

The pounding on the door made her jump. Honoria had been lulled by the quiet in the house. With the League out on a mission, she'd worked in silence for the past few hours. The small house on the Rue du Jour was tucked away in the shadow of the north façade of Saint Eustace church. The little street was close enough to the Palais-Royal and the Place de la Révolution for the members of the League to stay apprised of all that was happening in Paris. And yet the Rue du Jour was for all intents and purposes nothing but an ancient walkway dating from the time of the walls of Philippe Auguste. It garnered little interest from any but those who had business there or those seeking to attend services at Saint Eustace. And since in these times of revolution praying to anyone but the Cult of the Supreme Being was not prudent, few ventured inside the medieval church.

Honoria resisted the urge to run and hide or to rush to open the door. Instead she gathered the false documents she had been drafting and placed them and the pen and ink she used inside the false panel in the wall. Then she closed the panel, made certain it was not visible, and scanned the dining table to ensure she had not forgotten anything. A teacup and saucer sat on the table, the cup half full because she'd forgotten about it as she began her work. Beside the cup was a tricolor cockade.

The pounding on the door sounded again and Honoria hastily pinned the cockade to her dress before going to answer it.

It couldn't be soldiers. The soldiers usually came at night and made such a noise searching all the houses in the nearby streets and boulevards, the League knew well in advance when they would arrive. Still, Honoria's heart pounded. The Committee of Public Safety's law of suspects meant virtually anyone considered an enemy of the revolution or likely an enemy could be arrested. The nobles still in France had already been imprisoned as had former government officials, as well as anyone having an association with those nobles who fled the country for fear of their lives.

As she was a British citizen in a country at war with Britain and working to snatch the "enemy" out from under the noses of the Committee, Honoria was

doubly at risk. Fortunately, her French was flawless—thanks to her family’s origins in Brussels, and her papers impeccable—thanks to her skills in forgery.

If neither of those attributes saved her, she had a weapon of last resort.

At the door, Honoria paused. “Who is it, please?”

“Open up!” a man said in cultured French, slightly slurred.

“Of course, citizen, but who is calling?”

“I have a paper,” he said.

Honoria furrowed her brow. This was no group of soldiers. Had someone stumbled upon the wrong house? “Go away, citizen. My husband is not at home. If you return later, he will speak with you.” She had no husband, but it was what Ffoulkes had instructed her to say if anyone should come to call.

“Open the door,” the man said again. His voice had grown weaker, but still full of authority. “And I’ll show you the damned paper with the red flower.”

He’d spoken in French, and so his words had been *la fleur rouge*. It made no sense. It was a madman at the door.

And then dread slid down her back like an icicle. *La fleur rouge*. A scarlet pimpernel. The Pimpernel’s symbol was nothing more than a small red flower.

Her fingers fumbled with the locks, tripping over them in her haste. She flung the door wide and caught her breath. Blood dripped down the man’s cheek from a gash to his temple. His clothing was covered in mud and dried blood, and he leaned on the side of the door, barely supporting himself.

“Oh, my God,” she whispered. She pulled him inside before anyone might see him, and then wondered if it was already too late. If one of her neighbors had spotted him on her doorstep, she was doomed.

They were all doomed.

“Not God,” he said. “Citoyen Bourgogne—at least that’s what they call me.”

“Do not speak,” she hissed, leaning him against a chair while she hurried to close the door and turn the locks before anyone might walk by and see or hear them. It would take no more than a moment for a passerby to ascertain what she already had in one quick glance. This man was a noble running for

his life. Honoria did not know if he'd escaped soldiers, a mob, or the Conciergerie itself, and at the moment she did not care. She just needed to lock the dratted door and close all the drapes. She did this with speed and efficiency.

Alex had told her not to close the drapes unless there was an emergency. Closed drapes made one look as though one had something to hide, but if a French noble bleeding on one's carpet was not an emergency, Honoria did not know what an emergency was. Oh, how she wished Alex or Hastings or any of the League was here. They would know what to do. She was just a forger and an antiquarian. What did she know about head wounds and fleeing nobles?

When she'd secured the ground floor as best as she could at the moment, she turned back to the man, who had sat in a chair in the entryway. "I do beg your pardon," he said, indicating the upholstery now stained with his blood. "Very bad form of me." He looked up at her, slowly, a lock of his chocolate brown hair falling over one moss-green eye. Even with the blood and the fatigue on his face, she could see he was a man of beauty. "Is your Pimpernel here?" His words were slurred, probably from pain as the gash on his temple looked shallow but painful.

"We'll not speak of him at the moment," she said. "We must clean you up and hide you."

"I'd prefer you feed me. If you are making a list, do add that, won't you? I could use food and wine. Oh, and clean linens."

She raised a hand before he could make more requests. "No wonder they are cutting your heads off," she muttered.

"On second thought," he said, "I may just rest a moment." His head lolled back, and Honoria gasped when his eyes closed.

"No, no, monsieur! You cannot sleep here. You must go upstairs."

"Can't. Can't open my eyes."

She grabbed his hand and tugged. His skin was soft, his fingers uncallused, and yet there was strength in those long, elegant digits. If she did not usher him upstairs before he collapsed, she would have to wait until

Dewhurst or Mackenzie returned. The nobleman—Bourgogne—was a good foot taller than she and three or four stone heavier. The secret space between the floors was under her bed. If he'd been followed or soldiers came to search, she had to be able to hide him there.

“Please, monsieur. Stand and walk with me. You may lean on me, and if you cooperate, I will give you wine and fresh linen.”

Lord Saint Denys had left some clothing when he'd gone back to England a few days ago. She could give that to this Bourgogne. They were of a similar size and build.

He opened his eyes, so green they reminded her of the English countryside in Derbyshire, where she'd spent time in her youth. “I like how you call me *monsieur*. I've missed it.” His eyes closed again.

“No, no, no!” She wedged her shoulder under his arm and scooted him forward. His head thunked heavily on her shoulder, staining her dress with blood. “Monsieur, please. Stand. You must.”

He heaved out a disgusted sigh and clenched his hands on the arms of the chair. Then with no small effort, he pushed himself to his feet. He swayed drunkenly before he caught his balance. “I am at your command, mademoiselle.”

She could not stop herself from glancing at the door. Had that been a noise outside? “Quick. Up these stairs. I will help you.”

She put her arm around his waist and draped one of his arms over her shoulder. Under her fingertips, the silk of his coat felt smooth and finely woven. His waist was trim, and she could feel the muscles in his back move as he walked. He smelled faintly of oranges and sandalwood. It was a pleasant scent, and not one she'd expected from a man who had just stumbled in, bleeding, off the street.

“Where did you get the foolscap?” she asked as she could see he had crumpled it in his hand.

“I suppose from the Scarlet Pimpernel.”

“Shh! Don't—”

“Ah, yes. You said that already. Shall we call him *FR* for *la fleur rouge*?”

“If that suits you.”

“He saved me from the mob.”

Honorina almost stumbled on the step. Surprise, more than his weight, made her legs buckle—that and though they’d only walked up six steps, she was exhausted. “What mob?”

“The one slaughtering the inmates in La Force.”

La Force. He’d been in La Force. He’d escaped La Force, and he would be sought. When his body was not found among the dead, the soldiers would come looking for him.

“I see I’ve rendered you speechless.”

“La Force is not an easy place to be rid of,” she said.

“On the contrary, many are rid of it every day. They sneeze into the sack and go to their just reward.”

Three more steps. If she could but support him for three more steps.

“You know...what I mean,” she panted.

“I do. And I can’t for the life of me understand why *FR* would help me escape. God knows—oh, pardon me—the Supreme Being knows I do not deserve it.”

They reached the last step and Honorina’s legs gave way. She sank to the floor, and he with her. She cushioned him from the worst of the fall, laying his head down gently.

“Are you certain it was *FR*?” She had reason to suspect the Pimpernel had returned to London with Lord Denys.

“Who else?” he asked, and of course, she did not answer.

“Just leave me here.” He cradled his head in both hands. “My head feels as though it will explode.”

“We must clean the wound.”

He laughed, a derisive sound. “So it does not become infected? No, we would not want to deprive Madame Guillotine by killing me with an infection.”

Honorina took a deep breath, strength returning along with a steely determination. "Neither will claim you, monsieur, if I have anything to say about it. But you cannot rest here. If the soldiers should come looking for you, it would be better if you were in my bedchamber."

His eyes, which had been either closed or unfocused suddenly shifted and looked directly at her. He really did have beautiful eyes. She'd never seen that shade of green before. People were always commenting on her eyes, but when she looked in the mirror, she found them almost unsettling, such a strange shade of blue were they. His eyes were the green of peace and tranquility.

The way he looked at her did not calm her, though. His gaze swept her from forehead to knee, and she was suddenly aware she'd taken off her fichu earlier and never donned it again. Her dress was modest, but she felt exposed without the covering over the top of her chest. The glasses she wore to disguise herself were forgotten somewhere with the fichu, and she had not straightened her hair after she'd dealt with the mess from the domiciliary visit of the night before. She could feel loose strands of it tickling her neck.

"I wouldn't dream of refusing an invitation to your bedchamber, but I'm afraid at the moment I would not acquit myself very well."

Honorina felt the heat rush to her cheeks and knew they must be pink. "There is a hidden space under the floor in my chamber. We hide men such as you there when the soldiers come. That is all I meant."

He smiled at her, a charming smile, even with the smears of blood on his cheek. "I'm sure it is," he said in a tone that indicated he didn't believe her for a moment.

Honorina felt her cheeks heat further, and this time not from embarrassment but anger. How dare he act as though she was propositioning him? Did he think he was that irresistible?

She would show him otherwise. "Stand up, monsieur." She didn't feel quite so exhausted now that anger flowed through her veins. "It's this way."

She rose and waited for him to climb to his feet. She resisted the urge to help him when he all but lost his balance and tumbled down again. But he slapped a hand on the wall and levered himself up. "Which way?" he asked.

"Follow me."

He did, leaning one shoulder on the wall. The house was small, and they reached the bedchamber she shared with Alex quickly. "Two beds," he said from the doorway. "Which is yours?"

"You may lie down here," she said, giving him Alex's bed. Alex might complain later, but Honoria didn't want him in her bed. She didn't want the scent of oranges and sandalwood to linger and enter her dreams.

He sat heavily on Alex's small bed, then all but fell onto his side. Honoria didn't know whether to divest him of his shoes or see to his wound. Since his feet were still hanging off the bed, she went to the pitcher of water on the washstand and poured it into a bowl. Taking several cloths with her, she crossed to him and set the bowl on the floor beside the bed.

She lifted his head, ignoring his groans, and put one cloth under it to protect the linens. Then she turned his head so she could see the wound and began to wipe up the blood.

"What happened?" she asked as she worked, cleaning the extraneous blood and working her way closer to the wound itself.

"One of the revolutionary mob hit me with a spade."

She winced.

"I should actually thank the dirty sansculottes. The blow sent me to my knees and I was kicked out of the way. My head would be on a pike at the moment if not for that spade."

"You are fortunate indeed." But his comment had sent her mind racing. Who was this man that the peasants would wish to parade his head on a pike?

He hissed in a breath as she dabbed at his wound.

"I apologize. I'm afraid I am not a very good nursemaid."

"You're too pretty for such menial work," he said through clenched teeth. Honoria felt her cheeks heat again. She hated when men commented on her

appearance. She hated when women did it as well, but no good had ever come of a man noticing her.

The water in her bowl was red with his blood, but even if it hadn't needed to be thrown out, she would have done so. She needed a moment to collect herself. Honoria went to the window, and after checking no one was watching them on the street, she threw the water out and poured fresh from the pitcher.

"You haven't asked my name," he said. She could feel him watching her, even though she made a point of keeping her gaze on the stream of water flowing into the bowl.

"It is probably best that I don't."

"And what is your name?"

"Bernadette Deschamps," she said without hesitation.

She carried the water back to him and knelt beside the bed. When she put the cloth to his wound again, cleaning the last of the blood, his hand wrapped around her wrist. "What is your real name?"

"It is probably best that I do not tell you."

"You are English?"

Her hand trembled slightly in his, and she did not dare answer. Was it best to deny it or better to admit it? How had he known? Her accent was not Parisian, but she had worked on her pronunciation so much it was almost indistinguishable.

Instead of answering, she looked at his hand, then those eyes that saw far too much. "Release me," she said in English.

He did so. She dipped the cloth in water again and dabbed at his wound. Strangely enough, she could still feel his touch on her wrist.

"You did not flirt with me, that is how I knew," he said in strongly accented English.

"I don't flirt." She wiped away the last of the blood.

"That is...how do you say? A tragedy?"

"I'm sure it is." She plopped the wet towel on his face. "Your face is dirty. Clean up while I see if I might find you unsoiled clothing."



He pulled the cloth off his face. "I doubt you have anything as fine as these." He glanced derisively at the room.

"No, but what I give you won't have bloodstains." She started for the door, then turned back to him. "It's true."

He arched a dark brow, the same color as his rich hair.

"You did not deserve to be rescued." She turned on her heel and marched out of the room. She'd taken no more than three steps when she was seized with guilt. What an awful thing of her to say. She should go back and apologize.

That was when she heard it.

He was laughing.