rise. And he didn't want to show up wearing his own hair, looking ridiculous. He had to look promising. Like someone who could be Somebody.

At least his coat was good, he thought, as he lifted the dove-grey silk from its hook and shrugged it on. And voilà – there the damned wig was, its long white hair tied back with a black satin bow. He pulled the wig on and cocked an admiring eyebrow at his reflection in the window: he was no longer a tradesman's apprentice. He was absolument parfait.

Into a canvas satchel he tucked his most precious candles, the ones he'd tinted the hazy apricots and violets of dawn. All he needed now was money for the carriage. From under the counter he heaved up the strongbox and lifted its lid to reveal a shining pile of coins: rivulets of gold louis and livres and tiny sous. Candles were good business. No matter how little bread there was, how few people bought snuffboxes or plumed hats, they all needed light. In the back, Maître Orland kept the cheap tallow candles that reeked of hooves. They sold more of those every day. But in the front of

the shop, nestled in boxes and dangling from their wicks, were Yves's own lovelies: wax candles, their colours like enchantments. A rose pink that made old women seem young; a watery grey that reminded him of the ocean. And one day soon – he hoped – he'd make candles for the queen.

For, like himself, Marie Antoinette loved extraordinary things. Yves would make candles to suit her every fancy, candles she'd never even dreamed of. He'd be asked to make thousands because, in the endless rooms and halls of Versailles, candles were never lit twice.

From his coat pocket he pulled a leather purse and began to flick livres into the bag. *Clink*, *clink*, *clink*. But one coin made him pause. It was a louis d'or, seemingly no different from the others. Yet to someone who handled candles, always checking the soft wax for imperfections, it felt off. Holding it to the fading afternoon light, he saw nothing wrong. He put the gold coin between his teeth and bit it. It was as hard as any other. And yet. He found another louis and held one in each hand, weighing them. He closed his eyes. Yes – the one in his right hand was lighter. Still, who but a true craftsman such as himself would notice? He was about toss it back in the box when it twitched.

The louis d'or was moving.

Yves yelped and flung it on to the counter. The coin spun in a tight circle and dropped flat. As it lay there, its edges began to ripple, like beeswax in a flame.

'Mon Dieu,' he muttered. What in God's name was happening?

The louis twisted upon itself and flipped over. The king's face with its curved nose had vanished, the familiar crown and shield too. And as Yves stared, the coin lost its roundness, thinning and separating until it looked like a bent harness buckle. He reached out a tentative finger to touch it.

It *was* a bent harness buckle.

With a cry, he reached for the strongbox. Mixed in with the coins was an ugly tin button, dented on one side, and a crooked piece of type, a letter *Q*. Worthless scraps of metal.

He remembered her exactly. He'd even flirted with her. Red hair, freckles across her sharp cheekbones. Hungry. Not that that excused it. How she'd done it he had no idea – but what a fool he was to take a gold louis from a girl in a threadbare cloak. If he hadn't been dreaming of the figure he'd cut at the comte's house, he would have thought twice. Idiot! Maître Orland was going to kill him.

He wrenched open the door and yelled into the crowded street. 'Help! Police! We've been robbed!'

♠ 2 ♣

But Camille had already slipped away through the arches of an arcade, across a tiny cobbled square, down a narrow lane perfumed by the scent of fresh bread, and into the bakery, where she now stood. She set her heavy basket, filled with candles and a rind of cheese, on the floor between her feet.

She inhaled deeply. *Heaven must be like this.* Like piles of raisin-studded rolls, braided brioches that flaked a rain of buttery gold when you bit into them, baguettes as long as your arm and still warm inside, sweet pastries that made your mouth water. The women ahead of her took their time, complaining about the cost of bread.

'Don't blame me,' the baker's wife snapped. 'Blame the weather! Blame the queen! She'd rather fill her wardrobe than her people's bellies.'

'It's true!' another woman grumbled. 'Madame Déficit spends money like it's going out of style. And how does she pay for it all?' The woman grimaced. 'With our money! They'll tax us even after we're dead and in the ground.'

Camille's fingers twitched with impatience. People complained about the king and queen and they complained about the nobles, even when there was absolutely nothing that could be done to change things. Her father the printer had called the nobles bloodsuckers, but even he'd needed their business.

Hurry. Soon it would be evening, shadows gathering in the city's crooked places. Pickpockets would slink out, madams

looking to trap young girls, men who didn't keep their hands to themselves.

'Oui, mademoiselle?'

Camille nodded at the day-old loaves. 'I'll take one of those.' She hesitated. 'And a sweet pastry, s'il vous plaît.'

Snuggling her cloak round her shoulders, Camille stepped out into the lane. Over the rooftops of Paris, the sky hung like a lead curtain, and the air tasted of metal. This morning she'd found a skin of ice stretched over the water jug in the kitchen. But cold May or not, there was nothing for it; she had one last errand and the blurry sun was already sinking behind the towers of Notre-Dame. Leaving the lane for a busy street, Camille dodged piles of manure and pools of horse piss, not to mention whatever filth people tossed from their windows. To keep from gagging, she burrowed her nose into her worn cloak. It smelt faintly of her mother's perfume.

Her pocket felt too large and empty, only a few sous wedged against its lining. With her fingertips, she traced the coins' thin edges. Still round. She didn't dare to take them out and count them, not on the street. There'd be enough for Alain's wine.

As long as the coins didn't change.

At the wine merchant's, she chewed the edge of her fingernail, waiting for him to fill a wine bottle from a barrel. When she left, she kept her basket pressed close to her side. She avoided the quarter's crumbling passageways, their entrances as narrow as the doors of tombs. She could almost feel the hands that waited there. Somewhere above her in the tilting buildings, a child sobbed.

As Camille turned the corner, a girl as young as her sister came running down the street. Her white face was rouged with hectic circles, her hair aflame, her eyebrows darkened to seduce, and her corset pulled tight to give curves to her child's body. Under the

dirty hem of her dress, bare feet flashed as she dodged shoppers and workmen.

'Stop, whore!' shouted a constable as he pushed through the crowd.

A prickling of fear made Camille pull her cloak up over her own red hair. But she couldn't take her eyes from the half-dressed girl, running like a spreading fire. She was living the life Camille feared – her nightmares made flesh.

'You there!' the constable shouted at Camille. 'Stop her!'

Camille shrank back against the wall. As the running girl dashed closer, Camille glimpsed the whites of her eyes in the half-dark. The raw leanness of her face, the bruises on her arms – and the tiny roll of bread she clutched in her hand. How many days could she make that last while her stomach churned with hunger? And then what? Camille felt in her pocket for her last few real sous.

'Thief!' yelled the constable. His face was wild with anger as the girl slipped away through the crowds.

It was too risky. Camille clenched her empty hand as the sadness welled up inside her. It was wrong not to help – but it was too dangerous. With the constable coming, there was nothing she could do. The horror of living on the streets was too big, a wall of fear that blocked out everything.

As the girl fled past, her scared eyes flicked to Camille's.

Then both girls vanished into darkening Paris.

♠ 3 ♣

Camille lived at the top of an ancient building on the rue Charlot. The stone edifice had once stood proudly, but now it leaned against its neighbour, as if tired from standing straight all those years. Unlocking a heavy door, Camille let herself into the courtyard. In the close darkness, a dog yelped; a neighbour's hen flapped against her skirts. Up in their garret window, a light glowed: Alain had returned. She imagined her older brother hanging up his officer's cloak and kicking off his boots, sitting by the fire and roaring with laughter at some jest, tickling the cat. The way he used to be.

She started to climb the stairs, the heavy basket bumping against her legs. The once-grand staircase spiralled up seven treacherous flights, but she knew where the rotten spots were. As she passed the third-floor landing, a door swung open.

'Mademoiselle Durbonne? A word.' Wearing a grease-flecked apron, Madame Lamotte raised her candlestick towards Camille. 'The rent is two weeks overdue. This is not a charity home.'

Camille blinked. She had nothing close to the full rent of two hundred livres – eight fat gold louis – and she couldn't risk giving magicked coins to Madame. When they reverted to scraps – and they would, because Camille couldn't get the metal to hold its shape – Madame would throw them out, bien sûr, no matter how much she'd liked their parents and felt sorry for the orphans. Then they would be tramps, living under a bridge. Prostitutes. Or dead.

Camille hated to beg. 'A few days?'

Madame Lamotte nodded begrudgingly.

Camille curtsied and began to climb the stairs again.

'One more thing,' the landlady called after her. 'Your brother.'

Camille stopped. Even Madame had noticed. 'I'm sorry,' she said, trying to keep the exasperation from her voice.

'I haven't said anything yet!'

'Go on, madame.' If it had to do with Alain, it was bound to be bad news.

The landlady pitched her voice low. 'Just be careful. Keep an eye on him.'

'Of course, madame.' It was impossible, a fairytale task. It'd take a thousand eyes to watch him.

When Camille reached the seventh floor, she paused, listening. Was that . . . music? She opened the door to their apartment. In the middle of the bare room, her little sister, Sophie, was dancing a sarabande while Alain piped on his army piccolo. In the candlelight, her hair shone pale gold, her wide-set blue eyes bright with amusement. She looked so much like their mother with her delicate features and slightly upturned nose, a princess in one of Perrault's fairy tales. Sophie had always been small: feet and hands dainty as cats' paws, an enviable waist that seemed even tinier as her skirts spun around her.

When Sophie saw Camille, she paused midstep. Her face was happy but flushed, the pulse racing in her neck.

'Join the revels, Camille!' Alain lounged in the best chair, boots on the table. The fire's light caught on the scruff of his unshaven cheek, while the cocked hat he wore slid the rest of his face into shadow. His hair, once golden like Sophie's, had darkened to amber and was tied with a black ribbon that threatened to come undone.

'I know you love to dance, darling,' Camille said carefully as she watched Alain out of the corner of her eye, 'but you've been so ill—'

'Alain asked me to.' Sophie's narrow chest heaved. 'He wanted to see if I was still a good dancer.'

'And she is!' Alain's smile gleamed. 'I'll find her a husband yet. See if I don't.'

'Don't tease, Alain. No one will marry me now.' Sophie bent her head so her hair hid the few smallpox scars on her forehead. 'Isn't that so, Camille?'

Camille hesitated. There was no good answer to this question.

'Whatever Camille says, don't listen! At court the grand ladies wear beauty patches to cover their pocks.' Alain raised his wine glass. 'To Sophie! Keep up your dancing and your needlework, and we'll find you a husband, handsome as a prince.'

'She's fifteen, Alain.' Camille shot him a dark look. 'Come sit by the fire, Sophie. Catch your breath while I put out the food. Boots down, Alain.' She gave his feet a shove; it was a relief to set the heavy basket down. Brushing off the table, she placed the cheese and bread, along with a knife, on a scarred wooden board. The sweet pastry she handed to Sophie.

'Oh, it's too much,' she said, but her face shone.

'Bien! Fatten her up, Camille. You've let her go to skin and bones.'

Camille nearly snapped: I *let her*? *It was* my *fault*? But she pressed the words down.

'Something in the basket for me?' Alain demanded.

Camille set the flask of wine on the table.

'Nicely done,' he said. 'Pour yourself a little glass, too. We've plenty now.'

'What do you mean, "plenty"?' She saw a bottle by the fireplace and her heart sank. 'Alain, where's the chicken?'

'What chicken?'

Camille sensed Sophie stiffen. The room suddenly felt very, very small.

'You know how Monsieur Dimnier always admired Maman?' Camille kept her voice even. 'I asked you to pick up the chicken he'd set aside for us. One that hadn't gained weight; one he'd had to kill early.'

Alain frowned. 'You didn't tell me anything about a skinny chicken.'

She had, but it didn't matter now. 'I'll go fetch it; it's not far.' Camille held out her hand. 'I'll need the money back.'

Alain laughed. 'You'd better make some more, then, because I don't have it.'

'What?'

'Just what I said.' Alain took a swig of wine and wiped his mouth with his sleeve. 'It's gone.'

'You can't just squander our *real* money!' She reached into her pocket. Just as she'd thought, apart from a few real sous, the rest had lost their magic and were now what they'd been this morning: bent, useless nails she'd prised out of a broken door. 'I can't pay Dimnier with this!' she stormed. 'We have to give him real money, remember? If he stops selling to us, what then?' She threw the nails on to the table so hard they ricocheted to the floor.

Alain shrugged. 'Just go further away.'

Camille stamped her foot. 'There is nowhere else! You've no idea how far I had to go just for the bread. Dimnier's the last one in our quarter who trusts us. And you threw away our chicken for a bottle of wine.'

'How was I to know you'd remember to buy some?'

Blood thrummed in Camille's head. It wasn't easy to make ends meet using la magie ordinaire – everyday magic – to transform bits of metal into coins. These days, her hands never stopped

shaking, and she'd become nearly as thin as Sophie. Little by little, magic was erasing her. Sometimes she felt it might kill her.

She grabbed the bottle of wine.

'Don't.' Alain swayed to his feet. 'Give that to me.'

'You don't deserve it!' Hoisting the bottle over her head, Camille hurled it into the washing tub. A grinding shatter – and the acrid scent of wine filled the room.

Alain grabbed the knife on the table and pointed it at her. 'That was my wine.'

'It was mine, idiot. I worked for it. I bought it.'

'Hush, Camille!' Sophie said, desperate. 'Please don't argue! Alain stands in our father's place now. You must listen to him.'

Camille rounded on her sister. 'Our father wasn't a nineteen-year-old wastrel!'

Alain lurched towards Camille, steadying himself on the table. Despite the cold, his face glistened with sweat. His eyes had a faraway look that raised the tiny hairs on her neck.

'Go sleep it off, Alain. I'll clean up – comme d'habitude,' she added in an undertone. As always.

Before she could think, his knife was at her throat. She froze, sensing each throb of her pulse just under the skin.

'What are you doing, Alain? Put away the knife.'

Alain's hand shook, and then – a bright line of pain. A trickle of blood curled into the hollow of her collarbone, hot and wet. All these weeks of threatening to hurt her, and now, drunk on who knows how many bottles of wine, he finally had. She wanted to rage and to weep at the injustice of it. But she did not flinch.

'You aren't my master, Camille Durbonne,' Alain growled. 'I'm a soldier, and I earn my keep.'

'Then go earn it. Show up for duty for once. Pay the rent.' She didn't move. Everything in her was shouting at her to run, but she

would never let him see her fear. *Never.* 'I can't keep on like this.'

'Oh, I'll do my part. And in the meantime,' he said, so close that Camille was forced to inhale the sour stink of his breath, 'do the only thing you're good for. Go work la magie.' Dropping the knife, he stumbled towards the door and flung it open.

Furious and heartsick, she listened as his stumbling footsteps echoed down the stairs. Working magic would be easy now, thanks to him. The petty magic of la magie ordinaire took all the skill she'd honed under her mother's supervision – and it took sorrow. Without sorrow, there was no transformation, no magic.

Tonight she would have plenty to spare.



That night, nightmares tore through Sophie's sleep. They'd begun when she was sick with the pox. Sometimes in her dreams, she'd told Camille, she went back in time, six months, a year, to when their parents were alive, kind and happy. Other times they only *seemed* alive, for when Sophie embraced them, they crumbled to ash in her arms. Or it was three months ago, when they were dying of smallpox, and Sophie had to retch up whatever scrap of food she'd managed to eat in order to feed them. It was an endless horror of fear, guilt and anguish.

Perched on the edge of Sophie's bed, Camille watched as Sophie's eyes see-sawed under their bluish lids and tensed each time Sophie drew a shuddering breath. When she was close to waking, she gasped for air, like someone drowning.

Then she woke, her eyes pinched tight. 'Please,' she begged. 'My sleep medicine.'

Camille held the brown bottle of laudanum up against the candle flame. It was nearly empty. She spooned the last few mouthfuls between Sophie's lips. It didn't take long before the drug worked its drowsy lull. Her eyelids fluttering, Sophie sank back into the pillow.

'In my dream, Maman had no fingers,' Sophie mumbled. 'She had sold them all for food. Stay with me, Camille, so the dreams don't come back.'

Holding Sophie's thin hand, Camille tucked her knees up under her chemise and rested against the wall. Sophie's coverlet