

THE PEN

Eric Maisel

Chapter 1.

Lily and her friend Albert came rushing out of the bushes where they'd been chasing one another. Lily laughed as she ran toward the back door of her house with Albert right at her heels. Suddenly she stopped short, hoping that Albert would bump into her. He did—but his bony elbow jabbed her right in the ribs.

“Ouch!” she cried.

“Then don't stop like that!” Albert complained.

All of a sudden he checked his pockets. His house key was there! He felt the heavy metal object and breathed a sigh of relief. If ever he lost that key, his father had warned him, there would be hell to pay ...

They pushed open the screen door and tumbled into the kitchen.

Lily's mother was preparing vegetables at the sink. She looked haggard. The war years had taken their toll on her. They hadn't lost a son in the war, as so many families had; but there had been so many other hardships, including the indignity of the Nazi occupation of their town. She peeled and quartered potatoes while Lily and Albert jostled each other and pushed each other about.

“Have some bread,” Lily's mother said absently. She looked especially distracted today. Lily glanced at Albert. Her look meant *She's sad again*. Albert shook his head. That meant *Let's skip the bread and get out of here!* Lily nodded her agreement.

“We’ll eat later,” Lily said. “We’re not hungry yet!”

“Not hungry? You’ve been running around for hours.”

She was paying them no attention. Lily watched her for a moment. She couldn’t understand why the grownups in town weren’t happier these days. You would have thought that the horrible war ending would have made them all rejoice. But in her own household, at any rate, everyone seemed more on edge than ever. And even sadder.

Watching her, Lily said softly, “What is it, mama?”

“Nothing, nothing!”

Lily shrugged, grabbed Albert by the hand, and yanked him out of the kitchen. They were off again! They’d known each other forever; he the son of the town lawyer, she the daughter of the town doctor, their homes back to back, their gardens touching, and he just a bare few months older than her, though he did lord that over her, since he was twelve and she eleven. They raced toward the “secret” hole in the fence, which was no secret to either family, and darted into Albert’s garden. Compared to her wild garden, his seemed as manicured as a British formal garden.

Lily stopped short. They could see Albert’s father standing at his desk in his second-floor study. The French doors were open and light curtains at either side of the doors fluttered in the breeze.

“What’s he doing?” Lily whispered.

Albert shrugged. "Something important. Men came from Paris the day before yesterday."

"From Paris?"

"One was in uniform, but not a uniform I'd ever seen before. Papa was very serious and ... I don't know ... he got angry."

"Angry? Really?"

"At one point he shouted. He said, 'Nobody should have to do that!'"

"Do what?"

"I have no idea."

They shook their heads. Albert grabbed her hand and said, "Let's go to the bakery!" It was the end of the first week of September. There were only so many days of summer vacation left. They had so much bike riding still to do, so much running and pushing, so much splashing at the river, so much fooling around to get in! They grabbed their bicycles where they'd left them in front of Albert's house and raced down the empty street toward the center of town. In three blocks they came to the main street.

Lily had seen photographs of destroyed towns throughout Europe, both here in France and in every country you could name, Italy, Poland, Germany, on and on. The war was just a few months over—in fact, it had only ended last month in Japan—and all those places remained

completely destroyed. Her town had been spared. Not a shot had been fired here—well, one shot exactly. The butcher shop was still the butcher shop, the town hall was still the town hall, the chickens roasting on spits still roasted on spits, the baguettes still came out fresh three times a day from the baker's. Lily had been told—and also knew, without being told—how lucky they had been here in Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine. Sometimes the fact that they had been so lucky made her cry, though she couldn't have said why she was crying.

At the bakery Albert chose an elephant ear and Lily hesitated between an almond croissant and a chocolate croissant. Finally she chose the chocolate croissant, on the grounds that it would ruin her dinner less. They each paid for themselves and took off on their bikes, eating as they raced toward the river. Hereabouts the Seine was narrow, no broader than a schoolyard, and you could almost wade from bank to bank. There were scores of secret places where you could hide out, hidden from view by trees and bushes.

They had three secret places that they used for different purposes. The first was their “detective place.” There they read Agatha Christie mysteries and dreamed up complicated plots and crazy clues. Lily preferred Hercule Poirot. Albert preferred Miss Marple. Neither could understand the other's preference.

“It's his moustache!” Albert would say.

“You like a little old lady!”

In the second, they were resistance fighters. They were a resistance cell of two and planned attacks and plotted how to defeat the Nazis. The set-up was always the same: it was near the end of the war and the Nazis were on the run, back toward Germany. Sometimes Lily and Albert got their orders from “higher up” and sometimes they acted independently. In the beginning of their game they would blow up retreating tanks or ambush convoys but as the summer progressed their ideas got more elaborate and breathtaking and even included a plan to capture all of Hitler’s generals.

The generals were gathering for a “high level meeting” in a certain place, one that Lily pictured as being in the Alsace, where she had visited relatives one summer, and which Albert pictured as near Heidelberg, because something about that ancient university town called to him. In this, their second haunt, they dramatically helped the war effort and sometimes even changed the course of history.

In their third secret place, they kissed. They went there rarely. Albert wanted to go there more often and, truth be told, so did Lily. But she understood that it was her job to keep Albert in check. She knew that intuitively but her older sister Beatrice had also explained things to her.

“It will seem like they have five hands,” Beatrice said. “Those hands will come at you from all angles!”

Lily had laughed and blushed the hottest red of her life.

Today they rode their bicycles to an open spot beside the river where they liked to torment any walking or swimming creatures silly enough to venture near them.

“What do you think those men wanted with your father?” Lily asked.

“I have no idea.”

“That he got so angry?”

“I know.”

They skipped pebbles over the water and waved when a barge chugged by. Finally, their pastries notwithstanding, they got good and hungry.

“We’re having stew,” Lily said.

“I saw. I think we’re having fish.”

“Yuck. Want to eat at my house?”

“Can’t. I was told I had to eat at home tonight.”

Lily stared at him. “You were told that you couldn’t eat with us tonight?”

Albert said sheepishly, “I was.”

Irritated, Lily said, “What’s that about?”

Albert shrugged. "I don't have the slightest clue."

Chapter 2.

When she got home she washed her face and hands and began reading a mystery. Soon she fell asleep. When she awoke it was already four in the afternoon. She wandered to her bedroom window and sat down on the window seat. The window overlooked her family's wild garden and Albert's manicured garden. She had as good a view into Albert's garden as into her own and she had often watched Albert's mother's gardening or Albert's father, who always looked serious—as did her own father—pacing in the garden, smoking a pipe.

Both men worked primarily from home. M. Monette, Albert's father, maintained a law office in town but he saw clients in his own home most days of the week. Likewise her father worked primarily from home. He had an exam room at home where he saw patients, sometimes he visited the sick in their own homes, and two days a week he took the train the thirty miles into Paris to teach at the celebrated Pitie-Salpetriere Hospital. Lily was so proud of that! She remembered seeing that ancient hospital from a distance when, one summer day, her family had gone to the Jardin des Plantes to visit the zoo.

She thought about that day. Her father knew history and liked to tell stories. She learned on that visit to the zoo that when the Prussians and the French were at war back in the nineteenth century and the

Prussians had surrounded the city and laid siege to it, preventing food from entering the capital, hungry Parisians slaughtered and ate all the animals in the zoo. That story had made a big impression on her and for two weeks she refused to eat meat.

She was thinking about that when she heard the front door open. That startled her. Her father wasn't due back from Paris for hours. She knew it was her father because no one else entered by the front door—everyone else used the kitchen door, her mother included—and because, a moment after the door shut, he shouted out, “Adele, I need to see you!”

He sounded angry and also worried. Lily crept down the stairs. Her mother hurried from the kitchen, wiping her hands, and her father led them into the formal living room, which they never used, and closed its double glass doors. Lily crept closer and put her ear to the glass.

“What is it?” her mother said in a muffled voice.

“What? Speak up!”

Her father had paced away from her mother and turned abruptly toward her.

“What is it?” her mother repeated. She looked frightened—even petrified.

“I knew this was coming!” he exclaimed.

“What--”

“Speak up!”

Lily had never heard her father speak that harshly to her mother. No; there had been a few times during the war when her mother had inadvertently done something that her father thought endangered the family. There was the time when her mother had gotten her hands on an underground newspaper, one of those that, if you ever got caught with it, could cause you to be taken away. And then there was the time when she'd gone to visit a friend who secretly listened to Allied radio broadcasts. So, Lily reasoned, this was a time like those: a time of danger for the family. But how could that be, with the war over?

“I have a patient in Paris,” her father said. “He’s very high up in one of the departments. He came to see me. He had two things to tell me.”

Her mother waited. Her father seemed unable to get the words out. Her mother knew better than to ask, “What is it?” She sat with her head bent and her hands folded in her lap.

“First, Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine has gotten a Pen.”

“Oh my God!”

“It’s Pascal Monette.”

“No!”

Albert’s father!

“The second is worse.”

Her father stood there shaking his head.

“They’re looking at Beatrice.”

“Oh my God!”

Her mother leaped to her feet and ran to her father, who embraced her. Her mother was sobbing. Lily had no idea what was going on. Just at that instant Beatrice entered the kitchen by the back door and, seeing Lily crouched by the living room door, approached her, smiling her gorgeous sunshine smile.

“What’s going on?”

“They’re ... I don’t know.”

“Arguing?”

“No. Papa came home early. He learned something in Paris that ... it’s something bad. Very bad. But I can’t figure out what.”

“Probably it’s about me,” Beatrice said, laughing.

“Why do you say that?”

Beatrice shrugged. “Because I’m the family trouble.”

“It is about you,” Lily said sheepishly. “I don’t know what ...”

Beatrice was beautiful. Lily forgot for a minute what was going on in the living room and stared at her sister. Beatrice had turned nineteen in the spring. In her mind, Lily pictured her in Paris. She always saw her in Paris, never in Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine. The town was just too provincial, too sleepy, too nowhere for someone like Beatrice. Lily pictured her eating at one of the great Paris dining rooms, maybe at La

Tour D'Argent; entering a fashionable shop on the Rue Saint Honore; having drinks in the hottest jazz club near the Sorbonne. In fact, it was odd that she still lived with them—it was as if she was bestowing a favor on them by still living at home.

“What are you saying, mushroom?” Beatrice laughed. “It really is about me? I don't think I've done anything outrageous in weeks!”

“You mustn't live here much longer,” Lily whispered. “I don't know—it isn't safe!”

“The war is over now,” Beatrice said softly, brushing a wisp of hair off Lily's forehead.

“You must go!”

Beatrice laughed again and tousled Lily's hair.

“You'll get out of here, too,” Beatrice said, “and soon enough. Just watch out no boy gets you pregnant! That'll trap you in this town for sure!”

They heard their father raise his voice.

“Stop it!” he cried. He was pushing away their mother, who was clinging to him.

“What *is* going on in there?” Beatrice said.

“It's something about – something about something called the Pen.”

The color drained right out of Beatrice's face. She shut her eyes and put her hand on the wall for balance. Lily rushed to her sister and grabbed her.

"Beatrice! Are you all right?"

Beatrice opened her eyes. "It's all right, mushroom," she whispered. "I spoke too soon."

"About what?" Lily said in a small, terrified voice.

"About the war being over."

Chapter 3.

Beatrice pushed open the glass doors and walked in. Lily trailed after her, half-hiding behind her. Her father was standing in the middle of the room. Her mother was slumped in one of the two armchairs that faced the sofa. Only one lamp was on and much of the room was lost in shadows. The clock on the mantle ticked insanely loudly.

“What is it?” Beatrice said, addressing her father.

Her mother looked at Beatrice and immediately looked away. Her father bit his lip.

“You and that German soldier,” her father said.

“Be quiet!” her mother cried.

“It’s not a secret here,” her father said quietly. “No one’s eavesdropping. It’s just us. We have to be able to talk about this.”

Beatrice nodded. “What’s happened?”

Her father shook his head in disgust. “We knew all that blood lust was coming. Some of the worst collaborators are crying the loudest for revenge! They think that by pointing a finger and by shouting they can deflect scrutiny from themselves.”

Beatrice shrugged. “They’re probably right.”

Her father sighed. “Many towns already had their Pens appointed. Many so-called collaborators have already been executed. I thought we

might be spared. I don't know why I thought that." He made a helpless gesture. "Paris has just picked a Pen for Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine."

Lily peeked out from behind Beatrice. "What's a 'Pen'?" she said softly.

Her father looked at her. She knew that it was his habit to explain grown-up things to her just as if she were a grown-up. He seemed to be debating whether to do that now. As she waited she noticed something incredible. Her father's hair seemed to have grown grayer since just this morning. Surely that wasn't possible! She wanted to reach out and touch his hair, to comfort him. She glanced up at Beatrice, who was staring steadily at their father. Her mother had shrunk into herself.

Lily said, "Please tell me."

Her father sighed. "You know what the word 'collaborator' means?" he said.

"Of course I do!"

A small smile appeared on his lips and disappeared just as quickly.

"'Pen' is the nickname for the person picked by Paris to have the power to decide who was and who wasn't a collaborator during the war. He can sign a death warrant for anyone he feels is guilty, no questions asked."

"Or somebody he just doesn't like!" her mother said.

"But that isn't fair!" Lily exclaimed.

“Our Pen was just appointed,” her father said, looking at Beatrice. “It’s Pascal Monette. And he has his eye on you,” he said.

A heavy silence descended on the room. Suddenly Adele Page seemed to wake up. “She can go to Paris!” her mother cried. “She’ll be safe there!”

“And, what, run for the rest of her life?” her father said, shaking his head in irritation.

“We can send her to the Alsace, to my sister--”

“Stop it!”

Her mother sank back down. Tears sprang to her eyes. Beatrice crossed the room, knelt down, and comforted her.

“All right,” her father said more calmly. “Yes, we have to look at those options. But first—I have to talk to Pascal.”

“You can’t!” Adele Page cried, shaking herself out of Beatrice’s grasp and sitting straight up. “What if Beatrice isn’t even accused? You’ll put the idea in his head!”

Daniel Page thought about that. “I think my information is impeccable,” he said slowly. “But you just might be right. That might be too grave a risk.”

They all fell silent. The ticking of the clock sounded like small explosions. They heard the clop-clop-clop of a horse-drawn cart pass

by, then the sputtering sound of a car doing poorly. Daniel Page walked to the sideboard and poured himself a very full drink.

“Pour me one too,” Beatrice said.

M. Page hesitated and then complied. As he walked toward Beatrice, the drinks in his hands, he looked at Beatrice with an expression that was considerably less than sympathetic. It wasn’t quite unfriendly and it wasn’t quite accusatory; but Lily sensed that her father was holding something against Beatrice.

Beatrice took the drink from him. She looked him in the eye. “Of course,” she said evenly. “I wish it hadn’t happened.”

“But it was nothing!” her mother said suddenly. “Just a friendship! Nothing so horrible!”

Beatrice and her father exchanged glances.

“Yes, mama,” Beatrice said. “Still, it would have been better. I should have been smarter.”

Lily watched her father. He seemed to want to shrug and say, “That’s water under the bridge.” But he couldn’t make himself do it. Lily desperately wanted to side with her sister and rush to her defense. But suddenly she thought, “What if there’s something I don’t know?” She remembered all the mysteries she’d read that summer and how things were often not what they seemed. She felt tears well up as she

pondered the possibility that Beatrice had done something much worse than just spending time with that German soldier ...

She couldn't let herself finish that thought. She wouldn't!

"So, what should we do?" Beatrice said.

"We can't just wait!" her mother exclaimed. "We can't just let things play themselves out in some crazy way!"

Daniel Page nodded. "We'll have dinner. We'll think. We'll see who we can enlist ... if there's anyone powerful. I've saved a few lives in my time! I'm sure--"

"That won't matter now," Beatrice said, smiling a small smile. "Not in the middle of this blood-letting. No one will cross a Pen."

Their mother started sobbing. Lily wished she would stop crying because a thought was coming to her. Her mother's loud sobs kept interrupting her train of thought. It had something to do with ...

"I have an idea!" Lily suddenly exclaimed.

"What?" her father said.

"I'll be right back!"

"Don't do anything!" her father ordered.

"I'll find out!"

"Lily!" her mother cried. "Come back here this instant!"

But Lily was already out of the room and flying down the corridor toward the kitchen door. They continued shouting after her as she ran. The screen door slammed behind her as she rushed to find Albert.

Chapter 4.

Lily raced through her garden, darted through the hole in the fence, and moved quickly and quietly through Albert's garden to the front of Albert's house. She was ready to ring the bell, if it came to that, but there was Albert sitting on the slate step in front of his house. He was tossing pebbles nowhere in particular. Seeing Lily, he stopped his game and smiled and odd smile. He looked sheepish, Lily thought. She dropped down beside him and punched him in the arm.

"This is a bad time!" she said.

"I know."

"You do?" She glanced at him. "So you know about your father?"

Albert nodded. "The news is going around. People are looking at me funny. Some seemed scared of me! Lucien gave me candy. At the bakery they wouldn't let me pay. I hate it. My father--"

"I need your help," Lily said, interrupting him. "It's Beatrice. I need to know if your father is or isn't investigating Beatrice. Do you know anything?"

"He is," Albert said.

"What?" Lily stared dumbfounded. "And you didn't tell me?"

"I knew that I wasn't supposed to."

Her whole body trembled. “I thought you were my friend!” Lily cried. “I can’t believe it! Beatrice is my sister! You weren’t going to tell me?”

She leaped to her feet. She didn’t know what to do. She wanted to kick Albert. But she needed him, too. She’d learned that during the war. Sometimes you had to stifle your natural impulses because there was something more important at stake. Torn, she bit her lip so hard she almost drew blood.

“What do you know?” she said, so angrily that Albert involuntarily shifted away from her on the step.

“Nothing from my father,” he said, half-shielding himself. “It was my cousin Leon. You know Leon. I hate him. He’s the worst. He came out from my father’s study and he said to me, ‘That little playmate of yours and her bitch sister. They’re in for it!’ I didn’t have the presence of mind to ask him what he meant. But I’m sure he’d come to rat on Beatrice.”

Lily stared at him. “Leon!”

Leon was a world-class bully. He was the same age as Beatrice and he spent his days drinking, playing pranks, and getting into mischief. His pranks weren’t funny at all. He was known to have set fires and killed pets. People shook their heads when they heard his name. Because he was a Monette and because that mattered, because Albert’s father was

the town lawyer and Leon's father was the town mayor and Leon's aunt was married to the chief constable, no one dared touch him. Little did they know that Leon's own family would have welcomed a little town outrage! But as it was ...

"Why would he do that?" Lily said.

"I don't know."

"What did he say to your father?"

"I have no idea."

"When did this happen?"

"The night before last."

"The night before last!" Lily stared at him, her eyes flaring. "And you didn't--" She stopped herself. "We have to find out what he said!"

Albert shrugged. "That's not possible--"

"Says you! We can make Leon tell us! Or we can sneak into your father's study--"

"Lily!"

"Lily, what? Are you my friend or aren't you?"

Albert looked away and hung his head. Lily, disgusted, kicked at the driveway gravel. A small cloud of dust rose and settled. Lily kicked again, harder. Albert flinched as if he'd been hit. Of course he was the target; they both knew that he was proving a coward.

Dusk descended. They would be eating dinner at her home. That is, if they could possibly be up for eating dinner. Lily couldn't picture it. She just couldn't see Beatrice, her father, and her mother sitting at the dining room table and someone saying, "Pass the bread" and someone saying, "More stew, please." It was unthinkable! That made her angrier still. She punched Albert hard on the arm. It was no love tap and Albert cried out and immediately began rubbing the injured spot.

Lily turned to leave.

"Lily!"

Lily spun on her heels. "I hate you!" she cried.

She flew back through the two gardens, ran directly to the cellar, and began pulling an old trunk up the cellar steps. After two or three steps she realized that she couldn't possibly pull it up herself. She let it fall back down to the cellar floor where it crashed with a bang that shook the house. She ran to Beatrice's room.

Lily pushed open the door without knocking. "You have go to Paris!" Lily cried. "Tonight!"

"What are you talking about, Lily?"

"Leon." She ran out of breath. She stood there heaving. "Leon's been telling Albert's father about you!"

"Leon," Beatrice said. She nodded and half-smiled. "It would be Leon."

Lily sat right down on the carpet. “Does he know something bad?” she whispered.

Beatrice cocked her head. “Maybe he does.” She picked up her brush and began brushing her long blond hair. “I’ll have to think about it.”

“But he says he knows!”

“Well,” Beatrice said, “he would say that whether he knew something or not. That’s who Leon is.”

Lily sat there for another moment and then hopped to her feet.

“Please, come down to the cellar and help me get the trunk up. I’ll help you pack!”

“No, mushroom,” Beatrice said softly. “I won’t go on the run. Let’s ... let’s wait a day. Papa may think of something.”

Lily sat back down on the carpet and began to sob. Beatrice got to her knees and held Lily tight.

“It’s all right, little sister,” Beatrice said. She began humming a song that she used to sing to Lily when Lily was an infant and when she, Beatrice, was only six years old. Beatrice had practically mothered Lily, as their mother had been sickly, distant, and not equal to the task. Beatrice hummed and Lily found herself falling asleep. The day had been too much for her. She made herself small and let herself be rocked. Soon she fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

Chapter 5.

“Ping!”

Lily awoke in her own bed. Outside the stars were shining and the moon was bright. The noise was unmistakable. Albert was tossing pebbles at her window.

“Ping!”

Lily fully awoke. She found herself still dressed for the day in her blue dress.

“Ping!”

She got up, moved to the window and opened it.

“Go away!” she cried.

“Please come down,” Albert pleaded. He was fully illuminated by moonlight. “I’m really, really sorry!”

“No!”

“I can help, Lily! I can make things right!”

“No you can’t.” Lily wanted to throw something at him. She glanced around the room. Her stuffed animals were too soft! And her precious box ... Albert wasn’t worth it!

“I can!” Albert cried. “I know what to do!”

Lily hesitated. What if he did know what to do? She watched his motionless figure and fought off tears. If he could possibly help Beatrice

...

“All right,” she said. “I’ll be down.”

She put on her shoes and tiptoed down the creaky stairs, which, as always, made such a racket that she presumed she must be waking the whole neighborhood. She silently passed through the kitchen, opened the door, and went outside. Albert had brought his bicycle, which meant that he gone all the way around the block to get to her backyard, since their bicycles couldn’t fit through the hole in the fence. That impressed her a little and inclined her to soften a bit. But almost as soon as felt herself softening, she bristled.

“I haven’t forgiven you!” she whispered.

“Just listen.” He looked to have been crying and he seemed shaken. “I know things about Leon. I’ll tell him that he has to take back what he said about Beatrice or I’ll blab!”

Lily stared at him. “What do you know that could really scare him?”

“I know things,” Albert replied evasively.

“Tell me!”

“I can’t.”

Lily stamped her foot. “Then go home!”

Lily turned away. Albert grabbed her by the shoulder. Lily angrily turned back.

“Don’t touch me!” Lily shouted.

“Please!” Albert cried. “Let’s go over there right now! You’ll see ... it’ll work!”

“I don’t believe you. I don’t believe you know anything. You’re just ... lying!”

“I’m not!”

“Then tell me!”

“I can’t!”

She didn’t believe him. But what if he was telling the truth? She stared at him. He seemed ... truthful. But he’d betrayed her badly already! She heard her heart pounding. Otherwise the night was completely still, except for the ever-present crickets. Some tiny creature rushed by in the darkness, keeping to the foot of the garden fence. At that speed, it had to be a mouse. Lily, suddenly cold, clutched at her shoulders. Finally she made up her mind.

“I’ll get my bicycle,” she said.

They raced side-by-side through the deserted streets under the moonlight. Leon lived by himself in a fisherman’s cottage right at the water’s edge. Lily and Albert crossed over the bridge, skirted the train tracks, and found the path that paralleled the Seine. Here it was pitch black and the moon and the stars hardly helped. But they had been up and down this path so many hundreds of times that they knew it

instinctively, knew all of its ruts and twists. They hardly slowed down, despite the darkness.

Sometimes the Seine magically appeared. The river sparkled in the moonlight. Then it would vanish again, hidden by trees and bushes. The path got darker then. Albert, in the lead, began to slow ...

“There!” he cried.

They stopped. There’s was Leon’s fisherman’s cottage, hardly more than a shack, with its small dock and its rowboat tethered to the dock. The lights were on. Albert and Lily stood stock-still.

Suddenly it seemed preposterous to barge into Leon’s home and threaten him. Lily found herself shaking. Nor did Albert seem inclined to proceed. But just standing there felt even worse. Finally Albert resumed pedaling toward the brightly lit cottage. Lily followed. At the door they set their bicycles down quietly. Albert rapped softly at the door.

The door opened abruptly. Lily and Albert both jumped back. Leon filled the doorframe. He was wearing a wool shirt, workmen’s pants, and heavy boots. Everything about him frightened Lily, his heavy work boots especially. She half-hid behind Albert, who was shaking. Leon smiled at them.

“What do you little rats want?”

Albert couldn’t speak. Lily waited. Finally she stepped in front of Albert and cried, “Albert knows things about you! I know them too!”

She involuntarily retreated a step. "If you don't take back whatever you've said about Beatrice, we'll tell everybody!"

Leon stopped smiling. His fists balled up, he took a step toward them. Lily held her ground. After a moment Albert stepped forward to stand at her side. Leon stared at them.

"So," he said. "You're tough, are you?" He stepped forward and grabbed Albert by the shirt. "You've come to threaten me?" He slapped Albert hard across the face. Tears sprang to Albert's eyes as he rubbed his cheek.

"You're lucky I don't pull down your pants and ruin your behind with my boot," Leon hissed, his eyes flashing. "You too!" he said, turning on Lily. "You think I wouldn't?"

"My father--" Lily whispered in a failing voice.

"Your father! He'll have his hands full when they hang Beatrice!"

Lily burst out crying. Albert grabbed her wrist.

"Come on!" Albert cried.

"Get the hell out of here!" Leon shouted. "That slut of a sister of yours! Thought she get away with giving it to everyone except me? We'll see about that!"

Lily and Albert raced off. After a little while they slowed. They pedaled as if exhausted. Neither called out to the other or said a word. At a certain spot Lily missed leaping over a rut and stumbled and fell.

She had never missed that jump in her life. She came crashing to the ground and scraped both knees. Tears sprang to her eyes. Albert hopped off his bicycle and came to help.

“Stay away from me!” Lily cried.

“Lily!”

“Don’t you dare help me!” Lily shouted.

She righted her bicycle and rushed off, her knees bleeding and tears in her eyes. Albert raced to keep up with her. Lily flew over the bridge and tore down the deserted streets. As they neared their respective corners, Lily went one way and Albert the other.

Chapter 6.

The next morning, Friday morning, Lily woke up feeling sick. She was certain that she had a fever. Her knees hurt; she'd cleaned them a bit when she got home the night before but the scrapes still had dirt embedded in them.

She could smell the coffee that her mother and father drank every morning, and that Beatrice drank too if she was home. Because she wasn't always home ...

Lily loved Beatrice but she didn't understand her. After she'd finished school, just about the year before, Beatrice had seemed unable to find a single thing to occupy her. Except for boys. She gotten a reputation; and she'd gotten it not just for spending time with Heinrich, the German soldier. Lily knew there'd been at least one other scandal. It had to do with Beatrice and a married man, though Lily never learned which married man.

Not that Lily wanted to know! She loved Beatrice and kept wishing that she would just ... stop getting into trouble. Why didn't she just go Paris and begin her adult life? But she seemed trapped in Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine in some way that was hard to explain. She had no job; she had too much time on her hands; she did too much flirting; and she drank. Several times their father had laid down the law ... but it

hadn't taken. Their mother called Beatrice "the wild child," and she hadn't said it affectionately.

Her mother was baking bread. Lily could smell the baking bread along with the coffee aroma. Her mother rarely baked and it wasn't a good sign ...

Lily sat on the edge of her bed. All summer long she had rushed out each morning to find Albert and start their day together. Now she sat, her thoughts jumbled, her forehead hot, her knees hurting.

She knew that she was obliged to do something to help her sister and that in fact she would figure out something to do. She just didn't know what. Leon was certainly not retracting his story, whatever that was! And what if there were more evidence coming, what if it was arriving right at this second ... she pictured a messenger, carrying a dispatch case filled with incriminating documents, arriving by motorcycle and pulling up to the Monette house.

Involuntarily she moved to the window. She stared out at the Pen's garden and beyond it. If you peered down the narrow path beside Albert's house you could just make out a sliver of the street in front of his house. Lily craned her neck to see if a motorcycle might be parked there. Instead she saw something very odd, a knot of neighbors standing together and whispering among themselves. The women

weren't dressed yet; they'd thrown on housecoats. One of the men, too, still had on his pajama top over his trousers.

Lily took a washcloth to her knees, grimacing as she cleaned the scrapes, and then washed her face. Her eyes, staring back at her in the mirror, looked wild and feverish. Her hair needed a good brushing. She quickly changed into her yellow dress and took the stairs two at a time. To avoid her mother, she headed for the front door rather than the kitchen door. The door to her father's exam room was shut. No doubt he was in with a patient. There were three other patients in the waiting room to her right, along with Mlle. Labelle, her father's nurse. Lily said good morning to Mlle. Labelle and scooted out the front door.

Hopping on her bicycle, she raced around the block to where the knot of neighbors was still whispering. She pulled up in front of Albert's house and dropped her bicycle to the ground. There were six of them in all; Lily knew Madame Germain the best. Madame Germain gave music lessons and for a while Lily had studied piano with her.

"What is it?" Lily said, cozying up to Madame Germain.

The music teacher glanced at Lily and shook her head. "Two families left last night!" she exclaimed.

"Left what?"

"Left town! Left Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine!"

"What? Who?"

“The Legrandes!” That would be the baker. “And the Jouberts!”

Joubert ran the hardware store.

“But why?”

Madame Germain glanced significantly at Albert’s house. “He was looking into them. You know?”

Lily nodded. Her blood ran cold.

“There’ll be more!” Madame Germain said.

“What ... what did they do?” Lily stammered.

“I have no idea!”

So whole families were fleeing! What could M. Legrande or M. Joubert possibly have done to get them in such hot water? They had no state secrets to give away. They were just shopkeepers in a town that had seen no action. Had they provided too many free almond croissants or free screwdrivers? You shouldn’t have to run for your life for that!

One of the men snapped his fingers. “I’ve got it!” he exclaimed. “It’s Legrande’s son! Must be. He never went off to fight. There must be a story there!”

“He had a bad back. Everybody knows that,” one of the women countered.

“Maybe. We’ll see. I have my money on him!”

Lily hopped on her bicycle and raced downtown. The bakery was indeed closed. The bakery never closed. She knew that in Paris bakeries

closed one or two days a week because she had heard stories of someone going all the way into Paris to purchase their favorite sweet only to find that they had picked the day when their preferred bakery was shut. But Legrande's bakery never closed.

Yet here it was, all shuttered up.

That gave her a terrible feeling. Clearly it was giving other people a terrible feeling, too. Everyone passing up and down the street had chosen the other side of the street to walk on, even though it was the hot, sunny side. Nor would they look at the bakery as they passed. They kept their eyes averted or else looked straight ahead. Lily, astride her bike, stood staring at the shuttered bakery. Finally she pulled at her bike and pedaled off at a tear.

Chapter 7.

Riding around town in agitation, Lily stopped at a bench in the town square. The square was on the small side, with a statue of some important person on a horse, a few flowerbeds, a playground for children, and some paths and benches.

At one corner of the square stood a small, open space where the earth was packed hard and where various vendors set up to sell their wares, the sisters from an abbey in the valley bringing their bottles of honey wine to sell on Wednesdays, a man who crafted hand-made sausages and salamis appearing with his charcuterie on Thursdays, and a crippled old lady arriving with a cart laden with flowers on Fridays.

Lily sat on a bench near this open spot, her bicycle on the ground beside her, thinking about the one execution she had seen. It was here that the boyish Emile Martin, by far the youngest teacher at her school, had been executed. Lily stared at the spot where today, it being Friday, the old flower lady was positioned and open for business.

The ancient lady sat on a chair in the shade of a poplar and beside her an old dog slept. Every so often she roused herself to do something to the flowers, jostle them or fluff them a little, activities which made no sense to Lily but which she supposed were part of the old woman's routine, reflexive actions, like blinking or clearing your throat.

The Nazis had publicly executed only one Frenchman in Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine. Lily remembered it as if it was yesterday. It had happened in the last days of the Occupation, just over a year ago, early in the summer. A sound truck had announced the execution. One weekday morning at about ten a.m. a sound truck began to move slowly up and down the streets of town, taking its time and seemingly taking forever. Lily could hear the amplified sound fade away and then, some minutes later, begin to return. The third time the sound truck rolled through her street she clapped her hands over her ears. She'd heard the message enough!

There were only five German soldiers in Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine. They lived in the mayor's house, which they had commandeered. That had forced Albert's uncle and his family to lodge for a while at Albert's house and then in a house on the other side of town, near the train station. Everyone knew those five German soldiers, a sergeant, a corporal and three privates, whose duties were completely unknown, at least to Lily.

Heinrich, Beatrice's friend, was the corporal. All five seemed pleasant enough and Heinrich and two of the privates spoke passable French. Many of the people in town were really quite friendly with those five Germans ... so it wasn't just Beatrice who had been guilty of fraternizing!

Friendly, that is, until that day when they announced the execution of Emile Martin and then executed him. That day everything changed. It was one of the privates, a young man who spoke the best French, who kept repeating his message as the sound truck drove slowly up and down the streets of Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine. "Sabotage against the Reich will not be tolerated. An enemy of the Reich will be executed at two p.m. in the town square." Again and again, "Sabotage against the Reich will not be tolerated. An enemy of the Reich will be executed at two p.m. in the town square." It began to sound like a terrible song.

Beatrice's Heinrich was the one driving ...

When she first heard the amplified announcement Lily immediately got in mind the image of a firing squad. But it hadn't happened that way. People began gathering in the town square almost as if they were sleepwalking and by one p.m. almost all of the townspeople were there. Of course they could have overwhelmed those few German soldiers but everyone in France knew what would happen then. They knew all about German reprisals.

Virtually all the adults in town were there; and she and Albert and almost all of the children in town were there as well, in little knots off to the side and out of the way, some on their bicycles, some half-hiding behind the potted shrubs lined up in front of the Alsatian restaurant. Every so often her family went to that restaurant for some specialty

that her mother loved and that reminded her of her childhood in Colmar.

No doubt all of the children had been commanded by their parents not to come—certainly Lily had been told not to—but there they were, a couple of boys up in a tree, some other boys edging very close to what they were all thinking of as “the spot,” and Lily and Albert up on the playground structure, from which they had a great vantage point.

If people in town knew who was to be executed, that news hadn’t gotten to Lily or Albert. The two of them waited, their hearts pounding, for two p.m. to arrive. Suddenly the sergeant, Heinrich, and a private appeared from the building that housed the mayor’s office—the town’s official building where you would go for marriage licenses and that sort of thing—leading a young man whose hands were tied behind his back with rope. It was Emile Martin. The whole crowd gasped.

Emile looked so calm, so peaceful. He wasn’t exactly smiling and yet he seemed to be smiling. It was over in hardly a minute. They marched Emile to the center of the open space, the sergeant removed his pistol from his holster, he put the pistol to Emile’s head, and he fired. That was it. Again the town gasped, shocked in part by how abrupt and nondescript the execution had been. It was almost as if nothing had happened. Then the three German soldiers stood around, not quite knowing what to do next, and finally the sergeant called out

to some of the nearby townspeople and ordered them to carry Emile away. Lily and Albert immediately rode away on their bikes as the crowd silently dispersed.

No one had been friendly to the Germans after that. In another few weeks the Occupation ended, the Germans having fled back toward Berlin ...

Although Emile Martin was so awfully young, he was already married and had two little children. Lily saw them often, his widow, barely twenty or twenty-one, and her little boy and girl, maybe four and two. They would have been three and one that day. Sitting there on the bench, Lily began crying.

How would they execute ... she couldn't make herself say, Beatrice. Nor could she say, "collaborators." She couldn't complete that thought and at the same time she couldn't get the image of Emile Martin out of her head. She hopped off the bench and, grabbing her bicycle angrily, raced off in the direction of home.

Chapter 8.

When Lily got home she found her father in the hall, dressed as if for church. He was wearing his best suit and his best shoes and he stood in front of the hall mirror adjusting his tie. Lily gave him a curious look. Her father said, “Now that we know for sure that Beatrice is accused,” he said, “I’m going to talk with Pascal. With M. Monette. I’m going to see what I can do.”

Lily nodded. She didn’t ask, “Can I come.” But she wanted to ask. She wanted to be there, to add, by her presence, another reason for Albert’s father to spare Beatrice. She felt he liked her; he always smiled when she raced by or came for dinner, although his smiles were rather absent and reserved; once or twice he’d patted her on the head. She felt that he liked her and that her presence at this conversation, as she called it in her head, would be an asset. But she knew that she couldn’t ask to come.

But she had to know. She’d eavesdrop! Her father would have to walk all around the block to arrive at the Monette’s front door. The second he left, Lily ran out the back door, cut through the two gardens and edged up to an open window near the front of Albert’s house.

She peered in. She could see the main hallway and the front door. She waited, pressed against the window.

After three or four minutes she heard the front door bell ring. Madame Monette, dressed as if for a shopping day in Paris, answered the door. When she saw who it was she nodded gravely and invited Daniel Page in.

He stood there silently as she went to get her husband. Pascal Monette appeared, putting on his jacket, and shook hands with her father. He pointed to the garden. Lily eyes bulged wide. She darted off in the direction of some bushes not far from the garden's single bench.

Ducking low, she ran to the bushes and hid behind them. She got deep into the dirt—she knew that she would be staining her dress—and watched as her father and Albert's father moved slowly toward the bench. They sat down close to one another.

"It's been very hard for very long," Daniel said after some time.

Pascal nodded. "Impossibly long."

Some sparrows alighted and danced in the grass in front of the two men.

"You know, we've both taken oaths," Daniel said, glancing at Pascal. "And we've both broken them from time to time ... for a higher good."

Lily didn't quite know what her father meant. She knew that doctors did take some sort of oath about "doing no harm." What sort of

oath could a lawyer take that was the equivalent of that? But clearly Albert's father understood. He nodded.

"This isn't like that," Pascal Monette said after a long moment.

"It could be. You know Leon--"

Pascal looked at him sharply. "What about Leon?"

"He's bragging about the harm he'll do my daughter."

"That idiot." Pascal shook his head in disgust. "He's been bragging? That might greatly reduce the weight one would put on his accusations."

"What are those?" her father said very softly.

Pascal shook his head. After a moment her father nodded.

"He could just be out to injure her," Daniel said.

"He very well could. Definitely."

"There are ways to ... to corroborate his accusations?"

"There might be." Pascal shook his head. "That is, if one went to great lengths, which might mean reaching into Germany. Right now ... I'm not sure there are. But I haven't really begun ..." He let his words trail away.

Daniel nodded. He was silent for a moment. "And what if Leon recanted?"

Pascal looked at her father sharply for a second time. "Recanted?"

“If he’s lying, maybe his conscience would compel him to tell the truth,” Daniel said.

Pascal slowly shook his head. “He has no conscience.”

“But if he did recant?”

“I’m not sure,” Pascal said after a moment. “I’m not sure which story I’d find more convincing, the accusation or the recantation.”

“But certainly that would have to matter,” Daniel pressed.

“Certainly it would.”

The two men sat without speaking.

After some time Daniel said quietly, “Did you ask for the job?”

“No!”

“But you could have refused it?”

Pascal thought for a while. “I didn’t want the job. But I also didn’t want someone ... less qualified ... to have this terrible power.”

“By less qualified you mean vengeful, vindictive and mean-spirited?”

“Yes. I mean exactly that.”

“My wife’s family comes from the Alsace ...” Daniel murmured.

Pascal nodded. “Yes. What they’re doing to the Germans there is a horror. Kicking out families that have lived there for generations. Executing so-called collaborators for nothing. The beheadings, the mutilations.”

“Sometimes just to steal their land,” Daniel said.

“Or over some petty grievance from before the war.”

Daniel nodded. “We’ll never heal.”

“I don’t think so. Not while we’re alive.”

After a moment her father said, “Of course, the Germans brought it on themselves.”

“They did.” Pascal shook his head. “That German soldier of Beatrice’s. He was so damned handsome.”

“That boyish smile. Those friendly words for everyone.”

“Of course, and then he only did his duty.”

Daniel said, “I don’t know what you mean.”

Pascal glanced at her father. “All right,” he said, getting up. “Of course. We’ll have to see.”

Daniel put a hand on Pascal’s forearm. “We don’t really have to see. We’ve been friends and neighbors for thirty years.”

Pascal looked down at Daniel, who was sitting abjectly. “But what about the victims?” Pascal said very softly. “The survivors? The children?”

“It was all--”

“I know exactly what it was,” Pascal said bitterly. “One lapse in judgment shouldn’t define a life. But when that lapse in judgment has terrible consequences ... ”

Pascal stood there. Her father seemed incapable of moving off the bench. Finally Pascal reached down, took her father's hand, and helped him off the bench.

"My friend," Pascal said, "nothing's written in stone. I don't know what I'm thinking or what I'm doing. If ... if I make a decision ... if it goes against her ... "

Daniel looked up at him. "You'd warn me?"

"I shouldn't," Albert's father said very slowly. "But I will."

Daniel nodded without looking up. "Thank you," he said, still not able to glance at the lawyer.

"Leave when you like," Pascal said. He turned, trudged to the back door of the house, opened the screen door to the kitchen, and shut it quietly. Her father remained sitting there, his head bowed and his hat in his lap.

Chapter 9.

Lily crawled to her room and sat on her bed. The thought came to her: “What would a resistance fighter do?” The thought agitated her and made her hop right off her bed.

Did she know a genuine resistance fighter she might consult? She snapped her fingers. Everyone knew that Abelard, who used to be the town’s blacksmith but who had lost his left arm during the war, had been a famous resistance fighter and a genuine hero. He was the largest man that Lily had ever seen and, now that he had lost an arm, his right arm looked even more enormous, at once monstrous and awesome. He was someone she could talk to!

He lived by the river in a building with a waterwheel that was at once his foundry and his home. He still maintained a forge but he no longer shoed horses or hammered out swords, which had been a specialty of his, or utilitarian objects either, which had been his bread and butter work. Now he was an artist.

He made beautiful, sinuous metal sculptures of couples in love, which he sold in a respectable gallery in Paris. In the three years he’d been making art he’d made a name for himself and he was something of a legend in town, what with his hero status and his status as an artist. But he kept very much to himself—Lily hardly ever saw him.

Everything was silent as she crept from her room. The house felt somehow hollow, as if something—its heart, its lungs, maybe its essential happiness—had been carved right out of it and discarded. She tiptoed down the stairs, which did not stop certain steps from creaking. The loud creaking filled the house with an awful noise and Lily supposed that someone was bound to come out—Beatrice from her room, if she was in there, her father from his study, if that’s where he was—to see who was making such a racket. But no one appeared. She left by the front door, so as to avoid her mother, who must be in the kitchen—though Lily didn’t hear any kitchen sounds—and, once outside, grabbed her bicycle and headed for the river.

It was a hot, dusty, silent afternoon. Every so often she bicycled through a swarm of gnats that followed her for a few yards and then suddenly dissipated and vanished. She bicycled through the center of town and out toward the river. At a certain spot she turned onto a dirt path that paralleled the Seine. Something was gnawing at her; suddenly she realized that she would need to pass Leon’s place in order to reach Abelard’s. She pedaled faster and half-shut her eyes as she raced past Leon’s. Then, in hardly another hundred yards, there was Abelard’s. It shocked her and sent a shiver down her spine that Abelard’s forge, as she called it in her mind, and Leon’s fisherman’s cottage should be standing so close together.

She dropped her bicycle on the ground and walked toward the gaping opening at the back of the forge, as big as the opening you'd find at a garage where cars went for repairs. Lily heard a hissing. As she approached she saw that Abelard was using a torch on a piece of metal. The torch hissed; after a moment Abelard put the torch down, grabbed iron tongs with his good right hand, gripped the piece of metal, and dipped it into a bucket of water. The metal sizzled and steam rose in a cloud. Lily finally found her voice and called out, "Hello!"

Abelard turned, stared at her for a moment, trying to remember who she was, and then said, "Lily Page. How are you?"

"Can I come in?"

"Of course!"

He put down his tongs, grabbed a cloth, and toweled off his face and neck.

"Sweaty work," he said.

"In the heat!"

Abelard smiled. "Exactly."

He poured himself some water from a bucket, using a ladle, and gestured to the bucket.

"Water?" he said.

"No thank you."

He pulled over a stool and sat down.

“I think you want something,” he said, studying her. “What can I do for you?”

Lily didn't know how to start. Suddenly this felt very dangerous. As much as she admired Abelard, as much as she felt in her bones that he was a good man, this was not something you could just blurt out. After all, she was revealing something about Beatrice and maybe even incriminating her!

“Can I trust you?” Lily said after a while.

“About what, Lily?” Abelard wiped his forehead and took a sip of water.

“First I have to know if I can trust you,” she said as tears began to well up.

He stared at her for a long moment. “No, Lily, you can't. I can't decide about what's right or wrong before I hear what you have to say. Something you say might force me to act against your own best interests. You can see that, can't you?”

Lily hung her head. She knew that Abelard was right. She actually respected his position. But what could she do? She couldn't just blurt out that Beatrice was being accused!

“You could maybe pose it as a hypothetical,” Abelard said gently. “You know what that means?”

Lily nodded. "I do." She thought for a second. "But wouldn't you see right through that? And then, having seen through that, maybe be put in a position?"

Abelard laughed. "That's very wise of you, Lily! That's exactly true. You have a head on your shoulders!"

Lily stood there. Suddenly she had an idea. "Maybe I can put it this way." She paused for instant. "During the war ... you had to do hard things, yes?"

Abelard stared at her seriously. "Yes, I did. We all did."

"And maybe ... maybe a friend of yours didn't act properly. Maybe a friend of yours did a bad thing. But he was still a friend of yours! Which ... which weighed more ... that he was a friend ... "

Some look came into Abelard's eyes. "You're asking the hardest question in the world, Lily, the very hardest. You're asking, how do you make a horrible choice. Well, it is worse than horrible! The choice that you make, whatever it is, never leaves you. I'm sorry ... I'm sorry that you have a choice like that staring you in the eye."

Lily nodded. She wasn't exactly sure what she'd been thinking or asking. Suddenly she began shaking.

"Lily," Abelard said, "you're shivering."

Lily turned, ran to her bicycle, and pedaled away from the forge at top speed.

Chapter 10.

Although the food was the usual, dinner that night was painful and horrible. Her mother had made fish, potatoes, and carrots. It was their customary Friday dinner. Her father drank red wine; her mother white. Her mother poured herself a glass from a bottle on the counter and left the bottle there. Her father brought his bottle of red wine to the table. The cut-up baguette in the basket looked as if it had been hacked to pieces. No one commented on its look, on the fact that her mother had prepared a preposterous amount of potatoes, or that no one had thought to bring over the mustard.

They ate silently, although the clacking of their knives and forks made such a racket that dinner felt anything but quiet. Every so often her mother would sigh; her father would glance at her and look away again without comment. Beatrice seemed in a dream state and smiled to herself every so often. That seemed so strange that Lily found herself staring at her sister, waiting nervously for that next smile. Because smiling seemed so out of the question!

Once her mother dropped her fork. It clattered on her plate and made everyone jump.

There had been an especially long silence when suddenly her mother said, "Beatrice should go away right now!"

“He’s going to warn us,” her father replied, looking down and cutting a piece a fish. “We’ll have time.”

“What if he doesn’t?”

He glanced at her. “Pascal keeps his word.” He took a bite of fish. “He always has.”

“This isn’t like any other time!”

Her father put down his fork and nodded. “You’re right. But he’ll keep his word.”

“How can you be so sure?”

To that her father made no response.

Another long silence fell. Lily wanted to escape. At the same time, she didn’t want to miss anything. Beatrice might say something ... or someone might come up with an idea ... she kept waiting for a good idea, for a plan, for anything that might help!

“Lily,” Beatrice said after a while, “did Leon say anything? About what he claimed to know?”

“No.”

Beatrice nodded. “I wonder if he does know anything.”

Lily averted her eyes. She was dying to ask, “What is there to know?” But the prospect of actually learning Beatrice’s secret frightened her terribly. She ate a bite of potato, pushed around the

carrots, and had another bite of potato. She kept her eyes fixed on her plate.

Another long silence fell.

“Don’t call Marie,” her father said to his wife. Marie was Adele’s sister in the Alsace. “Anyone can hear on the party line.”

“I know that!”

After a moment her father said, “Sorry.”

Her mother flung down her napkin, pushed her chair away from the table, and stood up. But she didn’t seem to know where to go. She stood there, her hands on the table, propping herself up.

“Sit down,” her father said quietly after a moment.

“I don’t know if I can!”

“Sit down, mama,” Beatrice said. “Please.”

Her mother sat down. After a moment she grabbed her wine glass and gulped her wine down.

After a while Beatrice turned to Lily. Beatrice was smiling that dreamy smile that Lily found so unnerving.

“Do you remember that day right after the war ended when M. Legrande gave away all his pastries! Free pastries for everyone! I think it was a Sunday, wasn’t it? We went crazy, didn’t we, choosing all those tarts.”

Lily couldn't smile. Had Beatrice forgotten that M. Legrande and his family had just fled from Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine? It seemed so odd of her to bring up that precise recollection!

"Yes," Lily said after a moment. "We couldn't finish them all."

"Not by a long shot! I'd just gotten that new burgundy dress and I certainly wasn't going to get too fat to get into it!" Beatrice laughed. No one else seemed to find her line of thought the least bit funny. Her father buried himself deeper in his fish and potatoes. Her mother stared off at an odd angle, as if she were inspecting the floral wallpaper. Beatrice shook her head. "I think we went into the garden the next day and crumpled all those leftover tarts for the birds." She turned to Lily. "Did the birds come for them?"

"I don't remember," Lily said.

Beatrice nodded. "I don't remember either."

"Enough!" her father exploded. "Enough!"

On Fridays they usually had fruit for dessert, usually berries, often with cream. Tonight there was nothing. No one commented on the absence of dessert. Somehow it seemed fitting. Her mother began removing the dishes and Beatrice got up to help. They moved awkwardly around one another, as if they'd forgotten how two people could manage one chore. Once they actually bumped into one another

and each said, “Sorry.” Her father remained sitting at the table, staring off, his hand clasped around his wine glass.

Finally dinner was over. Lily trudged up to her room. She left the light off—she didn’t want to see anything. But so much moonlight poured in that the room was still illuminated. She thought about pulling the curtains shut but she couldn’t find the energy. All she could do was get undressed and crawl into bed.

What struck her as she was falling asleep was that someone as strong and as brave as Abelard the blacksmith had proven of no help. What could you do when a strong arm and a brave heart didn’t count for enough? How weak it made one feel! She found herself shaking her head—or else dreaming that she was shaking it.

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Chapter 11.

Once or twice a week her mother made candles. She would set up her melting and dipping apparatus in the kitchen and happily spend several hours creating colorful candles that she sold at the Saturday open-air market.

Lily would always accompany her to the market and help with the carrying, with making change, and with wrapping the purchases in paper. Her mother allowed her to sneak off, to poke around the stalls, and to grab a fruit sample, a sausage sample, or a bread sample, but most of the time she remained with her mother, helping.

Usually they were quiet together. Each loved watching the scene. But sometimes they talked; it was perhaps the only time during the week when Lily and her mother engaged in any sort of conversation. In fact, practically everything she knew about her mother's childhood and her mother's family she'd learned on these Saturdays.

For example, she'd learned that her mother had had twin brothers several years younger than herself who had both died in infancy from pneumonia. Lily dreamed a lot about those little boys. She learned that her mother's father had been a cavalryman in the Great War, which seemed to Lily very dashing and exciting. She also learned that her mother spoke excellent German, which apparently was customary for

anyone growing up in the Alsace. She'd never heard her mother speak a word of German and her mother had said to her, "And you never will."

When Lily awoke she remembered that this was Saturday. Her first thought was, "I wonder if we'll be going to the market?" She tiptoed down in her nightclothes and saw that her mother was packing up for the market. Lily retreated, got dressed, and reappeared ready to help.

"What should I do?" Lily asked.

"Carry those two bags. But have some bread and butter first!"

Neither Beatrice nor her father had come down yet. It was only eight o'clock in the morning and there was certainly no reason why they shouldn't sleep in; and yet it seemed odd to Lily that anyone could sleep under these circumstances. She toasted herself some baguette in the smallest of her mother's cast iron skillets, slathered the bread with butter and jam, and poured herself a glass of lemonade that her mother had made from lemons from their lemon tree. They'd had a huge crop of lemons this year, so many that they'd given three-quarters away.

By nine o'clock the open-air market was in full swing. Housewives with their mesh bags were picking over the apricots and peaches or standing in line at the butcher's stall or the fishmonger's. No one smiled. It was like the war again. During the war it was as if smiling had

been forbidden. The children still laughed and smiled and horsed around but the adults found nothing to smile about.

Lily remembered that the only grownups in town who ever smiled during the war were the five German soldiers. They seemed to be having a carefree, fine old time of it. You would see the sergeant walking down the street munching on an apple, or Beatrice's corporal stopping to look in the shop windows, first at the bakery, then at the delicatessen where roasting chickens turned on their spits just inside the steamy window, then at the cheese shop where platters of olives filled the display window. Who wouldn't smile at all that—if, that is, you were a German soldier at his leisure and at his ease.

Well, and Beatrice also smiled, which was perhaps as significant a charge against her as any ...

Lily sat beside her mother in their booth at the market. Some Saturdays, especially before holidays like Easter and saints' days, business would be brisk, and other Saturdays they might not sell three candles altogether. But even on the slow Saturdays people always took an interest in her mother's candles, touched them, handled them, and thought about buying them. Not this Saturday. Not only was there no business; no one stopped to look.

In fact, they seemed to be actively avoiding her mother's stall, either rushing by it or studiously looking the other way as they passed

...

"Good morning, Madame Brisbois," Lily said as the wife of the train agent passed by. The agent's wife didn't so much as glance Lily's way.

"They're shunning us," her mother murmured.

Lily glanced at her mother. "Is that what they're doing?"

"Yes."

"But ... how can they know anything?"

"In a small town?" her mother said. "With Leon bellowing all over the place?"

"But why would anyone believe him? They know he's a terrible liar!"

"People believe liars much more than you might think."

"Even when they're proven to be liars? Time and time again?"

"Yes."

This so exasperated Lily that she hopped off her stool and darted out of the booth. She felt like smashing things. She rushed between the shoppers and ran all the way to the end of the market, then turned and ran back again, pointedly knocking into the ladies. As she rushed past the ancient woman who was selling flowers, the woman cried, "Stop all that running!"

“What?” Lily said angrily.

“You heard me!”

“I’ll run if I please!” Lily cried.

“You’ll get yours!” the old woman hissed.

“Will I?” Lily kicked the nearest flower can, one full of daffodils. The can toppled over, clattering to the ground. Water poured out of it.

“Little monster!” the old woman shouted.

Lily knew that she was in sight of her mother but she didn’t care. Of course people stared at her—she didn’t care about that either. She would have kicked them all if she could! She raced to her mother’s stall and darted in. To her amazement, her mother smiled at her. For the first time in what felt like forever, Lily smiled too.

“The old witch,” her mother said.

Lily plopped herself down on the stool, as if ready to resume selling. Her mother shook her head.

“No, let’s go,” she said. “Enough is enough.”

They packed up the candles and began the long trudge home. They hadn’t sold a single candle and not a single person had said a kind word to them. Not a single kind word, after having lived in Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine all her life. Just like that, Lily saw that she had no allegiance to her town. As soon as she could, she would leave it for Paris. Sainte-

Therese-Sur-Seine was no longer her home—from this morning forward it was just a place she happened to find herself.

Chapter 12.

When she got home she wolfed down a cold lunch of bread, cheese and salami, popped a pickle into her mouth as she darted out the door, and hopped through the two gardens to find Albert. She'd come up with an idea. The thought of it frightened her—but at least it was something!

Albert was sitting on her front step, tossing bits of gravel nowhere in particular.

“Albert!”

Albert nodded. He looked under the weather. She knew that he must still be stinging from his encounter with Leon. She plopped down beside him.

“Look, I have an idea!” she whispered.

“What’s that?” he said without interest.

“You know, the sorts of things detectives do. They gather information. They don’t always know what’s going to prove important. Right? We need information. We need to know the case against Beatrice. I want to get into your father’s study.”

“What?” Albert stared at her dumbfounded. “We can’t do that.”

“Why not? We’ll sneak in there, we’ll look around; probably it’s right on his desk! Doesn’t that make sense? If he’s investigating

Beatrice, wouldn't he keep her file right on his desk? I'll just take a quick peek."

"No! We can't do that!"

He was failing her again.

"All you have to do is stand guard," Lily said. "I'll go in!"

"No!"

"Is your father in his study right now?"

"I have no idea."

"Go knock. If he isn't there ... it'll just take a minute for me to look around."

"We can't."

Lily grabbed his hand and pulled him to feet.

"Come on, Albert," she whispered. "It'll just take a minute!"

She opened the front door and pulled him inside. After a moment Albert stepped in front of her and led them down the hallway. They could hear activity in the kitchen. At the closed door to Pascal's study they stopped and listened. No one seemed to be inside.

"Knock!" Lily whispered.

"We can't go in there," Albert said, shaking his head with finality. "It's wrong."

"It's for Beatrice!"

"It's still wrong!"

They faced each other, glaring. At that instant Albert's mother appeared. She gave them a quizzical look and said to Albert, "Get washed up. We're going to your uncle's for dinner." She turned to Lily. "Lily, go home now." Both Lily and Albert bent their heads. Albert trudged up the stairs and Lily moved through the Monette kitchen and out into the garden. There she stopped. Pascal Monette was sitting on the stone garden bench, smoking a pipe, lost in thought.

Lily decided to head in the other direction and go all around the block to get home, rather than cutting through the fence, but suddenly it struck her that she wanted Albert's father to see her. She walked across the garden defiantly. If M. Monette condemned Beatrice to death, he'd have to deal with seeing Lily after that awful fact. He'd have to live with Lily as his neighbor long after that!

He looked up as she passed. "Ah," Pascal murmured, "you go back and forth through that hole in the fence, don't you?"

Lily stopped and nodded.

"Presumably neither you nor Albert want that hole fixed?" he said with a smile.

"No, we like it," Lily said, her voice on edge.

Pascal glanced at her. "Come sit with me," he said.

Lily sat down. She bent her head and folded her hands in her lap. Pascal glanced at her again.

“Did you know that I lost a son in the war?” he said.

Shocked, Lily exclaimed, “Albert had a brother?”

Pascal nodded. “Albert hardly knew him. I don’t know how many times they met. Very few.” He stared off. “When I was young ... I knew a woman. We had a son. Michael grew up with her in Rouen. I saw him only rarely. I think Albert met him maybe twice. He went into the Navy at the start of the war. Then he was killed ... ridiculously.”

“I’m sorry,” Lily whispered.

Pascal nodded. “Wars are so incredibly stupid,” he said. “Do you know how he was killed? By the British! When the British sank our navy, he was one of the sailors who died.”

Lily remembered that story. Her father had told it to her. As the Nazis approached the French fleet anchored in the Mediterranean, the British demanded that the French scuttle their navy rather than let the Nazis get their hands on all those valuable boats. The French agreed; but as the Nazis got closer and closer, the French still hadn’t scuttled their ships. Finally, perhaps through a misunderstanding or because the British felt they couldn’t wait any longer, the British fleet fired on the French fleet, sinking the French navy and killing thousands of French sailors. That helped explain why, in the aftermath of the war, the British were almost as despised as the Germans.

“It was grotesque, ridiculous,” Pascal muttered. “To die that way.”

Lily waited. She glanced surreptitiously at Albert's father.

"Can you tell me anything about Beatrice," she whispered.

Pascal came out of his reverie. "Ah, your sister," he said. He nodded. "She hasn't been on my mind today."

That seemed like a good sign!

"She hasn't?" Lily said.

"Let me ask you something," Pascal said. "If a boy steals an apple, should he go to prison for twenty years?"

"No!"

"No. Every schoolchild knows that. And what if during the war I'm friendly with a German soldier and he gives me some cigarettes? How bad is that?"

Lily hesitated. She wasn't sure what she ought to say. What would help Beatrice the most? Finally she murmured, "I don't know."

"That's harder, isn't it?" Pascal said. "But still, is that so very terrible? I mean, a friendly German soldier, some cigarettes, that isn't the end of the world."

"No," Lily agreed after a moment.

"But what if you tell that German soldier something that you really shouldn't--"

Lily leaped to her feet. "I have to go home now!" she cried.

Pascal nodded. "Of course, Lily. Sit just one more minute."

Lily forced herself to sit back down. Pascal sighed heavily.

“Things will never be the same after Monday,” Pascal said.

Lily froze. “Is that about Beatrice?”

“No.” Pascal stared at her. “I haven’t decided about Beatrice.”

“Leon is a liar!” Lily exclaimed suddenly. “You know that!”

“I know that, Lily. I know that as sure as I know anything. But that doesn’t mean that he’s telling a lie this time.”

“Just because he’s your nephew--”

“No.” Pascal shook his head. “I would never choose based on that relationship. It’s that ... the facts look to match.”

Lily felt tears spring to her eyes.

“M. Monette,” she whispered.

“I know, Lily,” Pascal said gently. “Look. All I can say is that for today, at least, you needn’t worry. No one is coming for Beatrice today.”

Lily leaped up and raced off. Sobbing, she caught her dress as flew through the hole in the fence, ripping a huge gash in it.

Chapter 13.

After they'd endured another miserable dinner Beatrice went to her room and Lily to hers. Lily lay on her bed, fully dressed and completely agitated. She could hear Beatrice listening to music on the radio. It was a show that came on every Saturday evening live from a Paris nightclub where a French big band played dance music. Lily thought that the music was called "swing."

On the rare Saturday nights when Beatrice was home, Lily loved to listen to the music through the wall and picture couples dancing. For some reason she never cared to listen to the program on the big downstairs radio. She only liked it when Beatrice had the program on and Lily, lying in her bed, could hear it, muted but crystal clear, filtering through the wall.

Tonight the music made her intensely sad. After a while she hopped out of bed, left her room, and knocked gently on her sister's door.

"Come in, Lily," Beatrice said.

Beatrice, sitting in the room's one armchair, was dressed as if to go out. Lily gave her a quizzical look.

"No, I'm not going anywhere," Beatrice said. "I just felt like dolling up."

Lily hopped on Beatrice's bed, which was much higher and fluffier than her own. Sometimes, especially during storms, she would sleep with her sister in this bed. In a way the bed had frightened her as much as those storms, because, being so high off the ground, Lily had worried about falling off. She would sleep tight to the middle, right against her sister, so as to prevent any inadvertent falls. And Beatrice would hold her, as an extra measure of precaution.

They listened to the music. After a long while Lily said in a small voice, "Beatrice, didn't you know better than to go out with a German soldier?"

Beatrice shook her head. "Ah, mushroom, I did know better. I knew better than to drink so much, I knew better than to have so many boyfriends, I knew better ... I just seemed to hate doing the right thing."

"Why was that?" Lily whispered.

"I have no idea."

The music played. Beatrice smiled to herself. She must be picturing herself in Paris, dancing in this very nightclub. The program was called "Intimate Ballroom." Lily liked that image very much, the image of a room with high ceilings and vast spaces that was still intimate and made for couples.

"Is it more like a ballroom or more like a cave?" Lily said. "The place on the radio?"

“It’s a big space,” Lily said. “Not very elegant at all. Not Belle Epoque,” Beatrice laughed. “It’s really just a big dance hall in Pigalle, down the hill from Sacre Coeur. Nothing special.” She smiled at Lily. “It’s much nicer on the radio than in real life.”

Lily nodded. After a while she said, “The trouble ... is it just about going out with Heinrich?”

Lily knew that it couldn’t be. Leon knew something; there was some secret involved. Everyone in Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine knew that Beatrice had spent time with Heinrich. That was no secret. There had to be something else ...

Beatrice made no reply. Lily watched her grow sad. Beatrice began shaking her head. “It was a terrible, stupid thing,” she said. “So stupid and so terrible!”

Lily hopped off the bed and hugged her sister. Beatrice was crying.

“If I tell you the story, you’ll hate me,” Beatrice said.

“Never!” Lily cried.

“No, you will.”

The music played. Invisible couples danced in that Pigalle dance hall that, on the radio, felt like some ballroom at Versailles. Lily retreated to the bed. Beatrice dried her eyes.

“I’ll tell you,” Beatrice said. “But then you’ll know and you’ll have to live with it. Okay?”

Lily nodded.

“I was seeing Heinrich,” Beatrice said, looking off. The song ended and the band started up again. The blast of the horn section startled Beatrice. She lowered the sound until just the faintest strains could be heard. “It was a Sunday afternoon early last summer. It was hot, quiet, peaceful ... we were having a picnic by the river. The war felt so far away, even though the Americans were approaching Paris. Everyone knew that we’d be liberated soon. Heinrich knew it. He knew he’d be retreating back to Germany. We were a little sad because we actually did like each other. We’d had some wine, I was very sleepy, and Heinrich said to me, ‘It’s like I never went to war, being stationed here in Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine.’ I smiled at him; we both knew that we’d been lucky, as far as that went. Then he said, ‘Though we may be executed, all five of us, because we never found that shortwave.’ And I said, ‘Oh, you mean Emile’s?’ It was the most horrible moment of my life, wanting to get those words back, wanting to eat them! But I couldn’t. They were out there in the air, they’d found their way to Heinrich’s ear. He just looked at me. Neither of us said a word.”

“How did you even know about Emile’s shortwave radio?” Lily whispered.

“This just goes to show you,” Beatrice said. “How one stupid thing leads to another. The fact of the matter is that I’d also been seeing

Emile. They'd just had their first child and his wife was pregnant with their second child and somehow ... He was such a sweet man and I think I just wanted to give him something. Myself. I wasn't being mean. I didn't want to hurt his wife. I didn't want to break up his family. We spent a little time together. And during one of those times he said to me, 'The Americans are at Houdan!' And I said, 'How can you possibly know that?' And he said, 'I have a shortwave radio.' He shouldn't have told me that!" Beatrice exclaimed. "He knew how unreliable I was!"

Lily sat silently, her legs folded under her. "But how could Leon have known anything about this?" she exclaimed suddenly.

"That picnic of ours? It was near that shack of his. He must have spotted us ... he was always sniffing after me. He hid in the bushes and watched us as we picnicked. And when I said what I said to Heinrich, Leon popped right out of the bushes, pointed a finger at me, and said, 'That'll do it!' Heinrich got up to thrash him for spying on us ... but everything was so jumbled in that moment that we just packed up our things and left. We didn't say a word about Leon or Emile after that."

"And then ... they took Emile away?"

"I never spoke to Heinrich again. And he never spoke to me. 'Our' five Germans were gone within weeks of that, fleeing back to Berlin with the rest of the German army."

A new song began. It was the signature finale song of “Intimate Ballroom.” In a few moments, when the song ended, the announcer would invite listeners to come back next Saturday to “dance away your cares at the Intimate Ballroom.” Before the song ended Lily struggled off the bed and left her sister’s room.

Chapter 14

Lily fell right asleep. Into her dreamless sleep some ferocious pounding erupted. She awoke: men were shouting and pounding at the front door. She looked at her clock: two a.m. She ran to the door of her bedroom, opened it, and stood stock-still. In a moment Beatrice appeared at her bedroom door. Then her father appeared, tying the belt of his bathrobe. Behind him her mother, bewildered, struggled with her robe.

Her father made his way down the stairs. Lily ran halfway down the stairs and stopped. Her father opened the door and two policemen in uniform barged in. Lily had never seen them before. They pushed her father back, causing him to lose his balance. He stumbled, just managing not to fall. Lily screamed.

“Out of the way!” the taller policeman cried. “We’re here for your son!”

“For who?” her father exclaimed, confused.

“Your son, the traitor!” the shorter one cried.

“We don’t have a son!”

“Don’t try to harbor him!”

Beatrice had come halfway down the stairs too. She and Lily stared at each other in bewilderment. The taller policeman pushed her father again. Lily ran downstairs to stand beside him. That same policeman

pushed forward, knocking Lily right over. Her father, struggling with the two policemen, flailed with his arms. Lily found herself entangled in a sea of legs. One of the policemen raised his flashlight as if to strike her father. Lily screamed. Her father shielded himself from a blow that didn't come. Above them, at the top of the stairs, her mother was screaming too.

“We don't have a son!” she kept screaming over and over again.

Lily, lost in that tangle of legs, crawled out and got to her knees. A third policeman wearing sergeant stripes hurried in with his pistol drawn.

“M. Dupuis,” he shouted. “Stop fighting! It's no use! If you don't give up your son we'll take you all in!”

“I am not Dupuis!” he father cried.

Lily blinked. They had the wrong house! Her father's exam room doubled as his study. Lily crawled and then ran to where her father kept his identity papers. She rushed back waving them. She ran right toward the sergeant's drawn pistol, which caused him to take a step back. Lily held out her father's identity papers and waved them at the sergeant.

“Here, here! Look for yourself!” she cried.

The sergeant grabbed the papers and studied them.

“Damn it!” he exclaimed. He turned to her father. “You're M. Page?”

“I am!”

The sergeant turned on the other two policemen. “What the hell are we doing here?” he yelled.

“We’re not from around here either!” the taller one replied. “We just go where we’re told!”

Many of their neighbors had appeared. A crowd of them gathered outside. They filled the Page’s small garden and pressed toward the front door.

“What’s going on?” one cried.

“For God’s sake!” a woman exclaimed.

The crowd pressed closer. The sergeant turned on them.

“Back off!” he cried. “Get back!” He turned on Lily’s father. “So where is this Dupuis?” he demanded. “Where the hell does he live?”

“Get out of my house!” her father yelled.

“Point out the Dupuis place!” the sergeant screamed. “Or I’ll take you all in!”

“I won’t!” her father replied.

The sergeant turned, tramped to front door, and confronted the crowd.

“Somebody tell me where this Dupuis is or I’ll haul you all in!”

“It’s the one with the rooster weather vane!” someone yelled from the crowd. “Right across the street!” Several in the crowd booed the informer. “The hell with all of you!” the man shouted back.

“Let’s go!” the sergeant cried.

The three policemen took off running. They rushed across the street toward the Dupuis house, where they began pounding on the door.

It was like a horrible comedy. Lily had once seen some Keystone Cops comedies at the cinema featuring funny policeman who were continually rushing around, tripping over themselves, and piling into and out of cars too small for them. This felt like that, only horrible.

The policemen were shouting “Let us in right now!” and “Open this door!” as Lily’s neighbors hurried over to that side of the street.

Lily’s mother had collapsed on the hall carpet. Lily only noticed her now.

“Mama!” she cried. “Papa!”

Her father turned and dropped to his knees. He knelt down and bent over his wife.

“Love,” he said. “It’s all right. It’s all right.” He patted her hair. “Get my bag,” he said to Lily. Lily raced to her father’s exam room and came back dragging his heavy leather doctor’s bag. Her father found the

smelling salts and passed them under his wife's nostrils. Her eyes opened wide.

"It wasn't for us," he whispered. "It wasn't for us."

Her mother said nothing. She looked amazed. Her father helped her sit up. Lily glanced up the stairs. Beatrice was standing at the top of the stairs, her arms wrapped around her chest, holding herself tight.

A huge commotion erupted outside. Lily ran to the front door and looked out. The two policemen were dragging Matthew, the Dupuis boy, out of his house. Matthew was struggling and screaming, "I didn't do anything! I didn't do anything!" The shorter of the two policemen got in Matthew's face and cried, "Shut the hell up!"

The sergeant gestured to the crowd to get out of the way. Some of Matthew's neighbors resisted and made a show of blocking the sergeant's way. The sergeant pushed them right aside. Several people in the crowd began cheering and applauding. A woman's voice rang out, "Give the boy a chance!" This was answered instantly by a man's voice shouting, "Give him some rope!"

They dragged Matthew to their car and pushed him in. The sergeant got in the back with the prisoner and the other two jumped in front. In an instant the engine turned over, the lights came on, and the car sped off, leaving the crowd standing there in the middle of the street.

Chapter 15.

Lily tossed and turned until four in the morning. Then she drifted into a deep sleep. When she awoke it was 10 a.m. She leaped out of bed. She'd never slept so late on a Sunday morning in her life.

Sometimes they went to church on Sunday, though that had been very inconsistent during the war years. Her father hadn't liked the priest, a man he called "to the right of Franco." Lily had a vague idea of what that meant. But when the war ended there'd been a change in priests and the new one rather appealed to her father. "An intellectual from Paris," her father had said. "A socialist and, who knows, maybe a communist." He'd said that with a chuckle, as if being a communist wasn't half-bad.

But even though the new priest rather appealed to him, church really didn't. Nor did her mother seem that interested, although sometimes she went by herself during the week, very early in the morning. Still, they did sometimes go to church as a family for noon mass on Sunday. Lily never knew whether or not they were going until she came down for breakfast Sunday morning. Then she would either hear her mother say, "We're off to church today!" or else hear her talk about other things, which meant that church wasn't on the agenda.

This morning Lily tiptoed down and listened at the kitchen door. Her father and mother were talking. She peeked in and saw that her

father was dressed for the day and appeared to have been out already, to judge by the fact that he was wearing his light jacket and his shoes looked dusty. Her mother wasn't dressed yet. Her father sat at the kitchen table drinking coffee. Her mother stood by the sink doing nothing. Probably she was too agitated to sit. She wrung her hands as they talked.

"Tell me again what he said," her mother said.

"He said he'd go to Pascal and change his story."

"Change it how?"

"I don't know. I don't know what the story is!"

"You didn't ask?"

"No." Her father paused. "I didn't want to know."

"It can't be so bad! It's Beatrice, after all!"

"Who knows what bad even means," her father muttered. After a moment he said, "It could be bad."

"You have some idea?"

"No!"

They fell silent. Lily pressed her back to the wall. The house grew so silent that she could hear the ticking of the big clock in the living room. A horse-drawn cart clattered by. She heard the sounds of her father pouring himself more coffee and then the scraping sound of dry toast being buttered.

“But he took the money?”

“Leon took the money.”

“How was he?”

“Sarcastic.”

“Of course.”

Her mother ran the faucet. Pipes squealed somewhere in the house.

“What are they saying in town?”

“That Leon is going around saying, ‘Beatrice is going to get hers!’”

“No details?”

“No.” Her father paused. “Not yet, anyway.”

“That’s a good thing!”

Again they fell silent.

“We have to do something today,” her mother said suddenly. “You saw what happened last night!”

“We have to give Leon a chance to go see Pascal and change his story. Plus Pascal said he’d warn us if ... if he decides against Beatrice.”

“Do you think Leon will go and see him?”

“No.”

“You think he’d just take our money!” her mother exclaimed.

“Of course,” her father muttered. “Of course he would.”

A moment later a plate fell to the kitchen floor and shattered. Lily heard her mother scurrying to sweep up the pieces.

“Don’t worry about that!” her father exclaimed. “Come,” he said more gently, “sit down.”

Lily heard the scrape of a chair. Her mother sat down.

“Look,” she said suddenly, “we have to send Beatrice away. Hear me out! If Pascal finds her innocent, we can call her back. If Pascal finds her guilty, she’s safely away. It’s the only plan that makes sense! I know you’re fixed on waiting to hear and convinced that Pascal will warn us. All right! I accept that he’ll warn us. But how much time will he actually give us? Can you be sure he won’t warn us one minute and then policemen will show up at our door before we’ve had a chance to get our wits together? Isn’t that a possibility? How will you feel then? Isn’t my plan better?”

A long silence followed. Finally her father said, “It is.”

“It is!” her mother echoed. “She can go to Paris this afternoon and be on a train for the Alsace by tonight!”

“Do we even know what’s going on there?” her father said after a moment. “The reprisals look to be terrible against those old German families. It’s been a bloodbath.”

“I know. But in a way that’s a gift, Heaven help us. Who’ll care about a French girl showing up at her aunt’s in the middle of all that?”

Lily imagined her father nodding. She would have nodded.

“I’ll get the trunk from the basement,” her father said.

“No! Let’s give her a lighter thing. I don’t want us to look conspicuous! Beatrice is just going off to Paris for the evening and we’re seeing her off. Maybe we won’t even see her off! We’ve got to act like nothing is going on ... just to be on the safe side.”

“Agreed. What did you have in mind?”

“I have a small bag in my closet. It’ll do.”

“Who’ll tell Beatrice?”

“I will. I’ll go find that bag and then knock on her door.”

“All right.”

Lily expected to hear movement. But nothing happened.

“There’s a train schedule in one of those kitchen drawers,” her father said. “Let me see it.”

Lily heard her mother get up, open first one drawer and then another, rummage around, shut the drawer, and return to the table. Next came the rustling of the train schedule.

“There’s an overnight train to Colmar that leaves the Gare du Nord at 7 p.m.,” her father said. “There’s a train from here at 4 p.m. that gets into the Gare de L’Est before 5. That gives her plenty of time to get to the Gare du Nord.”

“All right.”

“Will you phone your sister and tell her she’s coming?”

They both fell silent, thinking.

“I don’t know,” her mother said.

“I don’t know either,” her father said.

“I think it might be safer if we didn’t call. If she just showed up.

With the party line and so much gossip.”

“I agree.”

Her mother laughed. “I wish I could send my sister a smoke signal, like the American Indians used to do!”

Her father chuckled. They were feeling better. Lily finally exhaled. Now they would certainly be moving, leaving the kitchen, putting their plan into action. Lily turned and tiptoed toward the front door, which she opened. A moment later she found herself out in the bright sunshine.

Chapter 16.

She stood in the sunshine, not knowing what to do or where to go. Normally she would have searched out Albert. But today she didn't dare. She didn't trust herself not to say something about Beatrice leaving town and she didn't trust Albert not to pass that information along to his father.

She found herself walking in the direction of the main street and the center of town. She had a vague idea that she might visit the train station, though she couldn't say why.

Few people were about. No doubt that had something to do with the arrest of Matthew Dupuis. The town must be reeling with shock. And maybe consumed by fear, too, because who knew how many other secrets townspeople were harboring behind their pretty little gardens and substantial doors.

Lily examined the houses that she passed in this new light. Could it be that everyone had something to be ashamed about? Was everyone in town guilty of one thing or another?

But certainly Emile's children were innocent. Emile had made a fatal mistake confiding in Beatrice, Beatrice had made what might soon be deemed an executable offense for blurting out what she knew to Heinrich, Heinrich did his terrible duty, at once a sin and not a sin, but Emile's children? Certainly not them!

Suddenly she wanted to do something for them. But what could she possibly do?

She reached the main street. Few shops were open this Sunday morning. Normally the bakery would have been open, but not this morning. As Lily trudged along she came to the florist shop, which opened early on Sunday mornings for families wanting flowers to place on graves. Lily nodded to herself and entered.

The young woman who ran the shop was very pretty. She lived in the next town over and therefore Lily didn't see her much and didn't know anything about her. But something about her appearance and her smile reminded her of Beatrice. During those years of the occupation, didn't every pretty girl in France go out with one German soldier or another, so as to have stockings, cigarettes and chocolate? More to the point, didn't they step out with Germans so as to provide their family with a little added food and an extra measure of security?

Wasn't it almost the honorable thing to do, if you loved your family, to go out with a German soldier who might in the end do your family some important, even life-saving favor?

Lily thought about that as she looked around at the bouquets of roses, at the tall, single sunflowers, at the exotic birds of paradise, at the mixed bouquets. She looked without, however, quite seeing them.

Her mind was very far away. The proprietress, drying her hands, came out from behind the counter and smiled at Lily.

“Can I help you?”

“Some flowers for a grave,” Lily said quietly. “I don’t have much to spend.”

“Here,” the young woman said. “These are sweet.”

It was a mixed bouquet of daffodils, violets, and baby’s breath. Lily nodded and paid. She felt a little odd and self-conscious carrying her bouquet through town; but as the streets were so empty, she stopped thinking about how she looked after a block or two.

The graveyard was part of the town’s famous mansion. Everyone called the estate at the edge of town the mansion. It was once a great house and a great estate, a miniature of the beautiful manor, gardens, and lakes at Sceaux, but now it was a public park. The manor house was used for events; couples came from as far away as Paris to get married here. It was a serene, amazing place, with swans on the small lake and a tiny café that the baker’s family ran. Who would run the café now?

Lily pushed open the wrought iron gate to the cemetery, which squeaked so loudly that Lily jumped. Inside, she walked slowly among the gravestones. She felt as if she were trespassing. But of course she had every right to be there. Still, she kept an eye out for a guard or a grave keeper.

There were a few elaborate mausoleums and some intricate marble statues here and there but for the most part the graves were simple, a granite marker, a name, dates, and a brief inscription. Most of these were headstones; some of the markers were planted flat in the ground. Few had bouquets of flowers. The graveyard seemed only marginally tended.

She looked for Emile's grave. The last names of the families here were all so familiar to her. The same families had lived hereabouts for the longest time. There were Albert's grandparents, his father's mother and father, side by side. There were the parents of her music teacher. And there ... there was Emile.

Lily stopped. She found herself shaking. There were three bunches of flowers in front of his headstone, the flowers faded, probably placed there the Sunday before. The inscription on his headstone read, "He loved his country." Lily began sobbing. She couldn't stop. Her body heaved until finally, choking and gasping for air, she managed to slow the flow of tears.

She wished with her whole being that she hadn't come. A sparrow alighted on the ground in front of the headstone, danced there for a moment, and darted away. Lily wiped away her tears and stared at the marker.

"I'm so sorry," she whispered.

She couldn't put her bouquet on the ground with the three others. She didn't feel entitled. Looking at the three bouquets of wilted flowers at the foot of Emile's headstone hurt so much that she thought she might fall down. New tears in her eyes, she turned from Emile's grave and moved blindly along the path toward the exit.

Suddenly she stopped. There was no way she would carry the bouquet home! Nor could she just discard it. She looked around her and spotted a headstone that read, "Clara Abraham, 1864 – 1898." The inscription read, "She brought music to our town." Lily carefully placed the bouquet down in front of the gravestone and ran from the cemetery.

Chapter 17.

When she got home she was amazed to find her father napping on the living room sofa. She'd never in her life seen him do such a thing. Not only did he seem to have endless energy, he'd even made some pronouncements about how napping constituted a weakness. But there he was, curled up on the sofa, dead to the world.

Lily tiptoed upstairs. The door to Beatrice's room was open. Beatrice and her mother were talking quietly. The majority of Beatrice's clothes lay scattered on her bed. Beatrice smiled and waved Lily in.

"Beatrice is visiting my sister," her mother announced, making light of it. "Your aunt Marie in Colmar."

Lily nodded.

"She's leaving this afternoon."

Again Lily nodded. She avoided looking at either her mother or at Beatrice. Her eye landed on the small suitcase that looked to be just about full already. It was really too small to hold much of anything, maybe a couple of dresses, a few toiletries, some undergarments. Lily understood why her mother had chosen such a small suitcase, so as not to draw attention to the fact that Beatrice was leaving. But it looked so inadequate! Lily eyed the suitcase skeptically.

"She's not bringing much," her mother agreed, catching Lily's look. "But she may only be there for a very short while."

“That’s good!” Lily said.

Beatrice was deciding between two of her stuffed animals. The first was a colorful fabric snake that had somehow made its way from South America to provincial France by way of a Parisian shop in a courtyard off a narrow street in the Marais. The second, the tiniest bear imaginable, also came from Paris, from a shop on the rue Jacob. It was hardly two inches tall and it made one smile to look at it. Beatrice held the bear in one hand and the snake in the other, trying to decide.

“Well, Lily,” Beatrice finally said, “I’m leaving one of these in your care. I don’t think it’s very friendly to leave you with a snake, so it’s the bear for you. Come along snake!” She stuffed the snake in the bag and turned to Lily. “Now, let me tell you how to care for teeny bear,” Beatrice said. “He has many special likes and dislikes.”

Lily laughed. Beatrice proceeded to describe the bear’s likes and dislikes. Lily’s eyes began to tear up. Beatrice smiled and patted her head.

“And absolutely do not put teeny bear in a dresser drawer. He’s claustrophobic!”

Lily nodded solemnly.

“You can shop for some things when you get there,” her mother said, trying to choose between one sweater and another.

“Of course,” Beatrice replied.

“I don’t know.” The sweaters were frustrating her. “It’s still summer but the cold comes so quickly there!”

“It’s all right, mama,” Beatrice said gently.

“You choose!”

Beatrice did. The small bag, full to overflowing, had to be shut. Nothing else could be squeezed in.

“That’s that,” Beatrice said.

Her mother was lost in thought. “If you write, don’t put on a return address,” she said after a bit. She pondered that. “No, better that you don’t write at all.”

“Really?” Beatrice said.

Her mother nodded. “For the time being.”

The three of them stood there awkwardly.

“I’m afraid it’s a slow train to Colmar,” her mother said. “It stops everywhere.”

“That’s all right.”

“And money ... I don’t know ... your father will figure that out.”

“Of course.”

“And you know not to phone?”

“I do!”

They were getting a little testy. The sound of footfalls reached them. The stairs squeaked in their characteristic way. Lily’s father

appeared at the door to Beatrice's room. He stepped inside and glanced at the stuffed overnight bag.

"Everything in order?" he said.

As if everything was in order! Lily fought back tears. Her mother shrugged, no doubt more irritably than she had intended. Beatrice nodded and began returning her unpacked clothes to the dresser and the closet. The three of them watched Beatrice without speaking. In no time the room was back in order. That made it worse.

"How are we going to communicate?" Beatrice said, turning and facing her father.

"It's impossible to say how carefully they're going to monitor matters," her father replied. "Are they going to open mail? Are they going to listen in to phone calls? Read our telegrams? All over France, with a Pen in every town signing warrants and people fleeing right and left? That seems implausible!"

Everyone seemed to agree but no one nodded.

"Nevertheless," her mother said sharply.

"Nevertheless," her father said. He thought for a moment. "If it's good news, that's easy. We'll call immediately! If it's bad news ... I'll come personally. I'll get on a train," her father said.

"So if I see your handsome face in Colmar," Beatrice said, "I shouldn't be so very happy to see you?"

Her father stepped forward and hugged her. He remained holding her for the longest time. Her mother hugged her next. Her embrace was a little more formal, a little more cursory. But then she kissed Beatrice on the forehead in the sweetest way.

“All right,” her mother said.

“I’ll walk with Beatrice to the station!” Lily said. “That’s all right, isn’t it?”

Her mother and father exchanged glances.

“Yes,” her father said. “There’s nothing suspicious about that.”

“In fact, nothing could be more natural,” her mother agreed.

They remained standing, immobilized. The room felt small and tight. Lily, teeny bear in her hand, said, “Let me just put teeny bear away! Then I’m ready!”

Beatrice laughed. “At least teeny bear will be happy,” she said.

The spell felt broken. They could all move again.

“I’ll make you a snack for the train,” her mother said.

“I’ll get you some money,” her father said.

Beatrice nodded. She lifted the bag off the bed and grunted.

“Ugh! Not so light!” she said.

“Maybe we could take out--”

“That’s all right, mother. It’s all right.”

Lily ran to her room. As she carefully placed teeny bear on her dresser beside her clock she could hear her mother and father on the stairs, the stairs creaking noisily as they descended.

Chapter 18.

It became too hard to remain in the house. Lily and Beatrice left for the train station early. They had more than an hour to make their way to the small station. The afternoon heat daunted them and they moved slowly. Lily held her sister's hand as they trudged along.

They could have skirted the center of town but Beatrice led Lily that way. On the main shopping street, Beatrice stopped in front of every shop window. Finally Lily began yanking at Beatrice to get her to move more quickly.

"You're dawdling!" Lily cried. "You'll miss the train!"

It was taking forever. Beatrice, smiling, moved even more slowly. She spent forever peering at the window display at the small shop run by a rather elegant middle-aged woman who'd lived in Paris and who'd brought genuine antiques with her when she settled in Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine. The window contained an assortment of oddities, cups and saucers, clocks, fancy pens, old books, posters, period pieces, even a stuffed squirrel.

"I should get myself a nice pen like that one," Beatrice said, pointing to a gorgeous emerald green fountain pen sporting a fantastic price tag.

"We'll miss the train!" Lily cried.

Fortunately the shop was closed or else Beatrice might have stepped in. Thank God almost all the shops were closed! The bakery would normally have been open—but not now that the Legrande family had fled town. Even the florist had closed for the day. The only shop open was a little market that sold a bit of everything, oranges, canned soup, biscuits, and a few foreign things as well, including grains and spices from Africa. The proprietor was from Tunisia and spoke very little French. He stood outside his open shop, his white apron a blinding white in the afternoon sun, and greeted them as they passed.

“Good morning!” he said.

“Good afternoon,” Beatrice replied, laughing.

“Ah, afternoon. Of course!”

Beatrice smiled at the Tunisian. “Do you like it here in Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine?” she asked.

“Not too much.”

“No?” Beatrice said quizzically. “Any reason?”

The Tunisian shrugged. “I miss my home.”

Beatrice nodded. Lily pulled her away. When they passed the bakery, Lily almost asked, “I wonder what they did?” But she held her tongue. Finally the small station came into view. It was nothing much of a building, just a small, nondescript box that usually stood completely empty except for a few moments before a train arrived, when,

suddenly, the ticket seller would appear out of nowhere to sell tickets. There was a bit of platform, a single bench, and nothing else.

Beatrice slowed as they approached the station. Then she stopped.

“I’m not going,” she said.

“Beatrice!” Lily exclaimed.

“I’m not going to Colmar.”

“You have to go!”

“No.” She turned to Lily and knelt down on one knee. “There’s nothing but Leon’s say-so. That’s all there is. Nothing else. And I have a plan about that! A plan came to me as we were walking.”

“What plan?” Lily whispered.

Beatrice put a finger to her mouth. “I can’t say. It’s very grown up.”

“Beatrice!”

Beatrice turned toward home. Lily couldn’t quite believe what was happening. She tugged at her sister’s arm.

“Mama and papa will be furious if you just show up again!”

“Not furious, mushroom,” Beatrice said gently. “Beside themselves with worry.”

“And they should be!”

Beatrice squeezed Lily’s hand and smiled. “My plan will work. I know Leon.”

They headed home. Beatrice was hurrying now. She dragged along her bag and dragged Lily along too. Finally Lily had to let go of her hand and trot beside her. Sweat dripped down Lily's forehead and into her eyes. Beatrice strode forward, sometimes grabbing her bag with both hands, sometimes switching hands in mid-stride. The few people about on the half-deserted streets couldn't help but stop and stare. Beatrice took no notice and rushed on.

As they approached their own block, Albert came flying around the corner on his bicycle. He raced up to them, jumped off his bike and threw it to the ground.

"I've been looking for you everywhere!" Albert exclaimed.

Beatrice and Lily stared at him. He was beaming, ecstatic.

"What is it?" Lily whispered.

Albert gasped for air. "I heard them!" he cried. "I heard my father and mother talking. He won't sign, Beatrice. He's not signing!"

"What?" Beatrice said.

"He--" Albert shook his head. "I'm sorry that I know you were being investigated," he said guiltily. "But ... my father has decided not to sign the warrant. You're safe, Beatrice," Albert whispered. "Safe!"

"You're positive?" Lily said, not believing her ears.

"I am!" Albert smiled. "I'm absolutely certain!"

"Tell me everything," Beatrice said, gripping Albert's arm.

“I was in the hall. My father came into the kitchen and said, ‘I’m not indicting Beatrice. Not just on Leon’s say-so.’ My mother said, ‘That’s wonderful news.’ Then my father said, ‘I’ll tell them tomorrow.’ My mother replied, ‘No, better tell them today.’ My father hesitated and then agreed. ‘You’re right,’ he said. ‘I’ll walk over this evening.’ So he’ll come by this evening!” Albert exclaimed. “You’ll see!”

Lily and Beatrice exchanged glances. Finally Beatrice broke into a broad smile. She hugged Albert, who blushed; then Lily kissed him quickly on the lips, causing him to flame red. Without another word he grabbed up his bicycle and pedaled away at top speed.

Beatrice and Lily hurried home. They exchanged glances and proceeded along the side of the house to the back, where Beatrice quietly opened the screen door. Their mother was standing at the sink. She turned around and stared at them, horrified.

“Beatrice!” her mother exclaimed. “What are you doing back?”

“It’s all right, mama,” Beatrice replied, rushing up to her mother and hugging her. “I’ve got news!”

“What? What news?”

Beatrice whispered the news into her mother’s ear. At the same moment their father entered the kitchen from the hall. He gave Lily a worried look and she smiled back, beaming from ear to ear.

“Beatrice is spared!” Lily exclaimed.

“How can you possibly know that?” her father said dubiously.

“Albert told us! He overheard. Monsieur Monette will be coming over this evening to tell us!”

Her father stood there motionless. A full ten seconds passed. Then he said soberly, “I’ll get the brandy.” He glanced at Lily and smiled.

“Four glasses, I should think.”

Chapter 19.

Lily and her family were sitting in the living room, listening to the radio. But what they were really listening for was the door. Was Pascal Monette really coming?

The evening drew on and the tension mounted. Every so often someone would get up abruptly and do something, go into the kitchen, go to the bathroom, grab a magazine. They listened to one show after another without really hearing. The clock with its implausibly loud ticking struck nine p.m. Surely it was getting too late for the Pen to make an appearance? Had Albert gotten it wrong?

Just at that moment they heard a knock at the door.

Daniel Page jumped to his feet. He was formally dressed; reflexively he adjusted his tie. “We can’t seem to know!” he warned.

“Remember!”

Her father opened the door. Pascal Monette stood there, his hat in his hand. He bowed slightly.

“Forgive me for calling on you so late,” he said. “I had some things I had to attend to.” He glanced significantly at Daniel. “I had to deliver some news to my nephew.”

“Of course!” her father said, ushering him in. “Please come in! We’re in here!”

Pascal entered, moved the few steps to the living room, and bowed at the threshold. Adele Page nodded. Beatrice and Lily sat stock still.

“Come in,” her mother said. She got to her feet. “What will you have to drink?”

“A brandy. A whiskey. Whatever you have.”

“Calvados?”

“Calvados will be fine.”

He remained standing.

“Sit, sit,” Daniel Page said.

“Maybe in a moment,” Pascal Monette replied. He seemed so solemn that Lily froze. Was this a man bringing good news? It hardly seemed possible. Lily felt herself ready to burst into tears. What if ...

Pascal Monette held his hat in his hands. “Forgive me,” he said. “But I didn’t want to use the telephone and a letter would take too long. So I thought to walk over ... ”

“Of course!” her father exclaimed.

“You know ... what’s been happening,” he said, addressing the family. “You know what Paris has authorized me to do. Demanded that I do, to say it frankly. You know that there was an allegation against Beatrice lodged by my nephew Leon.”

It was impossible to breathe. Lily shut her eyes. She thought she would certainly faint. If only he would get on with it!

“I believe him,” Pascal Monette.

“No!” Adele Page cried.

“Wait!” Pascal exclaimed, raising his hand. “Wait! I do believe him, even though he’s a notorious liar. I’ve heard a lot of stories in my time and I have a pretty good sense of when a story seems solid. This one does. It fits the facts; it just sounds plausible. But,” he said solemnly, “there is a very big but. I simply won’t condemn a person on the basis of a single uncorroborated story. That I personally believe it to be true is neither here nor there. Leon’s word just isn’t enough for me. Not to act in such a dreadful way.”

Everyone stared at the man who looked more like a supplicant than an executioner. It seemed preposterous to say “Thank you.” Thank you was simply too paltry a response! Nor did it seem safe to leap up and hug Pascal Monette, as that felt terribly dangerous, as if it would break the spell, as if it might cause him to change his mind. The Page family sat in complete, unnatural silence. Pascal Monette, standing there, awkwardly fingered his hat.

“Come, sit down,” her father finally said. He rose and helped Pascal to the best armchair. “Please, take this chair.”

The Pen sat down. Adele Page brought him a Calvados in a cut crystal glass. It was their best crystal, which hardly ever got used. No one knew what to say. Were they now to talk about the weather? Then

a terrible thought popped into Lily's head. What if Beatrice confesses? Sitting here so long, with no one saying anything, might she not just blurt out something? That frightened her so much that she determined to speak.

"M. Monette," Lily said, "I didn't tell my family ... about what you told me."

"What was that?" Pascal Monette said absently.

"About your other son."

"Ah, that," he replied, nodding.

"Your other son?" Beatrice cried. "But ... I've never heard a word about him!"

"No, few people have," Pascal Monette agreed. "He was the fruit of an affair that I had with a woman many years ago. We didn't stay together and she raised him where she lived. I saw him almost never ... for those first few years I didn't see him at all. When he got older, when he was maybe ten or eleven, I initiated contact. We had ... something of a relationship. No, that's going too far. We saw each other a bit."

"Where is he now," Daniel Page asked gently.

"Ah." Pascal waved his hand. "That incredibly stupid moment when we refused to scuttle our ships and the British fired on us? He was lost that day."

"My god," Adele Page whispered.

“I’m so sorry,” Beatrice said.

“I can hardly stand this species of ours,” Pascal Monette muttered.

Her father got to his feet and poured himself another cognac and Pascal Monette another Calvados. Pascal surprised them all by holding out his glass for a toast.

“To your health,” Pascal said, gesturing with his glass. “To all your good health.”

“To your health,” everyone replied.

Lily was crying but trying to hide her tears. Everything still felt dangerous—even her crying. She kept rubbing at her eyes, brushing away the tears. Everyone obliged her by agreeing not to notice.

“I should be going,” Pascal Monette said.

Her father stood. Pascal Monette got to his feet. They shook hands formally.

“It was touch and go, touch and go,” Pascal Monette said, still shaking her father’s hand. “There was a real death, a real widow, real orphans, a real betrayal. Ah ... what can I say?”

Daniel Page said nothing. To say even a heartfelt “Yes” was to acknowledge too much. He couldn’t even nod. Through her tears, Lily could see him squeezing Pascal Monette’s hand in his.

Chapter 20.

“You know,” Lily blurted out as Pascal Monette started to leave, “Albert is terribly worried about losing his house key.”

“Is he?” The Pen smiled at her.

“It’s so big and heavy and with him riding his bicycle all day long ... ”

“Let me see what we can do about that,” Pascal said. “Thanks for telling me, Lily.” He paused. “I’m glad he’s taking that responsibility so seriously.”

“It never leaves his mind!”

Both Pascal and her father laughed.

“That’s excellent!” Pascal Monette said.

A pounding erupted. Someone was beating violently on the front door. Her mother leaped to her feet. Lily jumped up too. Only Beatrice remained seated. She stared into her lap as the pounding intensified.

“Open up in there!” a drunken voice cried.

“It’s Leon,” Pascal Monette said. “I’ll talk to him.”

“I can deal with him,” Daniel Page said, moving toward the door.

Pascal put a hand on Daniel’s arm. “Let me,” he said. “He may listen to me better.”

Her father led the way to the door. Pascal stepped in front of him and opened it. A belligerent, feverish Leon almost fell in when the door opened. He righted himself, saw Pascal, and glared at his uncle.

“You!” he cried. “You’re the collaborator!”

The street was dark except for the lit windows of the neighbors’ homes. A summer fog had rolled in, turning the lit windows ghostly. Nothing stirred. Lily crept down the hall so as to better hear.

“What do you want here?” Pascal said, blocking the door. He was larger than his nephew, which surprised Lily. In her mind she thought of Leon as huge and Pascal as small. That wasn’t the case at all. Pascal was easily the physical equal of his nephew. “Are you here to make trouble?” the Pen said.

“Trouble?” Leon exploded. “I will definitely be making trouble!”

“You think I can’t make trouble for you?” Pascal said ominously, leaning right into Leon. “Is that what you think?”

Leon sneered. He put a hand on his uncle’s chest and pushed. “Get out of my way. Traitor!”

Pascal didn’t budge. “One more second and you’ll be very sorry,” he said softly.

Leon stopped pushing. Still, he remained right in his uncle’s face.

“Hah!” he cried. “Maybe you’re letting her off the hook. But we’ll see what the town thinks! They won’t be so generous!”

Pascal Monette gave him a shove. Leon staggered back off the front step and fell to the ground. For a long moment he lay there. Then he

got to his knees, managed to stand, and took a menacing step forward. Pascal stepped forward as well, right into Leon's chest.

"Answer me one question," Pascal whispered. "If you heard what you say you heard, why didn't you warn Emile? You hear someone tell a German soldier that Emile has a shortwave radio. You know exactly what will happen next. Explain that to me, Leon. Why did you do nothing? If this story of yours is true, you are exactly as guilty as that other person!"

Leon stood there. You could see the cogs and wheels of his brain working through the fog of alcohol. This was his specialty, slipping through the grasp of the just. Lily, huddled in the corridor, held her breath. She knew that Leon would have something to say, just no idea what it might be.

"You think you've got me!" Leon cried. A weasel smile appeared on his lips. "Let me tell you how it was. I heard what I heard. I went directly to Emile and told him. I presumed he'd run. That he didn't run ... that's not my business! I guess he just wanted to be a martyr. What a hero!" he added facetiously.

"You're lying," Pascal Monette said ominously.

"That's my story and I'm sticking to it!" Leon crowed. "Just try to break it. And let's see what the town thinks!"

"You think your father has no power over you?"

“The hell with him! The hell with you! And the hell with that whore in there!”

Pascal Monette stared at Leon, reared back, and delivered a mighty punch to Leon’s jaw. Leon dropped like a stone. Daniel Page put a hand on the Pen’s shoulder.

“Are you all right?” Daniel asked. He glanced down at Leon. “Is he out?”

“For the moment.”

Leon was already stirring, shaking his head and clawing himself back onto his feet. Some lights had come on; a few neighbors appeared to see what the disturbance was about.

“It’s nothing!” Lily’s father called out. “Sorry for the noise!”

Leon stood there, glaring at his uncle, saying nothing. Once or twice he felt for his jaw. Pascal Monette, not taking his eyes off Leon, waited. Lily held her breath. Leon, in a half-crouch, looked as if he might rush his uncle. Lily could see him think better of it and stand up straighter. After a long moment he turned and stumbled off. After twenty wobbly steps he fell down in the street.

A horse pulling a cart clopped down the dark street. No one from the Page house called out to warn Leon. Leon, looking up, saw the cart, staggered to his feet, and just managed to get out of its way. He turned back to Lily’s house, gestured with his fist, and stumbled off.

“Your hand?” Lily’s father said. “Let me look at it.”

“I’m fine,” Pascal Monette assured him.

“You’ll be obliged to defend your decision,” Daniel Page said softly after a moment.

“I think he’ll be quiet. Once he thinks it through.”

“Maybe.” Daniel Page nodded. “But probably Beatrice should leave anyway.”

“Probably she should,” Pascal agreed. “Small towns aren’t very pleasant when there’s blood in the air.”

The two men stood there in the damp night air.

“Wednesday will be terrible,” Daniel Page said. “When Matthew is hanged.”

“Terrible,” Pascal Monette muttered. He paused and glanced significantly at Lily’s father. “But completely justified.”

Daniel Page nodded. Pascal Monette tipped his hat, glanced back over Daniel Page’s shoulder, and, noticing Lily huddled in the corridor, threw her a small wave. Then he strode off into the night.

Chapter 21.

Suddenly Beatrice came flying out of the house. She rushed off in the direction that both Leon and Pascal Monette had taken. Her father called after her but she was quickly lost in the fog and the darkness.

Lily joined her father at the front door. They stared in the direction that Beatrice had vanished. They waited; long minute after long minute passed. After about ten minutes Beatrice returned, walking slowly.

“I had something to say to Leon,” she said, pushing past them. Without another word she headed upstairs to her room.

Lily slept poorly. Her dreams, which started out sunny and warm, turned into nightmares. At times she thought that she heard pounding at the door. In the middle of the night she came so entirely awake that she had to sit by the window for a full twenty minutes, staring at the pale moon shining through the fog, before she got sleepy again.

Monday turned out to be a beautiful day. It was a perfect early autumn day, crisp but still warm and full of sunshine. School would start in a week. That seemed a million years off still. After breakfast Lily thought about searching out Albert; but she was still angry with him. Yes, he had delivered some great news; but he'd only been a messenger for that. When it came to his own actions, he hadn't been on her side well enough at all; nor on Beatrice's.

Lily bicycled into town. It was a bustling Monday morning with the town fully awake. As she approached the center of town she heard a mighty hammering. It was only when she reached the town square that she understood what the hammering was about. There, in the open spot where every weekday morning produce or goods were sold, they were erecting a gallows.

Several boys on their bicycles watched the proceedings from the foot of the scaffolding.

“Where’s your boyfriend?” one of them cried out to Lily.

“I don’t have a boyfriend!”

“Tell that to Albert!”

After a moment they rode off. The square was considerably emptier than usual. People bustled along the streets all around the outside of the square but avoided entering it. Even the dog-walkers seemed to have gone elsewhere this morning.

Lily approached a little closer. She recognized the workmen. They were a farmer who ran a dairy farm not far from town, a man known as Hook because of his prominent, crooked nose, and his two grown sons, strong, strapping young men.

One of the town’s petty officials approached with his hands in his pockets. Lily thought that the man’s name was Bordelon.

“Hello, Hook!” Bordelon called out jauntily. “Going well?”

“Coming right along!”

“When will you be done?”

“Two days! Just as requested,” Hook called back. “We can put a barn up in two days. A gallows is a snap!”

The older of his two boys put down his hammer and mopped his brow. “We use the same sort of trap door we use in a silo, only smaller of course,” he said. “Nothing very tricky about it.”

“Not at all!” Bordelon shouted merrily.

“Of course, we’re not really making it to last.”

“Well, that’s good for you!” Bordelon said, laughing. “You never know how many hangings there might be! You can take the gallows down and put it right back up! Very profitable!”

“You’re right!” Hook replied. “This could become our second business! Erecting and dismantling gallows.”

“It would be cheaper if they just left it up,” Bordelon chuckled.

“But a bit of an eyesore!”

They all laughed.

Somehow Lily understood why they were being so light-hearted. For one thing, the war was over. It was over in Europe and it was over in Japan. That was a relief beyond words. The Germans had been defeated, crushed really. The Japanese, too, and the Italians. You could breathe again!

Yes, the wounds were still fresh. Yes, there were new horrors, like that amazing mushroom cloud bomb used against Japan, or the mighty Russian Army flexing its muscles all across Eastern Europe, or the first news of the death camps. But here in Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine relief and even a little giddy joy seemed entirely justified.

If the only real reminders of those recent cataclysmic troubles were a few hangings, that seemed like a small price to pay so as to put the past behind them. Lily shook her head. She understood their merriment. But she felt anything but merry.

“It’s a terrible thing,” a voice beside her said.

Lily startled. She turned to see Pascal Monette, as formally dressed as the night before but in a different suit, shirt, and tie, standing beside her.

“Good morning,” Lily said shyly.

“Good morning, Lily.”

They watched the workmen continue erecting the gallows.

“What did Matthew do?” Lily whispered after a while.

“I can’t say.”

“People are saying that he was an actual spy. That he delivered secrets from Paris to Berlin.”

Pascal Monette laughed derisively. “A spy? That’s what people are saying?”

Lily nodded.

“That would make it so blessedly simple,” the Pen muttered.

The workmen took a break. They sat in the shade of a tree and shared some bread and cheese. Normally they’d be devouring fresh baguettes; but the bakery was still shut tight. How odd not to have a bakery in Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine! It was almost the oddest part of the whole business.

“Will you be here on Wednesday?” Lily asked.

“I have to be.” After a moment he added, “I should be.”

“I won’t!” Lily exclaimed.

“No,” Pascal said quietly. “Better to skip it.”

Bordelon, who’d been chatting with the workmen, approached in their direction. It was clear that he felt awkward having to pass the Pen. Lily realized that no one in town had any idea how to deal with Pascal Monette. Bordelon began to tip his hat, then thought better of it, and ended up with his hat above his head in a comical fashion. Monette nodded at the agitated petty official.

When Bordelon had passed, Monette muttered, “They’re all afraid of me. Some of the women even curtsy, as if I were royalty! It gives you a sense of what it must have felt like to be king. I quite hate it!”

Pascal Monette shook his head a final time, turned, and started off. Lily, glancing after him, saw something that horrified her. It was

Beatrice in her short red dress and her highest high heels, striding in the direction of the river.

Chapter 22.

Lily hopped on her bicycle and raced after her sister. She hated it that Beatrice was all dressed up. The short red dress and red high heels spelled trouble. Lily pedaled harder.

“Where are going?” Lily demanded when she caught up with Beatrice.

“Go home!” Beatrice exclaimed.

“Tell me where you’re going!”

Lily hopped off her bicycle and walked beside her sister. They headed out of town toward the path by the Seine that Lily and Albert had taken so many times. It led to their secret places, to Abelard’s forge and to Leon’s boatman’s cottage.

“I made a deal with Leon,” Beatrice finally said.

“No!” Lily cried.

“He’ll keep his end of the bargain.”

“He won’t!” Lily exclaimed. “But even if he does, it’s too high a price to pay!”

Beatrice stopped and stared speculatively at her sister. After a moment she said, “It’s isn’t that big a deal.”

“It is!” Lily said. “You know it is!”

They proceeded down the path. An old man walking his dog approached from the opposite direction. Lily and Beatrice fell silent.

The old man approached slowly, stopping every so often to let his dog sniff around. Lily and Beatrice waited, not speaking. Finally the old man passed. Still they remained silent. A barge came into view. Like the old man it moved slowly, up the Seine in the direction of Paris. They watched it crawl along, appearing almost motionless. Suddenly, and for no discernible reason, it tooted its horn, startling them both.

“He’ll start blabbing today,” Beatrice said. “He said so. I can’t face that.”

“Maybe he won’t! He’s at risk too!”

Beatrice shook her head. “He feels invulnerable in this town.”

“Maybe yes, maybe no. But he hasn’t said anything for a full year!”

“I’m still going,” Beatrice said.

Beatrice started up again, stepping forward uncertainly. The path here was rutted and uneven and she moved carefully in her red high heels. Lily pushed her bike. Abelard’s forge came into view. Beatrice stopped.

“I don’t want him to see me like this,” Beatrice whispered.

“Abelard?”

“I can’t stand the thought of him seeing me going to Leon’s!”

“See, this does matter!” Lily cried.

There was no way around. Lily thought, "Maybe this will force her to stop!" They could hear the blacksmith hammering. Certainly Abelard was there.

"You see," Lily whispered. "You're really not proud of this!"

"Maybe not." Beatrice's eyes filled with tears. "I'm going through with it, nonetheless."

"No!" Lily stepped in front of her. "Just make some excuse," Lily pleaded. "Give us another day or two to think."

"I can't stand the idea of him telling!" Beatrice replied frantically. "Everyone knowing about Emile!"

"If that happens," Lily said, "then, yes, probably you'll have to leave town. Maybe you'll have to go to Paris or somewhere. Is that so terrible? You should do that anyway! Shouldn't you leave Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine already?"

Beatrice stared at her. After a long while she smiled. "I should, mushroom. Of course I should."

"Then don't do this today," Lily said. "Please. Make some excuse and let's think."

"All right, mushroom."

Surprised and relieved, Lily said, "You can come up with an excuse?"

"A woman can always find an excuse," Beatrice said, half-smiling.

They proceeded forward. As they passed Abelard's, the blacksmith-turned-artist looked up from his hammering and nodded at them.

"Hello, monsieur!" Beatrice cried. "Beautiful day, isn't it?"

"A little warm," Abelard called back.

"Indeed!"

They slowed as they approached Leon's.

"You stay here," Beatrice said.

"Let me go with you," Lily pleaded.

"I don't need protection, mushroom. It'll be easier for me to say what I need to say if I'm alone."

"All right," Lily agreed reluctantly.

Lily watched Beatrice march up to Leon's door and knock loudly. The door opened instantly. Leon looked savage. He seemed to understand crystal clearly that he was not getting what he wanted. Maybe he'd looked out the window and seen Lily tagging along and figured it out? At any rate, he looked fit to kill.

Lily could see his expression but not her sister's, who had her back to her. His terrible visage frightened her. Lily could tell that he was threatening Beatrice, warning her against pulling any tricks. Beatrice seemed calm and not at all scared. She nodded, agreed, and placated him. Finally Leon made a gesture as if to grab her and force a kiss. Beatrice leaped back out of reach.

“Not even a kiss!” Leon cried. “Bitch!”

Beatrice turned, started off, and said over her shoulder, “Wednesday’s our day. You’ve waited this long, you can wait a little longer!”

“Bitch!”

Beatrice was smiling. She took Lily’s hand.

“Let’s go!” she said.

They walked together without speaking, Lily pushing her bike along with one hand, Beatrice navigating the ruts in her high heels.

“Thank you,” Beatrice said. “You’re much my better half.”

Beatrice made a big show of greeting Abelard as they passed the forge, as if to say, see how little time I spent at Leon’s! She and Lily continued down the shady path, the Seine at their right. The barge, even as slow as it had been moving, was nevertheless now out of sight. A gull dive-bombed the placid river. Beatrice squeezed Lily’s hand.

“You know, Lily,” Beatrice murmured after a while, “I wonder if part of me felt I owed it to Leon?”

“Owed him what?” Lily exclaimed.

“He never did tell, did he?” Beatrice said quietly. “After they ... you know ... he never said a word against me.” She shook her head. “Maybe he loves me as much as he hates me.”

“Or,” Lily exclaimed, “Maybe it’s exactly what M. Monette said! Leon could have warned Emile and he didn’t. Maybe he didn’t dare open his mouth because of his part in it!”

“Yes,” Beatrice agreed after a moment. “It could be that.”

A boy of about six or seven appeared out of nowhere and rode along beside them on his bicycle. He stared at Beatrice, who smiled at him. Suddenly he zoomed off, leaving the path, and darted between the bushes.

“What was that about?” Beatrice said, laughing.

“It’s because you’re so beautiful,” Lily said. “He couldn’t help himself.”

They both laughed.

“You will be the greatest beauty this town has ever known,” Beatrice said after a moment. “Wait and see!”

Lily blushed a bright red. By the time they got home they were feeling quite merry, laughing and singing some of their favorite songs.

Chapter 23.

That night dinner was almost normal. Her father updated a story he'd been telling about a patient of his in Paris who wanted his wife to stop drinking but who wouldn't stop drinking himself.

“‘What about your own liver?’ I said to him. He came back with, ‘My guess is that the liver is overrated.’”

Everyone chuckled a little. It was hard to really laugh. It had been hard to really laugh for years. But her mother smiled her dreamy smile, the one she smiled when she was feeling at her best. And Beatrice's smile was gentler and less ironic than it often was.

“You should see the color on this fellow,” her father continued. “He's as yellow as a banana! I wonder what he thinks when he looks in the mirror?”

“That he's a tropical fruit,” Beatrice said, “misplaced in a northern clime.”

The roast was delicious. Lily ate her share of everything. If asked, she would have said that her family was prosperous. She liked the sound of the word ‘prosperous.’ If her father didn't keep an automobile, it was only because he didn't see a need for one. In town, he bicycled, his doctor's bag strapped securely to the back of his sturdy bike. To get to Paris, he took the train. To go on vacation, which they hadn't done in forever, they would take the train too, whether to

Normandy, the south of France, or the Alsace. They had food on the table; her father was respected; Lily smiled and cut herself more roast.

After a while her father said to Beatrice, “We’re still worried about Leon.”

Beatrice, chewing, shook her head. “Not to worry,” she said, swallowing. “If worse comes to worse, I’ll go to Paris. Or somewhere. So long as there’s no warrant, Leon doesn’t matter.”

“True enough,” her father said. “Where would you go?”

“Probably Paris. I can work in the shops.”

Her mother glanced at her. “You don’t want to study something?” she said nervously.

This was a volatile, tiresome subject. Her parents could hardly stand it that Beatrice, so quick, so smart, hated school, hated studying, and had no intellectual interests. They’d fought with Beatrice about this a million times. Lily braced herself.

“Maybe I do,” Beatrice said after a moment.

Her parents stared in amazement. Both of them stopped eating and glanced at their older daughter. Then they glanced at one another, as much as to say, should we pursue this? And which one of us should say the next thing?

“What might you study?” her father said carefully.

“I’d like to write,” Beatrice said. “Novels.”

Again, her parents looked shocked. Were they also visibly disappointed? After a moment her mother said, "That's not a profession."

"No, mama," Beatrice agreed, laughing. "It's a calling!"

"I had no idea," her father said, trailing off.

"Think of what a pen can do," Beatrice said, suddenly serious. She put down her knife and fork. "It can sign a death warrant. It can write *Madame Bovary* or *The Red and the Black*. Are those two powers really so different? M. Monette serves as one sort of conscience, to call it that. Flaubert, Stendhal, Balzac, they serve as another sort of conscience. Don't you think?"

No one at the Page dining room table had ever heard Beatrice speak like that. They took turns looking at one another.

"I think that's absolutely true," her father said.

"And Agatha Christie!" Lily exclaimed. "Albert and I have been reading mysteries all summer. I know that's not the same thing. But those mysteries give us pleasure!"

"Exactly," Beatrice agreed. "Life is hard. Novels help the living."

A silence fell. Everyone was thinking.

"But how will you live?" her mother said after a bit.

"I'll go to school, I'll write, and you'll help me," Beatrice said, smiling her sunniest smile. "Isn't that a brilliant plan?"

“Well,” her mother said.

“You know I can’t stay here much longer,” Beatrice said after a while. “No matter how any of this turns out. I’ve outgrown this place. To stay here would be just ... just to provoke more mischief.”

“Agreed,” her father said without looking up from his plate.

“So maybe I should start making plans,” Beatrice said.

“Let’s talk tomorrow,” her father said. “We’ll all sit down and talk.”

They had an apple tart for dessert. Lily’s mother didn’t bake and the bakery in Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine was shut. That was the question on everyone’s mind: where had the tart come from?

“This is delicious,” her father said. “Where’d you get this?”

“I went into Paris,” her mother replied.

They all stared at her. Her mother did sometimes go into Paris but it was always a big production, prepared for many days in advance. Had she ever just up and taken the train in by herself on a moment’s notice?

“Paris?” her father said.

Her mother nodded.

“Just like that?” he said.

“I had to get out of town. Those gallows! I couldn’t stand it.”

Everyone looked down. But after a moment they were cheerful again. They finished dessert.

“I’ll get us some cognac,” her father said.

He returned with the decanter and four glasses and poured everyone a drink, including a small one for Lily.

“Why is the hanging public?” Lily said in a tiny voice.

“Better that things like that be done in public than in secret, if they’re going to be done,” her father said. “Better that everyone knows exactly what their government is doing.” He glanced at Lily. “Seeing it with your own two eyes, you can decide for yourself if you like it or not, if you want it to continue or if you want it to stop.”

Lily nodded. She would not watch it with her own two eyes. She would not watch Matthew hanged on Wednesday. She had no opinion as to whether it was right or wrong for the government to hang someone. It was simply too much to bear, simply too horrible!

“Lily really helped me today,” Beatrice said, pushing her chair away from the table. She got up, leaned over, and tousled Lily’s hair. “She saved me.”

No one asked, “From what?” Her mother collected the dessert dishes. Her father sat, drinking. Lily followed Beatrice up the stairs, neither saying a word.

Chapter 24.

They'd eaten early. It was still light out. Restless, Lily came back down and headed outside. She grabbed her bicycle and biked around to Albert's front door. She actually hoped that she wouldn't find him there. But there he was, sitting on the front step, tossing bits of gravel at nothing in particular.

Lily remained on her bicycle. Albert glanced at her and then resumed his tossing. Lily discovered that she had nothing to say to him. In a moment there would be nothing left to do but to bicycle off.

"Do you hate me?" Albert said, looking away.

Lily said nothing.

"You're not saying you don't," Albert said after a moment.

"I don't hate you," Lily replied, her voice on edge. "But I don't trust you."

"Because I didn't tell you what I knew about Beatrice?"

"That. And because you wouldn't help me snoop around your father's study."

Albert glanced at her defiantly. "I couldn't let you do that!"

"I know you couldn't," Lily said quietly. "That's why I can't trust you."

Albert thought about that.

“You’re right. I guess there are things more important than friendship.”

“There are. We’ve learned something, haven’t we?” Lily said quietly. “Lots of things come before friendship.”

“Or before love,” Albert said.

Lily blushed.

“Good night, Albert,” she said.

Albert nodded. “Good night,” he said, looking away.

In bed, Lily thought about Beatrice. Maybe Leon could manage to turn the town against her and quite possibly he would try. With that threat in the air, Beatrice would doubtless have to leave Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine. Really, she had no good reason to stay and many excellent reasons to leave.

Would she really want to run into Emile’s widow and children? Would she really want to find herself passing the school where Emile taught? Would she really want to pass the mayor’s house where the German soldiers lodged and where Beatrice spent time with Heinrich? No. Why would you risk any of that? Why would you subject yourself to that?

Beatrice had to leave Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine. Nothing else made sense.

Still, what did sense have to do with it? What if something defiant rose up in Beatrice and she refused to leave? What if, against her own best interests and just to thumb her nose at the universe, she ... what? Got a teaching job at the school! That would be the maddest thing she could do! Lily pictured Beatrice in front of a room full of students just like herself. She could see it! She could see Beatrice doing exactly such a wild thing.

Finally she slept. When she came down in the morning she found her father already dressed for seeing patients, drinking his morning coffee. Neither her mother nor Beatrice were anywhere around. Lily gave her father an inquiring look.

“They’re upstairs talking,” he said.

Lily ate an apple. “I’m afraid that she won’t leave,” Lily said quietly.

“I know,” her father replied.

Someone began pounding on the front door. Daniel Page got to his feet and hurried down the corridor. Lily trailed after him. Her father pulled the door open and found himself face-to-face with a distraught Marcel Dupuis, Matthew Dupuis’s father.

“My wife!” Dupuis cried breathlessly. “Come right away!”

“What is it?”

“She cut her wrist!”

“Just the one?”

“Just the one!”

Her father darted into his exam room and returned with his bag. He and Marcel Dupuis hurried across the street. Lily ran after them.

Dupuis led them into the living room. His wife lay on a blue sofa, moaning. Her daughter, Matthew’s sister, who was known primarily because she hadn’t married yet, held a towel wrapped around her mother’s left wrist.

“Let me,” Daniel Page said. The young woman moved out of the way and stood beside her father.

Lily couldn’t watch. She turned away. She found herself staring at a photo of Matthew Dupuis and his family. The photo, in an elegant silver frame, stood on a round table next to an armchair. It was a beach photo. Since everyone looked cold, Lily imagined it was a beach on the Atlantic shore, maybe even one of the Normandy beaches where the Allies had landed. The photo looked to be about six or seven years old, maybe just before the war had come to France.

Despite the cold, the family managed to smile. Who could have predicted today or, worse, tomorrow? Who in the family could have said to Matthew, “Well, the Germans will occupy France, and you’ll do something terrible, and you’ll be hanged.” Lily couldn’t stop staring at the photo. She wanted to warn the boy in the photo, “Don’t do it! Whatever it is that you’ll do, please don’t do it!” She wanted to say

something to his sister, too, and to his mother and father. She wanted to warn them all!

Her father finished up. He motioned Marcel Dupuis into a corner and put an arm around his shoulder.

“Watch her like a hawk,” Daniel Page said. “Take turns. Don’t take your eyes off her for a minute. She’s likely to try again.”

“I’ll have her sister come,” Marcel Dupuis said.

“Even while she sleeps,” her father warned. He shook his head.

“What a terrible business!”

Dupuis glanced timidly at her father. “Do you think ... is there anything you can do?” he whispered.

“Not a thing,” Daniel Page replied hoarsely.

“You and M. Monette are friends.”

“It’s just impossible!” Daniel Page cried, no doubt more loudly than he’d intended. Matthew’s mother stirred and Matthew’s sister glanced at Daniel Page with displeasure.

“Sorry,” her father apologized.

“You know, what he did wasn’t so bad!” M. Dupuis continued, not giving up. “Not compared to so many others!”

“Don’t tell me!” Daniel Page warned.

Lily desperately wondered what Matthew Dupuis had done. It must have been something. Pascal Monette would not have sentenced

Matthew to death over nothing. But what could anyone have done in Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine that could have been so horrible? Something worse than what Beatrice had done? Lily just couldn't conceive of it.

Her father noticed her sitting there. "Go home, Lily," he said. "I have some things to chat with M. Dupuis about. Tell your mother ... no, that's all right."

Lily nodded. She trudged across the street, entered by the front door, and parked herself on the living room sofa. After awhile the amazingly loud ticking of the mantle clock drowned out her thoughts.

Chapter 25.

The day passed in a strange haze. About one p.m. Lily heard a rapping at the back screen door. She expected her mother to answer—but nothing. Lily got to her feet and made her way to the kitchen as the rapping continued. As she entered the kitchen she saw an agitated Albert peering in.

“What is it?” Lily said.

“My father needs your father!”

Lily froze. “Is it news?”

“He’s sick!”

“Sick?”

“He’s having an attack!”

Lily crossed the kitchen and opened the screen door.

“Come through the house,” Lily said. “My father’s in his office.”

They hurried along the long corridor. Daniel Page was just finishing with a patient. He glanced at the two of them and frowned.

“What is it?” her father said.

“My father’s having an attack! Stomach pains! He’s bent over double.”

“All right,” her father said. “I’ll come right away.”

The three of them hurried out of the house and rushed around the block. The front door opened before Daniel Page could knock. Albert's mother, as always dressed as if for an occasion, shook her head.

"It's been awful," she said. "Stomach pains."

"All right."

"He's in his study."

"Lead the way."

The children followed the doctor and Albert's mother. At the door to Pascal Monette's study Albert hesitated but Lily followed her father right in.

"Come into the kitchen with me," Albert's mother said to him.

"But Lily went in!"

"That's her business!"

Pascal Monette, sitting bent over double on his leather sofa, clutched at his stomach. He made a weak show of greeting the doctor.

"What is it?" Daniel Page said, opening his bag.

"Terrible stomach pains."

"When did they begin?"

"The middle of the night."

"How bad are they? On a scale of one to ten?"

"Ten!"

Daniel Page continued asking questions as he examined Albert's father. Lily made herself small in a corner. If there was any news, she was going to hear it! Her father would have to throw her out to make her leave. Her father got out some white powder and mixed it with water from the pitcher on Pascal Monette's desk. After a few minutes the Pen began to look visibly relieved. He sat up, though not quite completely.

"What is it?" Pascal Monette asked.

Her father shook his head. "Can't say. You'll need tests in Paris. It could be ulcers. It could be something you ate. But it could also be a stress reaction. My hunch is it might be that."

Pascal nodded.

"With the hanging tomorrow," her father added.

Pascal shook his head. "It's not that. I'm at peace with that. It's something else."

Lily froze. She had a bad feeling about what was coming.

"Something else?" her father whispered.

Pascal Monette did his best to sit up straight. Lily understood that he was about to deliver bad news. She wanted to clap her hands over her ears. But she also needed to hear every word.

"When the Germans left they burned their papers," Pascal Monette began, not looking at the doctor.

“Of course.”

“They forgot one box.”

“Damn it!” her father exclaimed.

Pascal Monette nodded. “My brother found it rummaging around his basement.” He glanced at the doctor. “You remember, the Germans commandeered his house?”

“Of course.”

“So there it was, the box.”

“He should have burned it!”

“All the things we should have done!” Pascal Monette exclaimed.

The exclamation caused him to writhe and clutch at his stomach.

“Take it easy,” her father said.

Pascal nodded.

“I had to examine the papers,” Pascal said after a moment.

Now it was her father’s turn to nod.

“What did you learn?” her father said.

“Of course they kept good notes. What else would you expect from Germans? Reports on this, reports on that. Many that confirmed what I already knew. And several that confirmed Leon’s story.”

“No,” her father whispered.

Pascal nodded. “It was exactly as Leon said. Heinrich and Beatrice were having a picnic. Heinrich said something out of the blue about

how much trouble they were all in for not finding the shortwave radio that was broadcasting from Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine. Beatrice inadvertently blurted out, 'Oh, you mean the one Emile has?' That was it. That's the whole story. That remains the whole story. But now it's confirmed."

Her father said nothing.

"All the rest plays itself out exactly the way we know it played itself out," Pascal continued. "The arrest. An interrogation you don't want to know about. The execution."

After a long silence her father said, "Does your brother know? Did he look through the papers?"

"No! He didn't want to know anything. He presented me with the box unopened."

"So," Daniel Page said significantly, "you're the only one who knows?"

"Yes." Pascal met her father's gaze. "But that's one too many."

Lily could see her father thinking.

"In a way, nothing has changed," Daniel Page said. "You believed Leon to begin with. You found it all credible and consistent."

"Yes. But it was still uncertain ... up in the air. Now it's incontrovertible."

“But it’s the same set of facts!” her father exclaimed, no doubt more loudly than he’d intended.

“I understand your point,” Pascal Monette said softly. “And no doubt you’re right, these stomach pains are proof of the fence I find myself on. But these documents do make a difference. Before it was 55 – 45 against condemning Beatrice. Those were the numbers in my head. Now the scales have tipped in the other direction.”

“With the same set of facts,” her father said bitterly.

“Not quite,” Pascal Monette replied. “I didn’t know about Emile being tortured.”

Daniel Page got to his feet.

“But you’re not pronouncing sentence today?” her father said after a moment.

Pascal Monette shook his head. “I’m not. But I think you should consider this fair warning.”

Her father nodded gravely.

“All right,” he said. “I still hope you’ll see your way to forgive her.”

Pascal Monette nodded. “Thank you for coming,” he said.

“Of course. And you should get yourself seen in Paris. It might be ulcers.”

Somehow they could not find a way to shake hands. Her father nodded at her and Lily followed him out of the silent house and into the autumn sunshine.

Chapter 26.

Lily trudged after her father. It was a gorgeous September day, warm with a hint of autumn in the air. People on the street, though not actually smiling, seemed light-hearted. For the moment at least, the impending hanging seemed forgotten by the townspeople of Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine. On such a beautiful day it seemed possible to think of other things. But Lily could only think of one thing, that Beatrice's fate look sealed and that she would have to go into hiding.

When they arrived home Daniel Page headed directly for the cellar. Lily remained at the top of the cellar stairs, staring down into the dimly lit hole, as her father made his way down to retrieve the family trunk. Lily watched as, grunting and straining, he dragged the heavy canvas trunk up the cellar stairs. At one point he stumbled and almost lost his balance. Lily wondered how they'd ever get it back downstairs from the second floor after they'd packed it full or how Beatrice could possibly handle it on her long journey to Colmar.

"We'll pack it in the living room," her father said, catching his breath. "Then we won't have to carry it down from the second floor."

Lily nodded.

"And Beatrice will have to get help in Paris," he said, as much to himself as to Lily. "She'll need a porter."

Again Lily nodded.

“See if your sister is upstairs,” Daniel Page said quietly. “If she is, ask her to come down.”

“Yes, papa.”

“I’ll be in the exam room making a phone call. We’ll need a car to get this trunk to the station.”

Lily crawled up the stairs and knocked tentatively at Beatrice’s door.

“Come in, mushroom!” Beatrice cried.

Lily opened the door. She could feel the tears coming. She didn’t want to blurt out the news; she rubbed at her eyes, trying to hold herself together. Beatrice was on her bed, writing in a notebook.

“My first novel!” Beatrice exclaimed. “Of course, it’s terrible.”

Lily nodded.

Beatrice glanced at her sister, put down her pen and notebook, and sat up straighter.

“What is it?” she said gravely.

“The Germans left some papers,” Lily said. “They tell the same story as the one Leon’s been telling. The Pen hasn’t condemned you yet but he thinks he will. Papa needs you downstairs. You have to leave today.”

Beatrice sat there, staring at her sister. “I have to start running,” she said.

Lily broke down. Sobbing, she ran to her sister and hugged her as tightly as she could. Beatrice, with tears welling up in her own eyes, tried to comfort Lily.

“Don’t worry!” she whispered, forcing out a laugh. “If he hasn’t condemned me yet, there’s still a chance. And I’ll be fine in the Alsace! It’s just an overnight train trip away!”

Lily clung to her sister. Finally Beatrice unlocked Lily’s arms and gently moved her.

“I have to go downstairs, mushroom,” Beatrice said. “Papa’s waiting.”

Lily nodded. Beatrice slid off the bed and, heaving a huge sigh, made for the bedroom door. Lily followed her.

Their parents were in the living room. The canvas trunk sat open on the carpet.

“I’m airing it out,” her mother said.

“A car’s coming later this afternoon,” her father said. “It’s my friend Paul Firmin. He’s coming from Marne Nord.” That was the next town over. “He’ll take us to the train station.” Daniel Page paused. “He offered to drive you all the way into Paris but I know that his car isn’t reliable. I didn’t want him to bother.”

“You should have let him!” Adele Page whispered hoarsely.

Her father waved that away. “The train will be fine.”

“Your father should go with you!” Adele said to Beatrice.

“No, he shouldn’t. I’ll be fine,” Beatrice replied.

They fell silent.

Resigned, her mother said, “Let’s bring down what you’ll need. We’ll put things on the sofa and let the trunk air out some more.”

“All right, mama.”

Lily sat in an armchair. Beatrice and her mother made a dozen trips up and down the stairs. The stairs squeaked almost continually. At one point her father muttered, “I have to get those stairs fixed!” He’d only said that a million times before. He shook his head and left the living room. Lily could see him entering the exam room, which doubled as his study.

She sat there in the living room, alone. Beatrice and her mother remained upstairs a long time. The sofa was completely piled with Beatrice’s things, with dresses, sweaters, undergarments, shoes, toiletries, at least half of what Beatrice owned. Finally Beatrice and her mother came back down. Beatrice was carrying her stuffed snake.

“Plenty of room for snake,” she said to Lily. “And you’ll take care of teeny bear?”

Lily nodded.

Her mother proceeded to fold Beatrice’s clothes and pack the trunk. Beatrice sat in the other armchair, silently watching. When their

father entered he approached Beatrice and handed her a sheet of paper.

“A list,” he said. “Things you should know.”

Beatrice nodded.

“We should have some food before you go,” he said.

“All right.”

It was somewhere between lunchtime and dinnertime. Once Adele Page had finished packing the trunk she put out a cold meal of bread, cheese, salami, and pickles. They ate at the dining room table. No one could find anything to say. They were thinking their private thoughts and also listening for the sound of Paul Firmin’s car arriving.

A long time passed. Finally they heard a car clatter to a stop outside the front door. Beatrice and her father exchanged glances.

“Off!” Beatrice said, feigning cheerfulness.

Everyone rose. A knock sounded. Her father led the way down the corridor and opened the door. A man considerably younger than her father stood there. Daniel Page and his friend exchanged greetings.

“We have a big trunk,” her father said.

“This old car has a large boot. I’m sure we can manage.”

“Can you help me with it? It’s monstrous.”

“Of course.” His friend hesitated. “Are you sure you don’t want me to drive your daughter all the way to Paris?”

“How many times has your car broken down in the past month, Paul? Answer me that.”

Paul Firmin laughed. “Maybe ten.”

“The train station will be fine.”

Without anyone saying a word it was clear that Adele would not accompany Beatrice to the station but that Lily and her father would. Adele Page hugged her daughter, held her for a long time, and then abruptly hurried upstairs. Paul Firmin and her father muscled the trunk into the boot of his car. Daniel Page’s friend got in and waited. Beatrice and her father stood together next to the car.

“It’s funny,” Beatrice said. “After spending my whole life in Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine, there’s no one I feel the need to say goodbye to. Except you and Lily and mama, of course.”

“We should have moved to Paris at some point,” her father said. “This was never the place for you.”

Beatrice shrugged. “You think I couldn’t have gotten into trouble in Paris?”

Her father could only nod. He got in the seat next to Paul Firmin. Beatrice and Lily climbed in the back. The car pulled away with a huge racket. Lily rode in cars so infrequently that normally this would have been a great treat. Today it wasn’t. She held her sister’s hand and stared out the window as dusk settled over Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine.

Chapter 27.

The church bells began ringing explosively at seven in the morning. Lily sat up in bed, hugging her pillow to her chest. Beatrice was gone. And today Matthew would be hanged.

The church bells had never rung so many times before. They would stop abruptly and then start pealing again. It reminded her of the sound truck announcing Emile's execution. Finally she let go of her pillow and clasped her hands over her ears. Would the ringing never stop?

She wondered about Beatrice. Had she arrived in Colmar by now? Lily could feel the rattling of the train over the tracks, the braking as it pulled into some dark, empty, moonlit station, and the slow starting up again as it resumed its journey from west to east. How had Beatrice slept? Had she slept at all?

Ping! Ping!

Pebbles hit her window. Now it was Albert! First the bells and then Albert!

He'd never called on her so early in the morning. Lily got out of bed and opened the window. A rush of cold air struck her face.

"Is she gone?" Albert called up.

"She is!"

"Good!"

All of a sudden Lily wondered if Albert had news. Maybe his father had decided. Her blood ran cold.

“Have you heard something?” she cried.

“No. Nothing.”

“Okay!”

He craned his neck. “Are coming down?” he said.

“It’s so early! I haven’t had breakfast or anything!”

“We can go to the bakery!”

“What are you talking about?” Lily exclaimed. “It’s locked shut!”

“It isn’t!” Albert cried. “I just rode by it. It’s open again!”

“No,” Lily replied, shaking her head. “How can that be?”

“Come take a look!”

She got herself together and hurried down, trying to keep the stairs from squeaking and as always having no luck. They pedaled off toward the main street. Nothing was open yet except the café where workingmen went for their morning coffee ... and, yes, the bakery! Even from outside Lily could smell the baguettes fresh from the oven and other breads and pastries. You couldn’t miss the smell of almond croissants! She pushed the door open and Albert followed her in.

A heavysset, middle-aged woman nodded as they entered.

“Hello,” Lily said. “Good morning.”

“Children,” the woman replied, smiling. “How are you today?” She had an unmistakable accent. She was German!

“You’re new,” Lily said.

“Yes. From Mulhouse.”

The Alsace! Where Beatrice had gone.

“I’m Lily Page,” Lily said.

“Madame Schmidt,” the woman said as she filled the display case with croissants.

Lily stared. Her head reeled. Beatrice had fled to the Alsace. And Germans were fleeing from the Alsace to come to Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine!

“What can I get you?” Madam Schmidt asked.

“What are those?” Lily said, pointing.

“Bavarian pretzels.”

“We’ve never had those before. They’re enormous!”

The woman smiled. “And very salty. To make you drink more beer. We make some with salt, some without.” She laughed. “They’re better with salt!”

“I’ll have a pretzel,” Lily said. “With salt!”

“Me, too,” Albert chimed in.

The woman wrapped each pretzel individually in paper. She handled their change easily, making Lily think, “French German!” Lily

had noticed in Paris how tourists fumbled with their francs and had to count everything out two or three times. Madame Schmidt had no such trouble. She handed them their change and their pretzels and, still smiling, wished them a good day.

When they were outside Albert whispered, “Won’t someone break their windows? Them being German?”

“You’d think so!” Lily replied.

“How’d they get the place so quickly?” Albert wondered.

“I have no idea!”

Reflexively, without giving it any thought, they bicycled toward the town square, eating their pretzels as they raced along. As they neared the square they saw it. The gallows appeared out of the fog. They slowed to a crawl but continued heading toward it.

A policeman guarded it. He looked frozen and out of sorts. He was someone Lily knew, a policeman from town. Lily and Albert stopped on the path, a hundred feet from the gallows, keeping their distance.

“What time will it happen?” Lily asked Albert.

“I don’t know.”

“I’m not watching!”

Albert thought about that. “I think I should,” Albert said. “Because my father made it happen.”

Lily glanced at Albert. Was he proud of his father? Worried for him? Or was it something else? Albert looked solemn and very adult. Lily could see him becoming a lawyer just like his father. Suddenly she giggled.

“What’s funny?” Albert said.

“I saw you in your father’s suit and tie ... and hat!”

“Maybe,” Albert said after a moment.

Some laborers on their way to work approached. The oldest, who must have been fifty and who appeared to be the boss, walked a few steps behind the other two, one a slender fellow, the other as big as a house. They all eyed the gallows. The slender one spit in its direction.

“You’re coming?” he said to his huge coworker.

“I wouldn’t miss it!”

“I wonder where they’ll bury him.”

“They’ll burn his body!”

“They should bury him in the cemetery,” their boss said soberly.

“He’s still a son of this town.”

“Not on your life!” cried the slender one.

“Over my dead body,” seconded the other.

Their boss shook his head. “We don’t even know what he did ... if anything.”

“Monette found him guilty!” the slender one exclaimed. “That’s good enough for me!”

“Not for me,” their boss said quietly. “Not by a long shot.”

The sun began to rise and slowly burn the fog away. The town awoke. How would it ready itself for the hanging? Who would come and watch? Would nobody come? Would the whole town? Lily shook her head.

“I’m going to the river,” she said.

“Okay!”

She frowned. “I want to go alone,” she said.

“Why’s that?” Albert said, peeved. “I’ve apologized twenty times already!”

“Just let me be!” Lily cried, vexed. “All right?”

Lily turned her bike around and raced away. She could tell that Albert wasn’t following her but she glanced over her shoulder just to make sure. Albert hadn’t budged. Behind him, the gallows stood silhouetted in the morning light.

Chapter 28.

Lily rode out toward the river. Part of her wanted to rush to Albert's house and press Pascal Monette with some argument on Beatrice's behalf. But that was obviously too dangerous. She might make matters worse! Nor did she know what argument she might make.

Part of her wanted to turn around, race back to the bakery, and warn Mrs. Schmidt that she was making a big mistake. Germans running a bakery in Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine! The town certainly wouldn't stand for it. It wouldn't matter in the slightest how good her almond croissants were or how many excellent items like Bavarian pretzels she introduced. The town would be thinking, "How dare Germans take over the bakery from the Legrandes!"

Lily shook her head as she pedaled.

It hadn't warmed up much. Summer felt really over. It was all so strange. Japan had surrendered only a week ago! A World War had ended. Now she was supposed to go back to school and sit at her desk and learn about all those Napoleons and the dusty Prussians laying siege to Paris and those countless religious wars and more math than she could tolerate and facts that didn't interest her about rocks and the length of the Seine and this and that ... how odd. So many millions had just recently died and she was supposed to sit there and tolerate

hearing about the future perfect tense and then go home and memorize poetry from a hundred years ago ...

Why couldn't they teach detective novels and murder mysteries!

She found herself on the path beside the Seine. She knew that she didn't dare pedal past Leon's—somehow that felt too dangerous. She told herself that she would go as far as Abelard's and no further. After a bit she could hear Abelard's hammering. The big barn-like doors to the forge stood half-open. Lily pedaled up to the forge, set down her bike, and peeked inside. Abelard was working; steam rose from an over-sized coffee cup; a white cat lay on a cushion. Lily stepped inside.

"Good morning," she said quietly.

Abelard looked up. "Good morning, Lily," he said.

"They're hanging Matthew today," she said after a moment.

Abelard nodded.

"You're not going?" she inquired.

"No."

"Me neither."

She watched as Abelard hammered a piece of steel. Sparks flew; and yet it seemed like a safe and gentle activity. It was beautiful to watch. Lily glanced around. On one wall hung five intricately engraved swords of different sizes and shapes. Lily studied them for a bit.

"Why did you make swords?" she asked.

Abelard put down his hammer and mopped his brow.

“You can be for peace all you want,” he said, “but you’d still better make sure that you’re well-armed.” He sat down on a stool too small for him. “When the time comes, there’s no such thing as neutrality.”

“But a country like Switzerland,” Lily began.

“A whore!” Abelard exclaimed. “Pardon my language. They serviced everyone so as to remain safe. They’ve done unspeakable things in the name of neutrality. Well, they aren’t my favorite subject.”

“But a Denmark, a Sweden--”

“Were run over, weren’t they? Occupied. They had zero chance against Hitler. They are free today because the Americans came. Do you know how many young boys the Americans lost in Normandy alone?”

Lily shook her head. “An awful lot,” she whispered.

“You can’t be a pacifist in the real world, Lily,” Abelard said. “The world is full of bullies.”

Lily noticed several wire sculptures in various stages of completion on the huge table in front of her. Wires of every length and thickness littered the table, along with hammers, pliers, and tools that Lily had never seen before.

“Those wire sculptures are amazing,” Lily said.

Abelard nodded. “I’m enjoying working with steel wire. There’s something about the result that’s both comic and lonely. You can’t

quite laugh and you can't quite cry." He stood up and moved things around on the table. "Here, see if you can use these pliers. Just make twists like this." Abelard demonstrated. "Try your hand at making something. Probably the skinniest pieces will be the easiest for you to work."

"What should I make?" Lily said nervously.

"That's up to you."

For the next half hour Abelard hammered and Lily twisted wire. At first she had no idea what she was doing. Then she began to see a tall, skinny man emerge. She thought about giving him a hat, then decided against it. She made his arms longer than were natural. Instead of looking grotesque he looked interesting. Lily studied her man. There was something wrong with his face. It was too round for his body. She scrunched the wire tighter there; but that made his cheeks look too sunken and caved in. She pulled and tugged and suddenly exclaimed, "There!"

Abelard glanced over. "You've become a sculptor," he said, laughing. "Just like that!"

Lily smiled.

She'd forgotten about the hanging. She'd forgotten about Beatrice. That was interesting. She paused to think about that. Making her wire man had obliterated everything!

“Can I make another one?” she said shyly.

“Of course!” Abelard cried. “There’s no shortage of wire.”

Lily wondered what she ought to make next. Then she decided not to think. She’d let her hands inform her. She picked out a length of wire, twisted it, looked at it, twisted it some more, thought that she saw a bird emerging, and then decided against allowing it to be a bird. “No, no animals!” she heard herself exclaim. She had to smile. What did she have against animals?

She continued twisting and manipulating the wire, then added another length of wire, and after half an hour created something that was hard to name but that resembled a tree leaning precariously. Abelard disappeared and returned with bread, butter, and jam. They ate quietly. After they’d finished eating, and without thinking twice about it, Lily returned to her work and Abelard to his.

After several hours they both naturally stopped. Lily had made five things. They looked interesting – at least, she thought they looked interesting. How was one to judge?

“Take them with you,” Abelard said. “They’re yours.”

“Are they worth keeping?” Lily replied dubiously.

“Worth keeping? My gallery in Paris would put a hefty price tag on those!”

“You’re joking!” Lily exclaimed.

“Am I?” Abelard laughed merrily. “Leave them with me. Come back in a week and I’ll tell you whether or not they’re in a Paris gallery. You think I’m joking?”

“I don’t know,” Lily whispered.

“Leave them. Come back in a week and I’ll let you know one way or the other!”

“Of course!” Lily exclaimed.

Stunned, Lily said, “I should probably go.”

“Yes.” Abelard glanced at the clock on the wall. “But they’re hanging Matthew right about now. Maybe we should keep working, have a little lunch, and let them finish their business.”

“All right,” Lily nodded. She returned her attention to the lengths of wire on the table, readying herself to see which wire wanted to speak to her next.

Chapter 29.

It was mid-afternoon when Lily left Abelard's. Working with the wire had felt amazing, completely natural and even effortless. Was this her calling? She smiled as she pedaled along the Seine path and she remained smiling until she remembered what had just transpired in town. Matthew Dupuis, someone she had known her whole life, her neighbor from across the street, someone just a few years older than Beatrice, had just been hanged.

She pedaled on, trying to decide. Should she avoid the center of town? The hanging would be finished, so there was no worry on that score. But the gallows would still be there. She shook her head. She'd head straight home! Why go anywhere near the town square or the gallows? Yet she found herself pedaling in that exact direction.

When she arrived she found the town square deserted. But she heard a loud commotion in the distance, in the direction of the main street. She exited the square and, as she turned down the main street, saw a menacing crowd gathered in front of the bakery. She pedaled on and, as she drew near, recognized everyone. Hook, the farmer who'd help built the gallows, stood in front, brandishing a hammer. His two sons flanked him; one hoisted a brick. There were maybe a dozen others, all men of the town, several of whom carried something—a

broom handle, a bicycle chain, a knife—to use as a weapon. And there was Albert, too!

A single policeman stood in front of the bakery door, his arms raised, admonishing the crowd to disperse. It was clear to Lily that he was having little effect. The crowd pressed in on him. The worried policemen glanced to his right, no doubt on the lookout for reinforcements. For now he was the only obstacle between this mob and the Schmidts.

“Death to the Germans!” Hook shouted.

“Hang them all!” his youngest cried.

Hook’s son heaved his brick through the bakery window. The glass exploded, cascading the policeman and the crowd with flying glass. Lily shielded herself from the flying glass. She could feel glass splinters land in her hair. When she dared to look up she saw that the glass had drawn blood. Several of the men in the crowd were bleeding. One looked to have a severe cut above his eye; blood ran down his cheek.

Two policemen were running from the direction of the town hall. Could they possibly arrive in time? The window exploding had inflamed the crowd. They were shouting, brandishing their makeshift weapons, and pressing in on the lone policeman. Albert had his fist in the air just like the others. It was monstrous to see!

“No Germans in Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine!” a shopkeeper cried. He was the town shoemaker and jack-of-all-trades. He could fix your watch, press your pants, repair your radio, or do anything. Lily had never seen him even slightly agitated. Now he was almost frothing at the mouth. He brandished a knife that he must have grabbed from his shoe repair equipment.

He repeated his cry. “No Germans in Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine!”

“No Germans in Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine!” Albert shouted in turn.

The two policemen arrived, huffing and out of breath, and, joining their colleague, put their bodies between the mob and the bakery door. The standoff had reached the breaking point. Hook stepped forward, his hammer raised, grinding glass under his boots. His two sons stepped with him, crushing glass underfoot. The shoemaker brandished his knife. A man whom Lily knew but whose name escaped her advanced wielding his broom handle like a lance.

Lily pictured the Schmidts cowering inside. She realized that she didn't even know how many of them there were. Were there young children? That struck her as intolerable. She dropped her bicycle and pushed her way through the crowd. She made her way right to the front and, pressing her back right up against one of the policemen, faced the mob.

“Stop it!” she screamed. “Stop it! They're just people!”

She could feel the tense presence of the policemen behind her. One put his hand on her shoulder, in a gesture of protection. The late afternoon sun beat down on her forehead and half blinded her. She glared at each of the men in turn, saving a special glare for Albert.

“Albert!” she cried. “Stand beside me!”

Albert hesitated. Finally he released himself from the grip of the crowd, sheepishly stepped forward, and took his place beside Lily. His head bowed, his face turned away from hers, he stared at the ground. Lily glanced at him and shook her head. She wanted to shake him!

“That’s the Pen’s son,” someone said.

That had an immediate effect. Instantly the steam drained from the crowd. Hook let his hammer drop to his side. The shoemaker let his knife dangle. Someone at the back of the crowd turned and walked away. Soon a second wandered off. A third shook his head, muttering “Not worth it!” Still shaking his head, he trudged away through the afternoon shadows. After a minute or two only Hook and his sons remained. Finally Hook spit and said, “The hell with them!”

Lily waited. She was not going to leave until every last one of them retreated. She warily watched the men drift away. After a while she felt a pat on her shoulder.

“You did it,” the policeman at her back whispered. “Bravo!”

“We were like resistance fighters!” Albert crowed gleefully.

Lily felt like slapping him. Instead she hopped on her bicycle and raced away, taking care to avoid the glass shards shimmering in the road. Half-blinded, she raced home at top speed.

Chapter 30.

When Lily turned onto her street she saw Pascal Monette approaching her front door. She pedaled faster. His visit could only mean one thing. He'd decided Beatrice's fate.

She pedaled up to her door and dropped her bicycle. Pascal Monette, formally dressed in a suit, tie, and hat, nodded at her.

"Lily," he said.

Lily stepped in front of him. "I can let you in!" she exclaimed, pulling out her key.

"I should knock," Pascal Monette replied.

Lily stepped back and stood off to one side. It felt strange, waiting at her own door for it to open when she had the front door key in her hand. She glanced at the Pen. What had he decided? He looked serious—but not solemn or distraught. Lily, her fingers crossed, took that to be a good sign.

Her father opened the door dressed in his shirtsleeves. It took him a moment to recognize the caller. Startled, his eyes registering fear, he struggled to regain his composure. He bowed slightly and waved the Pen in. "Come in," he said, nodding.

"Are you through with patients?" Pascal Monette asked. "I can come back."

"No, no! I'm done."

He led Pascal past the waiting room on the one side and the exam room on the other and ushered him into the living room. All three reacted to the absurdly loud ticking of the mantle clock.

“I should destroy that stupid clock,” her father muttered.

“No doubt an heirloom on your wife’s side,” Pascal Monette said, chuckling. “I have to endure several of those.”

Another good sign, that chuckling! Her father seemed to think so also. Though still guarded, he relaxed a little. “Sit,” he said. “Please.” Without asking, he poured them whiskies.

Pascal Monette sat with his hat in his lap. He glanced around the room. “Beatrice is gone?” he asked.

Her father made no reply. He took a sip of whiskey and avoided the Pen’s gaze.

“It’s safe to say,” Pascal Monette said after a moment.

“Safe in what sense?” her father asked cautiously.

Pascal Monette sighed. “In the sense that is most important to you,” he said. He paused, as if making sure that he’d actually made up his mind. Nodding, he ratified his decision. “I won’t be signing her death warrant. That’s final. I’m done with it.”

Her father said nothing. Then, in what Lily supposed was against his better judgment, he murmured, “Why?”

Pascal Monette glanced at him in surprise. “Well, she’s guilty, of course,” he said after a moment. He took a sip of whiskey. “But guilty enough to die? For me, that’s the whole question. That I can’t see, that death is the right punishment.” He shook his head. “I can’t see that.”

“Enough is enough,” her father said, nodding.

“It’s not that,” Pascal Monette said, eyeing her father. “The whole question is, does the punishment fit the crime? I think it’s close.” He continued staring at Daniel Page. “Emile is dead. Emile was tortured before he died. There is definitely a victim here—and a hero, at that.” He sighed. “But ... should Beatrice’s punishment be death? It’s close. But I just can’t see hanging her.”

Lily began shaking. That sounded so brutal! Pascal Monette was not being friendly or conspiratorial. He refused to act like he was doing the Page family a favor or that Beatrice was exonerated. Far from it! It almost felt like he could still change his mind. His words “It’s close” echoed in her brain.

Just at that moment her mother wandered in with a duster in her hand. She wore an absent look and, not noticing the three of them, began dusting. With her back turned to them she dusted the piano, moving photos as she dusted. No one said a word. When she turned around, her eyes opened wide.

“God!” she exclaimed, seeing the Pen. She grabbed the side table nearest her to steady herself. Would she faint away? Lily jumped to her feet and rushed to her mother’s side. She readied herself to catch her mother.

Pascal Monette also quickly rose to his feet. “Madame Page, please don’t get excited!” he exclaimed. “I came with good news.”

Lily helped her mother to an armchair.

“Good news?” she muttered. It was almost as if she didn’t understand the words.

“Beatrice will be fine,” her husband said quietly. “Take it easy, love. All is well!”

“She’s spared?” her mother whispered.

Daniel Page nodded. Her mother shut her eyes and, muttering quietly to herself, began giving thanks.

Pascal Monette turned to her father. “Leon may still tell his story,” he said.

“I know,” her father nodded.

“I’ve warned him. But you know Leon!”

“Yes.”

“If he does ... it will be unpleasant for you.”

“And for you, too,” Daniel Page replied.

Pascal Monette waved that possibility away. "As long as I'm the Pen in this town, nobody's going to give me much grief! Not to my face at least. And down the road ... well, let's hope for short memories, for everyone's sake."

Daniel Page nodded.

"But it would be more than unpleasant for Beatrice," Pascal Monette said after a moment. "If Leon blabs, I don't think that folks in this town will let Beatrice off the hook."

"I doubt she'll ever set foot in this town again," her father said solemnly.

Pascal Monette nodded.

At the door they shook hands firmly. Daniel Page watched the Pen walk slowly away. He continued watching him—almost, Lily thought, so as to make sure that he didn't change his mind and turn around. Her father stood there until Pascal Monette turned the far corner.

Daniel Page returned to the living room and knelt beside the chair where his wife sat. He took her hand. "Call your sister," he said gently. "Just say, 'Tell Beatrice that it's in her favor.' That should be cryptic enough. That shouldn't raise any suspicions on the party line."

Her mother nodded. She rose to her feet and he rose with her. She began crying; but these were good tears. Relief welled out of her. Her stoic father couldn't help himself. He began crying also. Lily crept out of

the room. She wondered if she, too, would begin crying. It surprised her to discover that she had no such intention.

Chapter 31.

Lily, exhausted, took a book out to the garden, which looked wilder and more overgrown than ever. For a moment she couldn't locate her own garden bench, so tall had the grass grown in spots. When she spotted it she sat down, began to read, and fell asleep almost instantly. She slept for a long time. When she awoke dusk was falling.

She expected to feel hungry but instead she just felt tired. She yawned and rubbed at her eyes.

"Finally!" a voice cried.

Lily sat straight up. There, sitting in the grass, was Albert, pulling apart a brown leaf. Scattered around him were the remains of a dozen shredded leaves.

"So, you had good news," Albert said morosely.

Lily made no reply. She stared at Albert, as if seeing him for the first time. He hadn't been nice at the bakery; in fact, he'd aligned himself with the mob. That caused him to sink another notch in her estimation. She bit her lip.

"We did," she said.

"Not very talkative, are you?"

"Not so much."

Albert sat there, his head bent, tearing at one leaf after another.

"Leon is still a problem," Albert said.

“Is he?”

“He might still blab.”

“I don’t know,” Lily said. “I’m too tired to think about it.”

“What if Beatrice wants to come back? There will always be Leon.”

“And that’s the way it’s going to be,” Lily said, annoyed at Albert.

“He can’t be reasoned with.”

“I don’t intend to reason with him.” Albert looked up at her. “I have a .22 rifle.”

Lily stared at him. “What are you talking about?”

“I hate him. I’m going to kill him.”

“Albert!”

“Tonight.”

Lily shook her head. “That’s crazy!”

“What would a resistance fighter do?”

“Not that! This isn’t like that at all! This is just you ... being angry.”

“He deserves it! And it will help your family!”

Lily stood up. “I’m going in.”

“You don’t think I mean to do it?”

“I don’t know anything about you,” Lily said.

Albert got to his feet. Awkward, skinny, his head bent, he looked rather a pathetic figure.

“I’m going over as soon as it gets dark.”

“Leave me out of it!”

“I thought we were in this together, Lily,” Albert said plaintively.

“Not in this!”

She hurried inside without looking back. Her mother was putting the finishing touches on a stew. The smell of meat, potatoes, carrots and the spices of Provence filled the kitchen. The bread and wine were already on the table.

“Wash up,” her mother said.

The three of them ate dinner quietly, even gravely. Her father refilled his glass with red wine several times. They seemed to want to relax but couldn't quite. After dinner Lily wandered outside. It was early evening and chillier now that autumn had arrived. She got on her bicycle and pedaled around the block. As she approached the Monette house, she wondered what she would find. Would she find a wounded Albert, forlorn and bedraggled, stung by Leon's bullying, sitting on the front step tossing gravel? Or would she find an armed youth getting ready to exact revenge?

She arrived just as Albert was emerging from his house. There could be no mistake about it. He was carrying something and that something certainly looked like a rifle. Lily pedaled up to Albert.

He noticed her only at the last minute. "See!" he cried. He held the rifle up for her to see. "I've shot it. I've practiced with my father. I'm a good shot!" Even in the dim light Lily could see his eyes blazing.

Lily got off her bicycle, walked towards him and grasped the rifle.

"Give it to me," she said.

"I won't!"

"Give it to me," Lily repeated.

Albert furiously yanked it out of her grasp. "No! I'm going!" He jumped on his bicycle and pedaled off, steering with one hand and holding the rifle aloft with the other.

Lily jumped on her bicycle and followed. Albert pedaled so fast that he pulled further and further away from her. Lily, hunched forward for speed, raced through the streets, trying not to lose sight of him.

They flew across town, reached the Seine path, and raced through the darkness. Lily dodged ruts at a furious speed. Albert was far ahead of her. When she reached Leon's shack Albert was shouting at Leon's door and pounding on it.

"Get out here, you bastard!" he cried. "Get out here!"

Albert continued pounding. The pounding echoed in the night. Lily, even at this distance, could hear the sound of a crash inside the shack, then Leon grunting and cursing. When the door suddenly opened, Albert took several steps backwards.

“What do you want?” Leon hissed.

Albert pointed his rifle. Lily jumped off her bike and ran as fast as she could. She got between Albert and Leon and faced Albert, her back to Leon.

“Don’t do this,” she said. “Please don’t!”

The .22 rifle shook in Albert’s hands.

“What’s all this?” Leon cried.

“Move, Lily!” Albert warned her.

Leon hadn’t yet fathomed the situation. “What the hell are you doing?” he shouted through his drunken stupor. “What game are you playing?”

The word “game” seemed to agitate and provoke Albert even more. “Lily!” he shouted. “Get out of the way!”

Suddenly Lily felt herself falling. Leon had pushed her violently out of way and she hit the ground hard. Looking up, she watched as Leon slowly approached his cousin, a mocking smile on his lips, taunting him and daring him to fire. Albert hands shook wildly. Suddenly he threw the rifle onto the ground, turned around, hopped on his bicycle and raced off.

Leon laughed. He turned around and stared at Lily on the ground.

“You need a good spanking,” he said.

Lily scrambled to her knees. She tried to dodge to her right but Leon was amazingly quick. He grabbed her by her hair and she screamed. She knew that she would never be able to break free of that iron grip. She felt herself being lifted off the ground ... and suddenly Leon dropped her. Lily looked up. Leon, his eyes bulging, unable to utter a sound, found himself with Abelard's huge arm around his neck. Abelard was squeezing the life right out of him.

Chapter 32.

It was a Saturday in early April, eight months after the events of September. Lily woke up in a state. She'd be taking the train into Paris by herself! She was going to see Beatrice, going to spend the weekend with her sister.

Lily could hardly contain herself. She dressed, changed her clothes, and changed her clothes again. Then she packed and repacked and repacked her small overnight case.

At breakfast she could hardly sit in her chair.

"Calm down," her father said gently.

"Remember, it's about an hour trip," her mother reminded her.

"There are lots of stops but you go all the way to the end. So you can't really make a mistake."

"I know, mother!"

She'd looked at the schedule only about a million times. She knew that the Gare Montparnasse was huge. What if she and Beatrice missed one another? "Well, then I'll get on a train and come home!" she heard herself say. She smiled at that excellent solution. That wasn't so hard!

September seemed very long ago. She'd had exactly one conversation with her parents about Leon's death, on the evening of the day his body had been found washed up twenty miles downstream. Lily and her parents were having dinner together that night. Her

mother, who'd heard the news in town, told her husband what she knew. He thought about it and said, "Beatrice is really safe now."

"She could come home if she wanted to," her mother said after a while.

"But she won't want to," her father concluded.

They'd resumed eating their dinner that night. Lily could feel her father studying her.

"Do you know anything about that?" he asked.

"About what?"

"About Leon's death."

"I do," Lily said after a moment. "But I can't tell you about it."

Her mother glanced at her anxiously. "You won't get in trouble, will you?" she said.

"No."

After awhile her father reached over and patted her on the head. No one said another word about Leon.

Lily thought back to that moonlit night at Leon's. She'd presumed, staring up from the ground at that huge arm around Leon's neck, that at some point Abelard would stop squeezing. But he hadn't.

Leon hadn't made a sound. Instead, Lily heard frogs and crickets. It was a real cacophony in the night with all those invisible creatures

singing. But right above her, where Abelard had Leon in his grasp, there was nothing but silence.

When Leon was dead, Abelard released him and let him drop to the ground.

“I’ll take care of this,” Abelard said.

“It was self-defense!” Lily whispered. “Or defense of me!”

“No, it wasn’t,” the blacksmith said very quietly. “I could have spared him.”

“But that will be our story!”

“There’s no story,” Abelard replied, helping her off the ground.

“We’ll just let Leon float away. We’ll be quiet about it. I killed him—no need to broadcast that.”

“All right,” Lily agreed, nodding.

In remembering back, she also remembered Albert. He’d left her there on the ground, left her in Leon’s clutches. Lily wondered if he would ever forgive himself for running away. Or maybe it didn’t really matter to him, one way or the other? At any rate, they hadn’t spoken since that day. They avoided each other at school; neither crept through the fence to search out the other. That was over.

Well, and today she was off to Paris! Her mother brought more sausages to the table. They were all hungry!

“Papa,” Lily said, putting down her fork, “do you think we could fix that hole in the fence?”

“And the squeaking stairs, while you’re at it!” her mother chimed in.

Daniel Page glanced at his daughter. “Of course,” he said. “I’ll get somebody on it this week.”

Lily nodded. “Thank you!”

“And school?” he said. “Is school going well?”

“It is.”

“Good,” her father said, smiling.

Around Christmastime the Pen had been relieved of his duties. So had all the other Pens throughout France. France had had enough of reprisals. Many men and women, young and old, had been sentenced to death and hanged. Many more, sentenced to death, had fled and were in hiding or had escaped the country. Every other day there was a story in the newspaper of someone under sentence of death who’d been captured in Rouen or Marseille or somewhere. These last indicted souls still faced execution. But at least the tenure of the Pen in France was over.

While Lily no longer talked to Albert, she made it a point to say hello to Albert’s father whenever they met. Pascal Monette had aged and acquired something of a limp. She could of course never thank him

enough; there was no way to repay someone for sparing your sister. But she did make a point of saying as cheerful a hello as she could whenever they met. And each time, that seemed to please him. Lily presumed that most people in Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine were still wary of the Pen, even though his pen had lost his sting. Her cheerful hellos were perhaps the only ones he received as he went about his daily business.

As they finished breakfast her mother glanced out the window.

“It might rain,” she said.

“I packed my small umbrella!” Lily exclaimed.

Both her parents smiled.

“It’s time,” her father said. “Let’s get going.”

She’d picked a blue dress to wear. Her father carried her bag and walked with her to the station. They traversed the main street of town. The gallows were gone; so were the Schmidts. Sainte-Therese-Sur-Seine had proven too uncongenial a place for a German family. So, no doubt, had every other town in France.

“I wonder where they went?” Lily murmured.

“They couldn’t have had many good choices. Germany’s in ruins.”

When they got to the train station her father handed her an envelope.

“You’ll give this to Beatrice?”

“Of course, Papa.”

“Tell her I’ll see her on one of my hospital days when I’m in Paris.”

“All right!”

She tucked the envelope away in her purse. The train roared into the station. The second it stopped and the doors opened, Lily hopped aboard. Clutching her purse and her overnight bag, she made her way to a window seat. She pressed her nose to the window as the train roared out of the station.

Chapter 33.

The Gare Montparnasse was indeed huge. People rushed about in every direction. But Lily and Beatrice spotted each other immediately. Beatrice hugged her sister and grabbed her overnight bag.

“I’ll carry it!” She smiled at her sister. “It’s so good to see you!”

“You look happy,” Lily said, smiling too.

“I am.” They made their way out of the busy train station. “We’ll go the long way. Through the Luxembourg Gardens. Are you up for walking?”

“Of course!”

They turned left from Boulevard Montparnasse onto Boulevard Raspail and then angled down a narrow side street that led directly into the gardens. Lily could hardly contain herself. It was a chilly April day but the sun had broken through and Lily felt altogether warm and ... she searched for the word. Joyous! She felt joyous.

They sat for a few minutes by the central fountain, taking in the spectacle.

“Do you know Seurat?” Beatrice said, naming the famous pointillist painter.

“I do!”

Beatrice waved at the scene around them. “Seurat,” she said.

They left the Luxembourg Gardens and proceeded down shady shopping streets toward the river. After a while Beatrice said, "It's still a ways. I live very close to the Seine. On a street called rue Jacob."

"Do you know a street called rue de Seine?" Lily asked.

"I do!" Beatrice exclaimed. "It's just a few blocks from me. Why do you ask?"

Lily smiled. "I'll tell you later," she said.

Beatrice snapped her fingers. "We'll stop at the café where I write!" Beatrice said. "And have hot chocolate."

They proceeded along Boulevard Saint-Germain and arrived at the Café de Flore.

"We'll sit outside," Beatrice said. "It's pricier outside but how often do we get to do this?"

A brusque waiter arrived and frowned at their minimal order. When he returned with their hot chocolates he deposited them noisily, rattling the cups, saucers, and spoons. When he'd gone the sisters laughed.

"Part of their job is being rude," Beatrice said conspiratorially. "It's very Parisian."

They sat and watched the world go by.

After a while Beatrice said quietly, "I hear that Leon died."

Lily nodded.

“You were there, mushroom?” Beatrice said.

“Best not to talk about it,” Lily replied.

“You’re sure? You know you can tell me.”

“I’m sure,” Lily said. “It’s not just my secret.”

Beatrice nodded. “Understood.”

A handsome young man appeared from inside the café, approached their table, and kneeled on one knee next to Beatrice. Lily blushed instantly. He looked like a god!

“Who is this?” he said, smiling a thousand-watt smile.

“My sister,” Beatrice said. “Lily, meet Roberto. He’s a sculptor from Seville. Alberto, Lily.”

Roberto rose, bowed, and kissed Lily’s hand. She found it impossible to speak. Beatrice laughed.

“Go away now,” she said. “This is sister time!”

Alberto bowed to the two of them and made his way back inside.

“He’s so handsome,” Lily whispered.

“And very intense. He’s a communist!”

“Is he?”

“Everyone’s a communist, a dadaist, an anarchist, a surrealist, a something-or-other. You should see my boarding house! They’re coming from all over the world to be in Paris. It’s a scene!”

They finished their hot chocolates and left the café.

“We’re very close now,” Beatrice said.

They walked single file where the sidewalk was narrow, then turned onto rue Jacob. After about a block Beatrice stopped them. She turned to Lily. Lily, worried, looked up at her sister.

“I’m dedicating my whole life to Emile,” Beatrice whispered. Immediately she shook her head. “I know how pompous that sounds. But I had to tell you.”

“What does that mean?”

“I just want to do right things from now on. I don’t know how else to say it.”

When they arrived at the boarding house Beatrice said, “Just follow my lead.” She ambled in and waved to the severe woman behind the counter. “Hello, Madame. Lovely day!”

“She can’t stay with you!” the severe woman called out. “No guests!”

“No, Madame, of course. It’s just my sister. She’s going right home!”

“Just make sure!”

They proceeded up the narrow stairs, which creaked just like the stairs at home.

“Am I going right home?” Lily said, worried.

“Of course not! It’s just a game we all play. Madame says no guests and then she turns a blind eye to whoever stays over!”

At every landing the doors stood open. Did no one shut his door? Lily, wide-eyed, peeked into the tiny rooms. In one a man in nothing but shorts was contorted in some weird position.

“Yoga,” Beatrice whispered. “He’s a poet from Oslo. He’s almost always in tears!”

They continued up. “Just two more flights!” Beatrice said.

On the next landing more doors were open.

“In that one,” Beatrice whispered, pointing, “is a French painter who hid himself in an insane asylum in Provence for three years!” She shook her head. “And in that one is a strange composer who’s afraid to ride the Metro. So he takes taxis!”

Finally they arrived at Beatrice’s room. It was small, like all the others, and had a bed crammed in along with a desk, a chest of drawers, and a round café table by the window.

“It’s plain and tiny,” Beatrice said, “but it serves me.”

Lily could hear some sort of commotion, doors slamming, and frightful shouts. Beatrice smiled. “Everyone’s very dramatic,” she said.

They sat together on the bed, doing not much more than smiling. After a bit Lily said, “Can we walk along the rue de Seine?”

“Why’s that, mushroom?”

“There’s something I want you to see.”

“How mysterious!” Beatrice laughed.

They proceeded down the many flights of stairs and stepped out into the April sunshine. Strolling along the rue Jacob, they arrived at the rue de Seine in just a few minutes.

“Right or left?” Beatrice asked.

Lily peered left, then right. There it was! She spotted what she was looking for.

“Right!” Lily cried.

They turned right and passed several art galleries. Abelard had told her exactly where to look. At the fifth gallery Lily stopped. She stared at the display in the window, not quite believing her eyes.

“What is it?” Beatrice said.

“Those are mine,” Lily said, beaming.

“Your what?” Beatrice said, not understanding.

“I made those sculptures,” Lily replied, pointing at three wire figures on display in the window. “At Abelard’s forge. This is the gallery where he shows. He took in my pieces and showed them to the owner and ... voila!”

Beatrice, dumbfounded, stared at her sister. Then she hugged her ferociously.

“Lily Page, that is insane!” Beatrice cried.

Lily beamed.

“You’ll have to buy me our next hot chocolate, now that you’re the famous artist!” Beatrice exclaimed.

“I haven’t sold any yet,” Lily said, embarrassed.

“As if I have any doubt!”

Arm-in-arm they strolled back toward Boulevard Saint-Germain, first along the shady side of rue de Seine and then, when that felt too chilly, on the sunny side.

Lily glanced at her sister. Like Beatrice, she would not forget Emile. What was done could not be undone. But now there was a next chapter to write and they would each write it. Lily smiled at her big sister and Beatrice, beaming, smiled right back at her.

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