

T W O

*14 July 1789—September 1790*



On the fourteenth of July, two days after Eugénie and Hortense had fled the uproar in the Palais-Royal, the people destroyed the old fortress-prison of the Bastille, the hated symbol of oppression. Initially, they were searching for gunpowder and cartridges for the muskets they had stolen from Les Invalides, but in the turmoil the men defending the prison were savagely killed.

On the seventeenth, there was a special ceremony at the Hôtel de Ville—the town hall. Hortense took Eugénie to see the king acknowledge both the new National Guard, formed from the citizens' militia, and a revolutionary council, called the Commune, that would now govern Paris. The king's carriage arrived first; General Lafayette, the people's war hero, who had been appointed commander of the National Guard, rode behind it on a white horse, his beaky nose pointing the way. Sixty thousand citizens followed him noisily, armed with muskets, pikes, and cudgels.

Eugénie watched as the king stumbled out onto the balcony. He mumbled a few words and a tricolor cockade was stuffed into his hat. He had lost most of his personal army, most of his power

to the National Assembly, and his aura of royal invulnerability. He looked bemused—belittled—as he blinked shortsightedly at the shouting crowds.

Eugénie thought he did not look like a king at all.

The king had been forced to agree that the National Assembly should prepare a constitution. In the streets strangers fell on one another's necks in joy: The Revolution was over—or so it was generally thought.

But the country was still bankrupt, and still the people starved. In the sweltering heat of summer, they ransacked the empty bakers' shops; they accused the aristocrats of hoarding grain. While the comte and Eugénie's older brother, Armand, were away at Haut-bois, Eugénie and Hortense hid indoors with the shutters tightly closed, while the mob roared through the streets, overturning any carriage that bore the crest of a nobleman.

Eugénie stood in the dim, stifling withdrawing room on the first floor of her guardian's mansion house. Her silk dress, limp with the heat, clung to her as she peered down through a crack in the shutters. A group of men with pitchforks was running along the lane below in the hot sunlight, their filthy faces streaming with sweat: workmen or *sans culottes*, in long, dirty trousers. The sinister words of the "Ça Ira," the revolutionary song, came hoarsely up to her.

*"Ah, ça ira! Les aristocrats à la lanterne!"*

The street lanterns hung from iron supports that jutted out at right angles from the houses; they were used by the mob as convenient gibbets. Eugénie trembled as she listened. *Why do they hate us so much?* she thought. *What have we done?*

She asked Hortense, who was standing silently in the shadows behind her.

“The people hear about the extravagances of the king’s court, while they wear rags and can’t afford to eat.” Hortense shrugged. “The nobility have too many privileges. And they do not pay the *taille*.”

The *taille* was the main tax, and Eugénie could see it was unfair that only poor people had to pay it. “But will a new constitution change things?” she said, staring through the shutters again. “Will they stop threatening us, then?”

“People have long memories,” said Hortense. “There’s a chasm between the aristocrats and the poor. It’s so deep it can only be resolved by something great and terrible.”

Hortense was not given to affection, but Eugénie felt her hand touch her back lightly. “Many aristocrats are emigrating, fleeing the country before it is too late. You and your brother should do the same, mademoiselle.”

The men, still singing raucously, had disappeared into the rue Saint-Honoré.

“Armand will never leave,” Eugénie said firmly. “He is not a coward.” She turned from the shutters, but her voice wavered as she looked into Hortense’s intelligent, pitying eyes.

“What would those men have done if I had gone out into the lane?” She put her hands to her face. “Would they have hanged me? Yet I have done nothing. Have I, Hortense?”

For the next few months there was a deceptive calm in Paris. The National Assembly drew up the principles of a constitution: the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. “All men are born free and equal, in their rights.” The Paris season was the most glittering that it had ever been—either a feast before famine or a celebration, depending on one’s viewpoint.

Then on the fifth of October, a crowd of market women

stormed the Hôtel de Ville, which had become the headquarters of the Commune. They demanded bread for their starving families. In the wild, wet night they gathered in the Place Louis XV, waving pitchforks, broomsticks, and flaming torches, determined to march to Versailles and put their complaints to the king. They made such a fearful noise when they set off the following morning that it woke Eugénie as she lay between her lace-edged sheets, sleeping late after a visit to the Comédie-Française.

The king, the queen, and their two children were forced from their gilded palace in Versailles to the drafty and decaying Tuileries Palace, not far from the house belonging to Eugénie's guardian. King Louis XVI had become a prisoner of the people in all but name. The great and terrible thing of which Hortense had spoken was starting to happen.

One September morning the following year, Eugénie's brother, Armand, and their guardian, Comte Lefaurie of Haut-bois, were talking in the withdrawing room of the mansion house.

The elderly comte had lowered his great girth onto an armless chair that he knew from experience would take his weight, despite its delicate-looking carved legs. His young ward Armand was standing facing him, before the mantelpiece. Earlier that morning he had been fencing with his friend, Julien de Fortin, and his skin was still flushed with heat; but he had come down from his rooms with alacrity when a servant brought him the comte's summons. It was best to stay on the right side of the comte, who was still paying him an allowance and permitting him to stay in his house. He wondered a little apprehensively why his guardian wanted to see him.

The comte yawned. "I declare, long evenings, such as we

endured last night, are too much at my age. Give me my dinner at five. Ten o'clock and I am asleep!"

"It was a glittering gathering, though, was it not, monsieur?" Armand had been dazzled and thrilled by it, but thought it would appear naive to say so. His blue eyes, set wide apart, had a perpetual expression of wonder and delight in the world.

The comte snorted in derision. He rubbed his right leg in its white silk stocking, and rested it on a footstool; he suffered from gout.

"Madame de Staël's salons are always like that. Boudoir politics! Be careful. You'll be sucked in. She likes young men, particularly young lawyers."

"It's true that I have now become a bourgeois!" said Armand, nervously trying a joke. Unlike the middle classes—the bourgeoisie—it was most unusual for a member of the *noblesse de court* to take up the profession of law, but Armand wanted to rebuild his family's fortune. At the moment that was far off: He was still studying for his bar exams.

"A bourgeois is not a bad thing to be nowadays," said the comte thoughtfully. "They are stronger than us economically, now that the nobility has been stripped of its tax privileges and feudal dues." He regarded Armand with his sharp eyes. "Your poor father would be proud of you. You must qualify and not become distracted by the Revolution. I know you go to the Jacobin Club, that hotbed of Freemasons and revolutionaries!"

"I go to find out what mayhem they plan next," protested Armand, flushing. Was this why the comte wanted to see him? "But I am no radical, I do assure you, monsieur! I desire a liberal constitution—as you do—but I'm also a royalist."

"Soon it may not be possible to be both, Armand."

"Soon? Then you do not think the Revolution over?"

The comte shook his head. "The people have learned a dangerous thing—that violence and bloodshed bring power." He leaned forward.

"Louis is well guarded in the Tuileries Palace. But are they preventing an attack on him, or his escape? He will be forced to sign the constitution when it is finally drawn up. When I visited him last week, there was a hunted look in his eyes. What will happen next, I wonder?"

The comte sighed, took off his wig, and put it over his foot. His scalp was baby pink, with a fringe of sparse white hair. "At least I'll not be here to see it. I am retiring to Haut-bois. The peasants are still loyal to me at the moment. Let us hope that they will remain so in a year's time!"

"We'll miss you in Paris," said Armand politely. He did not love his guardian, but he respected him.

"Tosh! I am too old for all this. The world I know has been destroyed almost overnight. I'm a relic of the past. Even my servants have become sullen and lazy." The comte wiped his hand over the surface of the rosewood bureau beside him and blew the dust from his fingers in disgust.

"But the new house on the Champs-Élysées? I thought you were planning to move there?"

"Paris is covered with holes where grand new buildings were to rise before the Revolution. My house on the Champs-Élysées is one of them. All work has stopped on it. I trust you to visit it from time to time in my stead and supervise the builders when they begin again—if they ever do. I shall go on paying your allowance so that you can continue your studies, of course."

"Thank you, monsieur," Armand said gratefully, relieved that the comte had said nothing more about his revolutionary activi-

ties and that the conversation seemed at an end. “While you’re away I shall live a studious life and look after my sister.”

He was startled when the comte said abruptly, “That won’t be necessary.”

Armand, about to make his farewell bow, stared at him.

“It is high time Eugénie went to a convent to finish her education, like other young girls of her class,” said the comte. “She must learn some self-discipline. I have selected the Convent of the Sacred Spirit, which my own sister attended years ago. Eugénie will be safe within its walls whatever happens in Paris.”

Armand hesitated. “But Hortense, her governess? They are very close. Eugénie will be devastated to bid her farewell!”

The comte’s frown made deep folds in his fleshy forehead.

“The governess is one of the reasons I have made my decision. She has no regard for her position or place. She reads revolutionary newspapers, articles inciting violence—one of the servants told me so. I have seen her attending the National Assembly with a tricolor rosette pinned to her hat.”

“There is no law against women attending its sessions, monsieur,” said Armand mildly. “I believe many do—aristocratic ladies among them, who wear the tricolor.”

“She fills Eugénie’s head with nonsense!” retorted the comte.

“I doubt my little sister pays attention. I suspect she is more interested in the pretty clothes and trinkets you lavish on her so generously, monsieur!”

But the comte was not to be stopped. He held up a pudgy hand that sparkled with diamonds. “Women should not be involved in politics. They do not have the vote. Women have already had far too much to do with this revolution. Meanwhile, I do not believe Hortense spends any time with Eugénie on

embroidery or mending. The child has no accomplishments at all!"

"I taught her to fence at Chauvais," Armand offered, feeling he should defend his sister. "And she learned to ride and shoot there as well as any youth."

The comte glared. "Was it you who involved her in those inappropriate pastimes?"

"No, monsieur." Armand cleared his throat. "Her groom."

"That is exactly what I mean. After the death of her mother, she was allowed to run wild at Chauvais, and your father indulged her. Now she must learn the proper duties of a woman of her class."

Armand was silent, his face doubtful.

The comte shifted his gouty leg irritably. "Do you not understand? Eugénie has no title—not that that means much, now that we've been stripped of them—but worse, with the estate bankrupt, she has no money coming to her when she is of age. Her only chance is to make a good marriage with a wealthy husband."

"But I'll protect her, monsieur," said Armand eagerly. "Soon I'll be earning."

"The road is long and hard for a young barrister before he can make a name for himself, and who knows what the future holds for the profession now. No, Eugénie must marry and marry well." The comte paused.

"Raoul Goulet has observed her out walking with her governess in the Tuileries Gardens. He has asked for her hand."

Armand's face fell in shock. "Raoul Goulet? But he is so much older, monsieur! You cannot allow such a thing!"

The comte's frown deepened. "I am Eugénie's guardian. I am concerned for her future welfare. Goulet is the richest man in

Paris. And he is in excellent health. I have stipulated that no marriage can take place until Eugénie is sixteen.”

“But Raoul Goulet must be fifty!” cried Armand. “I have never spoken to the man, but he has no rank or breeding.”

The comte’s sharp eyes grew very cold. “Titles mean nothing anymore, since we are forbidden to use them. Eugénie does not need to love Goulet. If she carries out her wifely duties, she will be more than well provided for. She can take lovers.”

“Monsieur, there is something about Goulet I do not like. You know what they call him?”

“Le Fantôme?” said the comte impatiently. “The name signifies nothing. He is a well-known figure in Parisian society, attends every occasion.”

“That is exactly it,” said Armand desperately. “He is like a ghost, always listening in the shadows. I believe he confers with the Watching Eye, the brotherhood of Freemasons he has formed. Whose side is he on?”

The comte sighed wearily. “He is like you and me, Armand, trying to support both the king and the people’s constitution.”

Armand bit his lip. “Monsieur, I beg you, reconsider.”

The diamonds flashed with a hard glitter as the comte waved his plump fingers again dismissively. “It is too late. That is why I wished to see you. I signed the marriage contract last night.”

“You should not have done such a thing!” Armand burst out. “Have you told Eugénie?”

“Of course not. She is still a child, she would not understand my reasons. And I forbid you to mention it to her either.”

Armand stood rigid, the blood draining from his face. He was mute, not daring to defy the comte, yet shamefully aware of his own cowardice.

The comte's lips tightened. "I have taken you and your sister in, regardless of the inconvenience, for your father saved my life in that benighted war against the British in America that helped to bankrupt our country. But I mean to carry out my duties as guardian until you come of age, Armand. If you qualify as a barrister, which you cannot do without my money, and Eugénie marries, then I will know I have done my best for you both and repaid the debt I owe your father in full."

He took the wig off his foot and thrust it back on his head, where it hung down lopsidedly above his fiercely glinting eyes.

"Now ring the bell. First we need to dismiss the governess."

Eugénie had been standing at the window of her little salon on the third floor of the comte's old mansion house.

If she craned her head sideways she could see the trees of the Tuileries Gardens, already looking dry and yellow after the hot summer, and the roof of the *manège*, the former riding school, where Hortense went so often to watch the National Assembly meet. If she opened her window and leaned out, she could even see the gloomy facade of the Tuileries Palace at the end of the Gardens, where the royal family lived now. By all accounts it was a very drafty and uncomfortable place. She would hate it herself.

She looked around her comfortable sitting room with complacency; the comte gave her everything she wanted. Except love . . .

There was a familiar step on the stairs outside her door.

"Armand!" She skipped joyfully across the room and flung her arms around her brother. "I am so glad you have come to see me! It has been so dull all morning! Can we take the *berline* and drive out to the Bois de Boulogne this afternoon? Will you ask

Monsieur le Comte? He will allow it, I'm sure! I shall wear the new hat Madame Rose Bertin designed for me!"

Armand disengaged himself gently; his face was grave.

Her arms dropped to her sides, and her heart filled with a terrible foreboding. He looked as he had at Chauvais when he came to tell her that Papa had died.

"Why, Armand," she faltered. "Whatever is the matter?"

Armand had watched as the comte dismissed Hortense. The young woman did not flinch or shed a tear or beg him to reconsider. She merely nodded, as if she had been expecting such a thing. A small ironic smile played over her lips.

*I know you are a revolutionary like me, Hortense,* Armand thought. *But there is such a difference between us!* He was in awe of her strength and self-control, yet almost frightened by it.

When he went upstairs to tell Eugénie that Hortense was to leave and she would have to continue her education at the convent, he had never seen his sister turn so white, not even when Papa died.

Minutes later, Hortense herself came into the little salon. Eugénie ran to her without speaking and flung her arms around her. Tears streamed down her face.

Hortense stood as straight and stiff as a pillar, unmoving. Finally, one of her hands came up to touch Eugénie's shining hair. "Be careful, *ma petite,*" Armand heard her whisper. "Be very careful. Things are going to change."

After she had left and Eugénie had huddled, weeping, into an armchair, Armand found he could not bring himself to tell his sister about the secret marriage contract. He stared at her, the words sticking in his throat. *There is time,* he thought. *I will do it later, when she is not so distressed.*

Eugénie looked up at him through tear-drenched eyes. She had lost Hortense, and soon she would have to say good-bye to Armand as well. She had passed the Convent of the Sacred Spirit in the *berline* once, with Hortense.

It looked like a prison.